

Floods Continue To Wreak Havoc Across Cambodia

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Published on 20 October 2011



Svet Yen attended classes for only two weeks before his family was displaced from their home. For the past three weeks they have been living in an open air pagoda surrounded by water and accessible only by boat.

The worst floods Cambodia has seen in a more than a decade continue to wreak havoc across the country where over 250 people are reported dead, more than 46,000 families displaced and an estimated 1.2 million Cambodians affected.

PHNOM PENH -- Svet Yen is 12 years old and is in fifth grade at Kbal Koh Primary School, Kampong Chhnang province along the Tonle Sap River in central Cambodia. He wants to be a soldier when he grows up and has always been a good student but, as a result of widespread flooding in the country, Svet was only able to attend classes for two weeks before his school was closed due to high water levels. His family of eight has been displaced from their home.

For the past three weeks Svet and his family have been living in an open air pagoda that is surrounded by water and accessible only by boat. Water for cooking, bathing, cleaning and drinking comes from the river. There are no bathrooms at the pagoda and people jostle for space with pigs, chickens, and dogs.

Now that the school is closed Svet only eats two meals a day which primarily consist of rice and fish that he catches from the river. Svet hopes for the waters to recede so he can attend school again and play football with his friends. Svet is one of 1.2 million Cambodians who have been affected by this year's flooding. More than 46,000 families are reported to have been displaced and almost 250 have died.

A month after the Tonle Sap and Mekong rivers broke their banks water levels have still not yet receded. The United Nations World Food Programme is working closely with the Royal Government of Cambodia and humanitarian organizations to conduct assessments and ensure aid can reach the most-affected families.

"WFP considers the situation to be very serious. The damage of rice fields is cause for concern. WFP is assessing the mid and long-term food needs in flood-affected provinces while addressing the immediate needs of displaced families in close collaboration with Government, UN and NGO partners", says Jean-Pierre de Margerie, Country Representative of the World Food Programme in Cambodia.

Cambodia is among the most-vulnerable countries to droughts and floods in South East Asia. Almost one in five Cambodian households lives below the food poverty line. When hit by shocks such as this year's extensive flooding, families often have

very limited options and resort to negative coping strategies such as selling essential household assets or simply cutting back on food intake.