



10 Lessons Learned in Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change Adaptation in Viet Nam

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Introduction

With nearly 3,000 km of coastline, Vietnam is at high risk to natural disasters. Extreme hazard events are becoming more frequent and intense due to climate change, sea level rise and environmental pollution problems that challenge sustainable development.

When a disaster occurs, both women and men play an important role in ensuring safety for themselves and family members, and the disaster management activities in their community. However, the impact of natural disasters on women and men are not the same and vary based on the factors including their type of work and family and social roles.

Inequality in the division of labour at the household level, as well as in the work that women are usually in charge of when natural disasters occur often places a double burden on women. Equally important, women have fewer and more limited opportunities than men to participate in public community activities in preparing, responding and recovering from disasters. This means they are less likely to have the opportunity to express their ideas, explain their unique needs or lead or participate in processes that shape how disasters are managed in their communities or workplaces. Improving opportunities and access to resources for women and girls can help make sure that disaster management activities are more effective and accountable.

The Government of Vietnam has issued many policies and measures to strengthen disaster prevention and climate change adaptation systems, and the 2015 Law on Disaster Prevention and Control notes the importance of gender-sensitive disaster risk reduction (DRR) and management (DRM). The Government has also been active in taking up its international commitments on gender mainstreaming in disaster prevention activities in order to gradually eliminate the gender inequality between women and men.

In recent years, there have been a number of teaching materials and advocacy documents on the importance of gender sensitive disaster risk reduction (DRR) and climate change adaptation (CCA), but little documentation of practical lessons learned. To help the staff and lecturers apply reference materials on gender issues in a practical way, in this document the Vietnam Women's Union has brought together some specific lessons learned.

The Lessons Learned have been compiled based on research into locally and internationally funded projects to benefit women and men in the disaster prone provinces in Vietnam. Ideas have drawn on the perspectives of the staff working in disaster prevention and control and on the views of international experts working in Viet Nam. The document does not aim to fully document or analyse any particular project, but focuses instead on good practice in identify and acting to ensure gender issues are taking into account in all stages of implementation.

The 10 lessons focus on topics including raising awareness about gender and gender equality for officials and citizens, involving women in the decision-making process, on how to make community disaster prevention and control plans gender-sensitive, how to use micro-credit as a tool for gender-sensitive DRR-CCA projects and to empower groups such as elderly women to get

involved in community based disaster risk management. It also stresses the continued importance of collecting sex-age and vulnerability disaggregated data.

Through the stories and lessons learned in this document, it is hoped that staff working in the field of disaster prevention will gain inspiration and new perspectives on how to integrate a gender into disaster and climate change adaptation action. It aims to encourage gender sensitivity in the process of collecting and analysing information, in risk assessment and the planning and implementation disaster risk management measures the community level. It is hoped that this can contribute to making gender analysis not only theoretical exercised but part of the core professional work of the policy makers, staff and managers in the field of disaster prevention. To support this learning, a short glossary on basic concepts of gender in the management of disaster risks is provided at the end of the document.

This work was undertaken as part of the joint MARD-UNDP project "Strengthening the institutional capacity for disaster risk, particularly the risks related to climate change" (SCDMII) which was implemented in partnership with Women's Union, Viet Nam Red Cross and Oxfam with funding provided by the Australian Government and UN One Plan Fund.

The 10 Lessons Learned:

LESSON 1: Understanding the diversity of vulnerability and risk improves efficiency (including disaggregating data)

LESSON 2: Capacity building of staff and awareness raising on gender and gender mainstreaming is essential

LESSON 3: When offered full knowledge, women can be effective and change-makers in preventing and responding to disasters in their families and communities.

LESSON 4: Equal participation of women and men (50% -50%) in prevention and disaster management, especially in needs assessment is an effective way to increase ownership and accuracy of relief operations

LESSON 5: Gender sensitive DRR knowledge can be the foundation for wider climate change awareness raising, and effective action, particularly for climate-smart risk management

LESSON 6: Gender sensitive DPC plans are a useful tool for effective investment planning and mainstreaming

LESSON 7: When women participate in decision-making processes and the management of institutions, system become more transparent and more efficient.

LESSON 8: Women's Union's network has valuable experience and wide networks that can practically be used to enhance preparedness and timely response to disasters.

LESSON 9: Micro-credit can be a good tool to help women and vulnerable groups better cope with natural disasters.

LESSON 10: Elderly women are not just a vulnerable group but instead can be a key resource for information and guidance in managing disasters

Lesson 1: Understanding the diversity of vulnerability and risk improves efficiency (including disaggregating data)

Understanding the diversity of communities, and local vulnerabilities such as the greater risk often faced by single women, children, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, landless people or migrant workers encounter during disasters is essential making disaster risk management more efficient.

