

DIPECHO

ECHO Programme for Disaster Preparedness, Mitigation and Prevention

**REGIONAL CONSULTATION MEETING
ON
DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN
SOUTH EAST ASIA AND BANGLADESH**

FINAL REPORT

**Bangkok, Thailand
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ECHO
European Commission
Humanitarian Office



C R E D
Center for Research
on the Epidemiology
of Disasters

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II INTRODUCTION

On March 17 1998 the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) hosted a Regional Consultation Meeting on « Disaster Preparedness in South East Asia and Bangladesh ».

The consultation was held in Bangkok, Thailand and brought together representatives of national administrations and regional organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and experts in the field of disaster preparedness and prevention.

This activity was undertaken with the objective of providing general information on ECHO's new disaster preparedness approach in order to stimulate the interest and potential contributions of local governments and regional partners for the future. In this context, the draft DIPECHO Regional Programme Framework for South East Asia and Bangladesh was submitted to the participants for consultation: to receive observations and recommendations, the proposed draft document as well as the diagnostic study on the countries in the region was discussed in working groups and a plenary forum.

The consultation meeting not only allowed the incorporation of observations and recommendations expressed by the participants but also "facilitated" the exchange of information between the different actors in this field and gave a broader and more complete overview of the regional situation with regard to disaster preparedness. It also stressed the commitment of the region to improve the existing conditions and structures established to address disasters.

This document represents the final minutes of the meeting and contains a summary of the proceedings and presentations that were given during the event.

III BACKGROUND

Since 1994 the European Community Humanitarian Office has financed disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness activities throughout the world. Historically, ECHO has responded to requests from NGOs and international organisations as well as universities and research institutes, providing funding for projects as appropriate. Funding has generally concentrated on three types of activities: human resource development, organisational and institutional strengthening and community-based pilot projects.

In 1996 ECHO decided to adopt a new, more regional, pro-active approach in order to increase its involvement in disaster preparedness and to achieve greater coherence in its programmes. This new approach called DIPECHO (Disaster Preparedness-ECHO) intends to increase the impact and improve the effectiveness of ECHO's disaster preparedness interventions in the regions selected - the Caribbean, Central America and Southeast Asia including and Bangladesh. The Programme was presented to the Humanitarian Aid Committee in July 1996.

and received favourable consideration. DIPECHO encompasses natural and man-made disasters (i.e. technological hazards, fires), excluding conflict. The objective of the new approach is to improve and support disaster preparedness in the considered regions, which ECHO plans to achieve through a pro-active and flexible approach. It has furthermore targeted to increase its efficiency of interventions in disaster preparedness through close co-ordination with other Commission services and Member States.

In the first phase of DIPECHO, it was decided to undertake a diagnosis study for each region before the programme framework was drawn up in order to

- identify the hazards, vulnerabilities, response structures and policies already in place at community, national and regional levels;
- identify present and future external support in order to locate and address gaps;
- assess the coherence and efficiency of response systems as a whole.

The diagnostic study "Disaster Preparedness in South East Asia and Bangladesh" was prepared in consultative missions to countries in the region, interviews with a variety of players from government, NGOs, the academic community and community-based groups as well as an extensive review of documentation. It consists of three parts:

1. Country Analysis: it presents the disaster situation in each of the seven target countries. For each country some baseline data were provided, followed by a review of the hazards and vulnerabilities of the country. Additionally, a summary of institutional arrangements, current programmes and established policies was presented.

2. Regional Trends and Co-operation in Disaster Management: it places these country characteristics in a regional context and reviews current regional mechanisms for disaster management, as a basis for identifying appropriate structures for enhancing the effectiveness of disaster management.

