

# Mekong Climate Resilience Hub - Programme Description

## 1. Introduction

The Mekong Climate Resilience Hub (MCH 2019-2021) is a new CARE DK initiative on strengthening the regional capacity and learning on climate change programming within CARE in the Lower Mekong region.

The programme is a direct offspring of the previous joint CCAFS/Danida funded regional (Laos, Vietnam and Cambodia) Agro-Climate Information Service programme (ACIS 2015-2018). ACIS played a profound role in placing climate change on the agenda of CARE in the region, and kick-started climate change programming in Laos and Cambodia. At the final regional programme steering committee meeting of ACIS it was decided to aim for continued and deepened regional cooperation and learning. The current programme has been designed in close consultation with the relevant country offices in the region.

This programme document provides the strategic framework for the Mekong Climate Resilience Hub. The programme seeks to strengthen the capacity of CARE in Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam to increase the resilience of the most climate vulnerable women and girls in remote, rural areas by facilitating learning and supporting coordination among CARE in the Lower Mekong.

The programme focuses on Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam which is where CDK operates. However, learning and coordination will extend to CARE Cambodia and Raks Thai, the CARE Affiliated Member in Thailand, as relevant. Further the programme will aim at supporting the CARE Country Offices in the region to better utilise and coordinate the diverse funding for climate change initiatives provided by various CARE Member Partners.

The programme is a relatively low investment with potential high impact on the regional programming within climate adaptation. To ensure continued relevance the programme will within its scope be a flexible resource for strengthening capacity and learning based on demand and emerging opportunities. This includes positioning CARE for new regional or country funding opportunities.

## 2. Background and context

According to a 2017 study by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, the South East Asia region is on course for a “new climate regime” by the end of this century, when the coolest summer months could become warmer than the hottest months recorded in the period 1951-1980.<sup>1</sup> Average temperatures in Southeast Asia have risen every decade since 1960. In a business-as-usual scenario, temperatures are likely to soar by 4 degrees by the end of this century.<sup>2,3</sup>

The human and economic impacts of climate variabilities and changes are already felt, but they could become devastating. According to ADB estimates, Southeast Asia could suffer bigger losses than most regions in the world. Unchecked, climate change may shave 11% off the regional GDP by end of this century as it takes a toll on key sectors such as agriculture, tourism, and fishing—along with human health and labor productivity.<sup>4</sup>

By tracking the number of fatalities and GDP loss, the 2019 Global Climate Risk places Myanmar, Vietnam and Thailand amongst the ten countries of the world most affected by the impacts of climate change over the past

<sup>1</sup> [Asian Development Bank \(2017\): A Region at Risk – The Human Dimensions of Climate Change in Asia and the Pacific.](#)

<sup>2</sup> [German Watch \(2017\): Global Climate Risk Index.](#)

<sup>3</sup> [USAID \(2015\): Mekong, Mother of Water.](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Asian Development Bank \(2015\): South East Asia and the Economics of Global Climate Stabilization.](#)

20 years.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the 2018 Global Food Security Index, places Laos, Cambodia and Myanmar among the world's least food-secure countries<sup>6</sup> whilst the World Bank counts Vietnam among the five countries most likely to be affected by global warming in the future.<sup>7</sup>

The impacts of climate change on food systems is of particular concern. As an example, in the absence of technical breakthroughs, the World Bank estimates for rice yields in Thailand and Vietnam to drop by as much as 50% by 2100, as compared to 1990 levels, with devastating consequences for food and nutrition security.

While the distribution of global extreme poverty shifted dramatically from Asia to Sub-Saharan Africa between 1990 and 2015, more than 80% of the world's stunted still live in Asia, in particular South East Asia where 66 million, or 1 in every 4, was "severely food insecure" by 2017.<sup>8 9</sup> The worst-hit countries of South East Asia remain Lao PDR, Myanmar and Cambodia, even if all countries of the region have seen noticeable progress; in the case of Myanmar, stunting levels were reduced from 32% to 11% during the past 15 years whilst Lao PDR saw stunting drop from 27% to 17% during that same period.<sup>10</sup> However, climate change poses a threat to recent years' progress, with rising food prices bringing the spectrum of food shortages and undernutrition to millions more of the region's poor the past few years have seen a declining trend.<sup>11</sup>

