



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

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Neighbors work together for DRR



Photo by ?

Caption?

In the first trimester of 2015, USAID/OFDA, Universidad Nacional de Educación Enrique Guzmán y Valle, Civil Defense, and Bosque de Concordia neighborhood, part of San Antonio community in Chosica district, Lima, Peru, concluded a three-year project aimed at building resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) education in the community.

"Guardianes voluntarios de las laderas" ("Voluntary Guardians for the Slopes") was the name given to the project, which had the main purpose of creating and training teams for identifying risks and registering damages (ECIREDs), formed by members of Bosque de Concordia neighborhood.

This community is located on rocky, unstable terrains. Homes are built on terraces, on steep slopes, which have high risk for mud and landslides, as well as risk for earthquakes, rock-fall, and fires. The geography and construction present important challenges for the population, who lack safe mobilization routes, making evacuations extremely difficult and dangerous in case of an adverse event.

All these reasons led to the conclusion that it was necessary to have teams of members of the neighborhood, who know their reality, are duly organized and trained, and that can be a valuable asset to warn about risks and register damages in case of a disaster.

Other objectives for the project included: to facilitate DRR activities in the neighborhood; to keep local authorities constantly informed on existing risk; and to provide, in case of emergencies, quick and effective assistance to aid organizations, based on objective and correct management of information regarding damage during and after an adverse event.

Manuel Ramirez, USAID/OFDA thematic consultant for the education component, and director for the project, thinks that the work done in this neighborhood went beyond the expectations stated in the project's objectives.

"The integrated work between educational institutions, the Municipality, Civil Defense, community leaders, and community members, created a kind of magic to synchronize all elements towards a common, concrete goal."

"This has to be understood as an investigation/participative action from the educational point of view. The process does not depend on one person,

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DISASTER ASSISTANCE

USAID/OFDA assists families in Panama



Photo by Manuel Santana, USAID/OFDA

Delivery of supplies to families affected by a fire in the Madungandi community, Panama, as part of humanitarian actions by USAID/OFDA and the American Red Cross, with support from the Panama Red Cross.

On June 3, there was a fire that went through a group of homes in the Aguas Claras community, located in the Madungandi region, eastern Panama,

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

USAID/OFDA Supports Disaster Management Learning



Photo courtesy of Brant Mitchell

Participants from throughout the Caribbean took part in the LSU technical exchange.

For the third year in a row, USAID/OFDA supported a disaster management technical exchange at the Stephenson Disaster Management Institute at Louisiana State University (LSU).

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but on how and when the stages are fulfilled; all the actors have to contribute to the success. It is incorporating a flexible process into rigid systems, and promoting analysis of actions and achievement of goals, instead of complying with activity schedules," added Ramirez.

As a result, the goal was accomplished. Several teams of members of the community, not related to disaster work, were trained for two main purposes. The first is to identify risk factors in times of peace. This way, the community has the opportunity and time to put DRR actions into place. Second, to be able to use government official forms to register damages during and after a disaster, and communicate the information to the Municipality. This will ensure fast, clear, objective, and reliable information, which in turn will translate into more efficient assistance.

Other important results accomplished were to show that education does not only take place in the classroom. Through the trainings, members of a vulnerable community understood that by committing, they could achieve. It is important to highlight that the commitment is voluntary, which gives the population a sense of belonging to a community.

During the development of the project, the teams had to face a real emergency, when a mudslide affected the community. But, thanks to the training and simulations they had participated in, the neighbors knew how to respond and were asked to help in other communities.

"The systematization of this process will be an important tool for education and lessons learned for the whole region. From proposal, research and execution, even in a real emergency situation, the process can give valuable insight to be replicated in other countries of Latin American and Caribbean, where this kind of communities in high risk areas are common," said Ramirez.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

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This year's exchange took place June 8-12 on the LSU campus and at sites throughout Baton Rouge and New Orleans. While last year's participants were from Latin America, this year the focus was on the Caribbean, as 23 participants traveled from eight countries in the region to take part in the event.

Participants came from a variety of different fields, each with the hope of learning from the experiences of the Louisiana entities impacted by Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Representatives from federal, state, and local programs gave lectures and workshops to demonstrate hands-on tools, techniques, and information on preparation, mitigation, and response to disasters.

"It's an amazing opportunity for the participants to learn from the Louisiana entities, which are some of the best in the world at disaster preparation," said USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist Clive Lorde.

Some of the highlights included hurricane evacuation preparedness and planning, map creation for school safety, tsunami and storm surge mitigation, volunteer recruitment techniques, among others.

Mandela Christian, Program Officer for the Office of Disaster Management, on the island Dominica commented, "I took away so much from the various speakers that I will be able to implement in my home country."

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Photo by Manuel Santana, USAID/OFDA

Some of the 150 homes that were destroyed by the fire.

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caused by a gas tank explosion. The fire affected 150 homes, and left 800 people displaced and four with first and second degree burns. Fortunately, only material losses were reported.

The Office of the First Lady of Panama led the response, activating the Joint Task Force, integrated by 200 members of organizations that make up the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC). Staff from the Panama Firefighters Corps (BCBRP), Ministry of Housing, National Institute for Professional Formation and Training for Human Development (INADEH), National Border Service (SENAFRONT), Ministry of Social Development (MIDES), Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock (MIDA), National Police, and the Air and Sea Service (SENAN) participated in this operational group.

Their mission was to reduce the impact suffered by the people of the community. Many of whom had lost all of their belongings. The group worked immediately in the humanitarian action, which allowed coordination with all actors, including the affected population, to define the best course of action to help alleviate the situation.

Additionally, the Ministry of Health contributed with teams of doctors, nurses, environmental sanitation and personnel to provide first-hand attention to the affected population, including medical care and supplies to cover their needs after the fire, and care for those affected by burns and respiratory problems due to smoke.

To support response actions, USAID/OFDA cooperated with the American Red Cross in Panama and the Panama Red Cross, to strengthen the humanitarian action developed by national authorities, by supplying agriculture and construction tools, as well as cooking equipment lost in the fire to the affected families.

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean



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