The case study of the Inclusive Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Project in Quang Nam Province implemented by Malteser shows the effectiveness of learning with communities, especially disadvantaged groups and developing localised risk maps as a planning tool for disaster risk management.



Right from the start, the project put an emphasis on understanding who was most vulnerable during disasters. Using the Government approved community based disaster risk assessment tool (completed with support from the SCDM-II project) and incorporating community knowledge the project emphasised understanding who was living in the commune and the extent of damage caused by natural disasters in previous years. For example, in its initial screening it identified a baseline of potentially vulnerable people as follows:

- Children: 2,751 people
- Single women: 358 people
- Elderly: 1,541 people
- Disabled: 534 people
- Residents in flood plains: 491 people
- Residents in areas at risk of landslides and torrential waters: 217 people.

In close collaboration with the Commune People's Committees of all 13 villages in the project, through community consultations, this data was further analysed to help determine the strengths and weaknesses of each of these groups, and to determine what information, skills and help they might require to be resilient to disasters. This enabled the communes to develop localised digitized disaster risk maps which highlighted the weaknesses and strengths of the region where they live, which could be used in planning, but also in ensuring that systems were in place to help those who might need extra help in evacuating during a disaster.

The project then placed an emphasis on working with the whole community, but particularly vulnerable groups to increase their skills and knowledge regarding:

- ✓ How to move the property, food, food, livestock to high and safe locations and prepare food, food, drinks and utensils necessary for the family's daily life and helping others (flashlights, oil lamps, lamp lighters, medicines and emergency bags).
- ✓ Knowledge of how to care for the elderly, those with disabilities and children during disasters to make sure that everyone in the family is able to avoid floods and other disasters.
- ✓ Know where and how to regularly monitor information and updated news about the disaster in a timely manner and notify others who may have challenges to access this information.
- ✓ Know how to actively implement post-disaster activities such as site clearance and sanitising and preventing disease outbreaks that can occur after natural disasters such as cholera, dysentery, dengue fever and respiratory or eye infections.

"Women are the first to prepare for the whole family to cope with natural disasters and women are the first to bring life back to a stable community" (Local proverb)

In facilitating the sessions special efforts were made to make sure that the different vulnerable groups actively participated and expressed their views on both their needs and wider planning for implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Women comprised 30% of the Management Board and 31% of the rescue teams. The local Women's Union representative was actively involved, and plays a key role in disaster needs assessment and compiling disaster damage reports for the local council and government and in suggesting remedial measures to support families affected.

Projects like this can help gradually change traditional concepts of the role of local and contributions of women and of particularly vulnerable groups in the prevention and control

of natural disasters. Activities and advocacy actions helped raise awareness not only about gender, but also about differing vulnerability and involved a wide range of local people in evaluating the status of vulnerability, risk mapping and disaster prevention drills and planning exercises. This created opportunities for women and vulnerable groups to access to information, and being active in exercising their rights in the context of natural disasters.

Recommendations:

- Local government and the Committees for Disaster Prevention and Control and Search and Rescue at all levels should learn carefully and collect statistical data, about the composition of groups, and especially the location and needs of vulnerable people in the community before, during and after disasters. This is a prerequisite effective planning.
- Government led Disaster Prevention and Control Planning should organize activities to collect the opinions of the various population groups in the community, including from separate discussions with men, women and vulnerable groups to plan and support risk reduction activities and humanitarian relief after disasters to better meet the needs of the population.

Lesson 2: Capacity building of staff and awareness raising on gender and gender mainstreaming is essential

Raising gender awareness and capacity on gender and gender mainstreaming for officers who are working in disaster risk management can help lead to more humane and effective community-based disaster risk management. The case study of the Oxfam Gender Mainstreaming in Disaster Risk Management in two provinces of the Mekong Delta (Dong Thap and Tien Giang) shows how changing perceptions and awareness is key to improving the participation of women and men in disaster management activities.

In this project, Oxfam focused on raising awareness and capacity in a systematic way, and especially targeting government officials at all levels, including at the grassroots level. The project was able to:

- Develop training materials on gender and leadership of women in the disaster risks prevention and control and integrated gender issues into other training materials. In the process of compiling documents, the content of lessons was adapted based on the local circumstances and specific needs of the community.
- To build capacity and raise awareness for local officials, the project organized training courses on gender and women's leadership in disaster management for male and female staff of the local authorities at commune and hamlet level. Through the training, the gender awareness of the staff was increased, and they gained practical skills to help them plan their activities and their local better, in particular taking into account gender factors.
- Women were especially encouraged to participate in all activities of the project. Meanwhile, both women and men have the opportunity to share, exchange and decision-making in relating matters equitably.
- Capacity building and raising awareness for the people in the community: Conducting direct training for members of the community in order to improve capacity and provide them the knowledge on gender as well as a chance to exchange experiences, opinions equally. Since then, people have the correct awareness and knowledge of gender issues and have appropriate behaviour to create changes in the family in particular and society in general.