In this scenario, women are critical to reducing poverty, hunger and malnutrition. Evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that gender discrimination - or the denial of women's basic human rights - is a major cause of the poverty and food and nutrition insecurity which drive the climate vulnerability of women and girls.<sup>12</sup> This is because women play key roles in agriculture (producers, caregivers and community activists), but have unequal access to food and the resources, services and assets that could increase their yields and incomes, and nutrition and health for their families. They often struggle to secure land titles or access agricultural extension services.<sup>13</sup> Other challenges facing women producers include accessing savings, credit and insurance; obtaining quality and affordable seeds, fertilizers and equipment or technical extension services; maximizing market opportunities in markets skewed by power imbalances; cultural stereotypes that limit women's mobility or abilities to play certain roles; and having a say in decisions about agricultural and household incomes and assets, or even their own health. Women's high domestic work burden and lack of support from men in childcare also has dire consequences for children's nutrition and long-term health.<sup>14</sup>

The project is only indirectly addressing the broader context issues, the aim of the project is to enable CARE in the Lower Mekong Region, and in particular CARE International in Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar to improve the capacity to respond to the above challenges. The following provide a snapshot of the CARE existing practice and challenges in respect to climate change which the programme directly aims at addressing.

Climate resilience is priority to CARE International. Yet, out of 81 CI projects across the Lower Mekong (FY2018), country offices concluded that only a few fully addressed climate vulnerabilities, that is, by

<sup>5</sup> [German Watch \(2019\): Global Climate Risk Index.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Eco-Business \(2018, 5 November\): Why is Asia so food insecure?](#)

<sup>7</sup> [World Bank \(2018\). Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery.](#)

<sup>8</sup> [FAO, IFAD, UNICEF World Bank, WFP, WHO \(2019\): The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World.](#)

<sup>9</sup> [UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank Group \(2017\): Joint child malnutrition estimates - levels and trends in child malnutrition](#)

[Key findings of the 2017 edition.](#)

<sup>10</sup> [FAO, IFAD, UNICEF World Bank, WFP, WHO \(2019\): The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World.](#)

<sup>11</sup> [UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank Group \(2017\): Joint child malnutrition estimates - levels and trends in child malnutrition](#)

[Key findings of the 2017 edition.](#)

<sup>12</sup> [World Bank \(2012\); World Development Report 2012 – Gender Equality & Development. CARE \(2010\): Strong Women, Strong Communities – CARE's holistic approach to empowering women and girls in the fight against poverty.](#)

<sup>13</sup> [UN Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO 2011\): Women in Agriculture – Closing the gender gap for development.](#)

<sup>14</sup> [Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development \(OECD 2014\): Unpaid Work – The missing link in the analysis of gender gaps in labour outcomes.](#)

integrating resilience strongly and structurally in project design and implementation<sup>15</sup>. In fact, 68% of projects were perceived as not only having no strategy on climate resilience, but not even addressing the underlying vulnerabilities of our impact groups.

In CARE, most of our climate resilience programming takes place within the thematic area of food and nutrition security. However, in the food and nutrition security area, CARE International in the Mekong region perform worse on climate resilience: Out of 29 food and nutrition security projects across the Lower Mekong (FY2018), only 7% fully integrated climate resilience, whilst as many as 72% did not count on a climate resilience strategy, nor addressing underlying vulnerabilities.

The above said, it may be premature to draw conclusions: The results are derived from self-assessments (PIIRS) by country offices who reportedly struggle to fit their results into the *CARE Resilience Marker* vetting and assessment form. It does however give an indication of county offices own perception of their impact on climate resilience which, in comparison is lower (1.46 = “poor impact”), as compared to the CI average (1.89 = “fair impact”). With our impact groups among the most vulnerable to climate change globally our capacity seems not to match the needs of our impact groups, let alone our high ambitions.<sup>16</sup>

### 3. Rationale

**Climate vulnerability of CARE impact groups.** The Lower Mekong is among the areas most exposed to climate change, not least extreme weather events. CARE’s impact group of women and girls in remote, rural areas are particularly vulnerable to food and nutrition security, unless the root causes of their climate vulnerabilities are addressed.

