ABSTRACT: The USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) PREPARE Program is a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) program aimed at strengthening the ability of Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) teams and key local institutions to respond to urban earthquakes by helping these teams better understand the probable impacts of earthquakes on urban areas and plan accordingly. The primary goal of PREPARE is to provide city officials and first responders with a clearer picture of the probable impact of an earthquake, build their USAR response skills and help them improve their risk management capacity. The program is taking place in two high risk cities in Latin America: San José, Costa Rica and Pasto, Colombia.

The PREPARE program has three principal components. The first phase of the program is identification of earthquake risk. This is done by studying the seismic hazards and building types to determine the probabilistic damage for each city and then will work with local structural engineers, city officials and USAR teams to identify key buildings likely to require special attention after an earthquake. This analysis also will provide critical information about the probable impact of earthquakes on the overall building stock, which can guide response planning.

The second and third phases are planning for the response, damage assessment and capacity building. In the immediate aftermath of an earthquake, local USAR teams need to know which buildings they can and cannot enter. In the days and weeks that follow, the local population needs to know if their homes are safe for occupation. City officials will need to know how to estimate volume to create a Post-Disaster Debris Management Plan to deal with the rubble a disaster generates. Based on the results of risk assessment, structural engineers and earthquake disaster specialists will work with city officials, USAR teams and professional organizations to determine how emergency responders are supported and how best to implement damage assessments. And lastly, USAR specialists will work with the local USAR teams to help them understand and assess probable building collapse scenarios.

About 60 members of USAR Teams will receive training, along with about 300 municipal DRR officials, staff and other stakeholders. The program is being implemented within an 18-month timeframe.

The PREPARE program will build upon DRR work already completed by national and municipal institutions in San José and Pasto and supplement current efforts to implement the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. It will supplement and coordinate activities...
with those already underway by the Americas’ regional chapter of the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (ISARAG-Americas) and build upon the work of USAID/OFDA/LAC under its Regional Disaster Assistance Program (RDAP), including support for the region’s USAR teams. It will increase the capacity of USAR teams in San José and Pasto to save more lives following an urban earthquake and enable municipal staff and officials to move more quickly in rebuilding their cities.