3. Recommendations and Proposals for the DIPECHO Regional Programme Framework: it provides key themes for the preparation of the DIPECHO Programme for South East Asia and Bangladesh, including the scope and foundation of the framework, possible implementing partners and the level and type of activities

After completion of the diagnostic study, a draft paper « DIPECHO Regional Programme Framework for South East Asia and Bangladesh » was prepared. This framework is based on the study and proposes the guiding principles and strategies of the DIPECHO programme. It will help define the priorities and key activities of the programme. In order to ensure that the Programme Framework is relevant to the needs of the region, a wide cross section of regional partners and institutions was invited to the Consultation Meeting to review and provide inputs to the document. Following this meeting, a regional Action Plan will be drawn up for South East Asia and Bangladesh for the financing of activities by ECHO.



FINAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS — A SYNTHESIS

The discussion of the proposed Programme Framework for South East Asia and Bangladesh identified a number of important issues to be taken into account in the development of ECHO's Disaster Preparedness Programme. The principal observations and comments expressed by the participants during the course of the consultation are highlighted below.

Principal observations and recommendations

- More specific guidelines should be developed in terms of projects/activities supported by ECHO
- Health programmes should be emphasised with regard to the serious economic problems being faced by the nations worst hit by the crisis. Concerns were expressed that the critical economic situation causes various problems, amongst them visible effects on the health of the population (increase of morbidity and mortality, supply shortages of essential drugs, food security) In crisis situations, public health seems to be adversely affected first – a development ECHO has to take into account in its new approach.
- With regard to the cultural, political and social diversity of the countries in the region, new DIPECHO programme needs to be flexible and country-specific in order to correspond to needs and priorities expressed at local and national level but must have strong regional linkages to the regional level
- Projects to be funded should prioritise:
 - Early warning systems
 - Development of training programmes/human resource development
 - South to South exchange
 - Research and documentation of experiences
 - Health intervention and education
 - Consultation meetings at regional level to monitor programme activities and exchange of experience
 - Awareness education
 - An effective information network
- Country specific plans with strong regional linkage for information exchange and collaborative projects should be initiated.
- There is a need to integrate disaster management into the process of development planning through involving key development organisations.
- Projects that are involved in the mitigation of human-generated (manmade) disasters have to be included into the new programme.
- There is a need to strengthen the Regional Coordination Office with regard to the following future activities:
 - co-ordination of projects
 - advocacy for DIPECHO
 - support of national action plans
 - update database for a better co-ordinated effort

Additionally, a number of observations were made during the course of the Regional Consultation Meeting concerning the status of activities in the field of disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention in South East Asia and Bangladesh which should be taken into consideration by ECHO in developing its Disaster Preparedness Programme.

Key to these discussions was the recognition of the need for a permanent dialogue in the region to identify strategies and policies in the field of disaster mitigation. Likewise, a spirit of good will and co-operation was noted on the part of different actors involved in disaster management. This was coupled with a commitment to create mechanisms of co-ordination and disaster management at regional level. The relationship between prevention, mitigation and preparedness activities and development played a prominent role in the discussions as did the acknowledgement of the negative impact of hazards on the economies and development in the region.

The Regional Consultation also made clear the need for greater clarity regarding roles and responsibilities and future mechanisms of co-ordination between different governmental and non-governmental actors and institutions dedicated to the reduction of disasters. It was also recognised that institutional structures must be strengthened if efficiency and effectiveness is to be enhanced at regional level.

IV GENERAL INFORMATION ON THE CONSULTATION MEETING

The Regional Consultation Meeting on « Disaster Preparedness in South East Asia and Bangladesh » was held on March 17 1998 in Bangkok, Thailand. It was hosted by the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO) and organised in collaboration with the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) of the Catholic University of Louvain in Brussels.

