European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations

Vietnam, Cambodia, and Lao PDR

Introduction

The Mekong region - consisting of Vietnam, Lao People’s Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) and Cambodia - is frequently affected by natural disasters, especially floods, droughts, and typhoons. With the vast majority of the population in the three countries largely relying on agriculture, people’s livelihoods are often damaged by recurrent hazards and irregular seasonal patterns. The European Union funds projects that focus on enhancing communities’ resilience and disaster preparedness capacities. It also supports the delivery of emergency relief items such as housing repair kits, hygiene kits, and drinking water.

What are the needs?

In Cambodia, 90 percent of the country’s poor live in rural areas, where the seasonal monsoon rains and the resulting floods can cause widespread destruction. In neighbouring Lao PDR, vulnerability to natural hazards has increased as a result of illegal logging and deforestation. Disasters take place against the background of widespread poverty, especially in rural and inaccessible mountain areas. Most recently, in August 2016, a series of torrential downpours triggered floods in many parts of the country. The floods affected almost 20,000 people, damaged houses, and left huge swathes of agricultural lands inundated.

With its long coastline, cyclones and tropical storms are a regular occurrence in Vietnam. While local capacity to withstand and respond to natural disasters has been substantially enhanced in the last decade, additional support is sometimes required when large-scale disasters strike.

Storms, droughts, and landslides often leave local communities in need of help, as they destroy their homes and livelihoods. Outbreaks of tropical diseases such as dengue and malaria put an additional strain on local health services. Access to the affected populations can sometimes represent an additional challenge in remote areas with inadequate and damaged infrastructure.
How are we helping?

In 2018, the European Commission committed €1.2 million to support humanitarian aid and disaster preparedness projects in the Mekong region, as it sought to reduce risks posed by natural disasters to the most vulnerable populations, and improve local communities’ resilience.

The latest allocation brought the total humanitarian aid in the three Mekong countries to €35.5 million since 2009, including over €14.5 million in Cambodia, €9.55 million in Lao PDR, and €10.7 million in Vietnam.

The programmes strengthened disaster preparedness capacities through training disaster management committees at the local level, integration of disaster risk reduction into local planning, implementation of small-scale mitigation measures such as reinforcing of school buildings, latrines and wells against floods, raising walkways and small dykes, and setting up early warning systems. The programme also prioritises education, public awareness campaigns and epidemic surveillance in high-risk areas.

The European Commission regularly funds humanitarian assistance to address the needs arising from recurrent natural disasters in the Mekong Region. In response to the collapse of the Xepian-Xe Nam Noy hydropower dam in southern Lao PDR, the Commission provided €200 000 to support the delivery of emergency relief items such as shelter, housing repair kits, drinking water and hygiene kits to the most impacted families. Early in November 2017, when typhoon Damrey hit several parts of Vietnam’s central and south-central regions, the Commission allocated €200 000 to respond to the urgent needs of the affected populations. In 2016, more than €2 million was released to provide assistance to people affected by drought and saltwater intrusion in Vietnam’s Central Highlands and Mekong Delta. The funds focused on the provision of safe water and unconditional cash transfers, as well as the promotion of good hygiene practices. Considering how prone the region is to natural hazards, the projects also incorporated disaster preparedness measures. Overall, more than 135 000 people in some of the hardest-hit areas benefited from these EU-funded interventions.

In late 2013, a total of €4 million was provided following the devastation caused by cyclones Wutip and Nari in both Cambodia and Vietnam. In Cambodia, €2 million was allocated for emergency shelter, food aid, livelihoods, water, sanitation and hygiene, while another €1 million was used for early recovery such as rehabilitation of small-scale infrastructure and medium-term food assistance. In Vietnam, a €1 million envelope was released to meet the primary needs of the victims in terms of shelter, livelihood support, water, sanitation and hygiene for victims.