



DISASTER INFORMATION PROVIDERS IN CAMBODIA



International Development
Australian Broadcasting Corporation



Background

This report has been prepared by the International Development Unit of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABCID) based on background research, and discussions held between July and August 2014 with media organisations, disaster management authorities, and local and international non-government organisations. The overall focus of consultations was on community resilience, how citizens get information during disasters and opportunities to improve two-way communication between affected people and support providers via the media.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC)

As Australia's national broadcaster the ABC functions as Australia's emergency broadcaster. The ABC uses its radio, television and online services to deliver timely, accurate and relevant information to affected communities during fires, floods and other natural disasters and emergencies. The ABC also plays an important role in building community resilience and the ability to prevent, prepare, respond and recover during times of adversity. Local radio (54 stations across the country) has an estimated national penetration rate of 99.4 per cent and is often the only source of vital weather and emergency service information for regional and rural Australians.

This emergency broadcasting role is supported by agreements with all state and territory emergency services. The ABC has formal and informal arrangements allowing emergency agencies and recovery specialists to use the local radio network to deliver emergency warnings. Local radio managers are active members of most state and local emergency management committees.

The ABC provides emergency broadcast training for its local radio staff to ensure that they are adequately prepared for emergency situations. In recent years, local radio has provided emergency broadcasting for fires, cyclones, flooding, storms, tsunami warnings, heatwaves, equine flu outbreaks and locust plagues. The ABC has provided emergency broadcasting in every state and territory, on numerous occasions.

Radio and television broadcasting are very effective methods of communicating important information to large groups of people before, during and after emergency situations. Local radio services are particularly effective, as broadcasters have established relationships with local communities and detailed local knowledge that may assist listeners.

Acknowledgements

ABCID appreciates the assistance provided by Australian Aid and all organisations that shared information during consultations.

This report is not intended to be an all-encompassing exploration of the many disaster related projects that have been, and are being, conducted in Cambodia. We acknowledge the work of the organisations dedicated to decreasing disaster related risks within the country.

While it was not possible to consult all relevant actors, discussions were held with a range of organisations, in the media, government, disaster management and humanitarian support sectors to establish an overview of the major challenges facing the delivery of emergency information to citizens.

This report is based on the opinions and perspectives of the participants and does not necessarily reflect the views of ABCID or Australian Aid.

Acronyms

ABCID	Australian Broadcasting Corporation International Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CCAP	Cambodia Communication Assistance Project
CCDM	Commune Committee for Disaster Management
CRC	Cambodian Red Cross
DCCDM	District Committees for Disaster Management
DRR	disaster risk reduction
HRF	Humanitarian Response Forum
MoInf	Ministry of Information
NCDM	National Committee for Disaster Management
NGO	non-government organisation
PDI	Provincial Department of Information (radio stations)
PDMC	Provincial Disaster Management Committee
PSLP	Public Sector Linkages Program
RFA	Radio Free Asia
RNK	Radio National Kampuchea
RUPP	Royal University of Phnom Penh
TVK	National Television of Kampuchea
UN	United Nations
UN-DMT	United Nations Disaster Management Team
VDMG	Village Disaster Management Group
VOA	Voice of America
VOD	Voice of Democracy
WMC	Women's Media Centre



Country context

Cambodia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in Asia. Floods, storms and drought are the primary hazards that affect the population of approximately 15 million people. These events have caused significant loss of life and substantial damage to infrastructure, agriculture and the economy.