1. Objectives

The consultation meeting was part of ECHO's systematic approach to introduce and initiate the new DIPECHO Programme for the region. Its three principal objectives were:

- to present and discuss ECHO's proposed strategy for its Disaster Preparedness Programme in South East Asia and Bangladesh
- to promote and stimulate an exchange of ideas and experiences in the region
- to strengthen links among organisations and institutions working in the field of disaster preparedness, mitigation and prevention in South East Asia and Bangladesh and to encourage future collaboration among them

2. Participants

With a total number of 63 participants, the regional consultation brought together representatives of 15 governmental agencies, 3 regional organisations, 13 non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as well as EU and UN institutions working in the field of disaster preparedness in the region. Seven countries from the region (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam) were officially represented at the meeting, while Malaysian representatives were absent but expressed their commitment to further co-operation.

A complete list of participants is appended to this report.

3. Methodology

The Regional Consultation Meeting was characterised by a high degree of participation. The observations of the participants reflected a strong interest in and commitment to the issues discussed. The format of the consultation included plenary sessions and working group discussions. Five working groups allowed for an exchange of ideas and experiences while encouraging a high degree of participation of all conferees. While the morning working group sessions focused on recommendations for the DIPECHO Programme Framework, the afternoon sessions addressed the role of partners and identified criteria for selecting partners and projects. A summary of the plenary discussions and the main issues addressed by the working groups is included in this conference report.

4. Meeting Proceedings

Mr Jean-Claude Heyraud, ECHO Advisor on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness and Dr Debarati Guha-Sapir, Director of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), University of Louvain, chaired the consultation meeting. Following a brief introduction, presentations were given in the following order.

- **Mr. Michel Caillouët**, Ambassador - Head of Delegation of the European Community in Thailand: "*The European Union's Presence in South East Asia*"
- **Mr Jean-Claude Heyraud**, ECHO Advisor on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness: "*ECHO's Regional Approach to Disaster Preparedness*"
- **Dr Debarati Guha-Sapir**, Director of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED): "*Relief, Disasters and Development*"
- **Mr Nick Russell**, CRED consultant: "*Diagnostic Study and general context*"
- **Ms. Patricia Pennetier**, ECHO Regional Office Bangkok: "*The DIPECHO Framework Programme*"

The presentations were followed by a plenary discussion which allowed the participants to give first comments on the diagnostic study and the draft framework document.

A work group session on "Observations and Recommendations on DIPECHO" then provided the frame for an intensive discussion of ECHO's new approach. A summary of the findings of the five work groups and the following plenary discussion are included in this report.

In the afternoon, a second work group session focused on the "Nature of projects and the role of partners in the DIPECHO programme".

V PLENARY SESSIONS

Mr. Michel Caillouët, Ambassador - Head of Delegation of the European Community in Thailand

The meeting opened with an address by Mr. Michel Caillouët, Head of Delegation of the European Community in Thailand. After welcoming all participants, Mr. Caillouët gave a brief overview of « The European Union's Presence in South East Asia ».

Mr. Caillouët addressed both EU-ASEAN dialogue and the new ASEM approach. He pointed out that the European Union is ASEAN's longest standing dialogue partner with meetings going back as far as the early seventies. Both partners can look back on a successful working partnership in the field of trade and economic co-operation, education and the environment. Today, EU funding for ongoing projects in the region amounts to some 60 million ECU plus substantial EU commitments to bilateral with individual ASEAN countries.

ASEM was initiated two years ago on the ASEM Summit in Bangkok in order to respond to the perceived imbalance in the global network of international relations. It was thought that news links were needed between the peoples of the two continents. While being separate from the EU-ASEAN dialogue, ASEM has given an important impetus to complement EU-ASEAN relations with disaster preparedness being one of the areas to be addressed in the future.

Mr. Caillouët pointed out that - with regard to the current El Niño thread - people are more prepared than ever to talk about disaster. Disaster preparedness offers solutions replacing pessimism and fatalism with hope. He stressed the importance of linking developing programmes and disaster preparedness projects to achieve sustainable development, making disaster preparedness an important component of any development strategy.

Disaster preparedness will not only minimise the disruption to people's life but will also in short-term prove to be economically viable. Therefore, the EC places great importance on activities in the field of disaster preparedness.

