

# Possibilities and difficulties regarding DRR in a local context: lessons from Honduras after hurricane Mitch

Alfredo Stein

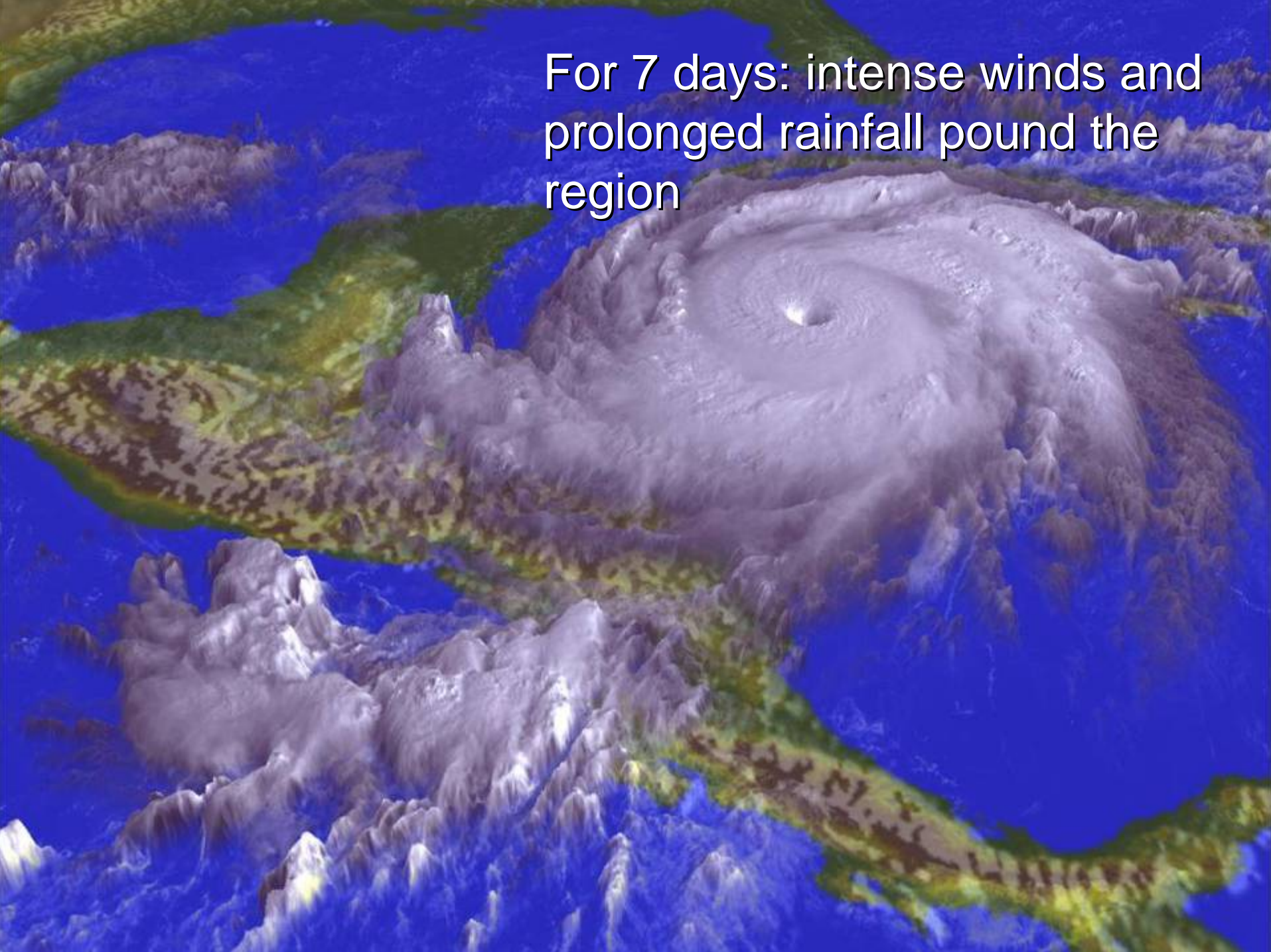
*Sida's Seminar on Disaster Risk Reduction:*

*A necessary means to reduce poverty*

Stockholm 23 of October, 2007



For 7 days: intense winds and prolonged rainfall pound the region



Torrents of floodwater drag enormous amounts of earth, mud and debris, houses, roads and bridges.

