Social and economic inequality limits disaster prevention amongst the most vulnerable in Vietnam[1]

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Where is the priority? My house? My car?

Keywords

Housing, Local governance, Disaster risk reduction, Advocacy

This paper forms part of a the DRR2DEV programme including a range of case studies, discussion and analysis and inviting further participation in thinking critically about how to do development differently and better.

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Other title: Centralised Bureaucratic Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM in Vietnamese…) vs Community networking for promoting safe housing concept and practice in Vietnam

Subject of the case study

This study in Vietnam draws on Development Workshop France (DWF)'s 30 years of experience promoting safe construction with poor families in the face of repeated typhoons and floods in Vietnam. Over this period, activities have always been founded on community collaboration and engagement, on awareness-raising using many forms of exchange and communication, and on improving the institutional and financial environment in which preventive strengthening can take place. Community and household networking to exchange information has been very important, but so too has national level advocacy for establishing construction standards in the context of disaster risk reduction against annual flood and typhoon events. DWF recognised that working with families, with local builders we have trained in safe construction techniques, and with the most local level of local government, the Commune Peoples' Committee, was on its own not enough: higher level government engagement is necessary to achieve a genuine wide and non-donor dependant impact. Despite considerable progress, more needs to be done to achieve this goal.

To this end, DWF has essentially been working for disaster risk reduction and more recently climate change adaptation in two ways in Vietnam:

- At local level, promoting key ideas and methods on DRR and safer housing and small public infrastructure, especially between populations living in the same conditions and through capacity building amongst local builders as agents for safe building; and through horizontal networking and exchanges, and challenging (as do many NGO's) that lessons learnt and good practices – of which many examples have been published - could have an impact on higher decision makers and on DRR policy;
- At national level, directly promoting safe housing and a preventive strengthening policy, and advocating for the diffusion of national standards for construction adapted to low-income and poor populations.

In practice, and as an ongoing effort, DWF has worked to develop and organise a collective approach to evaluating local needs and defining action plans to reduce the impact of disasters in both the short term and long term. Since 2012 DWF has worked as well with the Ministry of Construction and its Provincial Departments to implement the National Programme of Safe housing, and to prepare new 'National standards for Low Rise housing in flood and storm areas'.

We need to thank our donors: DWF programme support has come mainly through a series of ECHO/Dipecho projects in Vietnam, the Canadian International Development Agency, GNDR Action at the Frontline projects in 3 Provinces, collaboration with the Red Cross, a SEEDS Project on "Safe coasts /Safe communities", the stimulus of Ford Foundation support to put in place an innovative programme of loans for safer housing, a project where DWF has worked with the Vietnam Bank of Social Policy (VBSP) to get this established.
But fundamentally, local contributions from families strengthening their homes and local authorities supporting making local infrastructure, which can stand as examples to the public, have been the backbone of our work in Vietnam.

Important themes and issues

Cohesive or passive local populations?

Due to the long history of disaster events in Vietnam, the population and each Commune's People's Committee (the lowest level of local authorities) keep a high level of solidarity and cohesion in case of

disasters – which allows rapid basic recovery actions in the short term, and based on good knowledge of whom in the community is most at risk. Everybody knows who is in need.
On other hand, people are passive in the face of repeated disaster events and the impacts of climate change, when they could instead be involved in DRR (and other) planning, policy and wider actions in the community, and this constraint is because they know that their own real view-points and needs will not be considered outside their very local situation and beyond very local decisions. The Commune's People's Committee itself too has very few resources.

Learning from each specific & unique situation?
In Vietnam, many "experiences" and many good practices are well documented and available[2]. But such opportunities for learning are not sufficiently shared more widely and are limited to specific spaces, times and situations. The government does not disseminate this experience.
The political challenge is not to replicate experience on a one by one local basis, but to fully share and extend the proven methods and actions, and to do so by providing resources and the State authority's backing to do so.

