

China and Cambodia: Integrated programming and cooperation with local authorities boost communities' disaster preparedness



Beneficiaries collaborating on a housing project – disaster risk reduction measures in China.

Summary

Both China and Cambodia are prey to natural disasters affecting the lives and livelihoods of millions of people. To help vulnerable communities prepare for and withstand such disasters, the National Societies are implementing community-based disaster preparedness (CBDP) programmes that have embraced integrated programming and cooperation with local authorities, both of which have contributed to the appropriateness, efficiency and sustainability of these programmes.

Integrated programming brings together a range of elements from traditionally separate sectors, such as health, livelihoods and disaster management.

Cooperation with local authorities looks at ways to involve the government and local authorities in programme implementation.

The China and Cambodia examples, each dealt with separately in this case study, illustrate how integrated programming addresses community risks and needs in a more holistic way and how working closely with local authorities can support the smooth implementation and sustainability of actions that lead to safer and more resilient communities. The two boxes at the end of the case study summarize learning from both country examples and highlight key points to consider when planning integrated programming or implementing CBDP programmes in cooperation with local authorities.

Integrated programming reduces vulnerability in China

Background

Floods in China as well as in other parts of Asia are increasing in frequency. Figures show that over the past ten years the number of weather-related disasters worldwide has risen by 69 per cent, with floods the most reported natural disasters in Asia, Africa and Europe. Subject to flash floods, landslides, earthquakes, typhoons and drought, China is among the most disaster-prone countries in the world. Annually, millions of hectares of farmland are ruined in China's flood season, and with them millions of livelihoods. Poor rural sanitation and unsafe and unprotected water supplies present enormous health hazards in China, particularly during flooding. Effluent washed from crude village latrines contaminates surface and ground water every flood season.

Many remote villages in China have limited access to public infrastructure and basic medical and educational services. Consequently, health and hygiene awareness can be minimal at best. Soaring urban populations, environmental degradation, poverty and disease meanwhile are compounding seasonal hazards to create situations of chronic vulnerability. Old ways of coping are proving inadequate.

The Red Cross Society of China has long played an active role in disaster response. It is often the first agency on site following a disaster. However, the 2001 floods in particular revealed the vulnerability of the rural poor when exposed to the combined force of disaster, poverty and threats to health.

National Societies have a major role to play in assisting vulnerable communities beyond simply providing relief after disasters. This includes increasing communities' capacity to prepare for disasters by raising their awareness of disaster risk and implementing mitigation measures promoting resilience to natural hazards. Recognizing that communities' safety and resilience are effectively enhanced through integrated actions, the National Society's Guangxi and Hunan provincial branches have developed a community vulnerability reduction (CVR) programme to assist the most flood-prone and flood-affected villages in a number of different but interrelated ways.

Community vulnerability reduction through integrated programming

The CVR programme, supported by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Department (ECHO), combines sanitation (toilet construction), health and



Local villagers prepare the way for the new water supply system.

hygiene education, disaster preparedness and water supply activities. Through this integrated approach, communities' access to a safe water supply, improved sanitation and hygiene education help prevent the spread of disease, while health education ensures that they have the resources and knowledge to support a sustainable improvement in their general health and living conditions. In addition, the inclusion of disaster preparedness activities encourages communities to develop locally appropriate strategies to mitigate the impact of disasters and reduce their vulnerability.

The CVR initiative has its origins in a sanitation programme launched in 2001 to construct toilets for villages. Hygiene education was included in the programme in 2002–03 and the water supply component was added in 2003–04. Around the same time, it was realized that, even though the interventions did respond to some of the communities' needs, communities could have had a greater say in what was done and in what order of priority. In other words, more could have been done to raise communities' awareness and involve them in decision-making. This led to the introduction of participatory assessment and hazard awareness (vulnerability and capacity assessment – VCA), which enabled the integration of a disaster preparedness component, including the planning of prevention and mitigation actions. In 2004, with the backing of the Australian Red Cross, disaster preparedness was integrated into the programme in Guanxi province and later in Hunan province with Danish Red Cross support.

The inclusion of disaster preparedness was relevant to the communities concerned. Community members

spoke of the frequency of flooding in their villages and the adverse impact it had on their lives. The objectives of the disaster preparedness component of the programme are to:

- support the development of the skills, knowledge and education resources of the provincial Red Cross in participatory disaster preparedness methods
- improve the preparedness of vulnerable villages by developing their capacities to identify and implement disaster mitigation solutions.