Mr. Caillouët concluded by expressing his hope that the consultation meeting will prove to be useful for future co-operation in this field and wished the meeting a successful outcome.

Mr Jean-Claude Heyraud, ECHO Advisor on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness

Mr Jean-Claude Heyraud, ECHO Advisor on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, began by welcoming the conferees and thanking them for their participation in the Regional Consultation meeting. He also thanked CRED for the considerable work already undertaken in this area as well as the EC Delegation and the ECHO Regional Office in Bangkok for their support in the preparation of the meeting. He continued by stating that this meeting was an important milestone in the development of DIPECHO programme for South East Asia and Bangladesh

Mr Heyraud then provided a number of definitions in order to ensure a common understanding of terminology in the context of the discussions. He noted first that DIPECHO's mandate includes natural and man-made disasters (excluding conflict). He defined a natural disaster as the occurrence and impact of a natural phenomenon on a vulnerable population and its property. An environmental disaster can accordingly be the consequence of a natural disaster or of a disaster caused partially or totally by an implication of man and always resulting in the deterioration of its environment.

Given the variety and scope of disasters, it is necessary to speak of disaster preparedness in its most general terms. It is a complex concept that includes three key elements: prevention per se, mitigation and preparedness. These three concepts are inter-related and for the purpose of this discussion Mr Heyraud gave a brief description of these elements.

- **Prevention** – in which the vulnerable population is protected from the phenomenon which could cause a disaster, and
- **Mitigation** – interventions which reduce the consequences of a disaster on a population and its property
- **Emergency Preparation and development of alert system** - to protect oneself for the event of a hazard strike as well as the preparation to respond to the emergency situation after the impact of the disaster.

The first two elements are considered by ECHO to be relevant to development policies and to development co-operation. Although these areas are not within ECHO's competence per se, ECHO can and should play a role in promoting this idea in discussions with policy makers in the development field. The work of ECHO in the field of disaster management will be to promote disaster preparedness, in general, and prevention and mitigation, in particular, as necessary components of any development or development co-operation policy.

One of the methods of promoting this concept is through the financing of micro-projects that have demonstration value. It is through this approach that ECHO hopes to convince its colleagues in the development arena as well as governments to become involved in disaster prevention and mitigation and to reproduce these positive experiences at national and regional level, as ECHO does not have the financial resources to be involved on a large scale.

The third aspect of disaster management is preparedness for response to a disaster. Preparedness includes such measures as education and training (designed to transfer essential knowledge necessary to confront disasters), institutional strengthening and early warning systems. ECHO has a clear mandate in this area as well as extensive experience from the numerous humanitarian operations it has funded in recent years

Following these definitions, Mr Heyraud then proceeded to discuss ECHO's role in the area of disaster preparedness and how it would fulfil this role. Since its inception in 1992, ECHO has tried to incorporate preparedness in its humanitarian aid operations. This remains to be fully effective and the European Union's determination to embark into linking relief, rehabilitation and development are likely to contribute to the success of ECHO's operations.

Every year since its inception, ECHO has provided considerable funding for disaster preparedness projects. Between 1992-1997 this amounted to some 20 million ECU for approximately 100 projects. The evaluations undertaken to date of these projects have demonstrated the positive impact of these operations. However, this purely reactive approach is considered unsatisfactory. Thus, the decision was made to adopt a more pro-active, regional approach through the DIPECHO programme.

This new regional approach will concentrate initially on three target regions - the Caribbean, Central America, and Southeast Asia (including Bangladesh) - which are very vulnerable to disasters. In addition, it was decided that the new policy would be implemented in close co-operation with other services of the Commission and with EU Member States in order to ensure greater coherence and effectiveness. Emphasis will also be placed on greater co-ordination with governments of disaster-prone countries, UN agencies with implementing partners (international organisations, NGOs and academic research institutes). It was also noted that the policy of ECHO is in full agreement with the goals of the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction.

