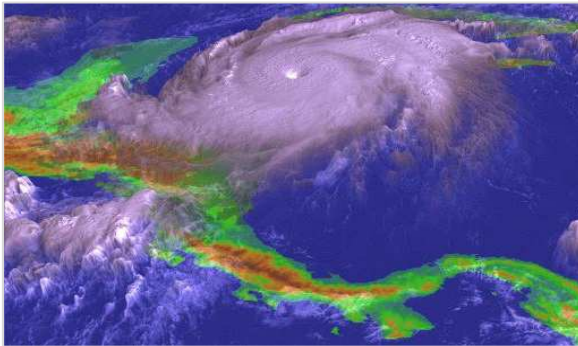




Local Emergency Teams (LET) – Joint efforts of the Swiss Cooperation and the Swiss civil society in response to disasters in Central America

Background

Due to its geographical position, Central America is exposed to a variety of natural phenomena such as hurricanes, floods, drought, earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions. Hurricane Mitch in 1998, for example, was one of the most powerful and deadly tropical cyclones observed in the region (see satellite image below). In 2006, the region was hit again by hurricanes and tropical storms which caused at least 1600 deaths and affected more than two million people. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Central America responded to these events by joining efforts with the Swiss civil society. The Local Emergency Teams (LET) were created in 2006 with representatives of SDC Central America and Swiss NGOs in Nicaragua, Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala. The LET have an increasing interrelation and regular exchange with the Rapid Intervention and Support Group (GIAR) which is SDC's regional rapid response mechanism in South America.



Objectives

The LET are prepared 24/7 for intervention and support during emergencies with capabilities for rapid assessment of damage and humanitarian needs. In coordination with the national emergency systems and the SDC Cooperation Office (CoOf) in Managua, the LET immediately start to provide humanitarian aid during emergencies. In addition, the LET propose projects and urgent actions to the Swiss Humanitarian Aid in the CoOf Managua.



Mobilization and functions

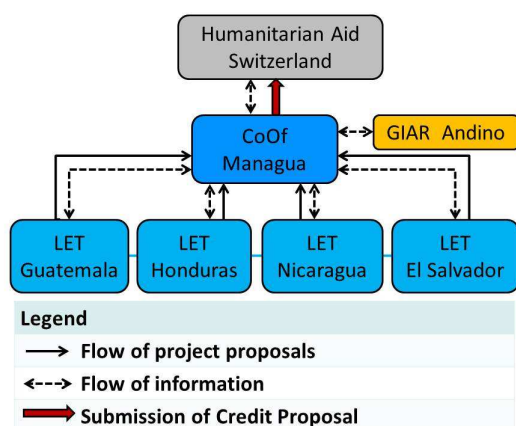
Immediately after receiving the official emergency declaration from the national government, the CoOf Managua sets up the crisis unit and activates the respective protocols. Then, SDC contacts the LET of the affected countries which provide primary information about the situation in the field. This information helps the CoOf Managua to analyze the situation as well as to identify problems and propose solutions. In addition, the CoOf Managua alerts the Swiss Humanitarian Aid at SDC headquarters in Switzerland to mobilize funds and ensures the flow of information with the Swiss Embassies in Central America. The main functions of the LET during emergencies are:

- Collection of primary field information in the affected areas and frequent information of the CoOf in Managua.
- Rapid damage assessments and identification of humanitarian needs.
- Definition and implementation of immediate assistance to affected people in coordination with the CoOf Managua.
- Coordination of aid with national systems, international organizations, NGOs and others.
- Support possible external missions of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid such as the Rapid Response Teams or the Swiss Rescue Chain.

Particularly in countries without presence of the Swiss Cooperation, the LET assume the function as SDC's operational arms. Local field knowledge and their contacts with local authorities allow the LET to provide rapid and effective response during emergencies.

Organization and Responsibilities

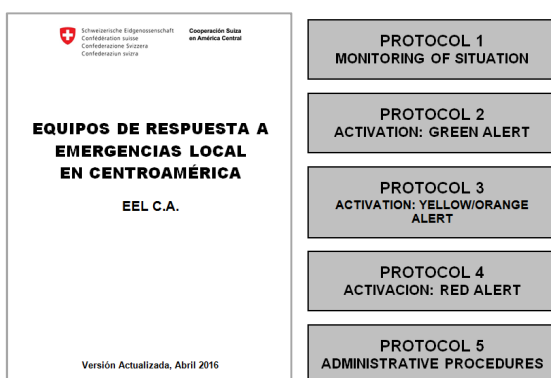
The LET are composed of disaster response experts from Swiss NGOs and staff of SDC and the Swiss Embassies in Central America. Each team has its internal organization with well-defined roles for each member (e.g. operational coordinator, responsible for logistics and information management, among others). The flow of information between the LET and SDC enables the rapid preparation of proposals and humanitarian actions during emergencies.



In 2016, it was decided to create the LET Panama as well as the LET Costa Rica under the lead of Terre des hommes and the Swiss Embassy in San Jose, respectively.

Tools and equipment

The LET have a contingency plan with different protocols and a communication tree which are constantly updated (only available in Spanish). In addition, they dispose of basic equipment and a minimum emergency fund in cash for immediate mobilization.



Training of the LET

To exchange knowledge and best practices among the LET, their members are trained annually at the national and regional level. During simulations and drills organized with national emergency systems, the protocols are tested to continuously improve the coordination mechanisms.



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