

OFFICE OF U.S. FOREIGN DISASTER ASSISTANCE (USAID/OFDA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA

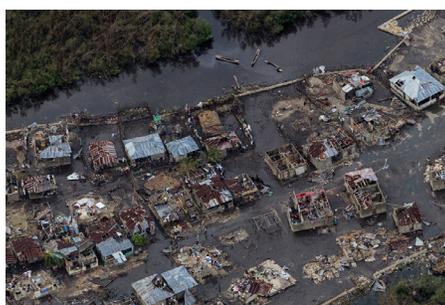


Residents walk along the flooded streets in downtown Jeremie, Haiti. Photo by Logan Abassi, UN/MINUSTAH

USAID/OFDA Mobilizes in Response to Hurricane Matthew

As the storm that would become Hurricane Matthew—one of the most destructive hurricanes in the past decade—approached the Caribbean, USAID/OFDA began preparing for a large-scale response. This involved reviewing emergency relief stockpiles, deploying staff from Washington, D.C., and the regional office in Costa Rica, and activating local disaster experts throughout the region.

USAID/OFDA/LAC has a unique response mechanism that is based on best practices from previous responses and relies on an extensive network of USAID/OFDA-trained disaster management specialists. These specialists are



Western Haiti was impacted by heavy winds, rains, and on the coast, storm surge. Photo by Logan Abassi, UN/MINUSTAH

available for activation as required in nearly every country of the region, within hours, to liaise with host government emergency response systems, assist with preparedness efforts, ground-truth disaster reports, and conduct damage assessments and needs analysis. This network allows USAID/OFDA to have a presence on the ground that can respond immediately to identified humanitarian needs and rapidly expand as necessary.

As Tropical Storm Matthew approached the eastern Caribbean in late September, USAID/OFDA deployed a regional advisor from Costa Rica to Barbados and activated nearly a dozen disaster management specialists in Barbados, Dominica, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines to track the situation.

After the storm passed through the Lesser Antilles, causing minor damage and displacement along with one fatality, and quickly became a hurricane, USAID/OFDA activated a Colombia-based disaster consultant to report on the effects of the hurricane as it moved westward, causing coastal flooding and other impacts along Colombia's northern peninsula.

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USAID/OFDA Provides Aid to The Bahamas

Hurricane Matthew blew through The Bahamas on October 5 and 6 as a Category 4 hurricane, bringing winds of 140 miles per hour and rains of up to 18 inches. The storm primarily impacted the islands of New Providence, Andros, and Grand Bahama.

On New Providence, shingles were blown off roofs across the island, but the impact was felt most severely along the southern shore where some communities experienced flooding of up to 4 feet. On Andros and Grand Bahama, conditions proved worse as many residents lost their roofs due to the high winds.

USAID/OFDA provided an initial \$100,000 to the Bahamas Red Cross to respond to the anticipated needs of hurricane-affected populations.

USAID/OFDA also airlifted relief commodities with a value of more than \$241,000—including approximately 300 rolls of plastic sheeting, 30 generators, 1,000 blankets, 1,000 hygiene kits, 1,020 kitchen sets, and 1,200 water containers—to Nassau beginning on October 8, for forward distribution by the Bahamas National Emergency Management Agency to approximately 15,000 beneficiaries on New Providence, Andros, and Grand Bahama.



A USAID/OFDA staff member oversees delivery of relief supplies to The Bahamas. Photo by Adam McBride, USAID/OFDA

Helping Hurricane-Affected Haiti

Hurricane Matthew crossed over the tip of Haiti's southern peninsula on October 4, causing extensive infrastructure damage and at least 546 deaths, and leaving another 128 people missing and an estimated 1.4 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. In response, the DART in Haiti is coordinating the USG's lifesaving assistance to affected populations, which totaled nearly \$40 million as of October 25.

