

Voices of resilience

Disaster risk reduction in Thailand

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International**

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About the project

“Voice of resilience: Disaster risk reduction in Thailand” is part of the documentation of good practices in community-based disaster risk reduction of the project “Facilitating Partnerships of National and ASEAN Disaster Risk Reduction Authorities and Civil Society to Support AADMER Implementation (AADMER Project)¹, by the AADMER Partnership Group (APG)². In Thailand, HelpAge International acts as the Country Lead and works in partnership with the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM) and other civil society organisations engaging in disaster management including APG member organisations. The project is supported by the European Commission on Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection (ECHO). The document highlights mobilising multi-stakeholders for disaster risk reduction and contributions and needs of vulnerable groups including older people, children, people with disabilities and women. The documentation was undertaken in Pong Namron and Huaymayom Sub-districts of Fang District, Chiang Mai Province in collaboration with Foundation for Older Persons’ Development (FOPDEV), one of HelpAge’s key affiliates and Plan International Thailand, APG’s member organisation, and their local partners.

1 AADMER– ASEAN Agreement for Disaster Management and Emergency Response was initiated in 2004 after the Indian Ocean Tsunami. The Agreement was signed by the ASEAN Foreign Ministries in 2005 and became legally binding as it entered into force on 24 December 2009 when ratified by all ten ASEAN Member States. This makes the AADMER the first legal-binding Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA)-related instrument in the world. AADMER Project is implemented at both country and regional levels. Country-level implementation in Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam. AADMER stands for ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response.

2 The APG is a consortium led by Oxfam, the member organisations are ChildFund International, HelpAge International, Mercy Malaysia, Plan International, Save the Children International and World Vision. It aims to promote partnership between civil organisations and ASEAN in development and disaster management.

HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives.

HelpAge International
East Asia/Pacific Regional Office
6, Soi 17, Nimmanhemmin Road, Suthep, Muang, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand
Tel: +66 53 225 440, Fax: +66 53 225 441, hai@helpageasia.org

www.helpage.org

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Introduction

Natural disasters linked to climate change are increasing in regularity at an alarming rate worldwide. In Fang District of Chiang Mai Province, close to Thailand's border with Myanmar, villagers - including those from ethnic hill tribe communities - have been experiencing severe flash flooding, twister wind storms and droughts, as well as related phenomena such as landslides and forest fires. Together with a small group of local partners, HelpAge International and Plan International have been working

with select communities here to make them safer and more resilient in the face of such disasters.

The various partner organisations each bring particular expertise, so that multi-stakeholder engagement is possible. HelpAge and the Foundation for Older Persons' Development (FOPDEV) specialise in working with older people while Plan International and the community-based organisations CITC (which stands

for Capacity Improvement of Tribal Communities in Nam Fang Basin) are primarily concerned with children and youth. Cooperating with other stakeholders from different sectors in the localities, they are taking a distinctly inclusive, intergenerational approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR). This is designed to ensure that no vulnerable people are left out, whether they are old, young, female, disabled or cross-border migrants.

This area is home to many people who have difficulty accessing government assistance at times of crisis because they are 'stateless' living in remote ethnic hill tribe communities in the border triangle with Laos and Myanmar who did not get registered at birth nor received citizenship yet. A lot of these individuals are further disadvantaged because they speak only their ethnic hill tribe language, not Thai. Taking an intergenerational approach has paid dividends here. Because those youth who are able to access education and learn Thai, can serve as a bridge between community elders and the various government service providers such as the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation or the Forestry Department and Irrigation Department who can help with disaster risk reduction in the community.

Security for vulnerable groups

in the face of climate change



Working together through

an intergenerational approach

While Plan and CITC have worked with youth groups and community leaders to develop this bridge, HelpAge and FOPDEV have been engaged with the establishment and strengthening of older people's groups. These help to ensure that older people's as well as children's specific needs are incorporated into disaster response planning, and also give them space to offer the benefits of their own specific capabilities, which are often overlooked. Together with the Pong Namron Sub-district Administrative Organisation (SAO), they have sought support from other community-based groups and agencies in the area such as a women groups, local temple, school and the Border Patrol Unit.

FOPDEV and HelpAge have also brought technical and corporate assistance into the picture, through a tie-up with Prudential that enabled 68 'PruVolunteers' from 10 Asian countries and the Faculty of Architecture of Chulalongkorn and Chiang Mai University to assist with the repair and reconstruction of older people's homes.

This short book is designed to communicate the impact of this novel approach to disaster risk reduction (DRR), and also the methods behind it. Through these pages, you will be introduced to some of the people



that HelpAge and Plan and their local partner organisations have been working with in two sites in the district of Fang. You will hear them recount what they have been through, and share how the project has enabled them to build a renewed sense of hope for a secure future.

While nobody can be sure when disaster might strike again, there is a clear sense that these communities are better prepared than ever. They have plans in place that

consider the needs of their vulnerable members. Through these pages, you will hear about these for yourself directly from community leaders, women, older and younger people alike. You will also hear these people speak of the specific contributions that they can make, proving that especially the so-called 'vulnerable' have crucial roles to play in bolstering their communities' resilience.

