

POUNDS OF PREVENTION

- A Disaster Risk Reduction Summary -

“Pounds of Prevention” is a series of short articles that illustrate how disaster risk reduction works and why it is important. Take a behind-the-scenes look at aid work in action, long before the disaster occurs. How is that possible? Read on!

FOCUS: SAINT LUCIA

Residents of Saint Lucia—an island of steep, volcanic hills rising sharply above the waters of the Eastern Caribbean—are vulnerable to many hazards, including hurricanes, rainstorms, landslides, erosion, floods, and earthquakes. These threats, exacerbated by development challenges, have inspired residents of Laborie Quarter, a district in southern Saint Lucia, to take action to prepare for and mitigate the potential effects of future disasters.

In early 2013, USAID teamed up with the Laborie Disaster Preparedness Committee to help the district become more resilient to the impacts of natural disasters. Specifically, USAID partnered with the committee to design and install a rainwater harvesting and storage system to ensure an adequate supply of safe drinking water in the event a disaster rendered the public water system inoperable.

As part of the disaster preparedness project, the committee installed 6 rooftop rainwater catchment systems and a total of 18 potable water storage tanks at public schools, churches, and a health center in Laborie. The committee also held public meetings in the Laborie area to reach the population of approximately 10,000 people with information about the rainwater harvesting project and provide guidelines for how the system would work during an emergency.

A few months later, on December 24, torrential rains and heavy winds produced flooding and landslides throughout the Eastern Caribbean. In Saint Lucia, the inclement weather caused six fatalities, temporarily displaced thousands of people, and damaged bridges, roads, health centers, schools, homes, and public water systems, leaving several areas—including Laborie—without piped water.

In Laborie, the rainwater catchment and storage system operated as designed and provided an alternative source of water to the residents of Laborie Village and the surrounding communities for two days until the Saint Lucia Water and Sewage Company restored water service to the district. In fact, thanks to the USAID-supported project, Laborie was the only community in southern Saint Lucia that did not suffer shortages during the disruption in the regular water supply.

Members of the Laborie Disaster Preparedness Committee coordinated closely with managers of the facilities where catchment systems and storage tanks were installed to ensure that all disaster-affected residents had access to a protected water source. Individuals from as far away as three miles made regular trips to Laborie Village to obtain water for household use.

According to Laborie Disaster Preparedness Committee chairman Ulric Alphonse, USAID support made a major difference: “We always realized that the real test of success of this project would be when it was actually needed, although we prayed that this would never happen. We know now that the project’s significance cannot be overstated. We of the Laborie community are truly grateful to USAID for its contribution to the welfare of the community.”



A committee member points out the planned location of two rainwater storage tanks. Photo by Beryl Armbrister, USAID.



Girls in Laborie use water from storage tanks after a December 2013 storm disrupted regular water service. Photo courtesy of the Laborie Disaster Preparedness Committee.