



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

### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

#### USAID/OFDA Defines Regional Strategy for 2009-2013 Period

The USAID/OFDA Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has developed a strategic approach to assisting countries in the region with disaster response, early recovery, and risk reduction activities that strengthen national, local, and community resilience to disasters and increase capacities to reduce risk.

The main focus of the new five-year regional strategy is disaster risk reduction (DRR), said LAC senior regional advisor Tim Callaghan. Reducing the risk of disaster – preventing or limiting adverse hazard impacts, especially within the context of sustainable development – is the only long-term solution to more effective disaster response.

However, DRR – a complex, context-driven combination of disaster prevention, mitigation, and preparedness – remains conceptually and technically underdeveloped in much of the world.

As part of its strategy for the LAC region for the 2009-2013 period, USAID/OFDA plans to fully conceptualize DRR by stimulating new DRR activities and strengthening existing DRR activities and programs.

"This is what we'll be focusing on



Photo by Phil Gelman, USAID/OFDA

*Building back better after disasters, as was done in Peru using reinforced adobe after the August 2007 earthquake, is one of the many ways in which USAID/OFDA intends to carry out disaster risk reduction in the future.*

for the next few years," Callaghan said. "What this means is that we'll be looking at anything we do through the lens of DRR. This is where we will focus our resources. We'll be looking for windows of opportunity to implement DRR through our training and technical assistance program, through partner projects that we fund, and in the way we respond to disasters. As an office, we

are committed to working strategically in this area."

The LAC regional office plans to document and analyze these efforts in hopes of providing models or templates for use in this region and beyond.

"The LAC office will also work with other donors and nongovernmental  
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### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

#### Regional Advisor Named to Coordinate RDAP Activities

USAID/OFDA regional advisor Sidney Velado has been named to coordinate the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides disaster risk management training and technical assistance to countries throughout the region.

Longtime USAID/OFDA regional advisor Rene Carrillo had focused on the RDAP since the early 1990s until his retirement in April 2009. Rene will continue to be involved in the RDAP program in the upcoming months to ensure a smooth transition.

Since the RDAP was established in 1989, the program has trained more than 50,000 emergency response workers and officials.

### DISASTER RESPONSE

#### USAID/OFDA Provides \$200,000 for Brazil Floods

USAID/OFDA has provided \$200,000 to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for the local purchase and distribution of relief supplies to families affected by flooding in Brazil.

Heavy rains since late April caused widespread flooding in more than a dozen states, primarily in the north and northeast, and displaced more than 400,000 people as of late May, according to the Brazilian Civil Defense. The most severely affected states are Maranhao, Piaui, and Ceara.

Preliminary assessments conducted by USAID/OFDA field staff in late April indicated that many of the temporary shelters were lacking basic supplies such as personal hygiene and cleaning items.

In response, on May 1 USAID/OFDA

provided an initial \$50,000 to CRS for the provision of relief supplies through its local partner Caritas. Within weeks, USAID/OFDA gave an additional \$150,000 to CRS/Caritas to improve hygiene conditions in temporary shelters in Maranhao, Piaui, Amazonas, and Ceara.

CRS/Caritas is working in close coordination with the Brazilian Civil Defense to distribute basic hygiene and cleaning items such as water filters, bathing and clothing soap, buckets, brooms, mops, disinfectant, toothpaste, toothbrushes, toilet paper, and garbage bags to affected families.

In addition, CRS/Caritas staff and volunteers are providing orientation to families in shelters about good personal hygiene practices.

## COMING UP

### Hurricane Season Briefings

Tim Callaghan, USAID/OFDA senior regional advisor for the LAC region, will participate in a series of hurricane season briefings in Washington, D.C., on June 16, 17, and 18 to inform the U.S. Military, U.S. Coast Guard, National Security Council, Federal Emergency Management Agency, World Bank, and Pan American Health Organization about USAID/OFDA preparedness for the 2009 Atlantic basin hurricane season, which began on June 1 and continues through November 30.

### ICS Launch in Cuzco, Peru

From June 22 to 25, USAID/OFDA will provide technical assistance to local emergency response organizations and city officials in Cuzco, Peru, to implement their Incident Command System (ICS) plans and procedures before, during, and after the Inti Raymi Inca Festival of the Sun on June 24. Local emergency managers are preparing for any contingency that might occur during the annual festival, which draws hundreds of thousands of visitors to the area. The ICS is a predefined organizational model and chain of command promoted by USAID/OFDA that helps first responders – such as police, firefighters, medical personnel, Red Cross, and other aid workers – to collaborate more effectively during operations to prevent and respond to emergency situations.