Context

A growing class divide
Understanding the hazard and risk reduction environment of the poor in Vietnam is easier when one considers the evolving socio-economic context of Vietnam over the past fifty years. In the aftermath of the US Vietnam war some 70% of Vietnam's population lived below the official poverty line[3] and many more dangerously on or just above it. But the Government's espoused socialist tradition, that promoted social fairness and standing up for the poor, by the late 1970's was under severe pressure: internationally the country was subjected to post war embargos on trade and financial support led by the United states and its allies (The Guardian, 2015), as well as major internal challenges for rebuilding the country, including policies for the collectivisation of the land and produce and the state ownership of enterprise, creating an environment where industry underperformed and peasant farmers were left with no incentive to produce, a system which could not survive. The country was again under severe strain, facing an intense struggle for survival, but this time against poverty.
In 1986, liberal socialist party leaders facing this struggle bravely introduced economic policy changes, known as đổi *mới* ("reform") (Nugent, 1996[4]), that embraced several major policy changes,[5] amongst which was the significant change that farmers could retain all production beyond an agreed quota given to the Commune People's Committee. In both agriculture and industry profit sharing then provided a power basis for reform and commercialization, in effect, enabling the emergence of a market economy and capitalism.[6] Peasant farmers kept some of the fruits of their labour, as did industry. But the gap between poor and rich grew.
These reforms benefitted many different actors in Vietnamese society, and as we shall see below, helped spur investment even by the less well off in making improvements to their homes and living conditions. But gradually, the reforms that helped Vietnam achieve remarkable growth over the past 35 years have also lead to the social and economic division of the population into four classes: rich; middle income class; low income; and the poor. Success includes a drop in the poverty in Vietnam from nearly 60 percent in the early 1990s to 20.7[7] percent in 2010, according to the 2012 World Bank report titled "Well Begun, Not Yet Done: Vietnam's Remarkable Progress on Poverty Reduction and the Emerging Challenges" and they also said that "inequality is back on the agenda" (World bank, 2012): there is increasing inequality between the classes – the income of the poorest 10% dropped by a fifth, and low income families live precariously on or just above the poverty line so that any shock, including frequent typhoons and floods, can tip them back into poverty as well. In addition, the growing urban poor and particularly the rural poor are very vulnerable to small as well as large hazards, and to everyday events and their impact. At the other end of the scale, the top 5% of the wealthiest take about 25% national income (Op.cit). This socio-economic divergence is critical, creating imbalance that influences state investment priorities!

Hazards, risks and vulnerability

By late 1980's one could see that đổi mới had triggered a slow process of housing improvement amongst the middle and lower classes including even the poor. Rice straw thatched roofs were beginning to be replaced with tile roofs still on bamboo and grass walls; bamboo walls were replaced with cement blocks or bricks. Just like Vietnam's economy, small incremental investment by the poor meant that by 2000 commune statistics[8] in central Vietnam showed that some 70% of provincial and rural housing had been upgraded using reinforced concrete, blocks, bricks, tiles, corrugated sheeting, all material that had been bought whereas before almost everything for a building could be gathered locally for free. The "home" took on a monetary value where before it had little or no monetary value. But the same commune statistics - and visible evidence - showed that many of these new houses have remained, as before, 'semi-solid', meaning that they are vulnerable to damage caused even by relatively small disasters. Hence the paradox in the context of poverty and natural hazards: millions of families invest their time and hard-earned savings in a house that they believe is much more solid than the house of the past. In reality, their limited technical knowledge of materials and lack of skills to build well, as well as willingness to reduce cost at the expense of reducing construction resistance, result in houses that represent considerable investment and effort but which remain essentially severely exposed to damage caused by storms and floods (Norton et al, 2008)[9].

Overall, Vietnam is hit annually by cyclones (Typhoons), and associated flooding and new risks are emerging, including sea level rise, droughts and landslides. Indigenous knowledge is being put into question as seasons and events change, as do warning signs based on insect behaviour.

For poor and nearly poor families, the house is the main lifetime investment. But houses still easily lose their roofing, whether the roofs are made with tiles, or roof sheeting. The supporting structure is often weak and badly executed. When damage occurs, repairs are made mainly with salvaged material and nothing is done to prevent the same damage occurring next time. The risks remain the same. Thus there is a cycle of damage and loss, both material and financial.

Because houses and small and medium public buildings frequently lose their roofs and have (unnecessary) damage to the structure, these events represent recurring costs. The cost of recovery for a family can return them to poverty, and many families tell of their homes being unroofed five or six times in as many years.

The risks are multiple:

- Any damage to the home costs money to repair and invariable leaves the house weaker than it was before; suddenly the safety of the home becomes a n°1 priority.
- Savings and monthly revenue are absorbed by recovery costs, families are indebted; they return to poverty or sink deeper into it.
- Other priorities, such as health, education, and income generation are put on hold, slowing down or endangering the family.

The case study looks at a multiyear process of encouraging the preventive strengthening of homes and public buildings to resist the impact of typhoons and floods in Vietnam.

Social classes affected differently by 'natural' disasters:

In Vietnam, the emergence of different population classes with greatly varied priorities and extreme differences in access to resources means that socio/economic groups are affected differentially by natural disasters. The table below, based on 15 years data gathering after disasters by DWF in Vietnam, distinguishes the severity or impact of different risks in the urban, peri-urban and rural contexts of the country for different socio-economic classes.

