



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

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo courtesy of the U.S. National Weather Service Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program

USAID/OFDA staff and disaster risk management specialists (DRMSs) from the Bahamas, Barbados, Dominica, Haiti, and Jamaica recently visited the "Tsunami Ready" Mayagüez Municipality in western Puerto Rico, home of the U.S. National Weather Service (NWS) Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program.

Supporting Tsunami Preparedness

On April 1, a magnitude 8.2 earthquake struck near the northern coast of Chile, killing six people and prompting a tsunami and a series of strong aftershocks. Nearly 1 million people were safely evacuated from harm's way, thanks to timely alert messages from the Pacific Tsunami Warning System (PTWS) as well as Chile's disaster preparedness and swift response actions.

According to the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, which supports tsunami warning systems worldwide, the situation in Chile has improved significantly since the February 27, 2010, earthquake and tsunami that impacted the country and caused more than 550 deaths. Today, local populations are well prepared; regional cooperation is effective; and warning and response mechanisms are efficient.

"The Chilean Government's response to this most recent disaster demonstrates the lifesaving power of disaster risk reduction work," said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

USAID/OFDA has worked with the Government of Chile for more than two decades to strengthen its natural disaster preparedness and response capabilities. Since 2010, efforts have expanded to help Chile improve its national seismic monitoring system. Additionally, USAID/OFDA and the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric

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Photo by Diedra Spencer, USAID/OFDA

USAID staff survey damage from the 2010 Chile earthquake and tsunami.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Partner Meetings Help Establish Mutual Priorities

In countries where the USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) operates, staff meet annually with host governments and other partners to review work plans and establish mutual disaster management priorities, including training, technical assistance, and other disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities.

At each meeting, participants typically review the USAID/OFDA regional DRR strategy and RDAP work plan, as well as discuss specific areas where USAID/OFDA can help the country improve resiliency.

"These meetings are tailored to the unique context and needs of each country, but with similar objectives: to establish mutual priorities and areas of focus for our activities," said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan.

Through the years, the meetings have evolved from small, informal gatherings with host government representatives to large, well-attended events featuring the participation of government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations, and the private sector.

"This year, for the first time, stakeholder meetings in Dominica and Saint Vincent included not only government entities responsible for public health, social welfare, public works, and emergency response, but also various NGOs, amateur radio societies, private shipping companies, and local service clubs including Rotary, Lions, and Kiwanis clubs," said Dominica-based DRMS Cecil Shillingford, who coordinates program activities in Dominica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

At a recent partner meeting in Uruguay, 53 representatives from 21 organizations including the Government of Uruguay emergency management system, police and fire departments, education sector, hospitals, municipal governments, NGOs, and the U.S. Embassy in Montevideo, reviewed RDAP-related achievements during the previous year and discussed national disaster management goals, including strengthening national urban search-and-rescue and damage assessment capabilities, DRR in education, and gender concerns in disaster management. The Uruguayan news media, including all local television stations, attended and covered the March 14 event.

In other countries, the national emergency

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Partner Meetings Help Establish Mutual Priorities

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management system has adopted the stakeholders meetings.

"In Grenada, stakeholders met several years ago and discussed the disaster risk management program, shared information about each partner's activities, and identified a need for better overall information sharing. Toward this end, Grenada's National Disaster Management Agency now includes the USAID/OFDA-supported annual stakeholders meeting in its annual work plan. Two years ago, a working group was established, including a University of the West Indies representative, to plan the meetings," explained DRMS Audrey Mullings, who coordinates program activities in Grenada.



Photo courtesy of Julie Leonard, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard (center) helps take measurements during a post-tsunami survey by U.S. Government and Government of El Salvador authorities following the 2012 earthquake and tsunami that affected coastal areas in El Salvador.

Supporting Tsunami Preparedness

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Administration (NOAA), through the PTWS, are helping Chile strengthen its tsunami warning system, which has bolstered the country's ability to detect tsunami threats and alert people as necessary.

USAID/OFDA is part of the U.S. delegation to the inter-governmental coordinating groups for both the Pacific and the Caribbean and adjacent areas tsunami warning systems, and has supported several workshops designed by the NOAA International Tsunami Information Center (ITIC) for Chilean and other Latin American scientists and disaster managers, to help strengthen tsunami warning and emergency response standard operating procedures.

In fact, at the time of the April 1 Chile earthquake and tsunami, scientists and disaster managers for the Caribbean system, including participants from Central America and Mexico, were at the most recent ITIC workshop in Mexico. A similar training will be held in Ecuador in June in support of Latin America's Pacific coast countries.

USAID/OFDA also supports community-based tsunami awareness projects. The most recent project began in March in El Salvador, where USAID/OFDA provided \$150,000 to support a community-level tsunami preparedness project implemented by Save the Children.

The project aims to address vulnerabilities that Government of El Salvador officials, with assistance from ITIC and USAID/OFDA, identified following a magnitude 7.2 offshore earthquake and tsunami that affected El Salvador in August 2012. Specifically, the project intends to strengthen the capacity of residents of Isla de Méndez, in Usulután Department, to better prepare for, respond to, and recover from tsunamis and floods.

The population of Isla de Méndez has a high degree of vulnerability to these hazards due to the coastal town's relatively flat surface, compounded by the absence of a warning system and the lack of appropriate shelter infrastructure. The USAID/OFDA-supported project intends to increase tsunami awareness among the community's approximately 2,500 inhabitants, including 1,500 children, establish an early warning system linked to national and regional warning systems, and build an elevated temporary shelter facility.

Finally, as part of USAID/OFDA's ongoing efforts to support tsunami preparedness in the Caribbean, on April 8, USAID/OFDA regional staff and Caribbean-based DRMSs participated in an annual program review in Puerto Rico, as well as visited the NWS Caribbean Tsunami Warning Program and the Puerto Rico Seismic Network offices in Mayagüez Municipality, one of the island's 42 "Tsunami Ready" municipalities. The delegation learned about how the NWS Tsunami Ready Program operates and visited the Mayagüez Municipality Office of Emergency Management.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Donates Equipment for Hazardous Materials Incident Response

USAID/OFDA, through RDAP, recently donated \$25,000 worth of equipment and personal protective gear for use during responses to incidents with hazardous materials to the Government of Guatemala's National Coordination for Disaster Management's Executive Secretariat (SE-CONRED).

Guatemala-based DRMS Ricardo Berganza delivered the donation, which includes personal protective equipment and various kits to contain chemical spills and leaks, on March 20.

SE-CONRED head Alejandro Maldonado, who accepted the donation, thanked USAID/OFDA for the equipment, as well as for the disaster response training and technical assistance provided through the years. RDAP has supported disaster management capacity building in Guatemala since the 1990s.



Photo courtesy of SE-CONRED

Members of SE-CONRED demonstrate the protective gear and equipment that USAID/OFDA donated to the agency for hazardous materials incident response operations.

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean



Tel: +(506) 2290-4133
E-mail: ofdalac@ofda.gov
Internet: www.usaid.gov