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USAID/OFDA Latin America and Caribbean Disaster Risk Reduction Plan 2015–2019

Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
U.S. Agency for International Development

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ON THE COVER: Firefighters combat a blaze in the San Rafael Reserve in Paraguay in January 2012. USAID/OFDA has helped train Paraguayan firefighters since 2001. In recent years, USAID/OFDA has supported exercises for firefighters across the country to learn the latest techniques and improve coordination mechanisms.

Photo courtesy of the Association for the Protection of the San Rafael Cordillera

USAID/OFDA Mandate

The U.S. Agency for International Development’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) has the responsibility to provide foreign disaster assistance and to coordinate the response of the U.S. Government (USG) to disasters abroad.

USAID/OFDA’s mandate is to save lives, alleviate suffering, and reduce the social and economic impact of disasters.

INTRODUCTION

USAID/OFDA is the lead USG office charged with providing humanitarian assistance in response to international emergencies and disasters. Additionally, USAID/OFDA provides assistance to help vulnerable populations prepare for, mitigate the impact of, respond to, and recover from adverse events.

Since the early 1980s, the USAID/OFDA regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (USAID/OFDA LAC) has provided humanitarian assistance to the region. Initially, USAID/OFDA LAC focused primarily on responding to emergencies. However, by the late 1980s USAID/OFDA LAC began to complement response activities with disaster risk reduction (DRR) interventions. Since then, USAID/OFDA LAC has successfully programmed a multitude of preparedness and mitigation activities designed to increase in-country response capacity while reducing overall risk and vulnerability to disasters.

The goal of USAID/OFDA LAC’s disaster risk reduction programming is to support governments, communities, and civil society in reducing the risk of and preparing for natural disasters by safeguarding lives, livelihoods, services, and facilities, ultimately increasing resilience to adverse transitory events.

To help guide future DRR programming in the region, USAID/OFDA LAC drafted the following USAID/OFDA LAC DRR Plan, 2015–2019. It builds on previous USAID/OFDA LAC DRR plans and supports the U.N. International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA), 2005–2015.¹ The USAID/OFDA LAC DRR plan also aligns with *USAID/OFDA’s Strategic Approach to Disaster Risk Reduction*, which provides a conceptual framework for all DRR programming within USAID/OFDA.²

¹ The current HFA will be reviewed at the 3rd World Conference on DRR in Japan, March of 2015, and a post-2015 DRR framework will be adopted. If the HFA changes significantly, USAID/OFDA LAC may revise its DRR plan accordingly.

² USAID/OFDA’s Strategic Approach to DRR is not yet public.

This document describes the regional context within which USAID/OFDA LAC programs DRR activities, as well as highlights the challenges that the region faces in adopting DRR practices. Moreover, this document presents the principles and approaches that USAID/OFDA LAC uses to select DRR activities. Finally, this document also outlines the DRR priorities of USAID/OFDA LAC for 2015–2019.

USAID/OFDA LAC REGIONAL OFFICE

Background and DRR Initiatives

USAID/OFDA LAC, headquartered in San José, Costa Rica, was established in 1983. During the early years, USAID/OFDA LAC focused primarily on responding to emergencies. Subsequently, following a series of highly destructive events in the region between 1985 and 1986, USAID/OFDA LAC convened a set of meetings with key actors and charted a multi-stage, ten-year program to increase in-country disaster response capabilities to include training for first responders and emergency managers. This training initiative has evolved to include a multi-layered program providing specialized, targeted technical assistance known as the Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP). The RDAP provides training and technical assistance for both response and DRR activities. This multi-stage DRR approach has strengthened local, national, and regional capabilities. Today, governments and organizations in 30 LAC countries participate in RDAP.

In addition to RDAP, USAID/OFDA LAC also supports stand-alone DRR initiatives to improve preparedness and to mitigate and prevent the worst impacts of disasters in the LAC region. At the regional and country levels, USAID/OFDA LAC and implementing partners engage communities, local and national governments, international and regional organizations, and non-governmental organizations to develop effective strategies—tailored to the needs of at-risk populations—to reduce the risk of disasters.