Photo by Dante Torres, USAID/OFDA

*USAID/OFDA is assisting emergency response organizations in Cuzco, Peru, with emergency preparedness for the Inti Raymi Sun Festival.*

### Agreement with Paraguay Education Officials

On June 30, USAID/OFDA representatives will sign a cooperative agreement with Paraguay's Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) and the National Emergency Secretariat to continue developing the National Disaster Risk Management Education Program with technical assistance from USAID/OFDA. Later that same day, the MEC is scheduled to officially unveil its National Plan for Disaster Risk Management Education.

### MOU with Asunción Municipality, Paraguay

On June 30, USAID/OFDA representatives will sign a memorandum of understanding with the Municipality of Asunción and other local institutions in Paraguay. The document outlines plans for ICS development among emergency response organizations in the area, with technical assistance from USAID/OFDA.

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



Tel: (011-506) 2290-4133  
E-mail: ofdalac@ofda.gov  
Internet: www.usaid.gov  
Keyword: ofdalac

## Strategy Focuses on DRR

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organizations to implement risk reduction in the region. We'll also work with development partners to incorporate risk reduction into their plans and projects," Callaghan continued. "In addition, we plan to increasingly foster private sector involvement."

USAID/OFDA recognizes the need for a long-term strategic approach to its activities that will help articulate funding and program priorities, streamline decision-making, and allow for a smooth transition from humanitarian relief to early recovery and development, explained regional advisor Sidney Velado.

"We have seen recurring threats affect vulnerable communities in different countries," Velado added. "We are going to focus on assisting these communities to become less vulnerable and more resilient. We hope that DRR activities implemented before the impact will help minimize the shock to households in these communities."

While the overall focus of the LAC regional strategy is DRR, its specific goals are to safeguard livelihood assets, prevent the loss of shelter, and build capacities for disaster preparedness and response.

Since the late 1980s, the LAC regional office has focused on complementing disaster response activities with training and capacity-building activities for first responders and emergency managers. Through the years, as participating agencies and governments gradually began to assume these training activities, USAID/OFDA began to focus on providing technical assistance to strengthen national training programs and support national disaster response preparedness and risk reduction activities.

Today, the LAC regional office provides technical assistance and funding for a variety of activities, including the development of DRR curriculum in schools and universities, supporting "communities of practice" focused on advancing DRR concepts, and programs to "build back better" after earthquakes and other adverse events so that the structures are more resistant to future disasters.

For example, since 2005 USAID/OFDA has supported a growing community of practice composed of university staff, researchers, planning experts, and community leaders who periodically meet to exchange experiences and best practices to improve environmental and land-use management, especially in high-risk zones. And following the August 2007 magnitude 8.0 earthquake in Peru, USAID/OFDA funded a CARE Peru project to help rebuild homes in Chincha using seismic-resistant reinforced adobe.

## DISASTER RESPONSE

### USG Continues to Monitor A/H1N1 Situation

The U.S. Government (USG), through USAID's Bureau for Global Health (GH) and USAID/OFDA, continues to monitor the Influenza A/H1N1 situation in the LAC region and worldwide.

As of June 1, 62 countries had officially reported 17,410 cases of Influenza A/H1N1 infection, including 115 deaths, according to the U.N. World Health Organization.

For the time being, the new virus appears to be mild and does not pose an imminent public health threat, according to USAID/GH. Nevertheless, as part of USAID's preparations for the possible emergence of a more virulent mutation of the virus, the USAID/GH Avian and Pandemic Influenza Unit is conducting a comprehensive review of commodity needs and resource availability with other USG and international partners. This will allow USAID/GH and USAID/OFDA to be optimally responsive and ensure access and availability to life-saving commodities should the virus become a more virulent threat.

In May, USAID/OFDA helped coordinate the USAID/GH donation of 40,000 personal protective equipment (PPE) kits to provide first responders in the LAC region with respiratory, skin, and eye protection equipment. A total of 5,000 PPE kits each were provided to Ecuador, Paraguay, and Peru, and another 25,000 shipped to Panama for the Pan American Health Organization to distribute throughout the region, mostly to Caribbean countries.