

Disaster Management Planning in Rural Cambodia

Background

Cambodia has been affected by many weather-related natural disasters such as heavy rain, flood, drought and severe storms, and climate change is intensifying these phenomena. People living in rural areas are the most vulnerable to these shocks because their capacity to deal with climate variability and extremes is limited. In efforts to mitigate vulnerabilities and improve disaster resilience, the government has created mechanisms for emergency management to help affected communities cope with and recover from disasters.

Set up 1995, the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) has overall responsibility for developing and coordinating emergency plans and responses. Disaster management agencies such as the Provincial Disaster Management Committee, District Committee for Disaster Management (DCDM), Commune Committee for Disaster Management (CCDM), and Village Disaster Management Group (VDMG) are responsible for disaster planning at their respective levels. These agencies receive technical and financial support from NGOs and the NCDM. At commune and village level there are two kinds of action plans, one for emergency preparedness and response and the other for disaster risk reduction.

This article describes village and commune-level planning processes for disaster management in rural Cambodia. It draws on the initial findings of a larger study (Sam 2015) conducted to determine the situation of NGO-assisted community-based disaster management projects, and the best ways to promote effective emergency planning and preparedness in rural communities. The study was commissioned by the Japanese Institute for Irrigation and Drainage.



Method

Primary data was collected from four focus group discussions organised with members of Srey Snom DCDM and Tram Sosor CCDM in Siem Reap province, and members of Sangkat Lolok Sor and Kompong Po CCDMs in Pursat province. Further information was gathered from seven key informant interviews with representatives from NCDM, Plan International Cambodia, Action Aid, Life with Dignity DanChurchAid/ChristianAid, Oxfam GB, and Partnership for Development in Kampuchea.

Secondary data was collected from the NCDM, and from local NGOs involved in emergency management and which focus on providing disaster management training.

Key findings

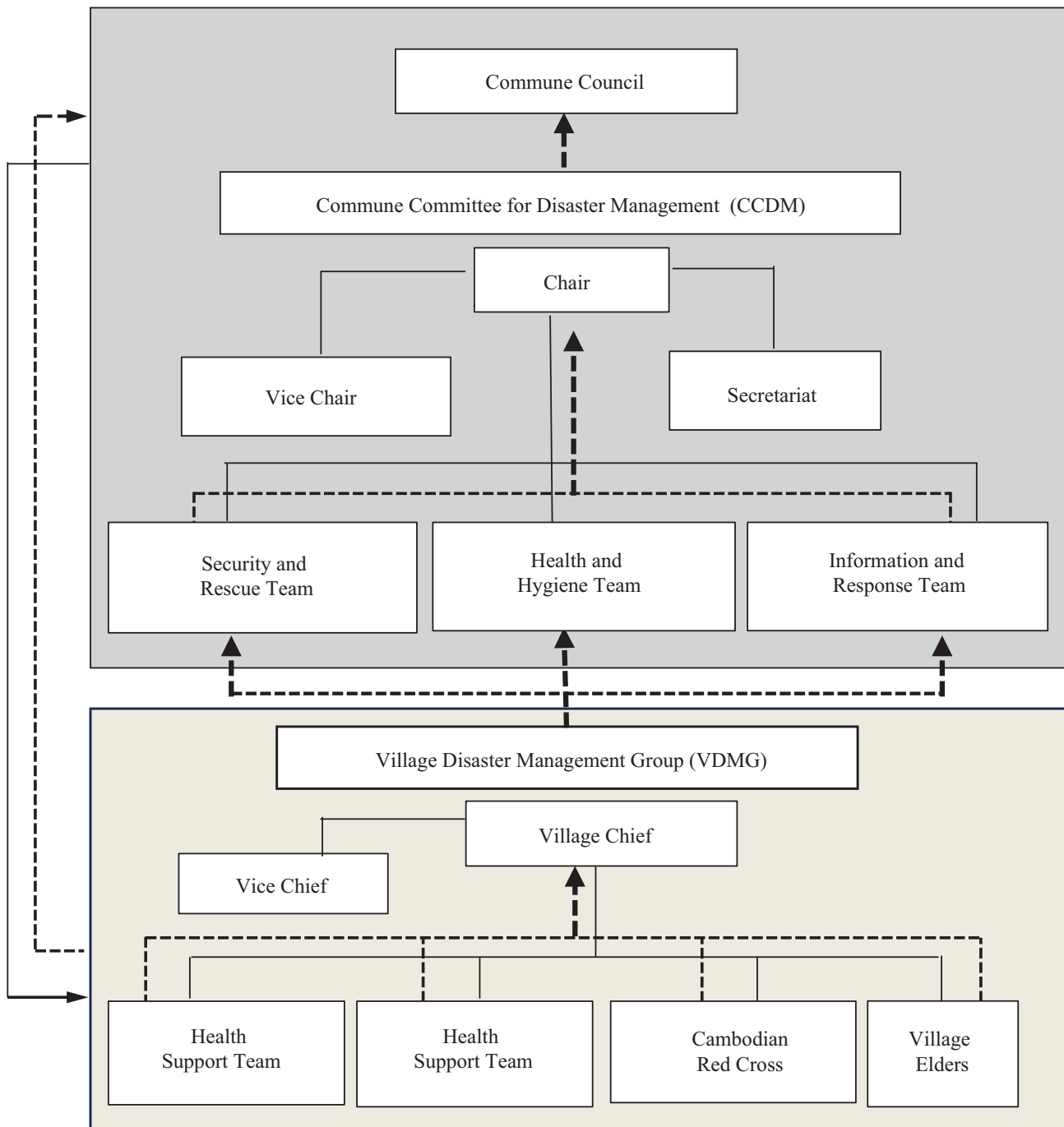
Structure and functions of CCDM and VDMG

