

USAID/Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)

Latin America and Caribbean Disaster Risk Reduction Plan

2012-2014



USAID/OFDA's Mandate

The U.S. Agency for International Development's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance has the responsibility to provide foreign disaster assistance and to coordinate the response of the U.S. Government to disasters abroad.

USAID/OFDA's mandate is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and reduce the social and economic impact of disasters.

Background

Located within USAID, the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is the lead U.S. Government (USG) office charged with providing humanitarian assistance in response to international emergencies and disasters. Additionally, USAID/OFDA provides assistance to help vulnerable populations to prepare for, mitigate, respond to, and recover from adverse events.

The USAID/OFDA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), headquartered in San Jose, Costa Rica, has existed since 1983. During the early years, USAID/OFDA's work focused principally on responding to emergencies in the region. However, by the late 1980s, USAID/OFDA began to complement response activities with a program of training for first responders and emergency managers. Through the years, this training program has evolved from focusing primarily on USAID/OFDA-funded training to a multi-layered program providing specialized technical assistance to participating agencies in host countries, which for the most part assume the training costs themselves. Today, governments and organizations in 30 countries participate in the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which focuses on training and technical assistance for both response and disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities.

For more than a decade, USAID/OFDA has supported a variety of other DRR initiatives in the region. These efforts have included interventions at both policy and operational levels, and promoted preparedness and mitigation themes. Today, there is increasing understanding of the impact of human behavior on the disaster profile of a given country, of the role that public policy and investment can play in reducing/transferring risk, and of the impact disasters can have on development goals and poverty alleviation efforts.

These realizations have meant that an ever-widening set of actors need to participate in planning for and implementing DRR interventions.

USAID/OFDA Coordination and Leadership

USAID/OFDA is facilitating the exchange of information, seeking optimal coordination between, and, when necessary, mediating between key individuals and stakeholder groups involved in DRR efforts across the LAC region. USAID/OFDA will continue to engage with regional organizations, national and local governments, and other institutions to ensure DRR is a priority with a strong basis for implementation.

USAID/OFDA has invested significant effort in coordinating with USAID Missions and strengthening their capacity in both disaster response and DRR. The LAC regional office holds regular meetings with Mission Disaster Relief Officers throughout the region. USAID/OFDA plans to increase engagement with Mission staff to explore linkages for DRR orientation in development programs.

USAID/OFDA also maintains close coordination with the U.S. Military, through contacts in Washington, the U.S. Southern and Northern Commands (SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM) and their representatives in each country to share information regarding USAID/OFDA's activities and participate in the military's humanitarian assistance planning.

USAID/OFDA engages with other USG interagency partners, including the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture, the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and U.S. Peace Corps.

USAID/OFDA plans to increase efforts to foster private sector involvement to leverage new sources of funding for community-based risk reduction activities.

Coordination with other donors and international organizations, including the Canadian International Development Agency, Swiss Development Cooperation, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the U.K. Department for International Development, the European Union, the World Bank, and various U.N. agencies, will help USAID/OFDA to prioritize geographic areas or themes, coordinate programs, and possibly leverage additional resources. USAID/OFDA will engage the regional development banks to strengthen DRR considerations in project planning and financing.

LAC Regional Context

The most frequent natural hazards in Latin America and the Caribbean include floods, tropical storms, earthquakes, landslides, forest fires, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis. Climate change is expected to alter frequency, intensity and duration of climate extremes. Non-climatic stressors, including population growth, rapid and unplanned urbanization, environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, poverty, and limited opportunities for economic development, may exacerbate current vulnerability and potentially increase exposure to natural hazards.

Disaster Risk Reduction

The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events. (U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction)

Caribbean Context

The Caribbean is composed of small island states with stable democratic governments and relatively small populations. Hazards in the Caribbean include hydrometeorological events, such as destructive hurricanes, as well as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides, and tsunamis.

The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency is the regional coordinating body for national disaster organizations (NDOs) in the region; USAID/OFDA supports its regional framework and DRR initiatives.

Because of stable, functioning governance in most of the region, USAID/OFDA has the ability to support interventions at national, community, and household levels in order to strengthen resiliency. Staff in NDOs tend to stay in their positions beyond the change of administrations, which enables continuity of programming.

Conditions in Haiti set that country apart from the rest of the region. While weather-related disasters have been the most persistent hazards in this highly impoverished nation, 2010 saw two events that eclipsed nearly all prior natural disasters in terms of the number of deaths and number of affected people. On January 12, 2010, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake claimed the lives of more than 300,000 people, according to the Government of Haiti, and affected nearly 40 percent of Haiti's 9.8 million inhabitants. Then, beginning in late October 2010, an ongoing cholera epidemic killed over 7,000 people and sickened nearly 526,000 people as of January 2012.

