Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.

CDEMA
CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY
Resilient States · Safer Lives

IFRC

OCHA

Funded by
European Union
Civil Protecction and
Humanitarian Aid

# **SYSTEMATIZATION OF** STRENGTHENING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS AND PREPAREDNESS RESPONSE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# STRENGTHENING EARLY WARNING SYSTEMS AND PREPAREDNESS RESPONSE IN THE CARIBBEAN

**Author**
Anthony Prassoulis

**Coordination**
Almudena Montoliú

**Editing**
Almudena Montoliú

**Art and Design**
Estudio Varsovia

**Contributors**
*CDEMA:* Alexcia Cooke, Elizabeth Riley

*OCHA:* Darío Alvarez, Rogerio Silva, Jennie Trow, Brenda Eriksen, Christian Vega, Anila Qehaja and Anthony Prassoulis.

*Red Cross Movement:* Dominican Red Cross, International Federation of the Red

Cross: Nicole Williams, Chantal Braithwaite and Krystell Santamaria.

*Red Cross Movement:* Dominican Red Cross, International Federation of the Red Cross: Natalia St Rose-Defoe and Nicole Williams

*UNDP:* Dayana Kindelan, Ana María Pérez, John Walcott, Ana Carola Terrazas and Almudena Montoliú.

*Saint Lucia:* National Emergency Management Office; Water Resource Management Agency: Jason Ernest and Fitzgerald John

*UNDP:* Marlon Clarke, Dayana Kindelan, Almudena Montoliú, Ana María Pérez, John Walcott, and Janire Zulaika

Photographic contributions were provided by implementation partners and national counterparts.

This document covers the activities implemented through the project "Strengthen integrated and cohesive preparedness capacity at a regional, national and community level in the Caribbean" project. This project supported concrete actions for an effective early warning system (EWS) and aimed to improve information management (IM) and operational capacity in an effort to strengthen the disaster preparedness mechanism for Caribbean regional response. The project was led by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in collaboration and coordination with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the International Federation of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). Financial assistance was provided by the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations ECHO). This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union (EU). The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of any of the partners involved in this project, nor those of the EU. Neither the partners, nor the EU, are responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained in this report.

UNDP Empowered lives. Resilient nations.

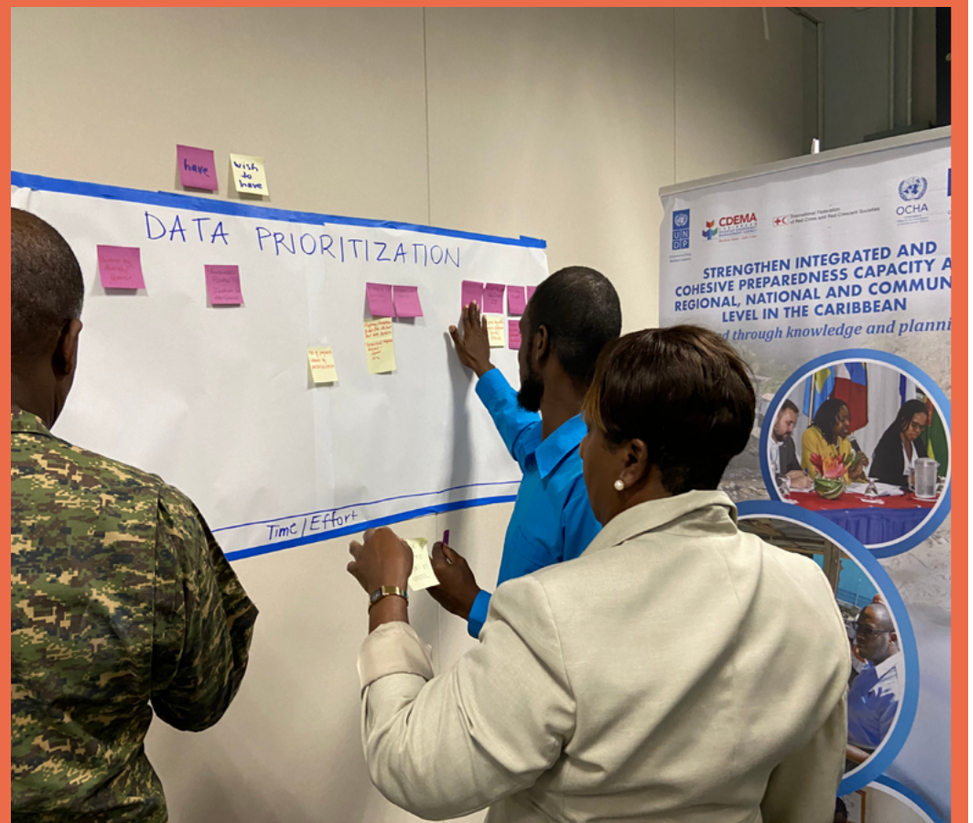
CDEMA CARIBBEAN DISASTER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY Resilient States - Safer Lives

IFRC

OCHA

Funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography




# ACRONYMS

**CDEMA »** Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency
**CDM »** Comprehensive Disaster Management
**DRR »** Disaster Risk Reduction
**EU »** European Union
**EWS »** Early Warning System
**HIP »** Humanitarian Implementation Plan
**IFRC »** International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
**NDMO »** National Disaster Management Organization
**NS »** Red Cross National Society
**OCHA »** UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
**SADD »** Sex and Age Disaggregated Data
**SLU »** Saint Lucia
**SSC »** South-South Cooperation
**UNDP »** United National Development Programme
**UNDRR »** United Nations Department for Disaster Risk Reduction

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 1. INTRODUCTION

The Caribbean region is highly prone to natural hazards such as hurricanes, floods, volcanic and seismic activities, droughts and forest fires. The increasing impact of global climate change and the risk posed by a range of natural, environmental and technological hazards are among the Caribbean's most significant development challenges. Past decades have been marked by an intensification in the impact of disasters, including destruction of livelihoods and communities, as well as setbacks in important development gains.

