

# Regional Disaster and Climate Risk Management Hub in Bangkok

Factsheet as of January 2023

## History and Purpose

Established in 2013, the Regional Hub for Southeast Asia and the Pacific is an important foothold of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in the two regions in the world most exposed to natural hazards and climate change. The Regional Hub contributes to upholding Swiss foreign policy on disaster risk management (DRM), climate change adaptation (CCA) and humanitarian assistance as part of the overall objective of achieving the sustainable development goals.

## Skills and Competencies

The Regional Hub's expertise ranges from humanitarian and development competencies to specialized skills on GIS and remote sensing, from integrated DRM to CCA, and from policy dialogue over capacity development to field support.

## SDC's Presence in the Regional Hub in Bangkok

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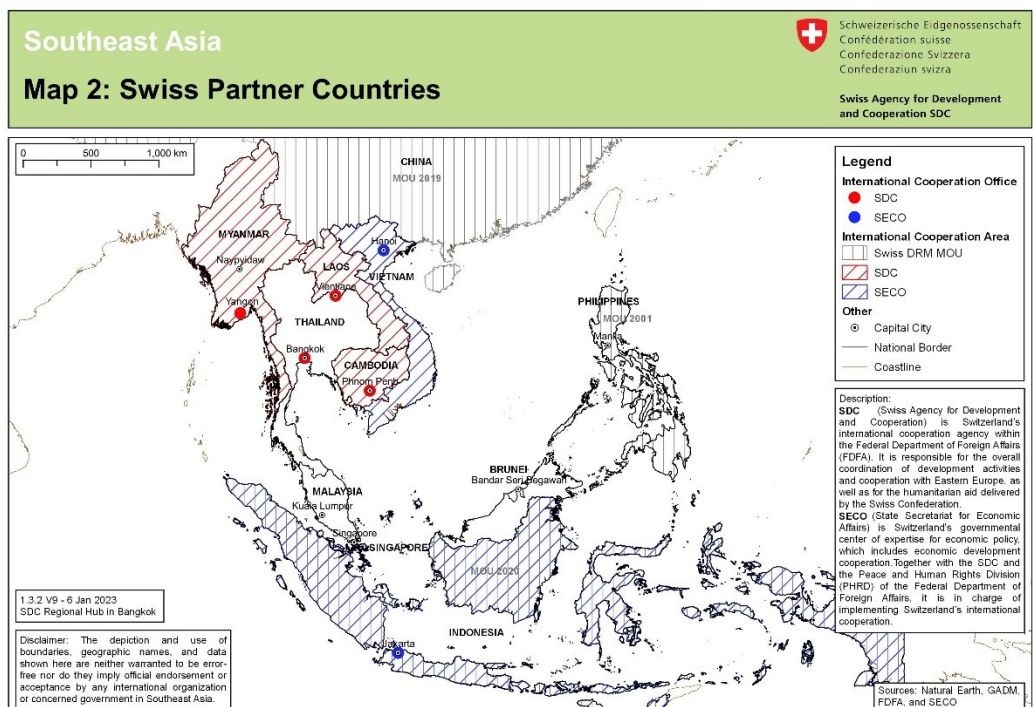
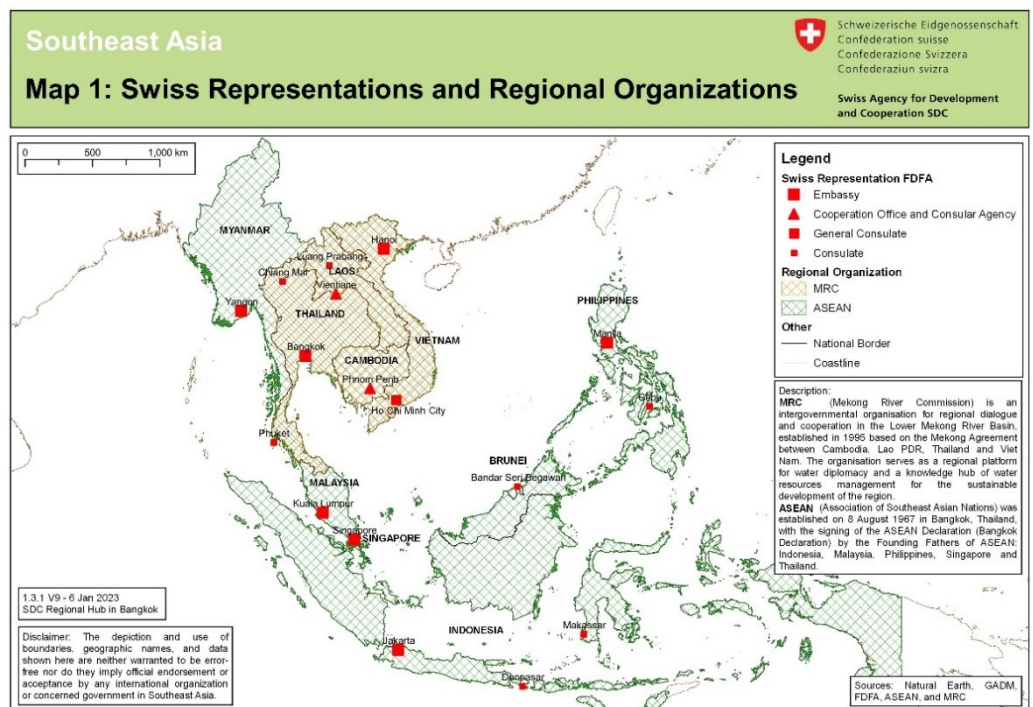
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## Introduction

