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Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA)  
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**DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

# USAID/OFDA Hosts Humanitarian Learning Exchange

On September 17 and 18, the USAID/OFDA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean hosted a humanitarian learning exchange in San José, Costa Rica, on markets and livelihood interventions in urban disaster risk reduction (DRR). The workshop explored how humanitarian efforts can best incorporate the economic recovery and market systems (ERMS) sector and cross-cutting “neighborhood approach” into DRR programming in urban environments. The approximately 20 participants included urban DRR and ERMS experts from USAID/OFDA implementing partners and international donor organizations.

Representatives from non-governmental organizations—including GOAL, Project Concern International, Save the Children, and others—presented on their experiences and lessons learned during the implementation of USAID/OFDA-funded projects. Participants discussed concerns related to the increased migration of vulnerable populations from rural to urban areas—a phenomenon that often results in the unregulated settlement of land prone to natural hazards, as well as urban issues such as crime and violence. Common program actions taken to increase household and neighborhood resilience include infrastructure upgrades and support for community groups—such as *Mujeres Empoderadas* in Mixco, Guatemala—that offer financial management and vocational training, disaster risk mapping, and emergency response planning with community members. Other activities include encouraging private-sector stakeholders to invest in DRR measures in their communities.



Photo by Rachel Ingersoll, USAID/OFDA

Ricardo Mena, head of the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) regional office in Latin America, spoke about his organization’s “Making Cities Resilient” campaign and noted the need for municipal governments to engage in risk identification and mapping.

“We encourage the bottom-up approach to generate social pressure from community organizations to encourage municipalities to take action,” he remarked.

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard, who helped organize the recent workshop, agreed.

“Successful DRR programming requires communities and governments really working together with private and public sector stakeholders and the emergency systems—from the municipal level up to the national governments—and involving international organizations such as USAID, UNISDR, or the European Commission of Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO),” she said.

Leonard discussed ways in which the innovative neighborhood approach—a practice arising from the post-2010 Haiti earthquake response—analyzes the resilience and disaster-recovery capacity of urban society through a lens that looks at vulnerable communities as interrelated geographical units to encourage social cohesion, strengthen community infrastructure, and fortify sustainable networks of market vendors and suppliers.

“Working in urban systems means embracing complexity. It is important to do as good an analysis as possible, but also to jump in and start implementation, remembering to check your

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Photo by Auriana Koutnik, USAID/OFDA



Photo by Ricardo Berganza, USAID/OFDA



Photo by Ricardo Berganza, USAID/OFDA



Photo courtesy of GOAL Honduras

**USAID/OFDA supports projects to strengthen urban DRR, including helping cities become more resilient, enlisting municipal authorities, conducting soil studies, and retrofitting unsafe structures. Top: Workshop participants pause for a group photo.**

## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo by Pedro Soto, USAID/OFDA

**USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist Manuel Ramirez addresses participants at the first regional forum on DRR in higher education, held in Panama in August 2012.**

### USAID/OFDA Plans Second Regional Forum on DRR in Higher Education

Recognizing the important role higher education institutions have in the disaster preparedness, response, and recovery potential of Latin America and Caribbean countries, USAID/OFDA and the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction are sponsoring the Second Latin American Regional Forum on Disaster Risk Reduction in Higher Education, organized by the Latin American and Caribbean University Network for Disaster Risk Reduction (REDULAC).

The forum will be held in Bogotá, Colombia, from November 24 to 26. An estimated 160 participants from 20 countries are expected to attend, including members of REDULAC national chapters, university authorities, national emergency system representatives, and international organizations, such as the Red Cross.

As with the first forum, held in Panama City, Panama, in August 2012, DRR experts and university professors will present on research experiences and lessons learned during the incorporation of DRR into higher education institutions and study plans, including careers, social action, educational outreach, and community DRR activities. Group discussions will follow daily panels involving subject experts, allowing participants to explore specific disaster management and risk reduction themes in greater depth and form communities of practice within the university networks.

The three-day event will be broadcast live via Internet in both English and Spanish and an anticipated 1,500 or more viewers will have the opportunity to engage in simultaneous question and answer sessions with forum participants. At least 35 universities and other institutions of higher learning, as well as numerous emergency response agencies, participated in the 2012 virtual forum, expanding the reach of the event tenfold.

For more information, see [www.redulac.net](http://www.redulac.net) or e-mail [foregional@redulac.net](mailto:foregional@redulac.net).

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## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### Project Helps Honduran Farmers Reduce Drought Vulnerability

Extremely dry conditions in parts of Central America earlier this year have caused extensive crop losses throughout the so-called "Dry Corridor" of the isthmus. In Honduras, the drought destroyed an estimated 70 percent of corn crops and 45 percent of bean crops, directly affecting an estimated 120,000 families in 97 municipalities, according to the Government of Honduras National Emergency Commission (COPECO).

To help mitigate the impacts of future droughts and reduce vulnerability and food insecurity among low-income farming families in Honduras, USAID/OFDA has provided \$150,000 to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to support a DRR project that will introduce water-harvesting and dry-climate farming techniques in drought-prone areas of Lempira, Intibucá, and La Paz departments.

The CRS-implemented project aims to benefit 1,300 families who own small plots of land in drought-prone areas, by providing training and technical assistance in soil management, mulching and composting, water channeling and irrigation systems, use of drought-resistant seed varieties, and adoption of alternative crops, as appropriate.

Project managers plan specific interventions for each farm plot in coordination with each farming family, following a field visit involving the participation of municipal technicians and community leaders.

"We are confident that this support can help mitigate some of the damage and get the people from these departments back on their feet in preparation for the next harvesting cycle," said Juan Sheenan, CRS Country Representative for Honduras.



Photo courtesy of CRS Honduras

**The USAID/OFDA-funded project will benefit farming families in three drought-prone departments of Honduras.**

### USAID/OFDA Hosts Learning Exchange

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original assumptions and adjust accordingly," said David Nicholson, Director of the Environment, Energy, and Climate Change Technical Support Unit of Mercy Corps.

ERMS experts, including UNISDR and Florida International University representatives, led workshop discussions on market incentives that support increased resilience and post-disaster continuity in urban centers, starting with careful analysis of individual communities' strengths and weaknesses while considering survival and recovery strategies used successfully during past disasters, in addition to cultural elements that maintain community cohesion and support systems. Building on this knowledge, the incentives aim to ensure post-disaster market continuity, with mapping tools to identify risk areas; micro-financing to aid small business recovery; affordable micro-insurance for businesses to guarantee immediate access to cash and resources after an adverse event; merchant training on best-practices to track inventory, income, and expenditures; and strategies to encourage private-public dialogue and provide DRR investment incentives to the private sector.

The workshop on markets and livelihood interventions in urban DRR is part of a series of humanitarian learning exchange workshops hosted worldwide by USAID/OFDA to promote a culture of learning and sharing of information that will positively affect future programming and disaster response.