Mr. Heyraud then summarised briefly the present status of the DIPECHO programme. Last June diagnostic studies of each region were completed and circulated. The process is now in its second phase, with the preparation of the Regional Programme Frameworks and Action Plans. This regional consultation meeting is intended to provide input into the second phase of the DIPECHO programme. Mr Heyraud stated that ECHO welcomes the comments and observations of the participants, particularly as it relates to work already undertaken. He emphasised that the strategy documents submitted to participants is in draft form, and as such would benefit from the participants' inputs.

In closing, Mr Heyraud said he would like to mention a few words on the availability of funding under the DIPECHO programme. He noted that no budget has been predetermined for next year. Projects will be examined for consistency with the selection criteria and with ECHO policy. Priority will be given to those proposals that are consistent with the priorities and types of activities identified in the Programme Framework.

With DIPECHO, the European Union will be financing short to middle term actions. Knowing that disaster preparedness needs long-term attention and support, ECHO will work with other services of the Commission and in particular with the Directorate responsible for relations with South East Asia and Bangladesh to promote prevention within its development co-operation policy.

Mr Heyraud then wished the participants a fruitful and productive meeting, which he hoped would be to the benefit of the whole region.

Dr Debarati Guha-Sapir, Director of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED)

The plenary was then addressed by Dr Debarati Guha-Sapir, Director of the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED) in Brussels, giving a brief summary on « Relief, Disasters and Development ».

Mrs. Guha-Sapir began her presentation by stating that in the last decade, there were nearly 50 major disasters every year in the countries included in the programme (Cambodia, Laos, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Bangladesh). Bangladesh and the Philippines suffered 180 and 149 disasters during this period. In most of these countries farmers and urban poor suffer most from natural hazards.

With regard to disaster preparedness, the most appropriate and effective level of action in the short and medium term – as far as CRED's experience has shown – is at the community level (district, municipal and village level). Not only is it more effective at those levels but also much cheaper and more sustainable bringing the actions within the means of local resources and therefore not turning into an aid-dependent activity. Mrs. Guha-Sapir stressed the fact that such a community-based approach requires substantially more work, supervision, monitoring and cultural adaptation. These types of projects are more difficult to realise than large-scale infrastructure projects, which are easier to implement (like contracting out construction of buildings) and therefore more visible. She then referred to the importance and necessity of looking at the problems essentially and throughout the entire life of the projects from the perspective of the victim.

Mrs. Guha-Sapir concluded her presentation by introducing the Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), a university centre in Belgium researching on disasters from a multi-disciplinary perspective since 1970. While CRED's focus is primarily medical, health and nutritional, the team includes also anthropologists, economists, lawyers and geographers

Mr Nick Russell, CRED consultant

Mr. Nick Russell, a consultant who was part of the team involved in the preparation of the diagnostic study, then addressed the meeting. He explained that a diagnostic study of the region had been undertaken which aimed at identifying the hazards, vulnerabilities, response structures and policies in place at the regional, national and community levels.

Following this introduction, Mr. Russell summarised the main parts of the diagnostic study and started with the **purpose and objective of the Diagnostic Study:**

- The Diagnostic Study presents a broad overview of the disaster management situation in seven countries in Asia: Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam and Bangladesh. The report looks at the disaster management situation in each country in a regional context and recommends future directions for the establishment of a regional programme on disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness by the European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO)
- The main objective of the Diagnostic Study was to provide a basis for the preparation of a

Programme Framework for Disaster Preparedness in South East Asia and Bangladesh
Similar programmes are being prepared for other target regions selected by ECHO.

- The report is not a comprehensive and complete overview of all activities in the field of disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness in the target countries. Instead, it aims to provide some strategic insights into current programmes and priorities in the target countries, and on the basis of these findings, suggests some future directions for a DIPECHO programme framework
- It is important to note that when the Diagnostic Study was undertaken, Malaysia and Indonesia were not at that time included as target countries. Therefore their presence today is to be welcomed.