Risk in Urban / Peri urban / Rural contextS TO DIFFERENT CLASSES AND FACILITIES							
Grades of risk by context and severity of event	***<Nill 0***	***Very low 1***	***Medium 2***	***Significant 3***	***High 4***	***Very High 5***	***Extreme 6***

Hazard ***Trend***	**RISK IN URBAN CONTEXT**						
	Rich	**Middle class**	**Low income**	**Poor**	**Infrastructure Networks**	**Public infrastructure**	**Business & livelihood**
Flood (High > 1m, several days)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Flood (Medium <1m, several hours) ↗	0	1	2	2	2	0	1
Storm (Up to level 12-13)	0	1	2	3	3	2	1
Storm (Over level 13)	0	2	3	4	4	3	3
Sea - river bank erosion	0	0	0	2	1	0	0

Hazard ***Trend***	**RISK IN PERI URBAN CONTEXT**						
	Rich	**Middle class**	**Low income**	**Poor**	**Infrastructure Networks**	**Public infrastructure**	**Business**
Flood (High > 1m, several days)	0	1	3	4	4	2	3
Flood (Medium <1m, several hours) ↗	0	2	2	3	2	0	1
Storm (Up to level 12-13)	0	1	2	4	3	2	1
Storm (Over level 13)	1	2	4	5	4	4	4
Sea - river bank erosion	1	0	0	2	1	0	0

Hazard ***Trend***	**RISK IN RURAL CONTEXT**						
	Rich	**Middle class**	**Low income**	**Poor**	**Infrastructure Networks**	**Public infrastructure**	**Business**
Flood (High > 1m, several days)	0	2	2	5	4	2	4
Flood (Medium <1m, several hours) ↗	0	1	2	2	2	1	1
Storm (Up to level 12-13)	0	2	2	4	3	2	1
Storm (Over level 13)	2	3	3	6	5	5	4
Sea - river bank erosion, landslide →	0	0	2	4	1	0	0

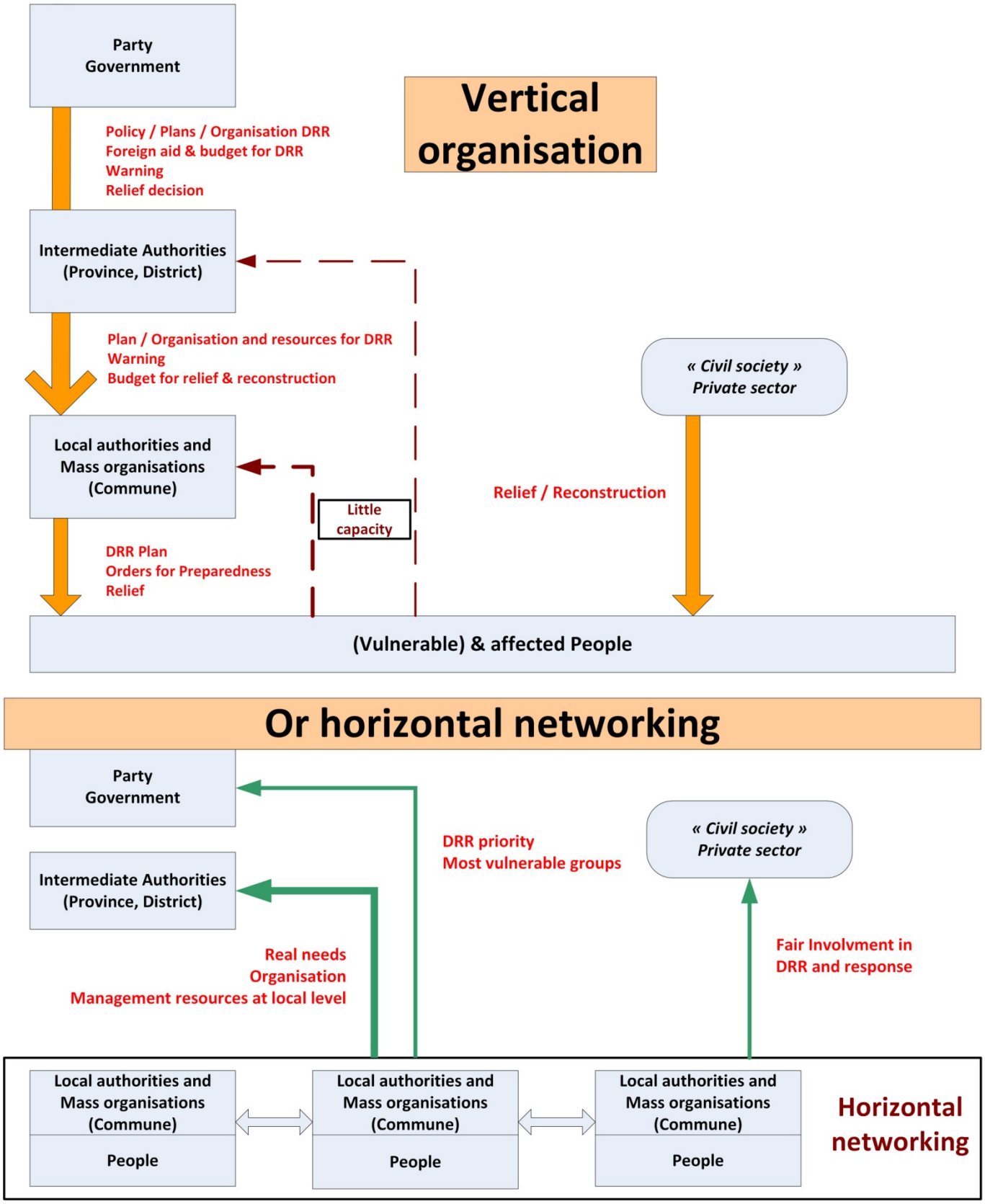
Thus, the rich are concerned about their own assets, businesses and factories, whilst the poor are most vulnerable, concerned particularly by everyday disasters and badly affected by major events. The middle classes, often living in apartments or multi-storey houses are mainly affected in terms of transportation and activity, and again here the poor are faced with critical losses. The government's actions reflect these distinctions.

