LEARNING BRIEF

A Journey of Partnership and Capacity Strengthening with the Government of Vietnam

FIFTEEN PERCENT OF VIETNAMESE CITIZENS HAVE ONE OR MORE DISABILITIES. THESE INCLUDE PHYSICAL, MENTAL, AND EMOTIONAL DISABILITIES, MANY ASSOCIATED WITH THE DEVASTATING WARS OF THE 1960S AND 70S. WHILE THERE IS A STRONG TRADITION IN VIETNAM OF CARING FOR PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, STIGMA IS SEVERE AND THESE INDIVIDUALS HAVE BEEN WIDELY RELEGATED TO LIVES OF DEPENDENCY AND ISOLATION WITHIN THEIR FAMILIES.

IDENTIFYING A VITAL GAP IN DISABILITY SUPPORT

Fifteen percent of Vietnamese citizens have one or more disabilities.[i] These include physical, mental, and emotional disabilities, many associated with the devastating wars of the 1960s and 70s. While there is a strong tradition in Vietnam of caring for persons with disabilities, stigma is severe and these individuals have been widely relegated to lives of dependency and isolation within their families.

To foster full inclusion of people with disabilities, the Government of Vietnam established a strong national policy foundation in 2010 to guarantee equal and equitable rights, access, and inclusion of all citizens. These policies are essential to full inclusion; however, the legal structure was neither widely understood nor optimally leveraged by the intended beneficiaries.

With home-based education support, a young girl practices reading. Her physical disabilities do not keep her from her schooling. Photo by CRS staff.

FORMING A PARTNERSHIP

Through its own internal assessment process, the Government of Vietnam identified a gap in its policy for inclusion and existing disability issues at the national level. Catholic Relief Services — which had already started to work on disability-related programming in Vietnam — approached the government in 1997 to discuss a potential pilot project. To bridge the gaps between theory and practice — and the national policy and the local reality — CRS facilitated adaptation of a bottom-up "working group approach" that the Agency first successfully employed in peacebuilding programming in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

This working group approach is rooted in the understanding that those most affected by a challenge are best-positioned to address that challenge. The working group engages a cross-section of local society and leadership who influence and/or are affected by a situation to identify and steer development interventions. The highly participatory groups help lead grassroots implementation, the success and limitations of which inform policy development and learning. Subsequent implementation efforts advance the cycle (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The working group approach cycle

Learning

Implementation

Policy development
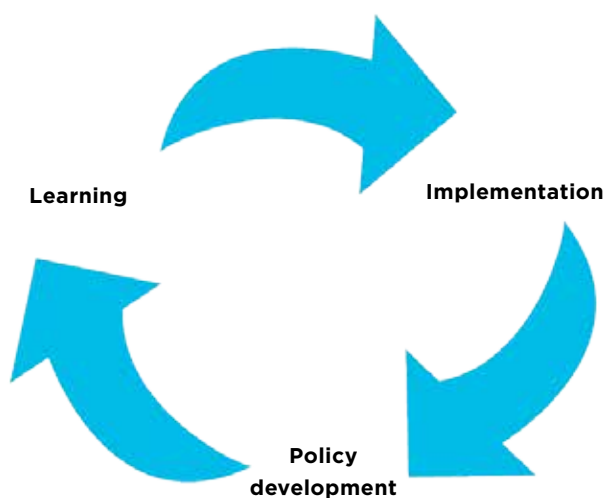
These pilots are critical because they help connect actual needs with innovative practices to address them, provide evidence to inform national policies, and bridge the gap between legislation and implementation. They also help ensure that the implementation is technically sound; policymakers are rarely technical experts and even if the legislation is well-informed, a great degree of technical expertise is needed after a mandate is issued (e.g., to design an inclusive curriculum, train educators, develop pre-service curriculum and education, etc.).

