



# OxfamImpact

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## ‘We are prepared’

In Peru’s biggest city, where earthquakes are a constant threat, Oxfam helps women and young people learn how to protect their families.

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Last June, Sabina Torres found out what it was like to live through an earthquake. Flashlights in hand, Torres, her four children, and their neighbors picked their way carefully through the dark, narrow streets of their neighborhood, on the outskirts of Lima, Peru. They followed a marked path to a safe area, where Torres and other trained first responders began treating the injured.

Of course, no one was really hurt—the “earthquake” was actually a drill led by Oxfam America’s partner the Center for the Prevention and Study of Disasters (PREDES). With Oxfam’s support, PREDES teaches women and young people how to prepare their communities for earthquakes, while working with local government to protect Lima’s most vulnerable areas.

“This is a high-risk area, and the land is not very stable. We realize this,” said Torres, a member of a civil defense committee charged with protecting about 130 families. “Our responsibility is to our people. When the earthquake comes, our goal is for them to be prepared.”

### Another way to save lives

In 2007, a magnitude 8.0 earthquake struck the Peruvian city of Pisco, killing 595 people. Oxfam and partner organizations responded with life-saving aid.

Today, Oxfam supports partners who respond to the threat of earthquakes in another way. Promoting preparedness—helping people build early-warning systems,

identify safe shelters, and learn evacuation and first-aid techniques—also saves lives, and preparedness is more cost-effective than responding after a disaster.

One such program is based in Lima, a city of nine million people that lies on the same fault line as Pisco. Oxfam program officer Elizabeth Cano said most emergency preparedness happens in Peru’s rural regions, where the population is lower but poverty is more prevalent. “People think Lima has better resources [with which to respond], but that’s not always the case,” said Cano.

After researching Lima’s at-risk areas, Oxfam and PREDES saw an immediate need in Nueva Rinconada, a poor, isolated zone in the San Juan de Miraflores district.

Last year, Oxfam’s partner organized a student mural contest on the theme of earthquake preparedness. The winning mural is now on display in this schoolyard in Lima’s San Juan de Miraflores district. Percy Ramírez / Oxfam America

"It was a place where no other organization was working," Cano explained.

Nueva Rinconada was settled in the 1980s, when rural families fleeing Peru's violent civil war sought refuge on the empty hills surrounding a pig farm. Some of the newcomers found jobs as construction workers or street vendors and stayed on, their makeshift dwellings becoming permanent homes. Families are still settling there today, pushed out to the city's edge by desperation and economic need.

Because the settlement of 5,000 people doesn't officially exist on city maps, and is accessible only via a steep, unpaved road, locals have no illusions about what might happen should an earthquake strike.

"We'd be the last people to get help, because it's difficult for help to come here," said resident Luz Ramos. "We have to be conscious of that and help ourselves."

### Training the next generation

"Because people in Nueva Rinconada don't have land titles, they can't invest in proper housing. So the first thing we did was make recommendations to improve the safety [of homes]," said PREDES president Dr. José Sato.

Next, PREDES reached out to two groups who play an important part in keeping families safe: women and young people. They organized a high school mural contest on the theme of earthquake preparedness, broadcast ads on local radio stations, and partnered with existing groups, like the communal kitchens where women work together to prepare meals for neighbors.

Many of these women took part in a hands-on emergency response training, as did a group of volunteers aged 13 to 17. "These



Luz Ramos, who was expecting her third child last spring, is a trained member of the civil defense committee for her neighborhood. "As mothers, we seek the security of our families," she said. *Percy Ramírez / Oxfam America*

efforts help young people give back, while improving their self-esteem," said Sato. "We teach them how to be leaders."

For women, too, the training brought additional benefits. "I learned skills like first aid, but I also learned how to develop myself as a human being," said Ramos. "I realized that I can teach others." She showed her young sons how to prepare backpacks full of emergency supplies and told them about the safe zone—a nearby flat area that PREDES determined would be relatively safe from landslides.

Local volunteers marked the route to the safe zone with hand-painted signs, and helped install battery-powered speakers to broadcast warnings throughout the area. They then worked with PREDES and government officials on realistic simulations, like the drill last June, to put these tools to the test.

### A plan for clean water

With an Oxfam investment of \$262,700 over three years, PREDES has been

expanding its efforts to reach more people. From 2010 to early 2012, staffers worked with elected city officials to create an earthquake preparedness plan for San Juan de Miraflores' 362,000 residents.

The plan includes contingencies for providing clean water and sanitation after an earthquake. In areas like Nueva Rinconada, where water is trucked in and deliveries can be unreliable, a successful plan "will require everyone's collaboration," said Sato. PREDES brought together representatives from the water supplier, local government, and the community to come up with solutions.

This year, Oxfam and PREDES will convene citizens, government officials, and companies to create a similar contingency plan for nearly one million residents of the region surrounding San Juan de Miraflores.

Meanwhile, in Nueva Rinconada, residents say they already feel safer. "With the training we received, I believe my family could be okay during an earthquake, and perhaps even help others," said Ramos. "We are prepared."



## Do one more thing today: Learn how disasters can be prevented

Responding to disasters when they occur is a crucial part of Oxfam's humanitarian mission. But helping communities prepare for emergencies is at the cutting edge of our work and can even prevent a natural event from becoming a full-scale disaster. Read about Oxfam's prevention efforts in El Salvador, Ethiopia, and other countries at [www.oxfamamerica.org/prepared](http://www.oxfamamerica.org/prepared).