This model has created favourable conditions and encouraged people in the community, including both women and men to participate in the activities of the project and to encourage and motivate those around them to get involved. In addition, encouraging women to participate in the local rescue teams has helped empower women and increased their prestige in the community.

The training program includes the main contents: the basic concepts of gender and leadership capacity of women, the status and barriers to the leadership role of women, the participation of women in disaster risk management and some leadership skills

Response plans more clearly show the current situation and look specifically at the roles, capabilities and needs of women and men and what measures are needed to mitigate the vulnerability of each. Base on this, the local government

has been able to develop an effective disaster prevention and control plan for both men and women that takes advantage of available local and state resources effectively.

For this to be effective, it is necessary to ensure that staff at all levels understand basic gender concepts and the tools that are requested to apply. Materials have now been developed, and human capacity exists to scale up this process, and to raise awareness about the important role of women in the disaster risk management.

Recommendation:

- All staff working on natural disaster prevention and control, should have the opportunity gain skills on gender analysis and mainstreaming in order to maximize the ability and resources of communities, in which women account for more than 50% of the population.

Lesson 3: When offered full knowledge, women can be effective and change-makers in preventing and responding to disasters in their families and communities.

Within Viet Nam, the Central Steering Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control (CSCDPC) is mandated to ensure that resources are in place for each of the phases of disaster risk management. In Viet Nam this is often understood as the “four-on-the-spot” approach where natural disaster prevention and control actions are carried out ensuring 1) command on the spot, 2) manpower on the spot, 3) means and supplies on the spot and logistics on the spot.



Every year, local authorities develop disaster preparedness plans under the "4 spot" motto in communes and villages. However, the plans traditionally have placed less emphasis on analysing and assessing the needs of the groups in the community and have not clearly defined response capabilities and resources of the community. Priority activities therefore usually concentrate on strengthening infrastructure, and less on how to build resilience and how to actively use the skills of women and men to enhance resilience.

However, between 2006-2010 in 24 communes in Dong Thap and Tien Giang Oxfam and partners showed how this can be done in a way that increases women’s skills and ensures their effective leadership and participation. The project has supported the Provincial Committee for Disaster Prevention and Control and Search and Rescue to implement simulation exercises for potential floods that mobilized the entire community, especially women and vulnerable groups in the simulation process, enabling them to be aware and be more proactive in responding to disasters.

Simulation exercises test specific situations such as: who needs to be involved in responding to disasters, how to do it; who needs to be evacuated, who provides warning, who rescues and protects embankments and agricultural areas, who prepares storm shelters, and one does rapid assessment of damage situation and implement emergency relief work. In each case its useful to identify what can women do, what can men do, and how this can best be done?

Specific activities included ensuring that both women and men were trained in key concepts of gender and vulnerability assessment. It then aimed to provide women the skills to promote their leadership and participation in each step of the process. The process of developing the scenario for disaster planning was decided with the participation of the agencies and organizations, especially the Women's Union. This laid a good foundation to detect of gender issues, and to encourage a focus on activities from the needs review and assessment to supporting vulnerable groups in communities.

The annual simulation exercises to test the plan was particularly useful in helping women learn

how to participate in the handling of emergency situations, strengthen their contributions during disasters, and can help ensure that local organisations, such as the Women's Union, are effectively mobilised in the community. Through the simulations, the "four spot" motto has been concretized by assigning specific jobs for women and men. The communication systems were also improved. Rescue teams were trained to strengthen their skills in dealing in real situations.



The simulation exercise particularly showed how to coordination mechanisms in particular needed to be strengthened to better reach women and other vulnerable groups. After the rehearsal the Steering Committee adjusted and supplement disaster prevention plan agreed to set up sub-committees to work in some key areas.

Simulation exercises can be a key vehicle to improve the capacity of WU staff who participate in Steering Committee of Disaster Prevention and Control. They also

help to mobilize women in community and support the government in ensuring people know how to prevent disasters, evacuate and allocate aid to right target groups.

Recommendation:

- Local Steering Committees for Disaster Prevention and Control should organize disaster simulation exercises regularly in order to mobilize a cross-section of local people, including women and the local Women's Union.

