

Resilience Recovery Workshops Continue in the Center and South of the Island

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GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico ? The municipality of Aguas Buenas is located on the eastern side of the Central Mountain Range. It is composed of a mountainous topography, which makes this town prone to landslides during rainy periods. According to the municipality's federal programs director, José Ortiz López, many communities were developed without considering issues such as runoff and water management, which has generated vulnerability for the roads that connect its residents.

To mitigate these effects, the municipality of Aguas Buenas is collaborating with the Puerto Rico Landslides Hazard Mitigation Office to implement sensors that monitor at-risk areas to forecast which zones may be vulnerable to landslides.

The implementation of these sensors is one of several tools that were discussed at the fifth workshop of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Regional Recovery Approach.

The meeting brought together mayors and staff from the central and southern municipalities of the island to provide practical tools that address the needs and problems identified in their communities. Issues such as coastal erosion, landslides, rehabilitation of abandoned structures and relocation of communities at risk were discussed.

"These efforts aim to move toward a more resilient recovery focused on the real needs of communities. The workshops provide tools, contacts and relevant information to empower each municipality and enable them to rebuild stronger," said Federal Disaster Recovery Coordinator José G. Baquero.

During the event, the coordinator of the Landslide Hazard Mitigation Office of the University of Puerto Rico at Mayagüez, Stephen Hughes, spoke about landslide risks on the island, a critical problem in several mountainous areas of the region. Hughes commented that "having these types of meetings is useful to share that



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message and then create contacts or connections with different communities on the island so that we can expand the effort,” as was the case with Aguas Buenas.

Part of the benefits of this type of workshops — coordinated by FEMA’s Hazard Mitigation Division and the Community Assistance Recovery Support Function — is to strengthen collaborative ties between the agencies, communities, non-profit organizations and academia to continue the recovery efforts of each municipality using their own tools and resources, without having to hire large companies.

The director of the Planning Office of the municipality of Caguas, Zaid Isaac, said that “we are in the perfect moment to begin to mitigate and reverse this situation at an environmental level.” Isaac also mentioned that these types of workshops are important “so that each sector begins to do its part and we begin to make real changes to avoid all these types of situations.”

Other panelists at the workshop included the paralegal for the Centro para la Reconstrucción del Hábitat, Melissa Gross, who spoke about abandoned and disused structures. “It is crucial to discuss this with municipal governments, who have the delegated authority by law to handle this public nuisance issue, not only to combat property abandonment, but to use these abandoned properties as affordable housing alternatives for people who are unable to participate in the traditional real estate market,” Gross said.

Also participating in the event were the founder and executive director of Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico, Ariadna Michelle Godreau-Aubert, who offered information on the fair relocation of the most vulnerable communities; and the deputy director of the Caribbean Coastal Ocean Observing System (CARICOOS), Patricia Chardón-Maldonado, who presented information on coastal areas.

FEMA’s fifth Regional Approach to Recovery workshop included attendance from the municipalities of Aguas Buenas, Aibonito, Arroyo, Barranquitas, Caguas, Cayey, Coamo, Cidra, Comerío, Guayama, Maunabo, Naranjito, Patillas, Salinas and Santa Isabel.

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