

Two Tropical Storms Caused Serious Floods in Laos

In the past few months, Laos experienced two tropical storms, namely Haima and Nock-Ten. On June 24, the Haima hit the northern and central provinces (Sayaboury, Xiengkhouang, Vientiane and Bolikhamsay) and on July 30-31, Nock-Ten hit central and southern provinces (Vientiane, Bolikhamsay, Khammuan, Savannakhet, and Champassak). They brought heavy rains, which had caused the rise of water levels in many rivers including Mekong. As a result, many provinces had been significantly affected by floods and landslides. The worst flooding in decades swept away houses and rice barns and damaged thousands of hectares of farmland, livestock, many schools, hospitals, roads, bridges, water supply systems, electricity networks and other infrastructure in those provinces.

Since June 24, 2011, flooding has killed at least 27 people, the total cost of damage is huge and thousands of people affected. In agriculture alone, eleven provinces across the country (Phongsaly, Oudomsay, Luang Prabang, Sayaboury, Xiengkhouang, Vientiane, Bolikhamsay, Khammuan, Savannakhet, Champassak and Vientiane) have been suffering a combined damage worth over 240 billion kip. Over 63,000 ha of farmland and 400 irrigation systems have been damaged or destroyed. Vientiane province is the most hard-hit province. The damage cost of the agriculture sector in the province is estimated at 100 billion kip. Some details of damage in each of the affected provinces are as follows:

1. In Xiengkhuang Province: Five of the nine districts have been affected by the storm. Houses, roads, electricity and telecommunication systems have been heavily damaged, a bridge spanning the Nam Mo was also impacted, and the newly built Khua-ou bridge in Yokmoun village was partly washed away. The flood killed seven people and the total cost of damage might reach 400 billion kip.

2. In Xayaboury Province: Eight of the 11 districts were impacted by the Haima storm, with only Botaen, Kaenthao, and Xaysathane districts unaffected. More than 2,000 families of 10,543 people in 45 villages have been affected, most of whom live in the provincial capital. A total 27 irrigation systems and water drainage canals, and 792 km of road have been damaged, along with over 500 hectares of crops. 46 houses and 179 vehicles (both cars and motorbikes), have been damaged, while a great number of poultry and cattle have been washed away. The flood killed two people. Xayaboury district has been heavily hit by the storm. This is the second time flooding has hit the province, with the last time 38 years ago. A preliminary estimate of the flood damage was set at over 98 billion kip (US\$12 million).

3. In Vientiane Province: As 2 tropical storms hit Laos, the heavy rains brought about additional rain falls to many big rivers, including Nam Ngum. As a result, the water level in reservoir of Nam Ngum I Hydropower Plant increased to its danger. In this situation, water was released from the reservoir, which affected low-lying areas such as Thoulakhom, Xaythany and Pakngum districts. About 300 homes and more than 4,000 hectares of rice and other crops were affected. Most of the affected people live in Hadxay, Bounghphao and Chaeng villages.



4. In Borikhamxay Province: 31 villages with over 3,000 families in Borikhan and Pakxan districts have been affected by the storms. The flood damaged some houses and crops. Roads 1D and 4B, and the road to Phukbeuak have been damaged in many places and electricity poles broken. So far, flood victims have received relief aid from various organisations, and local authorities have provided temporary shelter and medicines.

5. In Khammuan Province: More than 400 villages or about 70 percent of all villages in the province suffered damages. 37,000 hectares of rice fields or 63 percent of wet season rice crop were inundated by floodwaters from Mekong and Xebangfay rivers. About 17,000 hectares of crops are thought to have been destroyed. Although, there have been many organisations working on the ground in the province, providing assistance through the provincial authorities, hundreds of families have been in need of urgent assistance such as food and shelter after their houses were swept away by the floodwaters.

6. In Savannakhet Province: The flooding affected more than 26,000 families of 320 villages in the province and killed some livestock. A total of 34,000 hectares of rice fields were also flooded, with 27,000 hectares suffering some degree of damage. The cost of damage is about 167 billion kip. The respective provincial authorities are now focusing on health care and sourcing the necessary rice seed supplies to help farmers replant their crops.

7. In Champassak Province: More than 70,000 residents were affected by flooding caused by the rising levels of the Mekong, Xebangfay and Xedon rivers. About 15,000 rice farming families have been affected to some degree, with a combined cultivation area of about 18,900 hectares of rice damaged by flooding. It is estimated that at least 13,200 hectares of crops have effectively been destroyed. In addition, 20 irrigation areas and many local roads were damaged. The repair bill is estimated at more than 200 billion kip. 7 districts including Pakxe, Pathoumphon, Phonthong and Champassak have been affected.

Champassak provincial authorities are encouraging soldiers, police and local people to help build sandbag levies in Pakxe town to protect the provincial capital from flooding. The provincial disaster management committee is asking for assistance from various organisations to help evacuate people from flooded areas.

To replace the damaged crops, the agriculture and forestry sector is seeking rice seed supplies to provide to flood-affected farmers for dry season cultivation, and supporting small crop cultivation for sale in markets after the floodwaters recede.

So far, the provincial authorities have received aid worth 396 million kip from various sources, but the estimated cost of damage is about 400 billion kip.

