



**PROMOTING WOMEN'S**

**ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

**WITH ETHNIC GROUPS**

**IN THE MEKONG**

**LAOS CASE STUDY REPORT**





This case study report formed part of CARE's 2015 strategic evaluation into our Women's Economic Empowerment programming in the Mekong. The evaluation was jointly funded by CARE and the Australian Government through the Australia NGO Cooperation Program.

This report is one of three reports to emerge from this evaluation, the other two reports being the Evaluation Synthesis report<sup>1</sup> and the Vietnam Country Case study report<sup>2</sup>.

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The views in this report are those of the author alone and do not necessarily represent those of CARE Australia, its partners or the Australian Government.

The Evaluation Team would like to thank Josie Huxtable from CARE Australia who played an essential role in this evaluation – organising logistics, approving technical approach and undertaking interviews, collecting stories of change and doing focus group note taking. We would also like to thank the researcher team from Enterprise and Development Consultants (EDC); the CARE Lao staff in Dak Cheung who organised the logistics on top of already very busy workloads; and in particular Chris Wardle who gave a huge amount of support to the team; and the CARE Lao team in Vientiane who supported by contracting the researchers and taking part in the final evaluation presentation. And finally we would like to thank the numerous men and women in the villages who took part in the focus groups and interviews and were so open with their opinions and experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.care.org.au/what-we-do/lessons-impact/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.care.org.au/what-we-do/lessons-impact/>

## Summary

Women in Lao ethnic communities have limited income earning potential due to restrictive gender norms, heavy workloads and lack of mobility. CARE International in Laos has been working with ethnic communities in the poorest provinces in north and south Lao.

This ex-post evaluation covers 5 projects in a desk review of evaluation documents and a field study of the Dak Cheung Food Security Project. Four of the desk review projects aimed to improve food security and nutrition through a livelihoods approach. The fifth project combined UXO clearance with a livelihoods approach. Every project had some activity to empower women, and the approach evolved over time from a targeted to a mainstreamed approach, with the most recent two projects integrating gender equality throughout the project.

The evaluation found that a combined approach that increases women's inclusion in income earning activities while at the same time decreasing women's workload and promoting social norm change around gender roles has been successful in increasing women's economic empowerment. Action to improve women's agricultural knowledge and capability, was combined with approaches bring women together to identify and address problems. This has led to an increase in women's confidence, ability to negotiate and problem solve. Women and men successfully working together to produce coffee and rice, to market their produce and to make decisions together has been achieved through joint activities and gender training. Changes in the communities have resulted in respect for women's contribution to family income and inclusion in family and village decision making. There also appears to be some impact on women's and men's desire to have fewer children and to increase the age of marriage.

To strengthen the impact of CARE Laos' programming to promote women's economic empowerment future projects design should be based on an in-depth gender context analysis. Projects should include more comprehensive approaches to private sector development that improve women's access to markets and build up marketing knowledge and connections. They should also strengthen technical agricultural support and training with a more long term approach appropriate for women; enable women's access to financial services and strengthen financial literacy and business management skills; strengthen women's collaborative work within and between villages; support and strengthen gender equality champions; and analyse and monitor risks associated with alcohol abuse and violence against women. Programmes should consider whether and how to address structure and enabling environment barriers to gender equality.

Monitoring and evaluation of future projects and programmes should be based on appropriate mixed methods approaches – including appropriate measurement of income and expenditure and good quantitative and qualitative baseline and end line data.

# Acronyms

CISS	CARE sanitation project in Dak Cheung
DFSP	Dak Cheung Food Security Project
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICRW	International Centre for Research on Women
KII	Key Informant Interview
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprise
NTFP	Non-Timber Forest Products
PARUA	Poverty Alleviation in Remote Upland Areas
PFSCBP	Phonsaly Food Security and Capacity Building Project
PRDP	Phonsaly Rural Development Project
PWED	Poverty reduction and Women's Empowerment in Dak Cheung
SFSP	Sekong Food Security Project
SRHR	Sexual and reproductive health and rights
UXO	Unexploded Ordinance
VSLA	Village Savings and Loans Association
VVW	Village Veterinary Worker
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment
WINGS	Women's Income Generation and Nutrition Group

