

### 3.3.5 Lao PDR

#### Lao PDR

#### Empowering the Community for Disaster Risk Reduction through a Community-Based Disaster Management Project in Champasack District, Champasack Province, Lao PDR

##### Background

Champasack district in Champasack province is located about 70 km south of the capital Pakse in a tract of land between the Mekong river and the Thai border in the southern part of Lao PDR. Champasack district covers 800 km<sup>2</sup> and is home to over 50,000 people. The majority of the population of the district consists of lowland Laos. Every few years the eastern half of the district is inundated with destructive flooding while the western half suffers short periods of drought and flash flooding. Apart from a community development project started by World Vision Laos in 1998, the needs of these communities have been largely ignored as disaster risks are seen as small-scale annual events.

The National Disaster Management Office and the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, in conjunction with World Vision Laos, implemented a three-year project funded by AusAID entitled “Champasack Community Based Disaster Management (CBDM)” between April 2001 and March 2004.

The Champasack CBDM project was designed to meet the distinct but related needs of people living in the two regions of Mekong and Nongtae. The project sought to introduce a new approach to assist people to learn to live with disaster risk and mitigate the effects of flooding while at the same time maximizing flood benefits. It required a socio-economic rather than a physical view of disaster risks. This approach regards flood and drought as risk factors whose effects can be exacerbated by inappropriate human activities and responses. The project sought to help people realize that they are not helpless victims of hazards and that by adapting their behavior they can reduce the disaster risks.

##### Project Objectives:

- Develop and promote environmentally and socially appropriate early warning systems and community awareness of disaster risks and response options.
- Promote agriculture production practices that are more appropriate to the local environment and will improve security at the family and village level.

The project used a participatory approach to build sustainable institutional capability of provincial and district level government agencies to assist villages to develop community-owned organizations, systems and processes to mitigate, prepare for, respond to and recover from the effects of drought and floods. It had three significant program outputs.

- Early warning and response capacity were enhanced.
- A system of small rain catchment weirs was constructed.
- Diversified flood- and drought-resilient agricultural practices were established.

##### Activities Undertaken and Major Achievements

###### 1. Training

A total of 4856 individuals from 39 villages directly benefited from training. Of these, 2,136 were male and 2,182 female. The target beneficiaries comprised hydrology officials, members of Village Disaster Protection Units, regional, district and provincial-level government officials from departments of education, health, agriculture, planning, labour and social welfare and Lao women’s union members, teachers, students, village health workers, and farmers. The training covered skills development in the areas of early warning, preparedness and risk reduction from the community to district-level, such as measurement of precipitation, water level gauging/recording, early warning, participatory hazard and vulnerability mapping, preparedness planning, community-based first aid, community-based disaster management, weir management and dry season cultivation.

### 2. Raising Awareness

The work of raising awareness focused on school children and villagers. The VDPUs conducted village-level awareness activities in some cases. A total of 3904 individuals, including school children and villagers, benefited from interventions to raise awareness. The topics covered included flood and drought risks, protective actions for these two hazards and water and land-use planning.

### 3. Group Formation

The project established groups at the village level in order to enhance the preparedness capacity of the communities and enable them to reduce risks of food insecurity. The groups formed in this regard were:

- Village Disaster Protection Unit;
- Farmers' Group;
- Weir Management Committee;
- Village Health Workers.



PLA Data collection



Capacity and vulnerability mapping

#### 4. Infrastructure Development/Weir Construction

Weirs have been constructed in three villages out of four. They have allowed people to carry out small-scale dry season cultivation and support their livelihoods, either by consuming the produce directly or through its sale.



Weir constructed for villages in drought zone

#### 5. Mapping

Each village has a Hazard Map, which is kept in the village temple (Wat), except for Phanoneua village, where it is kept in the village head's house. The map provides information on hazards, low-lying areas, vulnerable families and resources to cope with disaster risks.

#### Major Achievements

The project has achieved its objectives in the Mekong region. These included the establishment of socially appropriate early warning systems and increased awareness of risks. An integrated and effective early warning system is in place. The system comprises gauging of water levels and recording by hydrology stations, issuance of warning information to radio and television stations, receiving information by the Village Disaster Protection Unit (VDPVs) and the issuance of warnings to villagers by the VDPU. The VDPU would then organize community level evacuations, if required. Communities provide information to the district about risks and vulnerabilities. The district authorities collect information on rainfall and water levels in the rivers and pass it on to the provincial authorities.

The achievement of the objective of raising awareness of disaster risks has been partially achieved in some villages, while in others it has been achieved fully. The people who have benefited from the process of raising awareness on disaster risks include the VDPU leadership, members of farmer's groups, school children and teachers.

#### - Total Budget

US\$420,000

#### - Contact Details

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