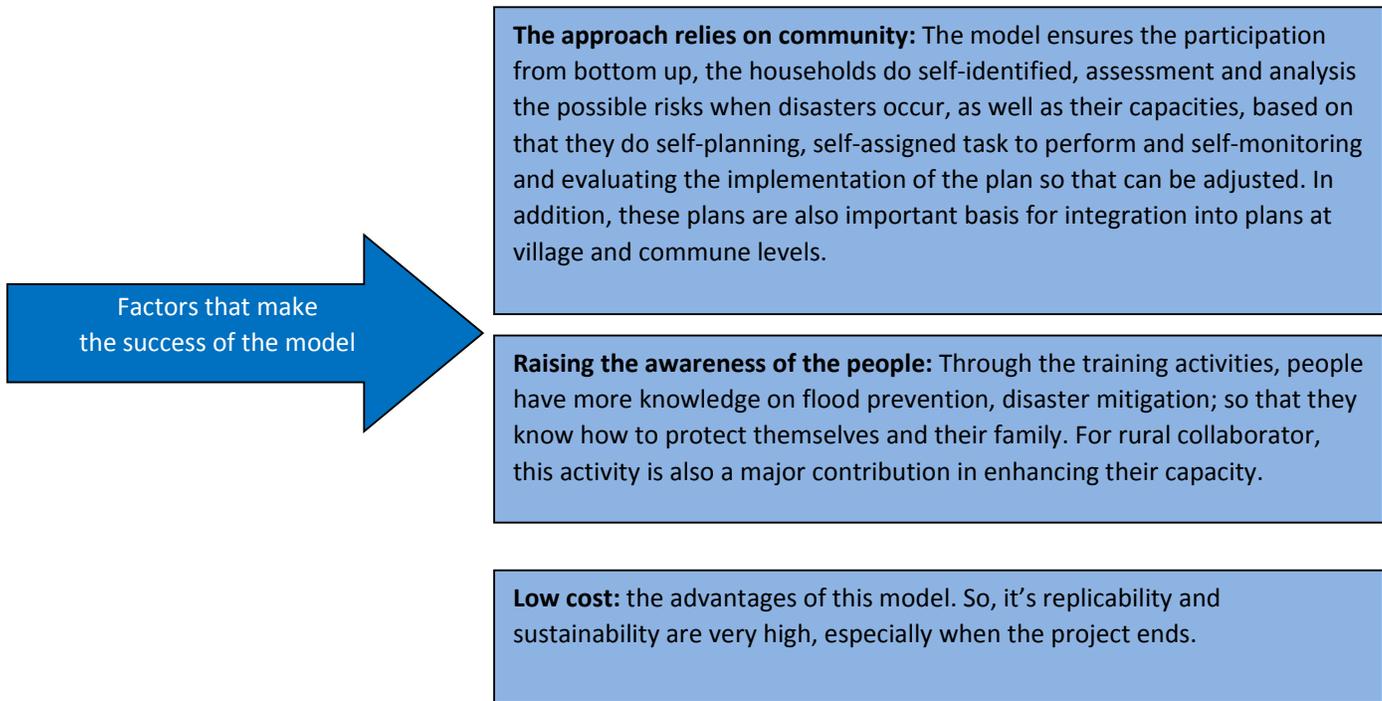
Lesson 4: Equal participation of women and men (50% -50%) in prevention and disaster management, especially in needs assessment is an effective way to increase ownership and accuracy of relief operations

Ensuring equal participation of women and men (50% -50%) in the disaster prevention and management activities, especially in the need assessment can help to collect information about risk reduction, preparedness and disaster response in the community.

For example, World Vision International has been working with households in Quang Ngai to develop Community-Based Disaster Prevention Plans in districts and communes. Before the project started, the plans had often not been very specific, and did not take into account the needs of specific households. Through the project, communities were able to establish village level networks of collaborators based on a set of criteria including professional background, age, their capabilities and credibility. Groups were also required to be 50% of men and 50% women. The People’s Committee then issued a decision to endorse the roster and the formal roles and responsibilities of this team.

Commune groups were trained, and actively participated in local plans and simulations and as a result when the storm season came were able to play a key role in supporting local evacuation and needs assessment.





Recommendation:

- The Government and Steering Committee of Disaster Prevention and Control should focus on developing commune/ hamlet level teams and set targets for gender participation (ideally 50% men and 50% women.)

Lesson 5: Gender sensitive DRR knowledge can be the foundation for wider climate change awareness raising, and effective action, particularly for climate-smart risk management

The National Community Based Disaster Risk Management Programme (1002) aims to prioritise local level risk assessment to inform commune level Disaster Prevention and Control Plans (DPC). These plans can help provide a realistic view of the needs within a commune. The results of a good plan take in account the diverse needs of women, children, the elderly, people with disabilities. They can also be useful in wider development and investment decision making.

For example, CARE international has been working within the framework a Disaster Prevention and Response Project in the Mekong Delta (CRND) to develop DPC plans but also promote sustainable livelihoods options that take into account the potential impacts of climate change. The project works in 12 communes in 6 districts in Dong Thap, Long An and An Giang province.

Previously, at the local level, the level of participation of the people and communities in the planning was limited. The project helped to build disaster prevention plan meets the actual needs of the people and in accordance with local conditions.



Plans were developed at the hamlet level with the participation of the population in order to determine the priority needs of women, men, and vulnerable groups focusing on three areas: (1) Capacity of prevention and disaster response community; (2) Suggestions for sustainable income-generating activities; (3) Direct support to communities and households related to the prevention and response to natural disasters.

