

Uniting local NGOs against disasters in Cambodia

Impact Story



Photo by: ADPC

ADPC's training builds the capacity of local NGO members and gives some outstanding participants the ability to facilitate their own training courses.

Phnom Penh, Cambodia – Cambodia's history of natural and human-induced disasters makes it a regular recipient of international aid. While the support is gladly accepted, Cambodian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country were eager to help themselves – but lacked the capacity to do so. Most of the humanitarian assistance was managed by international agencies.

This scenario occurred in 2011 when flooding inundated parts of the country as heavy monsoon rains and tropical storms affected 18 of Cambodia's 24 provinces. The event impacted one million people, caused 46,403 households to be evacuated and resulted in 247 deaths. International organizations rushed to assist.

Mr. Kep Kannaro, Executive Director of the Partnership for Development in Kampuchea (PADEK), recalls that very few Cambodian NGOs were involved in the response and recovery.

"I saw international NGOs working all around me, and I thought, 'Where are the Cambodian people that could help?'" says Mr. Kannaro. "Cambodian NGOs should have the capacity to work with international organizations to manage the situation on the ground," he continued.

There was a clear need for capacity building to boost the local NGOs' understanding of disaster preparedness and response. This improved capacity would allow them to work hand in hand with international NGOs during disasters and play a greater role in disaster preparedness and response activities.



Program Facts

Under the program called Strengthening Emergency Response Capacity of Humanitarian NGOs in Cambodia funded by USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, ADPC equipped local NGOs with skills and knowledge to respond to natural disasters.

16 training courses

405 people trained (132 women)

36 participants selected as trainers

Training topics:

- Humanitarian Assistance and Response
- Contingency Planning
- Effective Humanitarian Coordination & Leadership
- Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment
- Training of Trainers (TOT) Courses and Training for Instructors (TFI)

ASEAN selected the Cambodian Humanitarian Forum as a representative and coordinator of civil society organizations under the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response in January 2013. The forum acts as the focal point for all civil society organizations in Cambodia when the country is provided with international assistance to respond to and recover from natural disasters.



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Photo by: ADPC

ADPC and the local NGOs organized flood awareness campaigns, where volunteers marched through towns disseminating flood risk information via loudspeakers.

Stronger together

USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) with technical support from Asian Disaster Preparedness Center launched a program in 2012 entitled *Strengthening Emergency Response Capacity of Humanitarian NGOs in Cambodia* to enhance the disaster risk reduction capacity of local NGOs in the country. The project aimed to consolidate the local NGOs already operating in Cambodia to utilize their existing capacity for disaster situations. In order to achieve this, a network called the Cambodian Humanitarian Forum was established to act as a focal point for project implementation and future training initiatives.

The Cambodian Humanitarian Forum offered a membership to interested NGOs, and soon created a countrywide network to assist with local and international preparedness and response efforts. While the NGOs still acted independently, becoming a member offered a range of benefits. These include staff capacity building, training to support others in disaster preparedness and response, more coordinated humanitarian efforts at the local level and a role in disseminating early warning messages. For Cambodia, the true benefit is the network the forum created within the country and its outreach activities for preparedness and humanitarian response.

H.E. Ross Sovann, Deputy Secretary General of the National Committee for Disaster Management of Cambodia, is one of the founders of the project. He is committed towards improving and self-sustaining Cambodia's capacity in disaster risk reduction.

"We have been relying on international help for too long. A country needs to stand up and become involved to meet their own needs. Sometimes during a disaster, it is not only Cambodia that needs assistance. If other countries need help, and resources become scarce,

we need to be prepared to help ourselves," says H.E. Sovann.

The Cambodian Humanitarian Forum was the first step in making Cambodia more self-reliant in terms of disaster risk reduction. When it was established in 2012, 60 NGOs registered as members, and as of late 2015, there are about 123 local NGOs as members in 20 of Cambodia's 24 provinces. This network can be utilized to better coordinate disaster preparedness and response activities within the country.

For example, when the government issues a severe weather forecast, the Cambodian Humanitarian Forum is notified. The forum then updates their website and sends email notifications to zone and province coordinators, who can spread the message to rural areas and coordinate support when needed.