Caribbean Assumptions

- Strong NDO partnerships exist throughout the region.
- The national political systems of the countries in the region will remain stable.
- Regional coordination between Caribbean states will remain effective.
- Climate variability and change will continue to have significant impact on lives and livelihoods in the region.
- Additional population expansion along the coastline will create greater vulnerability to hydrometeorological extremes.
- Disaster impacts will provide insight to better guide potential DRR activities.

Caribbean Constraints

- Most countries have a limited number of NGO partners working on DRR activities.
- Small island populations and migration limit human resource capacity.
- Most countries have limited experience in carrying out DRR activities.

Central America and Mexico Context

The greatest threats for Central America and Mexico (CAM) are hydrometeorological extremes, particularly floods and drought (leading to food insecurity); earthquakes; and volcanic eruptions. High poverty levels increase vulnerability to disasters.

Capacity for disaster response in CAM is relatively high; all countries have democratically elected governments and established national disaster management offices with staff and budgets. Leadership of disaster management offices changes with new administrations, requiring regular outreach to new leadership to re-establish relationships.

Regional political trends include decentralization, regional integration, and greater openness to regional free-trade agreements. Increased economic openness may create opportunities for increased private sector involvement in DRR.

Central America and Mexico Assumptions

- Strong NDO partnerships exist throughout the region.
- The national political systems of CAM countries will remain stable.
- Regional coordination between CAM countries will increase related to disaster response and humanitarian assistance.
- Climate variability and change will continue to have significant impact on lives and livelihoods in the region.
- Disaster impacts will provide insight to better guide potential DRR activities.
- Free trade agreements may create opportunities for additional collaboration with the U.S. private sector.
- **Continued population migration to cities will increase their vulnerability to natural hazards, especially earthquakes.**

Central America and Mexico Constraints

- Changes in government administration may require regular outreach to new leadership to re-establish relationships to continue ongoing efforts in DRR and disaster preparedness.
- Security issues could limit activities in some countries.

South America Regional Context

The most significant hazards in South America include earthquakes, flooding, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, and tsunamis.

South America is characterized by mega-cities (metropolitan areas with populations greater than 10 million inhabitants), vast geographic regions, and sizeable populations. In most countries, significant economic disparity exists between urban and rural populations. In some countries, large indigenous populations, which are culturally and economically disparate from the rest of the populations, are increasing their demands for inclusion.

Governments in South America are democratically elected and manifest a wide range of capabilities. Throughout much of the continent, governments have made a concerted effort at decentralization down to the provincial/departamental levels; many are proceeding to the municipal level.

South America Assumptions

- High levels of humanitarian needs and vulnerability will continue in pocket areas, particularly in the Andean region.
- Strong NDO partnerships exist throughout the region.
- Climate variability and change will continue to have significant impact on lives and livelihoods in the region.
- Disaster impacts will provide insight to better guide potential DRR activities.
- Continued population migration to cities will increase their vulnerability to natural hazards, especially earthquakes.

South America Constraints

- Responsibilities for municipal-level DRR activities have increased with decentralization, but funding has not kept pace to fully address new responsibilities.

Priority Program Selection

This plan capitalizes on present USAID/OFDA activities addressing DRR in the LAC region and aligns USAID/OFDA goals with internationally recognized humanitarian community priorities. The LAC programs build in resources for program evaluations and require a monitoring and evaluation plan from each implementing partner.

Given the hazards, assumptions, and constraints of the LAC region, USAID/OFDA intends to prioritize DRR activities, in both urban and rural settings, in the following areas:

- **Safeguarding livelihood assets**

Disasters in the LAC region cause losses of and damages to assets, negatively affecting household livelihoods, and consequently, communities' ability to recover from disasters. USAID/OFDA will identify the primary assets on which the most at-risk communities rely and which are most vulnerable to likely shocks, and will implement activities to reduce vulnerability to asset damage and loss.

- **Preventing the loss of shelter**

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, natural hazards, including hydrometeorological and geological hazards, threaten to damage or destroy shelter. USAID/OFDA seeks to mitigate loss of shelter through targeted interventions.

- **Building capacity**

During the past 20 years, USAID/OFDA has devoted significant resources to build national capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters. The current RDAP portfolio of 17 courses in Spanish, English, Portuguese, and French, reflects this fact. USAID/OFDA has earned a privileged position in the LAC Region as the lead agency in capacity building for first responders. In the coming years, USAID/OFDA will engage with regional, national, municipal, and local authorities, as well as with communities directly, to continue to build capacity for disaster risk reduction and response.

Protection

Minimizing risks from abuse, exploitation, and harm in disaster settings is an integral component of all USAID/OFDA programs, and DRR activities are no exception. Protection mainstreaming is essential as communities prepare for disasters and work to mitigate their effects. In the LAC region, as elsewhere, USAID/OFDA pays particular attention to the needs of women, children, and other vulnerable groups.