Taking refuge

The people of Huaymayom, who practise ancestor worship, depend on Namoo Jayer for her deep religious knowledge. As such, she is considered a community elder. She chuckles frequently while speaking, keeping the mood around her buoyant even as she recalls the extreme weather events her village has survived.

“I remember a couple of disasters”, she shares. “About ten years ago, there was a terrible storm which destroyed several of our houses. It wasn’t wet, it was just windy. Most of us suffered damage that day”.

The other instance she recalls was a flash flood, which came more recently. “At around eight or nine at night, I heard the sound of water and a lot of people screaming”, she says. “We instantly knew what was going on, and started moving our important belongings to higher shelves and ledges so that they’d be safe”.

Sitting on her porch, Namoo points out the flaws in her home that render it vulnerable at such times. “It’s not a strong house”, she admits.

“The newer houses in the village have metal roofs and are built on stilts made of concrete, not wood”.

Pointing to her neighbours’ house behind, she adds,

“I know that one’s safe. That’s where I’ll take refuge the next time heavy winds or floods come”.

This indicates an important learning following a CITC-led training she attended. During the last disaster, she says she was so scared she didn’t know what to do, and simply remained rooted to the spot in her house. “Now I know what to look for”, she asserts, adding with a hearty laugh, “as soon as I see any sign at all that a disaster is on its way, you’ll find me there, inside that house!”

Because they’re more vulnerable owing to their physical conditions, she feels that evacuating the oldest and youngest will be the priority in the event of a major weather event. In spite of her age, she insists that she herself doesn’t come into this category yet. “I’m still more than capable of looking after myself”, she proclaims with a wide grin.

“Now I know what to look for. As soon as I see any sign at all that a disaster is on its way, you’ll find me there, inside that house!”



Sitting with her husband Jana, Namoo Jayar says she now knows exactly where she'll escape to if there's another disaster.



Nalor Taloi points out the threat that may come from the hillside overlooking her paddy fields.

Risk awareness

Nalor Taloi's agricultural land is precious to her. She and her husband moved to Huaymayom 30 years ago in order to be closer to the land that sustained them and that they lovingly cultivate. The prospect of anything happening to this land is a frightening one for Nalor, and she knows it is possible.

"I thank my luck that so far, my farmland has been alright", she says, adding that she can't be sure that this luck won't eventually run out during future heavy rains."

She recalls a close call when, on one occasion, the fallow land next to hers was inundated by a landslide. If crops had been growing there, she says they would have been completely covered by the mud that slid down the hillside.

"When it rains now, I feel afraid to go to my fields", Nalor admits. "I might get caught up in a landslide myself". She adds that such a landslide is quite possible where she's currently growing rice (left).

Some years back, her family cleared the thick forest cover from the hillside here so that they could plant lychee and banana trees. She now realises what a risk this poses, as these trees' roots do not bind the soil nearly as much as the thick forest vegetation used to.

Nalor talks fondly of her grandchildren and the work the older youth ones have put into measures designed to keep the community safe from future disasters. For example, a 15-year-old and an 18-year-old played active parts in

mapping the vulnerable spots in the village and in creating its forest fire buffer zone.

"Though I worry about my physical condition as I get older, I too help out in whatever way I can", Nalor adds.

She points out that she has 19 grandchildren in all, and that her family often looks to her to care for the younger ones. "If disaster strikes", she says, "I know that the first thing I must do is account for the little ones and bring them into the house, where they'll be safe".

"Though I worry about my physical condition as I get older, I too help out in whatever way I can"

Developing youth capacity

Taking a multi-stakeholder approach means working with both older and younger people alike. Project partners Plan International and CITC are very clear that they work not only for children and young people, but also with them. 19-year-old Darunee Jaoue (known as ‘Da’) is a shining example of their success in developing the capacity of youth leaders. Because these youngsters have generally learned Thai, unlike elder members of their villages who speak only their ethnic language, they are empowered to serve as a link between the leaders of their communities and government agencies.

CITC’s Yupin Lasan (known as ‘Sara’), who has been assigned to work on the DRR project in Huaymayom, says that Da is an especially active and enthusiastic member of the village youth group that she has been training. Sara describes how she has taught them about the sorts of disasters that could occur here and how they can prepare for these. “It’s not just for the young people”, she clarifies. “For example, community leaders, older people, youth group members, older people, children, the local government (SAO) and other volunteers all come together to learn how to map the areas of the village that may be vulnerable at times of disaster”.

“I’ve really learned a lot from Sara”, Da exclaims proudly. She gives examples that range from child rights to maternal health and child hygiene. On disaster preparedness, she

says that she can now tell if a flood is coming: “the river water changes from clear to a brown colour”, she explains.

Armed with this awareness, she and her friends keep a close eye on the water passing through their village when it rains. “When we see the water turning brown, we tell people that they may have to evacuate to higher ground. It depends on the speed at which the river is swelling, though. If it’s not too serious, the homes on concrete stilts should be fine”.