Due to high levels of vulnerability, there is a broad recognition of the need to strengthen capacity for preparedness, response, and recovery, and to integrate risk reduction measures into development plans to create safe, resilient and sustainable communities and states in the Caribbean. In a strategic effort to reduce risk, the Caribbean Comprehensive Disaster Management (CDM) Strategy 2014 – 2024 prioritizes integrated, improved and expanded community EWS.[1] This regional strategy is reinforced by the Sendai Framework for Action which calls for enhanced disaster preparedness.[2] Likewise, UNDP's Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021 aims to strengthen resilience to crisis and shocks and to support countries with assessments, planning tools and mechanisms so that gender-sensitive and risk informed prevention and preparedness solutions are available to limit the impact of natural hazards.[3] Reducing risk and building resilience is a theme that cuts across the Sustainable Development Goals.

As identified in the ECHO Humanitarian Implementation Plan (HIP) 2018, preparedness and response capacities in the Caribbean have improved. The HIP specifically highlighted that there is a need to "build on the learnings and windows of opportunity generated by recent disasters", in order to "consolidate and scale up proven disaster preparedness actions with clear transfer of knowledge mechanisms and local-driven rapid response capacities in order to face future disasters".

1. Priority Area 4, Outcome 3, Regional CDM Strategy 2014 – 2024 https://www.cdema.org/cdm
2. Priority Area 4, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030. https://www.unisdr.org/we/coordinate/sendai-framework
3. Outcome 3, Signature Solution 6, UNDP Strategic Plan 2018 – 2021 https://strategicplan.undp.org/

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

The 2017 hurricane season challenged the entire region in terms of preparedness for fast forming and approaching hurricanes, the readiness of the regional response system as well as the coordination of international relief response to the impacted islands.

A Real Time Review was commissioned by CDEMA in order to gather real time data on the Regional Response Mechanism (RRM) during Hurricanes Irma and Maria. The aim was to evaluate its performance in responding to humanitarian needs for real time learning and immediate adjustments.

In view of this, Antigua and Barbuda, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Saint Lucia and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines set out to continue improving their EWS at the same time that the four CDEMA Sub-Regional Focal Points (SRFPs) harmonized the RRM through a 23-month project financed by ECHO.

Under the current project, regional level actions were supported by OCHA and CDEMA with the aim of strengthening preparedness through improved operational response readiness and a harmonized approach to Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS). The country level actions, on the other hand, were supported by UNDP, IFRC and CDEMA, who embraced a partnership approach and helped reinforce efforts to realize a more integrated EWS and to enhance disaster risk reduction (DRR) at the national and community level.

The project placed emphasis on ensuring the transfer of knowledge through a communication and visibility strategy. It also aimed to promote the continuation of the South-South Cooperation (SSC) Strategy through the improvement of its model and the systematization of proposals in nine intervention areas for strengthening EWS, which was implemented in two countries. This document provides an overview of the results and lessons of the national assessment and planning processes to strengthen EWS in each country and the preparedness response at regional level.

The project had four expected results:

R.1: Regional preparedness is strengthened through operational response readiness and harmonized approach to MHEWS;

R.2: Appropriate actions and solutions taken to increase EWS integration and effectiveness at the national level;

R.3: Increased effectiveness of preparedness at the community level through concrete priority actions; and

R.4: Leverage existing best practices, and support for sustainable actions.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 2. OBJECTIVE OF THIS SYSTEMATIZATION

The main purpose of this systematization is to capture the best practices and lessons learned identified by coordinators from partner organizations in the consortium. In collectively reviewing the implementation of this project, the goal is to gain a better understanding of it strengthens and weaknesses, and how we can replicate successes and overcome challenges in the future, by eliciting recommendations from participants.

# 3. METHODOLOGY

For this evaluation, a mixed methods approach was deployed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data on the project's implementation.

Online survey questionnaire: 14 participants responded to the online survey conducted through SurveyMonkey (see Annex 2 for the questions and responses).

Semi-structured interviews: 10 participants were interviewed to gain a more in-depth look into the project's implementation (see Annex 3 for the list of interview questions).

In order to maintain participant anonymity, the names and organizational affiliations of participants have been omitted from this report.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 4. FINDINGS

This section will focus on the main achievements and strengths of this project, as well as key challenges and lessons learned, as described by participants. For a complete list of the best practices and lessons learned, as well as recommendations for improved project implementation, see Annex 1.

