

# Learning from Recovery After Hurricane Mitch

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## Background of the study

- Intended as the first of a series of ex-post recovery studies conducted approximately ten years after major disasters
- Focus on processes related to risk and recovery in Nicaragua after Hurricane Mitch, rather than specific programmes *-not an evaluation*
- Funded by ProVention



## Methods

- Literature review
- Interviews with those affected by Mitch and leaders in three municipalities
- Municipalities chosen to illustrate different development trajectories
- Analysis of a range of data on recovery in the three municipalities
- Interviews with key stakeholders in Managua
- Workshops in Nicaragua to receive feedback on initial findings

## Return of the state and civil society

- Humanitarian response only temporarily displaced national and local institutions
- Mitch became an arena for struggles for resources, influence and legitimacy
- The aid community was largely operating in a technocratic mode and could (would) not relate to these political processes
- Despite this, institutional and organisational capacities are much stronger today (at least centrally)
- The Stockholm Declaration has now been forgotten but was the start of a process that has influenced the nature of development cooperation in Central America

## Poverty, livelihoods and economic recovery

- The main enduring legacy of the Mitch recovery effort has been in housing, which has in many cases not contributed to livelihood security or poverty alleviation
- Claims regarding recovery leading to a transformation of rural livelihoods were wildly exaggerated
- 'Picking winners' has worked *-for the winners*
- Serial relief programmes have provided more social protection than social protection programmes
- Local organisational capacities have been a precondition for benefiting from both economic development and social protection

## The social fabric and community development

- The social fabric has proven more resilient than was expected
- But this social fabric has more to do with patron-client ties than conventional visions of equitable and harmonious community development
- This is part of the nature of recovery programming
- Conflicts have been fuelled, but have largely proven manageable
- Efforts to influence gender relations have had some success, but not when projectised

## Reduction of risk

- Mitch put risk on the local and national agenda, but investments and changes came later, largely in the post-post-Mitch phase
- Good progress has been made in creating more appropriate institutional structures and in risk (hazard) mapping, but impact is uncertain
- Main obstacles to impact are bottlenecks in local government capacities and politicisation
- For various reasons, risk retains a hazard bias, which ultimately hinders concern for vulnerability, and with that links to poverty, climate change adaptation, etc.