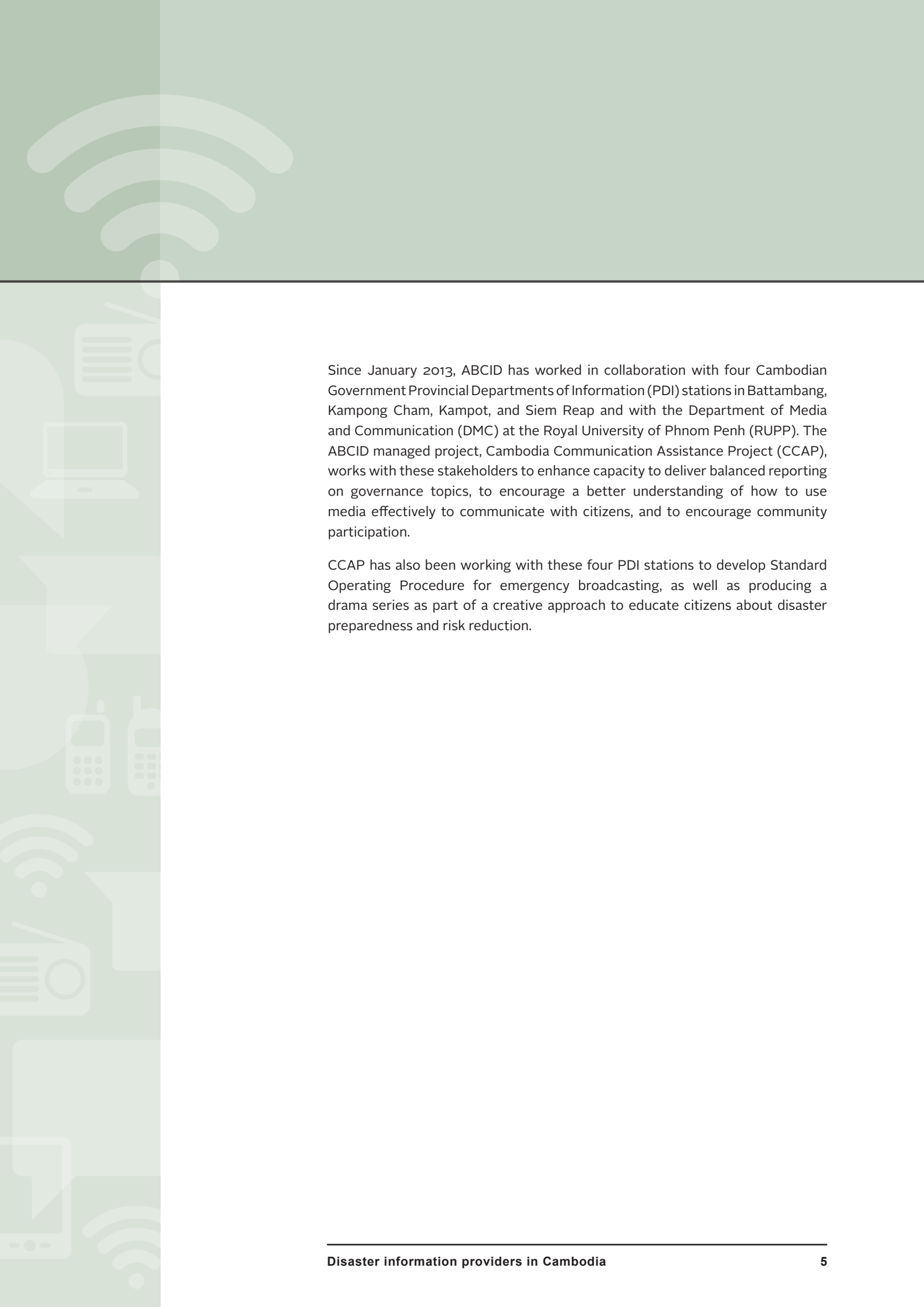
Flooding usually hits Cambodia between August and October. In 2013, floods killed 168 and affected 1.8 million other people, 300,000 rice fields, 1242 schools, 78 health centres, and 533 pagodas. The estimated cost to the state was \$US 356 million according to the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM).

The NCDM is responsible for the coordination of disaster management. Headed by the Prime Minister, NCDM was set up in 1995 and consists of 22 members from different Ministries, Cambodian Armed Forces, Civil Aviation Authority and the Cambodian Red Cross. This body is supported by Disaster Management Working Groups within ministries, Cabinet, Provincial Disaster Management Committees (PCDM), District Committees for Disaster Management (DCDM) and Commune Committee for Disaster Management (CCDM). The Village Disaster Management Group (VDMG) is the community level body for disaster management.

