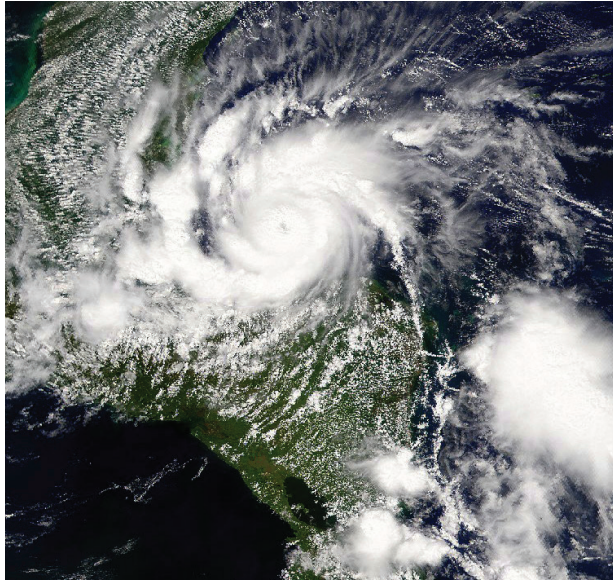




## Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean, San José, Costa Rica

### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



*Hurricane Iris in 2001.*

Photo courtesy of Wikimedia

## USAID/OFDA Finalizing Hurricane Season Preparations

This year, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecast a below-normal Atlantic Basin hurricane season. On May 27, NOAA predicted that up to 11 named storms are likely to form in the Atlantic Basin during the 2015 season, of which three to six are expected to become hurricanes, and zero to two could develop into major hurricanes—Category Three or higher on the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale. Based on the 1981–2010 period, an average season has 12 named storms, including six hurricanes, three of which are major.

Each year, USAID/OFDA's regional office for Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in San José, Costa Rica, prepares for months for the upcoming hurricane season. The office is led by Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan, who is supported by a team of four Regional Advisors (RAs). These RAs, along with two information officers, a communications officer, and 20 disaster risk management specialists (DRMSs) located throughout the region, are available for immediate deployment in case of a disaster.

RA John Kimbrough has been traveling to the Caribbean to finalize preparations with key partners, and will continue to visit the region throughout the hurricane season. "It is important that we prepare the same way every hurricane season, regardless of the forecast," commented Kimbrough.

USAID/OFDA also maintains a roster of 382 surge capacity consultants who are on call and can be activated as needed to strengthen USAID/OFDA's assessment and response capabilities. The surge capacity consultants are located in countries throughout the LAC region and, along with the DRMSs, form the Regional

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### DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Photo by Ricardo Herrera, USAID/OFDA

*USAID/OFDA Regional Office staff and MDROs from throughout the region meet to discuss their roles and responsibilities for hurricane season and beyond.*

## Supporting Disaster Relief in the Field

In preparation for hurricane season, and as a way to establish relationships, USAID/OFDA's regional office in San Jose hosted a meeting with representatives from USAID missions around the region. The Mission Disaster Relief Officers (MDRO) and, in some cases, their alternates, were invited to Playa Herradura, Costa Rica, on May 6 and 7. Representatives from 13 countries attended to learn more

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### DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo courtesy of RET

*Youth with disabilities from Panama participate in a Disaster Risk Management workshop.*

## USAID/OFDA Supports Youth with Disabilities in Panama

Since October 2014, USAID/OFDA has supported Teenagers and Youth with Disabilities in Panama Access Inclusive and Safe Education in conjunction with the Special Habitation Institute of Panama (IPHE) and Relief Education in Transition (RET). The project aims to include teens and youth with dis-

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## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

### USAID/OFDA Finalizing Hurricane Season Preparations

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Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), which provides training and technical assistance in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and response preparedness to partners in the LAC region.

In Miami, Florida, USAID/OFDA maintains a large stock of emergency relief supplies that can be quickly deployed in the event of a disaster. Some of the supply items include rolls of plastic sheeting for temporary shelters; water treatment units, containers, and purification tablets that can provide safe potable water for communities; emergency health kits; kitchen sets; hygiene kits; and blankets.