## A) Achievements & Strengths

This project has made significant gains in improving MHEWS, IM, as well as operational readiness and response capacity in the Caribbean. The vast majority of survey respondents (86 per cent) agreed that as a result of the activities implemented over the lifecycle of this project, operational readiness at the community, national and regional level in the Caribbean has been strengthened. The project has made real improvements in overcoming the challenges identified at its outset, including the lack of coordination at the regional level, gaps in operational readiness at the national level, and the duplication of efforts and information.

**86% of survey respondents agreed that operational readiness at the community, national and regional level has been strengthened by this project**

*"The region is much better off for having done this project and we are now in a better position to continue our work with countries in the region because of the relationships and trust we have built with national counterparts through this project".*

**- Quote from participant**

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 5. OBJECTIVES & ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PROJECT

*Result 1.*

## OCHA & CDEMA

### Objectives

Enhance information and data management, and coordination capacity for response.

Improve operational engagement between countries and organizations.

Develop a model national policy for multi-hazard EWS, and establish a regional network to support and improve national and regional EWS coordination.

### Main Products

Interoperability manual: CDEMA/OCHA Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) strengthened in information management, assessments and interoperability prior to peak hurricane season.

24 Caribbean focal points trained in "information management during emergencies".

1 Regional EWS gender responsive policy model and adaptation guide to serve as blueprint for the Caribbean countries.

1 Strategic vision for EWS through the REWS Consortium.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

*Result 2.*

## UNDP & CDEMA

### Objectives

Increase national and community public awareness on EWS so lives and assets are protected.

Communication strategy tailored to specific groups, such as women, persons with disabilities, or those facing imminent threats.

Establish and implement emergency protocols to improve coordination and institutional capacities of different actors.

### Main Products

5 EWS public awareness methodologies – 3 hazard awareness campaigns using Public Service Announcements through theatre, sign-language and closed caption in English and Creole; media training for reporters and information officers.

1 National Tsunami SOPs developed and adapted into 1 community Emergency Plan for Tsunami Hazard (Dominica).

2 Emergency Protocols at municipal level, 3 Common Alerting Protocol (CAP), 1 inclusive EWS regulation in Saint Lucia (SLU) involving people with disabilities and caretakers.

1 National MHEWS Policy developed (SLU).

*Result 3.*

## IFRC / NS

### Objectives

To help communities develop a better understanding of potential risk and take protective actions.

Provide communities with the necessary technology to mitigate the risk.

Test this understanding and ability to act through drills and simulations.

### Main Products

Approximately 165,477 persons covered by EWS information through radio, television and social media.

8 communities with Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) baseline surveys implemented.

The EWS of 10 communities assessed, including criteria for gender equality.

Tsunami signs and rain gauges installed in communities in coordination with national authorities.

10 Emergency Plans developed at community level.

10 communities with completed community early warning systems public awareness and publication education for disaster risk reduction (CEWS PAPE).

Tsunami and flood simulations implemented in coordination with National Disaster Management Organizations (NDMOs).

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

*Result 4.*

# UNDP & OCHA

## Objectives

Share best practices in preparedness between islands in the Caribbean.

Identify lessons learned from hurricane seasons and apply them to planning processes.

Produce video cases which capture the best of EWS in the region.

## Main Products

2 regional lessons learned meetings held for the 2019 and 2019 Hurricane Seasons.

3 video case studies to highlight the EWS policy, the tsunami national protocol and the SSC Strategy.

2 SSC missions in Antigua and Barbuda and SLU by Cuban institutions.

1 communication strategy.

Development of merchandising and visibility products.

1 public awareness communication campaign.

Stocktaking report update.

> *"An unanticipated result of this project was that vulnerable communities began to see themselves as agents of change for early warning action and disaster risk reduction".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 6. LESSONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

## Multi-Hazard Early Warning Systems (MHEWS)

Most participants felt that the second phase of the project successfully built on the foundation laid by phase one to solidify a comprehensive and strategic approach to MHEWS which effectively engaged all relevant stakeholders. This strategic approach allowed for partners, under the regional coordination and leadership of UNDP, to effectively scaleup and consolidate the actions initiated in phase one of the project. One of the main achievements of the project was the establishment of a common regional strategy for MHEWS, grounded in CDEMA's regional CDM framework, which meaningfully engaged national authorities in target countries to create a strategy based on Caribbean priorities. As an example of its success, a model national EWS policy is currently being implemented by the government of St. Lucia, a significant achievement which demonstrates the impact the project has had on policy and practice in target countries.

Building on the EWS Checklist developed for pillars 1 and 2 (Risk Knowledge and Hazard Monitoring and Capacity) during phase one, the second phase of the project successfully rolled out activities aimed at reducing country-specific gaps identified, placing greater emphasis on pillars 3 and 4 of EWS (Dissemination/Communication of Alerts and Response Capacity).

The Solutions Packages provided by Cuban experts in phase one were very useful in identifying the scope of intervention needed in EWS at the country-level. In phase two, Cuban experts worked directly with Antigua and Barbuda and SLU., providing additional support to complement and reinforce actions initiated in phase one, allowing countries to take targeted action toward implementing the proposed EWS solutions to address specific gaps and priorities. In the process, one of the less tangible benefits of the project, but nevertheless very important, was the awareness raised among local actors about the work of National Disaster Management Organizations (NDMOs), the relevant municipal and national laws for disaster preparedness and response in their countries, as well as the coordination

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

structures in place at different levels and their respective roles and responsibilities in ensuring their efficient and effective functioning.