The four components of the programme – sanitation, health and hygiene education, water supply and disaster preparedness – make up the integrated CVR approach.

To ensure that appropriate communities were targeted, Red Cross staff, accompanied by local officials, visited villages and selected those to be included in the programme according to pre-agreed criteria. To benefit, villages had to:

- have been affected by flooding within the previous 12 months
- comprise mainly ethnic minority groups
- have an average income lower than the provincial average
- have limited infrastructure.

The CVR programme uses participatory methods to enhance the innate coping skills of vulnerable people and to boost sustainability. One key component of the participatory methodology is self-assessment, whereby communities ask themselves questions such as: What are the possible dangers? Where will they come from? How can we put people out of harm's way?

The participatory exercise involves mapping risks and gaining a perspective on a village's history of disaster to understand traditional coping and survival strategies. Based on what emerges from the assessment, the community develops its own tailored disaster preparedness plan and decides on a disaster risk mitigation project to undertake. The hazard reports and disaster maps developed by each community are passed on to local government and to national response agencies. As well as helping to build capacity, these tools can provide significant input to local governments' land use strategies and disaster preparedness policies.

Cooperation with local authorities

The CVR programme is being implemented in cooperation with the local authorities. The Red Cross Society of China's close working relationship with the government at the prefecture, county and village levels has facilitated this cooperation. The government and

local authorities have contributed to programme implementation in multiple ways and provided encouragement, resources and sustainability. For their part, the local authorities have benefited from training and knowledge sharing during programme implementation.

Local authorities were involved in the programme in a variety of ways, including:

- providing technical support and advice, for example in assessing the need for and designing mitigation measures
- providing equipment, especially for small-scale construction projects
- giving visibility to the programme, thereby encouraging community members to participate in it
- taking part in assessment and planning visits
- undertaking aspects of programme implementation, e.g., health education
- upgrading other infrastructure, such as roads and drains
- assisting in the development of information materials
- matching funds for some disaster mitigation projects, according to their capacities.

Outcomes

The CVR programme achieved a number of positive outcomes in the way of improved infrastructure and behavioural change:

- Communities and individual households have a safe water supply, toilets and better health and hygiene practices.
- Community members have changed their behaviour in a way that supports risk reduction and preparedness, for example not cutting bamboo along the river banks knowing that bamboo helps to prevent erosion of the river bank, or evacuating their belongings to community centres after receiving a flood warning.
- Villagers implemented various disaster mitigation measures, including maintenance or repair of water pumps, planting on hillsides to prevent landslides, digging wells to prepare for drought, and building small dams.
- The capacities of the provincial Red Cross branches have been increased through training and coaching.
- Awareness of participatory methods and decision-making has improved both in the provincial Red Cross and in the communities.

Lessons learned

- Integrated programming (including health, safe water provision, and prevention and mitigation actions) provides a more holistic response to the needs of communities. However, implementing several

components of an integrated programme simultaneously requires human resources and expertise in the different sectors. This can be partially overcome by partnering with local authorities, who can provide expertise and resources and can implement certain components of the programme, such as health education.

- For the Red Cross Society of China, the government and the communities concerned, the CVR programme represents a new approach to supporting vulnerable communities by addressing the hazardous environments in which they live. Through the programme, the concept of disaster preparedness has been embraced by all stakeholders. Initially, however, non-structural issues, such as prevention, mitigation, hazard awareness and education, were characterized as a “hard sell” because they produce nothing tangible. It was therefore necessary to spend time and effort explaining the importance of preparedness work and motivating both the communities and the local authorities.
- Community participation is essential from the outset in a community-based programme. Communities may not, however, be familiar with such an approach in a society which is traditionally top-down and whose experience of knowledge transfer is primarily through formal lecture-based formats. There is a need, therefore, to introduce a grassroots participatory approach gradually and to build it into programme design so that staff and volunteers receive relevant training to enable them to empower communities to participate fully in the process.
- Community participation and commitment can be further enhanced by requesting that the community contributes resources to the programme. In the CVR programme, community members contributed their labour for structural mitigation projects, such as small-scale construction.
- In all CDBP programmes, it is a challenge to maintain focus on the disaster preparedness and risk reduction aspects once a main priority has been addressed through some kind of mitigation measure. For sustainability and continued preparedness for seasonal disasters, it is important to emphasize the need for longer-term planning and preparedness. This can be done through cost-free refresher activities, such as reviewing evacuation plans or conducting further awareness-raising in the community. In addition, lobbying for external support for second and third priority mitigation measures should be continued.

