



## 25 years of DRR in Central America - What can we learn?

### SDC's 25-Year Commitment to Central America's Resilience

Hurricane Mitch ravaged Central America in 1998. More than 10,000 people lost their lives in mudslides and floods. Damages in public infrastructure and private houses were huge. In this context, SDC decided to focus its reconstruction efforts on prevention and management of risks.

Today we mark the end of 25 years of SDC's programme on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in Central America. This newsletter stands as an opportunity to reflect on our achievements. It aims to celebrate results, share insights, and prepare for the road ahead.

Our [closing event](#) on bilateral cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean on April 24 in Berne will provide an additional opportunity to explore this issue in greater depth and identify paths for continued resilience building.

A diverse array of stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs, academia, and local communities, participated in the DRR programme. Their collective expertise and dedication have made possible a remarkable progress in disaster preparedness and response in Central America.

Designed for policymakers, development practitioners, researchers, and local actors alike, this newsletter offers insight into a broad range of best practices distilled from a rich capitalisation of experiences. Readers can expect to delve into six thematic lines of DRR action and learn about the programme's evolution, challenges and conclusions, through a variety of capitalisation products as well as critical reflections from involved staff.

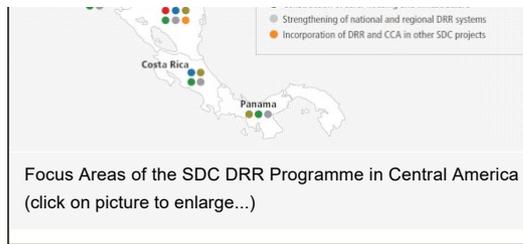
Please also find the present Newsletter on the brand-new Knowledge Platform of the Climate, DRR & Environment Network.

Enjoy your reading!  
*Beatrice Meyer*  
Co-Head of Section  
Latin America and the Caribbean

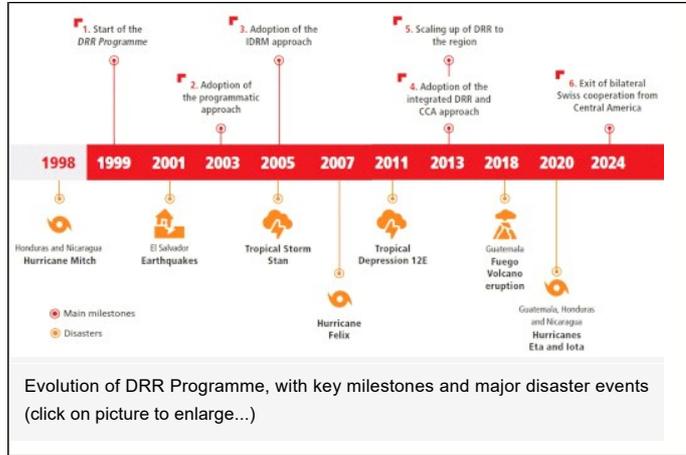
### DRR Programme in Central America at a glance



SDC's DRR  
Programme in  
Central America  
started 1999 in



finally, scaled to the entire Central American Region (2013).



population's suffering, losses and damages caused by natural (extreme) events. To do so, it needed to generate changes in the performance of public and private stakeholders, which, with improved and inclusive risk governance, could effectively reduce disaster risks.

The programme evolved through six phases, marked by six key milestones and the occurrence of major disasters of different nature that struck the region.

A detailed overview on how SDC's DRR action in the region moved progressively towards an integrated, regional risk management and protection approach, involving academia and incorporating Climate Change Adaptation (CCA), can be found in the Capitalisation Report, available in Spanish ([ESP](#)) and English ([ENG](#)).

## Capitalising on 25 years of experience in Central America

The capitalisation exercise, managed by the SDC cooperation office in Managua, was implemented in 2023 by a local consulting company (Crea Comunicaciones). The focus was laid on the programme's six thematic action lines:

1. Natural hazard mapping and local risk management
2. Strengthening national and regional DRR systems
3. Incorporation of DRR and Adaptation to Climate Change in other projects
4. Construction of safer homes and infrastructure
5. Early Warning Systems
6. Integration of DRR and Climate Change Adaptation in universities

A great collection of knowledge products features the lessons learned, success factors and best practices, with the following key conclusions and messages:

**External factors**, such as the recurrent impact of disastrous events and effects of climate change, have influenced the awareness of key actors and how pivotal the role of committed partners was in driving progress. The reports also document **internal success factors**, including the long-term dedication of SDC and their focus on disaster prevention, which solidified the programme's relevance and reliability. Another key was the support to partners in their annual planning and preparation of baselines to achieve measurable impact. Lastly, forming a critical mass of skilled professionals in alliance with universities, strategically collaborating with diverse stakeholders, and fostering knowledge exchange for enhanced regional integration was decisive for success.