DRR programming should include measures to prevent family separation when disasters occur; facilitate community discussion and planning for evacuating elderly persons and persons with disabilities during a disaster; and encourage local and national authorities to take early steps to address safety concerns, such as deployment of police, and the organization of safe displacement sites to prevent gender-based violence or exploitation and abuse of women, children, and other vulnerable groups.

The activities outlined in this plan address USAID/OFDA’s Natural and Technological Risks; Economic Recovery and Market Systems; Agriculture and Food Security; and Shelter and Settlements sectors. At this time, USAID/OFDA does not foresee engaging in DRR activities in the Nutrition, Health, and Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene sectors in the LAC region.

GOAL

Reduce risk through enhanced institutional and community capacities to respond to and mitigate the effects of disasters, strengthen the resiliency of vulnerable communities, and reduce exposure to hazards.

PRIORITIES

1. Ensure that disaster risk reduction is a national and a local priority with strong institutional basis for implementation.

Activity – Support Institutional Strengthening: USAID/OFDA will support regional, national, and local authorities to advance strategic planning and activity implementation in DRR. This could include policy development in urban and rural areas, consultation workshops at all levels and across sectors, and institutional capacity strengthening.

2. Identify, assess, and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning.

Activity – Strengthen Early Warning Systems (EWS): USAID/OFDA will support people-centered EWS to reduce loss of life related to hydro-meteorological and geological hazards. USAID/OFDA will give priority to activities at the local government and community level with strong linkages to national and regional EWS.

3. Use knowledge, innovation, and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels.

Activity – Strengthen Coping Mechanisms for Culturally Unique Populations: USAID/OFDA will support studying, documenting, and most importantly, strengthening

Gender

USAID/OFDA recognizes that disasters affect women, men, adolescents, and children differently, based on differing needs and existing social inequalities. Gender-sensitive approaches and activities should be incorporated—or mainstreamed—into all phases of disaster programming. DRR efforts must also address the different abilities and vulnerabilities of individuals in each gender group.

Examples of gender mainstreaming within DRR programming include gender analysis incorporated within needs assessment and planning phases; gender disaggregated data collection and reporting; gender analysis training for program and field staff; gender-balanced program implementation; systematization of successful incorporation of gender into project/program implementation.

traditional survival strategies, with the intention of significantly upgrading the self-sufficiency of culturally unique communities in responding to crises.

Activity – Support DRR in Primary and Secondary Education: USAID/OFDA will support DRR education to primary and secondary students, with interventions such as curriculum reform, revision of teacher education curricula in universities, and in-service training for teachers.

Activity – Institutionalize Higher Education in DRR: USAID/OFDA will support activities to assist universities in developing the DRR capacities of future professionals and leaders. In addition, USAID/OFDA will advance the role of universities in promoting DRR policies and influencing related decision-making, such as promoting collaboration between academics and local leaders to improve land use management practices in high-risk communities.

Activity – Increase Capacities for DRR in Urban Settings: USAID/OFDA will support the development of tools and activities to increase DRR capacities in urban settings, emphasizing the shelter and settlements and economic recovery and livelihoods sectors.

4. Reduce the underlying risk factors.

Activity – Safeguard Household Livelihoods: USAID/OFDA will support activities to protect household livelihoods in urban and rural settings susceptible to recurrent natural hazards, including protecting household income-generating capacity and access to credit, as well as safeguarding livelihoods assets for small-scale agriculture and livestock activities.

Activity – Leverage Private Sector Resources: USAID/OFDA will foster strategic relationships between private enterprise, governments, and NGOs, both in terms of in-kind and monetary support for disaster responses and strategic partnerships for risk reduction activities.

Activity – Promote Hazard-Resistant Shelter and Settlements: Just as USAID/OFDA supports “building back better” following a disaster, USAID/OFDA will support “building better” as a mitigation initiative. USAID/OFDA will support dissemination of technical expertise for improved land use management and building practices, such as training for masons for seismic-resistant housing.

5. Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels.

Activity: Improve Community Emergency Response Plans and Shelter Identification – USAID/OFDA will promote activities to improve community emergency response plans and identification of appropriate emergency shelters in vulnerable communities. In addition, USAID/OFDA will support dialogue and dissemination of experiences on issues related to post-disaster shelter needs.

Activity – Provide DRR Technical Assistance and Training: USAID/OFDA will support training and technical assistance activities at all levels that are in line with countries' priorities and needs and USAID/OFDA's capabilities.

Activity – Pre-position Emergency Relief Supplies: USAID/OFDA will support the pre-positioning of emergency relief supplies in areas prone to isolation during disasters, particularly floods, as the logistics associated with delivering such supplies to these communities during crises can be costly and complicated.