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Disaster Analysis & Roadmap Development for Cambodia

Field & Desk Research Project 2022/23

Conducted by ARC (Martina Mayr, Andrea Roth)
with financial support from IFAW

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1. Executive Summary

The global vulnerability to natural hazards is intensified by climate change. This affects millions of people worldwide, including their beloved companion animals, requiring an increase in preparedness and resilience of communities against natural disasters.

Cambodia's most common natural disasters - floods, droughts, fires, and disease outbreaks - impact poor communities in rural areas disproportionately, causing the most severe negative impacts for local communities, their companion animals and livestock.

- [Cambodia is highly exposed to natural disasters \(mainly floods, diseases outbreaks\)](#)
- [More than 7,800 disaster incidents recorded in Cambodia \(in the last 20 years\)](#)
- [5 million people & their cats/dogs affected every year by natural disasters](#)

[About 12.7 million Cambodians live in rural areas. Around 6.7 million people of the country's 16.7 million population are farmers.](#) Besides, despite its economic growth, [5.6 million Cambodians live below the international poverty line](#) (1.90 USD per day).

Therefore, IFAW and ARC teamed up to work with disaster-prone communities to help them to develop plans to become more resilient to natural disasters. A special focus therein was placed on **companion animals - cats and dogs**: the bond between humans and animals gets really stressed by disasters.

Therefore, this research project focused on identifying **local resources and capacities**, which need to be strengthened and developed, to **create entry points for keeping companion animals and their families together**.

A. Status Quo of Disaster Risk & Preparedness in Cambodia

Part of the comprehensive evaluation & analysis of the risk & disaster preparedness in Cambodia included desk research (online and primary literature) in preparation for the field research.

- 20 most at-risk communes to natural disasters in 14 provinces were identified (out of Cambodia's 24 provinces)
- Further stakeholders related to natural disasters in Cambodia were identified
- Relationships with key stakeholders were established (crucial in a collectivistic country like Cambodia)
- 200 households were interviewed
- 20 commune councils were interviewed
- 2 local NGOs (subsidiaries of iNGOs: ChildFund Cambodia, Caritas Cambodia) and 2 iNGOs (World Vision, ActionAid) were interviewed
- The General Directorate of Animal Health and Production (GDAHP/MAFF) on Government level was interviewed
- The existing Government and local authority processes were identified and outlined, incl. the structure of disaster management, existing disaster relief processes, and key stakeholders. This information can be shared with animal advocacy networks, media, other (i)NGOs, and other interested parties.
- Existing IEC materials were identified (by NGOs and the Government)

To date, Cambodia has weak disaster prevention and response structures and processes in place, an overall basic infrastructure and limited local capacity, although floods and droughts are recognized by the Cambodian Government as poverty drivers.

However, despite basic existing warning systems and response mechanisms (SMS alerts, loudspeaker announcements), clear and streamlined rescue plans and instructions as well as the flow of information are often limited.

While vaccination campaigns, disease transmission and basic disaster awareness for livestock is provided by the Government, this does not (yet) exist for companion animals and stray cats/dogs, especially regarding disaster preparation and response processes. Generally, rabies vaccinations (animals, humans) and access to **vet care is very limited in rural areas**. In fact, according to the interviews, 50% of animals don't have access to vet care. Besides, preventative measures like microchipping and database recording to reunite families with companion animals after a disaster are not yet implemented.

Overview of interviewed stakeholders in provinces

17 (out of 24) Cambodian provinces were personally visited during the interview/research phase of this project - marked red in the map below. The six least disaster prone provinces (flooding, drought) in the North and North-East as well as Kep in the South (due to its small size) were not personally visited and interviewed.



Source: commons.wikimedia.org

The Mekong River is the largest river in Southeast Asia and the Tonle Sap Lake, part of the Mekong River system, is the largest freshwater lake in Southeast Asia.

[During the most recent Cambodian flood in 2022](#), the most severely affected provinces were Kampong Thom, Siem Reap, Banteay Meanchey, Prey Veng, Battambang and Pursat - all of which were included in this study. [In 2015, Cambodia experienced its worst drought in 50 years](#), severely affecting 2.5 million people throughout all provinces.

B. Roadmap to Elevate Disaster Preparedness in Cambodia

To elevate disaster preparedness in Cambodia, four key components have been identified, which Animal Rescue Cambodia can assist to implement.

