



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

**DISASTER RISK REDUCTION**

## Community-Level DRR Moves Forward in Central America



Photo by Ricardo Berganza, USAID/OFDA

**Women in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, do laundry in a facility built as part of the “Safer Neighborhoods” project, financed by USAID/OFDA and implemented by CRS.**

USAID/OFDA is promoting urban disaster risk reduction (DRR) efforts at a community level as a way of making a large impact while working with small groups. Through grants, communities in many countries of the region have improved their preparedness for disasters and are becoming more resilient.

Guatemala and El Salvador are examples of some interesting projects that are being implemented in Central America, to achieve community DRR goals in the region.

In El Salvador, USAID/OFDA is supporting the local Red Cross in a project called “Building Resilient Communities”, which aims to build resilience in the communities near and affected by Chaparrastique volcano.

During a recent visit, representatives from USAID/OFDA and El Salvador Red Cross delivered basic first response equipment to schools in the municipalities of San Jorge, San Rafael Oriente, and Chinameca. The kits will benefit over 1,700 students, who have previously received training in first aid for first responders and the use of the equipment.

“This equipment is to help the schools be prepared in case of a disaster or other adverse event. We plan to continue supporting risk reduction at a community level, so local residents are prepared to prevent and mitigate adverse events,” explained USAID/OFDA Disaster Operations Specialist Peter Schecter.

In Guatemala, two projects financed by USAID/OFDA and implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and Project Concern International (PCI) are supporting community DRR using the neighborhood approach.

CRS is working in Quetzaltenango city, in a project called “Safer Neighborhoods”, which includes upgrades to infrastructure such as an emergency operations center (EOC), a bridge, a community laundry facility, and a retaining wall to protect communities from flooding. In Mixco municipality, PCI is building

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**DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

## USAID/OFDA Responds to Flooding in Chile



Photo by Víctor Hugo Ossadón, USAID/OFDA

**Mud and debris fill the streets of Chañaral, Chile.**

The last week of March, the northern regions of Antofagasta, Atacama, and Coquimbo in Chile were affected by unseasonal heavy rains. Because of the desert climate in this part of Chile, the sudden rainfall caused rivers to overflow their banks and streets to flood with muddy water. Over 29,000 people were temporarily displaced

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**DISASTER PREPAREDNESS**

## USAID/OFDA Sponsors Hurricane Preparedness



Photo courtesy of Jody-Ann Anderson

**Presenter Jody-Ann Anderson at the NHC conference shares her experience in DRR.**

The 36th annual National Hurricane Conference (NHC) took place the first week of April in Austin, Texas. Over 1,500 attendees from across the United States, Caribbean, and Pacific were in attendance. The goal of the conference is to improve hurricane preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation in order to save lives and property.

To this end, USAID/OFDA sponsored speakers from Catholic Relief Services’ (CRS) youth oriented DRR program in Jamaica and CARITAS Youth Emergency Action Committee programs in Saint Lucia and Grenada to attend the conference. Participants took advantage of the over 120 ex-

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## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### Community-Level DRR Moves Forward in Central America



Photo by Sergio David Gutiérrez, USAID/OFDA

**Basic first response equipment donated to schools in El Salvador as part of an USAID/OFDA and Red Cross grant will benefit over 1,700 students.**

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walkways and two water treatment plants, as part of their “My Neighborhood” project.

These projects have contributed to reducing vulnerability in urban environments, and have provided valuable lessons to different institutional and community actors. USAID/OFDA supports these initiatives as they complement the complex processes of risk reduction in Latin American cities, and offer financial, technical, and social options to reduce urban risk.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

### USAID/OFDA Sponsors Hurricane Preparedness

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hibitors to expand their knowledge, learn about new programs and ideas, and share their own knowledge about hurricane preparedness and response.

According to USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor (RA) John Kimbrough, “OFDA/LAC sponsorship of speakers for the Tropical Islands Sessions gives folks from the Caribbean a chance, not only to present a Caribbean perspective in the sessions, but also gives the Caribbean speakers an opportunity to attend state-of-the-art sessions related to preparedness, risk reduction and response that they can then carry home to their respective island nations.”

One of the people sponsored by USAID/OFDA was Jody-Ann Anderson from CRS in Jamaica. She presented what CRS has learned developing the Youth Emergency Action Committee (YEAC) Project on four islands in the Caribbean. The project teaches young people the tools and skills needed to take an active role in their communities’ DRR planning and emergency response. “The YEAC model approaches disaster risk reduction from the community or grassroots level. This is critical because it incorporates the people most affected by disasters in formulating strategies and solutions to increase their own resilience.”

RA Kimbrough went on to explain the impact of improved forecasting models from the National Hurricane Center and increased efforts in DRR by the communities and nations of the Caribbean. “As the National Hurricane Center introduces updated products related to forecasting and early warning, and lessons learned are incorporated throughout the Caribbean, preparedness gets better each year.”

## DISASTER ASSISTANCE

### USAID/OFDA Responds to Flooding in Chile



Photo by Víctor Hugo Ossandón, USAID/OFDA

**Fast moving flood waters severely damaged this section of Route 5 in northern Chile.**

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and as of April 14th the National Emergency Management Office (ONEMI) reported 27 casualties, 80 missing individuals, and 1,400 people still living in emergency shelters. The report also mentioned more than 8,000 homes either destroyed or with major damage.

In response to the needs identified, USAID/OFDA provided \$200,000 to CARITAS Chile, for the local purchase and distribution of emergency supplies, such as bedding, mattresses, blankets, and cleaning materials to sanitize homes.

The Government of Chile (GoC) response included the delivery of 2,453 tons of aid supplies to the affected populations by various GoC institutions. Some of the commodities provided were: food rations, blankets, diapers, personal hygiene kits, home cleaning supplies, portable toilets, tents, and tools.

ONEMI reports that electricity has been restored in the area and is working normally, after days of partial or total interruptions in the service. One of the biggest ongoing problems is damage to potable water and sewage networks. These services are still only partially re-established in the region, with only some communities with fully functional systems. Many communities are depending completely on the delivery of potable water by truck for all water needs.

At the same time that the flooding was taking place in the north, the central and southern portions of the country were being affected by extensive forest fires, which strained GoC response capacities. USAID/OFDA/LAC activated two surge capacity consultants to assist in monitoring and coordination activities with all institutions involved; one for flooding in the north and the other for the forest fires in the south.

More than 6,000 people are still participating in emergency response operations in flooded areas as part of the national response efforts, including the Chilean armed forces, national police force, health workers, and firefighters.

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



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