Finally, USAID/OFDA LAC supports a number of activities that integrate preparedness and mitigation into disaster response, early recovery, and transition programs. These initiatives, which are in accordance with regional DRR strategies, incorporate risk reduction objectives into a broad range of sectoral interventions to increase the resilience of communities to future shocks.

Partners and Stakeholders

An ever-widening set of actors participate in the planning and implementation of DRR interventions in the LAC region. At the international level, USAID/OFDA LAC coordinates with other donors and international organizations such as the Canadian International Development Agency, Swiss Development Cooperation, Japanese International Cooperation Agency, the U.K. Department for International Development, the European Union, the World Bank, and various U.N. agencies. Strong partnerships with these international organizations help USAID/OFDA LAC prioritize geographic areas and themes, coordinate programs, and where possible leverage additional resources.

On a regional level, USAID/OFDA LAC works closely with organizations such as the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency and the Center for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America. USAID/OFDA LAC also intends to engage with regional development banks to strengthen DRR considerations in project planning and financing.

On a country level, USAID/OFDA LAC works closely with national and local governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and institutions such as universities and university consortia. USAID/OFDA LAC also plans to increase efforts to foster private sector involvement in community-based risk reduction activities, and to promote business continuity planning.

USAID/OFDA LAC has also invested significant effort in coordinating with the Department of State and USAID missions to increase understanding of and strengthen capacity in disaster response and DRR. The LAC regional office holds regular meetings with mission disaster relief officers throughout the region. USAID/OFDA LAC plans to increase engagement with mission staff to explore further linkages for incorporating and integrating DRR as broadly as possible throughout development programming, as well as within development and recovery strategies.

USAID/OFDA LAC, through contacts in Washington, D.C., also maintains close coordination with the U.S. military—particularly the U.S. Southern and Northern Commands and their representatives in each country—to share information regarding USAID/OFDA response and DRR activities and participate in the military’s humanitarian assistance planning. Moreover, USAID/OFDA collaborates and engages with other USG interagency partners on programming, including the U.S. Geological Survey, U.S. Department of Agriculture/U.S. Forest Service, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and U.S. Peace Corps.

Disaster Risk Reduction

The concept and practice of reducing disaster risks through systematic efforts to analyze and manage the causal factors of disasters, including through reduced exposure to hazards, lessened vulnerability of people and property, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

UNISDR

INTERNATIONAL AND USAID CONTEXT

USAID/OFDA LAC supports the HFA and recognizes that countries in LAC have already developed national plans to implement the HFA. To align with country HFA plans, USAID/OFDA LAC used the HFA as guidance in determining DRR program elements and activities.

USAID/OFDA LAC DRR Plan also aligns with *USAID/OFDA’s Strategic Approach to Disaster Risk Reduction* to ensure that the regional approach is consistent with office-wide policies. Another

valuable resource utilized to provide more detailed information on specific DRR activities was *USAID/OFDA's Hazard-Specific Disaster Risk Reduction Implementation Guide*.³

Ensuring consistency with USAID's resilience strategy, the USAID/OFDA LAC DRR Plan seeks to reduce chronic vulnerability in areas of recurrent crisis while strengthening local capacities and systems to mitigate the impact of, adapt to, and recover from emergencies. Successful DRR can improve the sustainable coping strategies of populations and enable more effective use of a population's resources and tools, contributing to increased resilience to shocks.

USAID/OFDA's technical expertise in DRR focuses primarily on natural hazards, whether associated with rapid- or slow-onset disasters. This includes the full range of geological and hydrometeorological phenomena, including factors related to climate change.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

LAC countries are threatened by multiple hazards. According to the International Disaster Database, from 2004 through 2012, the Americas zone—Central America, the Caribbean, South America, and North America—suffered a total of 881 natural disasters. During those nine years, the Americas were, on average, affected by 98 disasters per year. An estimated 84 million people were impacted and \$573 billion USD in economic losses.