1. Implement safety net programs (preventative measures)
2. Emergency response (mitigation measures)
3. Elevating disaster preparedness & response at the ARC Center
4. Policy support (long-term change)

Setting up safety net programs **builds resilience at the local level** and is one of the most effective preventive measures to (1) avoid companion animal surrender, suffering, and distress as well as (2) exponentially increase the positive impact of animal shelters like Animal Rescue Cambodia.

Emergency response helps to alleviate the negative impact of disasters. Keeping families together **provides comfort to disaster-affected people** and while saving animal lives. Besides, human and animal mental health are supported by avoiding stress and suffering through separation.

By ensuring ARC's capacity to operate during emergencies, **disaster-affected families and their companion animals have continued support in times of urgent need**. The human-animal bond is kept intact as mental and physical suffering due to separation or inability to care is avoided.

In terms of policy support, a local charity like Animal Rescue Cambodia can advocate for and support the **integration of companion animals** into existing disaster preparedness and response processes of the Cambodian national incident management systems.

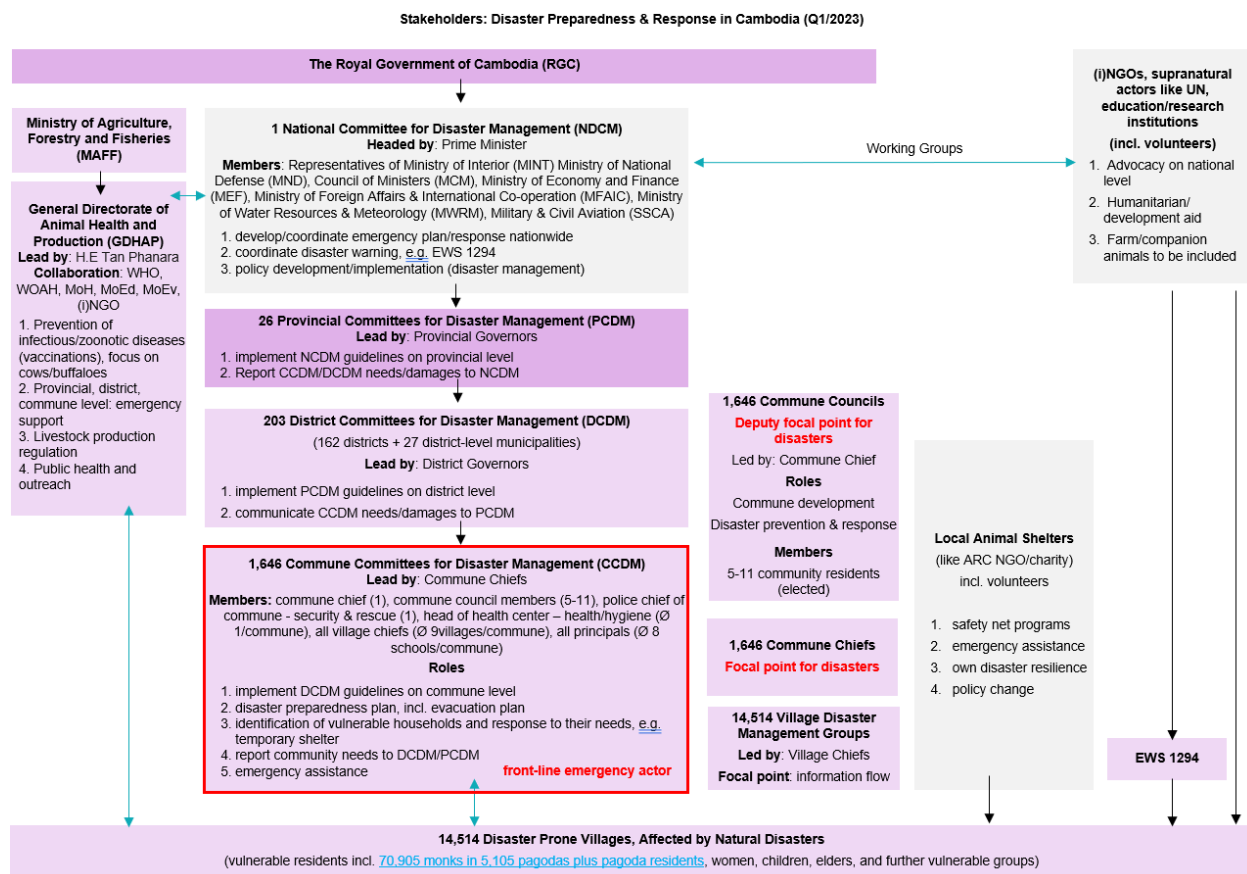
Saving Pets = Saving People!

