



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

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Supports DRR for Vulnerable Jamaican Farmers

With USAID/OFDA support, The Competitiveness Company of Jamaica is working to help vulnerable farmers reduce post-harvest losses through improved household seed storage systems.

The 18-month disaster risk reduction (DRR) project, entitled “*Seeds for Success: Disaster resilience for vulnerable smallholder farmers through seed storage models*,” aims to benefit approximately 1,000 Jamaican farmers using a three-pronged approach: improving seed storage systems, reducing post-harvest losses, and building the resilience of farmers.

The project will train farmers in seed selection and best agricultural practices to increase food production, and provide participating
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Photo courtesy of USAID/Jamaica

Scotch bonnet peppers are among Jamaican farmers’ most important local crops.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Signs MoU with Paraguay’s Emergency Secretariat

USAID/OFDA has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the Government of Paraguay’s National Emergency Secretariat (SEN) to strengthen disaster risk management cooperation.

The MoU builds on nearly two decades of disaster management collaboration between USAID/OFDA and Paraguayan officials and outlines areas of interest such as DRR in education, integral fire management, damage assessment and needs analysis, and urban search-and-rescue.

USAID/Paraguay Director Fernando Cosich, USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, and SEN Minister Joaquín Roa signed the MoU on October 29 in Asunción.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo courtesy of the Belize Red Cross

Red Cross staff in Belize (above) and various other Caribbean countries promote the mobile app among residents of vulnerable communities.

Caribbean Red Cross Societies Launch Free Life-Saving Multi-Hazard Mobile App

People throughout the Caribbean can now download a free mobile phone app to help them prepare for emergencies and stay safe during natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes.

With support from USAID/OFDA, the American Red Cross (AmRC), and the Global Disaster Preparedness Center, 12 Caribbean Red Cross societies recently launched the Red Cross Multi-Hazard App to deliver weather warnings and other life-saving information directly to people’s mobile phones.

Disaster preparedness is a key feature of the app, which is compati-

ble with iPhones and most Android phones. App users can track storms, view preparedness checklists, find out what to pack in a “ready” bag, and identify evacuation routes and nearby shelters so that they are prepared when disaster strikes. In addition to automatic alarms, the app features include a strobe light, a powerful flashlight, and a loud audio alarm to attract attention of rescuers.

“This is a great example of mobile technology really helping people in potentially dangerous situations,” said Matthew Marek, AmRC representative for the Caribbean.

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The mobile phone app is available for free download in Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago.



Image courtesy of the American Red Cross

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Supports DRR Efforts Focusing on Children with Disabilities

With USAID/OFDA support, UNICEF and other U.N. agencies are working to reduce the vulnerability of children and other individuals with disabilities during natural disasters and other emergencies in Central America. People with disabilities, particularly children, are often disproportionately affected by disasters and conflict, in part because response and recuperation actions generally do not include specific efforts to address the particular needs of these vulnerable populations.

The UNICEF project, entitled "*Participation and protection of people with disabilities during emergencies and disasters in Central America*," aims to increase awareness of the challenges and needs of people with disabilities in the context of disaster preparedness, response, and risk reduction, as well as improve their participation in disaster management activities to ensure greater protection during disasters.

The 18-month project, which began in October, will work closely with institutions and organizations in the region that champion the rights of children and others with disabilities.

UNICEF will also coordinate project activities with the Central American Coordination Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters (CEPRENAC), Central American Integration System's Educational and Cultural Coordination (CECC), and the national disaster management systems and government education ministries of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama.

USAID/OFDA contributed approximately \$268,000 to this project.

Staff from Costa Rica's national emergency commission, rehabilitation and special education council, and UNICEF inaugurate the project in Costa Rica in late October.



Photo courtesy of UNICEF



Photo courtesy of the Belize Red Cross

Belize Red Cross volunteers try out the new mobile phone app, launched with support from USAID/OFDA and other partners.

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Russell Williams, a resident of Saint Kitts and Nevis, used the app to safely track Hurricane Gonzalo as it swept through the Caribbean in October.

"It was really very good timing, because I would not have even known about the app had I not seen the information in the newspaper over the weekend," Williams said. One of the features he finds useful is the fact that the app informs people about multiple hazards, including earthquakes and floods.

The Caribbean's network of islands, diverse landscapes, and limited transportation has made it particularly challenging for national Red Cross societies to widely disseminate life-saving disaster preparedness and response information in a timely manner, particularly to isolated and highly vulnerable communities.

The new app specifically links existing early warning systems to mobile phone-based communication tools, expanding the reach of disaster alerts into vulnerable communities. The app is highly versatile and can be personalized to filter alerts to a specific location, as well as link users to social media outlets. For example, the "I'm safe" feature allows users to widely broadcast their safety status to friends and family members during and after disasters.

"I've shared links to the app on my Google+ community, my Facebook page, and other sites because I think it is definitely useful," Williams said.

Once the app has been downloaded and installed, individuals can view preparedness information even without a mobile connection.

The app is available for download at the Apple App Store, Google Play Store, or 3 Sided Cube Store in participating countries.

The app release is part of the USAID/OFDA-supported AmRC "*Saving Lives in the Caribbean through Preparedness*" program, launched in August 2011 to increase community resilience in the English-speaking Caribbean. The program helps communities create local hazard maps and family emergency preparedness plans, provides disaster management training to volunteers and community responders, and supports small-scale mitigation projects.

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farmers with seed storage units. The Competitiveness Company hopes to increase production by building on traditional agricultural practices that have served farmers in the past. The goal is to increase farmers' resilience and ability to recover after external shocks, such as hurricanes, floods, and other disasters.

Following a disaster, farmers tend to prioritize the immediate needs of their families, including shelter and basic services, leaving few financial resources available to start a new crop to earn income to support their families, explained Julie March, USAID/OFDA Agriculture and Food Security Technical Advisor.

Additionally, after a severe weather event, locally produced seeds, such as red peas or scotch bonnet peppers, often are not available in sufficient quantities to meet the demand.

"Having properly stored seeds ready to plant will go a long way toward alleviating or eliminating this problem and will significantly reduce recovery time for these farmers," March added.

USAID/OFDA contributed \$500,000 to support this agricultural DRR project in Jamaica.

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