From 1970 to 1999, more than 70 percent of natural disasters in LAC were hydrometeorological, with floods being the most common, followed by storms, droughts, and wild fires.⁴ Geological phenomena accounted for 30 percent of natural disasters, with earthquakes causing more than half of total disaster fatalities in the region.⁵ Considering that many of the capital cities and other major population centers of Latin America are located near the Pacific "Ring of Fire," a large proportion of the region's residents are highly susceptible to geological hazards such as earthquakes and volcanoes.⁶ Eight Latin American cities are ranked among the top twenty most seismically at-risk cities on the planet: Lima, Peru (5); Quito, Ecuador (6); Managua, Nicaragua (10); Guayaquil, Ecuador (14); Caracas, Venezuela (16); Bogota, Colombia (17); Santiago, Chile (18); and Mexico City, Mexico (20).⁷ Moreover, Central America ranks second after Indonesia for populations living in close proximity to historically active volcanoes. El Salvador alone has 1.4 million persons - approximately 23 percent of the country's population - living within 10 kilometers of historically active volcanoes.⁸

³ http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/12.30.13_Hazard_Specific_DRR_Guide_bleed.pdf

⁴ Charvériat, Célin. *Natural Disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean: An Overview of Risk*. Inter-American Development Bank. October 2000.

⁵ da Gama Torres, Haroldo. *Social and Environmental Aspects of Peri-Urban Growth in Latin American Megacities*. U.N. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. 2007.

⁶ <http://geography.about.com/cs/earthquakes/a/ringoffire.htm>

⁷ OFDA, Earthquakes: 20 (Twenty) most at-risk cities in the developing world, Compiled Feb. 2001.

⁸ Ewert, John W. and Harpel, Christopher J. *In Harm's Way: Population and Volcanic Risk*. Geo Times. April 2004.

Urbanization will most likely exacerbate the vulnerabilities of Latin American countries. In 2010, approximately 80 percent of the population in LAC was estimated to reside in cities and urban and peri-urban areas in both primary and secondary cities are expected to gain an additional 166 million inhabitants in the 30-year period between 2000 and 2030.

Capacity and Challenges in the LAC Region

Over the past three decades, governments and local communities in the LAC region have progressively built capacity to mitigate the impact of, prepare for, and respond to natural disasters. Most countries have established legal and policy frameworks to support multi-agency National Disaster Risk Management Systems (NDRMS) responsible for disaster preparedness and response, and affected countries in the LAC region have been able to manage disasters internally and have not required large amounts of external assistance.⁹

Many of the NDRMS direct efforts in DRR. In some countries, national agencies specialized in DRR have been created, to work in tandem with the NDRMS. At the same time, significant challenges to reducing disaster risk remain throughout the region. One challenge is due to disconnects between national level guidance and local level implementation. For example, while early warning systems (EWSs) are recognized as critical in alerting at-risk communities to disasters, these systems have tended to be developed in an ad hoc fashion and are often poorly aligned with national systems. Without investment or involvement from the national level, local efforts often fail when project funding ends.

Also lacking, even when hazards are clearly known, is a focused approach to land-use planning based on natural hazard risk assessment and micro-zoning. Although there are a few exceptions—such as Manizales, Colombia, a much-studied example and *pasantía*, or study tour, destination—by and large, throughout the region land-use planning and enforcement of regulatory measures are limited.

High-Risk Populations in the LAC Region

While disasters have negative impacts on affected populations, a number of groups tend to be at greater risk due to their particular status in society. Throughout LAC, as well as globally, these groups include children, women, the elderly, ill and/or disabled persons, and particularly those in impoverished communities. In the LAC region, indigenous populations are also at greater risk due to their lack of inclusion within decision-making structures in many countries and a lack of respect or understanding for their cultural traditions at national and regional levels. These groups face the challenge of social norms that tend to disempower and marginalize them.

⁹ It should be noted that while in general there has been significant improvement in disaster management performance across LAC, there are still countries at relatively low levels of capacity in terms of both response and DRR. USAID/OFDA/LAC is particularly attentive to the need to build institutional and technical capacities in these contexts.