“If it happens very fast and the colour turns a deep brown”, she continues, “we may need to head to the homes of people we know in another area”. She admits that this hasn’t yet happened, though she thinks it could some time in the future as extreme weather is becoming increasingly common. “That’s why I think it’s crucial for us to have an evacuation plan”, she adds.



Huaymayom youth leader Da (right) engages enthusiastically with CITC trainer Sara (left) during a training session.



With a wary eye on the rain, Namieu Panpakarin prepares food for her pig, which she considers one of her main assets.

Prepared for all seasons

Namieu Panpakarin is the mother-in-law of Huaymayom's community leader. She's only lived in the village for a short time, having agreed two years ago to live with her daughter to help her raise her grandchildren. In this time, she's already had to live through flash flooding.

"My pig sty was completely destroyed", Namieu recalls. She has another pig now, and explains that she considers the animal one of the family's primary assets, alongside their home and important documents. She'll now raise this animal until the family feasts during Lahu New Year in February. Over this time, she will feed it so that it'll grow from the 20 cm piglet she bought three or four months ago till it weighs 40 to 50 kg. Given the quantity of food - not to mention the time and effort - that goes into raising her pig, she insists that she really cannot afford to lose the creature to the elements.

"Living here, I fear both flash flooding and forest fires", Namieu says. She goes on to recount a traumatic experience where she used to live that was too close to comfort, wherein her neighbour's home burned down in a fire.

In order to guard against the possibility of fire during the heat waves the area is increasingly experiencing, the community have created a buffer zone around the village. This is a ring of cleared land at least a couple of metres wide that encircles the houses, designed to stop a fire in its tracks. Though they now have this protection, Namieu isn't complacent. "If we see a fire advancing, I know the

youth will hurry out to throw water at it and beat it so that it subsides", she explains, adding that she'll certainly assist them with this. "Age is no bar, we need to help each other", she insists.

Namieu also talks of how the youth have learned how to tell if a flood is on its way. "If I hear them saying the water colour's changing, I'll quickly make sure the children are safe and then raise our important belongings to a higher position so that they too will be out of harm's way".

She believes that her family's house can withstand all but the worst of floods; if that worst case comes, Namieu points out that the community have identified a place on higher ground where they can flee to. "I do think 'the big flood will come some day", she cautions. "We must always be prepared".

"I do think 'the big flood will come some day. We must always be prepared".



ผู้รับผิดชอบการควบคุมการอพยพ ณ จุดรวมพล

ลำดับที่	จุดเตรียมอพยพ (ระบุสถานที่)	ผู้ควบคุม (ระบุชื่อ)	หมาย
๑	วัดปิตยราม	นายนคร คำตัน	
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ส่วนราชการที่ตั้งอยู่ในหมู่บ้าน

- ๑. ศูนย์ช่วยเหลือผู้พิการ
- ๒. โรงเรียนบ้านโป่งน้ำร้อน
- ๓. โรงงานผลิตไฟฟ้าด้วยพลังความร้อนใต้พิภพของการไฟฟ้าฝ่ายผลิต

รายชื่อหน่วยงานราชการอำเภอฝาง

- ๑. ตำรวจอำเภอฝาง
- ๒. สำนักงานเกษตรอำเภอฝาง
- ๓. พัฒนาการอำเภอฝาง

Village Head Man Chan Wipak explains how his community has equipped itself to respond to future disasters.

Disaster vulnerability and response

In the event of another disaster hitting the village of Piang Kok, this room will become its nerve centre. Everything that Head Man Chan Wipak needs to coordinate the response is pinned to the wall, ready.

Chan is now serving his second term as the village's elected leader. He explains that if disaster strikes, he'll immediately call to action a ten-person committee, whose members each have distinct tasks for reacting to the event. This group of people also meets once a year to ensure that all their plans are up to date. These plans include checking on the community's older people and responding to their particular needs.

Chan takes the upkeep of the village's disaster vulnerability map (partially visible to the left) very seriously, as this gives an indication of where particular attention should be paid straightaway. "The committee reviews this map after we have dealt with each disaster", he explains, "assessing how the predicted vulnerable spots have been affected and whether any unanticipated places have been hit". Re-mapping then helps the village prepare for future events.

The extent to which the community has drawn up plans for dealing with disasters, clearly visible in this image, masks the fact that many of its members tend towards complacency. "Some people think that with the building of check dams and the buffer zone, and the strengthening of flimsy houses, enough work has been done", Chan remarks. "So I keep reminding them of the risks and what they must do to

minimise these. Even now, it's raining heavily and the river water is changing colour. If it continues like this for another couple of days, I'll announce that we must prepare for evacuation".

It's not only people's safety that concerns the Head Man. "Around 80 per cent of the people here have land that they farm; for them, bad weather equals bad news", he explains. "Many of them grow onions, and they've been finding that because it's been raining far more than it used to during and shortly after the sowing time, their onions have been spoiled or, at the very least, their size and quality has been affected". This, he says, has hit incomes hard. "Last year's harvest brought the farmers zero profit".

Demonstrating their resilience, the farmers are trying hard to adapt, planting corn or rice instead of onions. These are hardier and better able to handle unexpected weather conditions.