Having addressed the objectives of the diagnostic study, Mr Russell continued to elaborate briefly on the context of this activity

When ECHO launched its Disaster Preparedness Programme in 1994, it was decided that, before the programme framework was drawn up, a diagnosis study would be undertaken in each region in order to identify the hazards, response structures and policies already in place. The diagnostic study therefore consists of three parts:

Part One presents the disaster situation in each of the seven target countries in terms of hazards, vulnerability, etc

Part Two of the report places these country characteristics in a regional context and reviews current regional mechanisms for disaster management, as a basis for identifying appropriate structures for enhancing the effectiveness of disaster management.

Part Three provides key themes for the preparation of the DIPECHO programme for South East Asia and Bangladesh, including the scope and foundation of the framework, possible implementing partners and the level and type of activities.

The consultant then gave a summary of three key aspects of the diagnostic study's suggested approaches and recommendations.

1. Guiding principles for developing a Programme Framework for South East Asia

The goal of the DIPECHO Programme Framework for South East Asia is to assist target countries to improve their disaster management capacity and reduce risk exposure as part of efforts towards sustainable development. The following are the proposed principal approaches for the DIPECHO Programme Framework and its separate project activities:

- The DIPECHO Programme Framework provides a medium term framework for the implementation of disaster prevention, mitigation and preparedness programmes under the co-ordination of ECHO.
- The Programme Framework contains regional and country-based activities.
- The regional activities facilitate the strengthening of national institutions and capabilities in the target countries; emphasis is on information exchange and mutual co-operation.
- All national programmes should also have a regional exchange component and/or demonstration value for other countries involved.
- The national programmes should, to the extent possible, make use of experience available

in the other target countries. The expertise available in the target countries will in many cases make it possible to assign regional experts.

- The actual selection of national programmes is based on the extent to which they fit into the overall programme focus, the proposed regional approach, the country priority areas, and the government policy.

2. Principal Types of Activities

Because the practical needs of the target countries will vary considerably, the Framework for Action should not seek standard formula or universal panacea. Rather, it should promote a variety of country specific approaches linked to the three principal types of activities. Programme design should take into account not only differing national priorities but other factors such as absorption capacities, institutional structures, political will, available experience, expertise and resources in disaster management. In view of the wide disparities between the largest countries, it is not possible to identify detailed priority areas that fit all the countries involved.

The principal types of activities are **human resource development, management and institutional strengthening, and community-based, low cost technology** and have been selected for the following reasons:

- The effectiveness of external relief assistance largely depends on good disaster preparedness, and this must essentially have a local base
- Reducing vulnerability, strengthening local capacities and self reliance and supporting national as well as international structures are the most cost-effective and sustainable approaches to disaster management

In more detail, these types of activities might include:

Human resource development

- training/training materials development
- awareness raising (including use of media)
- public education (i.e. in schools, adult literacy classes)
- networking
- information management systems (i.e. including use of Internet etc.)
- skills development and pooling
- technology and experience transfer (i.e. Promote more Regional co-operation through exchanges)
- establishment of national and regional human, material, and experience resource inventories

Management and institutional strengthening

- institutional strengthening at national and local level (i.e. Government, NGOs, community organisations)
- enhancing structural and organisational capacities (i.e. through training, awareness raising)
- provision of resources and technical expertise
- fostering sub-regional (i.e. Indochina) networking, experience and expertise transfer, and resource pooling

Community based, low-cost technology

- support for Community Based Disaster Preparedness initiatives and activities through NGOs and community organisations
- combining "hardware" (i.e. appropriate structures such as community grainstores, flood and cyclone resistant community buildings, income generation micro disaster preparedness projects) with "software" (i.e. training, awareness raising, community based first aid, warning and disaster preparedness activities) to build greater capacity for coping with disaster
- support for community inspired projects aimed at building greater self-reliance linked to national disaster preparedness programmes.