In order to guarantee rapid deployment of staff and supplies during a disaster, USAID/OFDA maintains 16 open aircraft charter purchase order agreements in ten countries throughout the LAC region. USAID/OFDA may also request transport from the U.S. military if commercial services are not available.

## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

### Supporting Disaster Relief in the Field

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about their responsibilities and the work done in the region.

The MDRO plays a critical role in USAID/OFDA relief efforts when a disaster strikes. They are the focal point at post for disaster-related information, planning, and activities affecting the host country, and are the primary point of contact for staff from USAID/OFDA. The MDRO needs to be familiar with host government disaster authorities and their capabilities, as well as other potential humanitarian assistance partners. In the aftermath of a disaster, they continually liaise with the USAID/OFDA RAs to ensure the free flow of information related to evolving disaster situations.

At the meeting, several members of the USAID/OFDA regional office gave presentations explaining the different responsibilities and resources available for the MDROs in case of an emergency or disaster in their countries, as well as the procedures and mechanisms to be followed to coordinate a response.

The experience was enriched by open discussions between participating MDROs and the USAID/OFDA RAs. The RAs were able to clarify key concepts and procedures for the MDROs, and the more experienced MDROs had time to share their lessons learned with the group.

As a result of this exchange, the possible work of the regional office in a response will be strengthened by the MDROs in the field, who now have a better knowledge and understanding of the local environment where they work, the people and institutions involved, and the connections that can be used to ensure USAID/OFDA's mandate: save lives, alleviate suffering, and lessen the economic and social impact of disasters.

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## DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo courtesy of RET

*A vision impaired participant reviews workshop materials*

### USAID/OFDA Supports Youth with Disabilities in Panama

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abilities in DRR education strategies.

The main objective of the program is to strengthen the capacity of the IPHE and the education community to increase resilience and guarantee inclusive and safe education in emergency and/or disaster situations.

Among other results, the project has produced DRR-related hand signs and materials in Braille for vision and hearing impaired people, respectively.

In addition, the project aims to strengthen community awareness and mobilization capacity of nearly 3,700 boys, girls, teenagers, and youths with disabilities, 200 teachers, 60 staff members, and 60 community leaders regarding their role in DRR, inclusive education, and disabilities. The project also intends to strengthen individual, institutional, and community resilience before, during, and after a crisis.

Finally, an important desired result for the project is to provide IPHE with the necessary tools to institutionalize disaster risk management by increasing its resilience and helping them to comply with the National Integral Risk Management Policy, which is the framework for risk mitigation within Panama.

To reach its goals, the project includes a variety of activities, such as DRR, inclusive education, and disabilities awareness and mobilization campaigns; recreational-educational workshops on DRR for IPHE students; development and publication of the "Integral Disaster Risk Management Guide for Inclusive Education Centers;" capacity building for creation, implementation, and evaluation of "Integral Disaster Risk Management Plans for Inclusive Education Centers;" risk evaluations; mitigation work and/or evacuation route signaling; evacuation simulation exercises for emergency and disaster situations; and creation of IPHE teams for provinces in charge of disaster risk management in inclusive education centers.

"I think this IPHE project is building an inclusive dream for young people with disabilities regarding emergencies and disasters, a topic that is not present in plans, protocols, and procedures of first response institutions. Some aspects to highlight are including new words into sign language (risk, hazard, vulnerability) to communicate with the hearing impaired, and participant and instructor materials in Braille for the vision impaired," stated the DRMS for Panama, Manuel Santana.

This project serves as part of RDAP, which has worked in Panama since 2011, to promote the National Integral Risk Management Policy. Originally, the program was very general, and did not address people with disabilities specifically. IPHE pointed this out in an activity organized by the National Civil Protection System (SINAPROC). This led to a partnership between both institutions to support populations with disabilities, which are particularly vulnerable during a crisis.

Since 2013, the institutions have joined forces to organize several activities and produce documents to support the policy, with the objective of establishing guidelines for risk reduction plans for inclusive education centers.