



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

DISASTER RESPONSE



Photo by Mario Viera, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Surge Capacity Consultant David Castillo looks on as Momotombo releases gas and ash.

VDAP Helps Monitor Nicaraguan Volcanoes

In December 2015, Momotombo Volcano in Nicaragua erupted for the first time in more than 100 years. The eruption featured a pyroclastic flow that lit up the night sky as lava traveled down Momotombo's face.

The increase in activity continued through February with eruptions of gas and ash columns averaging two kilometers in height.

At the request of the Government of Nicaragua (GoN), the USAID/OFDA-funded and U.S. Geological Survey (USGS)-implemented Volcano Disaster Assistance Program (VDAP) deployed staff to help monitor gases emitting from the volcano. Scientists use this data to understand the volcano's current state as well as to help predict future eruptions.

VDAP and Nicaragua's Institute of Land Studies (INETER) have a long history of collaboration that includes remote and on-site assistance. In the past, VDAP has supported INETER in similar responses for Apoyeque, Momotombo, Telica, and San Cristóbal volcanoes.

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Supports Accreditation Agencies

USAID/OFDA's Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP) has been working with the Central American Council for Accreditation of Higher Education (CCA) for two years to create, among other products, a Self-Assessment Guide for Accreditation of Higher Education in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

CCA is responsible for promoting quality education in Central America and the Caribbean. Its mission includes the establishment of regional mechanisms to harmonize and standardize the accreditation efforts of different institutions and organizations throughout the region. The organization also seeks to achieve international validity of the region's higher education accreditation programs.

The guide will help accreditation agencies that work with CCA to incorporate criteria and indicators into self-assessment manuals that evaluate security at institutions of higher education and quality of DRR training given to students. The guide will also support higher education institutions in their commitment to local and national emergency systems.

Nine accreditation agencies in Central America will be using this manual. Representatives from univer-

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Forest Fire Education Gets Boost from Mascots

USAID/OFDA's RDAP is supporting youth education in the prevention of forest fires throughout the Latin America and Caribbean region.

According to the Government of Costa Rica Environment Ministry, forest fires are one of the main problems that the country's nature conservation systems face. Most of the forest fires are caused by human activities. As stated by Costa Rica's National Commission of Forest Fires, initiatives to address the problem are often hindered by lack of public information and knowledge about how to prevent forest fires.

USAID/OFDA is supporting these efforts by pro-

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DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Forest Fire Education Gets Boost from Mascots

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viding funds for the purchase of inflatable mascots or cartoon characters in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, and Paraguay. These inflatable characters will be used in events and activities held throughout these countries as an amusing way to educate and inspire children to help prevent forest fires.

Much like “Smokey the Bear” in the United States, each character is unique to their home country and provides children with a sense of pride and connection to the cause of forest fire prevention.

“These mascots symbolize not only the importance of forest fire prevention and control, but also a permanent call to protect the land, communities, watersheds, national parks, and wildlife in the region,” said RDAP Disaster Risk Management Specialist and Forest Fire Consultant Luisa Alfaro.



Photo by Luisa Alfaro, USAID/OFDA

Representatives from the Government of Panama’s National Environmental Authority, National Civil Protection System, and Fire Department pose with ‘Chicho Muleto’, Panama’s forest fire prevention mascot.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

USAID/OFDA Supports Accreditation Agencies

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sities in several Central American countries, as well as regional organizations, participated in the discussions and development of the guide.

“The willingness of the agencies to include DRR in their manuals recognizes the impact that this initiative will have in the education of future professionals and in the construction of an emergency and disaster resiliency culture in the region,” said RDAP Disaster Risk Management Specialist and School Safety Consultant Manuel Ramirez.

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This month, USAID/OFDA activated two local surge capacity consultants to assist Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) Mario Viera with monitoring and reporting the situation.

Since mid-February, INETER and VDAP scientists have been monitoring Telica and San Cristóbal volcanoes, which also have shown increased activity.

According to DRMS Viera and media reports, it is the first time in several decades that three volcanoes have been active in Nicaragua.

USAID/OFDA and VDAP will continue to monitor the situation and provide support as requested by INETER and the GoN.



Photo courtesy of INETER

Momotombo Volcano has been releasing ash and gases regularly since December 2015.

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