Women

As caregivers of dependents, women tend to have the greatest burdens in the aftermath of emergencies. The interruption of social service systems often results in women having to take on responsibilities beyond the household level in the wider community, and few, if any, women possess the appropriate resources to fully carry them out. Female-headed households are particularly at-risk to the impact of disasters, which can compound existing vulnerabilities. Gender-based violence, an issue in most countries within the LAC region, tends to increase in the aftermath of disasters.

Indigenous Populations

Indigenous populations tend to be more at risk from some hazards because they live outside of major economic, political, and social hubs. As a result, they have less access to services and less of a voice in decision making at national and regional levels. Cultural and linguistic differences, which are often not understood or valued by mainstream society, also serve to isolate indigenous people.

Globally, indigenous groups represent about 5 percent of the population, but make up 15 percent of the most impoverished. There are over 300 million indigenous people in the world, 40 to 50 million of whom live in Latin America, including 400 distinct groups with their own languages and cultures.¹⁰ In some areas of LAC, like Bolivia, Guatemala, and Peru, indigenous persons make up almost half of the overall population.¹¹

Children and Other Extremely Vulnerable Groups

For children, ill or disabled persons, and the elderly, the issue of dependence is a key factor contributing to their vulnerability. Children separated from their families during emergencies are particularly vulnerable to abuse, exploitation, and disaster-related injury. For individuals that are experiencing difficulties due to age, illness or disability, the risk of death, injury, abuse, and exploitation are also increased during disasters, particularly in the absence of strong social networks to account for them.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND APPROACHES

USAID/OFDA LAC DRR programming is guided by the following principles and approaches, and builds on years of field-based experience of its staff and consultants.

¹⁰ <http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/>; <http://www.iadb.org/en/topics/gender-indigenous-peoples-and-african-descendants/indigenous-peoples,2605.html>

¹¹ <http://www.ifad.org/english/indigenous/>. UNDP. *Indigenous peoples in Latin America Improve Political Participation, but Women Lag Behind*. May 22, 2013. Available at: <http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2013/05/22/pueblos-indigenas-en-america-latina-pese-a-los-avances-en-la-participacion-politica-las-mujeres-son-las-mas-rezagadas-segun-el-pnud.html>

Building Capacity

For nearly 30 years, USAID/OFDA LAC has dedicated significant human and financial resources to build in-country capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters, especially for first responders and disaster managers. The goal of building in-country capacity is to strengthen and professionalize national disaster risk management (DRM). Aimed initially at lead response agencies, USAID/OFDA LAC has expanded its focus to include key members of NDRMS, to include NGOs and local and community levels, thereby strengthening the overall national DRM architecture.

The main programmatic mechanism that USAID/OFDA LAC employs for implementing capacity building is RDAP, which provides specialized technical assistance and training. The RDAP is augmented by other USAID/OFDA LAC activities, such as establishing emergency operation centers; developing and implementing Incident Command Systems (ICSs); providing urban search-and-rescue (USAR) training; and supporting resilient livelihoods at risk of climate change impacts and other hydrometeorological hazards. Using RDAP and other resources, USAID/OFDA LAC has also made significant investment in promoting DRR in the education sector, supporting initiatives at primary, secondary and university levels.

Other established programs—such as the Volcano Disaster Assistance Program, the Earthquake Disaster Assistance Program, and the Pacific Tsunami Warning System and its Caribbean equivalent—also support the professionalization of national partners.

Community-Based DRR, Urban and Rural

USAID/OFDA LAC recognizes the key role of communities—including individuals and organizations—in reducing the impact of, preparing for, and responding to disasters. Our DRR programming prioritizes at-risk populations, areas recently affected by disasters, historically vulnerable areas, areas either undergoing rapid and unplanned growth or slated for expansion, and areas undergoing post-disaster transition. Projected programming encompasses activities that mitigate hazards and reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities to disasters in both urban and rural areas.

