



Flood Kindergarten: Community Need to Community Solution

Evidence shows that flood kindergartens in the Mekong Delta drastically reduce the number of child casualties in Vietnam. The Government of Vietnam recounts their experience in identifying and addressing flood vulnerability.

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Viet Nam is one of the most disaster prone countries in the world. Because of its geography and topography, the country suffers from almost every type of disaster, among which water disasters induced by typhoons and floods are the most frequent and severe. Every year, disasters claim hundreds of human lives and cause millions of dollars of economic loss in all regions of the country. Further, rapid urbanization and industrialization, resulting from the country's social, economic and technological reforms, are putting pressure on its already strained resource base. Environmental degradation is also partly the cause of the more frequent and severe disasters that have occurred in recent years. Some of the worst flood disasters ever recorded have hit the Mekong River Delta in the last few years. In response, the Government of Viet Nam has adopted a strategy for the Mekong River Delta to 'live with the floods'.

By building on the experience gained from the two large floods in 2000 and 2001, the local people and the authorities responded more effectively and actively to the flooding in 2002. For example,



following directives set forth by the government, farmers seeded summer-autumn crops earlier than usual and therefore more than a million hectares of rice were harvested before flooding. Houses were repaired, house foundations were elevated, and food and other essentials were stored in preparation for long lasting flooding. In heavily inundated areas, people

actively relocated themselves to safe residential clusters. The measures taken to implement this strategy have been based on local assessment of key areas where intervention is needed. One such strategy is the creation of 'flood kindergartens' to protect children during the time of flood.

Past records show children comprised a majority of the casualties during previous floods. During moments of crises, children are separated from their parents, get lost in crowds or swept away in the floods. Flood season is typically the busiest time for those parents who make their livelihoods from fishing and who therefore have very little time to watch over their children. The government set up 'Kindergartens' where parents could leave their children before they struggled to save their houses, belonging and livelihoods. The increase in the number of emergency kindergartens allowed parents to get involved in other family and community activities during the disaster times.

Medium to heavy rains hit the Mekong River Delta in late July 2002, causing a rapid increase in the flood level in the midstream and downstream of the Mekong River. In early August 2002, due



to the recurrent storms, the upstream flood water levels rose again. By the end of the month, the flood water levels at the Tan Chau gauging station and Chau Doc gauging station had reached their peak levels of 4.60m and 4.17m respectively. Over the next month, the water levels receded and rose again. By 30 September 2002, the flood water level at the Tan Chau Gauging Station was at 4.82 metres, higher than the peak flood water level in 2001.

On 8 October 2002, the flood water levels reached their peak and began to recede, but the inundation lasted for a long time. The peak flood water level was equal to that of 2001, causing inundation in 35 districts and many towns in the six most flood-prone provinces. Viet Nam sustained losses measuring almost US \$11 million. About 275 houses collapsed and 106 people were killed, 99 of whom were children.



In 2002, the number of children killed by flooding was half that of 2001 and one-third that of 2000.

During the 2002 disaster, 918 emergency kindergartens were organized to keep 20,273 children safe in flood-prone areas and information about them was widely communicated to the public. This resulted in a substantial reduction of child-deaths.

Although, the during death toll among children has been reduced, children continue to be the most vulnerable segment of the population. An analysis of the 2002 deaths has shown that no child died in the emergency kindergarten; children died in their homes or on their way to school. It is now considered that flood safety training, including swimming lessons, is important for children. To further reduce future casualties, the Vietnamese government plans to develop such training programmes and them into the regular school curriculum. In addition, the school timing has been changed according to the flood situation prevailing in the areas in heavily inundated localities.

The 2002 flood in the Mekong River was extraordinarily large and long-lasting. However, there were great changes in the awareness level of both local authorities and residents. People moved from defensiveness to offensiveness; from big losses to small losses, from flood prevention to exploitation of floods. With the cooperation of government at all levels, the people of the Mekong River Delta are increasingly able to cope with flood disasters.

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