

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA



The neighbors of Vistas de la Comunidad championed the community's progress and now enjoy living in a safer and healthier place. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA

'My Neighborhood' Project Improves Safety in Urban Guatemalan Barrios

With USAID/OFDA support, Project Concern International (PCI) developed an urban disaster risk reduction (DRR) model that is helping transform vulnerable neighborhoods in Guatemala City into resilient, safe, and healthy communities.

The first phase of the project, named "Barrio Mio," which means "My Neighborhood", was successfully implemented from 2012 to 2015 in two neighborhoods of Mixco Municipality, a densely populated urban area located on a hillside at risk of landslides, flooding, and earthquakes. In this phase, the project upgraded communities' water, sanitation, and



PCI Consultant Alejandro Rizo shows a retaining wall built with recycled tires. Photo by Irene Gago, USAID/OFDA

hygiene (WASH) systems, developed rainwater drainage infrastructure, improved stairways and emergency evacuation routes, engineered retaining walls, and reinforced housing structures through a cost-effective process that featured the active participation of the beneficiary communities and the collaboration of public, private, and academic actors.

The planning processes, activities, and lessons learned from these model communities were systematized through a series of guidelines and manuals that have been shared with key municipal and national authorities and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) throughout the Latin American and Caribbean region.

José Murguía, PCI Barrio Mio Project Director, said, "We aimed to model a project that could help reduce disaster risk in hazard-prone urban settings by improving settlements, WASH systems, and livelihoods. It is important for PCI to promote the replication of this project in other vulnerable communities of the region. According to recent research conducted in the

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USAID/OFDA Supports Belize Following Hurricane Earl

Hurricane Earl made landfall near Belize City, Belize, on August 3, bringing with it up to 12 inches of rainfall and a storm surge that flooded coastal areas across central and northern Belize, affecting approximately 12,000 people in Belize City, the Belize River Valley, and the town of San Ignacio.

Flooding displaced more than 3,000 people and damaged or destroyed approximately 250 houses, as well as public infrastructure, including several bridges.

In advance of the storm, USAID/OFDA activated two disaster risk management specialists and six local surge capacity consultants to assess the humanitarian situation, liaise with national authorities, and coordinate response activities.

After the storm, USAID/OFDA funded two helicopter flights to support the Government of Belize (GoB) in a rapid assessment of the damage caused by the storm. The flights allowed representatives of USAID/OFDA, the GoB, and the Belize Red Cross to assess areas that were difficult to access because of storm damage.

Following assessments, U.S. Ambassador to Belize Carlos R. Moreno issued a disaster declaration due to the effects of Hurricane Earl. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$50,000 to the Belize Red Cross to procure emergency relief supplies for distribution to vulnerable families affected by the storm.



Hurricane Earl damaged numerous buildings when it made landfall in Belize. Photo by Marlon Tillett, U.S. Embassy Belmopan

Chile Develops Gender and Disaster Risk Management Course

With support from USAID/OFDA, Chile's National Roundtable on Gender and Disaster Risk Management (DRM) developed and recently validated a new, two-day humanitarian training entitled "Gender and Disaster Risk Management Course."

The Roundtable, composed of representatives from the Government of Chile (GoC) Ministry of the Interior's National Emergency Management Office (ONEMI), Ministry of Women and Gender Equality, NGO Caritas Chile, and USAID/OFDA, worked for nearly two years to develop the training.

The course, intended for government emergency responders as well as humanitarian agencies, includes modules that cover concepts including DRM, gender and public policies, and integrating gender into DRM. The training reviews some of the reasons why women have a disproportionately higher risk of being affected by disaster, as well as ways to include a gender perspective in all phases of disaster management, including risk analysis, risk reduction, emergency response, rehabilitation, and recovery.

Course developers tested a pilot version last year among a small group of humanitarian organization staff, local government representatives, and gender specialists, incorporating participant feedback into a revised version imparted this year.

The course validation was held in Santiago, Chile, on August 23 and 24, with 22 participants including representatives from USAID/OFDA, ONEMI, the GoC Agriculture Ministry's National Forestry Corporation (CONAF), Caritas Chile, Foundation for the Elimination of Poverty (FUSUPO), Methodist Team for Humanitarian Assistance (EMAH), and the municipal governments of Hualpén, La Florida, Pudahuel, and Santiago cities.



Approximately two dozen representatives from various municipal governments and humanitarian organizations in Chile participated in the recent Gender and DRM Course validation. Photo courtesy of Caritas Chile



Cipresales neighbors work together to transport a huge tank down a steep slope to the wastewater treatment plant. Photo courtesy of PCI Guatemala

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metropolitan area of Guatemala City, more than 300 communities live under similar conditions as El Cambray Dos village, where heavy rains triggered a major landslide in October 2015, killing at least 280 people and leaving more than a hundred families homeless."

Eduardo Paiz, PCI DRR Specialist, commented that one of the most innovative elements of the project is the water treatment plant, which removes impurities from wastewater so that it can be discharged into the environment. The treatment plant was specially tailored to the steep slopes of the area and uses a low-cost biological process that works with the force of gravity, requiring no electricity. Before this innovation, untreated wastewater collected in the streets and flowed into a nearby river, creating health and mudslide risks.

Rosalba Ayala, a community leader and beneficiary of the Barrio Mio project, said, "We are very grateful to USAID/OFDA and PCI for helping us to develop a safe neighborhood. Previously, in the rainy season, it was hard to walk through our streets as they were always muddy and our houses were frequently flooded."

Ayala, who is also a mother of six children and a food vendor, added, "This project empowered our community, as we had to organize and work together to rebuild our neighborhood infrastructure. We started with a group of 10 women, who helped motivate other neighbors to join what we called the "ant plan", because we worked in rows, hauling down sandbags, pipes, and other materials. Our kids also wanted to be part of the project, so we gave them small jobs to contribute."

Julia León, another community leader, commented that it was very exciting to see more than 90 neighbors working together, sometimes until midnight. "We all put our hearts and souls into this project, and we had to do it all by hand, as our streets are too narrow to allow construction machinery to enter. We dug a tunnel at least two meters deep and 700 meters long, where we installed the WASH system and rainwater drains."

León added that one of the most memorable days of the project was when they were able to pull down the steep slope a huge tank for the wastewater treatment plant, equipment that they never imagined having in their neighborhood.

Barrio Mio Project Director Murguía said, "Women's involvement was essential to the project's success, as they had more time and willingness to work on a community project. It was also very important to partner with national and municipal government agencies, as they can continue to replicate the initiative throughout the country. In fact, the Mixco municipal government already has replicated the project in 15 communities, and they are currently working with other neighborhoods where the same needs exist."

[Click here to watch "Barrio Mio" video](#)

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