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

DISASTER RESPONSE



Flooding in Bañado Sur, Paraguay.

Photo by Sidney Velado, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Responds to Flooding in Paraguay

In December, Argentina, southern Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay experienced some of the heaviest rainfall and flooding in decades.

Paraguay was especially hard-hit as above-average rainfall triggered by the El Niño weather phenomenon exacerbated the effects of the country's rainy season. The water levels of the Paraguay River—which flows through the capital city of Asunción—rose to more than 13 feet above average for the time of year, reaching record heights not seen for more than 20 years.

As water levels reached rooftops in many areas, approximately

130,000 people were forced from their homes. "Not only were homes destroyed, but many people have also lost their livelihoods," commented Regional Advisor (RA) Sidney Velado.

On December 18, the Government of Paraguay (GoP) declared a state of emergency in Asunción and seven regions in the country, freeing up more than \$3.5 million in disaster funds.

On December 30, at the request of the GoP, U.S. Ambassador Leslie A. Bassett issued a disaster declaration for Paraguay. In response,

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo courtesy of Randall White, VDAP

Participants of the LAVAS IV workshop visit Mexico's Ceboruco volcano.

USAID/OFDA Supports Volcano Education

From January 15–29, USAID/OFDA financed the 4th Latin American Volcano Association of Seismologists (LAVAS) workshop at Mexico's University of Guadalajara SisVoc Observatory.

The U.S. Volcano Disaster Assistance

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

USAID/OFDA Supports Volcano Education

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Program (VDAP) organized the workshop, which brought together 35 participants from nine countries in the LAC region.

The workshop began with two days of lectures by VDAP volcanologists on the general precursory patterns observed at different types of volcanoes and before different phases of the eruption cycles.

The next three days comprised participant accounts of seismic activity occurring prior to the eruptions of local volcanoes. These discussions provided a forum for participants to share experiences, opinions, and advice for future seismic activity.

During the second week of the workshop, participants discussed seismic waveform analysis, various instruments for detecting and recording earthquakes, new techniques for locating earthquake epicenters and estimating their magnitudes, the use of satellite images to earthquake maps, and how to produce maps using closely spaced photos, a technique known as photogrammetry.

During the final two days of the workshop, participants discussed volcanoes that are currently active and precursors that scientists should look for in dormant volcanoes.

VDAP plans to compile a LAVAS Volcano Observatory Manual based on information generated from the workshop. The manual will assist observatories in predicting eruptions by identifying patterns that are likely to occur prior to an eruption.

"We have seen a dramatic improvement in Latin-American forecasting success since USAID/OFDA first funded LAVAS I in 2006," noted Randall White of VDAP. "Since that first event, there have only been 10 eruption-related deaths in Latin America."

During the LAVAS workshop, SisVoc Observatory personnel compared notes, experiences, and ideas on how to more effectively forecast eruptions.



Photo courtesy of Randall White, VDAP

Participants learn how to estimate intruding magma volume in near real-time.

DISASTER RESPONSE



Photo by Sidney Velado, USAID/OFDA

Displaced residents survey the damage by boat.

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USAID/OFDA provided an initial \$50,000 in disaster relief assistance to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for the local procurement and distribution of emergency relief supplies.

USAID/OFDA also deployed RA Velado to Paraguay to work with Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) Gabriela Frutos and two local Surge Capacity Consultants to assess flood affected areas, assist in prioritizing humanitarian aid, and help coordinate response activities.

The Secretaría de Emergencia Nacional (SEN) and USAID/OFDA worked together to determine additional support that USAID/OFDA could provide flood-affected populations. Both entities agreed that addressing the water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) needs of affected populations was a key priority in the response.

Following these discussions, and at the request of SEN, USAID/OFDA provided an additional \$600,000 to ADRA for the purchase and distribution of WASH related facilities, equipment, and supplies to more than 15,000 displaced families.

The situation experienced by affected families is expected to continue for at least six months, according to RA Velado and DRMS Frutos, which justified the investment in the facilities as opposed to shorter-term solutions.

"It is important that we recognize that many of these families will not be able to return home for several months," said RA Velado. "So providing them with basic facilities right now is critical for them to begin rebuilding their lives."



Photo courtesy of Tomo Pilar Sanz, ADRA

Metal roofing was part of the supplies purchased with USAID/OFDA funds to support the needs of flood-affected households.

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