When disaster strikes, the community also receives support from the SAO and the nearby Border Patrol Unit. In turn, the SAO coordinates support from different sources - the central government, NGOs, academics and the private sector - which comes in various forms. For example, there is cash compensation, transport for evacuation, people to help with cleaning up, repairing and rebuilding houses and technical assistance for improving the DRR plan and raising awareness about this.

Empowering children to inspire change

Eight-year-old Noppadol Jinaya (right) represents all things evil! Not in reality, of course. In a play performed at the hall above the offices of the local authority, he starred as a motorcycle gangster who relishes cutting down trees. “Chopping down forests makes flooding more likely”, he explains. “That’s a really bad thing”.

Makhampom Foundation teaches youngsters to use drama to express themselves on the issues that they care about. Perhaps unsurprisingly, these children chose flooding as the theme for one of their two plays.

Project Coordinator Surarak Jaiwut explains that her workshops help children to think more about issues that are important locally, and then express themselves to their wider community.

Fifteen-year-old Porntipa Toolongchag, who played the lead role in the performance, says that although school children don’t ordinarily have much of a role in community decision-making, this is a great way for them to make their feelings known and to encourage change. “I’ve also become less shy through acting”, she adds, “and I think I’m more likely to express my thoughts to my community now”.

When disasters hit, Porntipa insists that the youth can play important roles. She points to a youth group in the village of Don, and says that because its members care

about community safety, they could easily work together on projects designed to mitigate the impact of flooding. “For example, they could plant trees to help bind the soil and prevent landslides”, she suggests, adding that if floods come then they could also help at the evacuation centre (the temple), such as by serving food.

While Porntipa’s house lies higher up and wasn’t badly affected by the area’s worst ever floods two years ago, Noppadol says he was only six at the time and that he was very frightened. A little older now, he suggests that in future he will be able to help out more. “One of the best things about me is that I’m strong”, he notes. “Strong people can be very helpful because they can carry things to safety”.

Athit Pat, an officer in the Sub-District Development and Welfare Department, is pleased that this workshop has touched the students’ hearts and minds. “I was keen that it should help make those who’d suffered conscious of lessons they’d learned, and equip them to be active agents next time”, he adds. “Makhampom Foundation has helped us to achieve this”.



Playing the part of a mighty destroyer, Noppadol Jinaya says that in real life he'd rather use his strength to help people.



Buajum Jongkham lovingly rubs her nose against her granddaughter's face. In disasters, she's responsible for this girl.

Older people as carers

Buajum Jongkham farms rice, onions and garlic. “This year”, she says, “my onions were gravely affected by the amount of rain we had”. She explains that her onion and garlic sales should raise 90,000 to 100,000 Baht per year; this year she received only 20,000 Baht, not enough to even cover her investment. “Because of this”, she laments, “I’ve had to borrow and do daily wage labouring work in order to scrape together a living”.

Buajum plays a crucial role in her family because she takes care of her granddaughter. The little girl’s parents rely on her to do this because they are deaf mutes and they would like their daughter to grow up able to communicate like everybody else. In the event of a disaster, her grandmother would be her primary carer.

During the severe floods two years ago, Buajum says that her younger sister’s home (which lies by the river) was inundated. “When my son and I went to help her move her belongings”, she recalls, “the rapidly rising water forced us to escape to the roof, where we got stuck till it subsided”.

Thankfully, her own home was on higher ground, so she knew that her granddaughter would be safe there. Some time after the floodwaters retreated, Prudential volunteers came to build a small extension to her home so that the

whole family of five would be able to sleep securely there at night. The community voted for this family to receive this assistance on the basis that its members were particularly vulnerable, with a young girl, two disabled people who struggle to find employment and two older people whose farming income is increasingly precarious.

Buajum fears that owing to climate change, farming may not be enough to feed the family in future. As the little girl gets older, she envisages spending more and more time farming other people’s fields in order to bring home enough cash. “At least we can now sleep peacefully at night without worrying that floodwaters might consume us”, she admits.



Harvesting the paddy fields. Kam Nunthasin looks forward to a better balance being struck in water management.

Water management

Kam Nunthasin is also a farmer. In a typical year, she grows onions, corn and rice. Last year, however, her corn was destroyed by strong winds. She had invested 60,000 Baht in the crop that year, yet it yielded just 17,000 Baht worth of marketable foodstuff. “This was a big loss for me”, she says with a frown.

While the wind consumed her corn, it’s water that proves a problem for her rice. Not too much of it, but too little. This year, a drought prevented her from sowing her rice seeds at her preferred time. When the rains eventually came, they were insufficient.

“Nowadays, I’m only able to grow enough rice to cover my household consumption needs; I can’t sell any”, says Kam. “There isn’t enough water anymore”. She feels that pressure must be put on the Irrigation Department to change its water management policy, which currently prioritises protecting the community from flooding.

“The government drains away what’s on the other side of the water gate every ten days, even when there’s an ongoing drought”, she says with incredulity. If this isn’t quickly replenished, there will not be sufficient water to meet the paddy fields’ needs when the gates are opened.

