

Striking Gender Balance to Build a Flood-Resilient Community

Case Study

June 2013

Ayutthaya, Thailand – Hat is on. Mayuree Chaengpradit, or known among villagers as ‘Mo’, turns on her motorbike and gets ready for making a daily round of residential visit. As a village head of Moo 2, Ta Luang District in Ayutthaya province, it is her duty to take care of 300 village members and always carefully check safety and flooding preparedness especially when the monsoon season has finally arrived.

“Even though I am a woman, years of work here have proven that I can also be good at male-dominated position,” Mrs. Mayuree said.

The 49-year-old housewife-turned-village head was elected in the position when the heavy flood hit the old Capital of Ayutthaya in 2011. Ms. Mayuree still remembered that she and her relatives had to row a boat against strong water tide to run for the election.

Mrs. Mayuree conceded she was not certain that Ta Luang residents would choose her at the beginning. Never before had her village and nearby communities a female village head. Her sincerity and more than 15 years of work experience as health volunteer for the community however excelled.

After a week-long of floodwater receded, she won majority vote from village members. Everyone calls her “Poo Yai Ban” (meaning head of the village). Floodwater receded, but there was no time for the newly elected village head to relax. Many tasks were handed over to her. As a former health volunteer, “Poo Yai Ban Mo” knew clean food, water and medicine were important for her village members. She asked local administration of Ta Luang district for help and made sure that these relief supplies were delivered to her village members, so they could survive the post-flooding situation.

Also there were two patients with diabetes which needed continuous insulin injection. She helped coordinated with the district hospital to provide sufficient medication for patients at her community. In addition, she also had to follow up on the government fund for each of the family affected by the flooding.



Early flood warning reduces age and digital divide

Prior to the 2011 flooding crisis, residents of Ta Luang District, Ayutthaya province never heard about the early warning system before.

“There was no announcement, no updates whatsoever sent to us,” said Kornnisoron Jaibutra, leading Ta Luang district. “By the time we knew, it was too late. The floodwater already reached our first floor and that we could not go anywhere.”

Since no flood preparedness was available, the best Mr. Kornnisoron could do during that time was to provide sufficient flood relief, food and medicine supplies for hundreds of village members in his community until the water receded.

Weeks of flooding is a lesson learned for Mr. Kornnisoron that a district leader like him should be equipped with news and updates to alert local residents about the situation. He and his team members participated in the flood resilience workshop with high hopes that they could be more prepared the unexpected flood crisis.

“We cannot rely on only information from one source. We have to seek updates from as many sources as we can to help ourselves first during emergencies,” he said.



Tabletop exercise brings related parties together so that they can practice how to respond on different flood scenarios

Lessons learned from the 2011 flooding crisis

Although everyone got through the unusual flooding situation and that none of them suffered from serious post-flood disease like diarrhea and leptospirosis as warned by health authorities, Mrs. Mayuree conceded her work during the flooding crisis in 2011 was quite passive.

“We are like a big family. We help each other to survive the flood. However, we just focus on the relief part while preparedness has never been our priority,” she said

An estimated US\$ 45.7 billion loss caused by the 2011 flooding crisis in Thailand well reflected Mrs. Mayuree’s view towards less-prioritized issue of flooding resilience and preparedness among local communities.

In Ban Ta Luang district, flooding damages remain to be seen. Main road used for transportation in the area is still under restoration two years after the crisis.

To enhance resilience and sustainably reduce vulnerability of flood-prone province, local residents at Ban Ta Luang for the first time learned about disaster risk management skill in early 2012. Mrs. Mayuree also participated in a series of flood-resilience workshops usually organized during weekends so local communities would have time to join in the activities from drawing a community map to flooding drill.



As the flooding season is coming, Sophon Suwannapote, a member of Ta Luang Administration Organization, uses his iPad to check updated information about water level more often via mobile app Thai Flood Watch and Information from Thailand Integrated Water Resource Management via www.thaiwater.net and Irrigation Department via www.hydro-5.com.

The 64-year-old retiree said he still had strength to work for enhancing community safety, while learning digital-age technology. “In the age of information technology, the elderly also has to keep ourselves up to date,” he said.

Mr. Kornnisor together with Mr. Sophon and their team at Ta Luang Administration Organization would set a public relations team to keep their village members informed about the water situation. They also planned to send short message alert via cell phones since most of the elderly nowadays had cell phones, so they could get early warning and other information essential for preparation to the upcoming floods.



Role-playing exercise provides a chance for villagers to collaborate and ensure that vulnerable groups should be recognized during warning and evacuation.

Such capacity building process as tabletop and role-playing exercises are also good sessions that bring together all involving parties at local levels for example district and sub-district administration organizations, Royal Irrigation Department, Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, and community representatives to explore and assess their roles and responsibilities on flood warning, leading to better understanding and awareness of the early warning system and preparedness apart from flood relief.

After participating in a series of flood-resilience workshops, the 49-year-old female village head said she and her community also came up with an idea to have not only sufficient flood relief equipment such as parachutes and plastic boats, but also most importantly flood warning system put in place at Ban Ta Luang community.

The power of information

A simple metal pole painted with three colors—green, yellow and red—was put recently at the bank of Wat Hua Hin. Located in the high ground by the Pa Sak River, the Buddhist temple is regarded as community center of Ban Ta Luang suitable for attaching the early warning system for the community.

The three colors represent safety level. Green

means the water level is normal. Yellow means residents should start evacuating their belongings to higher ground. If the water reaches the red part of the metal pole, residents should go at the evacuation center as soon as they can because the water level is unsafe and that relief could be very difficult if residents insist to stay put at their places.

Prior to participating into the capacity workshop, community usually depended on information from government authorities. By the time they learned about the warning information, the water already flooded her community.

The 49-year-old village head hopes her community-initiated warning system would be of good use when the monsoon season in Ayutthaya usually reaches its peak in October. ■

Program for Reduction of Vulnerability to Floods in Thailand

Project Information:

The Asian Disaster Preparedness Center (ADPC) – supported by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated the Program for Reduction of Vulnerability to Floods in Thailand to enhance flood risk mitigation and management. The goal of the program is to promote sustainable development whilst enhancing Thailand's resilience to floods and other associated natural hazards. It achieves this goal by strengthening the capacity for disaster risk management in Thailand and providing support for flood vulnerability reduction. The program works in partnership with Thailand's Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) and other stakeholders and target provinces in the central and lower Chao Phraya River Basin, from Sukhothai to Samut Sakorn.

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