2. Status Quo in Cambodia: Emergency Stakeholders & Processes

Stakeholders

In terms of official procedures, on national level (top-down approach), the main stakeholders and their roles have been identified and depicted together with sub-national level (bottom-up approach).

To respond to the vulnerability of natural disasters, the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), which was established in 1995, is in charge of developing and coordinating emergency plans and responses in the form of a top down approach. The actual needs of disaster-prone communities are communicated bottom-up through a hierarchical structure.



Existing Disaster Management Structures in Cambodia

Due to disaster vulnerability and under-capacity against disasters, rural people in particularly low-lying communities are severely facing the loss of their livelihood, in particular shelter and agriculture (rice, crops).

It is noteworthy that these communities view natural disasters as a regular occurrence that just happens and accept it as part of their lives.

On a sub-national level, smart phones (internet, mainly Facebook/social media), word-of-mouth, loudspeaker announcements, radio and TV broadcasts are currently the most common disaster warning methods.

EWS 1294

In 2013, INGO People in Need (PIN), in collaboration with the NCDM, developed the first and only **Early Warning System (EWS) “1294”**. EWS 1294 is a notification system that provides alerts regarding natural disasters like floods, droughts, and fires through

- voice notifications (calls) to registered users
- Telegram notifications to registered users
- radio broadcasts
- public loudspeaker announcements
- the [1294 website](#)
- the [1294 Facebook page](#) (~130,000 followers)



EWS 1294 is free of charge and users can register for phone alerts by calling a toll-free number. It should be noted that the vast majority of Cambodians own phones, even in rural areas, often even smart phones. Today, EWS 1294 is managed by the NCDM.

There is an opportunity for an entry point of intervention to include companion animals in disaster prevention and response, and raise awareness of the interconnectedness between animals and humans under the OneHealth approach.

Media Updates (1276)

While EWS 1294 focuses on disasters exclusively, **media updates 1276** focuses on general issues of public concern, e.g. Covid-19, domestic violence, land disputes, safety/security issues, and disasters.

People who want to sign up for this service send a message to 1276 on their phone. Then they receive information about disaster-related TV and radio news. This hotline is managed by the Ministry of Interior under the Ministry of Post and Telecommunications.

3. Farm & Companion Animals in Cambodia

Cambodia is home to around 5 million dogs, of which 4 million live in the countryside, and an estimated 1.1 to 2.8 million cats. There are around [600,000 dog bite incidents per year](#) in the country. While millions of cats and dogs have kind caretakers, these people have limited resources to care for themselves and their beloved companion animals, in particular, during the events of unexpected natural disasters.

Rabies is endemic in Cambodia and has one of the highest incidence rates of rabies among humans in the world with up to 10 dog bite injuries per 100,000 people per year, according to the Mission Rabies and ARC IBCM report 2022. Around 800 people die from rabies in the Kingdom every year. In Cambodia, rabies is mainly transmitted by rabid dogs, though cats to humans and wildlife to human transmission can also occur.

Even though it is not common for companion animals to get rabies vaccinations in Cambodia, according to the interviews, dog owners typically compensate bite victims (up to 140 USD). In comparison, the Institut Pasteur in Phnom Penh charges 102 USD for three pre-exposure rabies vaccinations (Q1/2023), which is about one third cheaper than victim compensation.

On the other hand, animal rabies vaccinations are much less expensive. A charity like ARC can offer subsidized rabies vaccinations at around 5 USD, while vet clinics like VSL offer rabies vaccinations for 27.50 USD. That's 96% resp. 80% less compared to victim compensation and has health benefits in addition to financial savings.



4. Household Interviews

Overall, 200 households were interviewed:

- 130 households (65%) keep companion animals,
- 143 households (72%) keep farm animals
- 169 households (85%) keep companion and/or farm animals

People in rural Cambodia care about their animals. While livestock plays a significant role for their livelihood and survival, cats and dogs also are seen as companion animals in addition to serving a purpose, e.g. catching mice or protecting the home.