The NCDM also collaborates with the many international and non-government organisations operating within the country through the Working Group on Disaster Coordination, Response and Rehabilitation. The NCDM is the lead agency in this grouping in cooperation with the Cambodian Red Cross (CRC), the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the United Nations Disaster Management Team (UN-DMT). This working group consists of five sub-groups.

The Cambodian media is relatively young and much of it is owned by the state or the business elite with close ties to government. Only a limited number of international media outlets available in the country, such as Radio French International (RFI), Voice of Democracy (VOD), and Radio Australia (ABC), are considered independent, as they provide news and information that is not affiliated with a political party.

Coverage of emergencies in Cambodia is mainly the domain of the network of government owned provincial radio and television broadcasters scattered around the country.



Since January 2013, ABCID has worked in collaboration with four Cambodian Government Provincial Departments of Information (PDI) stations in Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampot, and Siem Reap and with the Department of Media and Communication (DMC) at the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP). The ABCID managed project, Cambodia Communication Assistance Project (CCAP), works with these stakeholders to enhance capacity to deliver balanced reporting on governance topics, to encourage a better understanding of how to use media effectively to communicate with citizens, and to encourage community participation.

CCAP has also been working with these four PDI stations to develop Standard Operating Procedure for emergency broadcasting, as well as producing a drama series as part of a creative approach to educate citizens about disaster preparedness and risk reduction.

Major disaster risks

Of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries, Cambodia ranks first in risk of citizen mortality from floods as 33 per cent of the country's total area is in a high flood risk zone.¹

Following the start of the monsoon season, flooding generally occurs in the country from late August to early October. The most damaging are generally the floods caused by the overflow of the Mekong River and its tributaries and the Tonle Sap Lake (Great Lake), the largest freshwater body in the country. The provinces of Battambang, Kampong Chhnang, Kampong Speu, Kampong Thom, Kampot, Kandal, Pursat and Rattanakiri are regularly hit by flash flooding. The much slower but prolonged flooding is caused by the overflow of Tonle Sap river and Mekong tributaries, inundating the provinces of Kampong Cham, Kratie, Kandal, Prey Veng, Stung Treng, Svay Rieng and Takeo.²

Although not usually hit directly by typhoons, Cambodia is subject to heavy rains from typhoons as they make their way inland through neighboring Vietnam. These heavy rains exacerbate seasonal flooding. Droughts are also an increasingly reoccurring slow-onset disaster in many agricultural areas.

These consecutive annual disasters, coupled with cyclical droughts, jeopardize development gains and increase the vulnerability of people by reducing their opportunity to recover. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) in 2013, up to 34.5 per cent of Cambodia's GDP is accrued in areas at risk of reoccurring disasters and more than 31 per cent of the population, or 4.1 million people, live in a disaster prone region.

Summarised Table of Natural Disasters in Cambodia from 1900 to 2014

		# OF EVENTS	KILLED	TOTAL AFFECTED	DAMAGE (000 US\$)
Drought	Drought	5	–	6550000	138000
Flood	Unspecified	1	506	29000	–
	Coastal flood	1	–	124475	–
	Flash flood	1	7	535904	500
	Riverine flood	15	1128	12113708	1418600
Storm	Tropical cyclone	3	44	178091	10

Source: "EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database, www.em-dat.net - Université Catholique de Louvain - Brussels - Belgium"

¹ Center for Excellence in Disaster Management & Humanitarian Assistance (2014) Cambodia Disaster Management Reference Handbook <http://www.coe-dmha.org/shared/pdf/disaster-mgmt-ref-hbks/disaster-mgmt-ref-hdbk-2014-cambodia.pdf>

² ADPC (2014) Cambodia Report http://www.adrc.asia/countryreport/KHM/2013/KHM_CR2013B.pdf

Media consumption

As of 2011, there were 52 radio stations and 96 television channels in Cambodia, including 59 cable outlets in the 24 provinces.³ Every Cambodian has access to one or more form of media such as print, radio, television or the internet. In contrast to many countries in the region, radio and television are equally important as information providers with 79.8 per cent of people relying on radio and 78.2 per cent on TV as their main source of information. Cambodia was the first country in the world with more mobile phones than fixed-line phones.⁴ According to recent research (2014), 94 per cent of Cambodians own a mobile phone.⁵

The two major national broadcasters, National Television of Kampuchea (TVK) and National Radio of Kampuchea (RNK) are departments within the Ministry of Information (MoInf). While government owned, they are dependent on commercial advertising for revenue. FM broadcasters are very popular in Cambodia and, as is the case in many countries, the government broadcasters (RNK and TVK) have experienced declining audiences over recent years.