WIDE-RANGING APPLICATIONS

CRS has partnered with the Government of Vietnam to fully implement and continuously strengthen its policies regarding people with disabilities since 1995. Together, the Agency and local, provincial, and national government bodies in Vietnam work to fully engage people with disabilities in the realms of education, meaningful employment, and social inclusion. In the two decades since first employing the working group approach in Vietnam, the CRS country program has successfully expanded use of the approach in more than a dozen projects across five lines of programming (see box), and effectively piloted interventions that have been scaled up across the country and have deeply informed national policy.

Lines of Programming

1. Inclusion of people with disabilities

2. Strengthening community-based parent associations

3. Mine risk education and victim assistance

4. Health system strengthening network model

5. Disaster risk reduction

PURPOSE OF THIS LEARNING PAPER

This learning paper seeks to document the effectiveness and implementation of the working group approach as applied across dozens of projects and five lines of programming in Vietnam. Readers can use this paper to consider if and how the working group approach could benefit their own activities.

The working group approach is highly customizable to its context and develops somewhat organically. However, several characteristics and knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSAs) appear to be critical to successful implementation.

This paper documents those for readers who decide to use the working group approach in their programming.

Mr. Luan (center) is a landmine victim. Mr. Hai (left) and Mr. Nam (right) suffer from disabilities caused by dioxin. They all attend a vocational training course and physical rehabilitation in Dong Ha, Quang Tri. Photo by Alberto Andretta/CRS.

METHODOLOGY

In response to a request from CRS' Vietnam office, the Agency's Partnership and Capacity Strengthening unit provided technical and financial support to a structured learning exercise that informed the development of this paper. A desk review of standard project documents (e.g., technical reports) and relevant literature was conducted. Through dialogue with stakeholders from the CRS Vietnam country program, learning questions were identified (see below) and participatory research (see box) was planned for and conducted in April 2015. CRS deliberately engaged a range of stakeholders and actors from the Vietnam working group process to identify, collect, and interpret heterogeneous data through a series of individual conversations and group discussions.

Previously agreed-upon learning questions (also called a "learning agenda") guided and structured the entire process for data collection and interpretation.

LEARNING AGENDA

1. Identify and describe features, drivers, milestones, and required KSAs of CRS' multi-year partnership with the Government of Vietnam.

2. Identify and describe milestones, barriers, and enablers with regards to the sustainability of the changes achieved by CRS in partnership with the Government of Vietnam.

3. Identify and describe ways in which the partnership was leveraged to increase sustainability.

4. Identify and describe the main initiatives and investments in partnership and capacity strengthening.

5. Identify and describe instances of more equitable access to decision-making, resources, and administrative processes, and of more equitable standards (outputs) or outcomes.

II. RESULTS OF THE WORKING GROUP APPROACH IN VIETNAM

The working group approach has been the foundation of much of CRS' work in Vietnam since 1997 and has yielded profound, often systemic results in program areas ranging from inclusive education to climate-based disaster risk reduction. So far:

- Ten thousand teachers have been trained in inclusive education.

- An estimated 500,000 children with disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools.

- International-standard computer training facilities have been established in three higher education institutions; more than 60 percent of 1,400 IT graduates are employed in the field

- More than 140,000 children and 79,000 teachers, parents, and community members have been trained in mine risk education

- A network model of comprehensive care for vulnerable children is included in Vietnam's National Plan of Action for Children (2011–2015) and is benefitting 2,200 children in eight provinces

- Twelve community-based mangrove forest protection groups have been established through collaboration with local partners. The plantation of mangroves is expected to benefit 80,000 individuals in two high-risk provinces.

- 45 parent associations have been strengthened to support more than 1,500 children with disabilities to access to education, health and other rehabilitation services in three provinces.