**Relatively low but diverse CARE capacity on climate resilience.** CARE capacities do not yet match our ambitions, even in the area of food and nutrition security. Capacities and needs differ widely: CARE Laos and CARE Myanmar have greater capacity constraints, while CARE Vietnam has potential to “export” its role as a national climate resilience knowledge hub beyond the borders of Vietnam.

**CARE sub-regional climate coordination.** The ACIS project stimulated an appetite for climate resilience programming and strengthened demands by country programmers for closer and more strategic, CARE-wide cooperation in the Lower Mekong, especially around climate resilience where small climate adaptation projects tend to be attached with high technical and operational expectations that the country offices are often unable to fulfill.

**Increased focus on sub-regional programming** place new demands on country offices and Care Member Partners (CMPs) active in the region. CARE country offices with lead CMPs have agreed to pursue the increased focus on regional and multi country funding opportunities in the region. CARE would be better positioned to pursue multi-country, perhaps even sub-regional, opportunities within climate financing if a shared regional approach, and strong regional coordination is in place.

### 4. Programme objective

The programme is having a focus on strengthening the Capacity of CARE International in the Lower Mekong Region. The ultimate aim of the intervention as expressed in the **Overall objective** is to:

Increased resilience of the most climate vulnerable women and girls in remote rural areas of the Lower

<sup>15</sup> CI measures annual performance against four outcome areas, including resilience, through the Project and Program Information & Impact Reporting System (PIIRS). The PIIRS publicly available data is the only such exercise among peer INGOs. It is important to note that the PIIRS is a self-assessment in which COs scoring own impact and performance. With COs or individual staffs having different knowledge and perception, the score are not necessarily comparable across countries and regions. However, PIIRS data is useful in presenting and analyzing CO perceptions of impact and performance over time, and in identifying potential CO capacity constraints.

<sup>16</sup> [German Watch: 2019 Global Climate Risk](#).

Mekong subregion, especially Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

**The specific objective is:**

Strengthened CARE capacity for climate resilience in the Lower Mekong subregion, especially Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

The immediate objective will be reached within three outcome areas: 1. Increased learning, joint concept development supporting innovation and increased capacity within climate adaptation. 2. Increased coordination, synergy potential joint (multi country/regional) programme among Care in the lower Mekong region. 3. Increase technical expertise in the country offices with a particular focus on the Capacity of CARE International in Laos.

## 5. Theory of Change

The programme seeks to strengthen CARE capacities for climate resilience programming by strengthening CARE learning and coordination across the Lower Mekong and by building CARE Laos technical capacity. The extent to which the increased regional capacity within climate change will be translated into improved climate change programming, and hereby ultimately significantly contributing to the development objective, is based on an assumption that the involved CARE country offices and involved CMPs are committed to the CI priorities on climate change and have a relevant programme portfolio to promote climate adaptation. Both assumptions are likely to be met in the region.

**Outcome 1|** Increased learning, joint concept development in support of increased capacity and innovation amongst CARE in the Lower Mekong.

The project is based on a significant interest across the three focus countries in learning from each other and joint concept development and innovation in areas such as climate smart crop value chains and the application of climate resilience tools and approaches. Further there is an interest in strengthening the capacity to effectively utilizing tested CARE tools including the Gendered Climate Vulnerability & Capacity Assessments (G-CVCA) and Community Adaptation Action Planning (CAAP), as well as application of the CARE Resilience Marker.

The MCRH will support joint learning and concept development by facilitating meeting around identified shared learning areas. The project can further support joint concept development amongst the countries. The form will depend on the challenge and needs but could include facilitation of concept development workshop, provision of specialist input from CLAR, CCRP, CARE Vietnam or external resources centers/consultants. The CARE Denmark Regional Climate Change and Civil Society Advisor, funded through the project, will facilitate the processes and hold responsibility for the programme implementation further he will provide training on request on the G-CVA, CAAP and resilience markers.

**Outcome 2|** Increased coordination, synergy potential joint (multi country/regional) programme among

The Mekong Climate Resilience Hub seeks to complement CARE International in the subregion and strengthen collaboration both amongst country offices and Care Member Partners with climate related activities in the region. The aim is to exploit the comparative advantage of existing and future project by strengthening synergy between the CARE Member Partner climate change related interventions.

