

DIPECHO PARTNERS CONSOLIDATED LESSONS LEARNT

NATIONAL CONSULTATIVE MEETING (NCM)
THURSDAY 10TH NOVEMBER 2005
HANOI

1. ADMINISTRATIVE

1.1. Recruitment

- ✓ The recruitment of personnel with appropriate disaster preparedness experience and project management skills is difficult in Vietnam. The short duration of DIPECHO projects makes it all the more critical to have key project coordination and management staff in place prior to, or immediately upon, project commencement. *There should be a realistic gap (minimum 2 months) between the date of donor approval and project commencement.*

1.2. Government of VN approval / authorization / MOU

- ✓ Linking new project approval / agreements to those obtained under the 3rd Action Plan was useful for some DIPECHO partners in expediting the GoV approval process.
- ✓ The thorough involvement of GoV partners in the proposal development process is also conducive to rapid GoV approval.
- ✓ MoU's and other key approval documents can be drafted and discussed with GoV partners prior to donor approval of the project. Once the project has been approved by the donor, the GoV approval can be immediately finalized
- ✓ Signing key MoUs with central level partners first (immediately after donor project approval) can mobilise key project partner personnel to support the timely support or approval of provincial and district level authorities.

1.3. Reporting to DIPECHO

- ✓ The reporting system was a great improvement compared to the 3rd Action Plan which required grantees to submit quarterly reports. The 4th Action Plan only requires a mid-term and final report. This has reduced the workload and time spent for reporting purposes. However, the Reporting Form is not user-friendly, little or no feedback was received, and there appeared to be little or no coordination between DIPECHO partners reporting and DIPECHO's monitoring activities. *Recommend DIPECHO revise the reporting format rather than simply using the proposal to update project achievements/ information.*

1.4. DIPECHO monitoring / participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation

- ✓ There are aspects of the project performance that cannot be conveyed so easily on paper; reports and email are no substitute for the value of DIPECHO field visits where we can all see and discuss issues on the spot, and hear the opinions of team members, local partners and beneficiaries. *Greater transparency from DIPECHO about the objectives, methods and scheduling of its monitoring would help DIPECHO partners to better prepare for, and learn from, monitoring visits.*
- ✓ Genuinely participatory approaches to M&E require considerable time, resources and often the field presence of DIPECHO partners – these are constrained somewhat by the duration and budgets of DIPECHO projects. *DIPECHO monitoring visits should seek to demonstrate participatory approaches to M&E by engaging local partners (co-monitors rather than paying visits)*

- ✓ **The quality of local partner and beneficiary participation is greatly enhanced when resources are transferred direct to local partners, where communities are contributing resources themselves and where transparency ensures that communities hold local partners accountable for project resources.**

2. PARTNERS

2.1. Working with partners

- ✓ **Working effectively with local partners has been critical to ensuring the success of all DIPECHO partners. In general it is useful for DIPECHO to have a strategic partnership with a senior level partner (national or provincial) to facilitate access to, and a smooth working relationship with, lower levels of authority (district and commune).**
- ✓ **The Viet Nam Red Cross is a key local partner for many DIPECHO partners as the VNRC possess a strong capacity for hazard - vulnerability - capacity assessment (HVCA), the training of trainers (TOT), monitoring and supervision of disaster risk reduction activities.**
- ✓ **Key partner organizations and personnel are often lowly paid and already very busy with their regular duties. Some incentive is required to mobilize these key people to undertake additional tasks. This must be managed with transparency and accountability if the project is to build a credible relationship with both partners and the donor**
- ✓ **DIPECHO partners recognize that there are significant differences between the capacities and commitment of local partners in different locations throughout Vietnam. What works for one project in one location may not necessarily work elsewhere.**
- ✓ **An assessment of partner capacity should be undertaken during the project design process, rather than waiting till the commencement of the project. The low existing capacity and absorptive capacity of some local partners has proven to be a major constraint for DIPECHO partners in achieving timely and quality project outputs.**
- ✓ **The coordination and collaboration between DIPECHO partners has been useful in stimulating learning. Collaboration on workshops and study tours have been particularly useful for both DIPECHO partners and local partners. However, many of the joint activities and additional events organized were not reflected or resourced within individual DIPECHO partners' budgets and workplans. The additional burden that this places on DIPECHO partner personnel has meant that some joint activities / events have not been able to receive the quality and quantity of support necessary to maximize their success. *Joint activities should be identified and planned between DIPECHO and its partners at the commencement of the at the start of the Action plan implementation phase and appropriate resources allocated. Collective efforts for advocacy on disaster risk reduction should be prioritized and resourced by DIPECHO.***