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# 1. Introduction

This country case study for Laos is part of a regional ex-post evaluation of projects working with women in the different ethnic groups of the Mekong region. The aim of the overall evaluation is to provide evidence of impact towards women's economic empowerment and to contribute to learning on how to design and implement approaches that will contribute to women's economic empowerment. This country case study also provides recommendations to CARE International in Laos (CARE Laos) on a strategic approach to women's economic empowerment across their projects. The evaluation in Laos consisted of a desk review of five CARE Laos projects and a field study of one of these projects.

## Laos Context – Challenges for Ethnic Women's Economic Empowerment

### Income and poverty

Lao PDR has a population of 6.8 million, with 80% living in rural areas. and although economic growth and poverty reduction have been impressive with economic growth averaging 7.9% over the last 5 years and poverty rates steadily decreasing from 46% of the population in the early 1990's to 28% in 2010, rural poverty remains a major challenge. Laos ranked 139 out of 187 countries in the human development index of 2013.

The majority of the people in Laos who live in remote rural areas belong to diverse ethnic groups and, although complex, there is a strong link between poverty and ethnicity. Though non-Lao-Tai groups account for only one-third of the national population, they make up more than half of the poor. Remote ethnic groups face many challenges including: language barriers, geographic isolation and limited access to services like markets, education and healthcare and risks from unexploded ordinances (UXOs), a particular problem in Sekong province, affecting 25% of villages nationally.

The five CARE Laos projects reviewed as part of this evaluation were all implemented in areas considered to be remote rural areas and where ethnic minority groups make up a significant proportion of the population. Three of the five projects (PFSCBP, PRDP and PARUA II) were implemented in Phongslay and Sayboul in the north, while the other two (LANGOCA and DFSP) were implemented in Sekong Province in the south. The northern upland areas of Laos are home to a range of remote ethnic communities including the Prai, Khmu, Phounoy, different Akha, Tai Lue and Hor with diverse cultures, languages and customs. The southern province of Sekong is home to remote ethnic communities of Talieng and Katu.

**Structure and enabling environment:** While Laos is performing fairly well in terms of gender equality compared to some countries, with a ranking of 118 in the gender inequality index and 112 in the gender related development index<sup>3</sup>, ethnic women have a much more difficult time in terms of equality and rights. Though national Laos legal and policy environment is quite favourable to the protection of women's rights, customary law and lack of access to services often means that ethnic women living in remote communities do not benefit from the protection of the law and government policies. For example, while the Lao inheritance law is gender neutral and gives the same rights to women, men and children, customary law differs by ethnic group and depends on residence patterns after marriage - matrilineal, Patrilineal or bi-local<sup>4</sup>. The Lao law on Women's Development and Protection, passed on 2004, aims to promote measures that will enhance women's knowledge and capability, improve gender equality, combat trafficking and domestic violence, and uphold women's status in society.

**Social norms around gender roles - barriers to economic opportunities:** Women's status<sup>5</sup> among all of the ethnic communities is defined by their reproductive, caring and household roles. In some communities women are confined to the village and independent travel is limited. A large majority of ethnic women only speak their local language and have trouble with understanding and speaking Lao.

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<sup>3</sup> 2013 UNDP Human Development Report

<sup>4</sup> Lao PDR Gender Profile. Gender Resource Information and Development Centre 2005.

<sup>5</sup> Much of the information in this section is from the Gender and Power Analysis for Remote Ethnic Groups (REG). CARE International in Laos, 2011. There are also some pieces from project documents as referenced.

This further isolates them and limits their ability to link with markets and economic opportunities. Rigid social norms around gender roles has meant that women have been burdened with an excessive amount of work in comparison to men – some of the work being physically very demanding – whilst at the same time being the primary carers of children and the sick and elderly.