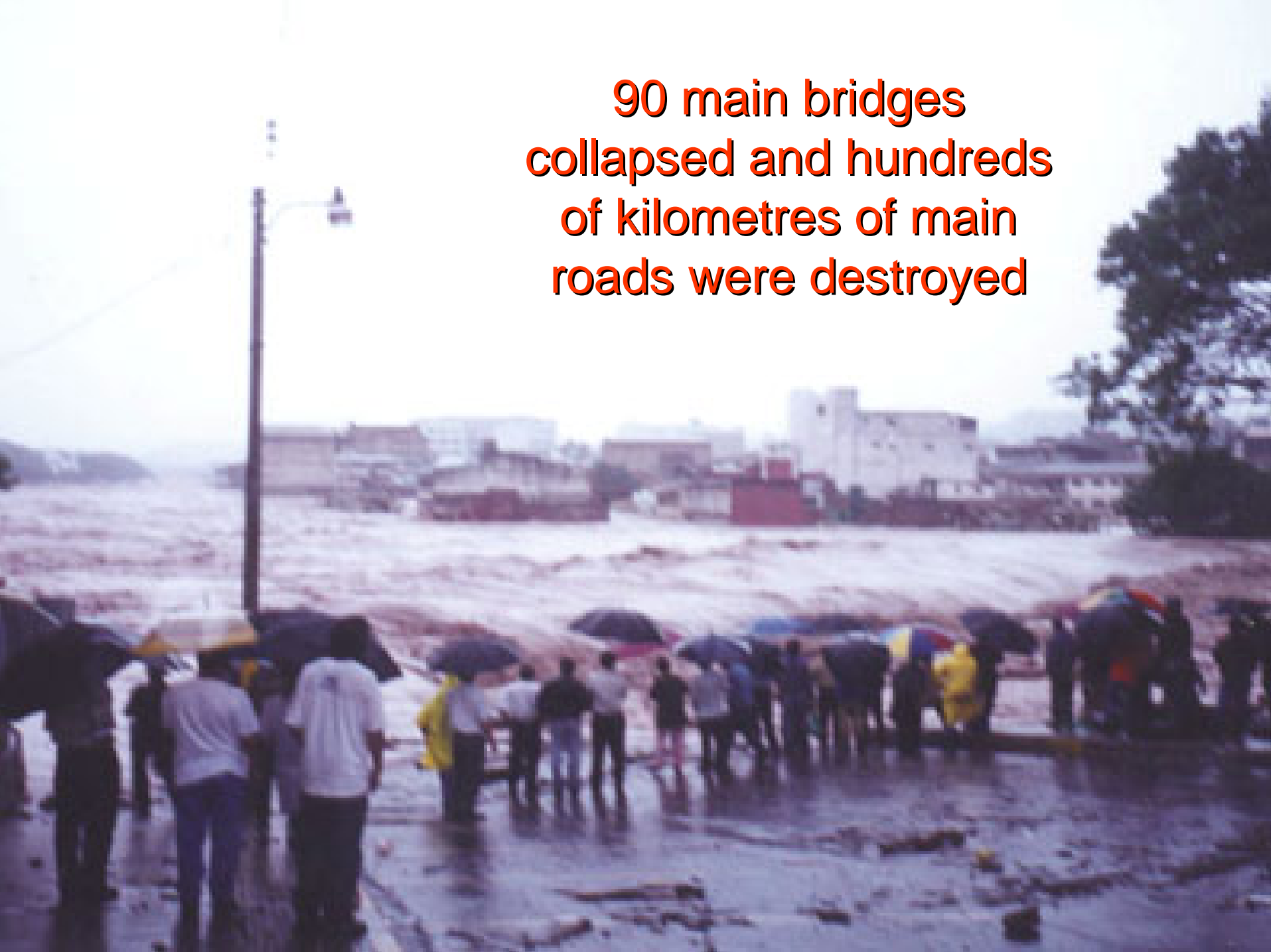
(AP)