2.2. Strengthening institutional relationships

- ✓ **The quality of DIPECHO partners' institutional strengthening work was significantly constrained by the short duration of project implementation.**
- ✓ **Institutional strengthening activities should seek to build on existing partnerships and be linked to the longer term objectives of GoV and other donor funded programs if they are to be effective and contribute to sustainable capacity improvements. *DIPECHO should consider a phased (multiple year projects / programs) or tightly coordinated approach to programming if it wishes to target institutional strengthening for key local partners.***

2.3. Building commitment / capacity of local partners

- ✓ **Due to the low capacity of many local partners, substantial project resources must be devoted to training, training of trainers, follow-up support and coaching. In most cases, there is little or no GoV resources available for training of key partner staff in HVCA, rights based approaches and PRA methods.**
- ✓ **Experienced trainers in the VNRC or CFSC can be shared across projects to help build consistency in the capacity of partners, this is easier to coordinate locally (provincial level and below). DIPECHO partners should seek to support the organizational development of the VNRC and ensure that local partnership arrangements are coordinated through VNRC headquarters.**
- ✓ **The short duration of DIPECHO projects is a constraint on building and sustaining local partner commitment and capacity. Whilst some impressive short-term improvements can be made – project capacity building activities should ideally be part of a longer term plan / strategy and be linked to collective advocacy efforts.**

2.4. Mobilising local partner / community resources

- ✓ **Mobilising local partner and community resources is an important strategy for encouraging commitment to, and ownership of, project activities.**
- ✓ **In general, it is easier to mobilize resources from the bottom-up (i.e. from communities, communes and districts) than it is from provincial and national level partners. However, the communities, communes and districts often have very limited financial resources and most contributions are in kind.**
- ✓ **Linking project activities with official GoV programs is one way to mobilize greater institutional partner resources.**

2.5. Selecting beneficiaries

- ✓ **Beneficiary selection is often a sensitive issue requiring substantial discussion with (and capacity building of) local GoV partners. This ideally should not be rushed during the project design phase, but incorporated into a quality baseline survey at the start of the project. Current project timeframes make this difficult and encourage approaches of working with the more accessible rather than most vulnerable, communities.**
- ✓ **Due to a lack of knowledge and skills, most local partners tend to select beneficiaries on the basis of poverty criteria rather than vulnerability and capacity criteria. Capacity building in transparent and accountable beneficiary selection processes are an important part of project implementation and necessary to manage the risk of local corruption and manipulation of the use of project resources.**

3. PROGRAMMING FOR DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

3.1. Improving efficiency and impact

- ✓ **The limited duration and budgets of DIPECHO projects suggests that projects with a narrow geographical focus working intensively with a small group of key partners are likely to be more efficient. However, DIPECHO partners observe the benefits of working in multiple locations for promoting cross learning and networking. Whilst this approach might be less efficient, its impact may be more sustainable.**
- ✓ **Whilst projects impacts have not yet been evaluated, preliminary assessments indicate that during the recent typhoons, disaster risk reduction efforts are better coordinated and disaster impacts were less in those communities where DIPECHO**

partners and other organizations have been working. Local authorities in these locations were better prepared.

- ✓ Projects which channeled resources directly to the communities (community managed preparedness and mitigation works) reported efficient local management of funds and sustainable local impact.

3.2. Promoting sustainability

- ✓ Detailed project design processes must be participatory and be based on local assessments (partner capacity assessments, community HVCA, etc). Respecting local differences and linking projects with longer term socio-economic development plans will enhance impact and potential for sustainability.
- ✓ The skills and knowledge imparted by DIPECHO projects can be effectively mainstreamed into commune and district level disaster management planning. Mitigation plans, strategies and activities developed under projects have been incorporated into district level planning to ensure that the community based approach is maintained and that mitigation works that cannot be funded by the project are prioritized for future government funding.
- ✓ Training in participatory methods and HVCA are likely to continue to be used by local partners and communities for DRR and broader development planning. It is important to include several phases of training in project implementation - introductory and refresher training with follow-up support - if impacts are to be sustained. *DIPECHO might consider making small grants to local partners at the completion of projects to continue this work.*

