

1 **Micro business participation in collective flood adaptation. Lessons from scenario-**  
2 **based analysis in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam**

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hat formatiert: Englisch (Vereinigte Staaten)

Feldfunktion geändert

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17  
18 **Abstract:**

19 Although research on the impacts of climate change on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs)  
20 and their adaptation to climate change risks has recently received more attention, the focus on micro  
21 and household businesses is still very limited. Micro and household businesses are adversely affected  
22 by compound flooding events - a situation that will become more acute in the future - but there is little  
23 attention in the scientific literature on their adaptation options and actual implementation. Against  
24 this background, the paper analyzes the following research questions: How are micro-businesses  
25 already responding to flooding? Are micro-businesses willing to collectively invest in future proactive  
26 adaptation efforts in their neighborhood? What are the key drivers and barriers to adaptation? Based  
27 on scenario-based field experiments in Ho-Chi-Minh City, our results show that micro-businesses could  
28 play a much larger role in collective adaptation. Often overlooked in adaptation research, their  
29 willingness to engage in collective action under severe constraints is surprising. The conceptual  
30 framework presented in this paper helps us to understand the key drivers and barriers of micro-  
31 businesses' willingness to participate in collective adaptation activities. The most important key  
32 barriers for micro-businesses are limited financial capacity and lack of support from local authorities.  
33 However, micro-businesses are willing to contribute depending on the concrete adaptation measure  
34 and financing options. If no financial contribution is expected, almost 70% are willing to participate in  
35 awareness raising campaigns. And although their financial capacity is very limited, 39% of micro-  
36 businesses would contribute financially if the costs were shared with other businesses in their  
37 neighborhood and with local authorities. In this context, micro-businesses should be much more  
38 involved in adaptation plans and measures. Through their local embeddedness, they can be important  
39 multipliers in strengthening adaptive capacity at the local level.

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41 Author contribution: Javier Revilla Diez and Matthias Garschagen develop the conceptual framework,  
42 Roxana Leitold designed the experiments and carried them out with Van Tran. Javier Revilla Diez  
43 prepared the manuscript with contributions from all co-authors.

44  
45 Competing interests: The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

## 47 1 Introduction

48 In many countries of the Global South micro businesses together with small and medium sized  
49 businesses build up the “economic and social fabric” (Chaudhury 2018). In an urban context they  
50 include individuals or households who are shopkeepers, run cafes, restaurants, or repair shops, offer  
51 transport and warehouse or construction and maintenance services, often located in the middle of  
52 residential neighborhoods. According to the UN (2015) these businesses are a key engine of job  
53 creation and responsible for more than 50% of total employment. However, these micro, small and  
54 medium sized businesses are facing tremendous challenges [with in](#) respect to climate change. A very  
55 illustrative example is Ho-Chi-Minh City (HCMC). HCMC is already facing manifold challenges due to  
56 regular flooding, which are projected to be aggravated by future climate change (Downes et al., 2016;  
57 Downes and Storch, 2014; Duy et al., 2018; Nicholls et al., 2007).

58 Although research on the impacts of climate change on small- and medium-sized firms (SMEs) and  
59 their adaptive behavior against climate change risks recently have received more attention (e.g.,  
60 (Halkos and Skouloudis, 2019; Howe, 2011; Marks and Thomalla, 2017; Neise et al., 2019; Neise et al.,  
61 2018; Neise and Revilla Diez, 2019; Pathak and Ahmad, 2018; Pathak and Ahmad, 2016; Pauw and  
62 Chan, 2018), the focus on micro and household businesses is still very limited.

63 Micro businesses typically have limited financial resources to invest in both short- and long-term  
64 adaptation measures (Leitold et al., 2021; Ngin et al., 2020) and underdeveloped capabilities in  
65 business planning (Gherhes et al., 2016). However, because they bear the brunt of climate-related  
66 impacts, generate high shares of employment, and are thus closely linked to peoples’ livelihoods, the  
67 discussion of the significance and prospects of micro businesses in responding to climate impacts has  
68 received attention in adaptation research (Chaudhury, 2018; Schaer et al., 2019). Crick et al. (2018)  
69 and Pulver and Benney (2013) exemplify that not all businesses have the same adaptive capacity,  
70 respond in the same way, and consider climate change as part of their business operations. What Daddi  
71 et al. (2018) and Linnenluecke et al. (2013) already illustrated for SMEs is especially true for micro  
72 businesses: Their decision-making for or against adaptation action is still underexplored and remains  
73 a black-box (Crick et al., 2018; Pauw and Chan, 2018). Recently, multi-stakeholder initiatives involving  
74 small- and medium-sized businesses have been discussed as door-openers for private sector  
75 engagement in adaptation efforts (Challies et al., 2016; Chen et al., 2013; Leitold et al., 2020; Neise et  
76 al., 2019). But, how successful can these initiatives be without exactly knowing how micro businesses  
77 are impacted and reacting to climate change, which adaptive capacities they possess and whether their  
78 adaptation behavior would change if for example incentives like financial support is provided?

79 Against this backdrop, this paper explores the potential role of micro-businesses in collaborative  
80 adaptation initiatives. We will focus on the following research questions: How do micro firms already  
81 respond to flooding? And more future oriented, under which conditions are micro firms willing to  
82 invest jointly into proactive adaptation efforts in their neighborhood?

83 Our methodological approach is twofold. First, by using scenario-based field experiments we examine  
84 the willingness of micro businesses to invest in collective adaptation options depending on different  
85 financing options. We analyze how the distribution of costs among other micro businesses and the  
86 neighbourhood, or financial incentives provided by local authorities, or pure political pressure impacts  
87 the willingness of micro businesses to contribute financially to different adaptation scenarios like the  
88 implementation of a dike system, a drainage system or awareness programs. Second, we applied a  
89 two-level binary-logistic regression that allows us to consider the differences and interdependencies  
90 between adaptation scenario and micro business characteristics in order to the detect the key drivers  
91 and barriers for adaptation. The necessary data was generated during a household and micro business  
92 survey as part of a collaborative research project “DECIDER” (Decisions for the Design of Adaptation

93 Pathways and the Integrative Development, Evaluation, and Governance of Flood Risk Reduction  
94 Strategies in Changing Urban-Rural Systems). A total of 252 micro businesses were surveyed in HCMC  
95 between September and November 2020. In addition, we were able to conduct the scenario-based  
96 experiments with 62 out of the 252 micro businesses. As each participant responded to 20 scenarios  
97 1,240 observations were generated for data processing.

98 This article is organized as follows. Section 2 develops a conceptual framework on potential drivers  
99 and barriers of micro business adaptation. Section 3 introduces the study area and methodology.  
100 Section 4 presents the descriptive and analytical results of the study, while Section 5 discusses the  
101 implications of the results for addressing micro business perspective in collective flood adaptation.  
102 Section 6 provides a conclusion.

