



# Evaluation of Participatory Disaster Preparation and Mitigation Project in Tien Giang and Dong Thap Provinces, Vietnam

Executive Summary

Oxfam GB Programme Evaluation

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## **Executive Summary**

### **Introduction**

#### ***The Vietnam - Australia NGO Cooperation Agreement***

In 2003, Oxfam Great Britain (OGB), in order to expand its existing programme in disaster management, made an initial approach to the Provincial People's Committees in Dong Thap and Tien Giang. Subsequently, a comprehensive and collaborative baseline assessment was later developed by OGB and Oxfam Australia and a project document submitted within the framework of the Vietnam - Australia NGO Cooperation Agreement (VANGOCA). By June 2005, a five year project (2005-2010) with a budget of AUD\$2,804,440 was approved by AusAID and OGB started implementation on behalf of Oxfam Australia, the main AusAID partner.

#### ***Project goal***

The goal of the project is: *“To mitigate the negative impact of floods on rural men, women and children”*, and the purpose: *“To reduce the risk of floods to rural men, women and children in Tien Giang and Dong Thap by decreasing their vulnerability and increasing the capacity of communities and institutions”*.

#### ***Location and organisational structure***

Within the two provinces, project activities are focused on 24 communes in 5 districts, with a population of approximately 265,000. To implement the project OGB formed partnerships with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) in Tien Giang Province and the Department of Planning and Investment (DPI) in Dong Thap Province. In each province a Project Management Board was created comprising a director, a deputy director <sup>1</sup>, and an accountant. These are supported through strategic directions in the biannual meetings by a Project Steering Committee, comprising representatives from members from the Committee for Flood and Storm Control in the province.

### **Purpose and methodology**

#### ***Purpose***

The purpose of this Mid-term Review was to assess the overall effectiveness and impact of the project during the first two years of implementation. The ToR essentially is to assess achievements with: *“reference to the purpose, output and learning of the project”*. The review also aimed to: *“provide capacity building to project partners, sharing learning and recommendations for remaining period and the future projects”*.<sup>2</sup> Based on the findings, the review was to provide recommendations to improve project implementation.

The review team specifically aimed to assess:

- a. the effectiveness of project activities in contributing to the key objectives of the project
- b. the impact of project activities on the target communities, in particular, the level of beneficiary participation in project activities

<sup>1</sup> in Dong Thap

<sup>2</sup> in addition, the *appropriateness, coverage, progress, participation, coherence, efficiency, management, impact, cost effectiveness, effectiveness, sustainability and learning* of the project were examined

- c. the effectiveness of project management, particularly the partner's capacity in coordination, monitoring, planning, reporting, learning and resource management
- d. the overall strengths and weaknesses of the project activities during the past two years and recommend ways to enhance effectiveness and impact.

### ***Review team***

The review team<sup>3</sup> comprised of one external international consultant; one external national consultant; one Oxfam Australia staff member; the OGB Project Coordinator; two OGB Project Officers; two Provincial Coordinators from the two provinces, and one translator<sup>4</sup>. The team were involved in all review activities in both provinces; the international consultant worked as the overall Team Leader.

### ***Review methodology***

The team utilised a range of qualitative and quantitative review methods, including: documentation review (of project proposal, reports, training and IEC materials); in-depth discussion with OGB project staff and project directors; focus group discussions with the Project Management Board, and with Steering Committee members from the Committee for Flood and Storm Control (CFSC) at province, district and commune level; field visits including interviews and field observations in a representative sample of targeted communities; visits to selected households and one-to-one interviews with village leaders and community representatives, government counterparts and other key informants in the communities. Two feed back sessions, one in each province, were held and post-review discussions with the Humanitarian Programme Coordinator and OGB Country Director.

### ***Constraints***

The evaluation process was constrained by the limited time in each province. Time scheduling meant that every field day was full of interviews, resulting in limited time for team meetings for sharing, process, reflection, analysis around the field visits - which is an integral part of a participatory approach and provided valuable learning for both partners and OGB staff. Visits were made to 4 districts and 7 communes but whether that was truly representative was questionable (of the 5 districts and 24 communes under the project). Some key informants were absent and there were no opportunities for dialogue with external stakeholders. As such the findings in this report are based on an assessment of the communities visited, and may not include all evidence relating to the progress and challenges facing the project.