CARE Denmark in collaboration with CARE Country offices in the sub-region will convene a meeting among and

between the CARE International country programmes in Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam and the CARE Member Partners active in the subregion, including Raks Thai which is the Affiliated Member of CARE International in Thailand. The meeting shall serve to build a common understanding across CARE of our challenges and opportunities in the subregion, to identify ways to make our operations more efficient (for example, agreeing on new cost-sharing models and coordination of engagements with regional donors), and to agree on CARE sub-regional climate priorities for the CARE Agenda 2030 regional programme strategy for Asia & the Pacific. The meeting will likewise draw up a framework for the future collaboration amongst CARE in the region, this framework will inform the future activities of Outcome 2.

Potential for multicounty/regional programmes joint programming will be supported based on identified needs and funding opportunities.

The outcome area will support CARE in Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam in representing CARE interest at relevant international events, such as the June 2020 Community Based Adaptation (CBA12) conference in Bangkok. Other relevant climate resilience events include the annually recurring Adaptation Futures and South-South Knowledge Sharing on Adaptation conference, and thematic conference with strategic potential for advancing CARE climate interests, such as the International Land Coalition Annual Regional Assembly.

The CDK Regional Advisor for Asia will continuously explore opportunities for joint programming between CARE in Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam, including with CARE Cambodia and Raks Thai whenever relevant.

### Outcome 3 | Increased climate change expertise in CARE Laos.

The programme has identified a special capacity challenge on climate change in CARE International in Laos. This is due to the programme portfolio, with limited flexible funding as well as the general lack of climate change expertise in Laos. The strong programmatic focus in Laos on livelihood and food security amongst ethnic minorities provide a solid basis for yet underutilised climate adaptation interventions. The programme will support CARE Laos in building technical expertise on climate resilience. First and foremost, the programme will finance the position of a Programme Advisor on Climate Resilience. The advisor will be provided to support CARE Laos in meeting the Long-Term Ethnic Women Programme (2014-2029) strategic objective on resilience, including the integrating climate resilience best practice into the design of new and, whenever possible, ongoing projects, as well as assuring the quality of climate resilience programming, including monitoring, evaluation and learning. Further, the programme will seek to support present CARE Laos staff in upgrading their skills through physical and online training opportunities, such as the CARE Academy online climate change course. In addition, the Programme Advisor on Climate Change will visit CARE Myanmar to learn from the CDK-supported Myanmar Climate Capacity Programme learning pilot.

The advisor will play a key role on cross-country learning under the programme (Outcome 1), together with the climate change advisors of CARE Myanmar and CARE Vietnam, thus ensuring that learning under this programme is shared across the long-term rural programme.

## 6. Partnerships

The MCH is not anticipated to have core partners but will capacitate CARE International in the Lower Mekong region to work strategically with and support partner capacity building in relation to climate resilience. Resource partners with specialised skills or knowledge might be drawn upon in the capacity building activities.

## 7. Approach

Climate change encompasses all sectors of society which is why the Mekong Climate Resilience Hub promotes integration of climate resilience into all country programme interventions, even though the scope is limited to

the long-term rural programmes. The rural-focused thematic area of Food and Nutrition Security remains the core domain of CARE climate resilience programming, together with the thematic area of Women’s Economic Empowerment in the region. This does not preclude urban resilience programming to be considered part of our programme learning and coordination outcomes, but it is simply beyond the scope of the programme to expand our focus to urban resilience which requires knowledge and builds on experience which is relatively new to CARE.

As we learnt in the Problem Analysis, CARE entry-points for climate resilience differ from country to country: This makes sense because local contexts differ from country to country, and CARE has different niches and opportunities in each country. However, everywhere, CARE seeks to build on our expertise on women’s empowerment and gender equality, by focusing on gender transformational approaches to climate resilience – or what CARE increasingly refers to as “gender-just” climate resilience.

At best, we deliver against standards such as the Sustainable, Productive, Equitable & Resilience (SuPER) Principles; we monitor our impact and design our interventions with the CARE Resilience Marker and CARE Resilience Vetting Form; we use tested community-based adaptation tools and approaches, such as Gendered Climate Vulnerability & Capacity Assessments (G-CVCA) and Community Adaptation Action Plans (CAAP); and we have policies and strategies to guide our work, notably the CARE Programme Strategy on Food & Nutrition Security and Resilience to Climate Change.