103

## 104 **2 Conceptual considerations**

### 105 **2.1 What do we know from adaptation literature?**

106 Businesses play important roles in economic and social development worldwide by providing  
107 employment, goods, value added, services, and taxes (Halkos et al., 2018; Leitold et al., 2020; Lo et al.,  
108 2019). However, the fifth IPCC Assessment Report (2014) revealed a striking gap in existing scientific  
109 literature on private sector adaptation to floods (e.g., Berkhout et al., 2006; Linnenluecke et al., 2013;  
110 Linnenluecke et al., 2011). Since then, a body of literature has emerged that focuses on large and  
111 multinational enterprises, that are understood to be important entities for financing adaptation  
112 projects, developing technologies, and innovative adaptation solutions (Averchenkova et al., 2016;  
113 Haraguchi and Lall, 2015; Neise et al., 2018). However, this focus on large, international enterprises  
114 provides only limited knowledge on adaptation actions, adaptive capacities, and the overall role of  
115 smaller local businesses in climate adaptation. In comparison, small and micro businesses typically  
116 have lower profits, smaller cash reserves and seldom backup resources so that a single extreme  
117 weather event [can](#) led to long-lasting negative impacts. Clearly, smaller businesses lack the capacity to  
118 design and implement adaptation measures (Zhang et al 2009). Small and micro businesses are  
119 therefore bearing the brunt of climate-related impacts – a burden that is expected to intensify over  
120 the next decades (e.g., Lo et al., 2019; Ngin et al., 2020). In the area of today's risk from flooding, storm  
121 surges, and heavy rainfall, several studies illustrate that smaller businesses with local operations in  
122 particular experience both direct impacts like property damage, mechanical breakdowns, and the  
123 destruction of stocks and assets, as well as indirect impacts like postponed distribution and  
124 interruptions of business operations and supplies (Bahinipati et al., 2017; Marks and Thomalla, 2017;  
125 Neise et al., 2019; Verrest et al., 2020; Wedawatta et al., 2014; Wedawatta and Ingirige, 2012). In  
126 addition, they are often situated in a multi-risk environment, usually unprotected by public flood  
127 protection. This is especially true in HCMC where uncontrolled urban expansion since the beginning of  
128 the 21<sup>st</sup> century into flood-prone areas led to increased exposition. Poorly established and connected  
129 infrastructure has exacerbated flooding risks leading to a reduction in water regulation capacity,  
130 drainage capacity, water permeability, and land subsidence (Storch and Downes, 2011; The World  
131 Bank, 2019). As a result, small and micro businesses are forced to respond to climate risks  
132 independently due to their higher vulnerabilities (Lo et al., 2019).

133 Recent research has sought to determine whether and to what extent micro businesses are responding  
134 to acute climate risks such as flooding and what options they have to prepare for the intensification of  
135 future impacts. Ngin et al. (2020) show that micro businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector in  
136 Cambodia usually adopt temporary and reactive responses against floods and storms rather than long-  
137 term and proactive strategies. In the same vein, Neise and Revilla Diez (2019) [emphasizeemphasize](#)  
138 that most of the small and micro manufacturing firms in their case study in Jakarta only cope during a

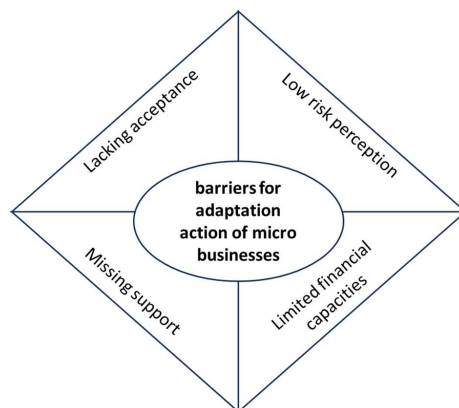
139 flood event. Relying on their established routines, they use floodwalls and sandbags to protect their  
140 production facility from water, place their products in higher places, and use small pumping systems  
141 to drain the water. While Chaudhury (2018) makes some arguments for motivating businesses to take  
142 proactive adaptation measures (e.g., greater risk awareness, benefits of adapting outweigh the  
143 financial costs), micro businesses face several barriers and structural deficits that limit their adaptive  
144 capacity and decision to invest in individual adaptation measures. Unlike their larger counterparts,  
145 whose adaptation actions are usually driven by organizational characteristics, such as financial  
146 liquidity, business performance, foreign ownership and knowledge-spillovers, micro businesses are  
147 facing different barriers (Leitold et al., 2021; Lo et al., 2019).

148

## 149 2.2 Drivers and barriers of micro business adaptation

150 [As micro businesses are a specific subset of small and medium-sized enterprises \(SMEs\), micro](#)  
151 [businesses have both similarities and differences with larger small and medium-sized enterprises. Both](#)  
152 [micro businesses and SMEs are characterized by their relatively smaller size compared to larger firms,](#)  
153 [are typically privately owned and operated by entrepreneurs or a small group of individuals, and have](#)  
154 [a local or regional focus, serving a specific market or community. However, the literature suggests that](#)  
155 [micro businesses, by definition, are even smaller in terms of the number of employees, have lower](#)  
156 [sales and profits, and have limited assets. A systematic literature review by Gheres et al. \(2016\) shows](#)  
157 [that micro businesses often lack growth ambitions because owners tend to be growth averse and are](#)  
158 [constrained by underdeveloped skills in key business areas such as networking, marketing, business](#)  
159 [planning, and human resources. Due to time constraints, micro businesses are locked into day-to-day](#)  
160 [operations rather than investing time in long-term strategic business management. In addition,](#)  
161 [institutional bottlenecks place an additional burden on micro-enterprises. As a result, they have limited](#)  
162 [access to higher-skilled labor, face a "closed" business environment as a result of negative external](#)  
163 [perceptions stemming from the stigmatization of their location, and find it more difficult to access](#)  
164 [finance and other support mechanisms than larger small and medium-sized enterprises.](#)

165 Based on [these specificities](#) the initial findings in vulnerability and adaptation literature, we present a  
166 conceptual framework to help to understand drivers and barriers to adaptation action of micro  
167 businesses. Many micro businesses find it challenging to develop adaptation strategies because of four  
168 key barriers (see Figure 1).



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**Figure 1:** Key barriers for adaptation action of micro businesses

171 *Key barrier 1: Acceptance of adaptation measures*

172 A key barrier to addressing climate risks is lacking acceptance of adaptation options due to cultural  
173 attitudes, social barriers, and a lack of understanding. A study by Geaves and Penning-Rowsell (2016)  
174 shows that large-scale protection measures fail to attract long-term participation from private actors  
175 due to a lack of local bonding. By contrast, a recent study by Leitold et al. (2020) reveals that small-  
176 scale adaptation measures initiated in a smaller neighborhood, like flood protection awareness  
177 programs, can promote the willingness of resident SMEs to adapt. In particular, collaborative  
178 approaches, with shared funding by different actors (i.e., the community, firms in the neighborhood,  
179 local government gives incentives) could help to overcome biases, and support the implementation of  
180 different adaptation options. Understanding an adaptation measure, its tangible costs, and benefits  
181 can lower the social barriers to adopting new technologies and participating in flood adaptation  
182 (Chaudhury, 2018).