Sub-decree No. 61, dated 29 June 2006, authorised the establishment of CCDMs, and Direction No. 315, dated 21 July 2010, led to the creation of VDMGs. As seen in Figure 1, the CCDM comprises three teams working across three main areas, and the VDMG is made up of four groups. All committee and group members are volunteers. If there is NGO support, they get some funds plus travelling costs from their respective commune authorities.

The main responsibilities of the CCDM are to develop plans for disaster risk reduction and emergency preparedness and response, carry out the activities detailed in both plans, coordinate

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Figure 1: Disaster management structures



Sources: Consortium AAC/DAC/PIN/Oxfam/SCI 2014; Leng 2014; NCDM 2013a; Khna Sanday CCDM 2013; Lolok Sa CCDM 2014

district and village-level disaster risk management and emergency response activities, and implement disaster management policies and strategies. The main roles of the VDMG are to reinforce disaster preparedness mechanisms by sharing disaster information among local people, disseminate warnings of impending threats and assist evacuation of people and livestock in times of emergency.

The CCDM is responsible for commune contingency planning and the VDMG for local

disaster risk reduction planning. Both receive support from NCDM line departments, provincial and district committees for disaster management, local NGOs and development partners.

Supporting NGOs follow the disaster management activities set out in the technical guidelines for contingency and emergency planning (NCDM 2013b), and provide pre-planning training to CCDM and VDMG members. Training covers the following topics:

- data collection
- plan development
- disaster and management and recovery basic concepts
- mechanisms, structures, duties and roles of local disaster management committees
- stakeholder mapping
- lessons learned from disaster management
- disaster impacts on women, children and other vulnerable groups
- vulnerable group analysis
- hazard mapping to an appropriate planning level or scale
- risk scenarios and risk levels
- emergency preparedness and response planning
- how to identify local resources.

Training on data collection covers how to gather primary information on the problems and difficulties vulnerable people face and their ability to deal with them (NCDM 2013a, c).

Developing an emergency preparedness and response plan

The NCDM (2013b) has produced technical guidance on contingency and disaster planning at municipality, province, district and khan levels but not at the commune level. In the absence of specific guidelines, commune plans are developed in the same way as those at khan and district level (Figure 2).