3.3. Integrating DRR into sustainable development

- ✓ This is easier said than done! However, it is feasible to integrate DRR into local level planning (community, commune, and occasionally district level) within the limitations of DIPECHO projects (duration and budget). Greater integration within more macro planning (province, national levels) is perhaps best achieved through coordinated advocacy.
- ✓ Important to recognise that reducing community and family level vulnerability to disaster enables people to focus more on development rather than on recovery.
- ✓ DIPECHO partners recognise the importance of developing sustainable financial services and credit mechanisms for the most vulnerable to compliment DRR activities (coping capacity) and promote opportunities for sustainable livelihoods.
- ✓ Through planning, implementing and evaluating DIPECHO projects, DIPECHO partners improve their own skills for integrating DRR into other relief, rehabilitation and sustainable development projects.

3.4. Promoting ownership and empowerment

- ✓ Linking training to resources and the delivery of very practical disaster mitigation works is an effective way of motivating people to become involved.
- ✓ The highly participatory approaches used for training, planning and implementation of project activities has directly benefited communities, and particularly women, in ensuring that their voice is heard when making decisions about resources that affect their livelihoods.

3.5. Poverty alleviation and DRR

- ✓ Whilst there are clear linkages between poverty and vulnerability to disasters, DIPECHO projects focus on DRR and poverty alleviation is not directly targeted. However, indirect benefits of DRR for poverty alleviation can be exploited where DIPECHO projects support community planned and implemented mitigation

works (e.g. water catchment protection, irrigation system improvement, constructing or strengthening inter-village roads and bridges, storm resilient housing, etc). These mitigation works support improved livelihoods for households now, and are a valuable risk management investment for the future.

3.6. Effective advocacy / policy feedback

- ✓ **DIPECHO sponsored ‘consultations’ (e.g. NCM) are important events for policy debate and feedback for DRR stakeholders in Vietnam. Direct donor involvement in national / regional advocacy activities tends to support better quality outputs and more effective participation than other regionally programmed advocacy activities.**
- ✓ **DIPECHO projects can successfully promote CBDRM approaches to policy makers, and integrate lessons learnt into the next National Strategy on Disaster Risks Management to 2020. However, effective national level advocacy needs to be pursued on the basis of a clear advocacy strategy in synergy with donors.**
- ✓ **There is significant un-tapped potential for advocacy on DRR which can be exploited by adequately resourcing and coordinating DIPECHO partners.**
- ✓ **Enhancing local capacity for, and promoting, grass roots democracy is important for establishing a credible basis for effective dialogue with stakeholders, relevant Government agencies and key individuals on DRR.**

5. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *DIPECHO consider supporting longer term projects or phased interventions (2-3 year commitment) ideally with a discrete funded design phase. This would better enable DIPECHO partners to: i) engage in participatory design and conduct timely partner assessments; ii) build local partner capacity; iii) integrate DRR into local planning; and iv) plan and implement more ambitious collective advocacy campaigns.*
2. *DIPECHO partners should seek to focus DIPECHO projects (and DRR activities in general) in areas where they intend to maintain a longer term presence and seek to mainstream DRR into sustainable development approaches.*
3. *DIPECHO and DIPECHO partners should plan and resource a coordinated campaign to promote CBDRM to the GoV during the 5th DIPECHO Action Plan for SE Asia*
4. *DIPECHO should allocate additional common resources targeting the capacity building of DIPECHO partners: i) for standardized training for all key partners on HVCA; ii) for the training of key personnel on donor requirements, particularly on reporting and participatory M&E; iii) for training on advocacy; iv) for more formal DIPECHO partner networks including cross project visits and exchanges, particularly for M&E; and iv) for standardizing IEC materials.*
5. *DIPECHO should consider supporting projects to maintain a small disaster response contingency fund to support disaster assessment and initial response if required. This small amount of funds could be dispersed as grants to local partners for ongoing HVCA training after project completion, if not utilized for emergency assessment / response during the project implementation phase.*
6. *Timing of DIPECHO project approval and commencement should be coordinated so as to not coincide with the Christmas, Tet, and Vietnam storm season period. Ideally projects would commence in March / April.*
7. *The issue of DRR and poverty alleviation needs to be considered within the 5th Action Plan for SE Asia. There is significant potential for greater project impact and sustainability from better integrating project DRR activities into local GoV poverty reduction development plans. Partners' experiences would also suggest that livelihood support and possibly credit / financial services to the most vulnerable should be considered.*