



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

DISASTER RESPONSE PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Luisa Alfaro, USAID/OFDA



Photo by Auriana Koutnik, USAID/OFDA



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Photo by Ana Silvia Fernández, USAID/OFDA



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On March 14 and 15, the Hurricane Hunters, a U.S. Air Force Reserve weather reconnaissance squadron that works closely with the U.S. National Hurricane Center, visited Costa Rica to raise awareness of the importance of preparing for hurricanes and other storms. Hundreds of schoolchildren from Costa Rica's Atlantic coast and Central Valley had the opportunity to visit the aircraft (above). The squadron also visited Mexico and various Caribbean countries during the tour.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Barbados Develops School Safety Policy

With USAID/OFDA support, the Government of Barbados (GoB) formed a task force in March to develop a national school safety policy as part of the country's school safety program.

These efforts, implemented by the GoB Ministry of Education with USAID/OFDA assistance, will include training, hazard identification, contingency plan development, and a series of simulation exercises and drills to ensure that the education community is self-sufficient in disaster risk management.

The program includes the USAID/OFDA-developed School Safety Course, which provides teachers and other staff with the concepts and tools necessary to reduce disaster risks and produce emergency preparedness and response plans for their schools.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

RDAP to Offer Advanced ICS Course

The USAID/OFDA Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) held the first Advanced Incident Command System Course for Command and General Staff in Complex Incidents (ICS 400) in San José, Costa Rica, from March 26 to 29. Twenty people, including instructors and leaders of ICS implementation processes in Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, and Mexico, participated in the training, provided by ICS 400 instructors from the Los Angeles County Fire Department, in California.

Following the course, RDAP specialists, ICS 400 course facilitators, and participants prepared a proposal to adapt the course to better meet the needs of Latin American and Caribbean countries. Once the new version of the course is developed and tested, RDAP plans to incorporate it into the program's portfolio of disaster management training courses.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Caribbean Tsunami Meeting Held

As part of its ongoing support for tsunami preparedness in the region, USAID/OFDA participated in the Seventh Session of the Intergovernmental Coordination Group on the Caribbean and Adjacent Regions Tsunami and Other Coastal Hazards Early Warning System (ICG-CARIBE), held from April 2 to 4 in Willemstad, Curacao. Additional members of the U.S. delegation included representatives from the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).

At the meeting, the four ICG-CARIBE working groups presented updates in the areas of hazard assessment; monitoring and detection systems (including seismic sensors and sea level gauges); communications; and preparedness, resilience, and response. Participants also discussed the potential establishment of a Caribbean Tsunami Warning Center in Puerto Rico and ongoing plans for a permanent Caribbean Tsunami Information Center (CTIC) in Barbados.

Significant advances have been made toward establishing the CTIC. During the recent meeting, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard led negotiations that resulted in participants adopting a proposed business plan and terms of reference for the regional CTIC. This center would be responsible for implementing a comprehensive regional tsunami preparedness and mitigation program, developing national standard operating procedures, and providing support to member states for tsunami education and awareness strategies.

"This was a very productive meeting, with substantial progress made on designing the work program and defining the products and services of the CTIC. Also, this year saw a significant increase in leadership from some of the smaller island nations of the region, and we were very happy to see this," Leonard said.

Meeting participants also agreed to begin planning an international tsunami exercise in the Western Atlantic, Caribbean, and adjacent regions, to be held in March 2013, to test and refine warning systems as well as national protocols. The exercise scenario will be based on a magnitude 8.5 earthquake off the northwestern coast of Venezuela. Regional seismic coordination actors, including the USGS, will help provide shake maps and intensity estimates.

Historical tsunami records from NOAA reveal that nearly a hundred tsunamis have been observed in the Caribbean, with 23 of them affecting the region's coasts. The concentration of populations and economies in coastal areas contribute to heightened vulnerability in the region.

USAID/OFDA has been supporting Caribbean tsunami preparedness and mitigation efforts since 2005, contributing approximately \$800,000 over the years to help upgrade the seismograph network in the Eastern Caribbean, empower communities to prepare for and respond to tsunamis and coastal hazards, fund training programs in seismology and tsunami warning systems, and support meetings among key stakeholders and regional seismic network operators.

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

COMING UP

USAID/OFDA Workshops for MDROs

USAID/OFDA is holding workshops with U.S. mission disaster relief officers (MDROs) from throughout the region to discuss USAID/OFDA disaster preparedness and response capabilities. Recent workshops were held for MDROs in South America on April 24 and 25 in Quito, Ecuador, and in the Caribbean on May 8 and 9 in Bridgetown, Barbados. A workshop for MDROs in Central America and Mexico is scheduled for May 15 and 16 in San Salvador, El Salvador.

Conference on Gender and Disasters

USAID/OFDA is supporting the IV International Conference on Gender and Disasters, aimed at raising awareness of the importance of incorporating a gender perspective into disaster response and risk reduction work. The conference, scheduled to be held May 17 and 18 in Bogotá, Colombia, is an initiative of the Government of Colombia's National Unit for Disaster Risk Management, the Presidential Office for Equality for Women in Colombia, and the International Organization for Migration. The conference will provide a forum for consultation and dialogue among institutions working in disaster response and risk reduction in the Latin American and Caribbean (LAC) region, with the goal of institutionalizing a gender perspective in both public policy and implementation at regional and national levels. Topics to be covered include the need to increase women's participation in the decision-making processes of disaster risk management, women's involvement in disaster-related activities, and differentiated services to address women's needs. Participants will also present a selection of successful experiences regarding inclusion of gender-specific strategies in disaster-related work throughout the region.

Hurricane Season Preparedness Meeting

USAID/OFDA is planning to participate in the Caribbean region hurricane preparedness meeting organized by the Pan American Disaster Response Unit of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). The meeting will be held from May 20 to 26 in Bridgetown. A breakout meeting between USAID/OFDA and IFRC officials is scheduled for May 23.

RDAP Review and Planning Meeting

USAID/OFDA staff and RDAP managers and disaster risk management specialists from throughout the LAC region will participate in the RDAP annual planning meeting in Miami, Florida, from May 21 to 25. Participants will review program activities executed during the past year, plan activities for the upcoming year, and receive training in the effective use of communications equipment during disaster response operations.

Seminar on Public-Private Partnerships

USAID/OFDA is supporting a regional seminar on public-private partnerships for disaster management, entitled "*Alliances between the Public and Private Sector for Disaster Risk Management: Government and Business Continuity in the Face of Disaster Situations*," scheduled for June 7 and 8 in Lima, Peru. The Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA), U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (ISDR), USAID/OFDA, and Peru's National Center for Disaster Risk Estimates, Prevention, and Reduction are organizing the seminar. SELA, ISDR, and USAID/OFDA conducted a similar forum in Panama in November 2011, entitled "*Public-Private Sector Partnerships for Disaster Risk Reduction: Aims, Advances, and Challenges*."