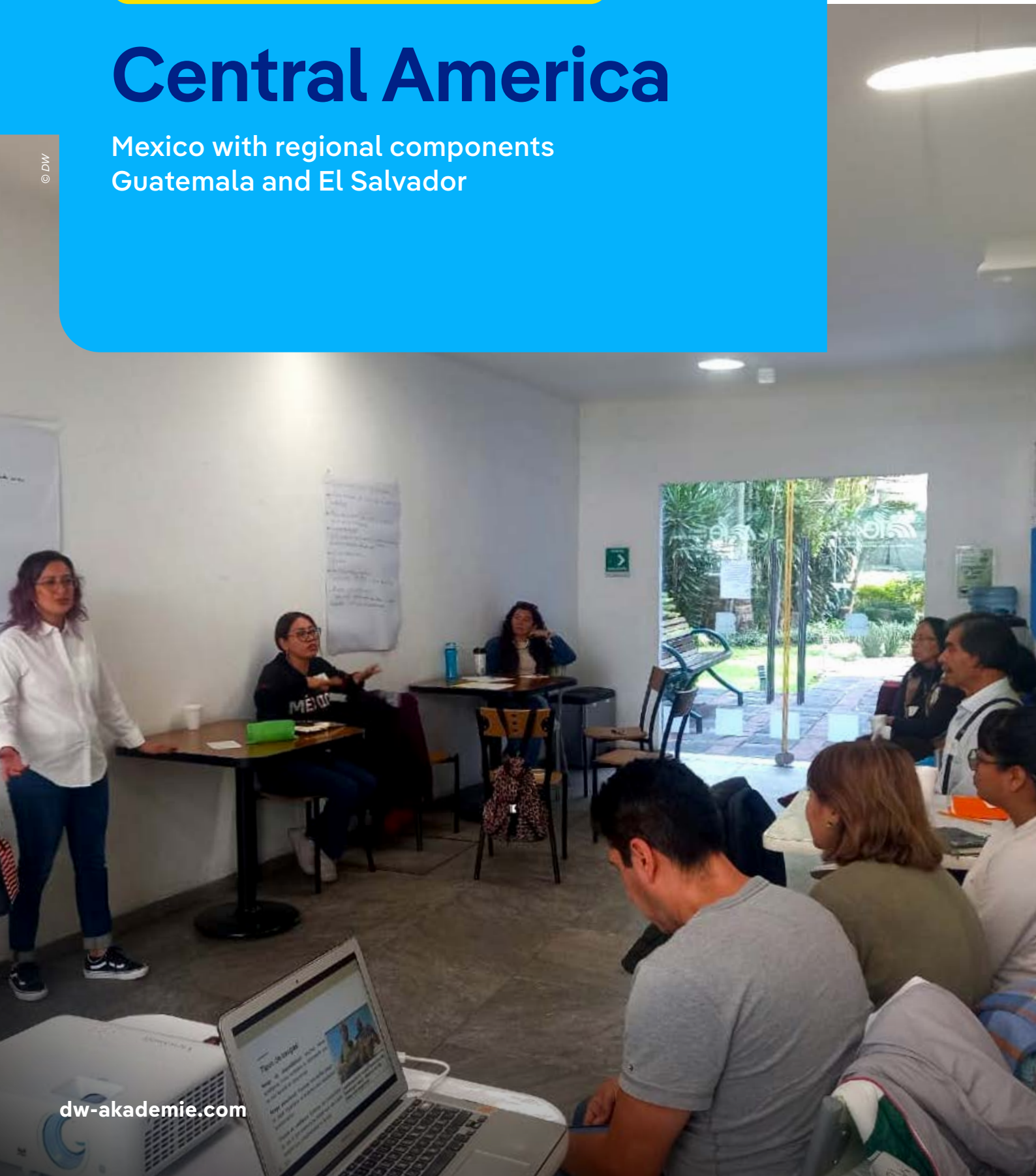


Evaluation Report 2025 • Executive Summary

Central America

Mexico with regional components
Guatemala and El Salvador

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Background

DW Akademie is implementing a BMZ-funded project in Mexico with regional components in Guatemala and El Salvador for a period of three years (2023–2025), which focuses on strengthening Media and Information Literacy (MIL).

