



Humanitarian Assistance to Decreasing Vulnerability in Flood-Prone Village: A Case Study in Boeung Leas Village, Steung Sen District, Kampong Thom Province, Cambodia

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Abstract Flood is the most severe disaster in Cambodia because the country locates in the flood plain region. To tackle this national challenge, the Cambodian government has been developing policies and programs on disaster risk reduction. For supporting disaster-affected populations, various organizations provide humanitarian assistance before and after the disaster. However, due to country's vulnerabilities, a number of Cambodians still suffer from floods, such as food insecurity and health problems. To decrease its vulnerabilities, community should build community resilience through build back better based on their past experiences, while receiving humanitarian assistance to enhance their capitals. As women are among the most vulnerable victims in post-flood situation, the study tried to understand existing major community capitals as well as gaps between humanitarian assistance and needs of vulnerable women. Totally 53 people consist from 33 female villagers and 20 key informants mixture of male and female were selected as respondents for Focal Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informants Interviews (KIIs) through purposive and snowball sampling approaches based on their status and experiences. The study concluded that humanitarian actors better to focus more on activities to enhance insufficient physical, natural, and financial capitals of the village for decreasing existing vulnerabilities including poverty, weak governance, and insufficient local structure for disaster risk reduction by applying Build Back Better approach, which build resilience of vulnerable areas based on past experiences and impacts.

Keywords community resilience, vulnerability, humanitarian assistance, build back better

INTRODUCTION

Cambodia has a tropical monsoon climate and is known as one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2012) reported that 53% of 2,050 disaster-related deaths between 1996 and 2011 were caused by flood in Cambodia. Women are

among the most vulnerable groups without their participation opportunities to share their experiences and needs in decision-making process of authorities. Even though the Cambodian government has policies and programs on disaster risk reduction, villages still have vulnerabilities to hamper community resilience. Vulnerability normally generated due to insufficient capacity for preparation, response, adaptation, resistance, and recovery from hazard impact (Winsner et al., 2004). As Human Policy Group (2006) specified that disasters are caused by human vulnerabilities rather than hazard per se, decreasing vulnerability is a key to reduce disaster impacts. According to Sendai Framework (2015), identification of vulnerability is essential for proper humanitarian assistance. It is because that vulnerability will be decreased when the community improve their capacity to cope with disasters because these two factors are interrelated (Cannon et al., n.d.).

Humanitarian assistance aims at lifesaving and damage alleviation during and after disasters, as well as strengthening preparedness for future hazard (Development Initiatives, n.d.). Ideal humanitarian assistances decrease vulnerability while promoting community resilience and capacity to mitigate impacts of future hazard. From this point, Build Back Better is one of appropriate approach for humanitarian assistance because it is an process to improve resilience and capacity of the disaster-affected communities, while reducing their vulnerability based on their experiences (Mannakkara and Wilkinson, 2015). Schilderman (2010) also specified that the experience with owner-driven reconstruction has been more positive than with donor-driven reconstruction.

Therefore, this paper attempts to analyze existing community's five-capital as well as gaps between emergency response and needs of vulnerable women to decrease vulnerability in Boeung Leas village.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Site

Study site is the Boeung Leas village, which is the one of four villages in Ou Kantor commune in Steung Sen district in Kampong Thom province, Cambodia (Fig 1). The village has 130.89 hectares of land with 88 households with population of 354 including 182 females. Main income resources of the residents are fishery, rice production and harvesting naturally grown morning glory (*Ipomoea aquatica*) because the village has big lake in the southern part of village, which stream from the Tonle Sap Lake. Due to its location in low terrain near Steung Sen River and Tonle Sap Lake, the village is the most vulnerable village to regular flood among four neighboring villages. Especially southern part of the village suffers from severe flood impact annually. Chronic impact of severe floods and droughts in whole year make the villagers poor. In 2015, 33% of households in the village recognized as poor and received the recognition paper for the poor by provincial government.



Fig. 1 Map of flood affected households and Boeung Leas village in Kampong Thom province

Data Collection and Analysis

By aiming at understanding existing major community capitals as well as gaps between emergency response and needs of vulnerable women to decrease vulnerabilities in village, the study applied focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). The study collected data from total 53 samples consist from 33 female villagers, nine members of the Disaster Management Committee in the commune, and 11 key informants who involved in the humanitarian assistance. All samples were purposively selected applying snowball sampling approaches based on their status and experiences. Align with recommendation of Dworkin (2012) for 25-30 participants for in-depth interviews, 33 women which covers 18.13% of female villagers were selected for three FGDs. Men were intentionally excluded to avoid interruption and dominant on answers. Besides, a female and eight male members of the Disaster Management Committee were also invited for another FGDs in order to understand vulnerability and common emergency response in the post-flood situation in the village. Addition to that, KIIs were conducted to purposively selected experts who involved in the emergency response, such as local NGO, the Cambodian Red Cross, and District Health Center.

Collected data summarized and analyzed based on the five-capital asset pentagon of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) (DFID, 1999). By setting the five-capital pentagon - human, social, physical, natural, and financial capital- in the key, the framework clarifying mechanisms of vulnerability, shocks, and transforming process. The SLF distinctly emphasizes improving capital assets to reduce vulnerability and enhance disaster resilience (Burton, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

General Information and Conditions

Although the villagers suffer from flood annually, after 2000, severe flood damaged the villagers in 2000, 2001, 2011, and 2013. Especially the Southern part of the village is vulnerable to flood due to its location along or in paddy field (Fig 2 left). Interviewees shared their experience that water level drastically increase to reach the house floor and occasionally cause water runoff to the house with the raised-floor style. It causes villagers in flood-prone areas to evacuate to higher road and stay in temporary tent for a while (Fig 2 right).

Villagers have similar flood-induced impacts in the post-flood situation, such as food insecurity, health problem, financial shortage, lack of accessibility, and loss of human lives and livestock. Due to lack of portable water, people reluctantly drink flood water, even though it may cause diarrhea and other health issues. Children generally suffer from diarrhea and accidental drown due to unsafe and high-level water. Many villagers also critically suffer from income shortage without accessibility to the big lake southern part of the village as well as Steung Sen River, where people gain profit from morning glory and fish sales.



Fig. 2 Shelter in flood-prone areas along paddy field (left) and higher road to evacuate (right)