



Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Costa Rica

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo courtesy of Maceo Sibbles, USAID/OFDA

A local USAID/OFDA surge capacity consultant performs a damage assessment after Hurricane Sandy struck Jamaica in October 2012.

USAID/OFDA Readies for Hurricane Season

USAID/OFDA is engaged in a number of preparations to ensure all facets of its response mechanism are in top shape for the upcoming Atlantic Basin hurricane season (June 1 to November 30). Meteorologists are predicting an active season this year.

On May 23, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) forecast that up to 20 named storms will form in the Atlantic Basin during the 2013 season, of which seven to 11 are expected to become hurricanes and three to six could develop into major hurricanes (Category Three or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale). Based on the 1981-2010 period, an average season has

12 named storms, including six hurricanes (three of which are major).

"I can't stress enough the importance of forging strong relationships with our partners and key actors in the Caribbean countries, to secure provisions, and review preparedness plans and protocols now; not when a storm strikes. The number of forecasted storms per season doesn't matter; it takes only one to put lives and livelihoods at stake," explained USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

Callaghan and four other regional advisors – experienced, multi-lingual disaster management

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Government of El Salvador Civil Protection, military staff, and USAID/OFDA representatives prepare to transport relief supplies to flood-affected families in El Salvador during the hurricane season in late 2011.



Photo by Sergio Gutiérrez, USAID/OFDA

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

2013 Annual RDAP Planning Meeting a Success

USAID/OFDA staff, Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) managers, disaster risk management specialists (DRMSs), and thematic experts who cover education, disaster risk reduction (DRR), urban search-and-rescue (USAR), fire management, incident command system, and pre-hospital care participated in the RDAP annual review and planning meeting from May 14 to 16 in Alexandria, Virginia.

Participants reviewed programs, shared regional successes, and planned activities for the coming year. In addition, the attendees were briefed on USAID/OFDA's policy regarding resilience and recovery programs, such as shelter and settlements and economic recovery and markets systems. They also toured USAID/OFDA's headquarters, including the Emergency Operations Center in Washington, D.C., to gain better insight into how USAID/OFDA carries out DRR and disaster response coordination.



Photo by Carlos Córdova, USAID/OFDA

The USAID/OFDA/LAC regional team poses for the camera during the 2013 annual meeting.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Experts Meet to Promote USAR Capacity in the Caribbean

A team of USAID/OFDA/LAC regional advisors, USAR experts, Caribbean DRMSs, and technical experts, recently met with national disaster coordinators, USAR focal points, Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA) staff, and U.S. Southern Command representatives to strengthen and consolidate USAR capacity-building efforts in the Caribbean region.

Meeting highlights included the drafting of national policy and program outlines, discussions exploring the strengths and weaknesses of existing programs, and the identification of specific opportunities for inter-agency collaboration.

The meeting was held in Bridgetown, Barbados, from May 22 to 23.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Small Grant Strengthens School Safety in St. Kitts and Nevis

On April 12, USAID/OFDA and the St. Kitts and Nevis Red Cross Society signed a \$30,000 small grant agreement to promote school safety for the approximately 11,600 students in early childhood education through secondary school in the twin island federation of St. Kitts and Nevis. The RDAP-funded grant aims to incorporate the USAID/OFDA-designed School Safety Program (SSP) into school infrastructure on both islands.

The project will help promote a culture of risk reduction in the local community by reducing the vulnerability of school populations while increasing the capacity of students and education personnel to manage and respond to disasters.

Goals of the six-month project include the production, replication, and distribution of a SSP training and guidelines video outlining emergency and school safety plans; the organization of emergency drills for all students and faculty; the purchase and distribution of emergency supplies to 30 ill-equipped schools, and the development of a national disaster risk management policy for the education sector.

**USAID/OFDA DRMs
Audrey Mullings
shakes hands with
Deputy General
Spencer Hanley of the
St. Kitts and Nevis
Red Cross during the
SSP small grant
award ceremony.**



Courtesy of the Government of St. Kitts and Nevis

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Helping to Make Colombian City Safer

With support from USAID/OFDA, Colombia emergency management authorities, municipal planners, local fire brigades, University of Nariño representatives, members of the Nariño Department Civil Defense, and USAR experts recently participated in a pilot USAR project to identify and address the structural and logistical vulnerabilities of San Juan del Pasto, a Colombian highland city of approximately 500,000 people.

The project included results from a seismic vulnerability study that identified building composition and resiliency within the city center, as well as inter-institutional discussions on how San Juan del Pasto can best support the national process for accreditation of USAR teams.

USAID/OFDA is actively engaged in a number of risk mitigation projects in Colombia, including work with local fire brigades and private-sector entities, a cooperative agreement with the university sector, and the provision of technical and operational support to the Government of Colombia's National Disaster Risk Management Unit (UNGRD).

**Participants of
the San Juan del
Pasto Pilot USAR
Project explore
ways to minimize
the city's
vulnerability to
seismic threats.**



Courtesy of USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Readies for Hurricane Season

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professionals with broad knowledge of the region's potential hazards, geography, and cultural and socio-economic characteristics – are based at the USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in San José, Costa Rica.

These advisors – along with two information officers, a communications officer, and 20 DRMSs – are available for immediate deployment in case of a disaster. In addition, USAID/OFDA maintains a regionwide network of approximately 350 on-call local surge capacity consultants who can be activated to quickly augment USAID/OFDA's assessment and response capacity. The DRMSs and local surge capacity consultants are the backbone of the USAID/OFDA's RDAP, which provides training and technical assistance in DRR and response preparedness to national disaster organizations and first responders in the LAC region.

The USAID/OFDA field office in Haiti, which has a senior program officer, a program officer, and an administrative support staff, remains ready to respond to adverse events in that country – including hurricanes and other tropical storms – as appropriate. USAID/OFDA also maintains two humanitarian assistance advisors at the U.S. Southern Command in Miami, Florida, who help coordinate USAID and U.S. Department of Defense emergency humanitarian assistance in the LAC region.

In the event of an impending hurricane, USAID/OFDA may pre-deploy staff in consultation with U.S. embassies and USAID missions in potentially affected countries. The LAC regional office also assigns staff to Bridgetown, Barbados, on a rotating schedule from July to November to provide USAID/OFDA preparedness and response coverage for the Eastern Caribbean during hurricane season.

USAID/OFDA continually replenishes stockpiled emergency relief supplies – including plastic sheeting for temporary shelters, water treatment units, water containers, hygiene kits, kitchen supplies, and blankets – for rapid shipment from the USAID/OFDA warehouse in Miami, Florida, to the LAC region in the event of a disaster. USAID/OFDA also has pre-positioned emergency relief supplies in Haiti. USAID/OFDA may purchase supplies locally, as appropriate.

USAID/OFDA maintains agreements with charter air service companies in the region to ensure timely transportation of staff and supplies to disaster-affected areas. If commercial service is not available, USAID/OFDA may request logistical assistance from the U.S. military.

In advance of hurricane season, as in years past, the LAC regional office briefed mission disaster relief officers and emergency action committees at U.S. embassies and USAID missions throughout the region, and met with key partners and other donors to coordinate hurricane preparedness activities.



Photo by Julie Leonard, USAID/OFDA

A downed transformer in Roselle Falls, Jamaica, provides evidence of the strong winds and heavy rains from Hurricane Sandy.

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Tel: +(506) 2290-4133
E-mail: ofdalac@ofda.gov
Internet: www.usaid.gov/ofdalac
www.usaid.gov/rdaptrainingportfolio