



SDC Network

Disaster Risk Reduction

Interview with Urs Nigg, expert in Risk Management related to natural hazards seconded by SDC to the Ministry of Interior of the Government of Morocco.

1) Urs, you are a DRR Expert working as SDC secondment to the Ministry of Interior in Morocco. What is the background and SDC's strategic goal of this collaboration?

Indeed, my work here as a thematic expert, directly under the minister's office, is strategically at a very important position. The Ministry of Interior (Mol) is the biggest Ministry and key player for decision making in DRR. This secondment position did not emerge yesterday, but is based on a longer history of collaboration: SDC Humanitarian Aid interventions in Morocco started as response to the Al Hoceima earthquake in 2004. Later, the Mol requested SDC's cooperation to strengthen its preparedness system through a close collaboration with the civil protection. This initially operational support, was then expanded to different prevention activities with further partners such as the University of Fès for hazard mapping.

A momentum for a Moroccan-wide and integrated DRR approach was when the World Bank started an important collaboration with the Moroccan Government under the Programme of Integrated Risk Management (see box) in 2015/6, where SDC co-financed some technical pre-studies. Thereafter, in order to institutionalize an integrated risk management, SDC continued

the collaboration with the Mol through this secondment of a technical DRR expert, always related to the Risk Management Programme. So, in a nutshell from relief and preparedness SDC's support now focuses on the institutionalisation of DRR within the Mol but also other technical ministries, regional and local governments all over Morocco to reduce and manage their disaster risks.

2) You started your secondment in July 2015. How does DRR look like in your daily work, how did your tasks evolve over time?

I am working directly under the Minister in its general secretariat, where all strategic and financial decision making takes place. I am the only international expert with a permanent position at this high institutional level. We were initially only three persons to manage the starting phase of the Programme. Meanwhile we are a group of seven persons and it is expected that we might create a separate new direction "risk prevention".

My initial task was to operationalize the World Bank loan contract of the Risk Management Project (see box). Together with experts from Morocco and from the World Bank, I elaborated a manual for its implementation with all necessary strategical, organisational and technical aspects in terms of coordination and exchange mechanisms, financial planning instruments as well as

Programme of Integrated Risk Management

Programme de gestion intégrée des risques de catastrophes naturelles et de la résilience

<http://www.gestionrisques.ma>

Duration: 2016 – 21.

Budget: 200 Mio. USD World Bank loan.

Components:

- 1) Promoting institutional reform and capacity building, 2) Scaling up DRR activities,
- 3) Improving disaster risk financing and insurance.

Main partners:

Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Ministry of General Affairs and Governance, Ministry of Urban Planning and Development, and other technical departments local authorities, establishments and public enterprises, SDC/SECO.

reporting and evaluation cycles. I also supported the development of tender documents for the annual call for proposals of of subventionned DRR projects, shaped their selection criteria and the according process. The tasks of my second year focused more on the roll-out of the implementation manual, the specifications for an institutionalized call for projects and the procedure of the project selections. It is pleasant to observe that we could initialize a country-wide impact by submissions of more than 100 DRR projects ranging from risk mapping, prevention training, warning mechanisms to hard infrastructure protection measures.

Now, in the third year I'm working on technical fine-tuning based on the experience of the DRR pilot projects. We are on the way to develop instruments to support staff of technical divisions and other ministries e.g. related to infrastructure or water supply, who should take over and implement the DRR projects.

As for the remaining time until 2019, my work will focus on capacity building inside as well as outside of the governmental institutions. Even if the internal bodies are now aware and ready to act for a better risk management, it remains a long way for the full capacity transfer to the local governments with decentralisation of risk management competences through standardized hazard-risk assessments, clear selection criteria, good quality proposals of DRR projects of local bodies etc.

3) Which were your entry doors to promote DRR mainstreaming?