In Vietnam, the working group approach has served as a laboratory for pilot projects that have expanded nationally and influenced national policy. For example, CRS' Network Model for health system strengthening originated as part of a 2008 response to barriers to care experienced by children infected or affected by HIV and their caregivers. At the request of the Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA), the model was soon expanded to include children made vulnerable by other circumstances (e.g., children with disabilities and landmine survivors). MOLISA also included the Network Model in the government's National Plan of Action for Children (2011–2015) and a related government decision asked all provinces to pilot the model in their context. Additionally, CRS trainings evolved into curricula serving more than 3,000 social work students (Network Model), 500 primary schools (mine risk education), and more than 3,700 primary school students (disaster risk reduction).

III. THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY OF THE WORKING GROUP APPROACH

Just as an individual exists within an ecosystem, so do communities and organizations. To make lasting, system-wide change, all facets and levels of the system must be considered and engaged appropriately. While priorities and activities can vary widely, CRS' historical observations and decades of first-hand experience have reinforced the Agency's position that communities and their institutions transform unjust systems and structures. This has been a defining trait of CRS' operating model since the Agency's establishment in 1943 and is consistent with the concept of Integral Human Development in Catholic social teaching.

The working group approach aligns seamlessly with Integral Human Development by helping to foster local community ownership of and participation in programs. The innovative working group approach has received mainstream recognition and acceptance in the field of international development by donors, NGOs, and private partners[1].

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1 The USAID publication *Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development* (2014) is one of the later examples of this wide alignment to the original and holistic insight of the working group approach.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS ARE BEST PLACED TO ADDRESS SITUATIONS OF STRUCTURAL POVERTY AND INJUSTICE, AND, AS SUCH, STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF THESE INSTITUTIONS WILL HAVE A DIRECT BENEFIT IN THE WELLBEING OF THE COMMUNITIES THEY SERVE.

Thien Thi Phan, a farmer from central Vietnam, leads a community discussion about clean water at a CRS training. After the training, Thien will share the information she learned with neighbors who could not attend. Photo by CRS staff.

IV. KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND BENEFITS OF THE WORKING GROUP APPROACH

MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Working groups are comprised of a cross-section of local society and community leadership. They create a space for transparency, accountability, and dialogue, and they essentially steer critical program elements. Representatives from multiple sectors and levels come together around issues of mutual interest or concern. The group is highly participatory by design. It is not just a consultative or advisory body. Working group members are actors and owners and the partnerships are founded on right relationships.

CRS defines partnership as the many forms of collaboration that enhance a community's ability to respond to its own problems. For CRS, partnership is founded on a long-term vision and a mutual commitment to peace and justice.[ii]

CRS' Partnership Principles

- **Shared vision**
- **Subsidiarity**
- **Mutuality and respect**
- **Commitment**
- **Community ownership**
- **Capacity building**
- **Sustainability**

During the learning exercise research, interviewees expressed appreciation for CRS' specific style of partnership, describing it, in their own words, as:

- respectful and humble
- engaged, supportive and responsive
- friendly and professional
- equitable, accountable and transparent
- mutual listening and learning, and open and direct communication
- nimble and adaptable in program implementation
- operational through accompaniment and coaching: CRS does not act simply as a donor, but shares the same commitment to beneficiaries and is willing to accompany partner in implementation of project (i.e., baseline surveys designed and conducted jointly between partner and CRS)

ENABLING TRANSPARENCY AND RESPONSIVENESS

The presence of local leadership throughout such sensitive processes ensures an additional measure of security for CRS. Activities are openly and honestly guided by the decisions of local actors (community members, civil society, and local government), thereby reducing the risk to CRS of accusations that it is forcing through a particular agenda or program.

Through these processes, community members can intimately see the transparency of project work, the unbiased nature of CRS programming (e.g., beneficiary targeting), and ultimately, the impressive results. This experience has greatly contributed to long-standing and trusting relationships between government officials of all levels and CRS.

These young men are participating in a distance-learning course to gain marketable IT skills. Photo by CRS staff.

