



**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 FIU

USAID/OFDA representatives and South American emergency officials visit the FIU "Wall of Wind" laboratory during the recent study tour.

Latin Americans Study U.S. Experiences of Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation

Latin American countries should cultivate a shared approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA), as well as take advantage of USAID/OFDA's support to build capacities and strengthen regional partnerships for disaster risk identification, urban DRR, early warning systems, and improved emergency response operations.

These are the conclusions of South American emergency officials and disaster management specialists from Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru, who, along with USAID/OFDA staff,

recently participated in a DRR/CCA study tour in south Florida, United States. The program placed special emphasis on hydrometeorological hazards, including tropical cyclones, extreme weather conditions, storm surges, and flooding, as well as CCA approaches adopted by Miami-Dade County.

The Latin American and Caribbean Center at Florida International University (FIU), which implements a USAID/OFDA-funded DRR program in the region, organized and hosted the week-long study tour with USAID/

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USAID/OFDA's Peruvian-based disaster risk management specialist, Dante Torres (left), with the Peruvian delegates.



Photo courtesy of INDECI

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Supports DRR in Ecuadorian Coastal Communities

With support from USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), Ecuadorian non-governmental organization EcoCostas has worked with coastal communities in San Cristóbal, Galapagos Province, and San Lorenzo, Manabí Province, to strengthen resilience against natural disasters, including floods, landslides, and tsunamis, and enhance CCA.

The project, funded through a \$38,000 small grant from RDAP and additional support from the European Commission, implemented a highly participative process at the community and municipal levels to create hazard and vulnerability maps and emergency response plans. The project also provided disaster risk management training to community leaders and local government authorities in the coastal districts.

In San Cristóbal, the easternmost island in the Galapagos archipelago, EcoCostas tackled hydrometeorological concerns such as preparation for seasonal heavy rainfall and associated flooding and landslides; helped to define municipal regulations for potable water management; and held workshops for key stakeholders and community members to map tsunami hazards and improve public awareness and safety procedures in accordance with national government guidelines.

San Lorenzo is a small coastal community near the new Pacific Refinery, currently under construction, and which lies approximately 25 miles south of Manta, the largest tuna processing port on the continent's Pacific coast.

As part of the project in San Lorenzo, EcoCostas worked with students from the Laica Eloy Alfaro University in Manabí Province to research and develop risk maps of areas vulnerable to floods and tsunamis. The project relied on community participation and dialogue, including for the mapping process and presenting the results to the public.

The project exhibited strong collaboration between EcoCostas and Ecuador's National Disaster Risk Management Secretariat, Environment Ministry, and municipal and district authorities, which joined efforts to strengthen the disaster management capabilities of vulnerable coastal communities.

EcoCostas' success in San Lorenzo has prompted two nearby coastal communities, Las Piñas and Santa Rosa, to strengthen their own DRR efforts.

DISASTER RESPONSE



Photo by Alfredo Chan, USAID/OFDA

Hurricane damage in Acapulco, Guerrero State.

USAID/OFDA Provides Aid to Mexico Following Hurricanes

Two tropical storms that developed into hurricanes in the Atlantic and Pacific oceans struck Mexico in succession in September, wreaking havoc on populations of both coasts.

Hurricane Manuel, which formed as a tropical storm on September 13 and dissipated on September 20, brought torrential rains and strong winds to Mexico's western states, particularly Guerrero and Sinaloa. Hurricane Ingrid produced heavy rainfall over eastern Mexico between September 13 and 17. The convergence of the two storms resulted in widespread flooding and landslides.

By September 24, the storms had caused 139 fatalities and scores of injuries, as well as prompted the evacuation of an estimated 59,000 people from affected areas; notably Acapulco, where tens of thousands of tourists, mostly Mexican nationals, were evacuated by airplane, helicopter, and ground transport from the popular vacation hotspot.

Government of Mexico authorities announced that 253 municipalities in 14 states were in a state of emergency as a result of the storms. The hurricanes damaged public service networks, schools, hospitals, bridges, and dams, and left hundreds of roads impassable, including Mexico's principal Autopista del Sol that connects Guerrero to the nation's capital, Mexico City.

On September 20, U.S. Ambassador to Mexico E. Anthony Wayne issued an internal disaster declaration due to the floods. In response, USAID/OFDA provided \$250,000 to the Mexican Red Cross for the local purchase and distribution of emergency relief supplies, including personal hygiene items, cleaning supplies, and kitchen utensils, to affected populations in Guerrero and Sinaloa.



Photo by Alfredo Chan, USAID/OFDA

Mexican Red Cross workers prepare emergency supplies.

Latin Americans Study U.S. Experiences

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OFDA support. The study tour examined disaster risk management in general and DRR in particular, from high-level research to community preparedness, and also illustrated the private sector's corporate social responsibility in developing emergency and business continuity plans. The south Florida partners included a cross section of the various sectors -- city, county, and state government, academia, business, and non-governmental organizations -- each with unique but complementary perspectives on both CCA and DRR.

During the tour, or *pasantía* as it is known in Spanish, participants toured the Port of Miami; the emergency operations centers (EOCs) of Miami-Dade and Monroe counties and FIU (which serves as a backup for Miami-Dade County); Home Depot; Florida Power and Light to discuss contingency planning for a nearby nuclear power facility; the FIU "Wall of Wind," where practical research on wind engineering takes place; Miami-Dade Fire Rescue; the American Red Cross Miami-Dade chapter; and the South Florida Water Management District.

"The *pasantía* was a tremendous opportunity for participants to observe first-hand the organization and coordination among the different agencies and stakeholders in a major U.S. city with frequent hydrometeorological hazards," explained USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard, who helped coordinate the event. "It received outstanding praise, with all participants commenting positively both on the spirit of sharing that the south Florida organizations demonstrated and the benefits of experiencing the tour with other countries from South America, which allowed them to reflect on lessons learned within the context of their own realities."

The study tour, which took place from August 19 to 23, originated with a request from several countries associated with the Andean Community's Disaster Prevention and Response Committee (CAPRADE) that desired a better understanding of how the United States coordinates disaster management and applies DRR programs.

The tour itself focused on risk identification, including hazard and vulnerability assessment, probabilistic risk assessment, hazard monitoring, and early warning systems. It also covered risk reduction and transfer, including physical and engineering mitigation works, land-use planning and building codes; economic incentives; education, training, and awareness regarding risks and prevention; self-insurance; disaster and emergency funds; protecting lifelines and critical facilities; insurance and reinsurance of public infrastructure and private assets.

Visits and discussions also focused on disaster management, including early warning and communication systems; emergency and contingency planning; EOCs; shelter facilities; and evacuation plans. Finally, tour participants focused on recovery, including rehabilitation and reconstruction of damaged infrastructure; business continuity plans; incorporation of disaster mitigation components in reconstruction activities; CCA; incorporating multi-sectoral taskforces; building risk scenarios; and mitigation and adaptation.

Carlos Ivan Marquez, Director General of the National Risk Management Unit, headed Colombia's delegation, which included the directors of the Risk Management Unit in the City of Cali and Antioquia Department. From Ecuador, the National Disaster Risk Management Secretariat's Deputy Secretary Jose Luis Ascencio led the delegation, which included the director of Ecuador's national EOC as well as high level advisors to the Secretary. Nestor Morales, Head of National Operations for Peru's National Civil Defense Institute (INDECI), led Peru's delegation, which included regional INDECI directors from Puno and Ucayali regions.

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