Cambodian Humanitarian Forum's training in practice

In September 2013, heavy rain caused massive flooding in Cambodia that led to 188 deaths and affected 1.7 million people. In some areas the flooding was worse than the 2011 Southeast Asia floods that inundated several countries in the region.

During the event, an organization called the Humanitarian Response Forum that improves coordination on emergency preparedness and response between the United Nations, international non-governmental organizations, and international organizations in Cambodia, needed assistance in conducting flood assessments to catalogue damage. They requested assistance from the Cambodian Humanitarian Forum to assist them by dispatching volunteers that have been trained in flood assessment.

"We had a list of our members in those provinces, and we contacted them to coordinate support. The local NGOs and the Humanitarian Response Forum worked

together by conducting the flood assessment,” says Mr. Sok Phoeuk, National Project Manager at the Cambodian Humanitarian Forum.

The three NGOs that assisted with the flood assessment include the Village Support Group in Battambang, Vulnerability & Illiteracy Reduction in Siem Reap, and the Tekdeysovanphum Organization in Banteay Meanchey province.

Sharing lessons with others

ADPC trained representatives from a variety of organizations throughout the project including members of the Cambodian Humanitarian Forum, government staff from different levels, and university professors and students – including men and women – on humanitarian assistance and response, contingency planning, effective humanitarian coordination, and rapid damage and needs assessment. After the training, participants shared the information with others and supported disaster risk management activities, such as training courses, locally.

As part of the program, master trainers of the Cambodia Humanitarian Forum had the opportunity to participate in the annual regional training courses hosted by ADPC, which included participants’ from various countries and organizations. The knowledge, skills and experience gained during the course added greater depth to the participants learning experience.

“Upon returning home, many participants shared what they had learned with their colleagues and were able to apply their new skills to the local context,” says Mr. Phoeuk.

The Training of Trainers courses further facilitated the spreading of disaster risk reduction knowledge and skills to different stakeholders in Cambodia. Mr. Kim Chanphreum, alumni of one of these courses, is specialized in monitoring and evaluation and works as project officer for the ASEAN Safe Schools Initiative under the Partnership for Development in Kampuchea.

“After the training, I shared information about hazards and disasters with teachers and students in several schools. All of these schools now have contingency plans and standard operating procedures in place in preparation for emergencies,” says Mr. Phoeum.

As part of the training he received through this program, he also trained field staff who are responsible for conducting disaster risk reduction training at the community level. This training was directed towards farmers and related to rice cultivation and how to safeguard crops against the effects of climate change.

“Field staff were very happy when they received this knowledge, and they are very happy to share it with the farmers in the field. This is a big success of the project, spreading information at the local level,” says Mr. Phoeum.

He stressed the importance of disaster risk reduction knowledge to help rural communities better prepare for disasters and develop and implement contingency plans to protect their livelihoods from the effects of disasters and climate change.

“I want to see all the provinces, especially those in the communes, have a contingency plan. I would like the training to reach the community people more frequently so they can adapt to the effects of climate change and improve resilience,” says Mr. Phoeum.

Due to the overall achievement and timely implementation of the project, USAID/OFDA will continue to support the project until 2018.

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National Project Manager at the Cambodian
Humanitarian Forum



Ready for response: ‘Volunteer to Respond’

Under an initiative known as Volunteer to Respond (V2R), ADPC trained a group of volunteers in Kratie and Pursat provinces on community-level disaster preparedness and response. They learned to identify natural hazards in their area and how to work with local authorities and the Cambodian Red Cross Society to respond to flooding, drought and other possible disasters.

ADPC also organized a community gathering in each province to increase awareness of natural hazards. Community members came together to listen and discuss good practices and increase their knowledge of how to prepare for flooding and drought.

In both provinces, ADPC and local NGOs organized flood awareness campaigns, where volunteers marched through towns disseminating flood risk information via loudspeakers. The volunteers will continue this practice to notify people when there is a report of incoming severe weather condition or a hazard.

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By: Don Tartaglione

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