CREATING CIVIC INFRASTRUCTURE

In the spirit of partnership, working groups provide a platform and an audience for perspectives that may not otherwise be available. Marginalized people gain a voice, and those in power (e.g., government) have access to beneficiaries and constituents that they might not otherwise reach (e.g., with information about new rights or available services). Working groups are not solely for advocacy, however. They promote multi-directional and multi-sectoral communication, coordination and decision-making. Working groups also promote direct, tangible services whether delivered through government or INGO programs.

Once established and functioning, working groups should be adapted for other activities (CRS or otherwise). The groups create a space for and habit of collaboration and right relationships — a "civic infrastructure" that may not otherwise exist.

V. SELECT FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

SHARED COMMITMENT

Working group participants should represent a wide range of populations and interests. Sometimes these interests may be at odds. A measure of "venting" is permitted, but the working group is meant to be a tool for unification around shared priorities.

In Vietnam, this shared and explicit commitment to vulnerable populations proved to be essential. The commitment provides a solid platform from which the partnership operates, clarifies, and evolves.

COMMUNICATION AND UNDERSTANDING

Interviewees expressed frustrations with a range of processes and requirements faced through project implementation. Several of these are rooted in donor requirements (particularly U.S. government agencies) that are more stringent than local partners (government or civil society) may be familiar with. Because compliance is frequently a condition of funding, it is important that CRS capacity strengthening efforts help partners meet relevant requirements. Additionally, CRS should help partners understand where the requirements come from and why they exist.

TECHNICAL EXPERTISE

Interviewees placed high value on CRS' technical expertise, as it applies to advocacy, policy development, capacity strengthening of various stakeholders and program implementation. The constellation of partners in Vietnam ranges from nascent civil society organizations (CSOs) to well-established national government agencies, and each has essential perspective and expertise. CRS' role is always to complement and enhance existing capacity; never to co-op or replace a local body.

VI. LINES OF PROGRAMMING

The working group approach is inherently adaptable and can be applied to any number of program areas and local contexts. For two decades, CRS and the Government of Vietnam have found the approach valuable in promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities, ensuring efficient and effective delivery of social services to people with disabilities and vulnerable children, reducing risk from and assisting victims of landmines and unexploded ordinance (UXO), and helping communities prepare for and mitigate damage from natural disasters.

CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

An estimated 12.75 million Vietnamese citizens have one or more disabilities.i Adults and children with disabilities remain among the most disadvantaged groups in Vietnamese society and face enormous challenges accessing education, vocational training, and employment opportunities. Only 25 percent of children with disabilities complete primary school (compared to 75 percent overall) and the rates for secondary school enrollment and completion are also much lower than the national average. Even more dramatically, only two percent of people with disabilities have access to vocational training. Underscoring these statistics is a lingering underestimation — among individuals, families, and communities — of economic and social contributions to be made by people with disabilities in Vietnam.

Four-year-old Yen Nhi participates in a home-based teaching program in Cam Lo, Quang Tri. Photo by Alberto Andretta/CRS.

CIVIL SOCIETY: AN UNDER-UTILIZED RESOURCE

Civil society can help link individuals and families affected by disabilities by raising awareness of the rights of and opportunities available to persons and children with disabilities, encouraging uptake of inclusion-related services, supporting families and communities as they expand their understanding of what people with disabilities are capable of, and enabling people with disabilities and their families to voice their needs and concerns to government. Unfortunately, CSOs in Vietnam face organizational challenges including poor linkages among CSOs (e.g., among organizations for individuals with disabilities, associations for parents of children with disabilities, and government); low organizational capacity that would help them better access resources, fulfill their missions, and garner a "seat at the table" with policymakers; and insufficient awareness of CSOs and commitment to CSOs on behalf of local government.

MITIGATING CURRENT DANGERS FROM PAST WARS

Landmines and unexploded ordinances contaminate as much as 15 percent of Vietnam. Landmines and UXO claimed an estimated 105,000 civilian victims in Vietnam between 1975 and 2007.[iii] These lethal explosives are especially concentrated in six central provinces that once straddled both sides of the former divide between what was North and South Vietnam, and are most-often encountered when people are farming, grazing livestock, or collecting scrap metal for cash. Children are especially vulnerable because of their involvement in these ventures, their naiveté of the risks, and because they are typically smaller than the adults these weapons were designed to harm.