Hamlet plans were then joined together in commune level plans, building a bottom-up highly localised approached to risk management in the target areas.

The resulting plans took a more holistic risk reduction approach, looking at disaster risk, but also at how women and men's livelihoods were affected, and how commune Disaster Prevention and Control Plans and investments could support resilience in the wider sense. It also aimed to provides local people and decision makers with up to date information on the potential climate change impacts in their areas. Seed funding for these initiatives helped build ownership of the plan, and active advocacy continues to try to make sure that ideas are implemented either with commune or external resources.

In particular, CARE worked at a community level to ensure that women, especially ethnic minority women, were able to actively participate in the program and affect decision-making within their communities. A Gender Action Plan was developed and implemented to support the achievement of gender-responsive goals. This plan formed the backbone of action to promote gender equality, and ways to measure progress. The plan included a variety of measures, including providing on-going investment in capacity building, supporting gender balance and gender-sensitive planning tools. Gender was also considered as part of the analysis of different livelihood options in the project.

As a result of CARE’s project, communities and local authorities have improved capacity to undertake gender-sensitive analysis and planning for community based adaptation and disaster risk reduction (DRR), and civil society. In particular, the project’s partner, the Women’s Union has a solid foundation for the scale-up of community-based, equitable and gender-sensitive adaptation in the Mekong Delta.

The story of Ma Rim

One woman who benefitted from CARE’s forward planning on gender equality in its project, was Ma Rim. Ma Rim is a Cham woman from An Giang province. Living and working on the rivers for decades, and being affected increasingly by volatile weather, has made life difficult for Ma Rim. But in September 2013, Ma Rim, along with other Cham women, joined one of the many village climate change adaptation meetings organised by CARE, together with the local Women’s Union. During these meetings, the women enthusiastically discussed past, current and future weather and climate trends, how they impacted their daily lives and community in different ways and what people could do about it. “Participating in these exercises was fun but has also taught me a lot about how and why the weather changes so much lately and how my village will be affected,” says Ma Rim. “Since we had that meeting, I now know what to do and I listen more frequently to weather forecasts.” “Cham men and women are now more equal and I am more involved. I value the importance of knowledge and education much more, and I will pass this on to my children.”

The village meetings also had an encouraging impact. “As an ethnic Cham woman, I have not previously been able to join these community meetings – and missed out on a lot of information. In the past, Cham women were always staying at home and not going to school. We were told what to do by our husbands.”

Success factors for enhancing resilience through gender equality identified by CARE include:

- A dedicated and competent management team that promoted a sustained focus on gender equality and women’s empowerment
 - Committed national staff who were keen to learn about and support gender equality and women’s empowerment
 - Use of community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction as an entry point to address gender equality
 - Targeting both women and men in gender and leadership training
 - Promoting gender-responsive livelihood models
- Consistent efforts by field officers to encourage the attendance and active participation of women in project activities
 - Separate focus groups discussions for women and men in project activities and participatory activities

- Partnering with the Women’s Union who had unrestricted access to women in all communities.
- Confident and experienced women mobilisers within the community

Recommendation:

- Community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction actions can be a useful entry point to address gender equality and vice-versa. Linking this to gender responsive livelihoods models is even more effective.

Lesson 6: Gender sensitive DPC plans are a useful tool for effective investment planning and mainstreaming

For single women, and poor and near poor families in Khai Nguyen district of Ca Mau province rising sea levels and saltwater intrusion are a huge challenge. The commune covers a large area, and is criss-crossed by rivers and estuaries. Particularly for women workers, who work mainly in small businesses, agriculture, aquaculture and seasonal employment, their livelihoods rely heavily on nature. Erratic weather events, and rising sea levels has led to increased flooding, damaging hopes, furniture, and household items. It has also negatively impacted production, health and property, as well as social networks.

In recent years, UN Women studied and launched a program of direct support to women aimed at providing information, knowledge and skills to promote effective flood risk management and climate change adaptation. This includes support for disaster planning, technical support for how to strengthen or build new solid design against flooding and rising sea levels and to make sanitary latrines. It also includes a communication component on how to protect the marine environment by changing some habits mining, seafood caught near shore or in the mudflats. Specific activities include organising training on disaster prevention knowledge, planning at the household level in preparation for disaster response, enhancing first aid and communication skills for technical support teams. It has also coordinated with the commune people's committee to use communal loudspeakers to broadcast stories about disaster prevention and response to climate change.

Ms. Dao Thi Thanh an, chairman of the commune Women's Union Nguyen Viet Khai: "In Cong Hoi hamlet pilot area, after 5 months of implementation our lessons learned exercise found the model to be highly replicable. 95% of women followed the model so this was an efficient way to minimize risk during floods. 9 Women's Union members also got loans to build new houses or repair them or to build more hygienic slaughterhouses. Loans totaled more than 100 million and now the model is being replicated in 14/14 hamlets."