This factsheet introduces the Regional Disaster and Climate Risk Management Hub in Bangkok. It provides an overview of the Swiss presence in Southeast Asia, the Regional Hub's strategy, key activities undertaken and projects supported by the Hub.

## Swiss Presence in Southeast Asia



## The Changing 'Riskscape' in Asia-Pacific

The Asia-Pacific region is characterized by a high level of geo-physical and hydro-meteorological hazards. The impact of recurring disasters and an increasing number of extreme weather events are reinforced by high levels of climate and disaster risk. Several risk drivers contribute to the 'riskscape' of the region including economic development, poverty, urbanization, environmental degradation and climate change. Although sustainable development, DRR and CCA contribute to enhancing resilience, vulnerability reduction cannot keep up with the growing exposure in the region. By changing the frequency, intensity and unpredictability of hydro-meteorological hazards, climate change acts a risk multiplier. Even when taking the current and future reductions in greenhouse gas emissions into consideration, the region is likely to confront more disasters and extreme weather events in the years to come than currently the case. For this reason, the Regional Hub has recently developed a new strategy with a stronger focus on risk reduction and climate adaptation than previously the case.

## The Regional Hub's Strategy

By narrowing the gap between humanitarian action and development programming, the Regional Hub can contribute to building resilience by addressing disaster and climate risk before they turn into disaster events. To support stronger integration of development and humanitarian aid, **the Hub's strategy** aims at making emergency programmes less shock-driven than currently the case and increasingly informed by current and future vulnerabilities. Simultaneously, it aims at substituting 'blind' development programmes with risk-informed and climate-smart solutions. In order to achieve these dual objectives, the Regional Hub's strategy pursues three priorities:

- 1) Risk assessment and geo-spatial mapping and planning
- 2) Mainstreaming of disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA) into development projects, plans and policies
- 3) Disaster risk management and response readiness

Whereas DRM is covered at the strategic level through regional policy discussions and capacity development, response readiness and DRR and CCA mainstreaming remain at the operational level, and risk assessments

and geo-spatial mapping and planning at research and project levels.

The Hub's new strategy is aligned with **Switzerland's Foreign Policy Strategy 2020-2023** that has four thematic focus areas: 1) Peace and security, 2) Prosperity, 3) Sustainability and 4) Digitalization. Risk-informed and climate-smart development contribute to prosperity and sustainability while use of geo-spatial data in DRM, climate adaptation and development is an example of digitalization.

The Hub's strategy and vision for the future portfolio is also in harmony with **Switzerland's International Cooperation Strategy 2021-24: Greater Focus and Impact** that aims at addressing climate change, reducing the causes of forced and irregular migration, and harnessing the potential of digital technologies. Asia is one of the four geographic priority regions. The *International Cooperation Strategy* provides guidance for Switzerland's international engagement by suggesting three criteria for future collaboration: a) The needs of the population in target countries, b) Swiss interests, and c) the added value of Switzerland's international cooperation.