The shift from reaction towards prevention is a long process, which was initially not centralized with the Mol, but distributed through different tasks amongst various technical ministries without a real coordination or strategic collaboration. A door opener for coordinated DRR mainstreaming was a World Bank study in 2014 with a real advocacy for a common approach, led by the Mol. Another important impulse was a peer assessment of Moroccan's capacities in risk management by the OECD in 2015/16, which considered disaster risks in a much broader way by including the whole administrative, economic and social competences of the Moroccan society, and also instances like tourism or industry. Both studies convinced the Mol to consider DRR

and risk management as a priority, involving other sectors, ministries and local actors. This is meanwhile reflected in the ongoing elaboration of the national DRR strategy. SDC supports this broader risk consideration and co-finances a parallel project of the OECD to reinforce the governance programme in Morocco. The Mol and OECD experts regularly organize workshops for local governments in various regional cities beyond Rabat.

In this sense the OECD assessment and its ongoing risk governance programme created an open door for DRR mainstreaming. Particularly the regional workshops, with experts sharing international examples related to risk aware governance, managed to bring actors of different sectors together.



Photo: The DRR expert Urs Nigg at the sea side in Rabat

4) What is your personal success story related to your working experience here?

I do not have a big break through, but I do have a couple of small indications, which illustrate the shift from reaction and initial "talks" to a real understanding in risk management. Two examples: Initially under the Risk Management Programme an installation of a back-up budget line for relief activities was planned - despite a separate emergency budget. This budget-line was more financially orientated than justified by strategic reflexions. In 2016

this was abandoned by the government as they explicitly wanted to focus on prevention instead of reaction.

Over long time I pointed out the importance of having further human resources, particularly technical DRR experts at the decision making level. In my team I was initially the only person with a solid technical background. Meanwhile we are seven

persons including two women, which indicates will for progress by the Ministry.



Photo: Urs Nigg together with DRR experts from different Moroccan ministries during a study tour in Fribourg, Switzerland September 2016.

5) How is your work within the ministry related to the SDC/SECO Programme in Morocco?

I am first of all a staff member of the ministry, which is essential for my main tasks. Hence I only have little interaction with the SDC / SECO team on a daily basis. However, in the regional OECD workshop events, I usually participate jointly with my colleague from SDC. This is an interesting exchange and we can together show the convergence in the Swiss Programme in interaction with other governmental partners.

As for the start of my work in this position, I could benefit from SDC's recognized reputation as a reliable partner based on positive references of the Swiss Humanitarian Aid programme and its DRR interventions including concrete action at the

ground and professional technical support. SDC's DRR programme will phase out in 2019. However, SECO may continue the built institutional relations and harvest some fruits of this DRR experience through their involvement related to risk insurance and risk governance.

6) Which aspects of your Swiss expertise in DRR do you consider as most relevant for the Moroccan partners

In Switzerland we have a long experience in illustrating the shift from reaction to an integrated risk management. This is greatly due to the decentralized DRR capacities, which were built up over long time. Today our municipalities are fully responsible for the implementation of DRR activities as they

know the local risks context best. I believe that in Morocco, the capacity building and decision making processes are not yet sufficiently decentralised to deal swiftly and in a contextualized manner with local disaster risks. It is obvious that not all can be done from Rabat by the MoI or even from the regional authorities, but it would be advisable to work towards the creation of provincial technical structures with DRR knowledge. Provinces have roughly the size of the biggest Swiss cantons - hence a process which requires a lot of time.

At the technical level, the Swiss DRR instruments, such as the hazard-danger-risk mapping standards, hazard management guidelines or cost-benefit analysis-instruments (EconoMe) are useful tools for our partners in Morocco.

In 2016 during a one-week study trip to Switzerland with colleagues of several ministries they had the opportunity to

exchange with Swiss national and local institutions. They were deeply interested and impressed by the Swiss experience as a useful reference for their work.

7) Do you know and use the SDC DRR Network, its relaunched shareweb and newsletter? How does it relate to your work?

I am actually rather new to the network as my daily work schedule hardly allows to spend much time exploring the shareweb. But good to know, that this is possible without a password. Reading the news, I found it interesting to see what other colleagues do in the field, particularly when they make use of Swiss DRR expertise. It would be useful to have the option for direct contact with field colleagues; I actually have not yet explored the internal member's database.

References

Website: [Programme de gestion intégrée des risques de catastrophes naturelles et de la résilience](#)

Website: [Projet Gestion des risques au Maroc \(OECD\)](#)

Factsheet: [Secondment au Ministère de l'Intérieur - Conseiller en gestion intégrée des risques](#)

Factsheet: [SDC and DRR in Morocco](#)

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