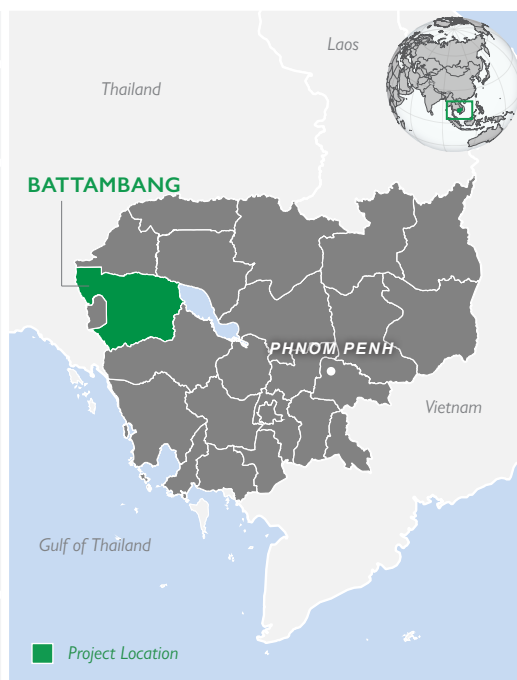


CASE STUDY

CAMBODIA 2018–2021 / DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

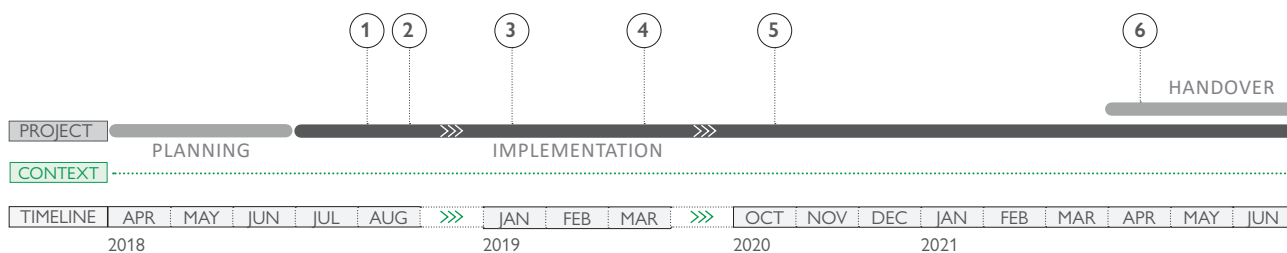
KEYWORDS: Conditional cash transfer, Disaster Risk Reduction, Infrastructure, PASSA

PROJECT LOCATION	Battambang province, Cambodia
PEOPLE SUPPORTED BY THE PROJECT	42,270 individuals directly supported 82,556 individuals indirectly supported
PROJECT OUTPUTS	48 Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) groups with 415 members (257 females), were formed and trained on the approach 48 disaster action plans were developed, and 30 community projects were implemented 42 urban informal settlements leaders received Training of Trainers on housing policy 1,052 individuals were trained in housing-related policies 1,669 individuals attended awareness raising events
DIRECT COST	USD 360-3,900 for each of the community projects



PROJECT SUMMARY

The project focused on reducing the vulnerabilities to disaster risks and enhancing the response capacity of the communities living in informal settlements in Battambang city, most of which were set up in areas with high risks of flooding, landslides, windstorms, and fire. Through the Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA), groups were formed in different settlements involving the communities, and other governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, for the development of Disaster Action Plans. Following the plans, 30 community projects were implemented with the resources mobilized by the project.



- 1 Aug 2018:** Introducing the project to relevant stakeholders and project partners.
- 2 Aug–Dec 2018:** Initiating and introducing the approach in the target communities of the project.
- 3 Jan 2019–Dec 2020:** Forming of the groups in the target villages and building of their capacity.
- 4 Mar 2019–Apr 2021:** With micro-grant support, the groups implemented their community-based Disaster Response, Recovery and Restore-oriented projects.
- 5 Oct–Nov 2020:** Part of the group's scope of work, they mobilized the resources to respond to the flood crisis.
- 6 Apr 2021–Jun 2021:** The project's final evaluation was undertaken and documented.



Participants of the PASSA groups played an integral role in the community-designed plans.

CONTEXT

Cambodia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in Southeast Asia due to hazards such as floods, storms, typhoons, and cyclical droughts, which frequently result in significant economic and social impacts. Poor rural areas and urban informal settlements in Cambodia bear the brunt of these hazards and continue to experience crippling challenges due to poor adaptive capacities, which are worsened by the negative influence of climate change. Shelter and settlement risks and vulnerabilities are also increasing due to changes in disaster trends, the impact of climate change, growing social and economic marginalization, and the impact of the process of urbanization.