Conversely, if too much rain falls and the fields flood, the rice can rot from the bottom upwards.

“I know the check dams that were built after the big floods two years ago are good at holding water back”, Kam says with confidence. “At least this means our personal safety isn’t an issue any longer. What I want to see is a better balance between working for safety and working for the farmers”. This, then, is an area for future improvement.

“I know the check dams that were built after the big floods two years ago are good at holding water back”

Post-disaster rebuilding and improvements

Noom Padawan, who lives alone with her great-grandson, is an active member of her local older people's group and never misses a meeting. "I like being part of decision-making on matters that affect us", she asserts. Now aged around 80, she grapples with deteriorating eyesight and says she has trouble sitting upright.

When flooding struck her village two years ago, water came into her house and right up to her waist. As it had surged down the hillside, the floodwater had torn down many trees, which were then carried into the village by the river. Timber built up at the bridge near Noom's home, and spilled out onto the surrounding land, preventing her from leaving the house.

"I picked up little Siwat and held him tight, so that he'd be safe", she says, recalling the dreadful memories. "Luckily my youngest grandson was with us at the time, so we took turns holding the boy". Ultimately, her neighbours were able to get into the house and rescue them, taking them to safety at the village temple. There, they remained for 10 long days.

When she got home, Noom found that much of her house and furniture had become weakened by the water and was now unsafe. She says she also lost much of her cooking equipment.

"I was so grateful to the people who came to help afterwards", she says with a warm smile. "First, volunteers from Prudential worked on parts of the house. They completely rebuilt my kitchen and fixed my leaking roof. Then some government staff came to strengthen the ground around the house, so that it wouldn't be muddy any longer".

Noom is especially relieved that her kitchen has been fixed up. "Before, even when there was a little rain while I was cooking, I'd need to wear this hat [pictured, right] because it dripped so much inside". Now that the walls of the house have been made much stronger, she feels confident that she'll be able to shut the door and keep floodwaters out in future. "Siwat will be safe; for me, that's what's most important".

And there's more to look forward to. Prudential will soon be disbursing further funds for a second stage of their work with FOPDEV, and at this time attention will be given to Noom's toilet. Currently, her lavatory is hard to reach at times of flooding. This time, instead of sending volunteers from overseas, Prudential will channel small grants through FOPDEV to the children of the village's older people, giving community members a sense of ownership of the process.



Until Prudential volunteers fixed her leaking kitchen roof, Noom Padawan would have to wear this hat to cook during rain.



Kham Wongkeaw (right) has played an indispensable role in ensuring her husband Ma's wellbeing since he suffered a stroke.

Support for the weakest

For Ma and Kham Wongkeaw, the flash flood of 2011 was not just a curse; it was also a blessing. A couple of years previously, aged around 80, Ma had suffered a debilitating stroke that had left him confined to his bed. “When our neighbours rushed in with alarm, shouting that floodwaters were coming”, Kham recalls, “Ma suddenly got up from his bed for the first time without assistance. It was a miracle!”

Kham experienced such a mix of emotions at that time, she says. “I was petrified of the floods, yet elated that my husband had got up all on his own”. Though the neighbours still had to carry Ma to safety, over time he gradually rediscovered the ability to walk (albeit very slowly) on his own.

For a 40 Baht application fee, Kham joined her local older people’s group. “In the first meeting I attended, the President asked whether any of us were having problems”, she remembers. “So I stood up and said ‘yes, I’m having problems’”.

This kick-started a process that ultimately resulted in the couple being built a whole new house. “Those volunteers were really nice”, Kham recalls, fondly. “There was one woman from Hong Kong with whom I built a really special relationship. It felt like having a new granddaughter! I cried when she left, and I hope she’ll come again.”

The floods were very frightening for Kham; she remembers the feeling well. Last night, she says she heard their neighbours talking about the heavy rain and the possibility of flooding, and felt a strong sense of worry.

Though he’s not able to speak much now, she adds that Ma feels the same at such times. In their state of fragility, they would not be able to climb onto the roof to escape rising waters, so it’s a blessing that they now have a new, robust house.

Having shared her anxiety, Kham adds that in her rational mind, she doesn’t actually expect such floods to come again. She’s seen the work that’s been done since the last big floods, and this has reassured her.

Still, she assures that she can’t ever get complacent, pointing out that she’s made an arrangement with the neighbours that they’ll come to help them if they need it. She also knows that there’s a plan in place for getting the community’s older people to safety if a disaster strikes again, which gives her some comfort.



When it rains hard, Buakam Inthasom has no difficulty heading upstairs to safety in her new home.

From flimsy hut to robust two-storey home

When Buanam Inthasom and her family constructed their home on this spot ten years ago, it was little more than a bamboo hut. This flimsy structure housed seven people in three small rooms.

“During the rainy season, all three rooms would leak”, Buanam says. “No matter how hard we tried to stop the water coming in, our house was made of bamboo, so we had little chance of success. We would end up confining ourselves to the small corners where there was less dripping, and then cover our heads with plastic”.