The Mekong Climate Resilience Hub does not promote one single approach to climate resilience, but helping strengthen gender-transformational approaches to climate resilience programming in the three programme focus countries. The cross-country learning will however see to ensure that in-country programming continues to reflect best practice, and that CARE in the Lower Mekong continues to contribute to communities of practice in and beyond CARE, for example the GGIAR Research Programme on Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS) research network with which CARE has entered a global strategic partnership.

## 8. Impact groups/beneficiaries

The nature of the programme as a catalyst for changes in the CARE programmes in the region is reflected in the immediate impact group of the project which is CARE programme staff in the Mekong Region. This fairly limited target group will however through the programme strengthen the ability to provide climate relevant services and support to CARE partners and ultimately to the impact groups of the national programmes in the region. The ultimate impact group/beneficiaries in the three target countries are climate vulnerable women and girls predominantly from ethnic minority groups in remote rural areas of the Lower Mekong subregion, especially Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

## 9. Links to SDGs

CDK works towards a dignified life for the most climate vulnerable. In the case of the MCRH, they refer to the “most climate vulnerable woman and girls in remote rural areas.” In practice, the “right to climate resilience links” directly to several SDGs such as Climate Action (13), Zero Hunger (SDG2) and Gender Equality (SDG5).

The SDGs are interdependent which means that SDG13 impacts on the realisation of all SDGs. To illustrate, CARE cannot promote climate action (SDG13) without gender equality (SDG5), and there will be no world without poverty (SDG1) and zero hunger (SDG2) without securing the “right to climate resilience.”

The SDGs guide the Mekong Climate Resilience Hub. New and innovative partnerships (SDG17) is a central reason to promoting sub-regional programming. We also follow principles such as of leaving no-one behind, by targeting the most climate vulnerable women and girls, and the principle of considering political, social and environmental dimension through our holistic approach to climate resilience.

## 10. Approach to gender equality and social inclusion

The approach to gender equality and social inclusion is facilitated by a strong focus on gender and social inclusion as reflected in the CARE impact group in the country strategies and existing programmes. The MCRH as a capacity building and learning programme will aim at reinforcing the existing practice on gender and social inclusion by promoting gender and social inclusion sensitive approaches to climate change.

## 11. Sustainability

As pointed out in the Theory of Change, the direct results of the programme (outcomes) is well within CARE control and, major risks part, the results will be sustained because climate resilience continues to be a strategic priority to CARE; from the CDK Strategy 2025, over the forthcoming CARE Agenda 2030 regional programme strategy, to the 10-year climate resilience strategic objective of the long-term rural country programmes.

The indirect results of the programme (impact), are not within CARE control, but we exert some influence over the sustainability of the impact: The Mekong Climate Resilience Hub promoted rights-based programming through which CARE strengthens civil society partners to hold Government (duty bearer) responsible for realising the rights of all citizens (rights holder), including the “right to climate resilience.”

We acknowledge that, by design, some CARE climate resilience interventions are more sustainable than others which partly justifies the need for the Mekong Climate Resilience Hub to support CARE in Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam in strengthening the quality of climate resilience programming, including sustainability measures such as civil society strengthening (impact multiplication) and community-based adaptation (local ownership).

The Mekong Climate Resilience Hub is not intended as a lasting mechanism, but rather as a catalyst initiative which in the medium term will be institutionalised in new practices in and among CARE International offices in the region and hopefully new externally funded joint initiatives/Projects/programmes.

## 12. Major Risks and mitigation measures

Contextual risks	
Lack of donor funding for climate adaptation and related areas will reduce the potential for attracting additional funding and thus utilizing the increased climate adaptation capacity within CARE in the region	While the overall funding available for the Mekong region might decline, and funding for particular countries might decline due to the political situation, provided the increased global focus on climate change the likelihood is assessed to be <u>low to medium</u> , the potential impact would be <u>high</u> .
Programmatic risks	
High staff turnover	The likelihood is <u>high</u> , especially, but the potential impact is <u>medium</u> because the programme requires for knowledge and learning to be shared across the long-term rural programmes through in-country trainings and integration of good practices into existing and new projects. The risk is mitigated by continuously improving the human resources management.