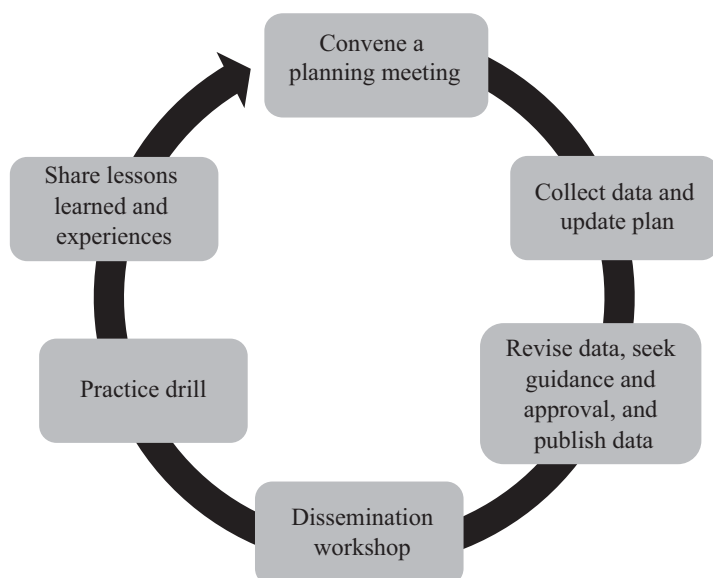
Participatory planning requires the involvement of all stakeholders concerned, but especially supporting NGOs and district and commune committees for disaster management. Before the planning process can begin, in accordance with NCDM's technical guidance, committee members attend training on various topics. Even so, depending on the supporting NGO, the content of emergency and preparedness response plans (EPRPs) may differ slightly from NCDM recommendations. The plans mainly focus on institutional preparedness and response and the resources they require, and need to be updated every year.

Developing a disaster risk reduction plan

Disaster risk reduction plans (DRRPs) do not exist in the three study communes. But a representative from Life with Dignity reported that such plans have been developed in the project's target villages and communes, where they are often known as a disaster risk management plan or community development plan.

The DRRP evolved from the process of identifying disaster risk management needs and prioritising local development projects. Before the creation of VDMGs, these activities were mainly the responsibility of the village chief with support from commune councillors. Once identified, priority problems and needs would be screened by the commune council and incorporated into the commune development plan and the commune investment plan. Thus, over

Figure 2: Development of commune emergency preparedness and response plan



Sources: Interviews 2014; NCDM 2013c

time, disaster risk reduction has been incorporated into commune planning.

With support from NGOs, distinct commune EPRPs and DRRPs are being developed. The latter differ from that recommended by NCDM and suggested by supporting NGOs. The NCDM recommends that DRRPs take the form of a table of activities, while supporting NGOs prefer a report containing disaster profiles, risk assessments, information about key local institutions and a preparedness plan. Commune and village DRRPs are reviewed every 2-3 years.

Challenges

A main challenge to the development of actionable commune and village plans for emergency preparedness, response and recovery is limited local knowledge about disaster management. This is largely due to the complexity of risk assessment and planning activities, low educational attainment among local people and limited timeframe for training, though training has been extensively conducted as part of project implementation.

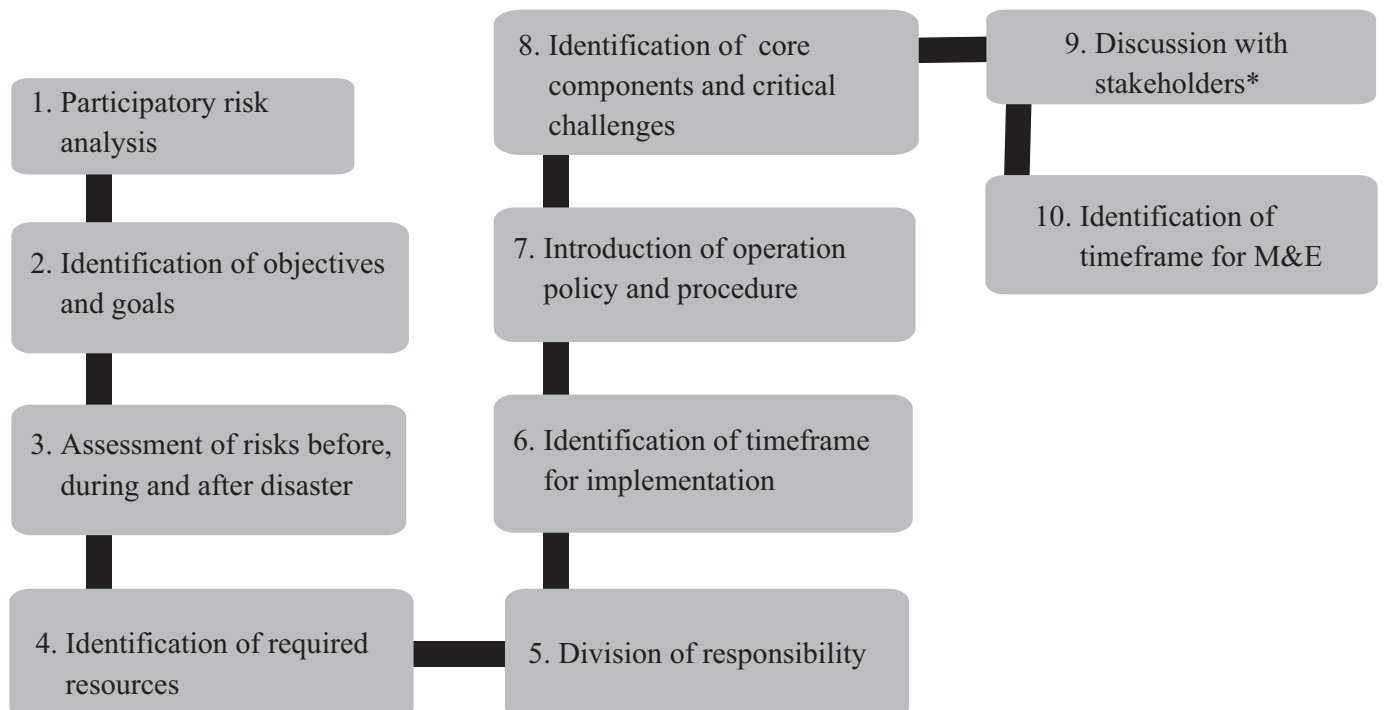
Another issue affecting the development of effective disaster management plans concerns time and space constraints. Participatory planning