The media environment in Cambodia is still evolving and much of the media is either government owned or controlled in some way. Consequently most, but not all media outlets, are viewed as political rather than business assets. A few small-scale media operators are supported or run by the opposition party and only a handful of media are run as business entities or as politically unaligned not-for-profit entities such as the Women's Media Centre (WMC) and Voice of Democracy (VOD), Sarika FM and Radio Behive. Interestingly, Sarika FM sees itself as a public service broadcaster as it operates in collaboration with non-government organisations (NGOs) to explore issues of corruption, current affairs, education and good governance.

Internet penetration is still estimated to be just under 20 per cent and social media access is still very much concentrated around major centres. For example, analysis of Radio National Battambang's (RNB) Facebook page shows that of its approximately 1,000 followers, the majority are aged between 18-28 and were born in the region but are now living in Phnom Penh or other urban areas so the connection was a tool to keep in touch with 'news from home'.

At this stage it does not appear that social media is a primary tool to disseminate information to target communities during an emergency. However, this is most likely to change in the coming years as social media is taken up more in rural areas as access to the Internet improves.

3 ABC ID (2012) CCAP Baseline Media Research http://www.abcinternationaldevelopment.net.au/sites/default/files/CCAP%20Baseline%20Report%20FINAL_ABC_o.pdf

4 We are Social (2012) Social, Digital and mobile In Cambodia <http://wearesocial.net/blog/2012/11/social-digital-mobile-cambodia/>

5 Phong, K & Sola, J (2014) Mobile Phones in Cambodia. The Asia Foundation <https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/MobilephonesinCB.pdf>



Observations on media as disaster information providers

Emergency broadcasting in Cambodia is mainly the domain of the network of government owned provincial radio and television broadcasters, scattered around the country. The national broadcaster RNK, is currently facing transmitter problems and only broadcasts to within 70 kilometres of the capital. However, they do still play an important role in advising the public about hazards relating to the increasingly regular flooding that occurs within Phnom Penh.

The national TV channel, TVK, and other broadcasters such as the Women's Media Centre (WMC), provide a level of emergency broadcasting. However, the focus is on providing information during and after an emergency rather than disaster risk reduction and preparation activities.

The NCDM has recently requested all ministries to create their own Emergency Response Committee (ERC). The Ministry of Information is the first to form their group and are now working on procedures to formalise how they will respond and work with information providers and broadcasters in a disaster. They envisage that the ERC will include a spokesperson to act as a focal point for information and respond to media requests, meaning that information would be more accessible rather than media having to try and access provincial or national authorities that might be too busy during an emergency. They also plan to make greater use of social media to disseminate information.

There is no separate media regulator in Cambodia and the Ministry of Information oversees media enterprises. These restrictions make it difficult for media to play an effective role in analysing the government's response to a disaster. The WMC provide an interesting example of a popular broadcaster not aligned with the government providing emergency broadcasting to its audience. Survey results from IndoChina research estimates that up to 60 per cent of the Cambodian radio audience listen to WMC. The broadcaster is 40 per cent donor funded, 60 per cent self funded and the majority of staff are women. The station provides a number of educational programs focused towards women's empowerment, health and financial independence as well as regular news programming and programs from Radio Free Asia (RFA) and Voice of America (VOA). In its licence, WMC agrees to avoid politically sensitive issues and to focus on women's empowerment.⁶

⁶ Namrata Bansal (2012), 'Public Service Broadcasting in Kampuchea: A Transitory Phase' in Sundeep R Muppidi and Premila Manvi (eds), *Public Service Broadcasting and Its Role in Raising Civic Consciousness: Case Studies from Asia* (2012) Singapore: AMIC



Media coverage of disasters

The approach to emergency broadcasting is unregulated and ad hoc. While RNK did provide a level of emergency broadcasting, including running DRR educational forums in the lead up to wet season as well as sustained coverage during and after the disaster, a transmitter failure in 2013 has left the national broadcaster with a range of approximately 70kms radius around Phnom Penh.