A number of DRR challenges are common to urban environments. As an example, cities in the developing world face increased risk due to rapid, unplanned urban expansion and poor urban management. Such expansion almost invariably leads to low-income populations settling in areas exposed to one or more natural hazards. Second, climate change leads to extreme variation in the frequency, intensity, geographical extent, and duration of hydrometeorological events—factors which are likely to exacerbate vulnerability and exposure of urban and rural areas, critical ecosystems, and citizens' livelihoods.

Starting in FY 2012, USAID/OFDA LAC began to finance programs aimed at reducing disaster risk in slum neighborhoods and informal settlements through support for participatory planning methods and the implementation of risk mitigation activities. This strategy, termed 'the Neighborhood Approach,' is a participatory and consultative neighborhood planning process

that results in improved land utilization – configuring/reconfiguring land to accommodate shelter and related services, livelihoods, and social/recreational services – which is essential for reducing vulnerabilities in urban neighborhoods.

In addition, USAID/OFDA LAC contributes to the UNISDR global campaign “Making Cities Resilient: My city is getting ready!,” which promotes development or improvement of local risk management strategies in municipalities around the world. USAID/OFDA LAC’s support has also been used to strengthen and expand a city-to-city learning program among local governments participating in the UNISDR campaign.

USAID/OFDA LAC will continue to refine promising tools and approaches for DRR work in the urban sector. Rural areas are also within the scope of LAC DRR programming. USAID/OFDA LAC’s DRR interventions will work to assist in strengthening rural production and marketing systems so they are more able to withstand shocks from natural hazards. Rural DRR activities will also focus on impacts at the community level, with a preference for interventions that address shared, as opposed to individual, risk.

Finally, USAID/OFDA LAC expects to support DRR interventions that reduce the vulnerability of populations to climate change, whether in urban or rural settings.

Participatory methods emphasize building cohesion and consensus, and can empower communities to take collective action. DRR programs undertaken by USAID/OFDA LAC will seek to strengthen capacities of governmental and non-governmental stakeholders to develop replicable, community-based approaches to urban DRR. USAID/OFDA will support municipal governments to develop tools and procedures that advance DRR in their jurisdictions.

Inclusive Programming that Accounts for High-Risk Populations

Inclusive programming requires an in-depth knowledge of the demographics of populations being targeted and a participatory methodology for all phases of project development and implementation. Above all, inclusive programming must account for high-risk populations through the following lenses:

Gender

Disasters are not gender-neutral. Disaster response and risk reduction programs must recognize and address gender differences if they are to effectively meet needs. USAID’s gender guidance requires that all proposals include an analysis of gender dynamics during project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

USAID/OFDA LAC has helped implement gender-focused DRR programs. Chile’s National Emergency Office of the Ministry of the Interior, for instance, has developed a gender working group to identify and address the needs of women in disasters, with the guidance of USAID/OFDA’s Disaster Risk Management Specialist. The National Coordination for Disaster Management in Guatemala has also developed a focus on gender issues with USAID/OFDA

support, and has trained and certified women in indigenous communities to work with local officials on DRM for vulnerable groups. Programs like these have had success in strengthening the capacity of women and men to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

Protection

All funding proposals submitted to USAID/OFDA must demonstrate protection mainstreaming across the response sectors. The principles of protection require that projects and project implementers minimize negative effects of their interventions. Protection risks exist for all people, regardless of age or gender, but certain groups are more at risk. Identifying such groups and addressing their needs through specialized programs or support networks is essential to supporting protection during emergencies.

Indigenous Populations

USAID/OFDA's funding proposal guidance does not include a specific section on indigenous populations. As a high-risk group, however, it is clear that their needs and concerns, as well as their skills and capabilities, are an integral part of gender and protection mainstreaming.

The existence of indigenous populations in a target area should be clearly identified during project development, along with any potential reasons that may affect their inclusion in DRR activities. Efforts to address these issues through, for instance, the development of trainings and materials that are linguistically and culturally appropriate, are essential. The most effective programs provide opportunities to incorporate their own customs and coping mechanisms into DRR programming.