3. Types of projects

Mr. Russell then gave a brief description of the three types of projects that can be envisaged in the Programme Framework.

a) Strategic framework projects

The strategic framework projects are those projects that are identified as crucial for the realisation of the objectives of the framework.

b) Country and regional priority projects

These are projects that clearly reflect clearly identified needs and national and regional priorities

c) Other projects

The other projects are those proposed to ECHO directly for funding. The type of activities funded under this category is quite broad and can include new local and national initiatives, but also activities that enhance regional co-operation such as meetings, training programmes, etc., thus allowing for a flexible and quick procedure.

Mr Russell concluded by saying that the Diagnostic Study was by no means exhaustive but that it was hoped that it would provide a basis for the development of the DIPECHO programme.

Ms. Patricia Pennetier, ECHO Regional Office Bangkok

Ms. Patricia Pennetier, the representative of the ECHO Regional Office in Bangkok presented the draft DIPECHO Programme Framework for South East Asia and Bangladesh to the participants at the Regional Consultation meeting.

She began her presentation with a brief description of the structure and tasks of the ECHO Regional Office for South East Asia in Bangkok and pointed out that there are two more ECHO co-ordinators based in Chiang Mai/Thailand and Phnom Penh/Cambodia

Before presenting the framework, Ms. Pennetier referred to ECHO's mandate described in the Humanitarian Aid Regulations, which is "to save lives and alleviate suffering of those populations affected by disaster, being it natural or manmade". Although disaster preparedness does not represent a substantial amount of the whole budget, it is nevertheless considered as an important part of ECHO's activities. Indeed, if disaster preparedness initiatives are

successful, they will not only decrease the frequency and dimension of emergency situations but, in the long run, finally overcome the needs for emergency aid, at least when it concerns natural disasters.

With regard to the framework document, must be seen in the light of the limits ECHO has in the field of disaster preparedness and prevention DIPECHO will be focused on disaster preparation, disaster prevention being the competence of development-based mechanisms. The Programme Framework will be adaptable and flexible in order to remain relevant to in-country situations.

Characteristics of DIPECHO

a) Support of initiatives with regional level impact

A regional approach from ECHO will serve the purpose of establishing links between the countries of South East Asia and Bangladesh, thus strengthening the co-ordination, impact and coherence of its actions in the region. ECHO will rely on the regional organisations already active in the field of disaster preparedness.

The objective is not to restrict the DIPECHO Programme to countries with the greatest needs (only taking into account the differences in terms of vulnerability, risks and management capacity) but also to make use of the different approaches and structures that exist in the region to bring countries closer together at a higher level. It aims to broaden and disseminate positive initiatives by facilitating regional exchanges of experiences and the implementation of common projects at this level.

b) Strengthening of the local level

As much as DIPECHO is conceived as a regional programme, due to the different levels of achievement in disaster preparedness in the countries of South East Asia and Bangladesh, ECHO will finance programmes in specific countries, either at national or local level, by keeping in mind the consistency which it wants to achieve on a regional level

It is therefore necessary to shape disaster preparedness actions, at a local level, into a more global framework and at the same time strengthen the management capacity of local development by the communities themselves

c) Strengthening of interrelations between local, national and regional level

The links between these 3 levels sometimes fail due to several reasons, but they are essential to ensure a better coherence of the response capacity at a regional level. Therefore, the DIPECHO Programme would like to stress that the national level of each country should play a linkage role between the regional level and the local operational level.

d) Strengthening of operational consultation and co-ordination between ECHO and its partners

While ECHO will strengthen its co-operation and consultation with its different partners in South East Asia and Bangladesh in the field of disaster preparedness, it will also increase its co-operation with the other services of the European Commission involved in the field of development.

Types of actions to be included in DIPECHO

Ms. Pennetier further said that DIPECHO aims to concentrate on disaster preparation and not on disaster prevention, the latter being more in the field of development. However, this does not exclude the support and funding of small, well designed pilot projects on prevention which have a measurable effect and may be reproduced on a greater scale by those who are better placed to intervene in this field.

