

# Vietnamese children learn lessons for life

## Background

Viet Nam Red Cross Society (VNRC) has focused on disaster preparedness (DP) since the late 1990s. One successful element of this has been the introduction programme to DP for primary school children, which started in 2001. This has now spread to 21 disaster-prone provinces throughout the country (Viet Nam has 64 provinces in all). The overall aim is to reduce risk for school children because they are among the most vulnerable when disasters occur. Findings from previous floods in the Mekong provinces show that two-thirds of the children who died drowned as a result of being left behind unattended by adults. Basic life skills could well have saved many lives.

The project received wide support from the education sector, teachers, children and parents. Schools in disaster-prone areas organized inter-provincial competitions including drama, quizzes, painting competitions, etc to build on key elements contained within the standard booklet and teaching on DP.



## The Project

*Be prepared: children learn all about reducing their risk*

The project had the following objectives over 12 months:

1. Disaster needs assessment material is developed; national and provincial trainers are trained; and district and commune personnel recruited in approximately 30 communes
2. Commune level disaster preparedness material developed and Community Development Boards trained in approximately 30 communes
3. Disaster preparedness material developed for grade 4 and 5 school children and training of trainers, schoolteachers and children undertaken in approximately 210 communes

The project was piloted in the Central provinces of Quang Binh and Quang Tri before being replicated elsewhere, especially in the Red River Delta, Mekong River provinces, and the central coast.



## Outcomes

Half a million children received training to better cope with natural hazards. Almost 15,000 teachers spearheaded the initiative. The children then shared their learning with parents and others in the community. Thousands of children have now become VNRC Disaster Preparedness and Response Action team members. Trained teachers continue to educate children in various aspects of DP on a voluntary basis as the initiative has demonstrated its worth in practice.

A package of DP training materials for RC staff community leaders, teachers and children supports the initiative.

Findings have revealed that during more recent disasters the number of children killed is less than before; an indicator that their understanding of reducing risks has been strengthened.



*Learning can be fun: a DP quiz created lots of energy and ideas.*

## Lessons learned

Disaster management should be considered in a broad way that takes account of many elements and a wide cross section of people at risk, all of which should be integrated into any plans of action.

The key success factors are the active participation of relevant stakeholders, particularly teachers and children, in writing and finalizing the training and learning materials. A more facilitating method as opposed to a lecturing one was used which tended to have better results in terms of

promoting active participation of children.

A memorandum of understanding between VNRC and the education sector to implement this initiative is needed to ensure a more strategic approach in terms of policy, cooperation and funding. Trained primary teachers should be encouraged to use their teaching experience to benefit future generations of students.

VNRC for its part will continue to focus on raising public awareness in terms of disaster preparedness, response and risk reduction especially among school children.

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