Evidence-Based Learning/Capturing Good Practices

The *USAID Forward* reform process places increased emphasis on evidence-based learning through improved monitoring and evaluation processes and capturing good practices through systematic collection and analysis of information.

In the LAC region, USAID/OFDA routinely carries out rigorous monitoring and evaluation in order to strengthen programs, encourage innovation, and identify replicable approaches. The Neighborhood Approach is a good example of how USAID/OFDA LAC supports evidence-based learning. In order to document and improve lessons learned from the Neighborhood Approach, grantees are being asked to reflect on a number of cross-cutting themes using a standard question matrix. USAID/OFDA LAC analyzes feedback on these questions both individually and collectively and has identified key considerations for future urban programs.

In addition, USAID/OFDA LAC recently evaluated the RDAP technical assistance and training program, and in 2015 will be assessing the impact of RDAP's small grants component, which provides targeted assistance for discrete activities to local NGOs and government counterparts.

Innovation

USAID/OFDA LAC supports innovative DRR activities. As noted in *USAID/OFDA's DRR Strategic Approach*, "One of USAID/OFDA's strengths has been the ability to pilot and test new approaches to DRR," and successful approaches are replicated, if and when applicable to local conditions.

One USAID/OFDA LAC example is the Neighborhood Approach, which shifts attention from the conventional "four walls and a roof" efforts centered on households towards a more integrated focus on the entire community. After the Neighborhood Approach was deemed as a promising community initiative for reducing urban risk, USAID/OFDA LAC replicated it throughout the Caribbean and Central and South America.

Another example is in Paraguay, where USAID/OFDA LAC is replicating climate-smart adaptation strategies developed by ACDI-VOCA - including supporting use of short-cycle seeds and improving agricultural techniques and inputs to mitigate the effects of drought - in other vulnerable rural communities. The program works in close collaboration with Paraguay's National Emergency Secretariat and the Ministry of Agriculture. The program has generated two inter-connected pilot activities; one that supports resilient livelihoods in the agriculture sector and the other that strengthens the local DRM architecture.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Given the hazards and challenges of the LAC region, USAID/OFDA intends to prioritize DRR objectives, in accordance with HFA goals, and undertake activities in both urban and rural settings in the following areas:

HFA #1 - Ensure that DRR is a national and a local priority with a strong institutional basis for implementation

Activity #1 - Support Institutional Strengthening

USAID/OFDA LAC will support local, national, and regional authorities to advance strategic planning and DRR activity implementation, including through policy development in urban and rural areas and improving institutional capacity. One example of institutional strengthening is the provision of DRR technical assistance and training to support a country's national emergency management system in such areas as developing plans for government continuity of operations, institutionalizing ICS, and strengthening disaster response legal frameworks.

Activity #2 - Promote Identification of Disaster Preparedness Guidelines

USAID/OFDA LAC will support DRR activities that promote the adoption and/or improvement of guidelines for disaster preparedness. Examples of disaster guidelines include the adoption of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) guidelines or NOAA's TsunamiReady program, which is in the process of being adapted for the Caribbean.

HFA #2 - Identify, assess, and monitor disaster risks and enhance early warning

Activity #3 - Strengthen End-to-End EWS

USAID/OFDA LAC will strengthen end-to-end EWS. An effective hydrometeorological EWS should provide sufficient lead time to save lives and livelihoods. USAID/OFDA EWS programs emphasize an end-to-end approach that integrates observation and monitoring; modeling, research, and prediction; guidance for decision makers; dissemination of information to users and at-risk populations; and strengthening action at the community level while allowing feedback to improve the process. USAID/OFDA LAC encourages activities that identify the gaps in existing systems and prioritize needs. USAID/OFDA LAC will continue to support implementation of community-centered hydrometeorological EWSs at all levels.

HFA#3 - Use knowledge, innovation, and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels

Activity #4 - Support DRR in Primary and Secondary Education

USAID/OFDA LAC will support DRR education for primary and secondary students. Activities may include school-based interventions, revision of teacher training in education curricula, and in-service training for teachers that could encompass online training and other non-traditional methods.