183 *Key barrier 2: Risk perceptions at individual and household level*

184 Since micro businesses are “owner-centered” (Gherhes et al., 2016), individual risk perceptions, skills  
185 and capabilities, and experience with, for example flood impacts, of decision-makers play an important  
186 role in micro business adaptation. Lawrence et al. (2014) reveal that flood experiences at the individual  
187 household level in New Zealand contribute to increased risk perception and readiness to adapt. For  
188 the manufacturing sector, Neise et al. (2019) also show that SME adaptation to flood impacts in  
189 Indonesia is closely related to the risk preparedness of their managers. However, information on future  
190 climate impacts are often inaccessible for micro businesses or even completely absent at the local  
191 level, leading businesses to make decisions based on subjective perceptions (Chaudhury, 2018;  
192 Danielson and Scott, 2006). In addition, there is general agreement that individual and household  
193 education levels can influence how businesses are organized and managed, and how they respond to  
194 current and future climate risks (Chirico and Salvato, 2008; Crick et al., 2018; Lo et al., 2019). Yet, the  
195 link between business viability and the need to adapt to future climate change impacts is not sufficiently  
196 visible (Frei-Oldenburg et al., 2018).

197

198 *Key barrier 3: Financial capacities*

199 It is common knowledge that business characteristics are critical factors that shape adaptive action  
200 (Agrawala et al., 2011; Halkos et al., 2018; Pulver and Benney, 2013). In particular, limited financial  
201 resources and business performance have been proven to be barriers to the implementation of  
202 adaptation measures in small and micro businesses. They tend to have lower business capital and cash  
203 reserves, and are less likely to have financial reserve funds (Gherhes et al., 2016). A study by Marks  
204 and Thomalla (2017) shows that after severe flooding in Thailand in 2011, SMEs recovery was  
205 particularly hampered by financial constraints. Chaudhury (2018) further argues that even after  
206 conducting robust risk assessments and identifying cost-effective adaptation options, limited financial  
207 capacity hinders the actual implementation of planned measures. In addition, the direct business  
208 neighborhood could shape collective business adaptation as micro businesses are highly dependent  
209 on their local customers and suppliers. Leitold et al. (2020) illustrate that interaction with neighboring  
210 firms is a driving factor for SMEs to invest into collective local adaptation measures. In the same vein,  
211 Pauw and Chan (2018) argue that smaller businesses could take active responsibilities in localized  
212 initiatives that connect different actors in the same neighborhood.

213

214 *Key barrier 4: Influence of the institutional environment*

215 Obviously, there are broader structural deficiencies in external support for microbusiness adaptation  
216 financing. In most recent literature that is developing around disaster risk reduction and adaptation  
217 barriers, access to and use of external finance such as loans and credits from banks or microcredit  
218 institutions and tailored insurances is argued to be the major bottleneck for adaptation (Chaudhury,

219 2018; Chinh et al., 2016; Crick et al., 2018; Surminski and Hankinson, 2018; UNDP, 2019; UNDRR, 2020).  
220 As many micro businesses are part of the informal economy, social protection and external financing  
221 mechanisms are often not accessible at the business level (UNDRR, 2020). Therefore, it is not surprising  
222 that Halkos et al. (2018), Neise et al. (2019), and Leitold et al. (2020) found that institutional support  
223 and external guidance have a direct impact on the engagement of smaller firms in implementing  
224 adaptation measures against recent and future extreme events like floods and storms. In some  
225 economies like Vietnam, private businesses are underserved with respect to supportive policies and  
226 regulations (Revilla Diez, 2016; Trinh and Thanh, 2017). Therefore, local (business) associations have  
227 recently been considered as a promising information channel around climate change impacts and  
228 ultimately for stimulating adaptation action of private businesses.

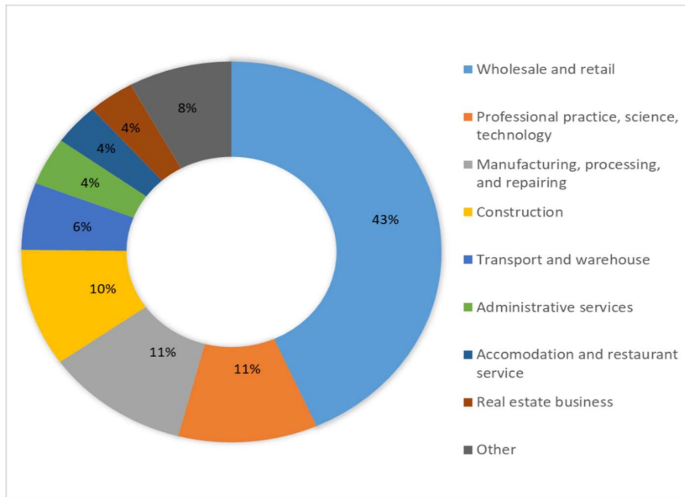
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### 234 **3 Material and methods**

#### 235 **3.1 Study area: Flooding in HCMC and the impact on micro businesses**

236 HCMC in Vietnam is already experiencing frequent flooding, which is expected to intensify in the  
237 coming years and decades due to the impacts of climate change. Seasonal extreme rainfall, storm  
238 surges, and discharge from upstream reservoirs often come at the same time with high tides and  
239 rainfall peaks, already resulting in compound flood events in many parts of the city (Downes and  
240 Storch, 2014; Scussolini et al., 2017). Located on the north-eastern edge of the Mekong Delta, at the  
241 mouth of the Dong Nai river basin, HCMC is characterized by topological conditions like many other  
242 delta regions in the world. More than half of the city is situated lower than 1.5 meter elevation above  
243 mean sea level (ADB, 2010). Lowlying lands, proximity to the sea, and an interconnected system of  
244 small rivers and channels result in a high overall exposure to future sea-level rise. According to national  
245 studies, the sea level has already risen by 20 cm off the coast of Vietnam in the last 50 years before  
246 2009 (MONRE, 2009) and the trend is upward (Scussolini et al., 2017). In addition, uncontrolled urban  
247 expansion and poorly connected infrastructure act as flood risk multipliers, leading to land subsidence,  
248 and a reduction in drainage capacity and water permeability. This is particularly problematic during  
249 the rainy season (May to October), which already provides 85 % of the total rainfall per year (MONRE  
250 et al., 2006; World Bank, 2019).