It is estimated that almost 10,000 farming families will suffer from a lack of rice this season after the recent flooding, with less than enough for their own consumption for the four months until the next harvest. There will be a six-month shortage for farmers who live outside irrigation areas with their crops yielding much less. About 3,500 tones of additional rice will be required to ensure a sufficient supply for affected families until the dry season rice harvesting begins.

However, Champassak province has sufficient rice storages to supply people with not enough, but affected villagers have to buy it.

In this connection, flood victims in all provinces need urgent help in the form of rice, clean water, clothes, medicines and crop seeds. Authorities in the provinces have appealed to all charitable people, companies and organisations to help relieve villagers' suffering.

Response from the Government, International community, local authorities and individuals:

Restoring the flood situation to normal is one of the most urgent duties of the Lao government for the remainder of this year. The government will increase preparedness for floods, droughts and other natural disasters that may occur in the future, in order to minimise their impact and help at-risk communities to deal with their occurrence.

1. High ranking officials including the prime minister and deputy prime ministers visited the affected areas.
2. The government has issued a notice to relevant ministries and Party and state sectors in all provinces to mobilise aid from across society to help communities affected by flooding.
3. The government has urged civil organisations, businesses, government officials and people of all professions to contribute funds, food or other supplies to help flood victims recover and resume their normal lives.
4. The government urged the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to urgently set up a committee to receive donations and inform members of the public on how they can make a contribution.
5. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been assigned to mobilise aid from foreign embassies and international organisations in Laos.
6. The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare has provided assistance to the four provinces including 300 million kip for Xayaboury, over 300 million kip for Borikhamxay, and 15 tonnes of rice for Xieng Khuang.
7. On July 7, the Foundation for Assisting Poor People of Laos handed over 20 million kip to authorities in Xayaboury and Xieng Khuang to help flood victims.
8. On July 11, various companies donated aid worth more than 240 million kip to flood victims in Borikhamxay, Xayaboury, Xieng Khuang and Vientiane provinces through the National Assembly.
9. On August 19, 2011, Ministry of Science and Technology has handed over a number of relief aid packages worth 4.6 million kip through the Lao Youth's Union to help the flood-hit victims by Haima storm in Sayaboury, Xiengkhouang and Bolikhamxay. The relief aid packages include ten boxes of clothes, 24 boxes of instant noodle, 30 boxes of canned fish and some drinking water.
10. The Agricultural Promotion Bank approved 18 billion kip worth of loans to farmers affected by tropical storm Haima in June in Xayaboury, Xiengkhuang, Borikhamxay and Vientiane provinces. In addition, the Bank will postpone the collection of credit lent to farmers affected by flooding caused by tropical storm Nock-Ten in central and southern provinces as they have suffered damages totalling about 15.3 billion kip from the flooding. Moreover, the Bank will

release more loans to farmers who are members of the bank in each province to support crop production and livestock breeding next season after the floodwaters have receded. So far this wet season, the bank has already released loans worth over 66 billion kip to rice farmers and 22 billion kip worth of credit to farmers of other crops.

11. The Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry has prepared 5,000 tonnes of rice seeds, livestock vaccines and other medications for farmers in the wake of the recent flooding. It has provided 3 tonnes of rice seeds to Xayaboury.

12. On August 12, Khamphay Sana Group President Mr. Khampay Somsana presented 30 million kip for victims in Haima-hit provinces.

13. Since July 14, to August 12, over 690 million kip, US\$ 40,110 and THB 152,000 have been donated by 96 individuals and organizations for flood victims in six northern and central provinces through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. The relief assistance is mostly in forms of medicines, educational material and cash.

14. The Lao-German Friendship Association, Committee for Peace and Solidarity, the Lao Journalists' Association, Lao Businesswomen's Association, Handicrafts Association, the Foundation for Helping of Poor People, Lao Red Cross, the Lao Association of Hotels, Restaurants and Young Businesspeople Association will jointly hold a charity concert, a photo exhibition, taking photo with well-known Lao singers, etc at the National Culture Hall, Vientiane Capital on August 30 for raising fund to help the victims, which will be broadcast live from 18:00 pm. It is similar to the previous successful concerts for helping the victims-hit Ketsana storm in southernmost provinces of Laos, the quake victims in Haiti and tsunami victims in Japan.

Assistance from overseas:

Receiving news about severe flood in several provinces of Laos, Lao oversea people have donated some cash to help the flood victims. They are namely:

1. Lao Family Mutual Association of Lowell, Inc in Lowell, Massachusetts (\$300),
2. Mr. Blong Xiong and Mrs. Bonnie Xiong in Lowell, Massachusetts (\$100),
3. Mr. Chareon Vannaboathong and Mrs. Chanthanom Vannaboathong, in Lowell, Massachusetts (\$100).

In this connection, those who wish to donate cash to help friends and relatives in your motherland can make it through both Banque pour le Commerce Exterieur Lao and Lao Embassy here. The bank account of the Banque pour le Commerce Exterieur Lao No is: 0109110025122. Those seeking further information can contact: 021 213005 021 213005, 021 222776 021 222776 , 021 219450 and 021 219450.

Lao Embassy, August 29, 2011.