**Power and Agency - decision making and violence:** Men are usually the head of the household and decision making is dominated by men in the house and in the community (only one percent of village heads are women despite 25% representation in National Assembly<sup>6</sup>). Household disputes are thought to be private and violence against women and girls is frequent (up to a third of all women in Laos), but not addressed. In the not too distant past, early and forced marriage (13yrs – 14yrs) was frequent and girls often dropped out of school.

**Power and agency – capability for income earning:** Women in remote ethnic communities have tended to have low levels of confidence in their own capability and are not supported within the community or through networks. There are hardly any services for women to build capacity for employment or enterprise and no access to finance. Before the CARE projects were started in some areas there were limited sources of income and much food was sourced from the forests and own cultivation, especially rice. There were different levels of food insecurity and poor nutrition in the provinces, where there are often food shortages towards the end of the dry season in many villages.

**Wellbeing:** In Sekong province food insecurity has led to chronic malnutrition with an estimated prevalence of moderate and severe stunting of 67.3%, with severe stunting prevalence of 31.3%<sup>7</sup>. Poor cooking methods and food hygiene also pose a problem for children’s health and nutrition<sup>8</sup>. Health care services were rare and access to contraception is still challenging in the remote communities, where roads are impassable for 3 – 5 months in the year.

**Infrastructure and development changes:** Rapid development in infrastructure and access to services has improved ethnic villages opportunities and women’s contact with the outside world. However there have also been increased risks from this development. For example in Sekong the increasing proliferation of mining by foreign companies has led to re-location of entire villages without adequate consultation. In other cases land for gold mining is bought from villagers and sometimes causes an inequitable influx of cash that can be damaging if not invested in development of the whole village.

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<sup>6</sup> UN Women Lao Factsheet

<sup>7</sup> Dak Cheung Food Security Project. Participatory diagnostic on current nutritional understandings and traditional practices associated with food, infant weaning and feeding and associated health issues. CARE August 2011. Jill Moloney MIPH, Midwife, BN

<sup>8</sup> Dak Cheung Food Security Project. Participatory diagnostic on current nutritional understandings and traditional practices associated with food, infant weaning and feeding and associated health issues. CARE August 2011. Jill Moloney MIPH, Midwife, BN

## 2. Evaluation Methodology

### 2.1 Literature review

As part of the overall regional ex-post evaluation a desk review of project evaluations in four countries was undertaken (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar). Project documentation was assessed for the following:

- Quality of gender context analysis and the use of this information in project design and overall approach.
- Quality of data collection and reporting available from each project – in particular the evaluation methodology and reports.
- Women’s economic empowerment results achieved by the project



**Caption:** Mrs. Sone, 23, has two children and is the head of her village's savings group. For the last two years, Sone and her husband have been running a shop selling general goods and fixing motorbikes. They have 5,000 cardamom bushes ready for harvest next year. “As the head of the savings group, I am really glad members can withdraw money for emergencies or for investment. In the future, I’d like to see a market in our village. I want to see the other producers of cardamom increase their production of crops because I want to see the entire village and get better.” Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

A framework for recording results and progress towards women’s economic empowerment was used to record findings from the evaluations. This was based on a hybrid definition of women’s economic empowerment, using the ICRW definition<sup>9</sup> and the CARE Women’s Empowerment framework domains.

This resulted in

**Table 1: Women’s Economic Empowerment Analysis Framework for WEEEM**

<b>Economic Advancement</b>	
Economic activity	Increase in sources of income and income earning activity
Income	Increase in income, who earns and controls the income (including activity and decision making around sales)
Asset ownership	Land, livestock, equipment Whether owned by husband, wife, family or both
Access to financial services	credit, savings, insurance, VSLA
Employment opportunities	working for others, MSMEs, formal/informal
Household wellbeing	changes in children’s education, nutrition, health
<b>Power and Agency</b>	
Agency (Power within)	
Knowledge and skills	Understanding of business, sales, marketing, or even basic arithmetic for recording income and expenses. Knowledge of and ability to use Lao language
Confidence and self esteem	Ability to speak out, be assertive and to make decisions. Belief in own abilities and value.
Aspirations	Ability to see beyond the current situation and aspire to increase economic activity or to generate different types of activity.
Ability to take advantage of opportunities	Sense of power and self-determination and authority to see opportunities and act on them
Relations (Power to, power with and power over)	
Decision making	Economic decision making around assets, income and expenditure; life and house hold decisions (including, for example, use of family planning).
Control of financial, physical or knowledge based assets	Decision making power over assets even if not owned.
Ability to organise with others	to enhance economic activities and rights
Household relations	including violence against women
<b>Structures, resources and social norms</b>	

