


# Chapter 6


## Resilience in Action: Cambodia's Evolving Disaster Governance and Regional Cooperation in a Changing Climate

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores Cambodia's evolving disaster governance as a case of resilient transformation in the Global South. Once seen as highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters, Cambodia has become an active player in disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate adaptation, and regional humanitarian cooperation. The chapter highlights legal reforms, institutional shifts, local preparedness, and cross-border initiatives that reflect a shift from reactive to inclusive, forward-looking planning. It examines how Cambodia integrates DRR with development and climate politics, asserts leadership within ASEAN, and uses disaster governance to build state legitimacy and strengthen diplomacy. Key themes include multi-level governance, gender and youth inclusion, early warning systems, and community-based management. Cambodia's experience shows how resilience-building can drive regional engagement, urging greater recognition of Global South strategies and investment in digital infrastructure, civil society, and cross-border collaboration for lasting climate resilience.*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Disasters occur when natural or human-induced hazards exceed a society's capacity to cope, leading to loss of life, economic disruption, and social instability. Climate change intensifies these risks by altering temperature and precipitation patterns, raising sea levels, and increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events such as floods and droughts (Amsalu et al., 2026; Çelik, 2026). These impacts disproportionately affect developing countries, where climate-sensitive livelihoods and limited institutional capacity heighten vulnerability, making disaster risk a central challenge for governance, development, and long-term resilience.

Over the past two decades, Cambodia has undergone a noteworthy transformation in the realm of disaster governance. Once predominantly identified as a vulnerable, aid-dependent country in the face of recurring climate-induced hazards, Cambodia is now progressively recognized as a proactive regional contributor in shaping disaster risk reduction (DRR) frameworks and climate resilience strategies. According to certain studies, like Kelman (2017), countries that have been through a war often have a hard time getting rid of bad climate governance. Cambodia, on the other hand, has gone against this trend by making its institutions more consistent, investing in local skills, and working together with other countries, especially in Southeast Asia. This chapter claims that Cambodia has successfully altered its status from being a symbol of climate vulnerability to becoming a leader in regional resilience and new ways of running the government.

This development should be considered within the broader context of Southeast Asia region, where countries are facing increasing climatic challenges such as shifting monsoon patterns, rising sea levels, and more severe weather events (Hugo, 2011; IPCC, 2022). Cambodia shares a lot of environmental difficulties with its neighbors, like Vietnam, Thailand, and Laos, especially in the lower Mekong basin. According to regional experts (Yusuf & Francisco, 2009), the region's ecological concerns are connected, therefore responses need to be coordinated across borders. Cambodia is becoming more aware of this as it takes part in ASEAN mechanisms and climate cooperation with other countries.

Cambodia was quite vulnerable to climate shocks at first because it was often flooded, especially in lowland and deltaic areas, and because it relied on subsistence farming (Hoang et al., 2018; Huot, 2025a). But now the state has a more organized and thorough approach to dealing with disasters. Alexander (2020) and other policy experts suggest that the changes to Cambodia's institutions are not merely technical; they are also political. The government is connecting building resilience to state legitimacy, working with other countries, and wanting to prosper. There are two key research goals that this chapter talks about:

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