In terms of disaster preparedness, rural communities have an understanding of natural disasters and basic measures in place to rescue themselves and their animals in case of an emergency.

However, the knowledge on disaster prevention, emergency plans, and response action is limited, and the flow of information is informal.

The existing action by the Cambodian Government and (i)NGOs focuses on the prevention and mitigation of climate change consequences (including natural disasters) with a special interest in human lives. The inclusion of animals, companion and livestock, is very limited to date.

Companion animals

- Cats are mostly kept to catch rats and mice, or as pets.
- Dogs are mainly kept to protect the home or as a pet.
- Identification of cats and dogs (microchip, collar), carriers, leashes, and harnesses barely exist.
- More than half the households with companion animals stated that they have pet emergency kits at home (food and can opener, water, medication, bowls).
- The majority of households (three quarters) stated that they had a plan where to go and how to get there in case of emergency and/or appointed someone to look after their pets in case the owner was unavailable.

Access to vet services

- Just over half of the households with animals stated to have access to vet services, because they weren't aware, it's too far away, too expensive, or they use traditional medicine/methods.
- The majority of companion animals among interviewed households do **not** have rabies vaccinations. The majority of households do not know what rabies is, and that there is a vaccination.
- All buffaloes/cows of interviewed households had foot & mouth disease vaccinations (Government subsidized).
- More than half of the interviewed households know who to contact if multiple animals get sick: village or commune chief or local vet.

Natural disasters occurrence

- The majority of interviewed households had experienced flooding, storms, droughts, river bank collapses, and/or disease outbreaks in the past.
- The most common consequences were
 - home destroyed, leading to (temporary) displacement, affecting also companion animals
 - road/access disconnected
 - rice fields/crops damaged (livelihood)
 - children could not attend school (education)
 - evacuation of people, pets, and livestock
 - livestock disease outbreak

Natural disaster preparedness

- More than half the interviewed households have received disaster warnings in the past.
 - They largely follow the instructions by the local authorities, evacuate (about two thirds with their farm/companion animals, or stay at home due to household/farm obligations.
 - At the same time households report they are not really sure or clear on what to do.
- Just under half the interviewed households report that there are no warning systems in place.

Natural disaster response

- After the occurrence of a natural disaster, the interviewed households mainly need food, crops, and healthcare. Further needs include money, water, household materials, hygiene articles, livestock services, transportation vehicles, information, temporary shelter, and home repair assistance.
 - In emergency situations, needs are typically responded to by the respective commune councils and healthcare is usually provided by commune-based health centers.
 - Food, water, and crop seeds are typically provided by the Government.
 - (i)NGOs provide assistance on occasion, but focus more on creating long-term self-governing systems.
- The largest gaps between needed assistance and help given are also in the above areas.
- The [National Committee of Disaster Management \(NCDM\)](#) operates in a hierarchical top-down system and is the key actor in charge of developing and coordinating emergency plans and responses.
- The interviewed households report that it usually takes 1-2 months to recover from a natural disaster.
- Almost all interviewed households worry about future disasters, in particular, flooding and drought, with consequent concerns of livelihood loss, loss of home, lack of sanitation, and disease outbreak.

Improved disaster preparedness

- The interviewed households mainly responded with animal vaccinations, improved water management, and improved flow of information.
- Besides, they expressed that they would benefit from evacuation drills/exercises, vaccinations for people, and pet supplies for evacuation.



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Elevating Disaster Preparedness in Cambodia



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5. Commune Council interviews

In Cambodia, there are [14,514 villages](#) with around 3.6 million residents. This equals 9 villages per commune on average, with an average of 2,174 residents. Furthermore, [there is 1 health center on average per commune](#). Finally, [there are 4 primary schools and 1 secondary school on average per commune](#) while every second community has a highschool on average.

Commune Chief

In Cambodia, the **key focal point** related to natural disaster preparedness and response is typically the commune chief. The commune chief is elected every 5 years. Their deputy is the commune council. Generally, the commune councils have monthly meetings. In case of emergencies they meet on a needs-basis and receive information from the district level.