The capitalisation calls for more exchange between national civil protection systems but also for global collaboration among DRR programmes to foster **institutional learning**. It advocates for more **gender and youth inclusion** to increase justice and aim for a lasting impact. The capitalisation specifically promotes the programme's best practices for DRR and CCA incorporation and advises bolstering preparedness and humanitarian response through systematic support to local emergency teams. Finally, it recommends replicating the developed innovative methods and technologies, as they have proven effective and represent an excellent entry point for local and national governments.

## Set of capitalisation products

The following **key capitalisation products** with a general scope were generated:

- **A Capitalisation Report** (34p, available in [ESP](#) and [ENG](#)): Provides an excellent overview of the programme's evolution and modalities, analyses the programme along its thematic lines and shares important lessons learned and concrete success stories. It also presents distilled success factors and recommendations relevant to any DRR programme.
- **Compendium of publications** ([ESP only](#)): A well-structured compendium, shortly presenting and linking to almost 150 publications, including guidelines, technical studies, strategies, training manuals, videos and more. A great resource useful to DRR practitioners looking for detailed knowledge, guidance, and tools.
- **Video on Timeline** of the DRR Programme (4min, [ESP](#) and [ENG](#)): a synopsis of 25 years of work with various partner organisations at the community, municipal, national and regional levels.



You will also find a set of thematic products for each of the six thematic lines, all available in Spanish and English:

- **Fact Sheets**: Practical 2-page sheets designed for non-DRR practitioners, on why and how the thematic action lines were approached in the DRR programme, providing a short process overview and lessons learnt.
- **Brochures**: Well-illustrated, 8-page documents ideal for DRR-practitioners, providing insight into how related activities can be organized in stages, but also presenting success factors, lessons learned and best practices in more detail.
- **Videos**: short 2-minute presentations of specific DRR programme activities, using images from project areas to illustrate the needs, the programme's response, and its achievements.

A **one-page overview**, with links to all capitalisation products, can be accessed [here](#) (the individual products can also be found in the related sections below).

## Successes and challenges – an insider perspective

Delve into the memory of Miriam Downs and Ali Neumann – both having worked in SDC's DRR programme for over 20 years. Get their insights on pioneering methodologies, mainstreaming DRR, and upscaling strategies that shaped the region. Uncover the lessons learned and recommendations for future DRR initiatives. Join us in exploring the dynamic integration of gender perspectives, knowledge sharing, and sustainable partnerships that have left a lasting impact on disaster resilience in Central America.

[Read the interview here.](#)

**Miriam Downs:** former National Programme Officer at SDC Cooperation office in Managua, coordinating regional DRR programme in Central America from 2001-2022 and then consultant on the capitalization exercise.



**Ali Neumann:** Senior DRR Advisor at SDC HQ. Former regional advisor in LAC (2001-2006) and backstopping the DRR Programme Central America as of 2014. Lead the designing and setting up of the capitalization exercise in 2022.



## Thematic action lines of DRR Programme

### 1. Natural hazard mapping and local risk management

As Hurricane Mitch hit Central America in 1998, governments were overwhelmed and their abilities to respond to such large-scale disasters showed gaps. Therefore, SDC's engagement started with mapping and assessing risks and strengthening local risk management capacities.



The hazard maps continue to be used and updated by technical staff in the municipality of Condega, Nicaragua.  
©COSUDE

The capitalisation describes how the DRR programme has evolved from this Hurricane response towards a comprehensive risk management approach. Find out about tools and capacities to incorporate risk management in planning and development processes. Learn how the methodologies and instruments were adapted to the local context jointly with municipal technicians. Study the programme approaches that have already been replicated manifold in the region and can serve as a model for similar projects elsewhere.

Find here the brochure ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)), fact-sheet ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) and video ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) dedicated to this topic.

### 2. Strengthening national and regional DRR systems

Governing bodies at different levels were supported to implement their DRR plans and consolidate their territorial organisational structures, such as the Emergency Operations Centres.

The following documents describe the programme's evolution from capacity strengthening to an inclusive approach to DRR governance, with more collective, transparent and effective DRR management according to relevant standards. Find out how drills organised to test regional procedures for humanitarian assistance have fostered cooperation across Central America. Read how the DRR programme's support to the implementation of national and regional DRR plans is ultimately aligned with the priorities of the Sendai Framework for DRR 2015-2030.



Experts from institutions in the Emergency Operations Centre of El Salvador.  
©CEPRENAC

Find here the brochure ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)), fact-sheet ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) and video ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) dedicated to this topic.

### 3. Incorporation of DRR and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) in other projects

Aiming to enhance the sustainability of investments and reduce disaster losses, this action line provided technical support for the incorporation of DRR and CCA in other SDC programmes.

