

Central America launches its 'Google' of weather

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A man under an umbrella as rain falls in San Jose. Officials launched a database Thursday they dubbed the "Google of Central American weather," designed to predict natural disasters as the region grapples with devastating consequences blamed on climate change.

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Technical director Norman Avila said the project will gather information from 150 stations in seven countries and has already accumulated decades of historical data.

The shared information will pave the way for improved forecasts of

hurricanes and other severe weather.

"Extreme hydrometeorological phenomena are the main threat to Central America," said Patricia Ramirez, head of the Regional Water Resources Committee based in Costa Rica, the organization in charge of developing the database.

Launched with the support of the Inter-American Development Bank, the database aims to help the agricultural sector, which has been badly damaged by [severe weather](#) in recent years.

"The challenge of [climate change](#) is how we prepare the region to better address this problem to reduce the risks," said El Salvador's Environmental Minister Herman Rosa Chavez.

Agriculture is the largest contributor to Central America's GDP and also the biggest job creator in the region.

During the past 40 years, natural disasters on the Central American isthmus have left 57,000 people dead, 123,000 injured and 10 million displaced, according to a study by experts from European and Latin American universities.

Hurricane Mitch and other [natural disasters](#) between 1996 and 1999 alone cost \$16 billion and caused a 1.3 percent reduction in regional GDP.

According to the 2009 COP15 [climate conference](#) in Copenhagen, Central American countries have suffered an estimated \$105 million in damages due to climate change.

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