Despite its current limitations, RNK does have a positive approach to emergency broadcasting and is interested in building capacity when transmission is restored. Importantly, the organisation is interested in discussing strategies to re-build the trust that has been lost in its listener base and to once again promote the national broadcaster as a trusted source of information before, during and after a disaster.

The relationship between RNK and the government-owned provincial broadcasters is minimal. RNK will share national stories with the provinces and, if a story is significant, provincial journalists will send their story to their national counterpart. Besides this the stations operate fairly independently. There is also a marked difference in the institutional capacity of each station with different staffing skill levels, infrastructure and policies relating to reporting, including during an emergency.

Funded by Australian Aid, ABCID is working with four provincial stations in Battambang, Kampong Cham, Kampot and Siem Reap to enhance the quality of radio production by building the capacity of media practitioners, as well as improving institutional preparedness through emergency broadcasting plans. Radio dramas also have been produced on drought, flooding and storms. However, there is no live emergency reporting on disasters yet.

At times media has acted to pressure government to react when a disaster has occurred. Radio National Battambang (RNB) cited an example where a community member had informed them that river levels were very high. No information had come in from the PDMC, so the station called the deputy governor for information. The deputy governor then used the station to announce that water would be released from a dam and residents should prepare for possible flooding. RNB often passes on information received from the audience to local authorities for action.

The WMC has developed an Emergency Broadcasting Plan that it follows to help respond to disasters in an effective manner. The station is currently looking for funding and assistance to develop a DRR program that could run in the lead up to the wet season to discuss issues of preparedness, response, climate change



and generally increase audience understanding of disasters and why they occur.

During a disaster the station sends reporters to the field to report live, as well as running a 'mini-program' for five minutes every hour with updated information relating to the disaster. This is increased to continuous coverage in the event of a major disaster. However as a non-government broadcaster, it cites that it is sometimes difficult and time consuming to get information from the government.

Observations on disaster managers as information providers

The National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM) is Cambodia's lead government authority for disaster management and response. The main responsibility of the NCDM is emergency preparedness and relief, and coordination with the various government ministries involved in disaster management and response. The NCDM also collaborates with the international humanitarian community for cooperation and support.

The National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (NAP-DRR) Update 2014–2018 and the Strategic National Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction (SNAP) 2008–2013 work as the overarching frameworks, and provide strategic direction to disaster risk management for the country. The role of the media is mentioned in section 4.2 of the NAP-DRR⁷:

- **Media:** *Media will support the implementation of the plans by playing two important roles. First, it will continue supporting public awareness raising and by improving its reporting capacity. Second, it will also help in facilitating exchange of information, dissemination of early warning and support in monitoring the NAP-DRR.*


The Cambodian Red Cross (CRC) operates as an auxiliary to public authorities and has been officially adopted by the NCDM as the primary partner to conduct relief operations. This model ensures the organisations work closely together.

The Royal Cambodian Armed Forces (RCAF) also plays a significant role in disaster response and relief and has trained with foreign militaries, including the United States of America, on improving coordination and response.

Several government ministries and agencies are responsible for disaster communication in Cambodia. The Ministry of Information provides a public information service to disseminate disaster mitigation measures as well as to assist in warning the public of impending emergencies through the government broadcasters at national and provincial levels. The Ministry also coordinates with government and private media in educating the public on emergency preparedness and emergency operations.

The Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology (MoWRAM) analyses and disseminates weather warnings, weather forecasts and flood forecasts. The DoM, MoWRAM, and the Department of Hydrology and River Works (DHRW) collects, analyses and disseminates information about floods. These three are assisted by the Mekong River Commission Secretariat (MRCS).

