

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

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

### USAID/OFDA Bolsters Community Preparedness in Latin America and the Caribbean

Community participation is key to reducing the impact of, preparing for, and responding to disasters. Helping communities to mitigate disaster risk and increase emergency preparedness is the core of USAID/OFDA's Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Plan for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). During the past decade, USAID/OFDA's DRR programming has helped at-risk populations throughout the LAC region located in areas recently affected by disasters, historically hazard-prone, or undergoing rapid unplanned growth.

“During the most recent disasters in the LAC region, community members proved to be among the first to respond, saving many lives. Also, in the aftermath of a disaster, community-based organizations have played a crucial role in all of the recovery stages. It is critical to prepare families and individuals, so they know when to evacuate, what to do in case of an emergency, and how to meet their basic needs after a disaster. It is also essential for communities to work together to reduce the potential risk of disaster,” said USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor (SRA) Tim Callaghan.

Acknowledging the importance of context-based programming, USAID/OFDA supports awareness-raising projects throughout the LAC region tailored to address the specific needs of each community.

In Colombia's Caldas and Tolima departments, USAID/OFDA implementing partner the American Red Cross (AmCross) is working with 16 communities located near Nevado del Ruiz Volcano to increase community awareness and responsiveness to future volcanic eruptions. Project activities include training on emergency assistance, water management, and basic hygiene and sanitation practices. The project has also provided first aid kits, stretchers, and radio communications equipment to each community. A key innovation of this local preparedness



USAID/OFDA-supported YEAC program teaches youth from hurricane-prone communities in Grenada, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia to become disaster preparedness leaders. *Photo by Oscar Leiva, Silverlight*

project is that it has helped these isolated populations to stay connected by radio frequency with each other and with the Colombian Geology Service (SGC) volcano observatory. The project has trained local populations to observe and monitor the volcano's behavior and provide information to volcanologists and other communities. This form of communication can facilitate the delivery of early warning systems, thereby significantly improving timely evacuations in case of an eruption.

“The program taught us how to make water filters, which is essential for cleaning water contaminated by volcanic ash and sulfur. Additionally, the project provided us access to radio frequency equipment, which will allow us to communicate with specialists when we notice an increase in volcanic activity. Communities located near the top of the volcano will be able to provide early warnings to those living downhill,” said project beneficiary Lucila Montaña.

In Grenada, Jamaica, and Saint Lucia, the Youth Emergency Action Committee (YEAC) program implemented by Catholic Relief Services (CRS), with support from USAID/OFDA and in partnership with Caritas, has engaged and empowered youth from hurricane-prone neighborhoods to become disaster-preparedness leaders. The program teaches teens how to plan for and respond to disasters, provide first aid, map evacuation routes, and set up emergency shelters. The YEAC program recruits at-risk youth, generally those who are unemployed or

*Continues on page 2*



USAID/OFDA implementing partner AmCross provided radio frequency equipment to isolated communities located near Nevado del Ruiz Volcano to help them stay connected with each other and SGC volcano observatory. *Photo by Jacquelinne Montaya, USAID/OFDA*

## Community Preparedness continued from page 1

not in school, and engages them through an “edutainment approach”—combining education and entertainment—that teaches youth to become change agents for their communities. For example, teens write music, mainly rap songs, and perform them to raise community awareness about disaster preparedness while simultaneously learning life-saving skills.

Allister Philip, YEAC Antilles Caritas Project Manager said, “This project engages young persons and not only trains them on emergency response and DRR, but also on team building and leadership. They become community leaders, imparting knowledge to their families and friends.”

In Guatemala and Honduras, USAID/OFDA has supported Project Concern International and GOAL to help dozens of high-risk urban neighborhoods and informal settlements prone to floods and landslides, to minimize the impact of disasters and enhance emergency preparedness through community participatory planning methods. This participatory strategy features the active participation of beneficiary communities and the collaboration of local public, private, and academic actors. Residents champion their community progress working together to upgrade water and sanitation systems, reinforce housing structures, and construct rainwater drainage infrastructure, stairways, and retaining walls. Termed “the neighborhood approach,” this methodology also has built cohesion and empowered communities to take collective action on DRR activities and emergency response planning.

USAID/OFDA has helped enhance emergency preparedness in hundreds of communities in the LAC region, which is critical for reducing the impact of disasters.



USAID/OFDA through Save the Children U.S. (SC/US ) supported urban neighborhoods in Carabaylo District in northern Lima to increase disaster resilience through the adoption of DRR-aligned policies and procedures. Photo courtesy of SC/US

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The GoC Vice-Minister of the Interior Héctor Olimpo (right) and DNBC Captain German Andrés Miranda (left) presents the San Miguel Cross Medal to USAID/OFDA SRA Tim Callaghan (center). Photo by Alejandra Parra

## Colombian Firefighters Corp Honors USAID/OFDA’s Life-Saving Efforts in Colombia

The Colombian Firefighters Corps (DNBC) honored USAID/OFDA SRA Tim Callaghan with the San Miguel Cross Medal—the highest award given by the organization—for his work promoting a culture of DRR and supporting firefighters’ capacity-building programs to protect the lives of Colombians.

The Government of Colombia (GoC) Vice-Minister of the Interior Héctor Olimpo Espinosa

and DNBC Captain German Andrés Miranda presented the award to SRA Callaghan during a special ceremony held on February 5 in Colombia’s capital city of Bogotá.

For the past 14 years, SRA Callaghan has led USAID/OFDA’s life-saving efforts in the region, including working with Colombian firefighters and helping communities prepare for disasters.

## USAID/OFDA Helps Earthquake-Affected Populations in Ecuador Build Safer Homes

Nearly two years after the April 2016 magnitude 7.8 earthquake struck Ecuador’s northern coast, seaside communities remain highly vulnerable to seismic activity. With USAID/OFDA support, structural engineering company Miyamoto International is training local masons and construction workers in Ecuador’s Manabí Province in construction techniques for earthquake-resistant homes.

The program features the participation of local partners, such as Laica Eloy Alfaro University of Manabí, the Pacific International Center for Disaster Risk Reduction, and Save the Children Ecuador, all working together with Miyamoto International to deliver capacity-building activities to builders and residents. The training

program targets 750 low-income individuals from earthquake-affected areas in Manabí, including Manta, Pedernales, and Portoviejo cantons.

The program aims to provide innovative, cost-effective solutions for constructing seismically sound structures. The first part of the program offers workshops and activities to promote the use of bamboo—a widely available local resource—for building safer houses. The second part features workshops on current building methods for construction technicians and public awareness campaigns to enhance the use of DRR construction practices among vulnerable households, particularly women-headed families.