At the community level, with activities led by IFRC and Red Cross National Societies (NSs) in 10 communities across five countries, the project also had a significant impact. Participants from IFRC added that the development of Community Disaster Response Teams (CDRTs) has strengthened disaster preparedness and response at the community level in the region. In addition, the gender responsiveness of activities at both the national and community level was seen by many participants as an important component of the project. However, some participants noted that community perspectives should have been better integrated into activities in order to enhance community buy-in and encourage active participation.

> *"Through this project, we advocated for actors and institutions to create communication mechanisms and linkages to support better coordination, with the goal being that they would carry out more regular coordination processes, not only during disaster or emergency situations. At first, it was challenging because of the lack of knowledge on laws and institutional responsibilities. There were important capacities and resources not being used at the municipal and provincial level because there was no coordination mechanism in place. In this regard, a lot of progress was made with our support".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

## Preparedness and response: Strengthening interoperability and information management

Lessons learned from the 2017 hurricane season pointed to the need for enhanced interoperability between CDEMA and OCHA. During this project, OCHA led 10 workshops in the SRFPs of the CDEMA system (Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago), with the aim of strengthening IM skills and building capacity for the interoperability of actors, tools and procedures to enhance preparedness and response in the region. The achievements of the workshops include:

- 217 beneficiaries (106 women and 111 men) reached.
- 12 countries and 48 agencies participated.
- 24 Caribbean focal points (five more than target goal of 19) trained in "information management during emergencies".

Importantly, CDEMA and OCHA jointly constructed SOPs during this project, allowing them to work together in a more predictable and structured way. Through the project's workshops, CDEMA and OCHA developed a greater awareness of each other's mechanisms and tools, and how to make them more interoperable, and identified areas for further collaboration, especially in IM. An unanticipated, less tangible result of the project was the enhancement of inter-agency communication and collaboration between national actors in the SRFPs, which is crucial in attempting to create a culture of information sharing that would greatly improve the availability of baseline data and enhance coordination in preparedness and response. In this regard, the consolidation and updating of the Common Operational Datasets (CODs) is an important outcome which has enhanced operational readiness in the region, as there are now CODs for 31 Caribbean countries and territories available on Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX), including sex and age disaggregated data (SADD), a key to conducting more thorough gender analyses and ensuring gender responsive actions in the region.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

Despite important gains made through this project, participants pointed out that there is still much work to be done in improving interoperability between CDEMA and OCHA. In navigating this process, the Interoperability Manual developed under this project will be a key living document that guides CDEMA and OCHA's work together going forward.

> *"Its about finding ways to bring [CDEMA and OCHA's] SOPs to life. We have the theory, but we need more experience working together and more simulations to iron out the kinks. It's a change process, not something which will be accomplished in 18 months. For now, this project has promoted a greater awareness of how each other's mechanisms and systems work, allowed us to identify areas for greater collaboration, and given us the opportunity to start looking at harmonized assessments in more detail".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

## Communication & Visibility Strategy

One of the strengths of the project was the robust communication and visibility strategy developed in order to effectively promote and disseminate its activities and results to a broad audience. Most participants agreed that the communications and visibility strategy of the project was crucial to making sure that partners were on the same page, that target audiences were reached through appropriate mediums of communication and importantly, they suggest that the strategy would ultimately contribute to the sustainability of the project. It is important to note, though, that some participants felt that the expectations laid out in this strategy made the process rather overwhelming and burdensome, given that the guidelines and practices for communication and visibility differed markedly from those of their own organization. Hence, one participant recommended that resources be allocated for a designated communications focal point in each partner organization to deal with the increased demand for greater visibility.

**79% of participants felt that the results of the project were effectively made visible and communicated to relevant stakeholders**

> *"There should be more budget allocated to public education and awareness. It's a real gap. We stick to social media because its cost-effective, but many people are still watching television and listening to the radio because maybe they don't have access to the internet at home. As a result, we have low 'hits' on social media, so we really need to focus more on public education and awareness".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

## Communication & Visibility Strategy

Another strength of the project identified by several participants was the development and implementation of the SSC Strategy. Importantly, this methodological framework can be adjusted and adapted to other issues beyond MHEWS in the region. In particular, the collaboration with Cuban authorities was key to the implementation of the project's activities; however, as some participants alluded to, SSC should also be actively encouraged and prioritized through inter-island exchanges between actors in smaller island nations.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

The development of the SSC strategy provided the clarity and direction needed to facilitate interactions between actors, as well as the sharing of knowledge and experiences on DRR, climate change adaptation and MHEWS. In phase two, as already mentioned above, Cuban assistance was critical to creating a more focused and better targeted approach to implement solutions for addressing the gaps and priorities identified in the solution packages for MHEWS developed in phase one.

However, SSC was not with its own set of challenges. While significant strides were made in improving communication and collaboration compared to phase one, some participants felt there were still some challenges which needed to be addressed. These challenges included: 1) translator(s) lacked the technical knowledge needed to effectively facilitate communication; 2) different ways of working and governance structures made it difficult to readily transfer solutions given by Cuban experts to different institutional and operating contexts of target countries; 3) technological issues created barriers to active two-way collaboration; and 4) lack of consistent communication and information sharing between target countries and Cuban authorities created delays in the process of analyzing and providing solutions to gaps in EWS.

