



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

### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

#### Improving Regional Disaster Information Management

On August 21, the USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in San José, Costa Rica, hosted an informational meeting with representatives from the Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO) and the Foundation for the Coordination of Information Resources for Disaster Prevention (FUNDACRID), an entity of the Regional Disaster Information Center, to discuss the USAID/OFDA-funded program that aims to improve communication on disaster preparedness and response and strengthen disaster information management throughout LAC.

The 12-month project, entitled "Strengthening disaster risk reduction in Central and South America through improved administration and management of disaster preparedness and response information," will provide more than \$110,000 to support and strengthen the emergency and disaster response information networks of Chile's National Emergency Office of the Ministry of the Interior, Colombia's National Unit for Disaster Risk Management, and the Faculty of Medical Science at the *Universidad de San Carlos de Guatemala* in Guatemala. The project will work closely with the Latin American Risk Management Information Centers Network (RELACIGER) to promote the integration of RELACIGER's goals with those of national civil defense and protection organizations in affiliated countries.

Participants discussed project objectives and outlined strategies for USAID/OFDA regional advisors and disaster risk management specialists (DRMS) to assist emergency response organizations in implementing the program. These strategies include supporting capacity-building activities and developing tools for information centers, virtual libraries, and civil protection entities to facilitate the selection, storage, processing, updating, and effective use of relevant information to ensure evidence-based management and educated decision-making processes during disasters.



Photo by Pedro Soto, USAID/OFDA

**Information is crucial for emergency operation centers such as this one in Colombia.**

### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Jacqueline Montoya, USAID/OFDA

**Early this month, approximately 100 participants met to discuss post-disaster business continuity strategies and explore risk reduction in the private and public sectors.**

#### USAID/OFDA Supports Public-Private Partnerships Regional Forum

The second regional seminar on LAC Partnerships Between Public and Private Sectors for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) convened in Cartagena, Colombia, on August 1 and 2 to promote and strengthen the exchange between governments and the private sector on disaster risk management in the region. A joint effort organized by USAID/OFDA, the Latin America and Caribbean Economic System, the regional office of the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), and Colombia's National System for DRR, the seminar also included speakers representing ECOPETROL, CEMEX, Louisiana State University, Florida International University, and major private companies, as well as representatives from governments and business associations in the LAC region.

During the two-day seminar, an

estimated 100 representatives from regional governments, disaster response organizations, and private sector entities in the LAC region discussed how to best prepare for adverse scenarios and ensure the stability and operational capacity of state and social institutions in the aftermath of disasters. Participants agreed that, while the public sector must ensure safe environments for the continuity of operations, the private sector must also take responsibility for investing in DRR and considering it an essential element of business and economic planning. For example, an estimated 25 percent of businesses do not re-open following a major disaster and approximately 80 percent of companies that do not recover from a disaster within one month are likely to go out of business, according to UNISDR.

Studies reflected in the 2013

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## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### Improving Disaster Preparedness Among Haiti's Municipal Leaders

In preparation for the 2013 Atlantic Basin hurricane season, USAID/OFDA collaborated with Haiti's Directorate of Civil Protection (DCP) National Disaster Risk Management Plan (PNGRD) to develop and conduct a technical assistance program with mayors from cities across Haiti. The program - implemented as a series of workshops in Sud, Sud Est, Nippes, Ouest, and Grand'Anse departments - was overseen by USAID/OFDA DRMSs Liliana Etchebarne and Rose-Luce Cadot, with the assistance of Dr. Richard Etienne, risk management specialist with the World Bank.

The goal of the USAID/OFDA-PNGRD workshops was to discuss the PNGRD and educate the mayors on their role as municipal leaders during an emergency or disaster. The workshops also taught the mayors the process of damage assessment and needs analysis (DANA) in post-disaster situations. In total, more than 200 mayors and deputy mayors attended the workshops, in addition to departmental technical coordinators and departmental delegates to the Government of Haiti (GoH).

Participants responded with positive feedback, though many noted the need for further specialized training of response teams for municipal disaster risk management and DANA, as well as improved communication systems between departments and the DPC. Participants also suggested the implementation of permanent working bodies and regular operations aimed at strengthening local community organizations. The importance of coordinated activities was a common theme during discussions.

The mayors' workshops are an example of how USAID/OFDA is working closely with the DPC and GoH to strengthen disaster risk management. In FY 2012, USAID/OFDA helped organize disaster simulation exercises, which incorporated lessons learned from previous responses to improve national-level coordination with department-level DPC units.



Photo by Antonio Pinheiro, USAID/OFDA

**Disasters can bring private and public business continuity to a standstill; such as in Pernambuco Province, Brazil, after heavy rains damaged infrastructure in 2010.**

### Regional Forum Addresses Public and Private Sector Relationships

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UNISDR Global Assessment Report on Disaster Risk Reduction reveal that, while the responsibility to mitigate the impact disasters often falls to the public sector, many of the disaster impacts actually occur in the private sector. Furthermore, governments and the private sector are not versed in collaborating on disaster risk reduction (DRR) and risk management solutions. Strengthening public and private sector partnerships has gained importance in recent years. Of particular importance is the need for the private sector to support and complement government actions during disaster.

Of particular importance, the seminar enabled participants to exchange experiences regarding DRR and propose strategies for continuity of government services and business operations in the aftermath of a disaster. The development of continuity of operations plans in the political and economic-administrative spheres - including best practices, recommendations, and training processes - is vital to ensure limited impact to socio-economic infrastructure during and after a disaster, since approximately three-fourths of companies without business continuity plans fail within three years of a disaster.

The regional seminar resulted in a number of recommendations going forward, namely, that viable partnerships between the public and private sectors in the LAC region move from theory to practice by articulating a technical system and translating it into political and administrative operations. By integrating the public and private sectors in DRR, countries can reduce the socio-economic impacts of disasters and strengthen resilience in their communities.

As Regional Advisor Sidney Velado explains, "The private sector relies on government for infrastructure repair and restoration, while government depends on taxes generated by private companies in the aftermath of a disaster to assist in those said repairs and restoration activities. It is in their mutual best interest to communicate, seek synergies, and be better prepared to deal with disasters whenever they strike."

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### Enhancing Uruguay's National Emergency System

Uruguay's National Emergency System (SINAE) and USAID/OFDA signed an agreement on July 5 in Montevideo that will further strengthen the relationship between the two organizations. Participants at the meeting included the U.S. Ambassador to Uruguay Julissa Reynoso, U.S. Mission Disaster Relief Officer Tomas Guerrero, and representatives from SINAE and the Uruguayan International Cooperation Agency within the Office of Planning and Budget of the Presidency of the Republic. USAID/OFDA's Senior Regional Advisor (SRA) Tim Callaghan and DRMS Liliana Etchebarne attended on behalf of USAID/OFDA.

At the meeting, SRA Callaghan noted the positive relationship between USAID/OFDA and countries in the LAC region, and emphasized that USAID/OFDA's mandate necessitates tailored support to the specific needs of an individual country. In Uruguay, for example, USAID/OFDA works with SINAE to improve emergency communications, as well as supports the educational and training needs of key stakeholders in cooperation with educational institutions already collaborating with USAID/OFDA, including Florida International University and the University of Chile.

In addition, USAID/OFDA and SINAE agreed to continue improving urban search-and-rescue (USAR) training in Uruguay, with Uruguay's National Fire Brigade offering use of a large property and existing infrastructure for USAR training exercises.

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