Informal settlements in the developing world are increasing in number and worsening in living conditions in the face of overpopulation, economic instability, and unprecedented climate variance. In Cambodia, cities act as powerful magnets for rural populations who lack local opportunities and who seek to achieve prosperity for their immediate and future generations. However, these cities fail to provide basic needs and services for increasing numbers of internal migrants. In Battambang City alone, the municipality recorded in 2018 that 2,586 households were living in 34 informal settlements, which had been set on public lands such as road edges, railways, riverbanks, and canals, and therefore without any tenure security for the inhabitants. Like many secondary cities, Battambang suffers from a land deficit, and accessing decent housing is not only difficult but economically unfeasible for the urban poor.

Battambang is one of Cambodia's largest provinces. It is located on the northwestern side of the country and is comprised of interconnected landscapes and watersheds that provide essential ecosystem services to the region. The province relies on the Sangker River, which served as the primary foundation for city and agriculture development. Battambang City consists of ten Sangkats (or districts) and 92 villages with approximately 196,709 residents. Urban regulations have often failed to keep up with rapid urbanization, leading to a heterogeneous urban fabric.

Several informal settlements were set along the Sangker River and railway, in areas prone to landslides and flooding.



A flooded village in Cambodia's western Battambang province, following heavy rains in the region, October 2020.

Most of them consisted of tiny wooden houses without access to water or proper sanitation services. Many households were living without land titles in areas where authorities could carry out relocations if the land was needed for development. Many households' livelihoods depended on work in small local businesses such as street food vendors, motor taxis, or household labor.

In late 2020, tropical storms resulted in severe flooding in Battambang province. Most residents living along the Sangker River experienced damage in their houses, as well as in the roads and drainage systems. A total of 66,088 households were affected, and 4,592 of them were displaced, struggling to access clean water and hygiene during the evacuation, which exacerbated tropical illnesses among the displaced. The Government distributed food and cash and coordinated with humanitarian partners for complementing the provision of food as well as WASH, NFIs, and shelter kits.

PROJECT DESIGN/STRATEGY

The implementing organization has operated in Battambang since 2007. Before the 2020 flood event, the organization implemented housing, WASH, and urban development projects in the area. Through its people-centered approach, the organization partnered with vulnerable communities who raised (through a feedback mechanism) increasing concerns for disaster risks, as the areas they lived in were along the Tonle Sap River where flooding was recurrently experienced. As responding to disasters was part of the strategic priorities of the organization, it designed a project aiming to strengthen the capacities of poor urban households who experienced crippling challenges due to insufficient adaptive mechanisms worsened by the negative influence of climate change. Women were likely more vulnerable due to cultural normative responsibilities such as securing water, cooking, and taking over household activities and sanitation practices. The project adopted a Participatory Approach for Safe Shelter Awareness (PASSA) to promote disaster risk reduction.



Increase of informal settlements in Phnom Penh, and rest of the country, consisting of makeshift housing, lack of land security and services, and poor sanitation.

Goal	Strengthen disaster risk management capacities of local communities, especially first line responders, in the most vulnerable urban poor communities in Battambang Municipality.
Outcome 1	Increased Community Participation in decision-making and management of disaster preparedness and reducing vulnerability through the PASSA approach.
Outcome 2	Increased Capacity on Land Frameworks and National Housing policy among the community and local authorities.

Under Outcome 1, the project aimed to tackle disaster concerns such as flooding and landslides while raising awareness about disaster preparedness and response in 61 poor urban communities (railways, riverbanks, drainage canals, and public state lands). Under Outcome 2, the implementing organization partnered with the Ministry of Land Management, Urbanization and Planning, and a National Policy Specialist to build the community’s capacity and knowledge in topics such as social land concession, urban framework, and housing policy. Youth, individuals from the community, and local authorities who joined the training played an essential role by advocating with the government for implementing upgrading works in the informal settlements.

IMPLEMENTATION

The project was implemented in coordination with authorities at different levels - Municipality, Province, and Ministry as well as universities and other stakeholders.

Through the PASSA approach, the project aimed to strengthen the resilience and safety of urban informal settlements in Battambang City by implementing a shelter and settlement improvement plan to enhance the disaster preparedness capacity of vulnerable communities. PASSA groups in the communities were formed and empowered to lead and coordinate processes independently. These groups were comprised of five units (construction, savings, monitoring, budget management, and case management) and led during the development of action plans and group

savings activities based on financial management training provided by the implementing organization. The project team assisted the groups on the development of proposals and community action plans and provided government-requested documentation.

