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, such as floods, droughts, and typhoons. With the vast majority of the population in the 3 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% 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 because of illegal logging and deforestation. Disasters take place against the background of widespread poverty, especially in rural and inaccessible mountain areas. Most recently, in September 2019, both tropical storm Podul and tropical depression Kajiki, triggered floods affecting an estimated 650,000 people and causing about 40,000 people displaced and 18 causalities.

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 2019, the European Union has committed €2 million to support disaster preparedness programmes in several Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam and Cambodia, as it seeks to reduce risks posed by natural disasters to the most vulnerable populations, and improve local communities’ resilience. The programmes explore new financing systems and approaches such as forecast-based financing, established from in-depth disaster predictions, or shock-responsive social protection initiatives. The emphasis is placed on decision-making protocols, which will enable relevant organisations to set up protocols and organise financial options based on forecast information.

The European Union regularly funds humanitarian assistance to address the needs arising from recurrent natural disasters in the Mekong Region. Recently, in response to the devastation caused by tropical storm Podul and tropical depression Kajiki that struck southern Lao PDR in September, the EU provided €200,000 to address the most pressing needs of the affected families. Earlier in August, when many parts of southern Vietnam were affected by floods, the EU committed €100,000 to provide crucial assistance to those most in need in some of the worst-hit areas.

In response to the collapse of the Xepian-Xe Nam Noy hydropower dam in southern Lao PDR in mid-2018, the EU 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. In November 2017, when typhoon Damrey hit several parts of Vietnam’s central and south-central regions, the EU allocated €200,000 to respond to the urgent needs of the affected populations.

In 2016, more than €2 million provided 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 benefitted.

Since 2009, the EU’s total humanitarian aid in the 3 Mekong countries has exceeded €39 million, including more than €16 million for disaster preparedness activities.