COMPREHENSIVE CARE FOR VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Vietnam possesses health and education systems that are largely functional and staffed by capable professionals who can provide and manage a range of quality services. The government provides multiple resources to supplement poor and otherwise vulnerable children and their caregivers, and numerous organizations provide complementary

Worsening seasonal rains and floods can devastate a family living close to the margins. With disaster risk reduction interventions, households can grow more resilient. Photo by CRS staff.

medical and social services. Despite these important resources, low awareness, stigma (particularly associated with HIV), and poor coordination among service providers make it difficult for vulnerable children to access these vital programs. Poor coordination has resulted in some children receiving double services with others being left completely out of the system.

PREPARING FOR UNAVOIDABLE NATURAL DISASTERS

Vietnam has more than 3.5 thousand kilometers of coastline and 70 percent of the country's population is exposed to environmental hazards and natural disasters. In some of the most vulnerable areas, large portions of the population are classified as very poor, earning a sparse living surviving by small-scale farming, raising cattle, and fishing. Many houses can barely withstand seasonal rains and floods, and have been washed away during extreme weather events such as the 2006 Xang Sane storm that destroyed about 30,000 houses or 2009's Ketsana that damaged 1,500 houses in one district. Severe rains and floods also kill and injure citizens, damage crops, and destroy livestock. Erosion and abrupt salinity reduce the amount of arable land available for sustenance or profit. These events threaten vulnerable households and communities that already live close to the margins, undermining food and financial security, and breaking up families.

A COMMON DISCONNECT BETWEEN POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION

Vietnam has well-established laws and policies responding to each of these challenges. Such authorizations are essential precursors to social change, yet too often the structures are neither fully understood nor optimally leveraged by the intended beneficiaries. Local or provincial governments — where, arguably, change is the most critical — may lack full understanding of the national policy and the technical and financial resources to effectively enact the policies. Furthermore, while civil society has the potential to be a vital partner, government and civil society do not always have experience working together. The working group approach has helped to develop and nurture these relationships.

Selections from Vietnam's Robust Policy Foundation

- **Law on Disability (2010) and Decree on Disability Law Execution (2012) provide a broad legal framework to ensure social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities.**

- **MOET Decision 23 (2006) and the National Disabled Law (2010) speak to the role and rights of disabled people in Vietnamese society.**

- **MOLISA Decree 67 (2009) entitles eligible poor households to receive a minimum monthly stipend and free basic medical care, makes health insurance free for children under six.**

- **National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention, Response and Mitigation to 2020 (2007) and the Law on Natural Disaster Preparedness and Prevention (2013) provide advanced strategies and programs for disaster risk reduction and mitigating the impact of climate change.**

- **National Target Plan for Climate Change (2008) focused largely on adaptation of previous laws.**

- **Decision No. 1002/QD-TTg (2009) enables community awareness-raising and community-based disaster risk management.**

Line of Programming 1: Inclusion of People with Disabilities

DURATION:	1997 TO PRESENT
Goal:	To facilitate the full participation of person with disabilities in all facets of life by ensuring equal access to education and employment and the enforcement of disability legislation at all levels to reaffirm VWD's rights to present their own needs and interests.
Partners:	**Government of Vietnam: National Level** • Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) • Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) • National Coordination Committee of Disability (NCCD) **Civil Society, National Level** • Vietnamese National Institute of Educational Sciences (VNIES) • Vietnam Federation for Disabilities (VFD) • Vietnamese universities **Government of Vietnam: Provincial, District, and Local Levels** • People's Committees • Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) • Department of Education and Training (DOET) **Civil Society, Provincial, District, and Local Levels:** • Organizations of Persons with Disabilities (DPOs)
Donors:	• Caritas Australia • CRS • Irish Aid • Private donors • USAID

POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Public institutions such as schools or social programs cannot take large-scale action without formal guidance. CRS provides technical support to central, provincial, and district-level government in developing and rolling out government policies supporting the role and rights of disabled people in Vietnamese society. Furthermore, CRS and a range of government bodies work closely to identify areas in which these policies require revision or enhancement to better serve the citizenry.