Commune Councils

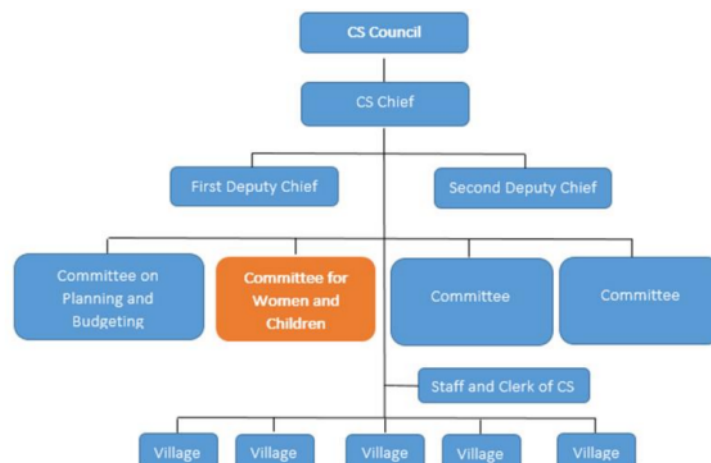
In Cambodia, there are [1,646 communes](#) and therefore commune council panels. The commune councils are connected to each other through needs-based forums and workshops, organized by the sub-national level (district or provincial Government).

The commune council usually consists of 5-11 members who are elected every 5 years. Any commune member over the age of 18 can stand for election.

CCDM

The commune council is responsible for overall aspects concerning their communities while the CCDM focuses on assistance with specific events such as disaster risk management. They meet on a needs-basis.

The Commune Committee of Disaster Management (CCDM) consists of the commune chief, the commune council members (5-11), the police chief of the commune, the head of the health center(s) of the commune, all village chiefs of the commune, and all school principals of the commune.



Disaster preparedness and response on the commune level spearheaded by the CCDM as a front-line actor, and includes

- evacuation plan development

- safe area identification for temporary shelter and security assurance at temporary shelters
- ensuring the flow of information
- visiting households to provide primary assistance and report household-needs to upper Government levels
- implementing Government policies, guidelines, rules, and regulations (law-based) from upper levels on commune level

Typically, commune, district, and provincial administration levels are well connected. In the event of an upcoming natural disaster or immediately thereafter, they meet to discuss precautionary measures (e.g. evacuation) and to coordinate emergency response action. They also make sure that the flow of information is guaranteed. The NCDM has rescue teams on the commune level on stand-by (e.g. village vet trained on disaster preparedness). The approach is typically top-down according to the guidelines of the higher-level authorities.

Community overview

- 20 commune councils were interviewed.
- The 17 provinces visited as part of this research are home to 1,301 communes with around 3 million households, at an average of 5.5 people per household.
- Their main sources of income are farming (more than 50%), formal labor (14%), small business (7%), providing services (5%), and others (12%).

Access to vet services

- Almost all commune councils confirmed that disease outbreaks had occurred in their commune in the last 5 years. Mainly foot & mouth disease, lumpy skin disease, and black leg.
- In case multiple animals get sick, all commune councils know who to contact - the village chief or local vet, the commune chief or higher authority.
- All commune councils affirmed that there are vet services available for the farm/companion animals in their commune. These vet services are typically provided by the Government, community members/animal health workers, and/or private vet clinics.
- Livestock vaccinations are most common.
 - For black leg, African swine flu, and Aujeszky's disease, the Government provided free vaccinations in the past. This depends on disease outbreaks.
 - Other vaccinations provided (paid) in their communes were foot & mouth disease, hemorrhagic septicemia, lumpy skin disease, and rabies (for cats and dogs).

Natural disaster occurrence

- According to the interviewed commune councils, floods, disease outbreaks, and droughts cause the most hardship in their communes.
- The most common consequences of natural disasters are the destruction of homes and crop loss. This corresponds with the answers by the 200 interviewed households.

Natural disaster preparedness

- The majority of commune councils receive input on disaster preparedness & response from upper level authorities (video, training session)
- All commune councils affirmed that they prepare their households for natural disasters.
- 60% of the 20 interviewed commune councils affirmed to have a disaster warning system in their commune. An (informal) word-of-mouth system is most common, as well as loudspeakers, radio, and TV information.
- If there are warning systems in place, 75% of the interviewed commune councils reported that the households follow their warnings and instructions.
- Those households that do not follow warnings do so due to lack of alternatives (nowhere to go, can't leave household/farm/animals behind) and/or because the information is not clear.