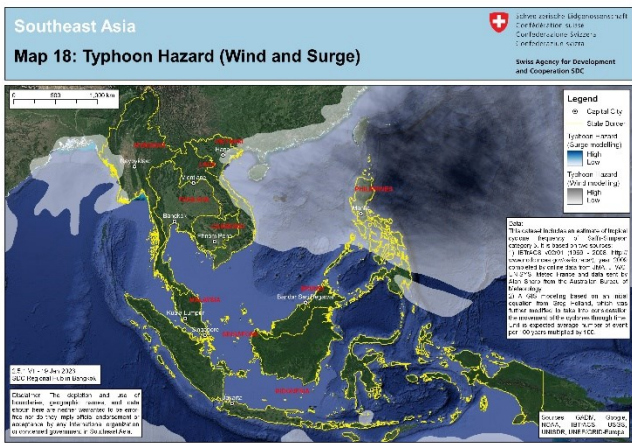
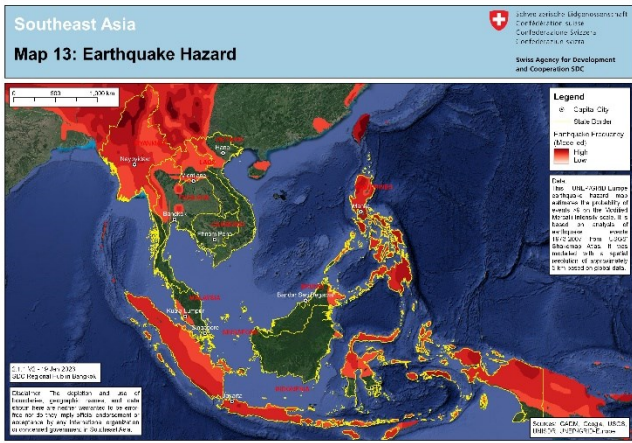
## Activities of the Regional Hub

### Disaster and Climate Risk Assessments

Risk assessments are imperative to safeguard past and current development interventions and guide future risk-informed and climate-smart investments. With outset in SDC's *Climate, Environment and DRR Integration Guidance* (CEDRIG), the Regional Hub is currently exploring how **high-resolution geo-spatial data** based on remote sensing, earth data, (near) real-time analysis and GIS can add value to development practitioners and humanitarian policy makers. Mapping is also critical for land use planning and zoning regulations. Rather than analysing past events, risk assessments must increasingly look into the future to capture the impact of increasing exposure, vulnerability and climate change. Geo-spatial data resonates with the SDGs and the *Sendai Framework for DRR*.

Initially, the Regional Hub relied on an external service provider to generate high-quality risk assessments. At this stage, the Hub utilizes in-house capacities to develop **project-specific risk atlases** to support programme planning and project implementation. The Hub's risk atlases are made by use of open-source software and utilise public data from multiple sources, including space agencies and international development, disaster and climate resource centres.

**Regional Risk Maps developed by the Hub**



▪ **DRR and CCA Mainstreaming**

Rather than managing disasters, the challenge is managing risks before they manifest in disasters. Rather than seeing disasters as threatening development programming from outside, the challenge is perceiving disasters as a cause and consequence of failed development. **Vulnerability reduction and resilience building** are therefore critical to meet the requirements of the *2030 Development Agenda* – notably leaving no one behind – and the associated climate and disaster agendas (e.g., *Paris Agreement* and *Sendai Framework*).

Currently, the Regional Hub follows a **demand-driven approach** based on input from Swiss Cooperation offices in Lao PDR, Cambodia and Myanmar to decide on the extent and types of support provided. Some field-interventions are stand-alone DRR activities (e.g. dam safety in Lao PDR), while others are integrated in planned or ongoing development projects (groundwater quality testing related to the CHAIN project in Cambodia) and humanitarian action. Alongside governance and gender, DRR and climate change are considered transversal themes in **Swiss Cooperation Strategies**, thus opening doors to mainstreaming across all sectors in *Swiss Cooperation Programmes*. In the future, the Hub plans to investigate the project portfolio under the *Swiss Cooperation Programme in the Mekong Region 2022–2025* and suggest further mainstreaming based on timeframe,

financial volume, entry points, data needs and data availability.

▪ **Capacity Development on Disaster Management, DRR and CCA**

The Regional Hub plays a role of knowledge broker for SDC colleagues in the region on DRR and CCA, **linking knowledge to practice** and facilitating adoption of resilience building measures through frequent communications with development and humanitarian practitioners in the field. The Hub organizes **regional learning events**: On CEDRIG in 2019, on DRR/CCA mainstreaming (online) in 2020, and with the IUCN on nature-based solutions (online) in 2022. This year, the Regional Hub plans to organize an in-person learning event on agriculture, food security and DRR in March and another on GIS-mapping and risk assessments during second half of 2023. In addition, the Hub shares announcements for trainings and news of innovations that could be relevant to Swiss Cooperation Offices in the region.

