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

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Supporting Costa Rica's National Meteorological Institute

USAID/OFDA's regional office in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) demonstrated its support to Costa Rica's National Meteorological Institute (IMN) on June 21 through the donation of electronic equipment, including a computer and two flat-screen monitors.

The equipment, valued at nearly $5,000, will enhance the research and data modeling capacity of the Central American Flash Flood Guidance System - used by IMN - and enables IMN hydrologists and meteorologists to better predict the probability of flash floods in rural and urban environments through accurate analysis of rainfall accumulation, soil saturation, and infrastructure and drainage capacity.

The equipment was presented to IMN Director General Juan Carlos Fallas by USAID/OFDA/LAC Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan and USAID/OFDA Disaster Risk Management Specialist (DRMS) Fernando Calderon.

In addition, USAID/OFDA is acquiring monitoring equipment from the Volcano Disaster Assistant Program (VDAP), implemented through the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), for donation to Costa Rica's Volcanological and Seismological Observatory (OVSICORI) later this year. The two cameras will complement OVSICORI's monitoring capacity for Turrialaba and Arenal, two of Costa Rica's most active volcanoes.

Photo by Krystal Hartman, USAID/OFDA

USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor and IMN Director General during the donation of equipment to monitor flash floods in Costa Rica.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Photo courtesy of USAID/OFDA

Students from the Táchira University in Venezuela participated virtually in the USAID/OFDA-supported DRR in Higher Education regional forum, which took place in Panama City, Panama, in August 2012.

Integrating DRR in Higher Education

On July 5, representatives from USAID/OFDA attended a meeting to discuss the formation of the Chilean chapter of the Latin American and Caribbean University Network for Emergency and Disaster Risk Reduction (REDULAC), held at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Chile in Santiago, Chile.

During the meeting, 26 participants representing nine universities in Chile agreed to conduct a national workshop - scheduled for December 2013 - sponsored by the University of Concepción, which was affected by the magnitude 8.8 earthquake and ensuing tsunami in February, 2012. The workshop will allow university professors to share best practices in disaster risk reduction and plan the inclusion of DRR in undergraduate curriculum, among other themes. Participants also decided to create a directory of universities, academics, and experiences, as well as a new website to provide a virtual space for universities to exchange ideas and extend the country's REDULAC network. In conclusion, USAID/OFDA witnessed the signing of an agreement between the REDULAC Regional Coordinator and the university professors whom will comprise the Chile Chapter of the REDULAC network.

The REDULAC meeting in Chile was the latest in a series of seminars and consultations in the region that aim to mainstream DRR and emergency management into public and private higher education institutions across Latin America. For example, in April 2013, USAID/OFDA signed an agreement with the Central American Superior University Council (CSUCA) - representing 19 public universities in Central America - regarding the integration of disaster risk management in Central American higher education. The

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DRR in Higher Education

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CSUCA signing ceremony and the Chilean REDULAC chapter meeting highlight the ongoing success of the first REDULAC regional forum, supported by USAID/OFDA and held in Panama City, Panama, August 28 to 30, 2012.

USAID/OFDA will support 24 participants from 16 countries of the LAC region to attend the first consultation meeting for REDULAC national chapter coordinators in Lima, Peru, from August 28 to 30. In addition, officials from the Disaster Preparedness European Commission for Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation are expected to attend. The meeting will provide an opportunity for the national chapter coordinators to discuss transforming REDULAC from a community of practice to a more formal regional organization with a proposed structure and governing board. USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Sidney Velado, who has provided technical assistance and guidance to REDULAC since its inception and will attend the Lima meeting, noted that, "USAID/OFDA believes in a higher education curriculum that educates professionals who contribute toward disaster risk reduction. We strongly believe that a resilient university can help support the nation and communities before, during, and after a disaster."

REDULAC, a community of academics and researchers in DRR studies, works to support and bring existing national, subregional, and regional networks together to raise awareness and advocate for higher education institutions and professionals to better understand risk management.

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DISASTER RESPONSE

Paraguay Recieves Flood Assistance

In late June, following weeks of heavy rain, the Paraná River in Paraguay overflowed and caused floods that eventually affected more than 2,700 families in Alto Paraná, Central, Itapúa, Misiones, and Ñeembucú departments.

On June 28, U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay James H. Thessin declared a disaster due to the effects of the floods. In response, USAID/OFDA provided $250,000 through USAID/Paraguay to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) for emergency relief supplies - including plastic sheeting, hygiene kits, and blankets - in addition to resources for local procurement of tools and materials needed for emergency repairs to damaged residences. In total, USAID/OFDA relief benefitted nearly 14,000 people in 39 communities in the five flood-affected departments.

Working closely with Paraguay's National Emergency System and other local and national authorities and organizations, USAID/OFDA DRMS Carlos Córdova arrived in Paraguay on June 30 to monitor flood response efforts. In addition, USAID/OFDA activated two local surge capacity consultants on June 28, who conducted assessments and provided up-to-date information from the flood-affected departments.

Photo courtesy of ADRA

USAID/OFDA DRMS Carlos Córdova (right) assists with the distribution of relief supplies to communities in Misiones Department after heavy rains caused extensive flooding.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Photo by Michael Camchong, USAID/OFDA

A USAID/OFDA DRMS and local surge capacity consultant team monitor the active Tungurahua Volcano in Ecuador.

VDAP Strengthens Seismological Monitoring Activities

Following the catastrophic eruption of Nevado del Ruiz Volcano in Colombia in 1985, USGS and USAID/OFDA developed VDAP to provide technical assistance, equipment, and training to volcano observatories in developing countries around the world.

VDAP improves the capacity of governments to rapidly respond to developing volcanic crises through consultations with emergency authorities, assistance with seismic forecasting, remote sensing data, and monitoring equipment. Between crises, VDAP scientists work with international partners to build and improve volcano monitoring systems and conduct joint activities to reduce volcanic risk and improve understanding of volcanic hazards.

In the LAC region, VDAP helps strengthen monitoring networks and improve capabilities for assessing volcanic hazards and forecasting eruptive behavior. To date in FY 2013, VDAP has provided technical consultation and remote sensing data on eruption and seismic crises for active volcanoes in many LAC countries, including Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, and Nicaragua. In FY 2012, VDAP also provided on-site crisis responses at Pacaya, Guatemala, and Nevado del Ruiz, Colombia.

In FY 2012, USAID/OFDA provided $135,000 to USGS to support volcanic countries in the LAC region with early warning remote sensing data technology. The funding also supported a workshop for the Latin American Association of Volcano Seismologists - a group founded through VDAP that includes the principal volcano seismologists from all the volcanic LAC countries - in Manizales, Colombia, during February 2013.

In total, USAID/OFDA provided more than $444,000 to USGS in FY 2012 in continued support of VDAP activities in LAC. Since 1986, USAID/OFDA support for VDAP in the LAC region has totaled more than $9 million.

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