ECHO in particular considers the following types of actions to be included in DIPECHO:

- a) Strengthening of local response capacity through training, evaluation, development of emergency plans and allocation of resources,
- b) Development of efficient and effective early warning systems,
- c) Development, completion and implementation of emergency plans at regional, national and local level

In addition to these types of actions, ECHO further plans to

- include projects in the field of research aiming at encouraging the scientific understanding of the different components of risk and to promote research initiatives which have direct influence on risk reduction
- include projects in the field of information and training in order to facilitate the dissemination and exchange of information and to strengthen disaster management capacity at different levels in the region

Implementation of DIPECHO

In her closing remarks, Ms Pennetier again stressed the importance of DIPECHO being a proactive approach. Through the Regional Office of ECHO in South East Asia, ECHO seeks to have a constant dialogue with all those active in the field of disaster preparedness, be it regional organisations of South East Asia and Bangladesh or traditional partners of ECHO such as UN agencies, international organisations, NGOs as well as national or local organisations. Any project proposed for financing will be discussed and tested upon its coherence with DIPECHO and the strategies in place in the region.

The co-operation will not remain limited to ECHO and the relevant organisations but will involve the Delegations of the European Commission in the region and Member States of the EU interested or involved in such projects.

Ms Pennetier concluded by repeating that the co-ordinators of the ECHO office in South East Asia are committed to co-operate closely on the subject of disaster preparedness and share their experience and knowledge to ensure good collaboration and co-ordination and strengthen the coherence of ECHO's involvement in the region.

Plenary Discussion

Following the opening sessions, a lively discussion ensued, which provided a first opportunity to give immediate comments on the presentations and the DIPECHO Programme Framework.

The question was raised in how far ECHO's policies interface with national policies in the region which – in some case – are the cause of certain disasters. It was recognized that it was a very important question to be addressed but that there is no realistic chance in the near future for DIPECHO to deal with questions of this magnitude and complexity.

Another participant asked how ECHO plans to a) reflect an intensified dialogue (between different partners in the region both at regional and national level) at the level of managing the programme and b) how initiatives/experiences made on national level would fit into the regional level. The participants were assured that ECHO gives the dialogue between the different partners a high priority while acknowledging that a dialogue between different levels in general is not an easy task to achieve. Nevertheless the Regional Consultation Meeting is a first manifestation of ECHO will to intensify this dialogue. It was stressed that the success of any dialogue intensification and exchange of experiences depends on everybody involved in this field. Therefore, ECHO asks all partners to contribute ideas and initiatives to this process by approaching the local ECHO office and EU representations.

It was mentioned that the diagnostic study as well as the strategy document do not take into account the recent economic crisis in South East Asia, which affects all target countries and that this crisis might have a negative impact on any disaster preparedness projects in the region. The question was raised in how far ECHO does take into account this new development and if there is a chance for continuity with regard to the critical economic situation in some of the target countries. Referring to the current recession in the region, it was explained that ECHO wants to learn from its partners in the countries how the economic situation will impact upon any current and future initiatives. Countries will – with ECHO's support - have to find their own mechanisms and resources for continuing the work. This reflects the need to adapt the type of approaches that exist and the need for partnership and thus constituting a challenge for flexibility and creativity concerning development and continuing, ongoing projects.

With regard to this complex problem, it was further stated that while facing a cutback of the state's response capacity due to economic constraints, a consolidation of local capacities through a strengthening of the popular base of preparedness (through co-operatives, forums at community level) is the most suitable approach and response to the recent development.

Referring to a question on funding procedures, the participants were furthermore assured that funding for projects would be open to all groups, as long as the proposals fit into the priorities identified in the diagnostic study and the DIPECHO Framework Programme. The fact that a particular group is not mentioned in the document does not mean it is excluded.

The participants furthermore repeatedly expressed the necessity to include Malaysia and Indonesia into the diagnostic study.