# In Honduras:



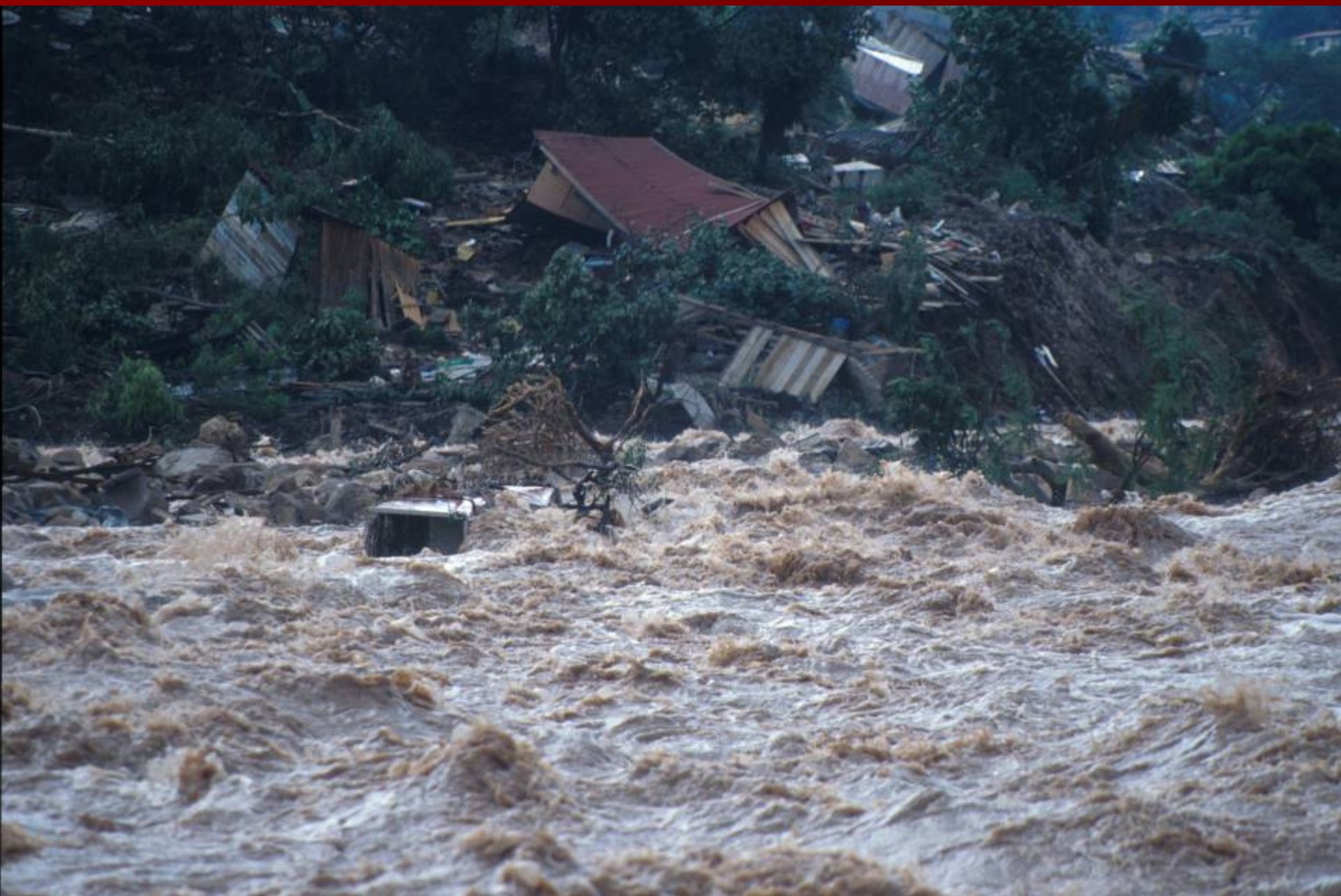
5,700 died + 8,000 disappeared

**90 main bridges  
collapsed and hundreds  
of kilometres of main  
roads were destroyed**





50,000 houses were severely damaged or destroyed





1,700 water systems were  
damaged



# Communications were severely damaged



# Main airports were flooded



70% of agriculture land became unproductive;



