



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

DISASTER RESPONSE

Building Back Better after Devastating Earthquake in Peru

The magnitude 8.0 earthquake in Peru in August 2007 damaged or destroyed nearly 100,000 houses, according to the Peruvian National Institute of Civil Defense. In some areas, such as parts of the Chincha Province, more than 90 percent of the houses were affected. Many of the homes fell apart because they were made of unimproved adobe.

"The adobe used is not like their ancestors' adobe buildings. There was not a lot of hay or vegetation in it. It was just bricks made from mud. When it started to shake, the houses just crumbled," explained USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Phil Gelman, who traveled to Peru the day after the earthquake to help coordinate the U.S. Government (USG) humanitarian response to the disaster. The response, which has focused mainly on short- and long-term shelter issues, includes assistance in excess of \$3.2 million.

The USAID/OFDA Shelter, Settlements and Mitigation Advisor, Chuck Setchell, traveled to Peru in early November and again in mid-December 2007 to advise key players on lessons learned from reconstruction efforts in other countries and assess potential USAID/OFDA activities during the reconstruction phase.



Photo by Phil Gelman, USAID/OFDA

Residents walk through rubble heaped in the streets after the magnitude 8.0 earthquake in August 2007. A new USAID/OFDA-funded project with CARE Peru aims to help reconstruction efforts in Chincha.

As a continuation of USG efforts to address key reconstruction issues in the aftermath of the devastating earthquake, USAID/OFDA recently provided \$400,000 to the non-governmental organization CARE Peru to help families in Chincha whose homes were destroyed to "build back better" using improved adobe techniques.

"This is a really exciting project – the opportunity to insert risk reduction into the reconstruction process, to promote mitigation via reconstruction," Gelman said.

The project aims to complement the Government of Peru's housing subsidy program, which has been established to pro-

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DISASTER RESPONSE

Helping Tabasco Restore Livelihoods



Photo by Cristina Prado, USAID

Following the severe floods in Tabasco, Mexico, in October 2007, USAID/OFDA awarded a \$917,372 grant to the NGO Project Concern International (PCI) to assist area families in need. As a result, PCI held 64 community capacity building sessions and distributed livelihood start-up assistance; families, including women pictured at left, chose among habanero pepper plants (71), fishing nets (1,930), or sets of 10 chicks (3,981).

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Caribbean Wind Hazard Maps Created

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) has developed new state-of-the-art wind hazard maps for the Caribbean basin, thanks to funding from USAID/OFDA and the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO).

The maps feature the most up-to-date meteorological records and methods and are intended to replace older maps currently in use for structural design and risk assessment. The previous maps date back to 1985, according to PAHO.

The 20 new maps, released in May 2008, are expected to be an important aid for engineers, developers, insurance providers, and others whose work requires knowledge of wind hazards.

Researchers developed the maps using data compiled in the region during the past two decades, and prepared them to be consistent with the new regional building standards being prepared with funding from the Caribbean Development Bank.

USAID/OFDA provided \$126,560 to PAHO in September 2007 to help develop the maps, which were created with assistance from Applied Research Associates (ARA). Principal researcher was Dr. Peter Vickery of ARA.

COMING UP

Caribbean Hurricane Season Rotation

USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan has assigned staff from the Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean to Bridgetown, Barbados, to provide preparedness and response coverage during the 2008 hurricane season. Regional Advisor Sidney Velado is in Bridgetown until July 18, and Communications Officer Ricardo Herrera will be there from July 28 until August 8. Callaghan will make multiple visits to the region during Hurricane Season, which ends on November 1.

**USAID/OFDA
Senior Regional
Advisor Tim
Callaghan (right)
helps respond to
the effects of
Tropical Storm
Noel in the
Dominican
Republic in 2007.**



USAID/OFDA archive photo

INSARAG Meeting on Accreditation

Representatives of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) Secretariat in Geneva and the Americas group, including INSARAG Americas President Tim Callaghan, USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor, along with members of the Los Angeles, California, and Fairfax County, Virginia, fire departments will meet in San Jose, Costa Rica, on July 18 to review the accreditation mechanism for urban search and rescue (USAR) teams in the region. INSARAG Americas participating countries are Argentina, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Montserrat, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, United States, and Venezuela. USAID/OFDA provides support to INSARAG efforts in the Americas.