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**Figure 2: Main sectors of micro businesses in HCMC [percentage of businesses]**  
 Source: GSO (2020~~17~~)

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257 Set in the motion by the liberalization policies in 1986 and the subsequent transition to a market-  
 258 oriented economy, HCMC has been steadily growing in population and private businesses. As the  
 259 Vietnam’s largest city, HCMC is home to officially 8.9 million people (GSO, 2020). Although the private  
 260 economic sector plays a decisive role in HCMC’s remarkable economic development, many of the SMEs  
 261 and micro businesses are at the forefront of flood-related losses and damage. [The VN Census in 2020](#)  
 262 [shows that micro and small businesses play an important role in Ho Chi Minh City. Alone, 86 % of the](#)  
 263 [firms are micro-businesses. Small and medium sized businesses account for another 11 % meaning](#)  
 264 [that micro businesses and SME represent 97% of the firms in HCMC. In respect to employment, micro](#)  
 265 [businesses account for 19 % and SMEs for another 25% of the total employment, summing up to 1,3](#)  
 266 [Mio. Out of 2.9 Mio employees in HCMC. However, as in many fast-growing countries, official statistics](#)  
 267 [about micro and small businesses in Vietnam in general and in Ho Chi Minh City specifically is limited](#)  
 268 [and fragmented. This implies that the sector is might be still undervalued.](#)

269 [In HCMC](#), 43 % of the approximately ~~200,000~~<sup>145,000</sup> officially registered micro businesses (1-9  
 270 employees) in 20~~2017~~<sup>2017</sup> belong to wholesale and retail, 11 % to manufacturing, processing, and  
 271 repairing, and 10 % to the construction sector (GSO, 20~~2017~~<sup>2017</sup>, see Figure 2). Micro and family businesses  
 272 in these sectors, in particular, are highly exposed to recent and future flood impacts. Manufacturing  
 273 businesses are sensitive to compound flooding sources due to their location-specific production, hard-  
 274 to-change infrastructure, and heavy machinery. While many medium and large firms operating in  
 275 international value chains are often located in industrial parks with sufficient infrastructural flood  
 276 protection, small and micro businesses have to put up with business interruptions during flood events  
 277 several times a year (Leitold et al., 2021). Wholesale and retail businesses are highly dependent on  
 278 regional and local value chains, which are particularly disrupted by heavy rainfall during the rainy  
 279 season and tide-induced flooding. In addition, direct flooding in stores damages flood-sensitive goods  
 280 such as flowers, food, and paper products.

281  
 282 This study was carried out in four case study areas in HCMC where households and micro businesses  
 283 have already suffered some flood damages in recent years. Businesses in the western part of the city  
 284 (District 8 and Binh Tan) are mainly impacted by urban flash floods and pluvial flooding after heavy and

285 prolonged rainfall. Binh Thanh district is located close to the Sai Gon river, making the area exposed to  
286 flooding, which is exacerbated by the release of upstream water reservoirs (Duy et al., 2018). Nha Be  
287 district is located in the southern parts of the city and characterized by a peri-urban morphology.  
288 According to the projections, Nha Be is one of the districts in HCMC that will be most affected by future  
289 sea level rise (Scussolini et al., 2017).  
290

### 291 **3.2 Household survey and scenario-based field experiments**

292 The empirical analyses in this paper are based on two combined datasets.

293 First, we used a household survey in HCMC conducted as part of a collaborative research project  
294 “DECIDER” (*Decisions for the Design of Adaptation Pathways and the Integrative Development,*  
295 *Evaluation, and Governance of Flood Risk Reduction Strategies in Changing Urban-Rural Systems*) to  
296 understand flood vulnerability of micro businesses, their respective perceptions, and flood adaptation.  
297 The standardized household survey was conducted in two different wards of the four case study  
298 districts (District 8, Binh Tan, Binh Thanh, and Nha Be) in HCMC. In addition to 748 households, a total  
299 of 252 micro businesses were surveyed in HCMC between September and November 2020. We  
300 developed a questionnaire on general characteristics and the economic situation of micro-businesses,  
301 investment decisions, flood impacts, adaptation strategies and perceptions of future risk and local risk  
302 management systems. All respondents have been experienced with flooding (i.e., water entering the  
303 house/business premise) and suffered damages/losses due to floods since 2010. The questionnaires  
304 were field tested during a one-week pretest in 2019, and adjusted afterwards. Moreover, the survey  
305 was preceded by a one-day workshop for the enumerators during which they were trained how to  
306 conduct the survey and received feedback. In Vietnam, our partners of the Southern Institute of Social  
307 Sciences (SISS) organized and implemented the training and the main field campaign.

308 Second, we run scenario-based field experiments with about a quarter of micro businesses owners  
309 from the main survey. The goal of the experiments was to examine the willingness of businesses to  
310 invest in collective adaptation options to protect themselves from future flood impacts. The scenario-  
311 based field experiments consist of a public-good game design with different adaptation scenarios in a  
312 field-experiment environment (Leitold et al., 2020; Neise et al., 2019). Public-good games are rooted  
313 in behavioral economics. They aim to explain why collective actions succeed or fail and decipher  
314 participants’ contributions to a public good (Ones and Putterman, 2007). In our experiments, flood  
315 adaptation measures are defined as discrete public goods that are only provided when multiple actors  
316 make individual financial contributions. Implementing public good games in real field environments  
317 rather than in a laboratory, provides a deep understanding of explanatory factors for participants’  
318 decision making in collective adaptation actions (Ehmke and Shogren, 2009). The experiments used  
319 vignette designs that present carefully constructed but hypothetical descriptions of adaptation  
320 measures that differ in their design and the financial contributions for their implementation (Atzmüller  
321 and Steiner, 2010).

322 In total, our Vietnamese project partners from the University of Economics and Law, Vietnam National  
323 University conducted experiments with 62 out of the 252 micro businesses from the main survey. The  
324 methodology, and the different scenarios were explained in detail to the enumerators in a training  
325 workshop and during supervised pre-tests prior to the experiments. Then, we linked the micro business  
326 survey data to our experiment data using the survey identification to combine information on  
327 household and business characteristics and perceptions with the investment decision at each  
328 experiment (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3: Data basis for the multilevel regression analysis

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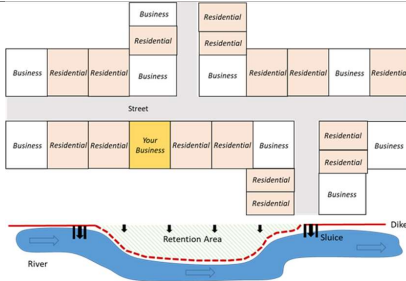
### 3.3 Experiment design, measurement, and data analysis

Four realistic adaptation measures were developed for the experiments. The conceptualization of these measures is based on our previous study of manufacturing SMEs in HCMC (2018-2019, see Leitold et al., 2020), but was adapted to the local realities of micro businesses in collaboration with our local project partners [in order to minimize hypothetical bias](#).

