

FLOOD EARLY WARNING IN THE MEKONG RIVER BASIN

BACKGROUND

- The Mekong is one of the world’s largest river basins, and flooding has been part of the river’s annual cycle since earliest human habitation. Though many of the effects of flooding are highly beneficial—by enriching aquatic habitat and replenishing soil fertility—higher-than-average annual floods and flash floods cause loss of lives and livelihoods, damage to infrastructure, and the disruption of social and economic development activities.
- In January 2003, USAID/OFDA and the Mekong River Commission (MRC) began an innovative project to strengthen warnings to communities most at-risk to floods. The project works with the most flood-vulnerable communities in Cambodia to develop useful and understandable flood information for these communities. In addition, the project develops tools, methods, and protocols, with the help of community-based implementing partners, to enable flood-vulnerable populations to effectively receive and act upon MRC flood information.
- MRC, in cooperation with the National Meteorological and Hydrological Service (NMHSs), aims to improve the dissemination of flood forecasts and warnings to selected communities and develop low-technology tools to help communities reference the flood warnings to their local circumstances. Lessons learned in program design and implementation in Cambodia may eventually be applied in Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and other Asian river basins with high vulnerability to flooding.



A Red Cross staff member shows a water marker.

PROGRAM UPDATE

- In cooperation with the non-governmental organizations (NGOs), Cambodian Red Cross (CRC), American Red Cross (ARC), and Action Contre la Faim (ACF), MRC and Cambodian NMHS are providing site-specific flood forecasts to an initial 60,000 people in 40 flood-at-risk villages in Cambodia. In addition, MRC and its partners are working with communities to improve preparedness for floods in the basin.
- To date, MRC, Cambodian NMHS, and NGO partners have installed flood marks and bill boards that are used for flood warning to aid communities in relating Mekong flood forecasts to their villages. In addition, CRC staff and volunteers have been trained on flood early warning and are working with village leaders and villagers to raise awareness and explain the use of forecast information. MRC and NGO partners are also working with villagers to prepare early warning actions for each pilot village.
- Villagers use forecasts not only to manage potential emergency situations but also for crop production and monitoring. Villagers are now taking the initiative for flood monitoring and strengthening local capacities in flood preparedness.

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