<sup>9</sup> Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment. Definition, Framework and Indicators. Anne Marie Golla, Anju Malhotra, Priya Nanda, Rekha Mehra. ICRW 2011

Village social norms	social norms, attitudes and behaviour in relation to women's economic activities and inclusion of women in decision making at village level (including and listening to their voices)
Institutional social norms	Including government institutions and organisations
Access to resources	agricultural inputs, water, power, training and education resources
Markets and value chains	Inclusion of women in new roles (e.g. sales and marketing), social norms and information, leadership
Changes in the physical environment	including time saving infrastructure and equipment, and physical changes and resources to improve security (e.g. UXO clearance)
Laws and policies	Changes in relevant laws and regulations to improve women's rights – particularly in relation to ownership of assets, business and access to finance.

The five projects reviewed for the Laos country case study were:

- Dak Cheung Food Security Project (DFSP)
- Phonsaly Food Security and Capacity Building Project (PFSCBP)
- LANGOCA – Reducing UXO risk and improving livelihoods for ethnic communities in Sekong Province.
- Poverty Alleviation in Remote Upland Areas – PARUA II
- Phonsaly Rural Development Project – PRDP

## 2.2 Fieldwork methodology

The Laos fieldwork focused on the DFSP project in Dak Cheung district, Sekong province in southern Laos. Data collection for the field study involved a combination of focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs) and collection of stories of change (SOCs). The field work was designed to be complementary to the desk review and to contribute to an overall analysis of change that has taken place by giving more in-depth detail of the changes that have taken place for ethnic minority women involved in the projects. The desk review framework informed the development of the following Laos fieldwork research questions:

(i). Have women's income earning and economic opportunities improved since the project began and how has this impacted on women's and their family's economic security and food security?

- How has women's income earning and economic opportunities improved security improved?? Level of asset or income increases (can we quantify)? Better food being eaten and protein more frequently. Children going to school.
- What has contributed to women's increase in income and economic opportunities? (e.g. land ownership, networks and cooperatives, skills and knowledge etc)
- Has this project contributed to women's economic and food security? How?

(ii). How has the project impacted on women's power and agency? (covering agency, structure and relations)

- How have women's capacity, self-esteem, knowledge and skills changed as a result of the project?
- How have women's relative power and voice within the community and the family changed as a result of the project?

- What has enabled these changes – e.g. networks, links with organisations, income, men’s attitude change, more time, etc?
- How have community and institutional social norms and attitudes changed as a result of the project or other activities?
- What is the most important change that has impacted on women’s empowerment?

(iii) What are the social, economic and environmental barriers to progress in women’s economic empowerment?

- What aspects of being a woman limit them from earning an income?
- Is there anything that worries or scares women? (Could include violence from partner or other family member, UXO, hunger, safety of my children).
- Do women need their husband’s permission to own an enterprise or to go to work or to sell products in the market in Dak Cheung?
- Is time a limitation in earning an income?
- Are women supported by family members, husbands or other people in the village?

(iv) How have institutions, committees, organisations and coffee processing groups changed to include women and enable women’s economic empowerment?