The one party political system relies on the market economy, and therefore reflects the interests of the rich and those of the emerging middle class, concerned with running business; conversely this system takes insufficient account of the interests or needs of low-income workers, employees, civil servants and of the poor classes of workers, farmers and unqualified labour – including ethnic minorities (Meding, 2017)[10].

It follows that the authorities support developing conditions including infrastructure for highways, airports, sea (and indeed golf) resorts that benefit the ruling classes and help to secure the political consensus of the middle class, to the detriment of the lower and poor classes. In this context, resources for developing a National Community Based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) programme targeting all rural and peri urban vulnerable communes – accounting for 60-70% of the population – are seriously lacking, even though the cost of these community level measures is relatively limited (estimated by the government at around 58 million dollars in 2009[11].) Meanwhile huge infrastructure projects costing billions of dollars to avoid temporary flooding in major cities are funded where the intended beneficiaries are above all the wealthy urban population – actions that are often paradoxically without the desired result[12] since the major issue is uncontrolled urban development. The vision of "Community involvement and participation" promoted by

the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (SFDRR) and by UNISDR has little chance of becoming a reality while the political system does not give communities any real capacity for inhabitants to decide freely what measures to take with their representatives and the lowest level of local government – the Commune People's Committee -, except at village level, nor the resources to activate these measures (See Figure below). Overall, there needs to be a mix between top down policy and support on the one hand and on the other, action reflecting local reality, experience and needs. This for now is not the case and it impacts both on the local appropriateness of national policy and the ability locally to address real threats and risks.

VERTICAL ORGANISATION OF FORMAL GOVERNANCE
VERSUS A DESIRABLE HORIZONTAL ORGANISATION OF LOCAL ACTORS



As the World bank 2012 study suggested, “inequality is back on the agenda” (World bank, 2012): in effect, there is increasing inequality between the classes, and although one could have assumed that the state is the natural representative of *all* the people, this is not necessarily the case: indeed, the long term strategy of the government would suggest a policy that assumes that continued overall growth would in time eliminate the problems and vulnerability of the poor. But that policy would appear to be slowing down – reducing poverty is harder to achieve than it had been in the years of solid growth.
It follows that instead of being really ‘community based’, CBDRM is in effect more “propaganda” than an action programme; for example as a way to attract funds from donors rather than be a real applied policy that helps poor communities. This means that local level communes and villages have scarce access locally to financial resources, and depend on the higher decision making levels for any investment - including for DRR – starting at the District and Province level and higher which thus tend to focus on larger projects and not on ‘local’ DRR.

Where is the priority? My house? My car?

Threats and consequences faced

1. Everyday disasters such as storms, floods, bank erosion and landslides lead to periodical damage and losses linked to low economic status;
2. Changing climate, leading to drought, salinization, sea level rise combined with land subsidence, and extreme rainy events result in impact on agriculture, land use and living conditions;
3. DRR/CCA is planned at high level without real involvement of affected local communities. Therefore there is little power and so little involvement in defining and implementing adapted DRR methods. It makes such planning difficult to implement in a meaningful way locally;
4. Financial resources targeting needs of poor and vulnerable people are scarce. Therefore investments at local level are not appropriate to the local needs.

Barriers to action

The politico-socio-economic system based on the interests of the wealthier classes – leaders, rich and middle-class – which channels resources and actions for a minority. Due to uncertainty about support, it is difficult to establish scenarios and actions that are pertinent to less advantaged communities.