typically involves a large number of people, but the demands and pressures of everyday life mean that committee and group members do not always have sufficient time and energy to engage fully in local initiatives. For example, collecting enough information to assess risks and develop an action plan requires local people’s participation. Yet the possibilities for data collection are limited because people must put all their efforts into earning their livelihoods.

Unless these constraints are recognised and properly addressed, innovation and planning can become self-defeating: capacity for active participation does not get built up or keep pace with technological innovation; individuals and communities fail to recognise how climate and disaster threats and related impacts can be reduced; a sense of powerlessness or the belief that their efforts will make no difference lead to inertia and acceptance of the status quo. This was evident to some extent from the discussions with DMCC and CCDM members; questions about the problems they face elicited few ideas.

The sustainability of disaster management and recovery assistance was also highlighted; discussants and interviewees stressed the critical need for

Figure 3: Development of a disaster risk reduction plan



Note: *Stakeholders include local communities, district and commune committees for disaster management, and supporting NGOs
 Source: Consortium AAC/DAC/PIN/Oxfam/SCI 2014

continuous financial and technical supports. The limited funds available for emergency management and response activities, as well as lack of community participation in disaster efforts, has reportedly constrained the implementation of emergency response and risk reduction plans at local level.

The problem of limited funds obstructing plan development and implementation was raised in all three study communes and by NGO representatives. The active involvement of local people is vital in dealing with disaster risks; they are required to cooperate with their VDMG and CCDM before, during and after disaster strikes. But it was clear from the discussions and interviews that some people ignore the warnings provided by their VDMG and CCDM. Instead, they usually wait until disaster hits and then act, thereby hampering the effectiveness of emergency planning and response activities.

Conclusion and suggestions

Despite extensive consultation and training, local people's actual involvement in disaster management planning remains limited. This emphasises the urgent need for continuous support from line agencies and NGOs to sustain all stages of planning and implementation.

Community planning is not new to village and commune authorities who have experience of assessing local needs and priorities and preparing community development and investment plans. However, emergency preparedness, response and recovery is hampered by local authorities' limited capacity to carry out the complex risk assessment exercises and disaster management activities, constraints on local participation in data collection, and difficulties getting community cooperation in disaster situations.

The following suggestions may help remove the obstacles to disaster management planning identified in the study:

- Enhance CCDM and VDMG members' understanding and ability through simplified risk assessment and planning activities and more follow-up training.
- Improve meaningful community participation by encouraging CCDM and VDMG members to share disaster information.
- Ensure sustainable planning and implementation through securing financial and technical support from line agencies and NGOs.

- Train CCDM and VDMG members on how to write proposals to seek funding from NGOs and other supporters
- Mobilise local leadership, ideas and efforts throughout the implementation of community action plans.

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