

USAID'S BUREAU FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE (USAID/BHA)

REGIONAL OFFICE FOR LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN, SAN JOSÉ, COSTA RICA



PREDES promotes the active participation of women in its volunteer programs; nearly 65 percent of the volunteers in the Northern Lima and Southern Lima VER programs are women. Photo courtesy of PREDES

USAID/BHA Supports Disaster Simulation Exercises in Central America and the Caribbean

In preparation for the 2023 hurricane season, USAID/BHA-funded partner Catholic Relief Services (CRS) held two disaster response simulation exercises from June 13-15 and June 16-20 in Saint Lucia and Honduras, respectively. The sessions brought together local partners involved in the CRS-led Empowering Partner Organizations Working on Emergency Responses (EMPOWER) project in hurricane-prone countries in Central America and the Caribbean to share knowledge, exchange best practices, and improve disaster response coordination.

The EMPOWER project aims to bolster local leadership in humanitarian responses by strengthening institutions and providing direct funding to local humanitarian actors. The program offers on-the-job support, technical assistance, resources, training, and regional workshops based on the needs of participating organizations. With USAID/BHA funding, EMPOWER also supports implementing disaster risk reduction activities, which help prepare local actors to lead disaster response efforts in at-risk communities.

Through the recent workshops, CRS helped partners gain a better understanding of the different phases of an emergency response and guided them on improving internal coordination mechanisms and collaborating with relevant



Representatives from the EMPOWER program and USAID/BHA participated in the Saint Lucia simulation exercise.

Photo by Erin Magee, USAID/BHA

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USAID/BHA Bolsters DRM Capabilities in Peru through a Neighborhood Approach

With USAID/BHA support, the Center for Study and Prevention of Disasters (PREDES) is strengthening disaster risk management (DRM) capacities in multiple disaster-prone neighborhoods in Peru's capital city of Lima, within the municipal associations of Northern and Southern Lima. In these areas, approximately 1.25 million people reside in informal urban settings on steep and unstable slopes with a high risk of flooding, landslides, and seismic activity.

With nearly \$4.8 million in USAID/BHA funding for Fiscal Years 2020 and 2023, PREDES is working with community members and local governments to develop a risk management model in Northern Lima's Comas, Los Olivos, and Puente Piedra districts and Southern Lima's San Juan de Miraflores, Villa María del Triunfo, and Villa El Salvador districts.

Based on lessons learned from other USAID/BHA programs with a neighborhood approach, this initiative aims to reduce disaster risk through awareness campaigns, upgrading critical community infrastructure, reinforcing

housing structures, and building DRM capacities. USAID/BHA's neighborhood approach features the participation of local governments and communities to provide neighborhoods with tools that enable them to be prepared for and resilient to future crises.

Program activities include social media campaigns for disaster risk awareness, workshops to increase communities' engagement in risk reduction actions, training sessions for municipal officials and leaders to institutionalize DRM and increase their capacity to access public funds for DRM projects, and the development of risk studies for vulnerable locations.

As part of the project, PREDES partnered with the Continental University in Peru to develop a Diploma Degree Program in DRM and Local Development with a Neighborhood and Inclusive Approach. The diploma program—which was launched in April 2023—aims to strengthen the capacities of government officials from 13 municipalities in Northern Lima,

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external stakeholders. Additionally, the training sessions addressed effective communication strategies and educated participants on enhancing emergency preparation and response capacity.

During the simulation exercises, local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) from various countries learned about how to prepare for emergencies and respond within the critical phase, or 72 hours before landfall. The NGOs tested their plans and procedures for this phase through tabletop exercises and identified their capacity to respond to a disaster. Furthermore, participants simulated a response to an emergency, identifying specific actions and coordination functions to execute within the initial three weeks following a disaster and subsequently conducted an after-action review of the exercise, allowing them to recognize challenges and areas for improvement. Workshop participants updated their emergency response plans based on the results of the simulation, bolstering their ability to provide relief to communities affected by hurricanes and other disasters.

“Local humanitarian actors are central to any disaster response. USAID/BHA remains committed to supporting and building stronger relationships with local organizations through initiatives such as the EMPOWER program. Through the simulation exercises, local humanitarian actors had the opportunity to test their disaster response plans and think through ways to make improvements, which will lead to stronger, more efficient responses in the future,” noted USAID/BHA Regional Advisor Erin Magee.

USAID/BHA supports multiple simulation and drill exercises through various programs in Latin America and the Caribbean. These activities offer countries in the region unique opportunities to practice, reflect, and receive valuable feedback from experts, enabling them to strengthen their systems and be better prepared to respond to a disaster.



Representatives from various Central American countries participated in the simulation exercise in Honduras. Photo courtesy of CRS

Bolstering DRM Capabilities, continued from page 1



Neighborhood leaders from Comas, Los Olivos, and Puente Piedra learned about the construction process of a “pirca” to reduce the risk of disasters. Photo courtesy of PREDES

Southern Lima, and Metropolitan Lima and integrate risk management into the urban planning and development processes of communities within these areas.

Additionally, in collaboration with municipalities, PREDES supports the implementation of community committees and provides technical assistance and training to their members. The committees serve as a link between municipalities and members of the communities; they analyze vulnerabilities and determine specific mitigation measures that should be implemented to reduce disaster risk and be well-prepared and equipped to respond to potential emergencies.

Moreover, in collaboration with other local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the program conducts specialized workshops on improving community infrastructure. For example, in early July, community leaders from Northern Lima received training from local NGO Mano a Mano on the proper construction of a pirca—a traditional stone wall or construction made by fitting together stones without the use of a mortar. The stones are carefully selected and stacked according to their shape and size to create sturdy and durable structures. These stone structures can help to stabilize slopes, reduce the risk of erosion and landslides, and protect against flooding, thus reducing the risk of disasters in vulnerable areas. The initiative seeks to empower leaders to employ ancient stone masonry techniques—used particularly in the Andean Region—to build safer neighborhoods.

Through the project, PREDES also supports the Emergency and Rehabilitation Volunteers (VER) program—created by the Government of Peru (GoP) Institute of Civil Defense (INDECI) and implemented in collaboration with local municipalities—by recruiting and training community members to collaborate with risk mitigation, preparedness, and emergency response efforts in their neighborhoods. The program has helped train volunteers in the areas of urban planning, search and rescue, first aid, and emergency evacuation plans.

“As volunteers in the VER program, we provide ongoing support in activities related to DRM; we raise awareness and educate the public through door-to-door training activities, fairs, and informational campaigns. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we also helped to distribute food and hygiene kits to communities in need. Additionally, we actively participate in simulation exercises and drills that contribute to our preparedness for potential emergencies,” said Juan José Rodríguez, a San Juan de Miraflores volunteer.

As of July 2023, the USAID/BHA-funded program had provided DRM training to more than 8,000 community members and local government personnel, developed six VER training programs to more than 420 volunteers, and reached nearly 1.25 million people through its social media disaster risk awareness campaign. Moreover, PREDES has implemented two emergency operations centers and a humanitarian aid warehouse in Southern Lima, containing equipment and tools that volunteers can use to support emergencies.

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