Given these challenges, participants suggested that more SSC missions would have been beneficial to the project's implementation.

Participants proposed the following recommendations for facilitating SSC:

- More SSC missions and/or longer in-country stay for Cuban experts.
- Translators with technical knowledge and expertise to facilitate communication and collaboration.
- Consistent communication and information sharing to facilitate the process of analyzing and providing solutions to gaps or priorities identified in EWS.
- Target countries need to be better prepared to implement solutions provided by Cuban experts.
- More funds should be allocated to activities related to SSC.

> *"It is a SSC methodology that must be shared and promoted as a model that can be employed across issues, not just in EWS. It is a well-thought-out methodology that clarifies all the necessary steps to creating a viable SSC framework no matter the issue".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

## Creating linkages and synergies with other actors and activities

Most participants expressed that creating the right linkages and synergies with different actors was crucial to achieving the expected results of this project. In the Dominican Republic, participants claimed that building a solid relationship with the National Civil Defense, and other key institutions, proved to be crucial in allowing partners to overcome the challenges which arose due to the ongoing electoral process in the country and the subsequent lack of institutional participation in the project's implementation. As one participant frankly put it, "If it hadn't been for the leadership of the civil defense, and the influence they have at different levels, it would have been very difficult to carry out the project. They helped us encourage institutions to actively participate … without them we wouldn't have achieved the results we did".

Reinforcing the importance of engaging local actors and institutions, another participant added that "creating linkages with the civil service and other institutions, as well as existing processes already in place … led to positive results. We were able to create these [early warning] systems using the capacity of the civil service to bring all the relevant actors together". In the English-speaking Caribbean, moreover, participants echoed the importance of collaborating with and complimenting the actions of local actors and

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

institutions, thus ensuring that cultural specificities and operating contexts were adequately considered when implementing activities across different communities and countries.

Participants also highlighted the significance of linkages and synergies forged with local institutions, the private sector, non-governmental organizations and UN partners, as well as within their own organizations with existing projects and/or programs. These include linkages to initiatives led by:

- The Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) initiative of the World Bank/Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR);
- The World Meteorological Organization (WTO);
- The UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR);
- The Caribbean Tsunami Information Centre (CTIC), a Government of Barbados and Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC) of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) partnership; and
- ARISE Haiti and ARISE SLU, an initiative of UNDRR for private sector engagement.

Even though these synergies represent an important best practice of the project, most participants agreed that the project lacked a strategic approach to identifying and realizing synergies, as participants had only limited awareness and knowledge of their partners' activities, let alone those of other actors outside of the consortium. Many participants noted that while they did successfully collaborate with other actors, these synergies were not identified until well into the implementation of the project, as was the case with the collaboration with CTIC which was only brought to the attention of partners following ECHO's field visit to the Caribbean.

## Recommendation(s):

Engage partners, participating countries and donor early in the project cycle to identify potential synergies.

- Create a coherent strategy among partners to foster synergies with other actors.
- Immediately communicate opportunities identified for collaboration with other actors to partners of the consortium.
- Greater donor flexibility to pursue opportunities to make an impact outside the workplan.

> *"Creating synergies with partners outside of the consortium proved to be very important. In identifying partners working on something parallel and complimentary, we were able to share costs when working within common themes and with the same stakeholders. This helped with implementation and funding challenges".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 7. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The project has made significant gains in closing priority gaps in EWS, strengthening information and data management, and enhancing coordination for better preparedness and response in the region. In addition to its many successes, however, participants pointed out that the project faced some formidable challenges to its implementation and highlighted specific lessons learned.

## Fragmented project design and structure

Most participants felt that the project's design and structure could have been more coherent and integrative, pointing to the fact that individuals and organizations were not fully aware of each other's activities, who their fellow partners were working with and where, as well as their respective strategies for implementing activities. During interviews, many participants expressed a sense of disconnectedness in the project's implementation, which they described as being the result of a fragmented project design and planning phase, ultimately leading to challenges in coordination, missed opportunities to build complimentary synergies, and limited collaboration and mutual accountability in pursing common purposes.

In comparison to phase one, partners employed a different modality in phase two of the project, "with partners working in different countries implementing different activities which made the partnership much more difficult to coordinate". On this point, one participant claimed that "we need to delve deeper in order to better understand our roles and responsibilities, as well as the methodologies and tools we will use. There needs to be greater awareness of each organization's activities on the ground". Based on participants' responses from the IFRC and OCHA, this disconnectedness was apparent in the activities being undertaken in EWS and IM, respectively, which limited "opportunities to see if synergies could be built or if there was any overlap in our activities". As a result, IFRC did not participate in the updating of the Damage Analysis and Needs Assessment (DANA) forms to be

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

used by national authorities for carrying out assessments in the region, missing an opportunity to draw on IFRC's experience using KoBoToolbox to conduct KAP surveys at the community level. For one participant, the very tight timeline for the project proposal was one of the key factors which contributed to coordination and collaboration challenges in implementing the project's activities, as partners did not have enough time to work together in the design and planning phase.

