

Finalizing Vietnam's Preparedness for disasters related to climate change programme

The end is in sight. Just one closing workshop to go, and then the pilot project in Vietnam on "Preparedness for Disasters related to Climate Change" has come to an end. After a rather slow start in 2003 the project faced several difficulties. This was a time when climate change was not exactly the focus of attention in Vietnam while worldwide there was hardly any experience in climate change adaptation projects at grassroots level. But today, nearly three years later, the project will be concluded as an appreciated project, recognized by several stakeholders in Vietnam (and abroad) as an example for climate change adaptation, and having created a willingness among the Vietnam Red Cross and the Netherlands Red Cross to continue. In retrospect, the project's development shows achievements as well as lessons.

Starting from scratch, the programme achieved a lot: various training and dissemination materials were developed on the relationship between climate change and natural disasters in Vietnam. VNRC staff, national decision makers, local authorities and inhabitants of the 30 project communities were reached by various dissemination activities on the relationship between climate change and disasters and the need to be prepared.

'First people did not want to use life vests, because they thought it would bring bad luck. Now they have different ways of protecting themselves. They have learnt how to do security checks before they leave; they use the life vests now and have

a radio system' said a representative of the Committee for Flood and Storm Control in Ha Tinh province when referring to the change of attitude of local people, which in his opinion is the most important change created by the project.

30 coastal communities were able to increase their resilience to storms, floods and drought by implementing small-scale adaptation measures such as building dams, search and rescue centres, planting trees and improving loudspeaker systems for early warning.

'When a flood happens we know better what to do, because of the plan we made. We identify weak places in the village and mobilize everybody to prepare. The loudspeaker system informs people about a disaster and what people should do' as Mr Phanh Phong from Thai An village in Ninh Thuan said.



Facilitator Hai is talking to one of the beneficiaries during the evaluation.

There were also lessons to be learned, as the recent external evaluation showed. First of all, the selection of project communities should take better account of the area's disaster proneness, as people will be interested and participate especially if they are threatened by the impacts of climate change or obvious hazards. In areas that are considered high risk but where people are not aware of this, awareness-raising should be first priority.

Second, as training on disaster preparedness and climate change was given only once to each target group, new knowledge and skills were not always mastered sufficiently. In new projects therefore training should be repeated. For awareness-raising, a special focus on children is recommended as they pass on any new information to family and friends.

Moreover, the new projects should focus more on the selection of the small scale mitigation measures, to guarantee that they are really given priority by the people in the community themselves. Also, because of the importance of this activity, the budget for these measures (now appr. 2,500 euro per community) should be higher and there should be more measures supported per community.

Finally, it was recommended that a simulation exercise be carried out for the local communities in the target areas to test the effectiveness of the DP plan and the readiness to respond in a disaster situation. This should be inclusive of all local stakeholders so that their roles and responsibilities are tried and tested.

Climate Change and Disaster Preparedness are still considered 'new' topics within the Vietnam Red Cross. To sustain what we have achieved and to expand to new areas, the Vietnam Red Cross and the Netherlands Red Cross have decided that it is desirable to continue with the project by both repeating it in the project provinces/communities and by expanding to other areas. For this reason we are preparing follow-up projects, and seeking funds for these. A small project in Quang Binh province has just been started to sustain the knowledge and skills acquired here during the previous project. The project includes the planting of trees in sand dune areas to protect inhabitants and their rice fields against sand drifts and ongoing erosion. A larger-scale project proposal for this province and for its neighbouring province Ha Tinh has just been submitted for European funding (EuropAid). The new projects will more or

less follow the previous project's approach, incorporating the main lessons learned.

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