Disaster Management Alliance Meeting

USAID/OFDA representatives will participate in the upcoming meeting of the Disaster Management Alliance in El Salvador. The Disaster Management Alliance, partially funded by USAID/OFDA, promotes the integration of the private sector into community disaster response, preparedness, and mitigation. It is a partnership between the Pan American Development Foundation (PADF), the Association of American Chambers of Commerce in Latin America, local American chambers of commerce throughout the region, and the Association of Contingency Planners. Since 2004, the Alliance has directly and indirectly assisted an estimated 165,000 people in 70 communities throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, including in Colombia, Costa Rica, Trinidad and Tobago, and more recently, in the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Haiti, and Honduras. The Alliance's July 23-25 Regional Integration Meeting in San Salvador aims to unite critical partners with a new, long-term vision for the program that will allow for more effective partnerships and sound investment strategies.

Joint Humanitarian Operations Training

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Julie Leonard will speak at the upcoming Joint Humanitarian Operations Course at JTF-Bravo at the Soto Cano Base in Palmerola, Honduras. Members of the U.S. Southern Command will attend the August 5 and 6 event. USAID/OFDA developed the two-day training in 2004 to establish a formal learning environment for U.S. military leaders to discuss the relationship between USAID and the U.S. military, and prepare participants for collaborative work during response operations.

Peru Reconstruction Project

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vide \$2,150 grants to eligible families to help rebuild their homes.

"At first, discussion within the Peruvian government seemed to be, 'Adobe is bad; let's not give any assistance to rebuild adobe houses.' But a closer look at the issue revealed two things. One, brick-and-mortar houses are beyond the means of most of the affected people; and two, there's been a lot of work done in Peru toward improving traditional adobe building techniques – adding in mats woven out of hay, a layer of cement between the bricks, etc.," Gelman explained.

One of the primary goals of the eight-month CARE project, which began in June, is that residents who rebuild their adobe homes employ improved adobe techniques to ensure that their new houses are seismic-resistant, safe, and healthy.

Entitled "Capacity Building for House Reconstruction in Chincha," the project involves Peruvian architects considered to be among the world's leading experts in reinforced, seismic-resistant adobe techniques, in an educational campaign to raise public awareness of new methods to change adobe building practices. The project also aims to train masons in affected communities on how to apply these new techniques, and inform families on how to best access the Government of Peru housing grant.

Plans also include building 16 model houses in different price categories using seismic-resistant adobe methods, including four that are 100 percent reinforced with polymer mesh and 12 made with alternative, less expensive technology.

"The idea is that inhabitants see for themselves that the new building techniques work, and then adopt the technology," explained USAID/OFDA Regional Advisor Sidney Velado.

Families that will not receive the government grant will be informed about other options for reinforcing adobe structures, such as using polymer mesh on less than 100 percent of wall surfaces or using natural elements such as cane, wood, or rope.

DISASTER RESPONSE

Assisting Belize after the Floods

USAID/OFDA provided \$134,371 in early June to benefit families in Belize affected by floods from heavy rains due to tropical storms Alma and Arthur in late May.

The flooding affected 40 communities in northern, central, and southern Belize, destroyed at least 26 houses, and affected another 400. Floodwaters also washed away bridges at Mullins River, Soldier Creek and Kendal Creek.

On June 3, U.S. Ambassador Robert J. Dieter used his disaster assistance authority to respond to the situation. As a result, USAID/OFDA provided \$25,000 to the Belize Red Cross for the local purchase and transportation of emergency supplies. On June 5, USAID/OFDA airlifted relief commodities worth nearly \$110,000, including transport, from its Miami warehouse to Belize, including 2,016 hygiene kits, 1,500 blankets, 600 ten-liter water containers, and 100 rolls of reinforced plastic sheeting. The Red Cross distributed the aid to affected communities.

USAID/OFDA disaster expert Beryl Armbrister deployed to Belize on June 2 to coordinate the U.S. Government response with the U.S. Embassy in Belmopan and Mission Disaster Relief Officer Sharon Featherstone. Armbrister remained in Belize until June 11.

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Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Tel: (011-506) 2290-4133

(011-506) 2296-3554

E-mail: ofdalac@ofda.gov