- Half the commune councils stated that farm/companion animals are included in rescue and evacuation processes. If they are not included, according to them, it is because animals are less affected by natural disasters and owners are responsible.

Natural disaster response

- After a natural disaster, the commune council mainly provides crops, food, and medicine. This is largely in line with the actual need of the households.
- 85% of the interviewed commune council representatives affirmed to discuss lessons learned after a natural disaster.
- the interviewed commune councils mainly named the following actors as drivers in disaster prevention and response in Cambodia
 - Government: NCDM, PCDM, DCDM, CCDM
 - (i)NGOS: Save the Children, World Vision, Cambodian Red Cross, Caritas Cambodia, Development and Partnership in Action, VSO Cambodia
 - Private individuals
 - Monks, pagodas
 - Private companies
- In terms of what works well regarding disaster preparedness and response, the commune councils mainly stated the cooperation between authorities across all levels.
- On the other hand, as main areas for improvement, rabies vaccinations for animals, evacuation plans and exercise, and improved water management were named.



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6. (i)NGO interviews

As part of this disaster preparedness and response research, World Vision, ChildFund Cambodia, Caritas Cambodia, and Action Aid were interviewed.

Natural disaster preparedness

- When asked whether the organizations provide assistance to communes to raise disaster preparedness, three of them affirmed. One organization (ChildFund Cambodia) focuses on disaster response only.
- Those organizations who work on disaster preparedness elevation mainly focus on training sessions and online information. Examples for rescue devices are swimming vests or boats. Online information mainly refers to the 1294 early warning system. An example for a nature-based solution would be Mangrove restoration on a river bank to reduce flooding. Standby

rescue teams, IEC materials and TV/radio information are part of their strategies, but are not widespread.

- Disaster preparedness by (i)NGOs does not include companion animals (yet).

Natural disaster response

- When asked, which disasters the (i)NGOs have responded to in the last 5 years, their focus typically lies on humanitarian aid. Their most common responses are in line with the most common natural hazards: floods, droughts, storms, and fires.
- None of the (i)NGOs interviewed provide vaccinations to animals.
- All of the organizations' main components to disaster response are largely in line with the needs of the households: food, money, household items, hygiene articles.
- The coordination with the Cambodian national and sub-national authorities is generally good. For example, for medical and health supplies, (i)NGOs typically collaborate with the Health Department of the Ministry of Health as well as local communal health centers.

Disaster preparedness elevation

- According to the interviewed (i)NGOs, the following would help households and companion animals to be better prepared for natural disasters (answers are in line with responses from households and commune councils): rabies vaccinations for companion animals, improved flow of information, and emergency drills/exercises.
- All interviewed (i)NGOs signaled willingness to collaborate with other actors like ARC to elevate disaster preparedness in Cambodia, with a focus on companion animals.

To sum it up, local and international organizations mainly focus on empowerment and ownership among local communities. Their goal is to enable them to increase their resilience towards (natural) disasters, e.g. rescue plans, and enable them to stay safe during emergencies. NGOs typically work with all levels of the Government (disaster management) as well as disaster-prone and disaster-affected communities directly.

At the same time, the interviewed (i)NGOs recognise the importance of farm animals and role of companion animals for families. As such, the interviewed organizations are open to collaborations to include animals in disaster preparedness and response programs. They particularly recognise disease prevention (especially rabies) as an important entry point as it also affects humans under the One Health approach. The interviewed (i)NGOs see educating rural communities on vaccinations as a first step, and offering vaccination campaigns as a second step.

7. Government interviews

On a national level, the [General Directorate of Animal Health and Production](#) (GDAHP) under the [Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries](#) (MAFF) is responsible for (infectious) disease outbreaks and animal health, including before, during, and after natural disasters.