US\$ 3.8 billion in losses



# Mitch occurred when region was

- Regaining hope after decades of internal conflicts, violence and economic crisis
  - Dedicating efforts to consolidate peace, democracy and sustainable development.
- This gave birth to massive solidarity effort from all the world (including Stockholm Conference and Declaration in May 1999)

# Social vulnerability resulted from:

- Rapid population and urban growth;
- Disparities in access to wealth and land;
- Inadequate infrastructure and services;
- Corruption and lack of transparency;
- Environmental degradation;
- Lack of adequate policies and systems;

What lessons learned from the Mitch process are important in terms of DRR:

- During immediate relief and rehabilitation period
- During reconstruction period
- During development period



# Rehabilitation Period: Difficulties and possibilities

- Nobody had clear criteria to determine who was affected and who was eligible for assistance:
  - *Rely on existing NGOs + CBOs working there before Mitch*
  - *Do not ignore and underestimate local governments knowledge and capacities*
  - *Do not supplant them, assist them!*

# Difficulties and possibilities: From disaster to 6 months

- No clear criteria for deciding on temporary versus permanent housing solutions:
  - *Rapid appraisals with CBOs, NGOs + local governments on land, services & housing physical conditions*
  - *Try to answer three main questions:*
    - *Can family go back?*
    - *If not, why not?*
    - *Can something be done so they can go back?*

# Reconstruction Period

## 6-12 months

- Suitable and uncontested land for resettlement was scarce:
  - Not everyone has to move to new settlement
  - Think that probably majority can rebuild *in situ*
- Difficulties deciding who has to do what and who leads the provision and operation of infrastructure and services:
  - Incremental settlement development
  - Incremental provision of services + housing
  - Avoid huge settlements in cities peripheries far away from livelihoods

# Reconstruction Period: 6-12 months

- Systems for evaluating projects and issuing environmental permits was slow and conditions difficult to comply
  - *One step forward – two steps backward*
  - *Use donor coordination leverage for change!*
- Planning, construction standards and codes where not adequate for reconstruction
  - *Use reconstruction to question and transform*

# Reconstruction Period: 6-12 months

- Some International NGOs arrived with little or no prior experience in the country and in housing
  - *One of the most difficult problems to deal with!*
  - *Assist national + local governments not to reject but to set limits for aid!*
- Competition for donor resources, land and even access to potential beneficiaries
  - *Wait until the 'waters go back to normal'*
- Introduction of schemes that generated passivity among recipients (all free);
  - *Use combination of loans, self-help and subsidies*
  - *Do not try to do what everyone is doing bad!*

# Reconstruction Period: 6-12 months

- Conflicts between poor affected by Mitch and historically excluded poor not affected by Mitch:
  - *Take both of them into account*
  - *The more you mix the better results you get*
  - *Heterogenous not homogenous settlements*
- Difficulties to reflect seriously on what is happening during first year.
  - *Promote dialogue between donor community, civil society and government*
  - *Define and agree indicators of success and failure*

# Post-reconstruction period: use process for transformation

- Address key issues evident before Mitch
- Institutional transformation: PVMR + PRIMHUR  
⇒ FUNDEV (government to non government)
- Use financial schemes that will continue in time
  - Revolving housing loan schemes
- Harmonize approaches, procedures and reporting routines with donors
- Try to influence reconstruction policies
- Provide institutional strengthening to key actors
- Think not the emergency but 10 years ahead.