To analyze the influence of respective adaptation measures and financing options on the willingness of micro businesses to participate in collective adaptation, we used the same locational setting representing typical-flood prone areas in HCMC for all adaptation options (see Figure 4 for the overall experiment setting). We designed four adaptation cards, which were shown to the participants. In addition to the designs of adaptation measures, we built different financing options into the scenarios cards. In the first two options, either the residents in the neighborhood or the other micro businesses contribute to the same amount and share the costs of adaptation measures (*neighborhood support*). In the third option, local authorities provide financial incentives and support the implementation of adaptation measures (*political support*). By contrast, in the fourth option, local authorities demand the participation of businesses or impose fines for non-compliance (*political pressure*). In the fifth option, other businesses contribute less than the necessary amount and the micro business must invest more than others in their direct neighborhood (*unbalanced contribution*). In total, the respondents have to go through 20 scenarios (4 adaptation scenarios multiplied by 5 financing options).

For data analysis, we created a dichotomous dependent variable *willingness to participate in collective flood adaptation*, where '1' was coded for micro business is willing to invest the necessary resources and '0' that a micro business was not willing to contribute sufficiently. In general, our indicators are presented on a binary scale (see Table 1 for the explanation of indicators). Following Leitold et al. (2020), we tested for *dike systems*, *drainage systems*, and *awareness programs* to assess the acceptance of different adaptation measures (**key barrier 1: lacking acceptance**). To test preference for different funding options, we used *neighborhood support* as a proxy for the preference for shared funding of measures, and *political support* as a proxy for desired support from public stakeholders. We also controlled for *unbalanced contributions of businesses*.

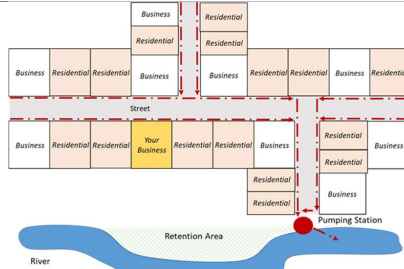
**Adaptation Option 1: Dike construction**



**Measure:**  
Sophisticated dike system with two sluices in front of the river. Retention area in front of the riverside

**Strategy:**  
Safeguard riparian zones and canal areas. Reduce inundation level

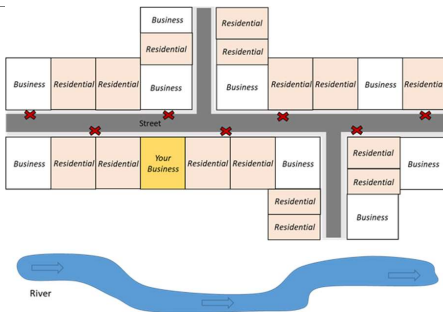
**Adaptation Option 2: Drainage system**



**Measure:**  
Clean and upgrade drainage system within the community

**Strategy:**  
Increase drainage capacity. Reduce inundation level

**Adaptation Option 3: Road elevation**



**Measure:**  
Elevation of the main roads in the neighborhood

**Strategy:**  
Reduce inundation level due to heavy rain.

**Adaptation Option 4: Awareness program**



**Measure:**  
Funding of an awareness raising program  
Develop district adaptation pathways

**Strategy:**  
Strengthen flood risk management. Increase awareness on flooding (and waste disposal etc.)

367 **Figure 4:** Overall experiment setting and adaptation options (Source: the design is based on Neise et  
368 al., 2019; and Leitold et al., 2020)

369 To test for the influence of risk perceptions at individual and household level (**key barrier 2: low risk**  
370 **perception**), we generated the indicators *expected flood increase* and *household education* (Crick et  
371 al., 2018). The latter describes that at least one person of the household has a university degree or  
372 vocational training. Consistent with Neise et al. (2019) and based on the assumptions of Lawrence et  
373 al. (2014), *flood experience* was measured whether a micro-business was flooded more than five times  
374 in the last 10 years. Based on the answers from the micro-business survey, an additional measure of  
375 future flood perception was included to represent *high individual damages* that occurred during the  
376 most serious flood since 2010. We hypothesized positive relationships between the indicators for risk  
377 perception at individual level and the willingness to participate in collective adaptation.

378 In the business environment, we tested for financial capacities as factor influencing adaptation  
 379 decisions (**key barrier 3: limited financial capabilities**). Following Chaudhury (2018) and Marks and  
 380 Thomalla (2017), we developed indicators of *decline in business revenue* (when revenues have declined  
 381 or fluctuated over the past five years) and *limited financial resources* (self-assessment of micro  
 382 businesses of their financial resources for flood adaptation). We expect both indicators to be barriers  
 383 to collective adaptation. We also tested dependence on local customers and suppliers as relations with  
 384 neighboring firms raises the probability for co-funding by other firms, although this indicator is difficult  
 385 to operationalize. However, we coded *local supplier* as '1' for businesses that report that their suppliers  
 386 are located in the same flood exposed neighborhood.  
 387

388 **Table 1:** Key indicators of collective flood adaptation  
 389

	Indicators	Descriptions (No=0; Yes =1)	Expected impacts
Adaptation measure	Neighborhood support	Scenarios with shared funding	+
	Political support	Scenarios with shared funding	+
	Unbalanced contribution of businesses	Scenarios where micro businesses need to invest more than others in their neighborhood	-
	Dike system	Scenarios with dike system (high financial input, technological infrastructure)	-
	Drainage system	Scenarios with drainage system (medium financial input, technological infrastructure)	+
	Awareness program	Scenarios with awareness program (low financial input, soft measure)	+
Individual / Household	High individual damages	High damage of business components (e.g., furniture, electronics, equipments, products), high equals major and complete damage	+
	Flood experience	Business was flooded more than 5 times in the last 10 years	+
	Household education	At least one person of the household has a university degree or vocational training	+
	Expected flood increase	Expected flood increase in the next ten years	+
Business environment	Decline business revenue	Revenue decline/fluctuation in the last five years	-
	Limited financial resources	Low financial resources for preventing flood impacts (rating from 1-5, low equals 1 and 2)	-
	Local supplier	Suppliers located in the same district	+
Institutional environment	Member organization	Household members are part of an organization (e.g, Fatherland's Front, Women's Union, Youth Union, etc.)	+
	No repair after flood events	Government/Law doesn't allow to repair/rebuild after flood events (e.g. it is in a planning project area)	+
	Access to external capital	Business finances investments through loans from banks or microcredit institutions	+

390  
 391 We test the influence of the institutional environment using three explanatory variables (**key barrier**  
 392 **4: missing support**). It is expected that the willingness to participate in adaptation if a *household*  
 393 *member is part of an organization* (i.e., Fatherland's Front, Women's Union, Youth Union) (Leitold et  
 394 al., 2020). Especially, in Vietnam being a member of the party's own social organization could offer  
 395 some patronage and special treatment when it comes to applying for support. To represent

396 institutional barriers, we build an indicator for the situation where *public policies or public laws do not*  
 397 *allow private buildings to be repaired or rebuilt* after floods. For example, when micro businesses are  
 398 located in a planning project area which is quite common in HCMC in recent years. Further, we test  
 399 the influence of *access to external capital* in the form of loans from banks or microcredit institutions  
 400 on willingness to participate. We expect negative correlations for both indicators and adaptation  
 401 willingness. Finally, we controlled for the influence of location within our four case study areas.