Training on the minimum Construction Quality Standards concept was provided to all groups to enhance awareness of the implementing organization’s construction policies. Before any housing construction-related work through the micro-grant began, the project’s construction supervisor reviewed the design and trained the monitoring committee to conduct independent monitoring.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

The project formed 48 PASSA groups in the urban Battambang province comprised of 415 members (62% of whom [or 257 in total] were female). Two of the groups were led by Persons with Disabilities. Each member was a representative of the community – including local leaders, authorities, Persons with Disabilities, youth, the National Committee for Disaster Management (NCDM), and local NGO partners. Team leaders in each group were voted by their members.

The implementing organization provided group coaching and monitoring on proposal development and grant



Training was provided to the groups to identify main hazards in their community, which further contributed to the Development Action Plans (DAPs).



Community members attended various awareness raising events on DRR.



Training on the PASSA approach to the selected groups, May 2020.

support to selected action. There were 30 micro-grants distributed through the project to 30 groups, who had identified the main eight hazards that their communities were susceptible to, including: flooding, landslide, fire, windstorms, theft, the COVID 19 pandemic, lightning and poor sanitation infrastructure and hygiene conditions. After that, they elaborated Development Action Plans (DAPs) to respond to the identified issues. The proposed interventions included:

1. Renovating roads damaged by a flash flood.
2. Building a drainage system to prevent flooding.
3. Restoring water canals.
4. Installing fire extinguishers in communal halls and schools.
5. Installing solar panels for community lighting along the streets.
6. Providing COVID-19 kits to poor, vulnerable households.
7. Housing repairs for poor, vulnerable households.
8. Raising disaster preparedness and response awareness in the community and building the capacity for disaster mitigation.

A total of 42,270 individuals, including 25,721 women and 97 Persons with Disabilities (56 male, 41 female) from 15,112 families benefited from DAPs that improved community living conditions. The average micro-grant amount supported by the implementing organization was USD 1,188 per DAP. In addition to funding supplied by the project, the PASSA groups also mobilized funding from their community members and the private sector, which was an average of USD 230 per DAP.



The project provided grant support to the groups to renovate the community's water drainage system.



Damaged roads after the impact of flooding. The community projects implemented included the renovation of roads, amongst others.

TARGETING

A total of 34 informal settlement communities were identified as the most vulnerable to climatic shocks, living on government and private land along rivers and roadsides. The communities included Persons with Disabilities, women headed households, people affected by HIV/AIDS, and older people with limited family support. The team coordinated the selection of settlements for the project with district and communal officials. During the verification and selection process, the technical team visited communities to understand their needs and challenges and conducted a resource mapping exercise.

During the assessment to establish the PASSA groups, Battambang local authorities were engaged within the group forming recruitment process, including its goal, objective, target, and community engagement purpose. The project team also consulted with the community at different levels to collect their ideas and suggestions on applying the approach in their settlements.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The project engaged with communities and local authorities through key communication flows such as outreach, consultation, collaboration, and shared leadership. The community participated actively in project activities, including PASSA formation and training, proposal writing, and implementing micro-grants. Primary knowledge and skills were shared to contribute to project implementation. A project signboard was installed as a complaint mechanism box and an online channel was set up through an app within the community for their members and authorities to share information and provide and receive feedback.

The groups identified the main challenges in each community and developed a proposal as a key action plan – in consultation with local authorities – to address them. Additionally, the groups played an essential role in tracking and monitoring information at the community level – assisting in creating coordinating communication mechanisms with government bodies, private sector actors, and

different organizations to mobilize resources for preparedness, response to, and mitigating the impact of disasters. The groups delivered the awareness raising of hazard prevention training among people in the community and prepared each proposal to request micro-grants for the implementation.

COORDINATION

The implementing organization conducted a project launch to provide a project orientation and information on monitoring plans, objectives, and activities to community members, local authorities, and local NGO partners. Collaboration with the Provincial Government was established from the start of the project.

MAIN CHALLENGES

Project sites became a hotspot for COVID-19. The Government of Cambodia and local authorities strictly banned mass gatherings – among other community events – for several months during the project period. Hefty fines were imposed and those who violated the protocols were incarcerated. The project was also obliged to follow government protocols and was guided by the ‘Do No Harm’ principle to ensure the safety of participants and staff. In response to this, challenges arose when field monitoring had to be postponed, leading to further delays of activities such as training, workshops, and individual coaching. To mitigate further delays and challenges, additional training was conducted for the staff to build technological capacities in relation to software and online tools for project design and monitoring.

CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

- **Environmental Impact:** Garbage bins with waste disaggregation (organic waste, plastic waste, and solid waste) and street solar lighting were included in the proposals.
- **Gender Equality:** Approximately 60% of the project participants were women, who joined project activities such as meetings, workshops, training, and awareness-raising. The project provided women with equal opportunities to raise their voices and participate in the community development plan. The project encouraged women to be leaders in their communities – the project had 6 female led group leaders.
- **Disability Inclusiveness:** The project promoted the participation of Persons with Disabilities. Two groups were led by people with disabilities and 25 (6 percent) of all participants trained were Persons with Disabilities.

TECHNICAL SOLUTIONS

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the project team faced challenges with project monitoring, including information collection, tracking progress on the micro-grant implemen-

-tation projects, and project participant tracking. However, the implementing organization developed remote monitoring tools at the field level. Groups were coordinated using online apps to schedule meetings, provide progress updates, and report on achievements.

EXIT/HANDOVER

Project staff promoted saving groups to sustain the DAPs on a longer term. Micro-grants enabled communities to implement interventions of community development through the creation and management of DAPs, by identifying issues, planning for solutions, and implementing them. Local authorities at the commune level acknowledged the groups’ organizational structure and terms of reference (ToR) as they were considered community-led groups contributing to improving the living condition of their different settlements.

WIDER IMPACTS

The project increased community participation in decision-making in terms of disaster management and vulnerability reduction through its PASSA groups. Each group assessed the levels of exposure and potential impacts from adverse events at the community level, and engaged their communities in proposing an intervention to mitigate the hazard. This increased their sense of responsibility for disaster preparedness, leading to behavioral change within the community and the development of settlement hazard mapping. Other significant outcomes of the project were creating safe spaces for women and girls through installing solar lights along the main roads and improving sanitation facilities and practices for the community. Members of the savings group were also able to use loans to invest in family livelihood development, shelter improvements (including house repair and upgrade), and WASH improvements (including clear water connection and toilet construction).

Battambang Municipality also required the strengthening of multi-stakeholder involvement to develop a holistic strategic development plan for the city. Consequently, the implementing organization advocated for land allocation and onsite upgrading for the most vulnerable households in informal settlements. The implementing organization was involved in a governmental multi-stakeholder platform where issues could be raised concerning development plans on disaster risk reduction and preparedness.



Communication mechanisms were established with community members, local authorities, and local NGO partners from the start of the project.

STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND LESSONS LEARNED

STRENGTHS

- ✓ **The PASSA approach aimed to develop local capacities to reduce shelter-related risks by raising awareness and developing skills within communities.** In the context of Cambodia, the implementing organization moved from raising awareness and education to an empowering approach through the further mobilizing of communities and rallying their participation, resources, and commitment as part of disaster risk reduction management, preparedness and response.
- ✓ **The project gave the community ownership of project implementation** and capacitated project participants to manage their own projects to respond to the needs of their communities.
- ✓ **The project constructively engaged with local authorities** in areas around disaster risk reduction, land and housing solutions.

LESSONS LEARNED

- The project kick-off orientation with local authorities was crucial, as they were engaged in all work processes with specific plans and schedules and for additional support.
- It is important to schedule frequent coaching consultations with group leaders on micro grant implementation to maximize potential support and enhance a smooth DAP implementation.
- The remote monitoring capability helped accelerate the implementation plan while COVID-19 was impacting the project implementation. Similarly, it boosted the technological capacity of project staff, participant groups, NGO partners and local authorities.

RECOMMENDATIONS MOVING FORWARD

- Concerning the cash transfer program – future projects should utilize the Minimum Expense Basket (MEB) of the cash working group in Cambodia and focus on five primary sectors (Shelter, Education, WASH, Livelihood, and Health) during disaster response.
- Saving group funding support should be scaled up for the affected communities.
- Similar projects should add a component and/or activities addressing project participant livelihoods to provide enhanced pathways to recovery.

WEAKNESSES

- × **Rigorous documentation** could have better included the engagement and impact of project participant demographics (female participants, Persons with Disabilities, and the elderly).
- × **A lesson-learned workshop** would have allowed the project to disseminate learnings and results of the project evaluation beyond its project partners.



© Habitat for Humanity Cambodia/PASSA Group



© Habitat for Humanity Cambodia/PASSA Group

The project provided grant support to the groups to install solar street lamps along the community streets, August 2020.



FURTHER READING ON SHELTER PROJECTS

On DRR: [A.15 / VANUATU 2018–2019](#); [A.21 / MALAWI 2015-16](#)

On conditional cash transfer: [A.5 / ETHIOPIA 2019–2020](#)

On infrastructure: [A.19 / IRAQ 2019–2021](#); [A.16 / MYANMAR 2012](#)