**57% of survey respondents agreed that partners effectively collaborated in all phases of the project cycle**

**29% of survey respondents replied that partners were unsuccessful in working together to overcome challenges to the project's implementation**

On a positive note, many solid and thoughtful recommendations for improving collaboration between partners were brought to the fore during interviews. These include:

- Strategic planning retreat for partners.
- Cross-training of staff.
- Project coordinator based in Barbados.
- Co-location of staff where feasible.
- Use of a common collaborative platform by all partners.
- Full-time focal point in each organization.

## Human and financial resource constraints

Most participants agreed that the lack of sufficient human and financial resources in their organizations, as well as among institutional actors at the national and community level in target countries, created many challenges to the efficient and effective implementation of the project's activities. This finding from interviews is supported by the results of the online survey questionnaire which found that 50 per cent of respondents agreed that their organizations had the required resources, both human and financial, to implement this project. Within their own organizations, participants expressed that the lack of resources created specific challenges in project management, especially in administration, procurement and finance.

**50% per cent of survey respondents agreed that their organizations had both the human and financial resources necessary to carry out their respective role and responsibility in implementing the project**

For instance, CDEMA faced challenges due to human resource constraints, as staff and resources were already stretched given the number of initiatives CDEMA is involved in at different levels across the region. This was only exacerbated by the additional workload demands of the project, making procurement and project timelines a constant challenge. As a result, in the spirit of collaboration and mutual support, OCHA provided assistance to CDEMA in carrying out its administrative responsibilities over the course of the project. IFRC and UNDP country offices, on the other hand, expressed similar challenges arising from limited human and financial resources, especially in administrative and financial support as well as procurement processes, which made project implementation more difficult and less efficient.

**57% of participants agreed that administrative processes were conducted in a timely and efficient manner.**

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

In some cases, many participants claimed that the lack of human and financial resources available to NDMOs, as well as other national and local actors and institutions in target countries, created significant challenges for partners in attempting to effectively collaborate and coordinate with these actors to implement activities. National authorities lacked the resources necessary to deal with matters related to EWS and often had to pull staff away from other tasks in order to implement the proposals made by partners to improve EWS. Hence, many participants pointed to the challenge brought about by competing priorities at the national level between partners and national authorities. Essentially, national authorities at times faced challenges in attempting to balance the competing priorities between their responsibility to carry out activities in pursuit of their own strategic plans at the national level, on the one hand, and their role and responsibility in implementing the project's activities, on the other. Put simply, attention, time and effort were diverted to fulfil other obligations national authorities had outside the scope of this project.

As one participant bluntly put it, "NDMOs do not have enough capacity for their day-to-day activities, let alone external projects". Therefore, participants made several recommendations for addressing this challenge in the future:

- Allocate a greater percentage of funds to staffing at both the national and regional level.
- Budget for hiring a local consultant as a national project coordinator in target countries.
- Draw on CDEMA's legitimacy and trust at the national level to find solutions to bottlenecks with national actors in project implementation.

## Gender mainstreaming in project activities

Women, girls, men and boys of different ages are affected in diverse ways by disasters and emergencies, as they have socially prescribed roles which influence their daily activities. As a result, it is necessary for humanitarian action to be responsive to the differentiated needs of women, girls, men and boys of different ages, gender and race/ethnicity, among other factors of vulnerability. Taking this into consideration, the project employed a gender-sensitive approach to ensure the mainstreaming of gender in all its activities at the regional, national and community level. In doing so, partners drew on the expertise of the Gender programme of UNDP Regional Hub, who worked closely with all partners, to provide strategic and technical support to ensure the integration of gender and inclusion (such as disabilities) and to strengthen project implementation.

Participants agreed that age and gender considerations, among other vulnerability factors, were better integrated into the project's implementation in phase two. At the community level, gender and vulnerability factors were integrated into community assessment criteria, and vulnerability and capacity assessments considered both women and men's access to resources, services and information. However, participants noted that better baseline data was required to conduct a more thorough analysis of the gender situation in target countries and communities.

At the national level, the differentiated needs of women, girls, men and boys were taken into consideration in revising EWS policies. A gender perspective was integrated into the development and elaboration of the regional SSC Strategy with Cuba, the National Tsunami protocol in Dominica and the SVH Communication Strategy. Also, three interactive webinars were conducted on gender and DRR, gender and data management, and gender and data-management as contributor to Sendai and 2030 Agenda. In addition, response and information management protocols and guides were developed in a way which reflect the needs and vulnerabilities influenced by gender, stressing the importance of SADD. The participation of the gender expert in the Information and Data Management and Assessments workshop in Barbados proved to be important in ensuring that a gender perspective was considered in training on needs assessments, data collection and analysis, as well as humanitarian financing mechanisms. A similar gender perspective was employed in the Interoperability Manual, focusing on how gender is taken into consideration in the composition of and methodologies used by response teams, in the collection and analysis of SADD, and how it is integrated into humanitarian response plans and financing mechanisms.

