

# Regional Snapshot

LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN | FISCAL YEAR (FY) 2014



## REGIONAL SUMMARY<sup>1</sup>

The countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)<sup>2</sup> are highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, including droughts, earthquakes, floods, forest fires, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Periodic El Niño meteorological events and poor land use management frequently exacerbate the effects of existing hazards. In addition to staff based in Washington, D.C., USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) maintains a regional office in San José, Costa Rica, and a sub-regional office in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and is supported by a network of 20 disaster risk management specialists in 16 countries, as well as nearly 350 on-call local disaster relief consultants in 28 countries in the region.

## RECENT HUMANITARIAN EVENTS IN THE REGION

- In early June, following months of heavy rainfall, flooding affected more than 31,800 families—or approximately 159,000 people—in Paraguay's Alto Paraguay, Ñeembucú, and Presidente Hayes departments, as well as the cities of Ayolas, Ciudad del Este, Presidente Franco, and Paraguay's capital Asunción. Flooding caused widespread damage to residential infrastructure, roads, and agricultural production.
- On December 24 and 25, 2013, torrential rains and high winds resulted in flooding and landslides in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. The severe weather resulted in nine deaths, left three people missing, temporarily displaced more than 500 others, and affected approximately 13,000 people.
- In FY 2014, USAID/OFDA responded to two disasters declared in the LAC region: flooding in Paraguay and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. In addition, USAID/OFDA continued to support disaster management capabilities in the LAC region, including earthquake-monitoring assistance, public-private sector partnerships to increase preparedness and response capabilities, and training and technical assistance.

## USAID/OFDA PRIORITIES FOR 2015

- Continue to prioritize hurricane preparedness in the Caribbean and Central America and maintain an experienced team of disaster risk management specialists throughout the LAC region available for immediate pre- or post-disaster deployment.
- Maintain operational readiness to respond to emergencies in the LAC region.
- Support disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities to save lives, safeguard livelihood assets, and prevent the loss of shelter in both rural and urban areas. Refine methodological tools and approaches for DRR work in the urban sector to strengthen urban risk reduction as it relates to natural hazards.
- Strengthen and build the capacity of national disaster risk management agencies to meet national and local emergency management needs.
- Build community-led programs and activities to help ensure continuity and effectiveness of capacity-building efforts in humanitarian response.

<sup>1</sup> For additional information on the humanitarian situation in LAC, please see USAID/OFDA fact sheets, available at <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/responding-times-crisis/where-we-work>

<sup>2</sup> The LAC region includes Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

---

---

## CHALLENGES

- Frequent earthquakes, landslides, and volcanic eruptions continue to pose challenges for the LAC region. During the hurricane season and regional rainy seasons, LAC countries are highly vulnerable to floods and other storm-induced disasters.
- Over the past three decades, the LAC region has progressively built the capacity to mitigate, prepare for and respond to natural disasters; however, a separation between national-level guidance and local-level implementation continue to present challenges to DRR initiatives.
- A comprehensive approach to land-use planning based on natural hazard risk assessment is lacking in many countries, even when hazards—such as flooding—are clearly known.

---

---

## KEY LESSONS LEARNED IN 2014

- Changing rural-urban demographics means that humanitarian approaches are also evolving. In the urban context, USAID/OFDA utilizes the ‘neighborhood approach,’ which embraces the concept of neighborhoods as interrelated geographical units, and seeks to understand and support how communities meet their basic needs, earn a living, and interact with one another. The neighborhood approach allows USAID/OFDA and partners to support more sustainable and appropriate disaster-response and DRR programs in an urban setting, particularly those activities that address limitations of space and high population density; clarify ambiguous land tenure regulations and rights to build or occupy shelter; improve unsafe living environments; increase access to neighborhood health and other services; and reduce vulnerability to floods, high winds, landslides, and seismic activity.
- Providing technical assistance and guidance to strengthen regional disaster management groups helps develop the sustainability of regional DRR activities and programs that increase the capacity of host governments to respond independently and appropriately to local and regional disasters with minimal international assistance.