

CULTURAL HOUSES BECOME INCLUSIVE SHELTERS: EMPOWERING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN VIETNAM.

(P3763, Ninh Binh province, Vietnam)

Located in the mountainous area, Nho Quan district frequently suffers from natural hazards, especially floods. For example, in October 2017, a historic flood forced 15,000 people of project communes to leave their homes. Persons with disabilities are among people most affected by these hazards due to their lack of access to early warning information, evacuation efforts, and the supply of shelter and food. To tackle this challenge, since 2019, CBM has funded the project "Promotion of Disability – Inclusive and Disaster Prepared Communities in Nho Quan district, Ninh Binh province". The project has implemented by the Aid for Social Protection Programme Foundation in Vietnam (AFV) cooperated with the Nho Quan district. The project constructed several disaster risk reduction models. One of the models, which turned village cultural houses to shelters that are accessible to persons with disabilities, was highly appreciated and co-funded by local authorities.



Figure 1: The cultural house in Dong Choo village, Ky Phu commune before renovation

Six disability-inclusive natural disaster shelters have so far been established in three project communes. Culture houses were selected because they are known to everybody, they are close to village roads and often placed on a high ground. The houses are fully equipped with basic equipment for disaster preparedness such as loudspeakers, flashlights, generators, petrol saws, life jackets, flashlights, signal lights, and raincoats. Furthermore, people with disabilities, local communities and authorities highly value this model because of the following factors:

- *They enhance participation of stakeholders and persons with disabilities:* Throughout the construction of these shelters, the Organization of persons with disabilities (OPD) in Nho Quan district was involved as technical advisors to the Management Board and local authorities to ensure the accessibility for persons with disabilities. Before the shelter was handed over to local authorities, the Nho Quan OPD checked it on site to verify if the minimum standards of accessibilities are met.
- *They enhance accessibility of persons with disabilities:* All shelters' ramps for wheelchair users, navigation signs, exit signs, signal light, siren at location,



Figure 2: a Nho Quan OPD's member examined the ramp of shelter.

instructions and regulations posted in areas where persons with disabilities can easily access and learn.

- *They are sustainable:* As a culture house, the shelter is managed and maintained by local authorities. Therefore, after the project ends, its existing function as a cultural house, where villagers gather during village events, and its new function as a safe place during the occurrence of natural disasters, will last long. At the same time, local authorities showed their commitment by co-funding 20-25% of the total cost.

Owing to project activities and support from local authorities, many local people in general and persons with disabilities in particular in the three project communes shared that they felt safer when the rainy season came. Particularly, persons with disabilities were introduced and guided on how to use disaster risk reduction tools at home, how to signal, warn, escape, call for support when necessary. They would be able to access to safe places and actively protect themselves in case of storms and floods as well as other disasters.

With the support from the project, local authorities as well as local people, especially persons with disabilities have been highly proactive in preventing and mitigating natural disaster risks, no longer worrying about every rainy season, storm. The project contributes to minimizing economic and social damage to the localities. The project believes that the inclusive shelter model will be one of the bright spots of the project for replication in the future.

Ms. Dinh Thi Huong – a member of DPO Nho Quan said: *"As a member of the executive committee of Nho Quan OPD, I was trusted to participate in a training course on monitoring and evaluating disability-inclusive construction and a training course on making a to-do list for persons with disabilities in disaster risk reduction. After these training courses, DPO members and I immediately could apply the learned knowledge to make a list of criteria for disability-inclusive disaster constructions. Moreover, we supported the Management Board to consult the design agency on technical standards when building disability-inclusive construction. In the process of building and renovating the natural disaster shelters, I and some members of Nho Quan OPD monitored and evaluated the process. Any works that did not meet the standards were feedbacked for prompt adjustment. After the construction finalization, we carried out the acceptance test based on the state regulations as well as the accessibility criteria for persons with disabilities, the works that met the criteria would be signed by Nho Quan OPD before handing over for the locality".*



Figure 3: Ms Dinh Thi Huong - a Nho Quan OPD's member examined the accessibility of toilet at shelter.