

Walk-through scenario: flooding across 8 provinces in the Mekong region

Speaking Notes:

In this section, we will walk through a hypothetical scenario that relates to common natural hazards and disaster risks that often impact Cambodia. In this instance we are using the example of flooding occurring across several provinces. It looks at an ideal scenario and the application of the 2015 law.

1. Early warning and evacuation

First, Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology. has issued as early warning about possible flooding in the Mekong region.

The communities are informed through an early-warning system and evacuate – they know where to go that will be safe as they have undergone simulation exercises. The Red Cross branch supports the evacuation, and have mobilised emergency relief items.

2. Immediate response

The flooding is substantial - a person in the community notifies the sub-national or community committee. This is good, as Article 44 specifies that every individual is aware of the risk situation which might cause a disaster. Failure to timely report, can be subject to legal penalties.

Reports show that 8 provinces have been seriously affected by Mekong river flood in (Ratanakiri, Stung Treng, Kratie, Kampong Cham, Tboung Khmum provinces) and by flash floods in (Preah Vihear, Kampong Thom, and Kampot provinces). 35 districts, 154 communes and 343 villages were affected. 176,638 people have been affected and 36,693 people are currently displaced.

The sub-national committee is undertaking damage and needs assessment, conducting search and rescue and providing medical care, with support from the Cambodia Red Cross. It realizes that the effects of the flooding are beyond their response capacity and ability, (article 22), and immediately reports to NCDM for assistance. This is also appropriate, as any disaster management official who does not take responsibility of tasks assigned to them, or if they do not fulfil their duty in disaster management and cause severe damage to private or public property, they can be subject to legal penalties.

3. NCDM mobilizes

After receiving the update report on the severe flooding, NCDM immediately mobilizes the emergency operations and dispatch rapid assessment teams to the affected areas for coordination, assessment and disaster response in collaboration with ministries-institutions, armed forces, public sector, private sector, civil society, and Cambodia Red Cross. Relief is provided, as well as emergency medical support.

In this instance, NCDM does not request the Royal Government for the immediate intervention and appeals to the ministries-institutions, public sector, private sector and civil society to provide support in the disaster relief and emergency response operations. However, this could be provided should the NCDM deem it necessary (article 22).

NCDM convenes a meeting with the relevant stakeholders on the response and raise the necessary proposals and measures to the Royal Government for decision making on the declaration of disaster and take actions to deal with the disaster relief and emergency response. Based on NCDM's recommendations, Royal Government places the provinces affected by the flooding under the disaster situation for a period of 30 days.

All relevant national actors are engaging in the disaster relief and emergency response operations, including ministries-institutions, armed forces, public sector, private sector, Red Cross and civil society as requested and coordinated by NCDM. they are supporting the response by providing human resources, materials, equipment, budgets, and technical assistance to the operations. (article 23). An appropriate reserve budget and resources for disaster management has been ensured by the State (article 39). Every person affected is given relief aid, and measures are taken to ensure their life, dignity, and property is protected (article 35).

Furthermore, people receive information through effective communication channels on the extent of the flooding. Information also includes what measures have been taken in the response, how people can engage in response and recovery activities and when they are expected to be able to return home (if they have been displaced by the floods). Effective communication channels could include radio, television, newspaper and social media such as Facebook or Twitter.

As assessment reports continue to come in, the NCDM realises that the extent of the flooding is greater than the response capacity of the country, and gives the recommendation to the Royal Government to appeal to the international community for emergency response and recovery assistance (Article 32).

4. International assistance

Individuals, international institutions and foreign countries offer to provide assistance; they inform the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and notify NCDM about this assistance including budget, resources, materials, number of people and expertise available to deploy for the disaster relief and emergency response operation (Article 33). Upon the commitment of the international community to provide assistance, the NCDM declares the acceptance of international assistance and directs relevant authorities, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the General Department of Immigration (within the Ministry of Interior) and the General Department Customs and Excise of Cambodia to coordinate and collaborate with donors and international response teams (Article 32).

It is important to note that international assistance agencies and international response personnel must respect and abide by the rules, regulations, cultures and customs of the Kingdom of Cambodia and shall cooperate with NCDM, relevant institutions, competent authorities, and communities in performing their duties (Article 33).

The NCDM and the relevant ministry-institutions are responsible for the efficient facilitation of international assistance, including efficient and streamlined import of materials, equipment, facilities, granting of special visas etc. As a side-comment, it is stated in Article 34 that a specific procedure on granting visa to personnel of the international response teams and the import of materials, equipment, facilities and humanitarian assistance shall be determined by a Sub-Decree.

As is bestowed by article 31, any and all taxes and duties imposed on assistance for disaster management and humanitarian response activities provided to Cambodia shall be borne by the state.

5. Recovery

As the international responders support and complement domestic efforts, all coordinated by NCDM, it is important to consider recovery as early as possible in the post-disaster period. Whilst relief items and emergency shelter are being provided, and international responders, including for instance nurses and engineers are supporting national staff in various sectors, a plan for recovery should be established. This is also coordinated by the NCDM together with relevant ministry-institutions and with technical support provided by the Clusters, IFRC, Cambodia Red Cross and Development Partners as requested.

Article 13 specifies that recovery activities shall focus on the post-disaster period and should include rehabilitation and reconstruction. Relevant measures to ensure that the health, dignity and resilience of the community is restored includes addressing recovery needs in sectors such as:

- Infrastructure and telecommunications; including roads, telecommunication towers, schools, hospitals etc.
- Livelihoods and agriculture; getting the communities back to normal, enabling them to sustain themselves through agriculture, businesses and professions. This can include provide seeds or seedlings for farmers. When recovery of infrastructure happens, and children can go back to school, the family members that generate income can get back to work. Article 35 also bestows the right of every Cambodian person to obtain the resources for post-disaster livelihood restoration.
- Healthcare and health care systems strengthening, including establishing sustainable and safe drinking water to avoid the spreading of waterborne diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and dysentery.
- Education; including getting schools back up and running, especially if they have been used as evacuation centers. Education could also include disaster risk reduction training, preparedness activities as well as training in good health practices and first-aid.
- Shelter; including transitioning from emergency to sustainable housing, supporting communities to rebuild and build back better to reduce the risk of further disasters.

6. Suggested questions to ask the group following this scenario, or to be discussed in groups and then presented:

- a. In your experience, is this what happens during a disaster? What is your experience?
- b. What do you think are the biggest challenges in a disaster response?
- c. What can be improved in practice through the provisions of the law?
- d. What do you think is needed for the scenario to happen as is described?
- e. What can you do in your work to apply the law and improve disaster management?