Activity #5 – Strengthen Coping Mechanisms for High-Risk Populations

USAID/OFDA LAC will strengthen coping mechanisms for high-risk populations. Numerous activities can strengthen the capacity of high-risk groups to better prepare for disasters and minimize negative impacts. These activities include:

- Community mapping exercises to help communities identify extremely vulnerable areas and populations most at risk.
- Development of support networks within and between communities to help ensure protection of the most vulnerable.
- Trainings on the protection of vulnerable groups during and after disasters.
- Advocacy for the rights and needs of high-risk groups.
- Research and information sharing on best practices, including traditional coping strategies of indigenous populations.

In addition, USAID/OFDA LAC will undertake more efforts to ensure the development of strong working relationships between high-risk groups and national disaster management authorities.

Activity #6 - Institutionalize Higher Education in DRR

USAID/OFDA LAC will support activities to assist universities in developing the DRR capacities of future professionals and leaders, as well as universities' own in-house capacities to work with local governments on DRR activities. In addition, USAID/OFDA LAC will advance the role of universities in promoting DRR policies and influencing related decision-making, such as by

promoting collaboration between academics and local leaders to improve land-use management practices in high-risk communities.

HFA#4 - Reduce the underlying risk factors

Activity #7 - Promote Strategic Public and Private Partnerships to Build Local DRR Capacity

USAID/OFDA LAC works to foster strategic relationships between private enterprise, governments, and NGOs in order to increase in-kind and monetary support for disaster response and strengthen strategic partnerships for risk reduction activities. Traditionally, post-disaster private-sector contribution involved the donation of emergency relief supplies or provision of services, such as transport, to impacted populations. However, with support from USAID/OFDA, U.N. agencies, and other donors, businesses and chambers of commerce and industry throughout the region are engaging in a wider spectrum of disaster management activities as part of their social responsibility efforts. Programs include support for disaster EWSs, forest fire brigade mobilization exercises, temporary shelter plans and designs, and logistics assistance during disaster response operations. USAID/OFDA LAC will continue to promote these types of engagements by the private sector.

In partnership with the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System and UNISDR, USAID/OFDA LAC also supports regional events to facilitate knowledge exchange and increase public and private sector cooperation in DRM, and envisions expanding this initiative.

Finally, in the context of community-based DRR interventions, USAID/OFDA LAC considers it essential that projects support municipal governments in the development of tools, procedures, and regulatory instruments that advance DRR in the jurisdiction. USAID/OFDA LAC considers that progress on DRR depends in large measure on municipal authorities engaging and mobilizing a range of stakeholders. Thus, USAID/OFDA LAC will emphasize the promotion of strategic private sector engagement opportunities with the objective of incorporating the skills and resources of such entities in DRR programs. USAID/OFDA LAC is in the process of working with stakeholders from throughout the region on development of an approach for municipal strengthening in disaster preparedness and response.

Activity #8 - Increase Capacities for DRR in Urban Settings

USAID/OFDA LAC will support the development of tools and activities to increase DRR capacities in urban settings, emphasizing the shelter and settlements and economic recovery and livelihoods sectors. In urban areas, USAID/OFDA LAC will continue to invest in the Neighborhood Approach.

USAID/OFDA LAC will also seek to expand its urban DRR programming. Previously, funding focused on USAR capacity-building efforts, first via INSARAG and then RDAP. Going forward, USAID/OFDA LAC plans to add to the urban “preparing to respond” program in cities with significant seismic hazard through the promotion of building stock evaluation and the

development of engineering surge capacity to assess structures in the aftermath of an earthquake.

Activity #9 - Promote Hazard-Resistant Shelter and Settlements

USAID/OFDA LAC will support dissemination of technical expertise for improved land-use management and multi-hazard resistant building practices. In addition, USAID/OFDA LAC will facilitate dialogue and dissemination of experiences on issues related to post-disaster shelter needs.