Local actors

"United" local communities and authorities could jointly influence policy at least at very local level and increase local capacity to define adaption plans for the most vulnerable people.
National level government tend not to resource disaster risk reduction for poorer and more vulnerable sections of the community, concentrating on the upper and middle classes.

The DWF Vietnam case study – The story from 1989 to 2018

The DWF action in Vietnam to reduce disaster risk and its impacts has been a long process starting in 1989 in Central Vietnam. It has not been without difficulties, but also with successes. It remains the case that in the political and socio-economic environment of Vietnam there are both tangible and intangible barriers that can limit how the transition from local ownership and adoption of DRR and CCA actions and strategies could become part of national applied policy.

DWF work in Vietnam has been an ongoing process over many years. To simplify this long process, here we have defined three periods highlighting different points of progress: overall, the process began primarily in work with and support to local communities and inhabitants, working with families, local builders and very local authorities, but an approach that over time developed to become, almost, an integral part of state policy.

Period	Date	Objective	Content
1st	1989 - 2005	Popular adoption of disaster resistant construction	Collaboration, demonstration, promotion, training
2nd	2005 – 2011	Sharing practice: Resistant house, safe people, community development, supporting systems	Sharing, and dissemination
3rd	2011 - 2018	Safe housing policy	Safe housing principles integrated in national standards and programmes

First period – preventive strengthening is possible and viable

In 1989 DWF[13] was invited to provide technical assistance for the first DRR[14] project in Vietnam – funded by UNDP[15] - to work in areas hit by a massive typhoon to demonstrate storm resistant building techniques focussed on resistant public buildings and involving construction technicians and decision makers. This initial action seriously lacked direct interaction with inhabitants other than opportunities to test various locally suited communication ideas which would publicise the key principles of safer storm resistant construction applicable to the homes of poorer families as much as to those of better off households, and did enable the assessment of how low income families were investing their savings in making their homes better in the post war period when economic policy change was being introduced. Further work in central and northern Vietnam supported by UNDP[16] enabled us to develop and test more traditional communication methods including puppet shows on safe houses and water, posters displays and live entertainment all of which directly touched families with practical action for improving their living conditions, including housing reinforcement, water and sanitation supply, improved stoves, and rural infrastructure.
In 1998 new funding enabled DWF to start a project working directly with poor families in Central Vietnam addressing the issues of helping families make their homes safer and more damage resistant. There were barriers: authorities at higher levels in the provinces expressed serious scepticism and disinterest that one could do anything to make the homes of the poor safer, and indeed doubted such ideas were worthwhile nor even an important issue. In 1999, however, there were over 800 victims of the historical floods which hit central Vietnam, and the DRR issue started to be taken into more consideration in the country. Various

initiatives at national level took place, including establishing the Disaster Management Working Group[17], the Committee for Storm and Flood Control (national and provincial levels) and a National Strategy for Disaster Mitigation in Vietnam up to 2020 – *a strategy that has since taken years to bring to fruition on the ground.*

Returning to Thua Thien Hué Province, the first Central Vietnam province DWF had worked in 1989 and had good relations, and with support from CIDA and subsequently the European Union (ECHO), as of 2000 DWF began work on the sustained project for preventing typhoon/flood damage to housing in central Viet Nam – working specifically and directly with families and commune authorities on house by house (and some schools) strengthening. This period has been critical, since through demonstration work directly with partner families and local builders the 'prevent storm damage' message and the accompanying promotion of the ten key principles of storm resistant construction began gradually to gain respect and popular conviction, thanks to the visible example that preventive strengthening of most of the houses of the poor and semi poor does work, is viable and affordable. Quite frequent major storms provided a life size public laboratory for people to see that houses resist. As much as the practical action of strengthening many houses helped, an equally important action was to use public campaigns to raise awareness – and such campaigns used many different popular media events such as concerts, boat races, mobile displays travelling through the villages with a full size "safer house example" built on the back of a lorry, and many other actions to promote the 'prevent storm damage' message. Families contributed substantially to the costs of house strengthening and in deciding with the DWF team what work was to be done. At the same time, local builders were quickly trained in two day sessions learning about why buildings are damaged by storms and floods and in applying the different safe construction techniques to houses and small local buildings such as kindergartens and schools, marrying these techniques with local practice and materials. Over several years local trust in the DWF approach has grown and attracted substantial attention.

Using social media to our own ends

Over the years, social media has changed, but in 1990 traditional Vietnamese puppet shows that had delivered social messages over hundreds of years still worked, and DWF used them to talk about preventive safety in houses, and water purification, putting on shows in rural Vietnam that pulled in large crowds; we have always used eye catching posters and banners to deliver our basic message 'Take preventive action against storms' – "Phong Chong Bao" ; in the following years we delivered our message through prevention songs performed in local rock concerts and during boat races. Now, using TV prime time spots we show clips about making one's home safer.

