



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

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Bell Initiative Honors Regional Office Founder

USAID/OFDA has launched the third round of the Paul C. Bell, Jr., Risk Management Initiative, a joint endeavor with Florida International University (FIU) to strengthen, consolidate, and expand risk management programs in Latin American and Caribbean institutions of higher education.

The initiative honors the extraordinary contributions of Paul C. Bell, Jr., an expert in risk management who dedicated his life to humanitarian work in the region. He helped establish the USAID/OFDA Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) office in San José, Costa Rica, in the mid-1980s and was its Senior Regional Advisor for 20 years until he passed away five years ago this month.

The past decade has seen an explosion of university-level interest in emergency and risk management curricula in the region,

stimulated by the severe El Niño of 1997-1998, Hurricane Mitch in 1998, major earthquakes in El Salvador and Peru, and a growing recognition that risk is multi-dimensional, according to FIU Professor Richard S. Olson, who directs the Bell Initiative.

The increasing number of risk-management education programs in the region poses two problems, according to Olson. First, many of the courses appear to have been developed ad hoc, so consistent professor and course quality is questionable. Second, many were developed in relative isolation and not tied explicitly to established disaster and emergency management training programs in the region, including the long-running USAID/OFDA Training and Technical Assistance Program, implemented by the International Resources

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USAID/OFDA archive photo

The initiative honors the work of late USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Paul C. Bell (center), who helped establish the LAC regional office.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo by Clive Lorde, USAID/OFDA

Rescue workers from the Caribbean practice collapsed structure rescue during a recent USAID/OFDA course in Panama. Another group will receive training in collapsed structure rescue in the coming months through the USAID/OFDA Training and Technical Assistance Program implemented by the International Resources Group. Selected participants will receive further training to become course instructors and work with urban search and rescue teams from the Caribbean at a new training field being set up in Barbados. Additionally, USAID/OFDA is negotiating an agreement with the American Red Cross to provide basic life support training to the teams, thus completing minimum requirements.

DISASTER RESPONSE

Seeds Distributed in Haiti To Help Quell Food Crisis

USAID/OFDA has provided \$150,000 for the purchase and distribution of seeds to farmers in Haiti, an impoverished Caribbean nation where food shortages and a sharp rise in the cost of living led to widespread civil unrest last month.

From August 2007 to March 2008, the price of basic food commodities in Haiti rose by as much as 65 percent because of world food price increases as well as heavy rains and flooding in late 2007, which reduced harvests in key production areas, according to the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince.

Many rural farmers do not have adequate seed for planting because they used their seed to feed their families. The USAID/OFDA funds have been programmed through USAID/Haiti's Title II sponsors and other non-governmental organizations with experience in seed provision.

In addition, USAID/Haiti is providing \$1 million to support the Government of Haiti's plan to subsidize imported rice in order to reduce the price of rice from \$51 to \$43 per 110 pounds.

USAID/Haiti also has reprogrammed \$5.5 million for job creation programs, projected to provide short-term jobs for 15,000 people in Fiscal Year 2008. Money earned through these jobs will allow beneficiaries to purchase additional food for themselves and dependents.

COMING UP

FA-HUM 08 Disaster Relief Exercise

USAID/OFDA is supporting the Fuerzas Aliadas Humanitarias (FA-HUM) 08, a series of U.S. Southern Command and Salvadoran Defense Ministry-sponsored disaster relief exercises involving military and civilian agencies from countries throughout the hemisphere. USAID/OFDA disaster experts are participating in exercises in El Salvador in early and mid-May. The related May 12-14 FA-HUM 2008 Expo will occur in San Salvador. This year, in addition to senior level disaster planners/operators, a distinguished visitors program will feature decision-makers from 22 countries. USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan and Jamaica-based Regional Consultant Audrey Mullings are keynote speakers at the event.

