



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

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

FIU Online Course Looks at Political Economy and DRR

The Extreme Events Institute at Florida International University (FIU) recently announced it is accepting applications for the online version of its Political Economy and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) course. FIU developed the 15-week distance-learning training with support from USAID/OFDA.

The course, which will be conducted in Spanish, focuses on the political and economic aspects of disasters and DRR. Participants will review four case studies in depth: Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, the Haiti earthquake in 2010, the earthquake and tsunami in Chile in 2010, and the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand. Participants will examine patterns of human and economic loss, as well as any differences among each of the four events.

The course looks at vulnerability as a critical component of the equation; reviews the process of creating a global inventory of disaster risk; and provides a general overview of the world's top 10 cities with the greatest disaster risk. In addition, the online training examines land-use management, building codes, and environmental management, as well as political dimensions of DRR including decision making, control of the public agenda, symbolic actions, and accountability.

Toward the end of the course, participants will select a recent disaster to analyze what political and economic measures might have been taken to minimize disaster impact, as well as political and economic factors that either helped or impeded effective risk reduction.

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Photo courtesy of USAID/Haiti

The 2010 earthquake in Haiti destroyed the National Palace, the official residence of the country's president at the time.

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Photo by Krystal Hartman, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA disaster risk management specialist (DRMS) Antonio Pinheiro addresses students at Brazil's Superior Firefighter Academy, which trains a wide range of emergency responders. USAID/OFDA's training courses are core components of the academy's curriculum.

USAID/OFDA Forms Regional Leaders

Since 1989, USAID/OFDA has trained approximately 60,000 national emergency system authorities, technical experts, firefighters, and other first responders from 32 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). In numerous instances, these alumni have ascended to positions of importance within their institutions and governments. In countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Honduras, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, professionals—learned in USAID/OFDA methodology—are applying the acquired training and skills to disaster preparation, response, and risk reduction within their respective spheres of influence.

Manuel Quezada, National Risk Management Director for the Chilean Red Cross, said USAID/OFDA training influenced his work in emergency management.

"I can say without a doubt that USAID/OFDA has helped my career grow. My role in disaster management—with an organization as large and dynamic as the Red Cross—demands a high level of education and

training, with a methodology that can be applied to different levels of society and be transmitted to community leaders and the beneficiaries of humanitarian relief," he said.

Through USAID/OFDA's principal training and capacity-building vehicle, the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), emergency management personnel are educated in a wide range of disaster management techniques. Participants of RDAP courses and training exercises enhance their skills in DRR, school safety, emergency operations center management, damage assessment and needs analysis, forest firefighting, urban search and rescue, and more. Highest achievers are trained to be instructors of RDAP courses, ensuring USAID/OFDA training and capacity building becomes a self-sustaining endeavor.

"Having performed a number of roles within Peru's National Civil Defense Institute (INDEC), I can say that RDAP training can be applied to countless scenarios in disaster risk

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DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

USAID/OFDA Holds Disaster Response Training for MDROs

USAID/OFDA recently held a disaster response and humanitarian assistance workshop for U.S. mission disaster relief officers (MDROs) and their alternates in the LAC region. The meeting, held from June 2 to 6 in Barbados, explained the roles and processes involved in providing U.S. Government (USG) disaster assistance to host countries in a timely, effective, and appropriate manner.

"One key role of the MDRO is to foster close ties with national emergency system representatives in the host country before a disaster strikes, so that in the event of the unexpected, humanitarian assistance can reach those in need in a timely and effective manner," said John Kimbrough, USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor for the Caribbean region.

Representatives from USAID/OFDA's Disaster Assistance Support Program and LAC regional office, along with a team of DRMSs representing 18 countries and staff from the U.S. Southern Command, provided guidelines and training to equip the MDROs and alternate MDROs with the tools necessary to successfully respond to disasters in the host country. The approximately 50 participants also reviewed case studies from real responses and discussed mock disaster scenarios.

USAID/OFDA provides humanitarian assistance when a disaster overwhelms the ability of the host nation to respond and if the host government requests or is willing to accept USG assistance.



Photo by Krystal Hartman, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor John Kimbrough speaks to participants in the MDRO training workshop.



Photo by Dante Torres, USAID/OFDA

INDECI's Deputy Director of Response Operations Management Luis René Vallenás (left) has participated in a number of RDAP training courses as well as USAID/OFDA annual stakeholder meetings in Peru.

USAID/OFDA Forms Regional Leaders

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management program planning, emergency operations center coordination, and rapid damage assessment and needs analysis work with multiple actors from all levels of government, as well as interagency missions in other countries in the region. RDAP training generates self-confidence and encourages us to learn more about specific disaster risk management topics in which we are interested," said Luis René Vallenás, INDECI's Deputy Director of Response Operations Management.

In Honduras, two USAID/OFDA alumni recently accepted high-level positions with the Government of Honduras (GoH) National Emergency Commission (COPECO).

National Commissioner Moisés Alvarado began taking USAID/OFDA courses in the early 2000s and has since performed a variety of roles in the nation's emergency management system. He noted that, previously, different agencies worked independently—and sometimes against each other—but national response organisms have now achieved a high level of coordination and teamwork, dramatically improving their preparedness and response capacity.

"This relationship between non-governmental organizations, response organizations, and COPECO began in the classroom. The training fostered stronger ties among us...and helped create a sort of institutional family with a feeling of closeness we never had before," Alvarado said.

Dolan Castro, COPECO Training Director, spent several years as a USAID/OFDA local surge capacity consultant, assisting with disaster response and damage assessments as a liaison between the GoH national system and the international humanitarian assistance community. His career as a firefighter began with RDAP fire management courses. Later, as an instructor, he trained firefighters and other emergency responders from the National Firefighter Corps, armed forces, and municipal government agencies—helping to form an independent national network of disaster management instructors in Honduras.

USAID/OFDA training "helps us feel that we are useful and... supports people to acquire critical knowledge to save lives. Safety aspects are emphasized, so that each person...each firefighter understands that he or she must safeguard his or her own life and the lives of others, first and foremost, while putting forest firefighting techniques into practice," Castro said.

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The online course, directed toward graduate students in a wide range of disciplines, begins on August 25. Even though the course will be conducted in Spanish, all course materials are in English; therefore, English-language reading proficiency is required. Applications are due by July 15; FIU will notify those selected to participate by August 5.

Following completion of the online course, FIU will select the highest achieving students to participate in a three-day workshop at FIU's main campus in Miami, Florida.

The Political Economy and DRR course is part of a series of DRR-related courses that FIU has developed with USAID/OFDA support. Other courses in the series include Cost-Benefit Analysis in DRR, Livelihoods and DRR, and Geographic Information Systems and Remote Sensing for DRR.

For more information about the Political Economy and DRR online course, see <http://drr.fiu.edu/news/2014/curso-de-politica-economia/> or e-mail gheberma@fiu.edu.

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