Loans for preventive strengthening

There have been numerous subsidiary initiatives in the Safe House programme: for example, early in this period we recognised that families were borrowing money from other sources such as relations and expensive money lenders, often

at usurious rates, to contribute to making their homes safer. This created other difficulties for a household and had to be avoided. In 2002 DWF piloted making credit available to poor families for house strengthening, so that they did not have to resort to costly borrowing, aligning instead access to loans for strengthening homes under the same conditions as those for borrowing money for small income generating projects offered by organisations such as the Women's Union (See below for more on this action). Based on the familiar model of the Farmers' and Women's Unions social lending programmes (not competing with usurious money lenders), this pilot showed that families consider strengthening their homes a worthwhile investment on a par with investing in income generation activities, since avoiding *loss and damage to the home means avoiding spending scarce resources on costly repairs and rebuilding, resources that would otherwise be used for priority projects in normal times*.

Second period 2005 – 2011: spreading the message

From the starting point of promoting and supporting family based safe housing, DWF worked to encourage and support the Communes' People's Committee (the most local government level) to elaborate Action Plans for Disaster Prevention, both short term and long term, taking into account the real local risks and needs of different components of the population. This used small group and public discussions in villages, but also used GIS for flood mapping at village level to help people see in a different way where the risks occurred and how to address these in terms of escape routes, where to raise the floor level your home, or where to place refuges.

The impact of Networking:

Main results, barriers and impact:

- A real capacity to exchange between local leaders, women, children…, about risk and to adopt ideas from other locations;
- An affirmation of solidarity between people who confront the same problems;
- A better local involvement in DRR, for the partners of these projects, including through possible future networking.
- Knowledge that you can take action to make your situation safer with modest resources

but also:

- A common evaluation of the lack of financial resources which could be managed at local level, and the difficulties to convince the Districts/Province to invest for disaster prevention;
- A common perception that DRR becomes only a priority – when disaster strikes, but remains a pre-occupation far later on.
- A good understanding that the actual system (DRR, CCA) is ruled by principles which local people cannot change and even give advice on them.
- And thus a reduced impact on DRR policy, practices.

Communication inside such horizontal "network" is easy, as members are at the same level in the social/political system. But due to the traditional and social relations between people and authorities/leaders, it is extremely difficult for community representatives to directly express their opinion, or to make proposals to their superiors.

Importantly, DWF encouraged the People's Committees to network with other Communes, sharing their experiences and expertise, helping other communes do the same work, and spreading the benefits of the Safer House project to other communes. Horizontal networking between the commune People's committees have proved viable because at this level the People's Committees already talk to each other and share experience. But it remains that sharing of local experience about needs and actions vertically to higher levels of government, including the district and provincial authorities, is much more difficult. And as such, if local risks are not taken into account, neither do they attract budgets to enable solutions. A sad reality has always been that disaster events provide greater publicity – and in the Vietnam case, work on post disaster reconstruction programmes after various events, including Typhoon Xangsane in 2006, major floods in 2007-2008, Typhoon Ketsana (2009) and Typhoon Wutip (2013) all helped spread impact of the safer housing approach with poor families. Methods that enabled family driven and family owned actions have been developed by DWF, for example putting in place a cash grants system for rebuilding linked to technical advice and supervision of reconstruction works in storms damaged communes, thus providing skills directly to individual families (ECHO 2017) [18]

Developing from the initial steps to address the need for credit officially targeting house strengthening, in 2008 a workshop in Hue city, central Vietnam addressed the problems of making it possible for poor families to borrow at affordable rates specifically for works to strengthen their homes, and included the participation of the Ford Foundation. Subsequent discussions led to the Ford Foundation providing a grant which enabled DWF to initiate a new credit for house strengthening offer with the Vietnamese Bank of Social Policy (VSPB) with loans provided to poor families by the VBSP on a monthly interest rate fixed (by the VN government) at 0.65%. The capital and interest were to be repaid in monthly fixed instalments over a maximum repayment period of 48 months. Since then credit for house strengthening gradually has gradually become a recognised policy, used in government programmes 716 and 48 (*see below*), and in a loan programme for flood affected household in Mekong Delta .[19]

As of 2008 international recognition for DWF preventive house strengthening programme has grown, winning 2008 World Habitat Award, the 2009 UNISDR Sasakawa Award Certificate of Distinction for Disaster Reduction, and the 2010 UN/BSHF Urban and Housing development South-South Transfer certificate of distinction, the offshoot of such awards being that DWF has on several occasions been invited to share and apply its safer house and safer schools approach after disasters, such as in Banda Aceh, Indonesia (Tsunami, 2004), Myanmar (Cyclone Nargis, 2008) and Haiti (2010). Although DWF work focuses on prevention, such actions help spread the word that preventive strengthening is viable and possible. Maybe more important in Vietnamese terms, the DWF programme coordinator was hailed in the National press as 'the foreign typhoon fighter!"

