

# RECOGNISE THE STRENGTH OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN REDUCING DISASTER RISKS!

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UP Women & Girls  
The Visible Force of Resilience



*Stories from Viet Nam*





# RECOGNISE THE STRENGTH OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN REDUCING DISASTER RISKS!

## *Stories from Viet Nam*

*For more information on the issue of gender equality and women's empowerment in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation, read the following policy brief:*

Gender Equality in Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction in Viet Nam. United Nations Viet Nam and Oxfam, March 2012.

Available at: <http://www.un.org.vn/en/publications/>

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# FOREWORD

## WOMEN AND GIRLS: INSPIRATIONAL VOICES FOR RISK REDUCTION

“Women have the power to shape our destinies in ways previous generations couldn’t imagine.”

This observation about women and girls as a force for positive and structural change was made by the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton during the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Women in the World Summit held in New York in March 2012. It stresses the potential and strength of an often untapped or unrecognized resource; the brave and strong women in our world, in your family, in your community.

Women play a crucial role in Viet Nam. Not only do they comprise almost half of the country’s population, they also play crucially important roles in the household, in the rural and urban economies and in society as a whole. Almost 14 million women are organized under the Viet Nam’s Women’s Union that is active in every province, district and commune of the country and has a wide range of programmes for the advancement of women.

With disasters affecting Viet Nam annually, in combination with a particular vulnerability to the adverse effects of climate change, it is essential to recognize women and girls as dynamic actors in disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation. Taking into account

important social and economic differences of women and girls, it is time to recognize fully their roles, concerns and contributions in households, communities and the workplace and reflect them in related national policies and actions.

Far too often women and girls are portrayed as passive ‘victims’ of disasters, ignoring their multiple talents, capacities and contributions to risk reduction. However, there are numerous examples of strong women and girls who - with men and boys together - work on building the resilience of their family, their community and their country. One by one they are a living proof of the inherent strength and capabilities but too often an ‘invisible’ part of the community.

This book aims to raise awareness on the importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment. It aims to tell the story behind the larger issues and show the visible force behind lasting change. For example, how a girl saved her father’s life from drowning; how a woman is devoting all her time and energy into teaching ethnic minority children how to better protect themselves; how girls express their concerns for an uncertain future in their own innovative way; how working with women in disaster preparedness and response can

achieve better results, and through many more truly inspirational stories. It hopes to inspire the reader to take action now for the future generations to come.

Enjoy!



# A VISIBLE AND EMPOWERED WOMAN IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION



Photo: Care International/2012

**T**his is the story of Ms. T.; a poor woman aged 50 years old. She is a single head of household and also a person with a disability. She had spent more than 40 years living in the poor, degraded and isolated coastal commune of Nga Bach in the province of Thanh Hoa.

“The community I am living in has long suffered from floods, storms and drought. During the flood season most of the households here have no electricity or running water because of the damages caused to the electric lines. It is also difficult to have sufficient water for cultivation because of the sea water and salt intrusion into the fields. The commune has a high rate of unemployment and the youth are migrating to the main cities for a job.

When I was young, during the war, I had an accident that affected my back bone. As a result I couldn't work and had to fully rely on my parents, sister's and brother's income. Few years ago my parents died, my sister and brother got married and left the house. I ended up staying alone.

When Storm No. 7 hit the commune in 2004 my house was damaged and the roof was totally destroyed. Floods also damaged my cupboards, table, chairs, and beds and all my food was completely lost... At that time I wished I had a husband to share my distress with him.

In 2011 thanks to the Community-Based Disaster Risk Management project supported by CARE and the Women's Union I had the opportunity to participate in several trainings and workshops on how to deal with disasters, reduce risk and prevent diseases during floods and storms.

I learned many things about disasters and what I could do before, during and after floods and storms to regain control of my life.

Together with the Viet Nam Women's Union, I helped to plan and organize 18 information sessions for other women in the nine villages of my commune. I also participated in performing plays on disaster risk reduction and disease prevention.

Through the project I was able to support other single women like me and other vulnerable people in the community. I gained knowledge and skills on disaster prevention but also training and organization of awareness raising activities in my community.

I found my life more meaningful, looked at things more positively and forgot my loneliness and sorrow. I even became an agent of change by mobilizing other women in the neighboring commune of Nga Bach.

I thought that the awareness raising activities on disasters and the prevention of diseases were very useful and practical for all members of my community; women, men and children. I now believe that if at the time of the storm I had some knowledge on DRR my house would not have been damaged like that.

With the support from CARE we also have more safe water points and new roads that could be used during emergency time to evacuate people more rapidly.

People in the community participated in the construction of the evacuation roads by dedicating their time and money to buy the cement.

When the storm No.2 hit our commune in 2011 I followed the messages I had learnt from the project, like listening to the radio, prepositioning





Photo: Care International/2012

some food stocks in my house and fortifying my house against the strong winds. I also supported other people to be evacuated to safer areas and helped them to protect their houses. Thanks to our joint work in the commune, when the storm came people were safe and no houses were damaged.

The project changed my life and brought benefits to 30,000 people living in the three coastal communes of the district of Nga Son where I live. I was proud to have contributed a part to the success of the project and now people in my commune have gained the tools and skills to be better prepared to respond to the next storm and floods.”



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*The story is related to a Community Based Disaster Risk Management project implemented by CARE International and its partners in the province of Thanh Hoa. CARE is a leading relief and development non-governmental organization fighting global poverty. The project was funded by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection department (ECHO). ECHO is one of the world's largest providers of financing for humanitarian aid operations. Through its disaster preparedness programme (DIPECHO), it assists vulnerable people living in the main disaster-prone regions of the world in reducing the impact of natural disasters on their lives and livelihoods.*

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