The way forward

- The CVR programme has been extended to a third province, Chongqing, which like Guangxi and



Red Cross volunteers and local authority staff conducting dengue awareness training.

Hunan suffers annual flood damage. In addition, in light of the success of the CVR programme, the Sichuan branch of the Red Cross Society of China is planning to use the approach as the basis to support the recovery of communities affected by the earthquake that struck the province in May 2008.

- A general CVR implementation kit has been developed and can be used by other Chinese provinces and adapted to other country contexts.
- The current focus is on sustaining village disaster planning even after the CVR programme is completed. Hazard reports and disaster maps developed as part of the programme are also shared with local authorities in order to inform future planning.
- Some of the activities, such as health education, can be continued by local authorities even when the National Society completes the programme, thereby increasing sustainability. Moreover, the communities are now more aware of the hazards in their environment and, with their capacities enhanced, can continue to work with the local authorities in reducing the risks they face.
- There is a pool of VCA facilitators able to conduct VCA training independently and facilitate a VCA process in local communities.
- Recent CDBP programmes have included a greater diversity of mitigation measures and education programmes, based on local needs. For example, in Hubei province, a safe school component has been added: through the incorporation of disaster training in local school curricula and simulation exercises, teachers and students gain valuable knowledge of what to do in the event of a disaster and disseminate that knowledge to the rest of the community.
- The Red Cross Society of China and its Hong Kong branch are discussing the possibility of setting up a CDBP practitioner group to further foster the sharing and exchange of CDBP best practices and experiences in China.

Sustainability through cooperation with local authorities in Cambodia

Background

Cambodia experiences seasonal flooding, as well as agricultural drought. Some of the lowland areas of Kratie province are bordered by the Mekong river to the West, a Mekong tributary to the North and a series of lakes to the East. In the rainy season, the Mekong river overflows its banks, fertilizing fields and flooding the forest floor enabling fish spawning. While this phenomenon sustains the farming and fishing livelihoods of the local inhabitants, it also puts them at high risk when the annual Mekong flooding is higher or longer than normal. The situation is sometimes compounded by flash floods. Provincial authorities have ranked the area as the most flood-prone in the province.

The Cambodian Red Cross Society is the largest humanitarian agency in Cambodia, with branches in all of the country's 24 provinces and municipalities. The National Society draws its strength from an extensive network of volunteers that is well recognized by the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and donors. The Cambodian Red Cross Society is officially recognized as an auxiliary to the government of Cambodia, particularly in terms of emergency relief and disaster response.

Throughout the late 1990s, the Cambodian Red Cross Society responded to the frequent floods, but preparedness activities were not a component of those responses. Guided by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (the International Federation), the Cambodian Red Cross Society began to think about how it could assist the vulnerable communities in the flood-prone areas more effectively by increasing their resilience. As a result the Cambodian Red Cross Society initiated a preparedness and mitigation project in 1998, in response to severe flooding that occurred in the previous two years.

The idea is to help communities cope better with the hazardous environment that provides them with a life-sustaining income but that is at the same time a threat to their livelihoods. The programme supports the establishment and development of commune disaster management committees and empowers villagers, local volunteers and community-based organizations to work together to increase understanding of the various hazards they face, to raise awareness of risks and to deal with disasters when they occur.

Reducing risk and improving preparedness

The Cambodian Red Cross Society CBDP programme launched in 2003 drew on the experiences and lessons learned from the earlier community-based flood mitigation and preparedness programme. It has since evolved, carefully incorporating further lessons from each previous phase. With the support of Disaster Preparedness-ECHO (DipECHO) and the Danish Red Cross, the CBDP programme is currently being implemented in 27 villages in 5 communes in the 4 disaster-prone provinces of Kratie, Prey Veng, Pursat and Svay Rieng. Targeting is based on a relatively high exposure to slow-onset flood hazard and to a lesser extent on agricultural drought hazard.

At the beginning of the programme, a VCA was conducted in the 27 villages by Cambodian Red Cross Society staff and volunteers. The most vulnerable groups, such as people living in marginalized areas, women with many children under the age of 12, the elderly or widowed, people living with HIV and the disabled, were identified through transparent and participatory methods.