Third period – Recognition, official collaboration with the Central Government, but still short on wide-scale national impact.

DWF direct support since 2000
2 500 families/houses in DRR programmes
2 000 families/houses in reconstruction programmes after typhoons and floods
150 commune public buildings (kindergarten, primary school, village community hall, health centre…) or small infrastructures (roads, bridges….)

DWF indirect support
25 000 families / Government Programme 716 & 48

After many years effort in the communes and provinces, this stage in our long presence in Vietnam appears to be one of success and positive results, and indeed in many ways it has been.

But, standing back from specific results and achievement, our reflection is that there remains not only much to be done but many barriers in the way of wider and accessible impact with and for lower income families who bear the brunt of the impact of floods, storms and other disasters. A large typhoon or flood will still force people on the margin of poverty back into difficulty, and losses of homes and their contents still remain far too high, and recovery costly.

In 2011, drawing on experience in many different parts of Vietnam, DWF published[20] the "Atlas for House Vulnerability and Strengthening for Vietnam" for the main regions of Vietnam (Northern mountainous areas, Red River Delta, Central coast, Highlands, Mekong Delta). The Atlas indicates the level of risks and the impact of events on housing and construction. It indicates who should take measures (State, local authorities, household). Technical solutions are proposed in each case, adapted with local architectural and building practices.
The Atlas attracted attention higher up in the government, with a foreword written by the Ministry of Construction[21]. In turn, this nurtured new collaborations. Between 2012 and 2015 the DWF team in Vietnam supported National Programmes 716 [22] and 48 [23] of the Ministry of Construction, which targeted 30 000 to 40 000 poor families in high flood, and subsequently in high flood and storm areas. These

Government programmes provided technical advice (model and specifications), subsidy and loans for families to build safe houses in a safe area in provinces of Central Vietnam.
DWF helped the provincial Departments of Construction to survey the real local process of building, and to propose adapted solutions. In some high flood areas, the proposal from DWF to incorporate 'above flood level' shelter for animals as part of the house – a popular local practice over many years - was adopted into provincial guidance. DWF also edited the Atlas of Programme 48, which summarizes all the housing models in the Provinces. DWF organised training sessions to diffuse the results of local survey and design for local technicians, and eleven provincial 'Atlas' were published in 2013 with the participation of the Provincial Departments of Construction.

In 2013 the Minister of Construction asked DWF to assist in revising and editing the construction standards for low rise building in Flood and Storm risk areas of Vietnam. DWF provided support and guidance for revising the draft standards[24], and visits and consultation with local experts were organised in several areas to evaluate the needs to improve the quality and safety of building for current disasters. For example, the method of securing tile roof with concrete ribs promoted by DWF was included as one of the best solutions for avoiding damage to roofs.
Draft standards were finalised in December 2015, ***but they are still waiting for legal formalisation and thus state ratification, a long process that has to be completed before the standards can be disseminated.***

Even for concluding this process, the task of the Ministry of Construction[25], and thus the interest to going further is constrained by other pressures. It is an unbalanced playing field, where political priorities can either advance or hinder the passage of change policy and practice. Compared to the need to have locally pertinent standards for low rise building in Flood and Storm risk areas, recently, standards and regulations to diminish and stop the production of clay burnt bricks are validated, because they could lead to fruitful investment within national Climate Change Plans

Impact on Standards

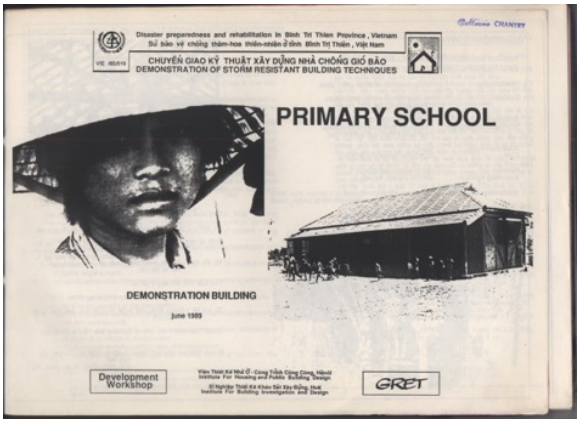
Main results, barriers and impact:

- Adapted standards have been prepared, based on survey of local construction practices and evolution, and thus represents a major step for promoting safe housing policy.
- Local technicians have been involved in the process, as well as local builders and families.
- The Standards need to be completed by Guidelines for each zone of the country – to reflect the local architecture and building materials use.
- However, it is not clear that there is sufficient political will and therefore resources for the Standards to be widely disseminated and become applied practice.