The initial situation in the three countries is characterized by a lack of access to quality and relevant information and the spread of misinformation, which makes social participation more difficult, as reporting is often guided by political and economic interests. These circumstances make it difficult for the public to engage in constructive public dialogue and draw attention to political, economic, and social grievances. Political decision-makers make use of populist discourses, which are also directed against media professionals, and deliberately spread false information. Behind the high media concentration are not only political and large-scale commercial interests but also interests of organized crime.

DW Akademie is strengthening a regional Community of Practice (CoP) with the following aim: “Organizations of a CoP in Mexico and Central America have been strengthened in their efforts to combat disinformation and foster MIL.” To this end, the project supports:

1. The consolidation of a portfolio of products and services for the systematic promoting of Media and Information Literacy;
2. New approaches to disinformation together with local media and media professionals;
3. Regional knowledge generation on mechanisms of disinformation and dialogue facilitation.

The main partners are Periodistas de a Pie (Mexico) and their network of local digital media throughout the country. Together with the educational association Asociación de Servicios Educativos y Culturales (ASEC) and the non-profit association Comunicare, work on MIL is carried out in Guatemala, especially with young people and indigenous

communities. The partner universities Escuela de Comunicación Mónica Herrera (ECMH) and Universidad Centroamericana José Simeón Cañas (UCA) in El Salvador share a knowledge and innovation hub, which conducts research on disinformation. The project acts also through the RedAMI México network, in which institutions from various sectors are committed to increasing MIL in Mexico.

The evaluation provides accountability to the funder BMZ and is part of a learning process between DW Akademie and local partners. Findings and recommendations are incorporated into the design of future cooperations. The six evaluation criteria of the OECD/DAC were used to assess the success of the project: Relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. The evaluation is based on a contribution analysis, which was used to draw conclusions about the project’s contribution to observed impacts.

Evaluation results

Relevance

The project design responds to central problems of the media landscape in the three partner countries. **Mexico:** The strengthening of independent media that take up local topics, are close to the

audience and report on human rights issues from areas where hardly any independent information can be obtained is proving to be highly relevant. **El Salvador:** Strengthening the scientific debate on disinformation not only

contributes to an evidence-based examination of the topic, but at the same time strengthens independent, critical actors without exposing them too much. **Guatemala:** Hate campaigns are often carried out on social networks, which is why equipping a broad civil society with MIL and promoting an informed citizenry is central to building resilience against harmful content and propaganda. Overall, the assessment of the relevance criterion is “comprehensively fulfilled.”

Coherence

Many of the partner organizations are experiencing financial difficulties. Even it was not the direct focus of the project at hand, DW Akademie contributes to improving the financial independence of the media by promoting national, regional and international networking, among other things, and thus opening access to other donors, joint projects and new sources of funding. The coordination of the partners yields mixed results. The “core” partners (PDP, ECMH, UCA, ASEC, Comunicares) are the most advanced in their form of cooperation; a constant exchange of knowledge takes place through the exchange of information. Coordination takes place selectively; long-term cooperation was not a primary objective, rather, emphasis was placed on building a shared understanding of MIL and engaging in joint learning processes. The potential to form a strategic alliance exists. There are already selective examples such as the development of the editorial guideline, the exchange on work with indigenous target groups or on gender issues. The assessment of the coherence criterion is “partially fulfilled.”

Effectiveness

The confirmation of the effect hypotheses is based on the understanding of the CoP as an information and exchange network around a certain topic. This network has been significantly strengthened. Experts within their own organizations better incorporate MIL, promote concrete projects and advocate for MIL in their environment as a response to the disinformation crisis. The CoP holds potential to be a self-organized, long-term group in which the actors work together regularly and collaboratively and to strengthen capacities within the CoP as an entity itself. The assessment of the effectiveness criterion is “overall fulfilled.”

Efficiency

The project formulation is carried out with very close involvement of the partners, which on the one hand strengthens ownership, but on the other hand requires a lot of both time and resources from DW Akademie and the partners. In contrast to the past, DW Akademie’s approach to the CoP obliges not only its partners, but also the DW Akademie itself to meet certain indicators. It was possible to continue to reach a broad (or even broader) target group with fewer resources and not to lose quality or depth of topics. However, this was achieved only by inserting an intermediary level (CoP) and with less influence on the final beneficiaries. The core members of the CoP have complementary competences. This potential was also recognized in project design. The joint identification of challenges, tendencies, solutions, joint research, experimentation and development with the involvement of the audience is a great advantage of the approach. In practice, however, not all partners see themselves as part of a regional project that works towards an overarching goal through complementary contributions. The assessment of the efficiency criterion is “overall fulfilled.”

