



HOMES & COMMUNITIES

Building Safe Homes and Communities: Vietnam

Vision: Improving the resilience of communities vulnerable to climate-change-related impacts in Vietnam by integrating programming for safe and dignified homes and communities into community-based disaster risk management.



In her new disaster-resilient home, Dang Thi Tam's fear of flooding has receded, and she and her family now have a safe mezzanine floor to escape to if necessary. Rain leaked through the walls of her previous house, making the winters bitterly cold.

Photo by Giang Pham

Context

Vietnam ranks among the five countries most affected by natural disasters and climate change. Its location in one of the world's five main cyclone-prone regions, and its environmental and geographical features, contribute to significant damage to life and assets.

On average, nearly 300 people died or went missing each year due to natural disasters in Vietnam over the past 30 years, and economic losses amounted to about 1 to 1.5% of GDP annually, according to the National Steering Committee for Natural Disaster Prevention and Control. Shelter is one of the sectors most affected by disasters, with an average of 1,364 houses collapsing and 115,818 being partially destroyed or unroofed each year over the past five years.

Opportunity

Among government and humanitarian agencies working in disaster risk response, the Community-based Disaster Risk Management (CBDRM) program is considered one of the most important long-term programs in Vietnam helping communities prepare for natural disasters. A government program, CBDRM is known locally as National Program 553 and was known as Program 1002 from 1999 to 2020. The new name reflects updates that include resilient shelter elements, for which CRS has been supporting efforts to ensure nationwide scaling. Given that there were no practical, specific and standardized guidelines for the shelter sector that covered all recovery phases, in 2021, CRS and the Vietnam Disaster Management Authority co-produced the *Community-led Housing Preparedness, Recovery & Reconstruction Guidelines*.



Dang Thi Tam in the kitchen of her new disaster-resilient home.
Photo by Giang Pham



“I was too focused on our struggles ... but now I can dream again, for my son and for myself.

Dang Thi Tam
CRS project participant,
Quang Nam, Vietnam

Story of impact

‘I never imagined I would live in a house like this’

In the quiet village where Dang Thi Tam lives in Vietnam’s Quang Nam province, life has been a tapestry of hardship and perseverance. After the death of her husband, Tam dedicated her life to caring for her family, including her youngest son, born in 1970, who has been bedridden for the past five years due to a severe stroke. With her health declining, the challenges of providing care and maintaining her small household can be overwhelming.

Their cramped 24-square-meter home was a constant source of discomfort. The harsh afternoon sun turned their living quarters into an oven. In the rainy season, water seeped through the walls, making winters bitterly cold. The kitchen, which doubled as their living area, was damp, especially during the storms that threatened to collapse their fragile shelter.

With CRS support and the diligent efforts of local leaders in the province, Tam’s home underwent a transformation. The bathroom was relocated, freeing up space for a small yard where her daughter-in-law can grow vegetables. New tiles brighten the floors, making the home feel fresh and inviting.

The changes didn’t just improve the family’s living conditions; they brought a renewed sense of dignity and comfort to Tam. Now, during storms, she and her son can retreat to a safe room. Their fear of flooding has receded, and they now have a safe mezzanine floor to escape to if necessary. Tam acknowledges that the support she received was pivotal in turning her life around.

With ongoing collaboration between CRS and local authorities, the project continues to expand, helping families like Tam’s find hope and stability. As she sits in her new kitchen, a space that once felt impossible to achieve, Tam embodies resilience. She has transformed not just her home, but her outlook on life.

CRS and Partner Response

Objectives

As a leading agency implementing disaster-resilient shelter programming in Vietnam, and with a strong working partnership with the Vietnam Disaster and Dyke Management Authority (VDDMA) in community-based disaster risk management over many years, CRS aims to embed safe and dignified homes and communities into its CBDRM programming. This initiative is being implemented in representative geographical areas of Vietnam from 2022 to 2026. Through the program, best practices in housing preparedness, recovery and reconstruction will be institutionalized by the Government of Vietnam, positively impacting millions of people whose homes are at risk of natural disasters.

Activities

- In 2021, CRS, with support from the Homes and Communities Strategic Change Platform, co-produced with VDDMA the *Community-led Housing Preparedness, Recovery & Reconstruction Guidelines*. The guidelines, adjusted for the local culture and practices of the three regions of Vietnam most susceptible to disaster, represent a significant step toward standardizing shelter guidelines.
- In 2023 and 2024, building on its previous learning in Central Vietnam, CRS has been working with local governments to roll out and apply the guidelines while creating a feedback and learning loop through the national CBDRM technical group to strengthen the process and approach for each geographic area.
- Within the “Community-awareness raising and community-based natural disaster risk management, with a vision to 2030” program, 345 sub-national natural disaster prevention and control staff from multi-government agencies at different levels have been trained as trainers on the technical shelter guidelines. They will be key to rolling out shelter knowledge and support at the community level.

Le Van Thuong, a local technical support representative, guides a project participant as she selects the most cost-effective typhoon- and flood-resilient shelter techniques and materials to strengthen the roof of her home.

Photo by Lisa Murray





Homes & Communities Strategic Change Platform

As a part of its Vision 2030 agency strategy, Catholic Relief Services has undertaken a transformational shift from a focus on shelter and settlement—the building of roofs and walls—to homes and communities, the foundation on which life rests. CRS is committed to achieving transformational systems-level change to reach 10 million people affected by crisis and enable them to live in safe and dignified homes and communities through its two-pronged approach:

- Expanding CRS programming reach
- Bringing about systems-level change

Le Thi Phuoc sits in her home in Dien Phuoc commune in Quang Nam province. She now has a better quality of life thanks to her home's improved roof and reinforced mezzanine section.

Photo by Lisa Murray

Looking ahead

Sustainability and a transition to resilience, with an emphasis on local leadership, were central to the design of this initiative. CRS fosters a collaborative community platform, deliberately integrating interventions into existing systems, structures and institutional arrangements rather than creating parallel, activity-specific frameworks.

As a key aspect of the transition and exit strategy, strengthening a culture of resilience involves communities and governments recognizing the value of resilient homes and communities, and fostering a shared sense of responsibility for resilience-building. This initiative will work to align political priorities with those of local communities, promote good practices, and share success stories from the community and provincial levels with national stakeholders and key decision-makers.

Working in partnership

CRS partners with the VDDMA to develop and build capacity for national training of trainers. These trainers will lead the rollout of capacity building and the implementation of shelter guidelines across sub-national NDPC committees throughout Vietnam.

As a core member of the Shelter Working Group in Vietnam—which includes government agencies and consortium partners such as the American Red Cross/Vietnam Red Cross, Plan International, Save the Children and HelpAge International—CRS Vietnam promotes the replication of good practices and innovations in various geographic areas to reach larger or different population groups. National and sub-national NDPC committees, alongside peer agencies, will start replicating the good practices or innovation demonstrated and promoted by CRS to enhance shelter resilience across the country.



CRS in Vietnam

Since opening an office in Hanoi in 1994, CRS has empowered communities in Vietnam to live more sustainable, resilient and inclusive lives. CRS works in close partnership with government agencies at all levels, as well as other organizations, to serve vulnerable people in 11 provinces of the country.

Key programming areas include disaster risk reduction and management, climate change adaptation and mitigation, mine action, and inclusive services for people with disabilities. In 2023 alone, CRS Vietnam supported 720,000 people directly and 2 million people indirectly.



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