



CARE International in Vietnam Ethnic Minority Women's Empowerment

Women in remote ethnic communities in Vietnam are not equally benefiting from the remarkable economic growth over the past decade. They experience high levels of poverty, unequal participation in economic opportunities, limited options to adapt to changes in the climate, and have a limited voice in decisions that affect them.

CARE's Ethnic Minority Women's Empowerment project (EMWE), supported by Australian Aid, works with ethnic minority women to overcome these challenges.

Timeframe: July 2013 – June 2017

Location: Dien Bien and Bac Kan provinces, Northern Vietnam & National level advocacy

Participants: 4,463 women and 2,595 men from ethnic minority communities, authorities and partners

Project overview

The overarching goal of EMWE is that **Remote ethnic minority women are empowered to actively participate in local socio-economic development planning and decision making.**

Four outcomes support this goal:

- › **Remote ethnic minority women have increased voice in local development planning.** Working with local authorities, EMWE strengthens People's Councils, Socio-Economic Development Planning processes and other community decision-making forums to be more inclusive of women. As a result, women have reported increased confidence to make requests to authorities and stronger voice within their households.

- › **Remote ethnic minority women use climate resilient livelihood options.** EMWE provides ethnic minority women with information including agro-climate information, skills and other support to adopt new livelihood options – such as biologically safe chicken-raising, bio-fertiliser and rice and corn cultivation techniques – that are resilient to changes in the climate. EMWE also links women with markets to earn an income from these activities.
- › **Women's groups are recognised platforms for women's empowerment.** Women's group members learn about and discuss legislation and policies that affect them, establish savings and loans systems to increase their incomes and practice new financial and communication skills.
- › **Local duty bearers and communities respect ethnic minority women's voice.** Through analysis and community planning, EMWE supports crucial changes in the attitudes of men, communities and local authorities to support ethnic minority women's empowerment.

Implementing partners

CARE implements EMWE with two national organisations in order to strengthen local capacity and ensure that project impact is sustainable.



The **Vietnam Women's Union** promotes women's affairs, voice, economic empowerment and the development of women's groups. In Bac Kan, the Provincial Women's Union leads the implementation of EMWE.



The **Centre of Community Development (CCD)** is a local organisation with a strong track record in community mobilisation and promoting market-oriented livelihood options. CCD is EMWE's implementing partner in Dien Bien.



EMWE's approaches

Climate resilient livelihoods

Remote ethnic minority women are among those most affected by natural disasters and climate change. EMWE promotes climate resilient livelihood strategies and new agricultural techniques that are successful despite the changing climate, and women are supported to diversify and sustain their income by taking up new activities using agro-climate information.

Legal Awareness and Rights Clubs

Women's groups provide a safe space for women to gain awareness of gender equality, women's rights and Government policy and legislation. They also provide an opportunity for women to increase solidarity by having a social network, and receive training on leadership, rights awareness and advocacy. These skills are used by members to advocate for women's rights, contribute to decision-making processes and speak out about issues that were previously taboo, such as domestic violence.

Village Savings and Loans Associations

Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLA) are self-managed and self-capitalised microfinance groups, developed by CARE and implemented in 61 countries with over 6 million participants. VSLAs established by EMWE save a set amount each week and pool their savings so members can take small loans at an agreed rate of interest.

Engaging men

EMWE works with male authorities to create spaces for women's voice in decision-making forums, and is establishing a 'Men's engagement for gender equality' network to promote women's rights.

Project achievements

Between 2013 to 2015 EMWE has:

- ✓ Supported over 1,720 remote ethnic minority women to learn about their rights and access finance for income-generation activities through establishing 41 women's VSLAs and strengthening 30 existing women's groups.
- ✓ Trained project participants and partners on climate change and worked with 426 remote ethnic minority women to identify and implement new climate resilient livelihood options.

- ✓ Introduced authorities to CARE's model of dialogue between ethnic minority communities and People's Councils, building their willingness to listen to ethnic minority women's concerns.
- ✓ Completed a participatory gender analysis to identify women and men's roles, responsibilities and harmful gender norms, and worked with communities to develop Action Plans to address any harmful norms.
- ✓ Engaged over 400 project participants and partners in dialogue about gender-based violence, with women's group facilitators showing an increased commitment to addressing the issue.

Case study: Women's savings improving lives

In a remote village of Bac Kan Province in northern Vietnam, Phay and other women used to face many difficulties. Phay dropped out of secondary school early, married when she was a teenager, and has since worked in the fields to support her family. Her agricultural production was not efficient, she had limited access to loans, and her heavy workload meant she rarely had time to relax. While life improved elsewhere in Vietnam, little changed in Phay's village.

In 2010, Phay was voted as the Chair of the Vietnam Women's Union in her village, the organisation through which CARE's EMWE project introduces Village Savings and Loan Associations to remote ethnic minority women. Phay and other women in her village formed a group and learned new types of agricultural production that are resilient to Vietnam's changing climate.

Now, women's skills, knowledge and solidarity have increased. Importantly, their husbands have become more supportive and have started sharing the household work, giving women more time to undertake activities outside of the home.

"Everything is getting better. My dream is to save enough money for my children's education. Whether it's a son or daughter, as long as they wish to study my husband and I will try our best to send them to school so that they will have a better life than ours," Phay says.