In 2015, 9 Women's Union members were supported with credit savings loans from the Bank for Social Policies to build permanent houses, according to an improved design using a stilt design to curb flooding.



In areas like Ca Mau, women in the community have a wealth of community knowledge of how disasters have been managed in the past, and many risk reduction actions like storing water or seeds are traditionally the work of women within the household. However, in the context of extreme natural disasters and with the unpredictable effects of climate change and sea level rise, women need updated knowledge and information how to strengthen early warning systems and response.

In addition, increasingly during disaster season women are having to take on additional workloads- and traditionally “male” roles in disasters, as many have migrated to urban areas to work and are not at home when storms occur.

Recommendation:

- Annual socio-economic development (SEDP) plans should draw on the disaster and climate risk analysis, and should consider funding of risk reduction measures that have been prioritised by men and women in communities using participatory, gender sensitive approaches.

Lesson 7: When women participate in decision-making processes and the management of institutions, system become more transparent and more efficient.

The effective management of water resources is a key component of disaster risk management in Viet Nam. Ensuring access to adequate clean water for people and livelihoods is a continual challenge in events such as droughts and floods. In recent years, the Women's Union has been working on Kon Tum Provinces in Kon Ray district and Kon Plong district to promote access to water. Following several severe droughts in recent years, the preservation, maintenance and operation of water facilities is particularly important to the lives of people.



Women are the main consumers of water through household use and agriculture in many areas. When irrigation and household water supply systems are improved, women have to spend less time collecting and worrying about ensuring sufficient water supply for their households and livelihoods. However, currently the design and implementation of rural infrastructure projects is currently done mainly by men who comprise the majority of commune officials and government technical experts.

In Kom Tum, the Commune Women's Union network was used as the vehicle to raise awareness and to implement action to better use and protect water resources. Women were involved right from the project planning stages, and led or actively participated in actions such as the process of selecting contractors, organizing community meetings for commenting on plans and mobilising people to contribute workdays to repair water systems. Women leaders were well-represented in the management committee for work and helped formulate regulations on how to use available water and how to equitably manage allocations during the dry season. They also developed timely reports for community leaders about the issues that arise in the implementation process.

Challenging gender stereotypes that some types of work are "just for women or just for men", helps address strategic gender needs and can change gender stereotypes about traditional roles.

Promoting gender equality often also means changing the perception, and behaviour of both men and women in order to reduce the social prejudices. In this process, it is necessary for women to be involved in decision making processes, in management positions and in decision making. This project has created opportunities and conditions for women to participate in rural water infrastructure projects, a task which, according to the traditional division of labour and in thinking of the people, has traditionally been the of men and male community leaders.

Recommendation:

- Create opportunities and conditions for women to be involved in management and decision-making in disaster prevention and control measures, especially non-traditional areas such as infrastructure works.

Lesson 8: Women's Union's network has valuable experience and wide networks that can practically be used to enhance preparedness and timely response to disasters.

Huong Khe is a mountainous district known as a flood prone part of Ha Tinh Province. People have adapted to the natural conditions and therefore are in the habit of stock-piling necessities for use during the rainy season when flooding can block roads, cause power outages and impact access to clean water.

In 2010, major floods affected this area. The speed of the floods onset was such that families who were able to evacuate, were not able to take furniture, property, food, and other assets with them. Many families living in the flood zone were stranded with no with no food or external assistance.

Concerned about how to help flood-hit people and access at least a minimum meal, Huong Khe District Women's Union took the initiative to cook and deliver food to the worst affected areas. With support from local leaders, the District People's Committees provided 1.3 tonnes of rice. However, after launching the program, donations from local citizens enabled additional items such as salted peanuts, eggs, and meat to be provided to those affected.

The Women's Union established 12 kitchens and 6 stoves directly located in the flood zone communes. Each kitchen was operated by 30 volunteers who worked to produce rice ball meals which were then wrapped in plastic along with sesame, eggs and other items. These were then delivered to affected households by canoe. Within days, the association was able to provide more than 2 tons of rice to an estimated 4,000 households in Huong Khe floodplains.

This very localised direct support was a practical and efficient way to reduce hunger among those stranded by flooding. The initiative also helped catalyse action from others, and was appreciated the country. From Huong Khe district, the stories of the Women's Union volunteer kitchens quickly spread to other districts in the province as the Vu Quang, Can Loc, Nghi Xuan Duc Tho and has inspired similar efforts in other areas. The sense of caring and solidarity also helped give hope to those affected in some of the most challenging moments of the flood.

The project, known locally as "Understanding the meaning of rice" shows how women can participate in community activities, demonstrating creativity and the contribution to a disaster response operation but also to the psychological well-being of the community.