In the days before impact, U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Peter F. Mulrean issued a disaster declaration in response to the anticipated effects of Hurricane Matthew. Besides activating a DART to coordinate disaster response efforts, USAID/OFDA also provided an initial \$300,000 to partners American Red Cross and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) for preparedness and response activities. Additionally, USAID/OFDA partners International Organization for Migration and CRS began implementing approximately \$200,000 in rapid response funding—previously provided by USAID/OFDA—to support preparedness activities.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, when roads were damaged and many areas in Haiti were cut off by the storm, the DART coordinated with the U.S. military to deliver critical lifesaving humanitarian assistance to affected populations. During its two-week mission, Joint Task Force-Matthew conducted 98 relief flights transporting 267 metric tons of food and emergency supplies via helicopter. On October 19, given improved road access and increased capacity of international humanitarian agencies, the DoD mission began demobilizing as anticipated.

To help prevent the spread of cholera and other waterborne illnesses in hurricane-affected areas, USAID/OFDA has provided 5.7 million water purification tablets to meet the water treatment needs of approximately 190,000 people for one month. In addition, USAID/OFDA is airlifting a three-month supply of calcium hypochlorite to assist the GoH with treating public water systems countrywide. USAID/OFDA is also providing 1.5 million packets of oral rehydration salts to help relieve the effects of cholera and other diarrheal diseases.

The DART continues to prioritize the distribution of USAID-provided food and relief commodities while simultaneously coordinating with the GoH and other relief actors to mitigate the spread of cholera, develop a comprehensive shelter strategy, and determine additional humanitarian needs.



The IOM warehouse in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, is one location where USAID/OFDA strategically pre-positions emergency relief supplies for rapid deployment. Photo courtesy of IOM

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Then, as Hurricane Matthew veered north toward Jamaica, Haiti, and The Bahamas, USAID/OFDA activated local disaster management specialists in all three countries to track the storm and remain in close communication with national emergency management officials. USAID/OFDA also activated a regional Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART), deploying staff from Costa Rica and Washington, D.C., to the three countries, and stood up a corresponding Response Management Team in Washington, D.C., to help coordinate the U.S. Government (USG) response.

When Hurricane Matthew struck western Haiti as a powerful Category 4 hurricane on October 4, causing widespread devastation that affected an estimated 2.1 million people, the DART immediately began moving food, safe drinking water, and other life-saving relief supplies to affected areas in coordination with the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD), humanitarian partners, and other international organizations in Haiti.

A Haiti-based regional advisor initially led the DART in Port-au-Prince, which included a civil-military affairs coordinator, an information officer, a program officer, an emergency operations center advisor, and an administrative officer. Additionally, a Haiti-based USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist (DRMS) was embedded with the Government of Haiti (GoH) Directorate of Civil Protection (DPC), and 13 local consultants were activated throughout the country to support preparedness and reporting activities. As soon as the international airport in Port-au-Prince reopened for humanitarian-related flights following the hurricane, additional USAID/OFDA team members traveled to Haiti to join the DART, increasing the team to approximately 60 disaster specialists at the height of the response.

Smaller teams in Jamaica and The Bahamas helped coordinate the regional DART's response to the less-severe effects of Hurricane Matthew in those countries. In Jamaica, the USAID/OFDA/LAC senior regional advisor led the DART—including two communications officers, an information officer, an administrative officer, and a logistics officer—until the team discontinued operations and relocated to Haiti on October 5 following assessment findings of minor storm-related damages and in consultation with host government representatives. Prior to the DART's arrival, a Jamaica-based DRMS and six local consultants were activated in Kingston, Westmoreland, and Saint Catherine's Parish to track the storm and support preparedness and reporting activities. In The Bahamas, USAID/OFDA deployed a regional advisor to Nassau to lead the response team, which included an information officer, a communications officer, two DRMSs, and five Bahamas-based local consultants in Abaco, Grand Bahama, Long Island, and New Providence. On October 13, the team concluded operations after finding minor hurricane impacts and in consultation with host government officials.

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