**"For us, institutional strengthening is not just about establishing protocols, plans or programs but also, providing [actors] with practical tools to implement them … basic materials so they can do their job, such as an adequate workspace, a computer or a map. The people in the field need it".**

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# The impact of emergencies: Hurricane Dorian & COVID-19

While Hurricane Dorian did not significantly affect the project's implementation, participants noted that, especially at the regional level, activities experienced considerable delays and coordination challenges in its aftermath. Dorian particularly affected the activities led by OCHA, in collaboration with CDEMA, including the remaining Information Management workshops and the Interoperability Manual under Result 1 of the project.

Hurricane Dorian presented specific challenges for CDEMA as the lead emergency coordination agency in the region, further stretching its already limited human resource capacity for the project as staff efforts had to be diverted to the humanitarian response in The Bahamas. While the challenges faced in running the workshops were navigated with relative ease (i.e. availability of participants and coordination of dates between CDEMA and OCHA), the drafting of the Interoperability Manual lacked meaningful collaboration. In addition, internal processes within CDEMA, including the ongoing review of the RRM, created further delays in finalizing the Manual's content. This example further reinforces participants' recommendation for greater human resource capacity dedicated to the implementation of the project's activities in each organization, as well as calls for a more integrative approach to the project's design, with co-responsibility among partner organizations built into project deliverables.

The COVID-19 global pandemic began to have an impact on the project's implementation in early March 2020, as target countries started to report confirmed cases of the virus and implemented increasingly more restrictive measures. With the benefit of hindsight, some participants pointed out that risk planning should have been better integrated into the project, while others noted that discussions should be held with the donor in the early stages of the project to create a common understanding on whether or not there is flexibility in repurposing funds.

In the case of COVID-19, given the cancelation of some activities, partners have been encouraged to redirect funds as they see fit to respond to the emergency in their respective countries. For example, some Red Cross NSs are redirecting funds to awareness campaigns and to purchase personal protective equipment, and UNDP and Red Cross NSs in the Dominican Republic are working together to plan and deliver an online drill for the COVID-19 response involving both municipal and national actors.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# 8. CONCLUSIÓN

Overall, most participants (71 per cent) agreed that right beneficiaries were reached by and involved in the activities of this project, with the result being better prepared communities and countries in the region. Participants agreed that it is important for partners to do their part in ensuring that participating countries continue to build on the gains made by this project, as there is still much to be done in enhancing preparedness and response capacity in the region. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 emergency, the closing ceremony of the project, an opportunity to reiterate this message to participating countries, has been cancelled. The closing ceremony would have allowed partners to showcase the achievements of the project and to ensure that counterparts in target countries continue building on its success by maintaining close contacts and relationships with these actors and by searching out collaborative synergies beyond the scope of this project.

**64% of participants believe the project was cost-effective and can be sustainably scaled-up without external funding**

According to some participants, the partnership strategy was one of the project's strengths, an approach with significant potential for future actions in region. Accordingly, one participant claimed that this regional partnership strategy should be employed to collectively tackle the most pressing issues facing the region, including climate change and hydrometeorological hazards. Another participant added that future projects should have a sustainability plan built into their design as a deliverable which participating governments approve and commit to implement following the completion of the project. They added that , "in this way, we will have ensured that there is a foundation for the sustainability of actions".

Based on participants' perspectives, processes have been set in motion at the community, national and regional level by this project which have created a

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

foundation for continued gains in EWS, IM and coordinated response capacity as part of the collective effort to build a safer and more resilient Caribbean. Participating countries and partners should continue to build on the successes of this project and find ways to collectively scaleup their actions at different levels, ensuring integration between regional, national and community level actions.

> *"EWS is still a gap for the Caribbean. Many countries still do not have a national EWS team. Cuban experts believe it is necessary for each country to have its own structure and practices for EWS in place. Even though we face many of the same vulnerabilities, our countries are still different in many ways, for example, governments, structures, systems and so on; therefore, a dedicated national team is crucial for success in EWS".*
>
> **- Quote from participant**

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# ANNEX I

| Best Practices | Lessons Learned | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|
| • Strong partnership strategy<br>• Solid communications and visibility strategy<br>• South-South Cooperation Strategy<br>• Beneficial synergies forged with institutions/ organizations and existing projects/initiatives in the Caribbean<br>• Raising awareness in CDEMA's Sub-Regional Focal Points (SRFPs) about the UN system and how it works with CDEMA in preparedness and response<br>• Strengthening of IM capacity at the national and sub-regional levels in the Caribbean<br>• Enhancing inter-agency communication and collaboration at the national level in the CDEMA's SRFPs<br>• Gender responsiveness of activities carried out at the community, national and regional levels<br>• Narrative approach to monthly/quarterly reports provided greater depth and insight into the implementation and impact of project's implementation | • Improve engagement in monthly/quarterly meetings by integrating all staff not just focal points<br>• More monitoring missions to target countries and communities<br>• Better baseline for beneficiary selection and analysis of gender situation in target countries and communities<br>• Ensure that a 'big picture' perspective on collective priorities is maintained and takes precedence over individual interests<br>• More flexibility needed to explore opportunities which present themselves but fall outside the workplan<br>• Need for better, more consistent collaboration on joint information products<br>• Attention, time and effort diverted from project due to competing priorities between commitments to its activities and existing organizational responsibilities (both for national authorities and partners)<br>• Procurement and logistics challenges caused delays in delivery and meeting deadlines | • Full-time/part-time focal point in each partner organization for duration of project<br>• Memoranda of Understanding with line ministries to facilitate sharing of preparedness baseline data with humanitarian community<br>• Early engagement of partners, participating governments and donor to strategically identify and build synergies<br>• Robust procurement plan to better plan for staffing requirements in the design/planning phase<br>• Hire translator(s) with technical knowledge and expertise to facilitate communication across linguistic barriers<br>• Co-location of program staff where feasible<br>• Evaluation of partners' performance and capacity to deliver target outcomes at key points in the project lifecycle and determine whether funds should be diverted to other partners and/or activities<br>• Sustainability plan should be a deliverable which is approved by participating governments to provide a foundation for the sustainability of the project's actions after its completion |