POLICY INTO PRACTICE

At provincial and district levels, CRS has helped to train and sensitize those responsible for turning national law into a local reality. CRS has helped to raise awareness of new policies among local government authorities, and to translate the new policies into practice. For example, CRS has worked with government and civic leaders to build local capacity to support individuals with disabilities and their families, and to roll-out inclusive education in schools.

CRS interventions also target educators and other decision-makers to change perceptions and expectations of people with disabilities. CRS has developed curricula and trained teachers in inclusive education and management for their classrooms, and works with public- and private-sector partners to facilitate meaningful employment of people with disabilities. CRS is helping to further reduce barriers to higher education and employment by making appropriate assistive technology available in both settings.

CIVIL SOCIETY ENGAGEMENT

Organizations for persons with disabilities (DPOs) and other civil society organizations play important roles in raising awareness of the rights of and opportunities available to their members. DPOs can encourage uptake of inclusion-related services, support families and communities as they expand their understanding of what people with disabilities are capable of, and enable them to voice their needs and concerns to government. To this end, CRS supports the establishment of strengthens the capacity of civil society partners.

Line of Programming 2: Strengthening Community-Based Parent Associations

DURATION:	2010 TO PRESENT
Goal:	To strengthen the voice of people with disabilities in local government policy dialogue and promote acceptance and empowerment of people with disabilities in their communities.
Partners:	**Government of Vietnam: National Level** **Civil Society, National Level:** Federation of People with Disabilities (VFD) **Government of Vietnam: Provincial, District, and Local Levels** **Civil Society, Provincial, District, and Local Levels:** Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs)
Donors:	• CRS • Caritas Australia • Irish Aid

Recognizing that strengthened capacity among VFD, DPOs, and parent's associations — coupled with linkages between VFD and DPO members, and between parent associations and DPOs — will help improve services and thus quality of life for adults and children with disabilities, CRS supports the establishment and strengthens the capacity of civil society partners.

CRS is supporting the establishment and strengthening of six district-level DPOs and 12 district level associations of parents with children with disabilities (CWD PAs). Efforts also will link DPOs and CWD PAs to ensure that PWD grassroots voices are heard, and that relevant policy implementation and social service programs reflect and respond to their rights and needs.

These initiatives and engagement of DPOs with provincial and district government will help ensure effective implementation of the National Action Plan for PWD support phase 2012-2020, and ensure that resources from the budget are allocated to support the expressed needs and preferences of PWD in targeted areas.

Line of Programming 3: Mine Risk Education & Victim Assistance

DURATION:	2000 TO PRESENT
Goal:	To reduce the impact and risk of injury and death from UXO/landmines in high-risk communities in three provinces.
Partners:	**Government of Vietnam: Provincial, District, and Local Levels** • Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) • Department of Education and Training (DOET) • District People's Committees **Civil Society, Provincial, District, and Local Levels** • Provincial Youth Union • Provincial People's Committees • Parents Associations of Children with Disabilities (PAs) • Organizations of People with Disabilities (DPOs)
Donors:	• Weapons Removal and Abatement (WRA) of the U.S. State Department • Caritas Australia • CRS

While mine-removal operations are underway, CRS works to mitigate the impact of landmines and UXOs in targeted regions through:

- Victim assistance: Facilitating needs-based, community-level services for survivors, to address medical and emotional needs and to ensure that they are reintegrated into the communities (e.g., through social, educational, and/or employment opportunities)

- Risk education: Improving the knowledge of students (grades one through five) about landmine and UXO risk to prevent additional injuries and deaths.

