

## **EARLY WARNING SYSTEM PROJECT**

*American Red Cross and Cambodian Red Cross in partnership with the Mekong River Commission*

### **1. BACKGROUND**

The American Red Cross (AmCross), the Cambodia Red Cross (CRC), and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) are providing an effective early warning system to communities living in four provinces in the Mekong River basin of Cambodia. In January 2006, the project began its fourth year of implementation of a five year plan funded by the United States Government Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA).

The goal of the project is to reduce the vulnerability of communities in the lower Mekong River basin to risk from higher-than-normal annual floods and flash flooding. The project targets 38 villages located in the four Mekong River basin provinces. The objectives of the project are to develop flood-referencing tools, methods, and protocols in order to enable flood-vulnerable populations in Cambodia to understand and effectively respond to MRC prepared warnings.

The project continues to strengthen the communication of flood-warning data and information at the community level. The project management is shifting from CRC national headquarters (NHQ) driven management focus to more of provincial branch level management with an increased involvement of Red Cross volunteers (RCVs).

### **2. IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS**

- Mekong River Commission: program technical support
- American Red Cross: financial and program technical support
- Cambodia Red Cross Society: project implementation
- National Commission for Disaster Management (NCDM): coordination in project implementation

### **3. OBJECTIVES AND ACTIVITIES**

**Objective I: Develop useful and understandable MRC flood information, which is responsive to the needs of, and promptly conveyed to the most flood-vulnerable communities in Cambodia.**

- Reinforce messages to RCVs, Commune Committee for Disaster Management (CCDM) staff, and District Committee for Disaster Management (DCDM) staff concerning flood disasters and flood preparedness.
- During the flood season, report village flood water levels to the CRC NHQ office (RCVs transfer flood marker information to CRC Sub-Branch Officers (SBOs) who in turn channel the information to the branch who then pass on to CRC NHQ).
- Train villagers in reading flood markers, writing information on billboards, and reporting water information to fellow villagers.
- Conduct flood early warning system dissemination in provincial schools before and during flood season.
- Produce a video relevant to flood impact and flood preparedness.

### **Objective I – Achievements to Date**

- The project began in 2003 in a pilot area of six villages in two flood-vulnerable provinces of Kandal and Prey Veng. In 2004, there was an expansion of 32 additional villages located in 4 flood-vulnerable provinces adding on Stung Treng and Kratie provinces. The project continues to work in the 38 villages.
- The project works with 76 RCVs who implement project activities in the 38 villages.
- Development and use of applicable tools and methods in the communities (38 billboards, 133 flood markers, six village map billboards, and 38 alarm boards).
- Flood-vulnerable communities receive MRC/ Department of Hydrology and River Works (DHRW) flood forecast and warnings.
- Cooperation with NCDM line departments, MRC, DHRW, and NGOs in early warning system dissemination and flood forecasts.
- Close coordination with local authorities in community.
- Community member participation and involvement in all aspects of project activities.
- Regular flow of information from RCVs to CRC NHQ office.
- Local flood information is recorded and shared with relevant partners.

### **Objective II: Develop tools, methods and protocols, to enable flood-vulnerable populations in Cambodia to effectively respond to MRC-prepared flood information.**

- Record information on the effects of flood waters at specified times and information is relayed to the CRC branch or sub-branch in the 38 villages.
- Conduct survey to measure information retention and knowledge of villagers based on information sharing from questionnaires and trainings.
- Distribute guidebooks, leaflets, and posters. CCDM staff and RCVs explain and distribute the materials during their village meetings, group meetings, and house visits.
- Ensure CCDM staff and RCVs maintain and repair billboards and flood markers in both dry and rainy seasons incorporating village contributions.

### **Objective II – Achievements to Date**

- Community flood preparedness and flood risk reduction information developed and disseminated.
- The project is equipped with computers including internet connection in all four CRC branches, a radio communication system in the CRC sub-branches, and Motorola radios for RCVs that enable them to receive and send flood information to and from the 38 villages.
- Incorporation and/or improvement of home flood markers among the population.

#### **4. LESSONS LEARNED**

- The communities use the information gained from the project to relocate and/or renovate their houses to a safer location. Livestock safe areas have also been incorporated.
- Through regularly group meetings as well as RCV and CCDM staff house to house visits, the communities have taken preventative measures concerning their possessions before the onsets of the floods.

#### **5. FUTURE PROGRAMMING**

- CCDM strengthens their capacity to mitigate flood disaster through the information provided by the flood early warning system project.
- Villagers continue to disseminate information amongst themselves and take appropriate actions.
- Focus on close cooperation and coordination with all relevant institutions, NGOs, and local authorities concerning the flood early warning system project in the communities.
- Conduct cross visit between villages in order to promote the flood early warning system project information.
- Further develop IEC materials.