The family tolerated this existence for eight years until the big flood of 2011. That night, Buanam was alone and frightened. “My family was trapped, unable to return from chilli harvesting”, she explains. “I had no way of knowing where they were. Meanwhile, the storm was so ferocious that I really thought I could be killed. All I wanted was for my family to return home, so that I could die in peace”.

Because the house was built on only one level and was close to the river, water rushed in from all sides and Buanam had nowhere to escape to. When FOPDEV later assessed what the family needed, it concluded that their house should be rebuilt from stronger, impermeable material, and that it should have two storeys.

Now, when the weather turns bad, Buanam knows that she doesn't need to wait for someone to come home to rescue her; she only needs to head upstairs and she'll be out of harm's way.

“Last night”, she shares, “I listened to the rain falling very hard against the house. I admit that I felt a little scared, but this was mostly because of my memories. Ultimately, I knew that all I needed to do was go to the other level and all would be well”.

The new building has brought peace of mind to the rest of the family as well. Before, when it rained hard, they used to worry that they needed to get home to look after Buanam, even if their work wasn't done.

Buanam is visibly happier these days. Before her house was rebuilt, she seemed to be living in perpetual fear. The community voted for her to receive help from Prudential because it pained them to see that she was always so miserable. Now, people comment that it's nice to see her smile, a simple thing that she never used to do previously.



Nu Kaewkham is a woman of great fortitude. She cares for her bed-bound husband and her granddaughter around the clock.

“The first time that outsiders had helped me”

One morning, Nu Kaewkham woke at 6am to find her husband Hyam lying on the ground, where he'd evidently fallen. He'd been there for the past four hours, unable to move; he would never walk again. Today, in spite of the nerve-related back problem that gives her considerable pain, Nu cares throughout the day not only for her husband but also her young granddaughter.

Nu worries that in the event of disaster, she will not be able to carry her husband to safety; she's simply too frail. Her daughter has now moved back from the city of Chiang Mai to help her parents, but the reality of living in poverty means that she has to be away in the fields most of the time, earning whatever she can to keep the family fed.

When severe floods hit the village two years back, they thankfully weren't life-threatening for this house, though they cut the family off from its regular sources of food for several days. In their old age, the couple were affected more during cold spells, while a lot of spray would come into the house and make it damp when it rained, because the doors and windows wouldn't close properly.

As she's a carer for both her husband and her granddaughter and also has to look after herself at an advanced age, Nu says with a deep sigh and moist eyes, “I feel so exhausted”. She explains that her biggest challenge comes when she's hungry and suffering from insufficient sleep, yet she can't rest or cook because there's not enough time nor food in the house.

“The problem is that there's nobody to take my place”, she adds, “so I must keep going”. She does so out of compassion, as she fears for her husband and granddaughter's futures in the event that she's no longer there.

“When the Prudential volunteers came to fix the leaks in the house and improve the drainage, this was the first time that outsiders had helped me”, Nu remembers. “Until then, I thought that the only thing I could do during difficult times was to find a way to help myself”.

Though it hurts and tires her considerably, Nu is a determined hard worker. If there's another disaster in the future, she says that as long as someone can help her get there, she will be well-placed to assist with caring for older and disabled people at the evacuation centre (the temple). Indeed, she says she already shares her knowledge at meetings of the older people's group whenever the topic of taking care of someone with a disability comes up.

Older people as resource

While being vulnerable as a result of the ageing process and sometimes experiencing health problems associated with their advancing years, older people are significant sources of local knowledge and command great respect from younger generations. They can therefore contribute to disaster management and support affected people.

He may be 88, but Moon Sompanjan is a sprightly man. He is jovial and positive, and says that he doesn't let his age hold him back. "I like to stay active, and get around by riding my bicycle", he explains, adding, "sadness is not a good thing". Though he assures that he will always invest his energy into doing what he can for the society of which he's a part, he admits that many other older people are more in need of help than able to offer assistance themselves.

"In all my 86 years till then, I never saw floods so bad as those that hit us two years back", Moon says. He took it upon himself to visit those in the community who were directly affected. "Those people whose homes became uninhabitable came here to the temple", he recollects. Showing how inspiring older people can be at such times, he adds, "I joined them here to talk with them and help keep their spirits up".

Moon is an active member of his local older people's group, and is proud to be part of the initiatives it fosters. Members of the group take part in community meetings to discuss disaster risk reduction and prevention, and they give their support based on their life experiences, local knowledge and wisdom. When they were asked to vote on which older

people ought to receive assistance with home repairs and rebuilding, Moon made an informed choice by selecting Buakam Inthasom (see above) because she was really poor and lived with her family in a small, flimsy hut right by the river.

