ResilNam–Coastal: Ecology and Gender Based Flood Resilience Building in Coastal Thua Thien Hue Province, Central Vietnam

“ResilNam-Coastal aims at enhancing resilience of coastal communities by integrating ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) and women’s empowerment in disaster risk management and climate change adaptation.”

Background

Thua Thien Hue province is a coastal province located in central Vietnam (Fig.1). The Tam Giang Lagoon – South-East Asia’s largest lagoon – and adjacent coastal areas are the basis for the livelihoods for many poor and vulnerable people, who directly depend on these natural resources. Currently, about half a million people live in 32 communes along the lagoon and the coast. In recent decades, the low-lying coastal areas have been repeatedly affected by severe flooding from the sea, rivers and heavy rainfall.

Resilience Challenge

In addition to the chronic stress and shocks caused by flood events, a range of societal factors undermines the resilience of already vulnerable groups of society, such as poor and women. These factors include:

► unstable livelihoods and lacking financial savings to handle external shocks or disturbances,
► the fast disappearance of coastal ecosystems,
► increasing pressure on natural resources due to population growth,
► gender inequality in political decision making, and
► a focus on “hard” (i.e. structural) and “exclusive” (i.e. top-down) structural flood defense measures, which are often associated with negative effects on poor and vulnerable communities.

Ecosystem-based adaptation as a mean to women’s empowerment in DRM and CCA

ResilNam-Coastal aims at strengthening the role of women in DRM and CCA through ecosystem-based adaptation, namely the restoration, conservation and sustainable management of mangroves in South-East Asia’s largest lagoon. Ecosystem-based adaptation (EbA) uses biodiversity and ecosystem services in an overall adaptation strategy. It includes the sustainable management and restoration of ecosystems to provide services that help people adapt to the adverse effects of natural disasters and climate change. EbA is more accessible and inclusive to vulnerable groups compared with structural measures, making them a promising means to strengthen the role of women in DRM and CCA.

Activities and Methods

Demonstrating the value of EbA: mangroves in the lagoon

The multi-faceted economic, social and cultural benefits of EbA measures are difficult to account for. This makes decision makers often reluctant to opt for such types of measures. To overcome the barrier towards more inclusive approaches of DRM and CCA, ResilNam-Coastal will conduct a valuation of the effectiveness, costs and multiple benefits of mangroves planted by the resilience team in 2011, using a participatory design and applying a gender lens. The valuation will include local cultural values, the importance of tourism, estimating the non-use values of nature, and the reduction in flood risk for mangrove-protected areas.

Investing in mangroves in the lagoon to strengthen the role of women

In addition to the multiple economic, social and environmental benefits, mangroves substantially reduce flood exposure by reducing wave and tidal energy and coastal erosion. To further enhance flood resilience, ResilNam-Coastal will directly invest in the plantation of additional mangroves in the Tam Giang lagoon, together with local communities, the Women’s Union, the Disaster Management Committee and the provincial Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE). A study tour program demonstrating the importance of mangroves will be developed. Local women will be trained to host this program, generating additional income directly from EbA in the long-term.

The role of women in disaster risk management (DRM) and climate change adaptation (CCA)

Existing gender differences make women especially vulnerable to the impacts of flooding. Reasons for this are:

► the direct dependency of women’s livelihoods on natural resources that are threatened by floods,
► their role and work-burden in the family, due to their responsibilities for children, sick and elderly,
► social, economic and political barriers that limit their coping capacity.

Even though women, as pivotal managers of natural and environmental resources, have the experience and knowledge to build the resilience of their communities, they only hold minor roles at the level of policy formulation. Without the full participation of women in decision-making and leadership, real community resilience to climate change and disasters cannot be achieved.

Improving resilience against coastal flooding by strengthening the role of women in DRM

To strengthen the role of women in DRM and CCA in Hue province and beyond, ResilNam-Coastal will engage in advocacy and knowledge dissemination activities, such as:

► Assess the environmental, social and cultural factors influencing flood recovery of men and women to derive tangible policy recommendations.
► Develop training and dissemination material to support the Women’s Union in strengthening the role of women in DRM and CCA.
► Provide capacity building for women in 12 coastal communities.
► Sensitize future decision makers on the importance of EbA and the role of women in DRM.

Envisaged impact

The mangroves will have a direct impact on 12 coastal communities (approx. 12,000 people directly in adjacent villages and 180,000 indirectly in surrounding communities). The coastal population of approx. half a million people can benefit from greater attention of the government to the value of EbA. 300 women will receive capacity building, reaching indirectly another 1500 people. The provincial population can benefit from recommendations on flood recovery and gender mainstreaming. Upscaling activities in Vietnam and internationally are jointly undertaken with the Women’s Union, the Vietnam River Network and the German Committee for Disaster Risk Reduction e.V.

Skill sets of the team

Flood impact assessment and modelling, vulnerability and resilience assessments, valuation of ecosystem services, gender mainstreaming in DRM and CCA, flood recovery, community-based research.

The core resilience team

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