The theory of change is direct: If students and communities are educated about mine risks and if survivors have increased access to comprehensive

social services, communities will see fewer explosive-related incidents and those affected will have an improved quality of life.

DOETs in the three, targeted provinces have approved the CRS-developed MRE curriculum (for grades one through five) and the curriculum is widely used. More than 500 primary schools in the targeted provinces have used the guidelines for integration of UXO/MRE in schools' compulsory curricula, and more than 140,000 children and 79,000 teachers, parents, and community members trained. These efforts contributed to a substantial drop in UXO/mine casualties in targeted areas: from 53 in 2012 to 37 in 2013.[2]

The tailored support for victims is centered on a needs assessment and referral mapping (of service providers) conducted by community-based workers who are trained by CRS in partnership with provincial and district-level DOLISAs and commune-level People's Committees. The projects are expected to have 5,000 beneficiaries.

Line of Programming 4: Health System Strengthening Network Model

DURATION:	2008 TO PRESENT
Goal:	To establish networks among and trained service providers, effective referral systems, and improved comprehensive care for children in special situations (also called "vulnerable children") in central Vietnam.
Partners:	**Government of Vietnam: National Level** • Ministry of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) • University of Labor, Invalid, and Social Affairs—Social Work Faculty **Government of Vietnam: Provincial, District, and Local Levels:** Department of Labor, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) **Civil Society, Provincial, District, and Local Levels:** Parents Associations of Children with Disabilities (PAs) and Organizations of People with Disabilities (DPOs)
Donors:	• CRS • Rauenhorst Foundation • UNICEF • USAID (sub grant via Pact)

CRS' Network Model originated in response to barriers to care experienced by children infected or affected by HIV and their caregivers. At MOLISA's request, it soon expanded to also include children made vulnerable by other circumstances such as disabilities and landmine survivors. The Network Model encourages various government agencies to come together to meet the holistic needs of each individual child, and shifts the response paradigm from public health-focused HIV programming to a social work approach.

The theory of change underpinning the model posits that with the appropriate policy tools in place at the national level, and with the appropriate provincial-level training in holistic care for children, vulnerable children will be able to better access the services they need, thus improving their quality of life.

To implement the Network Model, CRS provides technical assistance

2 Source: Data from Clear Path International/Vietnam

and advice to DOLISA, which coordinates among existing local service providers of six core service areas — health, nutrition, education, psychosocial, legal and shelter — to ensure holistic support for children with multiple needs. DOLISA acts as the main implementing agency. The CRS Network Model uses a case management approach, in which local social affairs staff interact directly with children and families to assess their needs and connect them to available community-based services. At the community level, the overall well-being of each child can be considered in their home environment avoiding the necessity for institutional care. The overall Network Model establishes functional systems for assessment, analysis, referral, and follow-up for enrolled children.

Line of Programming 5: Disaster Risk Reduction

DURATION:	2011 TO PRESENT
Goal:	To strengthen Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Preparedness at community and school levels, and promote community-based climate change adaptation models and protection of environmental resources.
Partners:	**Government of Vietnam:** National Level **Civil Society, National Level** **Government of Vietnam:** Provincial, District, and Local Levels • People's Committee **Civil Society, Provincial, District, and Local Levels** • Provincial Climate Change Coordination Office (CCCO)
Donors:	• Caritas Australia • Margaret A. Cargill Foundation (MACF) • OFDA/USAID

CRS works with provincial and local authorities, and with communities to increase the resilience of disaster-prone central coastal communities to natural hazards by:

- Conducting capacity building through trainings-of-trainers with local government entities that then facilitate (with Village Task Force members) participatory planning with communities

- Supporting Village Task Force members to advocate for commune-level funding for disaster risk reduction needs

- Strengthening Community Based Disaster Risk Reduction Preparedness at the community and school levels

- Promoting community-based climate change adaptation models and protective environmental resources

Guiding this approach is CRS' theory of change: if public, private, and civil society bodies at the community level have sufficient disaster risk reduction (DRR) knowledge and skills, and collaborate to promote and widely apply community-based climate change adaptation models and protective environmental resources, then communities will be more resilient to natural disasters in the context of climate change.

