

**ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES (OAS)  
DEPARTMENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

**NATURAL HAZARDS AND CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION: PROGRAMMATIC OVERVIEW  
MAY 2006**

**Organizational Approach:** The Department of Sustainable Development (DSD) supports a multidisciplinary approach to identifying and reducing the economic, developmental and human costs of natural disasters affecting OAS Member States. In this regard, the Department continues to provide policy and technical assistance and capacity-building to countries of the Hemisphere in preparing for, and adapting to, the impacts of natural hazards.

The Natural Hazards and Climate Change Adaptation Program of the OAS/DSD is the principal provider of services to OAS Member States to identify and reduce the risks associated with natural hazards. Program activities reflect the requests from countries, are intended to complement efforts of other international and regional organizations, and utilize other program areas within the OAS/DSD, notably sustainable energy, integrated water resource management, legal reforms and enforcement, land tenure, governance and educational outreach.

**Natural Hazards and Climate Change Adaptation Program Strategy:** The objective of the program is to reduce the risks associated with weather-related natural hazards, by helping to increase the resilience of OAS member states, communities and physical assets to natural disaster impacts. To complement the technical assistance priorities noted below, the Department will identify opportunities to mainstream natural hazards risk management policies within development planning, and economic and fiscal planning cycles, through cost-benefit and other economic analysis.

The program works to achieve its goals by reducing the vulnerability to the effects of natural hazards by the implementation of the following activities:

1. *Promotion of Safer Construction:* Private and public sector building practices are a key determinant in preventing damage from disasters, particularly damages to public buildings such as schools, critical facilities and tourism sector infrastructure, and private such as households, from the impacts of high-winds, rain and flooding. The program supports (a) efforts of Member States and communities to adopt building codes and standards that reduce the risks of natural disasters, (b) provide support to governments, including municipal authorities, in the on-going monitoring and enforcement of building codes and standards, through training and the sharing of practices, and (c) develop a cost-benefit analysis of the effects of building codes in relation to economic consequences of disasters and recovery periods.
2. *Support Innovative Financial Mechanisms:* The program supports regional initiatives aimed at integrating financial mechanisms, institutional frameworks and governmental arrangements for risk transfers, through the promotion of regional insurance and re-insurance pooling strategies, and integrating construction quality insurance practices in governmental physical planning and in the mortgage and banking industries. The program will provide assistance to governments in possible regulatory reviews and reforms to support financing mechanisms.
3. *Strengthen Infrastructure Management:* Economic and social infrastructure are impacted, damaged, and destroyed by natural disasters. The program works with key public

officials to help improve natural hazards risk management policies, urban planning, and hazard mitigation strategies for key public infrastructure sectors including electrical power, transportation, and communication.

4. *Land Use Management & Planning*: To address the vulnerability of communities to the impacts of natural hazards/climate change and the loss of ecosystem functions and services, the Program supports the implementation of sustainable land use management practices at both the community and institutional level, and through the DSD Land Titling and Property Rights initiatives, seeks to incorporate land tenure data in disaster vulnerability reduction plans and in field assessments for post-disasters housing reconstruction efforts. The program also promotes the strengthening of property rights to enable a mortgage loan market and a natural disasters homeowners' insurance program, and the institutional mainstreaming of land use management policies.
5. *Strengthen Regional and Hemispheric Natural Hazards Networks*: The program will establish a hemispheric network of national, regional, and international agencies involved in natural hazard mitigation activities, to enhance synergies and improve risk reduction and risk mitigation actions.

The issues of governance, including gender and public participation are a cross cutting issue considered in all activities.

**Services:** The following are the services provided by the DSD to the OAS Member States to implement the natural hazards strategy:

1. Public awareness: including implementation of social statistical analysis techniques to target behavioral changes.
2. Education: including formal and informal education programs oriented to the local communities at large.
3. Policy and legal reform: including the identification and networking of existing legal frameworks at national level.
4. Training: including support for training of personnel and local communities in collaboration with specialized institutions on natural hazards risk mitigation.
5. Capacity building: including creation and growth of local and regional institutions as well as development of links and networks among them.
6. Applied technology: including implementation of early warning systems, hazards modeling techniques, climate monitoring stations, etc.
7. Best practices: including sustainable agriculture and forestry practices, coastal zone management techniques such as "green hotel" certificate programs.

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