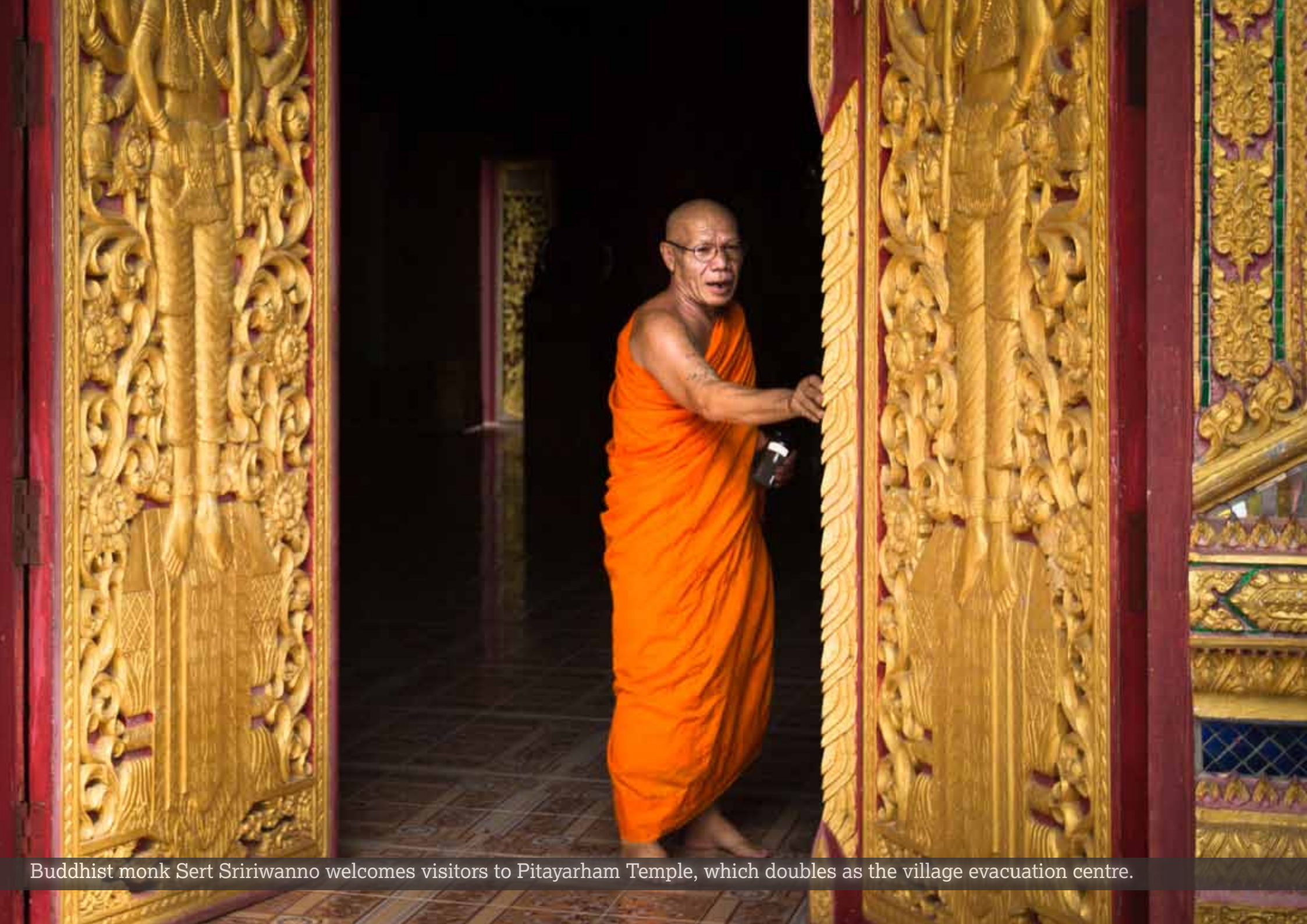
During this process, the other members of the group also selected him. "I feel safer now", he says, with his trademark smile. "When we first experienced twister winds here, they blew down the walls and also took my roof off", he explains. "So the Prudential volunteers fixed the roof and built a stronger exterior wall using *faux* wood".

Moon says he really liked how the volunteers behaved with him. Though he couldn't talk with the foreigners directly, he was happy that they had a translator with them, enabling them to form a friendly bond. When they left, they gifted him a beautiful enlarged and mounted black and white photograph of him with his granddaughter, which he found especially touching.

Looking to the future, Moon feels confident that the community will never again have to go through something like it suffered previously. "I've seen how they've built check dams and an overflow for the river", he explains. "I feel much safer now".



Moon Sompanjan spends Asalha Puja Day - when Buddhists honour the Sangha (community of the monks) - at the temple.



Buddhist monk Sert Sriwanno welcomes visitors to Pitayarham Temple, which doubles as the village evacuation centre.

Evacuation centre

A serving Buddhist monk for the past 25 years, Sert Sriwanno is the Acting Head Monk at Pitayarham Temple. He vividly recalls the night that the village of Piang Kok was inundated by record floods in 2011.

“At that time, there was no formal plan in place stating that the temple should be an evacuation centre”, he points out. “Yet people simply flocked here. Of course, we monks immediately started helping them in whatever ways we could, lighting candles so they could see while the electricity was out, and handing around food, drink and medicines that had been donated to the temple”.

Sert recollects how the floodwaters completely encircled the building, but because its inner chamber was raised far above ground level, people could gain sanctuary inside. Every other place in the village that could have offered people shelter had been blocked by the timber brought by the flood. So the temple became people’s natural refuge.

