



# Regional Snapshot

## LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Fiscal Year (FY) 2016

The countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC)<sup>1</sup> are highly vulnerable to a range of natural hazards, including droughts, earthquakes, floods, forest fires, hurricanes, landslides, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Rapid urban growth, combined with increasingly vulnerable populations in urban areas, exacerbates the effects of natural disasters. Periodic El Niño meteorological events and poor land management amplify the effects of existing hazards. In addition to staff based in Washington, D.C., USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) maintains a regional office in San José, Costa Rica, and a field office in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, and is supported by a network of 29 disaster risk management specialists, as well as approximately 400 on-call local disaster relief consultants in 27 countries in the region.

### Recent Humanitarian Events in the Region

- In FY 2016, USAID/OFDA responded to seven disasters in the LAC region, including an earthquake in Ecuador, floods in Paraguay and Uruguay, forest fires in Colombia, hurricanes in the Bahamas and Belize, and a landslide in Guatemala. In addition, USAID/OFDA continued to support disaster management capabilities in the LAC region, including earthquake-monitoring assistance, public-private sector partnerships to increase preparedness and response capabilities, and disaster risk reduction (DRR) training and technical assistance.
- The 2015 El Niño weather phenomenon caused above-average temperatures and below-average rainfall in Colombia, resulting in drought conditions and forest fires throughout the country in October. These El Niño-related events resulted in 11 deaths, affected more than 119,000 people, damaged 145 homes, and negatively affected livelihoods.
- USAID/OFDA also responded to severe drought conditions in Haiti intensified by the El Niño climatic event in FY 2016. The drought exacerbated food insecurity and increased malnutrition, particularly among children. In drought-affected communities, a lack of safe drinking water increased the risk of waterborne and hygiene-related diseases as a consequence of water shortages and contamination.
- On April 16, a magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck off the coast of northwestern Ecuador, resulting in more than 660 deaths and directly affecting more than 240,000 people, according to the Government of Ecuador (GoE).

### USAID/OFDA Priorities for 2017

- USAID/OFDA will maintain operational readiness to respond to emergencies in the LAC region by continuing to prioritize hurricane preparedness in the region and maintaining an experienced team of disaster risk management specialists available for immediate pre- or post-disaster deployment.

<sup>1</sup> The LAC region includes Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

- To fulfill its mandate, USAID/OFDA will continue to support DRR activities to save lives, safeguard livelihood assets, and prevent the loss of shelter, as well as strengthen DRR programming among vulnerable populations, including children, indigenous groups, and people with disabilities. USAID/OFDA will refine tools and approaches for DRR work in urban areas as it related to natural hazards. In Haiti, USAID/OFDA will prioritize local capacity building and disaster preparedness, as well as urban DRR.
- USAID/OFDA will continue to strengthen and build the capacity of national disaster risk management agencies to meet national and local emergency management needs, including supporting community-led programs and activities.
- USAID/OFDA will continue to support gender equity in disaster risk management policy and operations, as well as prioritize monitoring and evaluation—particularly for DRR programs—to develop approaches for improving program design and implementation.

## Challenges

- Over the past three decades, countries in the LAC region have progressively built capacity to mitigate, prepare for, and respond to natural disasters; however, bridging the gap between national-level guidance and local-level implementation continues to present a challenge for DRR initiatives.
- Many countries lack an approach to land-use planning based on natural hazard risk assessment.
- For many LAC country governments, ongoing political uncertainty and a high vulnerability to natural disasters create a challenging environment for national agencies to implement DRR and response activities.

## Key Lessons Learned in 2016

- Changing rural-urban demographics means that humanitarian approaches are also evolving. In the urban context, USAID/OFDA utilizes the ‘neighborhood approach,’ which embraces the concept of neighborhoods as interrelated geographical units, and seeks to understand and support how communities meet their basic needs, earn a living, and interact with one another.
- Providing technical assistance and guidance to strengthen regional disaster management groups helps reduce the need for international assistance. For example, following 20 years of USAID/OFDA training in urban search-and-rescue (USAR) across Latin America, expert USAR teams from 12 countries—including Ecuador—rescued more than 110 people from collapsed buildings immediately following the Ecuador earthquake.
- The wide-reaching effects of the El Niño weather phenomenon highlighted the need to continue to support risk mitigation efforts and to pre-plan response activities.
- To ensure local ownership and continuing effectiveness of DRR programs in Haiti, USAID/OFDA will continue to work at the national and community levels to conduct outreach with local institutions, such as the Haitian Red Cross, as well as work with private sector actors to identify opportunities for collaboration.