At the household and community level, CRS supports a participatory process for DRR planning and promotes preparedness measures including disaster-resistant livelihood techniques and evacuation/response mock drills. CRS also supports the establishment of participatory community-based mangrove regeneration, protection, and maintenance efforts, and works to raise awareness on the long-term benefits of mangrove protection.

At the school level, CRS helped integrate DRR into primary teaching curricula and to train teachers and students in DRR issues.

Thien Thi Phan and Duong Thi Bach Nguyen, a CRS project officer, review a disaster preparedness plan. They worked with local government to establish evacuation sites, vulnerable households and fortify early warning systems. Photo by CRS staff.

VII. CONCLUSION

LOCAL SOLUTIONS, COUNTRY-WIDE RESULTS

CRS first successfully employed the working group approach in Bosnia-Herzegovina as part of peacebuilding efforts after the war. The approach is rooted in the understanding that those most affected by a challenge are best-positioned to address that challenge. Members of local society and leadership who influence and/or are affected by a situation help to identify and steer development interventions, and to lead grassroots implementation — the successes and limitations of which inform policy development and learning. Subsequent implementation efforts continue to advance the cycle of practice, learning and policy development.

In Vietnam, the working group approach has been the foundation of much of CRS' work since 1995, and has yielded profound, often systemic results across five lines of programming:

1. Inclusion of people with disabilities

2. Strengthening community-based parent associations

3. Mine risk education and victim assistance

4. Health system strengthening network model

5. Disaster risk reduction

As a direct result of the working group approach:

- International-standard computer training facilities have been established in three higher education institutions; 60–70 percent of these IT graduates are employed in the field

- More than 140,000 children and 79,000 teachers, parents, and community members have been trained in mine risk education

- A network model of comprehensive care for vulnerable children has been included in Vietnam's National Plan of Action for Children (2011–2015) to benefit 2,200 children in eight provinces

KEY CHARACTERISTICS AND BENEFITS

The working group approach is highly customized to its context and develops somewhat organically. However, by examining applications of the approach, CRS found some common characteristics and KSAs:

- Meaningful participation and partnerships among all working group members; they are actors and owners of the interventions in their communities.

- Enabling transparency and responsiveness helps an intervention effectively address the root cause of a challenge that is a priority to the community, and can enhance trusting relationships among disparate, even conflicting, stakeholders.

- Creating civic infrastructure; the working group approach creates a platform and an audience for perspectives that may be overlooked or marginalized. A working group established for one issue can and should be adapted for other challenges that may arise in the community.

- Groups are most successful when they share commitment, have effective communication and understanding, and *complement* rather than replace existing technical or institutional capacity.

LASTING EFFECTS AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

The working group approach and the related CRS-government partnership has generated important precursors for lasting change. The resulting programs are designed and implemented based on local assets and available systems, and have been expanded to serve other types of vulnerable populations.

CRS believes the working group approach has potential for further linkages and collaboration among different facets of communities, civil society, implementing agencies, and all levels of government partners. The relationships established may reveal additional opportunities for capacity strengthening (to include team and individual KSAs, organizational systems and structures, and accompaniment); capacity strengthening may be led by INGOs like CRS or by local bodies, as appropriate to each situation.

It is CRS' hope that other teams within the Agency, peer organizations, and government partners will consider drawing from the working group approach when engaging communities and governments to develop effective policies and programming.

[i]International Labor Organization, Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Viet Nam. (Hanoi, Vietnam, 2013).

[ii]Catholic Relief Services, Institutional strengthening: Building strong management practices. (Baltimore, MD, 2011).

[iii]S. S. Cordall, "Landmines still exacting a heavy toll on Vietnamese civilians," The Guardian. September 18 2012. http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/sep/18/vietnam-unexploded-landmines-bombs.