

# Local residents gear-up collaboration efforts to prepare for floods

## Interest Story

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**AYUTTHAYA, Thailand** –It is nine o'clock in the morning and Tambon Tha Luang Administration Organization is unusually crowded today as up to 30 residents from nearby areas gather at the office soon after receiving an official warning of heavy rainfalls. Massive amount of water is also expected to reach this flood-prone province of Ayutthaya's Tha Rua district.

A small operation room is now filled with loud conversation whereas officials from the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation, Royal Irrigation Department, district office, public relations as well as village leaders, health volunteers and representatives community residents nearby the district located in the heart of the village are racing against time in a bid to come up with a strategic plan essential for protecting their communities from possible flooding damages.

More updates from Royal Irrigation Department show flooding is likely to strike the area. However, public relations team of the operation unit are now ready to send warning message to the public while mitigation teams are now going to vulnerable areas to begin evacuation procedure before it is too late to save lives and reduce damages.

Fortunately, the flooding situations these local residents are dealing with are part of the so-called "tabletop exercise" aimed at raising public awareness on strategic planning for flooding resilience.

These activities are under the Program for Reduction of Vulnerability to Floods in Thailand supported by USAID-OFDA



Supatta Chooporn, agricultural officer of Tambon Champa Administration Organization, provides input for a participating community participant.

*Photo by: Chusit Apirumanekul*

“ We would like communities to be more prepared strategically when it comes to floods, so any possible damages and vulnerability to disasters can be minimized, ”

said Dr.Chusit Apirumanekul, project manager of ADPC's flood preparedness in Thailand, spearheading the tabletop exercise project.

Thailand was heavily affected by major floods in 2011, particularly provinces situated in the Chao Phraya River Basin including Ayutthaya. Loss caused by the crisis cost as much as estimated US\$ 45.7 billion and that they Flooding damages still remained at Tambon Tha Luang, where the tabletop exercise is piloted. Main road used for transportation in the area is still under restoration two years after the crisis.

To enhance resilience and sustainably reduce vulnerability of flood-prone province, Dr.Chusit, also a hydrologist, said such disaster risk management skills usually carried out among policymakers and executives, was adopted for putting in practice at community levels with an aim to build capacity of all local parties through learning and practice. As a result, they would be much more prepared on how to respond to flooding situation and other natural hazards.

The tabletop exercise is also a good session for all involving parties at community levels such as district and sub-district administration organizations, disaster response and mitigation teams, and community representatives to explore and assess their roles and responsibilities on flood warning dissemination and responses, leading to better understanding and awareness of the early warning system.

Different scenarios prior, during and after floods showcased during the half-day session also well response from participants at community levels.

Supatta Chooporn, agricultural officer of nearby Tambon Champa Administration Organization, found lessons learned during the tabletop exercise very useful. She was responsible for public relations task at her community during flooding crisis in 2011. The female civil servant also learned how to translate technical message about flood level into simple alert for public understanding without causing panic.

The executive-like practice enabled her to not only be a part of strategic team but also learned how to plan work on flooding preparation in a bid to reduce flooding vulnerability in her own community, Ms.Chooporn added.

Sujit Wongnate, deputy chief of Tambon Ta Luang Administration Organization, said he believed the tabletop exercise should be put in practice at other flood-prone communities particularly those in the Chao Phraya Basin.



Mr. Sujit Wongnate, deputy chief of Tambon Ta Luang Administration Organization and Mr. Somsak Yingbumrung, Disaster Prevention and Mitigation Officer, Tha Luang Tambol Administrative Organization help participants brainstorm in a tabletop exercise.

*Photo by: Chusit Apirumanekul*

“ Lesson learned from the flooding crisis is that we all can help reduce damages caused by flooding. People at the front-line can also learn to strategically deal with the situation for sustainable flooding resilience, ”

said Sujit Wongnate, deputy chief of Tambon Ta Luang Administration Organization