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## **Main findings under the review components**

### ***Relevance and appropriateness***

- A significant number of project activities have been accomplished to date; all the main project activities in the log frame have been achieved. The training events and development of the IEC materials has resulted in over 6,000 men, women and children so far benefiting from access to awareness raising and capacity building in disaster management.
- The project is being undertaken in the correct locations in some of the most flood prone parts of the country responding to the needs of 5/18 districts and 24/337 communes in both provinces.
- Village Action Plans (essentially disaster preparedness plans) have been developed in strong consultation with the people in all the communities, detailing assigned roles and responsibilities and ideas for small scale mitigation works.
- There has been a focus upon the development of training material and training in a broad range of different issues, based on community needs and requests.
- A sizable “flexible fund” exists (for disaster risk reduction activity) which may be utilised to reduce local vulnerabilities; both non-structural and structural components are complementary and valid parts of the project, although some challenges have arisen in the structural aspects of the project.
- There is potential for project partners to raise advocacy issues to the provincial and local government concerning the needs of the communes and to utilise OGB funding as leverage.

### ***Coverage***

- The process of consultation with people in the communes, with the local authorities, combined with close and regular dialogue with the PMB and the various members of the CFSC at the different levels has helped to ensure that the project is responding to actual needs.
- Every effort has been made in the selection and training of people from the target areas, to ensure that a representative and diverse range of people participate. This has ensured that influential people from the various communities and representatives from the Mass Organisations and local government participated and many were able to further share the knowledge/information acquired from the training events.
- There has been wide engagement with people from all sections of society, with training events ensuring the participation of men and women, children and elderly persons.
- There was strong engagement with people in the project areas, and it was felt that needs were being met through the project, although the overall scale and associated impact still needs to be addressed.

- Scope exists for further dissemination through the existing organisational structures and the CFSC membership, to potentially increase outreach.

### ***Effectiveness and cost effectiveness***

- The Project Management Boards and Steering Committees in both provinces have provided active support; the Provincial and District Project Coordinators have worked exceptionally hard. The communities are engaged and active. The fact that all the objectives set out in the logical framework have been achieved to date indicates a commitment to the project by partners and local people, as well as the dedication and commitment by local OGB staff.
- The Women’s Union, the Youth Union and the Viet Nam Red Cross - as well as other Mass Organisations - have participated actively and there is great potential to utilise further these existing networks to more fully achieve the project objectives.
- There have not been any unforeseen effects of the project, although some challenges have to be overcome between the project partners and OGB (due to the decisions and the practical arrangements for the utilisation of the flexible funds and the most appropriate mechanisms for accessing safe water).
- The project has achieved its main outcomes regarding the training activities.
- No financial analysis or comparisons of relative costs were feasible during the duration of this review; however, for all procurements, proper procedures, conforming to strict OGB guidelines were followed.
- The project has procured items for search and rescue and for early warning system which were of good quality and appropriate to the situation. Procurements in greater quantities could have resulted in increased cost effectiveness.

### ***Efficiency***

- All activities were implemented according to schedule (with the exception of the utilization of the flexible fund and the safe water component). Fund transfers from OGB were undertaken at an appropriate time, and the OGB system is considered by project partners as being flexible and no major problems were encountered. The fact that training and procurements have been undertaken in a timely manner indicates that the systems are efficient.

### ***Impact***

- The widespread impact of the project is challenging to see at this juncture, however, clearly over 6,000 people have directly benefited from the various training events; equipment procured is in regular use (benefiting considerably more people), members of Mass Organisations have made opportunities to disseminate knowledge and skills learnt. The IEC “disaster management clubs” offers potential for wide scale dissemination and potential behavioural change. In the bigger picture relatively few people in the communities have so far directly benefited from the project’s activities and there is potential for unease amongst some who feel that they have so far “missed

out”. The challenge of how best to scale-up the programme activities to better engage with the whole community remains.

- There were no negative impacts reported as a result of the project’s interventions.

### **Main conclusions and recommendations**

The main conclusions and the corresponding recommendations of the Mid-term Review are as follows:

#### **1. To build knowledge, skills and resources to mitigate, prepare for and respond to floods amongst leadership and households in 24 flood-affected communes**

##### *Community based disaster management action plans*

###### *Training of facilitators*

- Good quality ToTs were conducted and there are a high number of facilitators but there is still a need for more, particularly at the commune level.
- All the training events according to the work plan have been organised.
- The quality and quantity of the training facilitated has been of a high standard although there is a lack of a comprehensive methodological training course.
- Participants are eager to share what they have learnt, have increased confidence to do so, however, scale and outreach remains a challenge.

Continue to invest in quality ToT and develop a stand alone curriculum focusing on **adult training and participatory methodology**, to develop a **cadre of commune level facilitators** and through these, **conduct more training at the commune and village level**.