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

| Best Practices | Lessons Learned | Recommendations |
|---|---|---|
| • Sensitivity to cultural specificities and local context in implementing activities in different communities and countries<br>• Regional coordination and leadership of UNDP<br>• Hiring of local consultants with knowledge of and experience in the region to fill gaps in capacity and expertise at the national level<br>• Actively collaborating with CDEMA proved to key in effectively implementing the project's activities<br>• Creating stronger linkages between provincial, municipal and local actors/levels by collaborating with stakeholders to construct communication and coordination mechanisms<br>• Raising awareness about local/national laws and the corresponding roles and responsibilities of actors in coordination structures for disaster preparedness and response | • Need to be better integrate risk planning into the project in order to effectively deal with events which impact project delivery (i.e. electoral processes, hurricane season and COVID-19 pandemic)<br>• Need for more consistent and timely communication and information sharing between national authorities and partners<br>• Improve integration of regional, national and community levels in EWS<br>• Engage more with CDEMA, as a legitimate and trusted partner of national authorities, to more efficiently and effectively address implementation challenges at the national level<br>• Need for communications focal points in partner organizations to manage increasing demands of communication and visibility strategy<br>• Need for better integration of community perspectives in implementing activities | • More funding directed toward face-to-face interactions between partners (i.e. more missions and/or longer stay in-country)<br>• Partner retreat to better design and plan project in a more collaborative, integrative and participatory fashion, allowing for a deeper understanding of respective roles and responsibilities, activities and implementation strategies as well as methodologies and tools<br>• Project coordinator should be based in Barbados<br>• Mandatory training of personnel new to the project and/or region, especially given staff turnover over the course of the project lifecycle<br>• Dedicated staff for project implementation in each partner organization to mitigate the challenge of competing priorities<br>• Expand MHEWS beyond natural disasters to cover other sectors, particularly health |

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# ANNEX II

## Online questionnaire survey and responses

**1.**
The project's objectives were realistic, given the time and budget allocated, the baseline situation and the community, national and regional institutional context in the Caribbean.

**2.**
The required resources, both human and financial, were in place and sufficient for my agency/organization to carry out its role and responsibility in implementing this project.

**3.**
Partnership arrangements were properly identified, and the roles and responsibilities negotiated prior to the project being implemented and sustained throughout its duration.

**4.**
Partners in this consortium effectively collaborated/interacted in all phases of the project cycle from design and planning to implementation and evaluation of activities.

**5.**
When challenges to the project's implementation arose, they were promptly resolved through a collective problem-solving approach employed by the partners involved.

**6.**
Administrative processes, such as the procurement of goods and services (including consultants), were conducted in a timely and efficient manner.

**7.**
The right target beneficiaries were selected and adequately reached by and involved in the project's activities.

**8.**
The expected results of this project were successfully achieved in a cost-effective manner, are sustainable and can be scaled-up in the long-term after external funding has been exhausted.

**9.**
Operational readiness at the community, national and regional level has been strengthened by this project.

**10.**
The results of the project were made visible and effectively communicated to beneficiaries, partners and donors using target communication methods to reach different audiences.

Credits
Acronyms
Introduction
Objective of this Systematization
Methodology
Findings
Objectives & Achievements of the Project
Lessons & Recommendations
Challenges & Lessons Learned
Conclusions
Annexes
Bibliography

# ANNEX III

## Semi-structured interview questions

**1.**
What was your role and responsibilities, as well as those of your organization, in implementing the activities of this project?

**2.**
What were the best practices and successes of this project?

**3.**
What were the main lessons learned and challenges of this project?

**4.**
What measures could be taken to improve project implementation between this consortium of partners in the future?

**5.**
How would you describe the relationship between implementing partners in the different stages of the project cycle?

**6.**
Were there any operational and political/institutional problems and/or constraints which influenced the project's implementation? If so, how did partners attempt to overcome these challenges?

**7.**
How was the project's implementation impacted by recent emergencies in the region (i.e. Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19)?

**8.**
How has the project influenced the target beneficiaries and what capacities has it built at the community, national and regional levels in the Caribbean?

**9.**
Has interoperability between CDEMA and OCHA been strengthen? Explain your response. What are the main challenges standing in the way of enhanced interoperability between the two agencies? (only for CDEMA and OCHA participants)

**10.**
What are the tangible gains made in improving Early Warning Systems in the Caribbean? What gaps still need to be addressed and what actions would you recommend be taken to address these gaps? (only for CDEMA, IFRC and UNDP participants)