Because it worked so well as an evacuation centre, he says the village’s formal disaster plans have designated it as such for future severe weather events and people are well aware of this. Indeed, Sert believes that his temple should in any case play this role. “The community depends on the mercy of the temple”, he explains, “and the temple should provide help to those who depend on it”.

He particularly recalls how older people came trembling to the temple that night. “I gave them traditional medicines and food and encouraged them to stay strong”, he recalls.

“In times like this, young and old alike must work together for everyone’s benefit”, Sert asserts. “Among our number we have a handful of novice monks”, he points out, “and if disaster strikes again I will assign these boys specific roles just as I will for the other monks”. He adds, “being a monk is about giving service, it’s not about living off the people’s support”.

As he contemplates the future, Sert says that he does not waste any time in worrying about the possibility that the village will be beset by disaster again. “We must remember the circle of life”, he explains. “Nature brings such things, and we must simply face them”.

Feeding the hungry

Jantip Norwong, second from the left in the image, is President of the Piang Kok Women's Group. On the night of the 2011 flash floods, she was aware that many of the villagers were rushing to the temple. "I knew straight away that this was going to be a really difficult time for our community", she says, "so our group needed to be as helpful as possible".

At that time, there was no plan as such for events like this. Jantip explains, "we quickly decided that we would cook at the temple's kitchen and deliver food, drink and medicines by foot, and just got on with it. There was no formal division of responsibilities, even. Our members just came forward and offered themselves up based on what they were good at".

Very quickly, members of the women's groups in the villages of Don, Ton Pueng and Ton Pueng Tai came to offer their assistance. "With so many women ready to help", Jantip says, "we were able to cook for all those that needed feeding, including the soldiers who'd been assigned here".

After a point, she recalls that the temple's reserves of food ran bare. So the women purchased new ingredients using money that had been given in donations.

During quieter times, the Women's Group prepares food for village functions, including when the older people's group meets. "It's a pleasure to cook for them", Jantip says, grinning. "They especially enjoy our desert!"

The Group also has a sub-group that makes and sells brooms as a means of income generation. After the big flood, the ladies donated many of these brooms to help the community clear up.

According to the rules, members of the Women's Group should pass from this to the older people's group after turning 60. Asked about her own plans for when she reaches her 'golden years', Jantip replies that even at that time, she will want to be helpful. She insists that she'll be capable of this until a very advanced age.

Just as the community now knows how important it is to ensure there's ample food at the temple in case of future disasters, Jantip says she applies the same principle on a micro scale at home. "If need be", she explains, "I even reduce the rice I cook in a day so that some can be put aside".



Women's Group members quickly mobilise to cook for the community's displaced and hungry during disasters.

Devoted to service

Much loved by the area's older people, 72-year-old Boonpeng Inkaew has occupied the position of President of the Pong Nam Ron sub-district older people's group for the past 12 years. He believes he was voted into this role because the community saw him as especially devoted during his time as a village Head Man previously. Indeed, he insists that he never misses any activities and that he always takes an active interest in the lives of his members.

“My most important responsibility as President is to ensure that the education of the older members of our community never ceases”, Boonpeng says, adding that he enjoys finding innovative means of achieving this, such as through traditional dancing.

When the 2011 disaster happened, he explains how he convened a meeting to decide how best to meet the needs of the older people who'd been affected. “We had a lot of success in encouraging people to donate whatever food they could spare in order to help”, he recalls.

“The work didn't end once life went back to normal”, Boonpeng adds. “Even now, when the older people come to collect their pensions, I remind them that they must remain prepared for future disasters and that they should never ignore the warning signs”.

He also reminds people that though memories of flash flooding may be most vivid, there are also other risks that should not be forgotten. Personally, in his own village, he is more concerned about the possibility of landslides as it lies close to a large mud slope. The village's disaster plan was framed around this particular threat.

Boonpeng is clear that older people are not simply vulnerable at times of disaster, they can also be a tremendous resource. “They provide advice and encourage people”, he explains. “I don't need to call on them to do this in the name of the group”, he clarifies. “They do it as individuals on their own accord, and we are all better off for it”.



On his rounds, Boonpeng Inkaew pays a house visit to raise the spirits of an older community member who is very unwell.

***By building our
resilience***

***we'll keep our
beloved home
in the hills***





About Plan International

Plan International is an international development organisation operating in 50 countries across Africa, Asia and the Americas to promote and protect the rights of children. In Thailand, Plan has been working for more than 30 years across 600 communities. Our goal is that children and young people from most-at-risk population in Thailand, in particularly ethnic minorities, stateless and migrants, enjoy their right to education, economic security, sexual and reproductive health and protection from all forms of abuse, exploitation and violence as well as from disasters.

About FOPDEV

Foundation for Older Persons' Development (FOPDEV) seeks to improve the quality of life for older people throughout Thailand by working with and for older people nationwide to address their physical, psychological, social, educational, and economic needs. Recognising specific needs and contributions of older people in disaster management, FOPDEV has promoted participation of older people in community-based disaster risk reduction and mitigation. This highlights multi-partnership and intergenerational approaches.