###### *Training materials*

- The material is relevant and appropriate to the local context and the content quality relatively high. Sometimes too much information is presented.
- There is an ambitious, broad training agenda.
- Although quality materials exist there is not a consistent “packaging” of training materials and in some the format and layout is not inspiring or concise.

Develop a **consistent OGB training product/or package** for each course with improved layout and more user friendly appearance, comprising: a reference manual, facilitator’s training notes and schedule, a trainee’s workbook and teaching aids. In all training material increase the number of illustrations/pictures/photos.

###### *Participants*

- Participant selection criteria are appropriate and resulted in respected, influential people being selected.
- All the training events planned have been conducted, although still relatively few people have benefited and the needs of the local people with regards to training are high.

Increase the **number of facilitators** at the training events. Try to work more **coherently** with other organisations involved in disaster management training. Increase the **duration and number of training events** for influential people at the commune level.

### ***Informed households and improved preparedness***

- The IEC materials are of an excellent standard in terms of content, style and format. The selection of IEC volunteers and their training has been good, but could be improved with greater emphasis on the methodological component.
- The disaster management club model has potential to be effective but must be supported and resourced, to ensure coverage and subsequent behaviour change.

Increase the **number of IEC volunteers** and focus on their **capacity building**. Diversify **dissemination strategies**, e.g. use street drama, puppet theatre, radio and TV as well as the better and synchronised use of the information systems provided.

### ***Established or improved early warning systems***

- The provision of equipment is suitable, appropriate for the local context and responsive to community needs, although the number of loudspeakers for the early warning system is inadequate to reach remote areas.

Provide **more loudspeakers** and high concrete poles for the early warning systems and place in strategic locations to ensure greater coverage and enable better audibility.

### ***Improved commune search and rescue teams***

- Training events are practical and appreciated, as is the provision of search and rescue equipment; however, investment into these teams (personnel and resources) is still insufficient.

Provide **more village level search and rescue kits** and further investment into personnel, through practical simulation exercises.

### ***Swimming training for women and children***

- The swimming lessons were well received and have been successful, but the outreach is limited. The current level of equipment is inadequate to meet training needs.

Determine how OGB can **best** add value to the existing swimming programme being delivered by the Centre for Sports, Gymnasiums and Culture and further support the increasing demand.

### ***Repaired or constructed small scale infrastructure***

- Significant flexible fund exists to undertake disaster risk reduction activities; however, some current challenges exist, which needs to be resolved; both OGB and partners are willing to address these concerns and to move forward.

Organise a **high level meeting** between the PMB and OGB; work through and resolve existing issues on the utilisation of the flexible fund.

Establish **clearer criteria for the selection of risk reduction measures** applicable for the flexible fund, clarify the **objectives, processes and procedures** for the flexible fund, and revisit community plans and community/OGB disaster risk reduction infrastructure priorities. To assist with clarifying the fund's objectives, rename the flexible fund the "*disaster risk reduction fund*".

## **2. To enable the Committee for Flood and Storm Control to facilitate a more targeted, coordinated, timely and effective response to floods in Dong Thap and Tien Giang**

### ***Disaster management training***

- There has been widespread engagement by the CFSC membership at all levels in a broad range of different capacity building activities, focusing mainly upon training but also simulation exercises and exposure visits.
- Second line departmental staff as well as Mass Organisation staff and volunteers participated and later organised training of their members.
- Clear evidence exists of behavioural change and knowledge improvement amongst the members of the PMB and CFSC.
- Whilst the project has aimed to both strengthen these groups and utilise them for information dissemination, the differing tasks of the members could be better tailored for in training events to ensure that capacities built more specifically meet these. Exposure visits were well received and there was indication of lessons learnt being applied.
- The equipment provided has been useful for the running of the project and for other work of the CFSC members.
- Clarify **Oxfam's niche** as to how best to augment existing training and capacity building initiatives facilitated for the CFSC membership to ensure that the differing needs of the CFSC members enables them to better undertake their mandated roles and responsibilities.
- Increase the number of **simulation exercises** and broaden the scope of these.

### ***Monitoring and evaluation, communications and data management***

- Training in MEL has taken place for CFSC membership at provincial, district and commune level in both provinces and other training is scheduled in communications and data management. Scope exists to improve the amount of mutual exchange, knowledge and sharing events/exposures between the PMB and partners in both provinces.

Ensure agreement on **implementation and MEL frameworks**, and to improve the quality of implementation, via continued communication. Increase the **linkages and involvement between the PMB and CFSC** in both provinces.

