



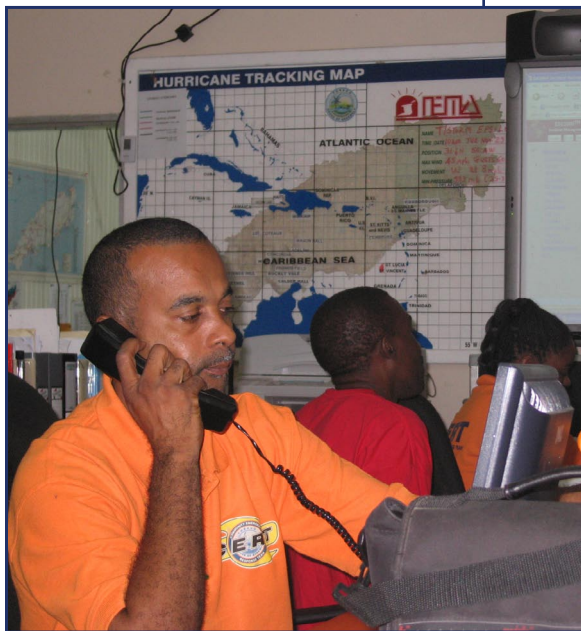
USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CARIBBEAN

SUCCESS STORY

Villages Improve Disaster Response

Communities learn to prepare and respond to disasters



A member of a Community Emergency Response Team takes a call in the Scarborough response center in Tobago.

Regional disaster response officials are discussing the possibility of replicating the USAID-sponsored CERT program in other Caribbean countries.

Telling Our Story
U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

Residents of the tiny island of Tobago in the southern Caribbean are well acquainted with intense weather. Meteorological events such as hurricanes and severe storms affect almost everyone each year. In 2004, Hurricane Ivan brought natural disaster to Tobago in the form of landslides that destroyed homes, farms, and livelihoods. Entire communities were left isolated. "Our village was completely cut off from the rest of the island," said one Tobagonian. "We could not get to the hospitals or anywhere. We could not even get food. It was horrible."

In the future, Tobagonians will not be left stranded. With assistance from USAID, Tobago is working to improve the ability of remote communities to respond to natural disasters themselves. Through this initiative, local Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) are helping isolated communities deal with a range of emergency situations like tornados, hurricanes, and heavy storms.

The CERT training process is so rigorous that even someone with no emergency response background can become a part of the team. State-of-the-art training teaches responders how to deal with any type of disaster, including medical and fire emergencies, as well as storms. Based locally, the teams can respond in half the time of traditional response services, which are located far from the island's most remote towns. Also, if an area becomes isolated during an emergency situation, the local teams can help if the main fire and medical teams are unable to. The CERTs work together with the island's other response groups to make sure that every Tobagonian can be reached in an emergency.

The program has built a strong reputation at home and abroad. In fact, disaster response officials throughout the Caribbean are discussing the possibility of replicating the program in their own countries. While Tobagonians may have no control over future disasters, they no longer have to worry that help is too far away.