The VCA encouraged participation from all sectors of the community and led to the formulation of village disaster reduction plans by commune disaster management committees, facilitated by Cambodian Red Cross Society volunteers and staff. The plans are intended to serve as guides for households and communities in undertaking activities to prepare for or mitigate the impact of various hazards, including flooding. They contain measures that communities can take using local resources, as well as other initiatives that require external support. The plans consist of both structural and non-structural disaster risk reduction measures. Non-structural measures include dengue awareness, fish raising, flood-risk awareness and preparedness, and clean-up campaigns, which also address health-related risks. Other issues in relation to livelihoods (e.g., livestock care) are also covered in order to facilitate recovery after a disaster.

Once a village disaster reduction plan is agreed, the commune disaster management committee organizes a meeting before each flood season to prepare the community for possible hazards. Teams made up of community members and Red Cross volunteers are trained to carry out various tasks, making use of local expertise and experience. The various teams include: a flood forecast and early warning dissemination team; an evacuation team equipped with a community boat; a team to clean and set up safe areas; and a team to educate communities in flood-related health issues.

A substantial amount of training and local capacity-building is required to prepare people to undertake the activities and to foster a participatory environment. Cambodian Red Cross Society staff members have taken part in regional VCA training, as well as training to build specific skills such as communication, facilitation and conflict resolution. Trainers from the National Society's headquarters have conducted training of trainers in disaster preparedness, community organizing and field-based VCA for Cambodian Red Cross Society development officers, field assistants and Red Cross leaders. They in turn have conducted training for all Red Cross volunteers and members of commune disaster management committees covered under the programme. Members of the commune committees also enhanced their knowledge and understanding of disaster risk reduction through orientation meetings and structured meetings to discuss the integration of village disaster reduction plans into commune development plans.

A notable improvement in the conduct of training can be seen in the adoption of a “learning by doing” approach, whereby Red Cross leaders and volunteers are provided with support and coaching while conducting a VCA and can thus actively improve their skills.

Cooperation with local authorities

An important aspect of the CDBP programme has been cooperation with local authorities. Traditionally, the authorities' focus has been on disaster relief and response. As an auxiliary to the public authorities, the Cambodian Red Cross Society has taken a leadership role in promoting disaster preparedness and risk reduction. This has also meant sharing its expertise, skills and knowledge in CDBP and advocating the usefulness of preparedness and risk reduction measures. The Hyogo Framework for Action has increased interest in risk reduction, paving the way for the Cambodian Red Cross Society to work closely with the local authorities in building safer and more resilient communities.

In order for the preparedness and risk reduction measures to be sustainable, it is essential to find linkages with local development planning and resources. In the case of Cambodia, the linkages have been mostly through commune disaster management committees. The efforts of the National Disaster Management Committee to mobilize and support commune committees have been very limited. Therefore, the training and activities undertaken by the Cambodian Red Cross Society for commune committees have played an important role in improving their functionality.



Local community members participate in the project review process.

Through training and participation in VCAs, the commune committees have also become fully supportive of the CDBP programme.

Members of commune disaster management committees play a key role in facilitating programme meetings and activities. This is particularly important in a context where conducting village-wide activities is traditionally viewed as the prerogative of commune or village authorities. Through these committees, it has also been possible to feed the contents of the village disaster reduction plans into commune development plans.¹ For example, in Kratie, one commune disaster management committee reported that all the identified priorities and projects in their commune development plan were disaster risk related. This came about naturally since the commune is one of the most flood-prone in the entire province and serves to illustrate the links between disaster risk reduction and development. In addition to working closely with the commune disaster management committees, the National Society has been more proactive in involving other local stakeholders, such as village health workers, community-based organizations and village livestock agents.

The value of the CDBP programme is that disaster risk reduction is now viewed holistically and the identification of risk reduction measures is more systematic. In previous years, for example, wells were constructed without regard to known flood water levels. Now, development projects also take into consideration natural hazards and possible measures to reduce risks.

Outcomes

- Village disaster reduction plans have been drawn up in the targeted communities, and disaster risk

¹ DipECHO, A Model of Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction in Cambodia, DipECHO evaluation, March 2008.

mitigation activities, including health, livelihoods and disaster preparedness, are planned and being implemented. For example, a better evacuation system for livestock has meant that in certain villages no cattle have died during the annual flood season.