402 The scenario-based field experiments generated 1,240 observations for data processing. As each  
 403 participant responded to 20 scenarios, scenario data are nested within business characteristics.  
 404 Analyzing such hierarchically structured data with ordinary least squared regression would lead to  
 405 spatial autocorrelation and a violation of the independence assumption for scenario observations (Hox  
 406 et al., 2017; Sohns and Revilla Diez, 2018). Therefore, we applied a two-level binary-logistic regression  
 407 that allows us to consider the differences and interdependencies between scenario and micro business  
 408 characteristics (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2008). Multicollinearity (average variance inflation factor  
 409 for the independent variables: 1.6) can be rejected.

410

## 411 **4 Findings**

### 412 **4.1 Descriptive findings**

413 Our sample consists of 62 micro businesses. 46 businesses are stores or retailers (74 %) for food and  
 414 beverages, clothing, houseware, electricity, or construction material. 10 businesses are operating in  
 415 the service sector (16 %), and three in the production sector (5 %). 61 % of all businesses have been  
 416 flooded more than five times per year in the last 10 years, and 44 % even more than 10 times a year.  
 417 It is evident that as soon as damage is reported, it is mostly classified as major damage requiring repair.  
 418 In particular, the level of damage to products is relatively high (see Table 2). Complete damage has not  
 419 been reported. As a consequence, the micro-businesses do undertake own precautionary measures.  
 420 We see that more than 50 % of the micro businesses already purchased water barriers for flood  
 421 prevention and dry-proof their valuables, goods, and products during severe flood events. In addition,  
 422 84 % of micro businesses have already elevated their ground floor or foundation to prevent flooding  
 423 into their premises. In terms of acute flooding events, which are already clearly noticeable today, the  
 424 micro businesses are therefore (most reactively) already doing something.

425 **Table 2:** Individual damage of micro businesses from the most severe flood since 2010

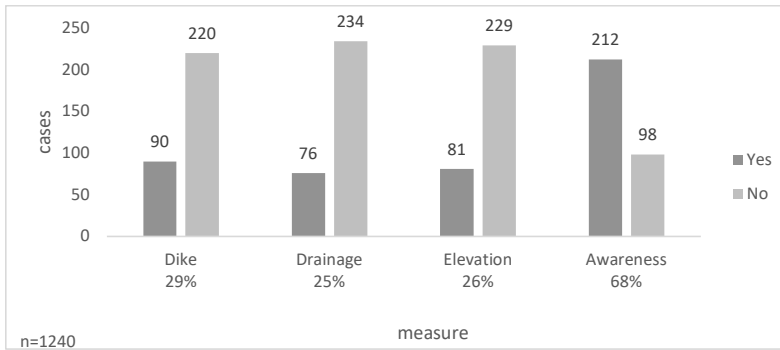
	no damage	minor damages	moderate damages	major damages- needs repair	complete damage - needs replacement	no answer
Furniture	39	8	1	14	0	0
Electronics	37	3	4	16	0	2
Business specific equipment	39	6	8	9	0	0
Products	28	4	6	22	0	2

426

427 The descriptive analysis of the key barriers partly confirms, but also oppose the findings from the  
 428 literature.

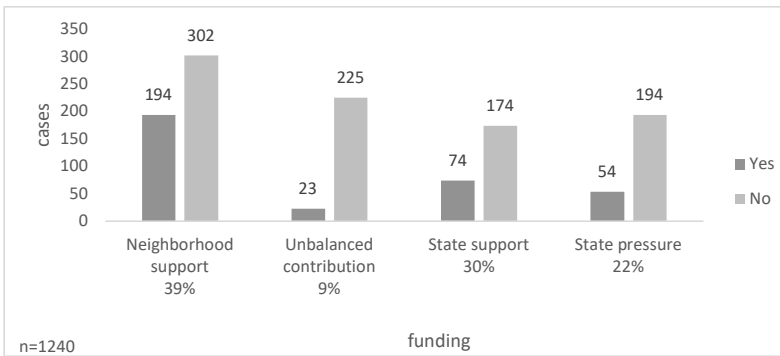
429 In respect to the key barrier 1 (lacking acceptance), the complete rejection of adaptation measures  
 430 cannot be confirmed as stated in the conceptual section. However, in only 28 % of all scenarios, micro  
 431 businesses were willing to contribute to flood adaptation measures in their neighborhood. The results  
 432 show substantial differences between participation in technical scenarios (dike system: 29 %, drainage

433 system: 25 %, elevation: 26 %) and the less expensive flood awareness program, to which micro  
 434 business owners were willing to contribute in 68 % of cases (see Figure 5). In terms of financing  
 435 adaptation measures, decision-makers were willing to contribute financially in 39 % of the scenarios if  
 436 other actors in the neighborhood (i.e., the community: 30 % and other businesses: 48 %) were also  
 437 involved. For all other options - financial support from local authorities or when businesses have to  
 438 pay a fine for not investing in collective protection measures - willingness to participate was below  
 439 average (see Figure 6). Also, the results for the key barrier 2 (low risk perception) are different than  
 440 expected. The survey results indicate that 77 % of the businesses expect flooding to increase in the  
 441 next 10 years, while 16 % expect flooding to remain the same or even decrease. These results underline  
 442 that owner of micro-businesses are well aware of the risks of future flooding.



443 **Figure 5: Preference of adaptation measure**

445



446 **Figure 6: Preference of funding**

447 In relation to the key barriers 3 (limited financial capabilities) and 4 (missing support) the results are in  
 448 line with the findings in the literature. About 37 % of businesses report a decline, and 15 % fluctuation  
 449 in business revenues over the past five years. In addition to revenue, the financial resources available  
 450 to prevent flood impacts are a key limiting adaptation factor to micro businesses. On a scale from 1  
 451 (very poor) to 5 (very good), more than half of the businesses rate their financial resources as limited  
 452 (58 % rate 1 and 2). Only 19 % of businesses surveyed have access to external capital, such as loans  
 453 from banks or from microcredit institutions. 16 % receive loans from family members, relatives, or  
 454

455 friends, while the majority finance their business investments through personal funds or savings.  
456 Support by state agencies is hardly mentioned.

457

458

#### 459 **4.2 Multilevel regression findings**

460 In order to detect the key drivers and barriers for micro-business adaptations' strategies, the main  
461 statistical analysis was based on the two-level regression. **Table 3** shows which indicators influence the  
462 willingness of micro businesses to invest in collective flood adaptation measures and whether they act  
463 as either drivers or barriers to adaptation. The scenario-level results underscore the findings of the  
464 descriptive analysis. Micro businesses significantly prefer to invest in the awareness program, while  
465 their willingness to invest is not influenced by hard technical measures like, for example, the dike  
466 system or the drainage system. What is particularly clear is that shared funding opportunities between  
467 micro businesses and local authorities, as well as the community and other businesses in their  
468 neighborhood, significantly increase the investment in collective flood adaptation. Accordingly, an  
469 unbalanced contribution of businesses in their neighborhood reduces the investment and thus acts as  
470 a barrier.