GDAHP/MAFF collaborates with

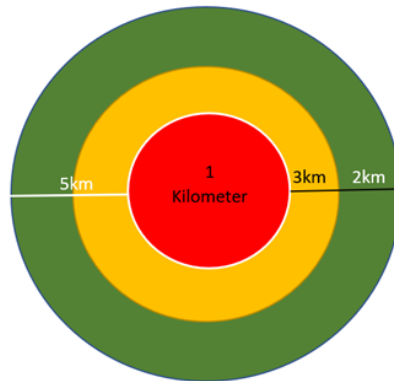
- disaster departments NCDM, PCDM, DCDM, and CCDM
- other line Ministries (Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Education)
- supra-national actors like the World Health Organization (UN-WHO), the World Organization for Animal Health (UN-WOAH), the Food and Agriculture Organization (UN-FAO)
- (i)NGOs like WCS Cambodia

The research team met with a GDAHP representative in February 2023.

Existing natural disaster processes

In case of emergency, four teams are responsible to take ring-action around the center of the disaster.

1. team one: red zone: emergency response within 1km
2. team two: orange zone: emergency response within 3km; including needs assessment
3. team three: green zone: emergency response within 5km; including awareness raising on zoonotic diseases
4. team four: hygiene team (bacteria extinguishing); includes vet services to vulnerable households; distribution of crop seeds; further support based on the need



In terms of budget allocation for existing Government processes regarding disaster preparedness and response, GDHP/MAFF creates an annual action plan and budget which includes 10 planned mission days per month, e.g. awareness raising on grassroots level, animal vaccinations, providing access to vocational education on veterinary medicine.

However there is no allocated budget for emergencies. In emergencies, GDHP/MAFF requests a budget from higher-level ministries.

According to the GDAHP/MAFF, in 2021/22, outbreaks of lumpy skin disease and African swine flu among farm animals caused the most hardship in Cambodia.

In 2022, 92,139 animals were reported to have died from diseases (2,662 dogs and 887 cats).

Natural disaster preparedness

The national-level disaster preparedness by the GDAHP/MAFF focus lies on

1. strategic vaccinations in high at-risk areas
2. public awareness raising (focus on zoonotic disease prevention)
3. IEC material distribution to local households (vaccinations, flood response, etc. - see below)
4. training sessions on animal healthcare (cows, buffaloes) for local households
5. crop distribution (animal food)
6. training of local vets

For example, the GDAHP/MAFF collaborates with the Ministry of Health to eradicate rabies in Cambodia, as well as Animal Rescue Cambodia, Mission Rabies and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) through the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ) as part of its Global Programme for Pandemic Prevention and Control, One Health (GPPPOH).

In 2022, the Cambodian Government provided almost 1,3 million vaccinations for cows, and buffaloes, including 21,335 rabies vaccinations for dogs and 5,892 rabies vaccinations for cats.

Natural disaster response

Animals, with a focus on cows and buffaloes, are principally included in disaster response, e.g. the evacuation plans to safe areas, and there are animal/healthcare workers on standby (village vets get trained by GDAHP/MAFF and receive technical support from them) to look after animals during emergencies (e.g. provide food).

However, the Government's focus principally lies on human lives, then farm animals (as part of peoples' livelihood). Pets are normally the responsibility of each household.

The GDAHP/MAFF is **not** responsible for providing food/water, household/hygiene materials, money or other assistance to disaster-affected households and their animals. The focus lies on disaster prevention.

After a disaster, the GDAHP/MAFF typically discuss lessons learned, together with the local communities, vets, private animal service providers, and other stakeholders.

Disaster preparedness & response elevation

When asked, what works well in terms of disaster preparedness and response in Cambodia, the GDAHP/MAFF stated the collaboration with local communities (in particular village vets), and vet clinics, as well as awareness raising and public education, and the collaboration with relevant (i)NGOs.

When asked what **would help local communities and their farm/companion animals to be better prepared** against natural disasters, the GDAHP/MAFF particularly highlighted disease prevention (vaccinations), food security for animals, biosecurity awareness to reduce the transmission of infectious diseases, and private public partnerships, e.g. with private vet clinics and other animal welfare/service providers. This is in line with the answers by the interviewed households, commune councils, and (i)NGOs.

A good example for such a partnership is the collaboration between GIZ, Institut Pasteur, the Ministry of Health and the GDAHP/MAFF on animal rabies vaccinations. They collaborate on a rabies eradication program under the "One Health" and "Integrated Bite Case Management (IBCM)" approaches. It is (not yet) connected to the ARC IBCM program (in collaboration with Mission Rabies & local partners). The GDAHP/GIZ program focuses on rabies surveillance, vaccinations, and response to bite cases/potential rabies cases, incl. follow ups.