- Village disaster risk reduction measures have been incorporated into commune development plans. This helps to increase awareness of disaster risk reduction among local authorities and encourages them to provide longer-term support and resources in this area.
- Awareness of disaster preparedness and risk reduction has increased both among the local authorities (e.g., commune disaster management committees) and among Cambodian Red Cross Society staff and volunteers.
- A functioning model has been developed and improved over time for CBDP in Cambodia. With this model, the programme can be expanded to other provinces by local authorities, NGOs and other agencies. In addition, it can be used as an example for other countries.
- The Cambodian Red Cross Society is considered one of the leading agencies in the country for disaster preparedness and risk reduction. The government and NGOs are interested in collaborating with it, as well as learning from its approach.
- National and local disaster risk reduction forums have been established, providing opportunities for different agencies working in the areas of disaster risk reduction and disaster management to share experiences and find more efficient ways of working together.

Lessons learned

- Starting a new programming area, such as disaster preparedness and risk reduction (new to the National Society and to the government), requires that time and effort be put into advocacy and into building an approach best suited to the context. Therefore, such programmes should be planned with a long-term outlook and not just as brief, one-year interventions.
- The integrated approach to assessment and village preparedness and risk reduction planning, which also considers health risks and risks to livestock, ensured that vulnerabilities were addressed more broadly (including from a health and livelihood perspective) and multiple hazards were taken into account. Using International Federation tools for integrated programming, such as VCA, as an entry point facilitates a holistic approach to risks and capacities.
- Participatory methods ensured that community members found the identification of vulnerable groups and the focus of mitigation measures fair.
- At times, communities concentrate on undertaking structural mitigation activities and pay less attention

to continuous preparedness and risk reduction measures. It is important to encourage them to introduce continuous preparedness (especially for seasonal hazards) at the same time as implementing one-off risk reduction measures. Efficient cooperation with local authorities can assist in this.

- While community volunteers may build their skills and knowledge through the development of awareness and understanding of the environment in which they live, they may still lack authority and leadership to mobilize the community. This problem can be remedied by linking the volunteers with the local authorities in order to provide them with the authority required. In addition, on-the-job coaching of volunteers has proven to be an effective way to build their skills and leadership qualities.

The way forward

- The CBDP model developed with the Cambodian Red Cross Society will be used to expand the programme to other provinces.
- The sustainability of the programme is a key consideration. The aim is to hand the programme over to the local authorities so that they can carry forward activities with some support from Cambodian Red Cross Society branches (e.g., local authorities could facilitate the updating of risk reduction plans and submit them to branches for fund-raising).
- Based on its CBDP programme experiences, the Cambodian Red Cross Society has devised a holistic disaster management strategy and is working on forming operational alliances with international and external partners to seek support to implement the strategy.



Commune Committee for Disaster management conducts programme evaluation.

Key points to consider when planning integrated programming

- A community's risks, needs and capacities should be viewed holistically in the assessment phase of the programme. This holistic assessment will work as a basis for integrated programming.
- Starting with a pilot project or with just a few communities can be a good idea in order to test the appropriateness of the programme's approach. Later, the programme can be expanded to a wider area using the tested and refined concept.
- If the National Society's capacity to support activities in different sectors is limited, partnerships with local authorities and NGOs can be a useful way of sharing the workload.
- The National Society needs to be ready at the organizational level to cooperate between sectors and share resources efficiently across departments.

Key points to consider when implementing CBDP in cooperation with local authorities

- If disaster preparedness and risk reduction have not been a high priority previously, advocacy will be required to motivate the government and local authorities to participate in CBDP. Involving local officials in training, assessment visits, planning processes and mitigation activities is an effective way of demonstrating to them the usefulness of disaster preparedness and risk reduction. In doing so, a National Society will often end up building not only its own capacity but also that of the local authorities.
- Raising awareness of disaster preparedness and risk reduction can be carried out simultaneously at different levels of the government by using different platforms and government commitments to international frameworks such as the Hyogo Framework for Action.
- Local authorities can contribute to a CBDP programme in a variety of ways (see China case study). Programmes should aim to match the needs and capacities of the communities with the capacities and resources of the local authorities.
- If local authorities acknowledge the programme, it can encourage communities to implement programme activities. However, in contexts where participatory methods of analysing risks, planning and decision-making are new to the community, the presence of local authorities can sometimes inhibit community members from voicing their opinions. Therefore, the gradual introduction of participatory methods should be considered in contexts where knowledge transfer is traditionally done through lecture-based methods.
- The sustainability of the CBDP programme outcomes can be enhanced by handing over some of the responsibilities to the local authorities (e.g. local health officials can continue with health and hygiene education even after the completion of the programme). Sustainability will be greater if the handover is planned from the early stages of the programme (e.g. as part of the roadmap) and the required capacities are built while the programme is under way.

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