471 In addition, further variables also influence the willingness to participate in adaptation measures.  
472 Businesses that already suffered high individual damages during the most serious flood since 2010,  
473 businesses that have high flood experience, and those that expect a high increase in floods in the next  
474 ten years are significantly more willing to invest in collective flood adaptation measures. ~~Since the  
475 influence of high individual damage yields positive, but only slightly significant results it should be  
476 interpreted with caution.~~ In the overall picture, all three indicators of risk perception and experience  
477 act as drivers for collective adaptation. Interestingly, the investment decisions of micro businesses  
478 were not influenced by household education.

479 As expected, financial constraints and decreasing business performance indicators act as barriers for  
480 collective adaptation. A general decline in business revenues and limited financial resources for  
481 adaptation measures are reflecting the situation of the majority of businesses in the sample. Both  
482 indicators significantly decrease participation in the scenarios. Regarding the dependence on local  
483 suppliers, the analysis did not yield any significant results.

484 The results further reveal that external guidance and institutional support play a major role in micro  
485 business decision making for collective adaptation. When a household member is part of an  
486 organization, the willingness to invest in collective adaptation increases slightly significantly. Similarly,  
487 access to external capital in form of loans from banks or microcredit institutions increases the  
488 willingness to participate. Since some urban development policies act as barriers to individual risk  
489 reduction and hinder the repair or reconstruction of private buildings after flood events, it is not  
490 surprising that such situations have highly significant positive influence on the willingness to invest in  
491 collective adaptation measures, together with other actors in the neighborhood.

492 The neighborhood of micro-businesses on decision-making in the experiments for which we controlled  
493 does not yield significant results. Thus, micro businesses in the case study areas make decisions based  
494 on scenario and individual-level characteristics, regardless of their place of operation.

495

496

497 **Table 3:** Multilevel regression results for willingness to participate in collective flood adaptation

	Odds ratio (standard error)	Odds ratio (standard error)	Odds ratio (standard error)	Direction of effect
Fixed effects	m0	m1	m2	
<i>Scenario characteristics</i>				
Neighborhood support (shared funding)		4.721*** (1.207)	<b>4.712*** (1.208)</b>	+
Political support (shared funding)		2.222*** (0.638)	<b>2.231*** (0.643)</b>	+
Unbalanced contribution of businesses		0.133*** (0.055)	<b>0.121*** (0.052)</b>	-
Dike system		1.333 (0.338)	<b>1.334 (0.338)</b>	
Drainage system		0.845 (0.220)	<b>0.844 (0.220)</b>	
Awareness program		1.697** (0.039)	<b>1.697** (0.426)</b>	+
<i>Firm characteristics</i>				
High individual damages			<b>3.207* (1.964)</b>	+
Flood experience			<b>5.596** (4.158)</b>	+
Expected flood increase			<b>7.496** (6.541)</b>	+
Household education			<b>1.322 (0.808)</b>	
Declining business revenue			<b>0.167** (0.121)</b>	-
Limited financial resources			<b>0.189** (0.126)</b>	-
Local supplier			<b>2.523 (1.759)</b>	
Member organization			<b>4.673* (4.184)</b>	+
No repair after flood events			<b>193.237*** (252.860)</b>	+
Access to external capital			<b>4.394* (3.624)</b>	+
<i>Control variables</i>				
Nha Be (location)			<b>3.136 (2.750)</b>	
District 8 (location)			<b>2.239 (1.930)</b>	
Constant	-1.489 (0.281)	0.894 (0.386)	<b>0.000*** (0.000)</b>	
<i>Random effects</i>				
Firm var.(_cons)	4.364 (1.146)	6.938 (1.840)	<b>3.780 (1.020)</b>	
<i>Model fit statistics</i>				
Observations	1,240	1,240	<b>1,240</b>	
ICC firm	0.570	0.678	<b>0.535</b>	
Prob>chi2	0.000	0.000	<b>0.000</b>	

498 \*\*\*Significant at 1% level ( $p < 0.01$ ); \*\*Significant at 5% level ( $p < 0.05$ ); \*Significant at 10% level ( $p < 0.1$ ). Source:  
499 Own calculation

## 500 **5 Future role of micro businesses in collective flood adaptation**

501 The empirical results of this analysis add important insights from the particular case of HCMC toward  
502 a broader understanding of drivers and barriers of micro business flood adaptation.

503 The acceptance of and participation in adaptation measures are clearly related to the risk perceptions  
504 and awareness at the individual and household level. In this case study, high future risk perception,  
505 often based on past experience with flooding and suffering from damage to stocks and assets, was  
506 clearly identified as a driver for investment in collaborative flood adaptation. Conversely, a lack of risk  
507 perception and assessment, particularly with an eye towards upcoming flood risks, acts as a barrier for  
508 long-term adaptation. Although 77 % of the businesses in our survey expect flooding to increase –  
509 suggesting that the awareness is quite high – the direct (or indirect) impact on business operations is  
510 often unclear and may explain the overall restraint in the experiments. Schaer (2018) argues that either  
511 businesses do not perceive future impacts to be a risk factor for their business operations or have  
512 limited expertise to predict and plan the risks accurately. The link between business benefits and  
513 adaptation is not clear to decision-makers. It is added that micro businesses differ from larger SMEs by  
514 being owner-centered, having a tendency of being “growth-adverse”, and focusing more on non-  
515 economic aspects of business ownership. Growth intensions are often limited to a desired income  
516 which is sufficient for making a living (Gherhes et al., 2016). Neise and Revilla Diez (2019) and Leitold  
517 et al. (2021) already point out that frequent but smaller floods are kind of normality for small  
518 businesses, against which they do not plan to adapt in the future. They often lack long-term business  
519 plans or any risk assessments, either for climate risks or for other business risks, and follow a “simply  
520 live with it” attitude. Business growth in terms of increasing headcount, diversification of products and  
521 services, and revenue growth is not aspired anyway. Thus, the impact of flooding is only relevant if it  
522 threatens the profitability of the micro business for household income.

523 Following this vein, we clearly see an overlap of the different key barriers developed in our conceptual  
524 framework (Lo et al., 2019). It can be argued that general development constraints of micro businesses  
525 are also responsible for barriers to adaptation. In particular, financial limitations in the business  
526 environment act as additional barriers for long-term adaptation. On this point, the institutional  
527 environment represents another critical barrier that can stimulate or inhibit adaptation. There is a lack  
528 of tailored external support mechanisms and adequate financing options that motivate micro  
529 businesses to initiate long-term business planning and thus also enables them to implement  
530 adaptation measures (Berkhout et al., 2006; Schaer, 2018).