▪ **Project Design and Implementation**

The Regional Hub manages a number of projects with inter-governmental and regional organizations and in collaboration with Swiss Cooperation Offices. In recent years, the Hub has worked extensively with ASEAN, UN ESCAP and RIMES and with Swiss Cooperation Offices in the Mekong region and Myanmar.

Since the Central Sulawesi earthquake in 2018, the Hub has worked closely with **BNPB in Indonesia**. In July 2020, a *Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Republic of Indonesia and the Swiss Confederation* was signed regarding cooperation in the field of disaster management. Since November 2022, SDC has begun implementing a 3-year project with BNPB to strengthen DRM capacities in Indonesia. A Swiss DRR Programme Manager based in Jakarta manages this project in collaboration with the Hub.



*Swiss emergency relief provided to earthquake-affected communities following the Cianjur Earthquake on 21 September 2022.*

SDC has supported the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (widely known as the **AHA Centre**) since 2017. A first broader support under a bilateral *Memorandum of Intent regarding Cooperation on Disaster Management and Emergency Response* signed in 2019 took place between 2020 and 2022. The second phase of this project was approved in July 2022. This renewed contribution aims at further supporting the institutional and capacity development of the AHA Centre and ASEAN Member States through ten activities to be implemented over the course of the next 24 months.

From 2018 to 2021, SDC supported the ASEAN Secretariat (or **ASEC**) under a tripartite agreement between SDC, IFRC and SRC to provide expertise and financial assistance to high-level policy discussions and training events as well as the ACDM Working Groups, notably the one on Protection, Gender and Inclusion (PGI).

The Hub also has a budget for small actions on DRM and CCA in support of *Swiss Cooperation Programmes*. Such activities include testing of groundwater quality in Cambodia and strengthening of dam safety in Lao PDR.

### ▪ **Networking with Development and Humanitarian Practitioners**

Bangkok is a center for multiple regional offices of development and humanitarian organizations. The Hub is well placed to take part in global, regional and national conferences in Asia-Pacific. Successive DRR-related events took place in 2022 including the Global Platform for DRR (GPDRR) in Bali in May 2022 and the Asia-Pacific Ministerial Conference on DRR (APMCDRR) in Brisbane in September 2022. The Hub also takes part in meetings, workshops and trainings organized by regional and partner organizations (e.g. ASEAN, ADPC, IFRC, RIMES and UNESCAP).

With a group of like-minded donors, the Regional Hub is currently undertaking an **institutional mapping exercise** of DRR, climate and environment-related activities of regional organizations in Southeast Asia to support the implementation of its new strategy.

### ▪ **Monitoring of Impending Disasters**

The Hub in Bangkok detects, monitors and informs Headquarters and Swiss representations in the region about **impending hydro-meteorological events** that threaten to exceed national response capacity. The Hub also monitors seismic events that could have destructive impact caused by ground motion and/or tsunami waves. Key data sources include international media, Crisis24 Horizon, IFRC, WFP Automated Disaster Analysis and Mapping (ADAM), OCHA Flash Updates, incident

reports from the Changi Regional Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief Coordination Centre (RHCC), the AHA Centre, the Pacific Disaster Centre's EmOps, and online and web-based real time monitoring platforms. For Indonesia, the monitoring is complemented by the direct information coming from our partner BNPB, and other relevant national agencies.

### ▪ **Response Readiness and Response Operations**

Governments in Southeast Asia have become global experts in emergency response due to contingency planning, pre-emptive evacuations, standing readiness and hands-on experience from countless disasters. Disaster response remains an area of high political and donor interest. Whereas a few decades ago, direct international humanitarian assistance was routinely requested, nowadays it is becoming the exception rather than the norm. Often, NDMOs in Southeast Asia are capable of handling disasters on their own, sometimes supported by the Red Cross/Crescent movement, regional organizations (notably ASEAN) and/or in rare cases international humanitarian assistance through United Nations.

The Regional Hub maintains standing readiness to respond to disasters through financial, technical and human resources. Financial resources include contributions to IFRC Emergency and UN Appeals. Technical support include liaison with Swiss representations, NDMOs and the UN cluster system as well as support to HQ Rapid Response Teams and provision of material aid. Depending on needs, Swiss experts from the Swiss Humanitarian Aid roster, other technical networks and/or the Hub could be rapidly deployed to support response operations.



*As part of the projects with the AHA Centre, Switzerland provides financial support to stockpile NFIs in ASEAN's Disaster Emergency Logistics System. The above photo shows Swiss Non-Food Items in the Chai Nat Warehouse in Thailand.*