⁷ The Royal Government of Cambodia (2013) National Action Plan for Disaster Risk Reduction (NAP-DRR) 2014-2018



There are two external and one internal alert levels for flooding in the country. The 'pre-alarm' is used internally to indicate the potential of flood conditions developing. When conditions worsen, an 'alarm-level' warning will be issued externally to the community and then 'flood-level' indicates flooding has in fact occurred.

Flood information is also collected by a network of hundreds of CRC volunteers who take river level readings and report to the MRC twice a day. This information is also posted on village notice boards for community use.

Flood warning information is generated at the Department of Hydrology and River Works, that information is then sent to the NCDM, where it is assessed and added to, and from there the alert is disseminated to the public through media and government websites. According to MoWRAM, this flow of information can sometimes be stalled at the NCDM level, delaying the release of information for several hours.

Cambodia is in the process of formalising a legal structure to regulate disaster management. National disaster management law has been drafted and finalised by the NCDM and is due to be enacted by parliament this year. On the 4th of July 2014, by Presidential Decree, the Government established an Emergency Working Group. This group will include 38 members from different line ministries, as well as local and international non-government organisations. It will meet regularly to develop strategies to improve collaboration in emergency response, including improved emergency communication channels and broadcasting.

Following the 2011 large-scale flooding in Cambodia, the Humanitarian Response Forum (HRF) was created in June 2012 to ensure improved coordination of emergency preparedness and response activities among stakeholders.

The HRF organises emergency simulation exercises to test process, including communication practices such as the development of key messages and talking points for spokespeople. However these simulations do not at this stage involve national media to also test their processes and ultimately test the emergency information delivery process to citizens.

Following the adoption of Hyogo Framework of Action, Cambodia developed the National Action Plan and Strategy on Disaster Risk Reduction 2008–2013. The media is mentioned as an important partner for increasing public awareness of disasters and disaster risk reduction activities.⁸

⁸ http://www.adrc.asia/countryreport/KHM/Plan/Cambodia_SNAP-DRR_2008-2013_Eng.pdf



Observations on international Actors

Many international humanitarian agencies are actively involved in disaster management, including through communication activities. But their engagement with media appears limited.

There are a variety of NGO and UN supported DRR and early warning projects being developed in Cambodia. A grouping of NGOs, including People in Need, Save the Children and ActionAID, is working with a local organisation, Open Institute, to develop a mobile phone based early warning system to warn the public about natural disasters. The system works on recorded voice messages that are played to subscribers when an event could impact where they live. A recorded voice system, rather than an SMS early warning system, was developed because of the low levels of literacy amongst the rural communities in the most vulnerable areas.

The Project has been endorsed by the National Committee for Disaster Management as well as the Telecommunications Ministry. However, the system requires further development. For example if the user misses the phone call, they will not receive the message. Being a recorded message it might be difficult for the user to remember all the information, so messages need to be very short and simple and the interface can be difficult for older users to register.

The UNDP is also investigating the introduction of an SMS based early warning system and have recently launched CamDI, an online database of natural disaster losses in Cambodia. This government-endorsed tool should prove very useful for governmental planning, response and research and is also open and available to the public.⁹

The government is very open to donor support. Regulations allow humanitarian relief partners to act in an emergency situation based on internal needs assessments without waiting for invitation from the government.

⁹ <http://camdi.ncdm.gov.kh/DesInventar/profiletab.jsp?countrycode=kh855&maxhits=25>



Summary

There are opportunities to increase community resilience, improve how citizens get information during disasters and enhance two-way communication between affected people and support providers via the media. This can be achieved by improving strategic connections between all information providers, and remembering that disaster prevention is as important as response and recovery phases.

Cambodia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in Asia. Its media is relatively young. While many humanitarian agencies are actively involved in disaster risk management and early warning projects, emergency broadcasting support for media as a key communication tool, appears to be a gap. The Women's Media Centre provides opportunities to engage with women on their role in protecting families.



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Further information:

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