Just as USAID advocates the concept of “building back better” following a disaster, USAID/OFDA supports “building better” as a mitigation initiative. Activities include dissemination of technical guidance for improved land-use management and building practices, such as training masons on seismic-resistant construction practices. These activities are central to the Neighborhood Approach for urban programming. In the rural sector, USAID/OFDA LAC will identify opportunities for supporting hazard-resistant shelter and settlements. Possible interventions aim to address multiple hazards in rural settlements and may include promotion of improved traditional building technologies, training for builders and home owners on safe construction techniques, or watershed protection activities.

Activity #10 – Support Flood and Drought Mitigation Interventions

USAID/OFDA LAC will support activities to reduce the impact of recurring floods and droughts by implementing community-based activities. Examples include, watershed management approaches, such as utilizing terracing, vetiver grass or similar vegetation, reforestation and other activities that reduce flooding. To reduce loss of livelihoods from recurring droughts, USAID/OFDA LAC will also strengthen the capacity of communities in agricultural conservation or similar practices.

Activity #11 - Safeguard Livelihood Assets and Critical Market Systems

USAID/OFDA LAC will support interventions that assist vulnerable groups to reduce, mitigate, or transfer disaster risk in order to protect livelihoods and critical markets. Safeguarding livelihoods assets is especially important, given the large informal sector in many countries in the LAC region and the disproportionate exposure and vulnerability to risk faced by micro and small enterprises.

Specifically, USAID/OFDA LAC will:

- Support activities that protect livelihoods and the critical market systems upon which they depend. This may be through either direct or indirect activities and will be specific to disaster risks – not general poverty alleviation or economic development, which is beyond the scope of this strategy. Examples of such activities might include, but are not limited to:
 - Market assessment of critical market systems coupled with risk analysis to identify likely disaster risks and catalyze system-wide investment in risk reduction;
 - Support to microenterprise and small-business continuity planning;
 - Facilitating access to insurance; or

- Support to enable physical risk reduction at the business or marketplace level (see Activity #9).
- Build the evidence base for effective and sustainable livelihoods and market-focused DRR programming, particularly at the urban level (see Activity #8) through evaluation and program learning.
- Leverage other stakeholder initiatives at the local, national, and regional levels to spur replication and institutionalization of effective approaches.

HFA#5 - Strengthen disaster preparedness for effective response at all levels

Activity #12 - Build Local and Community-Based Disaster Preparedness and Risk Reduction

USAID/OFDA LAC recognizes the need to invest in local preparedness and the risk reduction capacity of vulnerable communities. USAID/OFDA LAC will promote the development and implementation of community emergency response plans and continue to strengthen disaster response and the DRR capacity of communities and local governments.

CONCLUSION

For nearly thirty years, USAID/OFDA LAC has supported DRR programming in the LAC region and has seen in-country capacity to respond to disasters significantly increase. With lessons learned from the successes of USAID/OFDA LAC programs, the LAC office looks forward to implementing DRR programming for 2015–2019.

Note: The USAID/OFDA LAC DRR Plan is a ‘living’ document, subject to revision if the HFA changes considerably or if regional conditions change.

For more information on USAID/OFDA LAC DRR programming, please contact OFDALAC_SJ@usaid.gov.

ANNEX A: REFERENCES

- **APS** – For more information, please visit www.grants.gov and search for funding opportunity number APS-OFDA-14-000003.
- **Training**
 - <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/crisis-response/resources/rdap-training-portfolio>
 - <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/crisis-response/resources/rdap-training-portfolio-esp>

ANNEX B: ACRONYMS

APS	Annual Program Statement
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
EWS	Early Warning System
HFA	Hyogo Framework for Action
ICS	Incident Command System
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
RDAP	Regional Disaster Assistance Program
UNISDR	United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USAID/OFDA	USAID’s Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance
USAID/OFDA LAC	USAID/OFDA’s regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean
USAR	Urban search-and-rescue
USG	U.S. Government
VDAP	Volcano Disaster Assistance Program