Strengthening and Enhancing People's Involvement and Preparedness at the Grassroot Level: A Case of "Mr. Warning" a Village-Based Disaster Warning Volunteer, Thailand

Thailand

1. Background:

Like many of other countries worldwide, the trend of natural disasters in Thailand is on the rise both in terms of severity and frequency due to the rapid urbanization, degradation of the environment and the increasing population density. Whenever these natural hazards occur, they will leave in their wake a tremendous damage and destruction. Despite its negative impact, their calamities have shed a light on weaknesses of our disaster management system and have provided us with invaluable lessons that can be applied in addressing the existing weaknesses. Besides, they have served as the wake up call for all parties concerned to be more aware of and to be more well prepared for future disaster.

Furthermore, we have experienced that though the occurrences of disasters are inevitable, the minimization of their impacts are possible through disaster risk reduction strategy. As the consequence, Thailand has shifted its traditional "response approach" to "total disaster risk management approach" which encompasses holistic disaster management activities including risk reduction, creation of the awareness and preparedness among all stakeholders, and encouraging the involvement of the community at risk.

In this context, the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) and the Ministry of Interior has initiated various training courses for the people in the community at risk in order to create the awareness and preparedness among them, and to mobilize their involvement in holistic disaster management. The most recent initiative is a "Community-Based Disaster Volunteer Training Course, "Mr. Warning", which the DDPM has launched in conjunction with the Department of Provincial Administration, the Department of Local Administration, the Meteorological Department, the National Park, Wildlife and Plant Conservation Department and the National Disaster Warning Center."

This training course aims at creating a disaster warning network for villages in flashfloods and mudslides by designating the trained villages as "Mr. Warning."

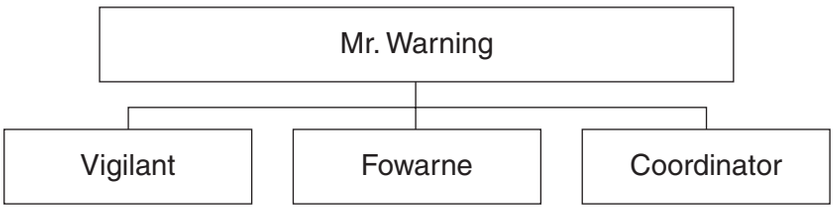
2. Qualifications of "Mr. Warning"

The villagers selected to attend the training course are required to meet the following qualifications

- Age between 18-25 years
- Able to read and write
- Decent manner, self-sacrifice and recognizable
- Trainees of Civil Defence Volunteer, Community Development Volunteer, Village Public Health Volunteer and Training Courses will have priority

3. Role of "Mr. Warning"

The following role structure will facilitate and a better understanding of the roles played by "Mr. Warning"



Upon the completion of the training course and being designated, "Mr. Warning" will be assigned tasks to shoulder the responsibility as "vigilant", "forewarner", and "coordinator" in non-emergency, pre-disaster, during, and in post-disaster phases.

(1) Non-emergency phase: At this phase "Mr. Warning" will perform the following functions.
- (1.1) Listens to the weather forecast and warnings from radio.
- (1.2) Checks and records the amount of rainfalls in a simple raingauge installed in the village at a daily basis.
- (1.3) Educates other villagers about floods and landslides and what to do in case of emergency.
- (1.4) Coordinates with village authorities and villagers to formulate community evacuation plan.
- (1.5) Inspects natural waterways within the village and reports any blockages to the authorities.