The capitalisation describes how the programme initially focused on water and sanitation and local governance, and then expanded to other areas of SDC intervention, notably through the promotion of the [CEDRIG tool](#). Examine how the programme moved from awareness raising to capacity development of partners and finally to the institutionalisation of DRR and CCA. Find out why the results are considered moderately sustainable and what best practices are suggested.

Find here the brochure ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)), fact-sheet ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) and video ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) dedicated to this topic.



Local Water and Sanitation Committee at their water treatment plant, strengthened with bioengineering works to avoid landslides. Community of El Jobo, Nicaragua. ©SDC

### 4. Construction of safer homes and infrastructure

This action line addressed the reduction of losses, and damage to public and private infrastructure resulting from natural events. The goal was to promote the application of building standards in the informal housing construction sector and the incorporation of risk analyses and DRR/CCA measures to the public investment project cycle.



Masons received theoretical and practical training on the construction of safe housing in Nicaragua. ©National Engineering University (UNI)

The capitalisation shows how the impact of disasters on infrastructure can be reduced by strengthening the capacity of sectoral and municipal staff, and designing and implementing risk analysis methodologies. Read how the programme tailored construction solutions to the local context and how it adapted infrastructure development to climate change. Find out how the programme developed and used an innovative public investment risk analysis model using geographic information to conduct risk and cost-benefit analysis of public investment projects.

Please find here the brochure ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)), fact-sheet ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) and video ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) dedicated to this topic - with a link to the thematic action line 3.

### 5. Early Warning Systems (EWS)

Effective Early Warning Systems (EWS), and precise warning, are key to saving lives and maintaining overall development. This thematic line was developed in four components: risk assessment, monitoring systems, dissemination of warnings and, finally, preparedness and response.

The capitalisation presents how an EWS can best be set up and operated. Find out, how the impact of natural events of various types can be mitigated. Get insight into how SDC



Expert in vulcanology reviews and adjusts a multiparametric station. El Palmar, Guatemala. ©Asociación Vivamos Mejor Guatemala

worked with, through and sometimes also around state institutions, to get EWS' functioning from the national to the local level, making use of cutting edge, robust and yet inexpensive technology.

Please find here the brochure ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)), fact-sheet ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) and video ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) dedicated to this topic.

## 6. Integration of DRR and CCA into universities

This thematic line is considered to be strategically important for a continued development of DRR and CCA capacities in the region, as universities generate specialised knowledge and produce educated professionals who are destined to become the future decision-makers.

The capitalisation describes methodologies and tools to integrate disaster management and climate change adaptation into research and study programmes of over 25 universities, but also how its outreach activities to communities aimed to enhance risk management and resilience across Central America. The programme engaged with young students to promote and consolidate a culture of prevention. Learn here about the institutional commitment, successes, and challenges of the collaboration with Universities.

Please find here the brochure ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)), fact-sheet ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) and video ([ESP](#), [ENG](#)) dedicated to this topic.



Students learn to analyse risk as part of their education at the National Autonomous University of Nicaragua  
©SDC

## Announcements

News and events of the CDE Network:

- **NEW knowledge platform of the SDC Climate, DRR and Environment (CDE) Network.** We proudly announce our brand new CDE knowledge platform with News, Tools and Guidances, Themes and Resources. [Explore it now – and enjoy!](#) Our old Shareweb will no longer be updated.
- **Closing event - Celebrating 60 years of Swiss cooperation with Latin America & the Caribbean.** On 24 April 2024, from 13:30-18:00 in Zollikofen, we celebrate to mark the end of 60 years SDC's bilateral cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, to capitalise on the lessons learned and shape the future of Swiss IC in the region. More information [here](#).
- **Trip around Rio - Tackling the triple planetary crisis - Solutions for sustainable development,** [online event series](#) by CDE, RésEAU and A&FS Networks, 24 April / 30 May 2024.

Other capitalisations related to DRR, Climate and Environment:

- **Analysis of 2022 Floods in Swat Valley, Pakistan:** The study presents key lessons and recommendations in order to facilitate a better reconstruction and reduce disaster risks in the Swat Valley. Read it [here](#).

Further news and events:

- **Learning Journey on Hazard and Risk Assessment – Part two,** by the Swiss NGO DRR platform: several online events until 29th May 2024. Register [here](#).

- **RIMMA 2025 - International Conference on Forecasting, Preparedness, Warning and Response:** Visualisation, Communication and Information Management; 28 - 31 January 2025, University of Bern, Switzerland. More information, incl. call for abstracts [here](#).
- **The Carbon Majors Database just launched its new report.** Read about historic and latest CO2 emissions data from the world's largest oil, gas, coal, and cement producers [here](#).

## CONTACT

Visit our knowledge platform: SDC [Network on Climate, DRR & Environment](#)

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Disaster preparedness activities in the community of San Agustín Arriba, San Esteban, Olancho, Honduras. © Swiss Red Cross

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