Recommendation:

- The initiatives and idea of the community members should be included in annual plans for Disaster Prevention and Control Plans, and the role of women in delivering support during disasters should be strengthened.

Lesson 9: Using credit is a good tool to help women and vulnerable groups better cope with natural disasters.

Housing safety issues for storms and floods has always been one of the major challenges for city authorities. All too often, efforts focus on responding to disasters once they have occurred rather than pre-disaster risk reduction actions which can prevent the need for relief efforts. Currently in Viet Nam there are few incentives for poor families in urban areas to repair or build houses to make them resilient to storms and floods.



Accessing permanent housing remains a challenge for many poor families, especially those for the disabled, single women and female-headed households. These categories also face difficulties in accessing preferential loans from the State due to the absence of collateral, and difficulties in producing certified papers related to housing and land.



To help address these issues, Women's Union has been working with the Rockefeller Foundation in 8 communes in Da Nang City for over five years. A revolving loan fund supports the construction of storm resilient housing. To date the fund has enabled 429 homes to be built or repaired for poor women households, single parents and poor across the city.

Under the scheme, women gain access to training, technical support and a loan of up to 35 million VND. The project also helps families with technical housing design support through the services of an architectural consulting firm.

The loan fund payments and repayments are managed through the Women's Union community networks, keeping costs low but also drawing on established social networks to promote high loan repayments rates. Based on the success of this model, Women's Union has also begun offering savings funds to members to enable further expansion of the fund.

In 2013 when Typhoon No. 11 landed in Da Nang with winds of 130km / h roofs collapsed and thousands of homes in Danang were damaged causing more than \$ 41 million USD, more than 800 billion VND in damage. However, all but one of the houses supported through the project was unharmed (in one apartment a wall collapsed as the storm struck during construction).

This model shows how a revolving loan can be an instrument of financial support to help poor women, single women and families access safe housing that can be resilience to floods and typhoons, contributing to building safer communities.

Recommendation:

- Further expansion of storm and flood resilient housing programmes for poor families should be a priority in high-risk areas. When combined with stringent technical and locally appropriate engineering support and monitoring, women's community networks can be an effective vehicle for managing local level interventions.

Lesson 10: Elderly women are not just a vulnerable group but instead can be a key resource for information and guidance in managing disasters

The average life expectancy in Viet Nam for men is 73 and for women is 76, and women make up the majority of old people. Through its project to "Support to the community to respond to disasters in the coastal areas of Vietnam" Help Age International has been working in Loc Ha district, Ha Tinh Province to mobilise local elderly people, especially women in disaster risk reduction and response activities.



The project worked through established Elderly helping the Elderly Clubs (10/10 clubs) which encourage retirement aged volunteers to be engaged in visiting others. It supplemented traditional activities with actions to raise awareness on disaster risks and improving response capacity.

Data from the project also showed the woman were by the far the most active in club activities with rates of participation 2.5 times higher than that of men (for example in one 165 club members were male; 408 were female).

The 10/10 Club teams established disaster communication, early warning and disaster prevention teams with 10-15 members to provide information about how to prepare and respond to disasters. In addition to awareness raising activities, the groups also were active in developing disaster prevention and control plans for their communes, and in preparing emergency response kits and participating in simulation exercises.

Members also boosted their skills in first aid and made clear plans for how members could support evacuation and disaster relief activities. This included raising funds to support disaster actions, such as the purchase of mobile communications systems for use during disasters or to install warning signs in high risk location.

The project also provided small scale loans to interested group members to promote sustainable and disaster resilient livelihoods. More than 70% those requesting loans were women. Although grandmothers, these women were also running small businesses or were active in the agricultural activities of their families. They welcomed loans that could help them cover key

costs, and be re-invested in areas such as aquaculture, building livestock breeding facilities or help purchase machinery for production.



Through these activities, older members of the community, and especially women gained skills in how to conserve and save resources, protect and improve the environment, and contribute to the disaster resilience of their communities.

Recommendation:

- Elderly people, and especially elderly women, can be an experienced and active resource in promoting local level disaster prevention and control action.

Conclusions and recommendations:

Women participate and play an important role in all areas of society: Women account for 50.5% of Vietnam's population. According to the 2009 census, 26% of households are female-headed. Women are involved in almost all areas of economic, cultural and social life and are therefore also affected by all of the impacts of natural disasters and climate change. As disasters become more frequent and extreme due to climate change, gender mainstreaming issues and ensuring that the voices and concerns of women are heard in the management of disaster risk becomes all the more necessary.

Taking into account gender issues, and looking at the roles, positions and the participation of both women and men can make disaster risk management actions more effective. Women account for 50% of the population, and can therefore contribute 50% of the action required to manage disaster risk and cope with climate change.