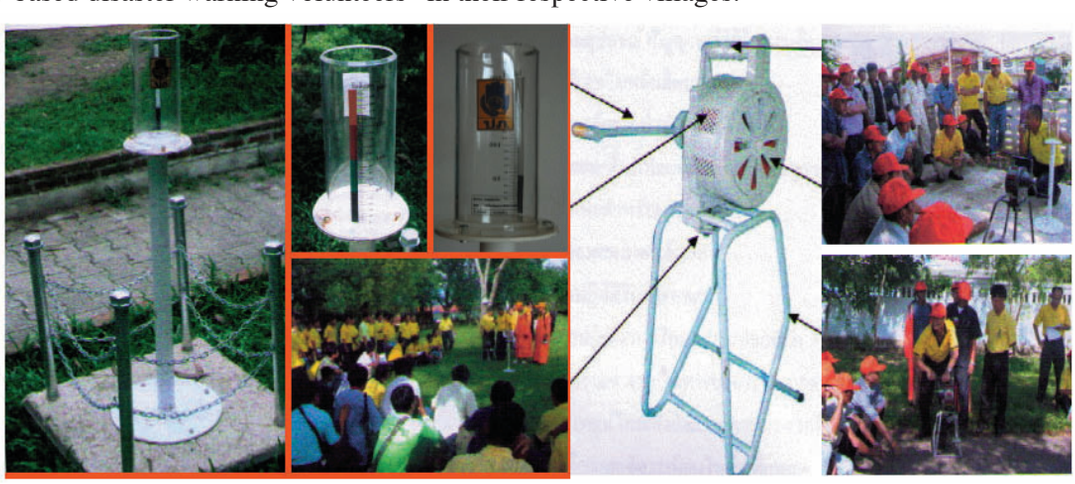
(2) Pre-disaster phase: The main functions during the on-set of disaster are to:
- (2.1) Listen to the weather forecast and warning information from the radio.
- (2.2) Check and record the amount of rainfalls in the simple raingauge and daily report the results to the village headman.
- (2.3) Observe the weather condition if the heavy downpour continues for days, and keeps a close watch for potential flashfloods and landslides in the risk areas, and be ready to warn the villagers.
- (2.4) Inform other villagers to be well-prepared and what to do.

(3) During disaster: During this phase, "Mr. Warning" mostly acts as the intermediary or coordinator and:
- (3.1) Reports the numbers of evacuees, injured, and missing to the ad-hoc directing center.
- (3.2) Coordinates with village headman and leads the evacuees to evacuation center.
- (3.3) Coordinates with authorities to report the relief items needed.
- (3.4) Coordinates with village headman to report the setbacks to authorities

(4) Post-disaster: During this phase "Mr. Warning" fulfills the following activities:
- (4.1) Assisting the injured to the medical care center.
- (4.2) Coordinating with the village headman and other authorities, particularly medical personnel.
- (4.3) Coordinating with authorities concerned to mobilize the evacuees homes.
- (4.4) Following up and coordinating the agencies concerned for humanitarian assistance.
- (4.5) Coordinating with the village headman and local authorities for rehabilitation of the damaged infrastructures, schools, temples etc. in the village.

4. Achievements:

Since the inception in August 2006, DDPM in collaboration with the earlier mentioned government agencies, has launched this training course in floods and landslides in villages of 51 provinces (out of 76 provinces) nationwide. A total number of 6,455 "Mr. Warning" have been designated and appointed as the "village-based disaster warning volunteers" in their respective villages.



Simple Rainguage, Manual Siren and "Mr. Warning" Training Course

One of the most effective performance that can be cited as the best practice of "Mr. Warning" is the case of Mr. Suthep Sae Pan, "Mr. Warning" of village 6, in Tambon Mae Ngon, Phang district, Chiang Mai province. It was reported that on October 8, 2006, the flashfloods and mudslides triggered by continuous heavy downpours had ravaged the Phang district. This hydrological disaster devastated the villagers' houses, infrastructures, and disrupted public utilities, 7 villagers were reported dead. Whereas in village 6, Mr.Suthep Sae Pan had kept the close watch at the weather condition and kept checking the amount of rainfalls in the simple raingauge. Besides, he had noticed that the water level of the canal in the village was rising and the colour of the water had changed and hinted to potential flashfloods. Immediately he reported the situation to the Tambon Administration Organization Committees, the chief of Tambon, and the village headman. Based on Mr.Suthep Sae Pan's information, the authorities then decided to evacuate approximately 100 villagers of village 6 to the high grounds. Mr. Suthep Sae Pan, "Mr. Warning" of village 6, Tambon Mae Ngon, Phang district, Chiang Mai province, has efficiently and effectively interpreted his knowledge passed on by the training and ultimately saved the lives of his fellow villagers.

5. Conclusion :

This project attempts to prepare the villages prone to floods and mudslides by using participatory approach to get the people in those villages involved.

The DDPM and the Ministry of Interior has realized that the traditional top-to-down disaster management bypasses the potential of local resources and capacities, and in some cases has increased the community's vulnerability. The successful experience of Mr.Suthep Sae Pan, "Mr. Warning" of village 6, is another evidence of the advantage of people's involvement.

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