531 In general, the willingness to participate financially in our scenario exercise stood at 28% and was lower  
532 than what we had expected. Average results in such public good games typically amounts to 40-60 %  
533 of personal endowment (Chaudhuri, 2011). The results of the experiments show no substantial  
534 differences between the contribution to different technical adaptation measures and the influence on  
535 decision-making to participate in adaptation measures. Although the preference for low-cost and soft  
536 measures over cost-extensive and technological measures is generally comparable to experiments  
537 with manufacturing SMEs (Leitold et al., 2020; Neise et al., 2019), the low uptake of technical  
538 adaptation measures can be explained by micro businesses’ prerequisites like limited financial  
539 capabilities and low risk perception for entrepreneurial decision-making.

540 However, depending on the adaptation measure and financing option micro-businesses could play a  
541 larger role in flood adaptation. Overall, almost 70% of the micro-businesses are willing to participate  
542 in collective awareness programs. In general, the willingness to participate financially increases



543 noticeable to 39% if the costs could be shared with actors in their neighborhood and local authorities.  
544 Moreover, businesses that have access to external capital from banks or microcredit institutions are  
545 more willing to participate in collective adaptation in general. In most cases, and in contrast to larger  
546 firms, micro businesses have a local life and business horizon and are closely embedded in local  
547 (business) networks (Halkos and Skouloudis, 2019; Kato and Charoenrat, 2018). Therefore, local  
548 adaptation solutions, support mechanisms and incentives must also be created in the direct business  
549 environment. Building local business associations outside of industry-specific associations and  
550 engaging decision-makers could be one important starting point to involve micro businesses into larger  
551 adaptation initiatives and motivate them to participate. Additionally, community organizations and  
552 neighborhood unions should place future risk trends and flood hazards on their agendas to promote  
553 micro business awareness of flooding, but also support micro businesses that face institutional barriers  
554 for flood adaptation.

555 It is argued here and supported by Chaudhury (2018), that information about future climate-related  
556 risks and uncertainties, while relevant for decision-making processes, is often still unavailable for micro  
557 businesses. Therefore, additional initiatives like awareness raising programs are easy to implement  
558 and do not reach technological capacity limits, but can help to promote future risk assessments and  
559 weighting of adaptation options, and possibilities. Building effective adaptation infrastructure consists  
560 not only of physical infrastructure such as elevation, drainage systems or dike systems, but needs also  
561 to include “informational infrastructure” (Marlowe et al., 2018; Ngin et al., 2020) in the form of  
562 channels for communicating disaster risks and raising awareness. But apparently as our results clearly  
563 show, micro-businesses willingness to participate in adaptation is also subject to socio-economic  
564 constraints confronting individual decision makers and their lifestyle preferences (Lo et al 2019).

565 This understanding of micro-businesses, their lifestyle orientation and their flexibility is often  
566 overlooked in adaptation research and in adaptation policies (Parsons et al 2018). There is a need to  
567 understand more about constraints and preferences of micro-businesses to better support them but  
568 also to integrate them better in adaptation schemes. As they are often located in densely populated  
569 neighborhoods where they also reside and form part of the social fabric, their role as multiplier for  
570 collective action could be used strategically in adaptation plans. However, our analysis is just a first  
571 step into this direction. Our multilevel analysis is based on hypothetical and simplified designs of  
572 adaptation scenarios. Therefore, external validity should be improved by conducting similar  
573 experiments in different field contexts. Moreover, the research design based on yes or no responses  
574 is not able to capture the intensity of contextual influences on micro business' willingness to participate  
575 in respective adaptation options. Another relevant future research avenue is to quantitatively  
576 investigate the causal relationships of various drivers and barriers that influence micro business  
577 decision-making for flood adaptation based on a higher number of experiments.

578

## 579 **6 Conclusion**

580 Micro-businesses could play a much larger role in collective adaptation. Often overlooked in  
581 adaptation research, their willingness to contribute in collective action amidst major constraints is  
582 surprising. The conceptual framework presented in this paper helps us to understand the key drivers  
583 and barriers of micro-businesses willingness to participate in collective adaption activities. The most  
584 important key barriers of micro-businesses are limited financial capabilities and missing support from  
585 local authorities. However, micro-businesses are willing to contribute depending on the concrete  
586 adaptation measure and funding options. If no financial contribution is expected, almost 70 % are  
587 willing to assist in awareness raising campaigns. And although their financial capabilities are very  
588 limited, 39% of the micro-businesses would contribute financially if the costs are shared with other

589 firms in their neighborhood and with local authorities. Against this background, micro-businesses  
590 should be much more involved in adaptation plans and measures. Through their local embedding, they  
591 can be important multipliers in strengthening adaptive capacity at the local level.

592

## 593 Appendix:

	Indicator	Description (min=0; max=1)	Obs.	Mean	Std. Dev.
<b>Adaptation measures</b>	Neighborhood support	Scenarios with shared funding	1,240	0.4	0.49
	Political support	Scenarios with shared funding	1,240	0.2	0.40
	Unbalanced contribution of businesses	Scenarios where micro businesses need to invest more than others in their neighborhood	1,240	0.2	0.40
	Dike system	Scenarios with dike system (high financial input, technological infrastructure)	1,240	0.25	0.43
	Drainage system	Scenarios with drainage system (medium financial input, technological infrastructure)	1,240	0.25	0.43
	Awareness program	Scenarios with awareness program (low financial input, soft measure)	1,240	0.25	0.43
<b>Individual risk knowledge, risk assessment and flood experience</b>	High individual damages	High damage of business components (e.g., furniture, electronics, equipments, products), high equals major and complete damage	1,240	0.52	0.50
	Flood experience	Business was flooded more than 5 times in the last 10 years	1,240	0.61	0.49
	Household education	At least one person of the household has a university degree or vocational training	1,240	0.52	0.50
	Expected flood increase	Expected flood increase in the next ten years	1,240	0.77	0.42
<b>Business environment</b>	Decline business revenue	Revenue decline/ fluctuation over the past five years	1,240	0.51	0.50
	Limited financial resources	Low financial resources for preventing flood impacts (rating from 1-5, low equals 1 and 2)	1,240	0.58	0.49
	Local supplier	Suppliers located in the same district	1,240	0.60	0.49
<b>Institutional environment</b>	Member organization	Household members are part of an organization (e.g., Fatherland's Front, Women's Union, Youth Union, etc.)	1,240	0.15	0.35
	No repair after flood events	Government/Law doesn't allow to repair/rebuild after flood events (e.g. it is in a planning project area)	1,240	0.07	0.25
	Access to external capital	Business finances investments through loans from banks or microcredit institutions	1,240	0.18	0.38
<u>Control variables</u>	Spatial influence Nha Be	Business located in Nha Be	1,240	0.44	0.50
	Spatial influence District 8	Business located in District 8	1,240	0.32	0.47

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