

# Forum aims to take action against flooding

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THE first National Flood Forum took place in Vientiane last Friday to address the situation in Khammuan, which is the province most in danger of flooding each year.

The government gathered together various organisations to discuss issues related to flooding, aiming to set up a special community to tackle the problem in Nongbok district, Khammuan province.

The National Disaster Management Office, Ministry of Social Welfare, Lao National Mekong River Committee and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Centre discussed ways to strengthen the capacity of the province's flood preparedness plan as part of developments in the lower Mekong basin.

This was the first National Flood Forum to be held in Vientiane and was supported by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department.

"The forum aims to exchange ideas between government officials and non-government organisations working to mitigate the effects of flooding in the country," the Acting Director of the Water Resources Development Division, Mr Chanthachith

Amphaychith, said at the forum.

The forum focussed on the information provided by various sectors working with local communities, and the different ways in which they presented this information to the community.

One of the goals of the forum was to standardise the targets and plans of the participants to help community preparedness.

"We are considering ways to warn local people and how best to prepare for flooding, such as how weather forecasts can be broadcast throughout the province and to local communities," Mr Chanthachith said.

Flooding in Laos typically takes on three different forms. In the north and northeast it happens very rapidly, but in Champassak, Attapeu and Xekong provinces flooding is short-lived.

"The most dangerous area is Nongbok district; every year there are problems due to flooding. In the past we've given some training on flood awareness and have been able to help a little. In the future we will visit individual communities to find out the facts and try to find the best way we can help them," Mr Chanthachith said.

Areas near the Xebangfay

and Mekong rivers are at particular risk of flooding in August and September because both rivers become swollen after the heavy rains.

The European Commission's Disaster Preparedness Programme continues to promote the implementation of strategic goals of the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015.

"In particular we are committed to improving the capacities of communities at risk from recurrent natural disasters and providing bridging strategies between emergency relief and response and long term development instruments," the European Commission Representative, Mr Mel Jones, said.

He said that by bringing together such a diverse group of disaster reduction stakeholders, the National Flood Forum provides the opportunity for everyone to share experience and learning methods.

This will help to further improve the process in the context of flood management and to promote the integration of successful practices into strategies and programmes, aiming at reinforcing the resilience of people at risk and reducing the loss to life and property.