



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

DISASTER RESPONSE



Photo courtesy of the U.S. Embassy, Bahamas

Emergency supplies being unloaded in Nassau, Bahamas, following Hurricane Joaquin.

USAID/OFDA Responds to Hurricane Joaquin

On October 1 and 2, Hurricane Joaquin moved slowly across the central and southern Bahamas, bringing sustained winds of approximately 130 mph, as well as heavy rains and storm surge that resulted in widespread flooding.

Information from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) estimated that 5,000 residents from six islands were affected as Hurricane Joaquin, which reached the Bahamas as a Category 4 storm, traveled through the central and southeast islands of Rum Cay, San Salvador, Acklins, Crooked, Long Island, and Mayaguana.

The hurricane significantly damaged homes and public infrastructure, including emergency shelter sites. Over 3,200 homes sustained moderate-to-severe damage.

In the days following the impact of the hurricane, NEMA reported that up to 190 people in shelters on the islands of Eleuthera, San Salvador, Andros, Exuma, Long Island, Cat Island, and Rum Cay.

USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) for the Bahamas Beryl Armbrister stated, "In the Bahamas, going to the shelter is a last resort. People would rather stay with friends and family." This explains why, despite the population affected, only a small number took shelter in the facilities; many decided to travel to other islands or stay with acquaintances.

One week after the impact, the Director of NEMA, Captain Stephen Russell, headed with a team to Crooked Island to render psychological counseling and moral support to those residents who experienced the wrath of the storm.

To support NEMA's response efforts, USAID/OFDA contributed

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Photo by Pedro Soto, USAID/OFDA

Participants of the USAR Regional Forum in Panama City, Panama.

USAR Representatives Gather in Regional Forum

The first Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Regional Forum took place from October 21 to 23 in Panama City, Panama. With 77 participants from 19 Latin American and Caribbean countries, the forum provided an open

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Photo courtesy of CNE

CNE President Iván Brenes, Director of World Vision Costa Rica Alejandro Guevara, USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist Fernando Calderón, and Siquirres Mayor Yelgui Night participated in the project launch on September 1, 2015, in Siquirres, Costa Rica.

USAID/OFDA Supports Disaster Risk Management in Costa Rica

Community leaders in Costa Rica will receive training in disaster risk management, as part of a project implemented by World Vision Costa Rica and the National Commission

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USAR Representatives Gather in Regional Forum

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and inclusive meeting opportunity to promote the exchange of knowledge and experiences from various perspectives, regarding the characteristics and links between urban risk and the national USAR systems implementation processes in the various countries.

Through different methodologies, including conferences, discussion panels, and workshops, the participants learned about the links and relationships among local urban risk, the private sector, and technical, academic, economic, and social approaches to the subject, which were all represented in the forum.

Five thematic sessions introduced the participants to the USAR subject from different perspectives, including political, academic, international cooperation organizations, NGOs and organized civil society, and the private sector.

In the sixth session, participants were divided into groups to learn the differences in perspective from political focal points, technical focal points, and USAR team leaders. The participants took the topics viewed during the previous sessions and integrated them into urban risk in their countries, focusing on their political, technical, and operational proposals in order to add value and fulfill the legal obligations and mission of the institutions they represented.

In addition to the on-site activities, the event was streamed online and had social network presence. With this, participation was much greater, and the discussion and the knowledge exchange between interested parties were enriched.

The speakers in each session had the opportunity to share the progress of the USAR process in their country or institution, as well as the circumstances and challenges they are facing or have faced in the past. Above all, they had a chance to explain how they have included different actors from other sectors in their day-to-day activities and general, long-term strategies.

The forum concluded with participants and organizers agreeing that the first USAR Regional Forum 2015 marked a before and after point for how USAR is viewed in the region. The concept of USAR is changing from simply search-and-rescue teams to a more comprehensive and integrated process in which many actors adopt the process as a functional philosophy.

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Photo courtesy of U.S. Embassy, Bahamas

DRMS Beryl Armbrister overseeing the delivery of the emergency relief supplies.

USAID/OFDA Responds to Hurricane Joaquin

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over \$100,000 in emergency supplies, which were flown in from its warehouse in Miami, Florida. The donated supplies included 200 rolls of plastic sheeting, 500 hygiene kits, 540 kitchen kits, 600 collapsible water containers, and 500 blankets.

USAID/OFDA also supported The Bahamas Red Cross with funds to assist with fuel for transportation of donations. The Red Cross gathered supplies like non-perishable food, water, clothes, and hygiene supplies from donors throughout the Bahamas and abroad, for distribution in the affected islands.

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USAID/OFDA Supports Disaster Risk Management in Costa Rica

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for Risk Prevention and Emergency Management (CNE), and funded with a \$150,000 grant from USAID/OFDA.

The 12-month project is aimed at 420 members of Community Emergency Committees (CCE) in the Caribbean, Pacific, and Huetar Norte Regions, and is expected to have an impact on over 330,000 people in Costa Rica. The purpose of this intensive training program is to reduce vulnerability and contribute to strengthening recovery capacities after a disaster by creating a safety and resiliency culture in the communities.

World Vision, CNE, and Costa Rican Red Cross collaborators will carry out the trainings, where representatives from the CCEs will learn about tasks such as risk diagnosis, analysis and development of field activities, monitoring, and evaluation.

"It is important that people have a better understanding of the hazards in their environment, and how to prepare for them. This will give communities independence and response capacities, which will ease disaster assistance in the country. A united effort has benefits; this is why teaming with World Vision and the Red Cross will have good results," said Iván Brenes, president of CNE.