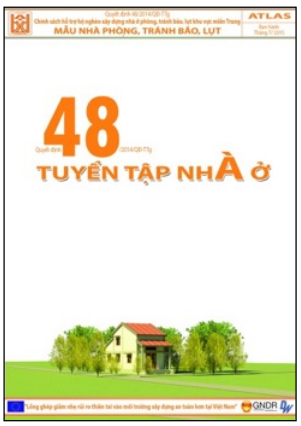
Beginning to have an impact on the vulnerability of homes and local public buildings takes a very long time; funding coming in for one or two year periods and the uncertainty this brings is one of the challenges to be faced in order to have a sustainable impact..

The start | **25 years later**

1989: Demonstrating safer construction, Central Vietnam



2015: Programme 48 Guidelines developed with the Ministry of Construction



Conclusion

DWF actions could be considered as successful, as they have brought into the debate the safe housing issue with adapted practical solutions and methods – like horizontal networking for sharing the message.

But would the situation and the resilience of local communities be different without these actions?

DRR is managed as a highlight at a time of crisis, during/just after disasters, but not as an element of sustainable development. Experts (and affected communities) repeat the same threats facing society over years, and years… but who listens to them, except other experts in National / International conferences?

Reflecting on Action

DWF actions in networking between similar communities have shown their efficiency in sharing experience… but are essentially limited in duration. DWF action at government level by contributing to adapting the National standards for low rise housing in flood and storm areas to meet and address local realities and practice is limited by the interest of authorities to consider local DRR as a major priority in the long term.

The Future

First, that the DRR/CC community moves on from discussing "global" community/city /country resilience or "data aggregation by some categories – gender, age….", and instead seriously explores the vulnerability of specific classes of the population, and shows how the actual DRR frameworks or CC Adaptation Plans do not cover the needs of most vulnerable people, nor address this problem. For example, in recent typhoon disasters in Vietnam in September and November 2017, in some areas the main damage was the destruction of industrial plant (rubber tree) or aquaculture (shrimp/fish ponds). But the official data (Number of hectares destroyed, number of ponds damaged with products lost) doesn't indicate the ownership (and associated profit) of these assets: owners could lose their investment – and the problem is same for the banks that support them. But hired labourers lose their daily income – and their problem is the immediate need to support the family and live; response or long term recovery/prevention will be not the same for these poor households. This needs to change.

Secondly, that the international networks (GNDR, ADRRN…and others) become more proactive expressing opinions that challenge the dominant UN position and system, in order to federate a new way to consider DRR and CCA as a human right with duties, and not only or just a commitment by and from Governments and the international community. SFDRR included the need to fully associate the communities, and to rely more on local organisations, but this great bargain still remains in practice too much a dream and insufficiently a reality. Recent huge crises (Typhoon in Vanuatu, the 2017 Myanmar Rohynga crisis, Haiti and Nepal earthquakes…) once again show that little progress has been made in the capacity of the international humanitarian system to address the underlying causes of vulnerability amongst poor families.

And as Meding (Op.cit) wrote in August 2017 "In Vietnam poverty and poor development, not just floods, kills the most marginalized".

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12 VietNamNet 17/07/2017 “Heavy rains put pressure on 550 millions $ drainage system in Hanoi” stated that ‘Despite a newly built $550-million water drainage system, Hanoi streets are still inundated during heavy rains.’

13 In consortium with GRET (Groupe de Recherches et d’Echanges Technologiques – Paris)

14 “Disaster preparedness and rehabilitation in Binh Tri Thien Province / Component C: Demonstration of storm resistant building techniques” – VIE/85/019

15 Following the Typhoon Cecil in 1985, with huge damage in central Vietnam

16 Working with the National Centre for Rural Planning and Development

17 Comprising the Government, the UN System, INGO’s and local NGO

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25 Article 42 Law on natural disaster prevention and control : State management responsibility of the Government, ministries and ministerial-level agencies of natural disaster prevention and control:

1. The Government shall perform the uniform state management of natural disaster prevention and control nationwide.

9. The Ministry of Construction has the following responsibilities:

a/ To promulgate according to its competence or submit to competent authorities for promulgation, and direct the implementation of, legal documents on assurance of safety for construction works in accordance with the law on natural disaster prevention and control; to assume the prime responsibility for, and coordinate with and guide local administrations in, implementing construction master plans to assure safety of construction works during natural disasters;

b/ To elaborate and promulgate national technical regulations on safety of construction works during natural disasters.

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