## **3. To reduce the incidence of flood related diseases affecting people in the project area**

### ***Increased awareness amongst households and changed practice on flood-related health and hygiene and increased access to clean water***

- A widespread consultative process regarding various potential means to access safe water was undertaken and a number of resulting options identified, however, to date the most appropriate option has not been decided upon.



- The IEC materials will complement this aspect of the project providing public health and WatSan messages.

During the proposed high-level meeting, resolve the most appropriate mechanism to use with regards to implementing a **safe water project**.

#### **4. To improve flood time food security and the income of selected poor and vulnerable households**

- Partners and OGB made a constructive, albeit tough decision and reallocated programme funds from the livelihood support fund to the flexible fund and to integrate other livelihood sub-objectives into other project components.

#### **5. To ensure effective and timely programme management and coordination**

##### ***Strengthened capacity of project management and coordination***

- The relationship between OGB staff, partner staff and the PMB is frank and open and parties are generally committed. There exist a few unresolved challenges primarily around the flexible fund and the safe water component that are affecting this relationship and overall project implementation.
- The Steering Committees, with their biannual meetings are deemed to be good coordinating bodies.
- There is potential for the CFSC membership and the District level leadership to play an even greater role in the Steering Committee.

Resolve during the proposed high-level meeting issues around: the **flexible fund processes**; the 'stalemate' over the **safe water project**, the challenge over the impact of significant inflation costs and the issue of *per diems* for the different levels. Further strengthen coordination between the PMB and OGB through a **bi-annual high level meeting between OGB and partners** with regards to programme strategy and operations. Encourage **more participation of the Steering Committee with the PMB**. Further support the **coordination between all CFSC member organisations** and explore the increased engagement they could have with the project. Increase the involvement of **District leaders** in the project Steering Committee.

##### ***Active coordination and collaboration with INGOs and other stakeholders***

- Other agencies are present in these provinces and although a certain degree of interaction is happening, further consolidation of this would lead to a more effective programme.

Oxfam and the PMBs should explore opportunities in which to **engage with other INGOs and stakeholders**, so that all respective projects can complement each other, and synergies can be enhanced for a more effective overall programme.

### **Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

- Oxfam GB has MEL material for training and guidance of participatory M&E processes and a detailed and relevant M&E component was developed as part of this project.
- The OGB local staff are interested and enthusiastic to learn more about the application of M&E processes; some training in M&E was already conducted for CFSC members and there is increased awareness amongst project partners and local communities. At the commune level, community assessment teams have been established to oversee future infrastructure projects.
- There is potential to increase a more bottom-up input into the M&E processes as well as sharing lessons between the two project sites amongst partner and OGB staff.

Increase opportunities for **sharing about MEL** and the use of guidelines, etc. between the project partners and OGB staff in the two provinces. Explore means to better **engage local people in a participatory M&E approach**.

### **Humanitarian accountability**

- The project has ensured high levels of participation by partners at all levels and by local people - there is already evidence of greater participation during community action planning and of adopting a participatory approach.
- The scale of the project is still relatively small, regarding the number of local people who have access to the training events and to such a participatory approach.

Continue discussions about **opportunities for scaling up** the project and of enhancing participation of local people in the different project activities.

### **Sustainability**

- There are a number of factors that bode well for sustainability of some aspects of the project in the future, these include: the commitment of PMBs and of the CFSC; the widespread engagement with the CFSC membership at all levels; the mature relationship with local government departments; the fact that local community people and government authorities are engaged and enthusiastic about project activities; the strong investment in facilitators at all levels; the development of good training and high quality IEC materials; established disaster management clubs and growing network of trained and committed IEC volunteers; a further two and half years to run; and a strong participatory approach.
- Challenges to sustainability, of course, remain and over the next few years this issue needs to be more earnestly addressed.

The **sustainability matrix** and log frame in the project design needs to be followed up and implemented.

### **Gender equality (mainstreaming) as a cross cutting issue**

- The project intentionally focused on women to strengthen their opportunities and leadership roles in disaster management. This has been undertaken through targeting women as specific beneficiaries.
- Gender issues have been included within each project component that aims to increase equality. However, there are recognised challenges in addressing long standing cultural norms and customs regarding women's roles, and difficulties associated with changing these beliefs and behaviours.

Continue with the **integration of gender throughout** all training events, and to ensure the fullest participation of both women and men in all project activities; encourage **women to take on leadership roles** within the project. Consider developing a strategy to increase opportunities for women to meet and discuss **leadership issues in disaster management** through an existing mechanism, e.g. the Women's Union.

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