Women also have valuable skills and knowledge about the dangers and safety of the community. They participate in the organizations and community groups, in response activities and emergency assistance.

Depending on the context and culture, and the level of underlying poverty and vulnerability, both women and men have both technical skills and vulnerabilities. When women are considered a "vulnerable group" it is often not because they are women, but because the traditional division of labour requires them to undertake vital work during disasters, such as caring for children, gathering food or water, or safeguarding assets.

More-over the social problems related to natural disasters and climate change are currently underestimated by policy makers. Key issues such as migration issues, domestic violence, girl's education, economic challenges and the reproductive health of women and girls are all impacted during and after disasters occur. It is important that risk reduction activities do not ignore these issues, which are key in women's minds when they ask communities to look at how to manage disasters and climate change.

Women's participation in the management of disaster risk is essential. They need to be involved in the design and implementation of Disaster Prevention and Control Plans to make sure that the such plans reflect the full picture and meet the needs of both women and men.

Increasing the efficiency of resource use communities by minimising gender disadvantages can enhance the resilience of women and men. Gender mainstreaming or encouraging women's participation does not use separate methods, but instead applies a gender lens at each step of a process. Gender analysis and the collection of gender disaggregated data is essential in these efforts.

Based on the lessons learned from the 10 stories outlined in this paper, a number of suggestions and recommendations have been included for consideration by Government officials and organisations involved in the prevention and control of disasters in Viet Nam:

- Local government and the Committees for Disaster Prevention and Control and Search and Rescue at all levels should learn carefully and collect statistical data, about the composition of groups, and especially the location and needs of vulnerable people in the community before, during and after disasters. This is a prerequisite effective planning.
- Government led Disaster Prevention and Control Planning should organize activities to collect the opinions of the various population groups in the community, including from separate discussions with men, women and vulnerable groups to plan and support risk reduction activities and humanitarian relief after disasters to better meet the needs of the population.
- All staff working on natural disaster prevention and control, should have the opportunity gain skills on gender analysis and mainstreaming in order to maximize the ability and resources of communities, in which women account for more than 50% of the population.
- Local Steering Committees for Disaster Prevention and Control should organize disaster simulation exercises regularly in order to mobilize a cross-section of local people, including women and the local Women's Union.
- Community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction actions can be a useful entry point to address gender equality and vice-versa. Linking this to gender responsive livelihoods models is even more effective
- Annual socio-economic development (SEDP) plans should draw on the disaster and climate risk analysis, and should consider funding of risk reduction measures that have been prioritised by men and women in communities using participatory, gender sensitive approaches.
- Create opportunities and conditions for women to be involved in management and decision-making in disaster prevention and control measures, especially non-traditional areas such as infrastructure works.
- The initiatives and idea of the community members should be included in annual plans for Disaster Prevention and Control Plans, and the role of women in delivering support during disasters should be strengthened.
- Further expansion of storm and flood resilient housing programmes for poor families should be a priority in high-risk areas. When combined with stringent technical and locally appropriate engineering support and monitoring, women's community networks can be an effective vehicle for managing local level interventions.
- Elderly people, and especially elderly women, can be an experienced and active resource in promoting local level disaster prevention and control action.

Key Concepts and Terminology

Gender: The socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them.

Sex: The biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not mutually exclusive, as there are individuals who possess both or who are in transition, but they tend to differentiate humans as males and females.

Gender roles: A set of prescriptions for action and behaviour assigned to men and women by society according to cultural norms and traditions.

Gender identity: Women's and men's gender identity determines how they are perceived and positioned in a society, and how they are expected to think and act along traditional views of masculinities and femininities.

Gender equality: Gender equality entails the concept that all human beings, both women and men, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviours, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally.

Gender equity: Fairness and justice in the distribution of responsibilities and benefits between women and men. To ensure fairness, temporary special measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. **Equity is a justice-based means—equality is the human rights-based result.**

Women's empowerment: The process of gaining access and developing women's capacities with a view to participating actively in shaping one's own life and that of one's community in economic, social and political terms.

Gender mainstreaming: Defined by the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC resolution 1997/2) as

"... the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality." (United Nations Economic and Social Council 1997)

Gender-based violence (GBV): The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and implementing partners use an 'expanded definition of sexual and gender-based violence', which defines GBV as follows:

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed against a person on the basis of gender or sex. It includes acts that inflict physical, mental, or sexual harm or suffering, threats of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty. While women, men, boys, and girls can be victims of gender-based violence, women and girls are the main victims. GBV shall be understood to encompass, but not be limited to, the following: a) Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual exploitation, sexual abuse of children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence, and violence related to exploitation; b) Physical, sexual, and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape; sexual abuse; sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions, and elsewhere; trafficking in women and forced prostitution; c) Physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State and institutions, wherever it occurs.

(UNHCR. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.org/4371faad2.pdf>)

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