Impact

The partners and the media that are part of the network are among the few actors who break up the scheme of traditional communication and approach the local audience and local target groups critically, independently and sensitively and take up their needs. In doing so, they open space for vulnerable groups in particular. Working with media professionals ultimately benefits the whole ecosystem. It not only changes the attitudes of individuals but also promotes the dissemination of approaches close to the audience, puts MIL on the public agenda, strengthens the concrete application

of MIL in various topics and provides media professionals with practical, creative tools to do so.

The partners are embedded in social systems and are in close contact with local actors and problems. Ultimately, MIL is not an end, but an instrument, a kind of “soft power” enabling people to not only recognize disinformation, but rather to question dominances (racism, machismo, etc.), to point out grievances (violence, environmental crimes, exclusion) and to promote democratic participation. The human rights-based MIL approach is intended to enable the target groups to exercise their own rights, not to deny other people their rights and to pass on this attitude in their environment. The assessment of the impact criterion is “overall fulfilled.”

Sustainability

In addition to a strong MIL practice and greater audience proximity, the Periodistas de a Pie network also has editorial guidelines on MIL. The network has a different attitude that is part of its identity and that shows in constant MIL practice. In the case of the partners in El Salvador, there is a great deal of interest in positioning themselves on the issue of MIL and disinformation. With their research, the two universities play a pioneering role in the region, which they want to expand. Comunicares in Guatemala has managed to internalize the topic of MIL and integrate it as an integral part of its services. ASEC has MIL experience that adds up to that of the previous project. The pilot experience of integrating MIL into a lower secondary school subject is valuable and sustainable, since the topic is likely to stay part of future revisions of the subject matter. DW Akademie’s partner advisory processes are only partially systematized and processed. The assessment of the sustainability criterion is “overall fulfilled.”

Selected lessons learned

1. **Expansion of target groups:**
The portfolio of training courses is relevant for different target groups and has supported outreach to organizations not previously involved as partners. A highly sought-after topic was taken up in short formats and made accessible to civil society, universities and other actors, including those from new media circles. What they have in common is a high multiplication potential, which can be used to continue to effectively reach the final beneficiaries.
2. **Work in electoral contexts:**
PdP in Mexico, RedAMI, the two universities in El Salvador and Comunicares in Guatemala have each reported on the respective national elections in their own way, produced special formats and met the challenges of these tense political conjunctures. It is precisely the capacity not to be overwhelmed by the national agenda, but to continue to respond to the needs of the local population and to take their questions and priorities into account, that is an important and not self-evident success.
3. **Multidisciplinary perspectives:**
The inclusion of different professional perspectives in the study of the two partner universities in El Salvador is a great enrichment in terms of content and leads to insights that are helpful in the fight against disinformation. Interfaces between (neuro-) psychology, statistics and information technologies offer potential for further studies, also at the regional level. Within the framework of the CoP in general, even more different professional perspectives could be incorporated.

Selected recommendations

1. **Conceivable future topics could be:**
 - A deepening of MIL;
 - The examination of artificial intelligence and its effects on the media system and society;
 - Issues such as climate change, protection of natural resources and biodiversity;
 - Constructive journalism and MIL to promote constructive dialogues with more active audience involvement.
2. **The partners and DW Akademie are critical of the social consequences of the increasing virtualization of information and opinion processes.** Instead of isolating oneself from the digital world, the question is how both realities can be connected and strategically used to their respective advantages. Conscious media use and combination are also to be seen as part of MIL.
3. **The CoP could be strengthened with a view to:**
 - Further developing its identity, the roles and functions of its members and their complementary effects;
 - More systematically promoting the exchange of topics and writing;
 - Joint production and activities, also from the point of view of optimizing existing expertise and resources.

DW Akademie

is Deutsche Welle's center for international media development, journalism training and knowledge transfer. Our projects strengthen the human right to freedom of expression and unhindered access to information. DW Akademie empowers people worldwide to make independent decisions based on reliable facts and constructive dialogue.

DW Akademie is a strategic partner of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. We also receive funding from the Federal Foreign Office and the European Union and are active in around 60 developing countries and emerging economies.

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The objective of the external evaluation is to provide a constructive assessment of the project results. It does not necessarily align with the perspective and planning of DW Akademie. Nevertheless, all findings were discussed in order to allow lessons learned to be incorporated into the development of future strategies.