

A Short Review of the Central Vietnam Disaster Mitigation Project in Quang Tri Province

Mr. Dang Thanh Son
Team Leader
World Vision, Vietnam

Background

Vietnam is highly disaster prone. Dwyer (2000) identifies the following risk factors: “the volatile nature of the Mekong River, a history of flooding and landslides in the Central Region, typhoon patterns in the Pacific, and the proximity to areas of conflict (Cambodia & Laos) and potential refugee problems”. Floods and storms are the principle hazard.

World Vision (WV) has worked in Vietnam since 1991. It began relief operations in Quang Tri in 1995 and subsequently established an Area Development Program (ADP) with health, education, micro-enterprise development and agricultural activities.

History of the request and preparation of the project

Quang Tri was identified as a priority area for mitigation activities in the Central Provinces Initiative (CPI) Multi- Donor Mission report. The CPI included representation by Vietnamese government (provincial and national) UNDP, World Bank, Asia Development Bank, and embassies of the Netherlands, France, Japan, the United States and Finland, along with major NGOs. Its focus was to consolidate operational, policy and funding agency activities to contribute towards disaster preparedness.

In April 2001, World Vision Vietnam began implementation of the Central Vietnam Disaster Mitigation (CVDM) Project with US\$505,499 from AUSAID, in order to strengthen community-based disaster mitigation. Using an integrated approach, the project improved the livelihood of local people through farming extension, while at the same time reinforced small-scale irrigation systems such as dams and drainage canals.

How project will address development needs

World Vision’s cumulative experience in relief and rural development works in the project areas point to the need for urgent intervention in disaster mitigation works in order to lessen the disruptions caused by annual floods. During a Participatory Rural Assessment (PRAs) exercise conducted by WV Vietnam, flood was identified as one of the major causes for poverty in the project areas.

WV Vietnam has learned that neither relief works nor development activities will be sustained unless supported by a strong flood mitigation program. Targeted disaster mitigation assistance for the most affected communities is the key strategy of this project. All the envisaged mitigation activities in the project are based on community needs and the disaster mitigation study undertaken by the CPI Mission.

While communities in the central Vietnam have been living with disasters for centuries, their response is usually based on traditional and social ties. During non-productive storm periods, household members often prepare for disasters, storing rice seed and food in the roofs of their houses, repairing boats, and building containing walls around buildings. However, due to a lack of information, this response is not always systematic, nor planned, and thus result with varied success.

One of the strongest methods to address disaster preparedness is at the household and hamlet level, as there is usually little immediate external assistance, and the communities’ response to an emergency will be the determinant of lives and possessions that are saved from disaster. Thus working with households to identify preparedness plans, and mitigation activities, in collaboration with mass organizations, will provide a framework that families will know and understand prior to the onset of a disaster situation. Thus the disaster preparedness activities proposed for this project are predominantly aimed at the community level as “almost all life saving activities related to natural

disasters is done at the commune level. During the critical first hours of a disaster such as a flood, many communes are cut off from the outside world and, unable to communicate their needs, have to depend largely upon their own resources”.

Major development objectives of project

- a) Sustainable disaster preparedness and mitigation capacity of communities is established through the availability and access to information in Trieu Phong and Vinh Linh districts, in Quang Tri Province.
- b) Construct small scale physical structures to reduce loss of life and property.

Achievements

The project raised the awareness of the local people on disaster mitigation through training courses, community planning, appropriate preventative activities, and emergency response. Course participants were selected teachers from secondary schools and members of mass movement organizations, including the Women’s Union, Farmers’ Union, Youth Union, and hamlet facilitators of targeted communes. Those who attended the training extended their knowledge and technical skills on disaster preparedness to students, colleagues, and other community members.

Farming extension was identified as one of the most important mechanisms to mitigate against the loss of food security. The project engaged different partners – the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Agricultural Extension Department, and community volunteers – to improve farming practices. Specific activities included use of higher yielding rice seeds, use of plant varieties which prevent soil erosion and resist drought, use of high-value fruit trees, and reforestation. Additionally, dams and drainage canals were designed, built, and operated for irrigation and flood prevention (pumping water both in and out). Finally, the people in the coastal communes of Vinh Linh and Trieu Phong were provided with life buoys and lifeboats.

The activities of CVDM were implemented by a local Project Management Board, with representatives from the community and local government. Community volunteers called Hamlet Facilitators (HFs) act as the main conduit for capacity building of knowledge and resources.

A clear system of monitoring and evaluation also contributed to the success of the project. Each project activity was monitored to determine if knowledge and skills were being practiced. During each stage of implementation, stakeholders gathered to assess lessons and challenges.

Conclusion

The CVDM project successfully pilots a useful multi-sectoral model of disaster mitigation activities. The sectors it covers: disaster preparedness; training; provision of rescue equipment; relocation villages; earthworks; afforestation; and agriculture, supported each other to successfully reduce vulnerabilities and enhance local capacities.

The CVDM Project being integrated in a World Vision ADP provides long-term sustainability to the project’s outcomes. The incorporation of such a Disaster Mitigation project into an ongoing development program, leverages the existing relationships and networks, and positions the community so they can effectively respond to emergency situations.