Joint Humanitarian Operations Training

USAID/OFDA Senior Regional Advisor Tim Callaghan will speak at the Joint Humanitarian Operations Course in Colorado Springs. Twenty-five members of the U.S. Northern Command will attend the May 14-15 event. USAID/OFDA developed the two-day training in 2004 to establish a formal learning environment for U.S. military leaders to prepare participants for collaborative work during disaster response operations.

Flood Assessment in Angola

USAID/OFDA/LAC Regional Advisor Sidney Velado departed for Angola on May 7 to assist with a three-week flood assessment in the sub-Saharan African nation. Floods since January have displaced 56,000 people and damaged crops, roads, houses, and schools in the provinces of Cunene and Kuando Kubango.

Paul Bell Risk Reduction Initiative

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Group. These problems can lead to duplication of effort and lost opportunities for exchange and coordination.

The Paul Bell Initiative was designed to address the challenges posed by these problems. It fosters increased communication and exchange of experiences among staff and professors at select institutions by making awards of \$10,000-\$20,000 to the best and most innovative multidisciplinary proposals. Launched in early 2006, the first round of the Bell Initiative was for South American institutions; the second round later that same year focused on Central America.

The South American recipient was the National University of Colombia at Manizales, which proposed a two-stage project. The first stage was a rigorous Internet-based course on integrated risk management led by Professor Omar Dario Cardona. The second stage involved a field visit to Manizales, so participants could observe a model for disaster risk management at the local level.

"The most innovative part was the link-up of that course with a rotation/site visit of a living laboratory of multisector risk management involving the government, mayor's office, university officials, community activists – basically, a community of practice – in a city that is prone to disaster. Everyone really got a lot out of the visit," Olson said. In fact, the combination of the online course followed by the field trip was so successful that the Bell Initiative decided to fund a second site visit last month.

The recipient of the Central American round was the Latin American Faculty for Social Sciences in San José, Costa Rica, for a seminar on risk associated with urban development and climate change, which brought in experts and academics from all over the region to push for greater exchange of approaches and information in order to reduce duplication.

The third round is open to institutions from all over Latin America and the Caribbean that wish to establish or strengthen university participation in disaster risk management "communities of practice."

Mission Accomplished

USAID/OFDA/LAC Articles on the Internet

Articles about USAID/OFDA disaster assistance and risk reduction projects in Latin America and the Caribbean are now available on the USAID Web site. To read them, go to the article index page at www.usaid.gov/our_work/humanitarian_assistance/disaster_assistance/ofdalac/articles/lac_articles_index.html.



USAID/OFDA staff from around the world met in Dakar, Senegal to share experiences in disaster response and risk reduction.

Photo by Richard Nyberg, USAID/Senegal

Regional Advisors Share Experiences

USAID/OFDA Regional Advisors from Latin America and the Caribbean met with colleagues from around the world and Washington management staff in April in Senegal to share experiences and discuss a renewed focus on disaster risk reduction.

Annual Planning Session a Success

From April 30 to May 2, International Resources Group and USAID/OFDA staff met in Miami to discuss the 2008/2009 Training and Technical Assistance Program.

DISASTER RESPONSE

USAID/OFDA Provides \$60,750 To Help Flood Victims in Brazil

USAID/OFDA has provided \$60,750 to Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to help meet the immediate needs of families affected by severe flooding in northeast Brazil in April.

Rains began in late March and continued into April, causing flooding and mudslides in the semi-arid region of six northeastern states. As of late April, the adverse weather caused at least 26 deaths in Paraiba state and affected more than 415,000 people in an estimated 250 municipalities. Nearly 40,000 people lost their homes and another 80,000 were displaced, according to information from the Government of Brazil's Secretariat for Civil Defense and northeast state governments.

CRS is using the USAID/OFDA funds to provide emergency assistance to 500 families in three of the hardest-hit municipalities: Crateus, in Ceara state; Esperantina, in Piaui state; and Aparecida, in Paraiba state. The money helped purchase relief supplies and support basic housing repair for the most vulnerable families.

USAID/OFDA also deployed Regional Consultant Antonio Pinheiro to Ceara in late April to personally evaluate the situation. He subsequently concluded no further support was required.

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