



# Lessons from Community-Led Actions to Strengthen Disaster Resilience A Case from Can Tho City, Viet Nam

Image source: LIFE Centre

## Key Messages

- A multi-stakeholder approach improved coordination and cooperation on addressing disaster risk within the context of local development
- A community-based approach deepened understanding of the root causes of disaster risk allowing the issues to be addressed more comprehensively and effectively through wider development processes.
- Participatory approaches were effective in identifying disaster risk management priorities and developing responses through livelihood interventions as well as empowering stakeholders at community and government levels.
- A community-based approach, coupled with civil society and local government engagement, enhanced development planning processes to address resilience concerns and provided a framework for supporting sustainable livelihood initiatives.

## Background

This project demonstrates the effective application of a community-based approach in Viet Nam to sustainably strengthen disaster resilience at the commune level. Using a multi-stakeholder process, priority community needs were identified, integrated into local government and line agency development plans, then implemented and monitored. The project is one of a number of similar pilots recently funded in Southeast Asia by ADB's Integrated Disaster Risk Management Fund and executed by civil society organizations<sup>1</sup>.

The project was implemented in two poor rural communes of Can Tho City in the Mekong Delta. The area is vulnerable to disaster events particularly flooding and drought; sea level rise is also causing problems of increased salinity in ground water. In Viet Nam disaster risk management (DRM) is coordinated by the Central Committee for Flood and Storm Control (CCFSC) which is established at all levels of subnational government, and includes key relevant line agencies. Subnational development planning is the responsibility of the People's Committees in cooperation with decentralized line agencies. Until recently disaster risk management (DRM) was not a significant feature of local development plans with emphasis being given to managing disasters rather than disaster risks. Participatory planning at the commune level is now gradually being introduced, but the governance and institutional environment below the Provincial level requires further strengthening to make decentralization more effective, and development planning more responsive to community needs.

## The Project

The main aim of this pilot project was to empower communities to engage with local authorities and other relevant agencies to strengthen disaster resilience in the context of wider development through a joint-planning and implementation process. In this way, the expressed concerns of vulnerable communities could be addressed systematically through local development processes.

The project was implemented by The Centre for Promotion of Quality of Life (LIFE Centre), in partnership with local Women's Union (both national organizations) through a multi-stakeholder approach that included community members as well as the People's Committee, line agencies, and the CCFSC, at both commune and district levels<sup>2</sup>. The selection of the Women's Union as a local implementer helped to ensure gender equality of participation, and the integration of women's perspectives on disaster risk into the assessment and planning process. The core activities comprised seven key steps through which solutions were aligned with the yearly plan of the district level line agencies. (Figure 1)

<sup>1</sup>The Integrated Disaster Risk Management Fund established by ADB in 2013 and supported by the Government of Canada aims to assist the development of disaster risk management solutions for ADB's Southeast Asia developing member countries. The objectives of the pilots were to support innovative gender focused community-based solutions to strengthen resilience.

<sup>2</sup>The Centre for Promotion of Quality of Life (LIFE Centre) is a non-governmental organization with extensive experience in coordinating and working with government agencies, LIFE's Community Health and Resilience Program has strengthened the disaster resilience of more than 1000 women through building resilient livelihoods.

## Key Achievements

- Increased awareness and understanding by all stakeholders about disaster risks in the context of wider development at the community level and the impacts of disasters on local livelihoods.
- An innovative cross-sector consultative planning process between commune and district level in Can Tho City that integrated disaster resilience solution activities into commune development plans for the first time.
- Critical livelihood resilience problems were captured and local solutions developed using participatory tools and Participatory Action-Oriented Training (PAOT) enabling rapid improvements through the mobilization of local resources.
- Community-generated resilience building solutions were integrated into district development plans, and implemented by line agencies under existing commune and district level budgets.
- New productive and effective partnerships and coordination established between communities, NGOs, local government and line agencies for both implementation and monitoring of resilience building activities in the context of the commune plan.
- A high level of participation by community women in assessment, planning, and implementation of resilience building activities at the commune level.

Figure 1



The Integration Process of Disaster Resilience Solutions into Commune and District Development Plan

Implementation of this community-based project resulted in a number of additional impacts. The multi-stakeholder approach drew in additional support and technical assistance from national and provincial government agencies, NGOs, and academia, enhancing the technical quality of local plans. Project implementation increased the capacities and motivation of stakeholders in respect of DRM, and led to a greater recognition by district government of the role of the Women's Union in integrating community solutions to DRM in local development planning. They have requested the Women's Union to develop a plan and budget for scaling up the approach across the district. The project also developed a simple but effective monitoring mechanism involving the pairing of each implementer with another stakeholder group.

## Lessons Learned

The project has yielded a number of important lessons on the value of community-based approaches particularly in the context of a multi-stakeholder approach.

As DRM is a cross-cutting issue, it is important to have a multi-stakeholder perspective for understanding the root causes of risks, and for developing effective responses. The multi-stakeholder approach also strengthened coordination and cooperation on addressing disaster risk in the context of development process at the local level and established or strengthened partnerships between communities, local government and civil society.

The community-based approach facilitated an understanding of the multifaceted localized issues related to disaster risk, and the impacts of disasters and climate change on local livelihoods. This led to solutions identified at community level that addressed multiple vulnerabilities, and introduced a greater demand driven element into local development planning.

Participatory tools and Participatory Action-Oriented Training were effective in identifying community priorities and developing responses. These approaches were also valuable for engaging in dialogue and negotiating with local government and, more broadly, empowering and raising the capacities of participating stakeholders in the process.

In situations where decentralization is not yet fully effective, a community-based approach coupled with strong engagement from civil society can serve to improve the quality of local development planning and local services, and/or provide a framework for supporting local livelihood initiatives.



Source: LIFE Centre, 2016



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