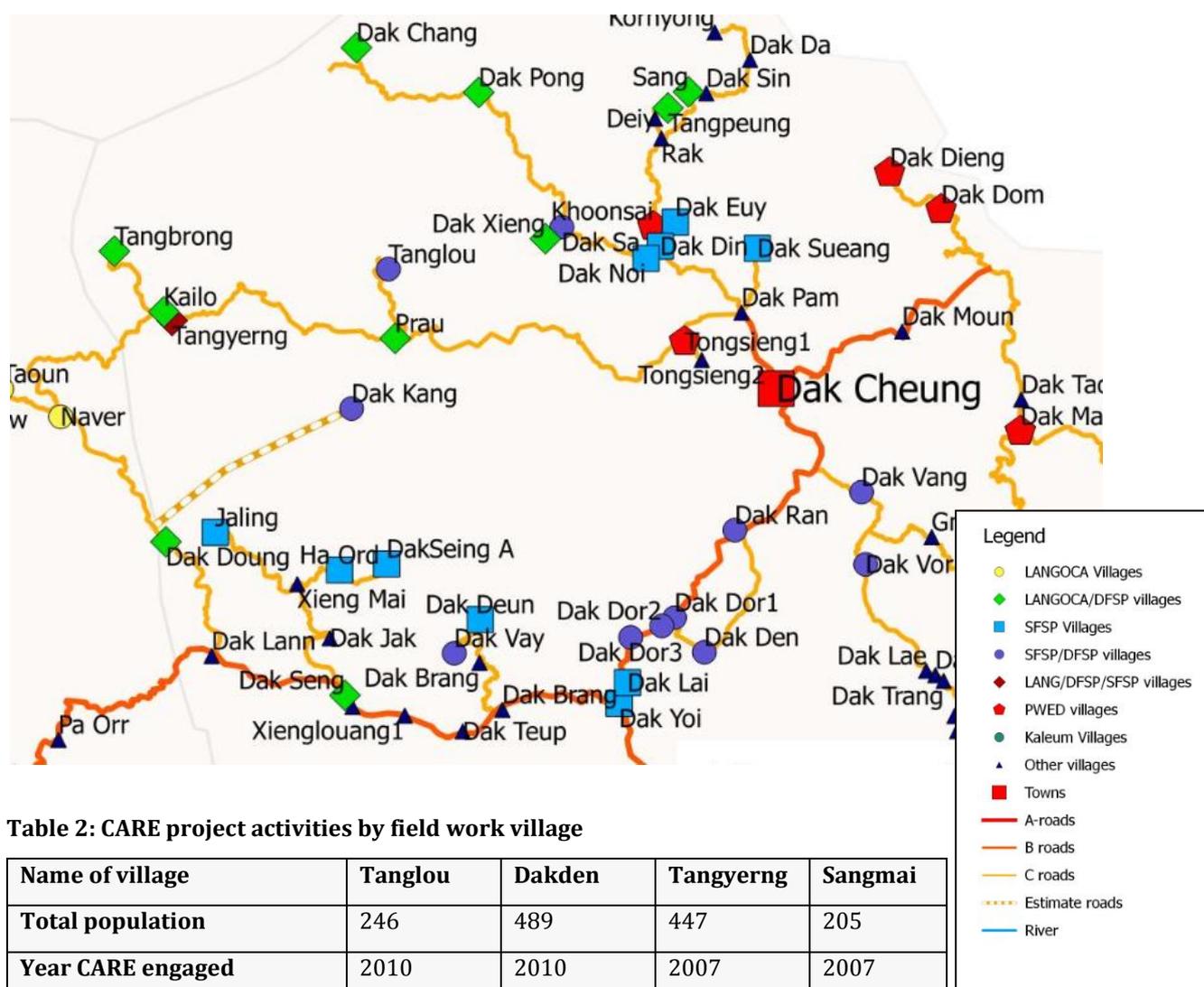
- Do women hold leadership positions in village committees/coffee groups?
- Are their voices heard and acted upon in the committee meetings?
- Are government institutions and policies supportive of women’s inclusion and participation in income earning activities? How do they support women?

Data collection for the DFSP project was carried out in four of the 20 villages in Dak Cheung where the project was implemented. The selection of villages for data collection during the ex post evaluation took into account the following criteria:

- Mix of size of village
- Covering both ethnic groups overall
- Covering a range of project mixes by village
- At least one remote village (i.e. with difficult access)
- Geographical spread

These four villages were found to have been covered by activities under three CARE Laos projects. Figure 1 and Table 2 below highlight which aspects of which projects were implemented in the villages and the timescale.

**Figure 1: Dak Cheung District in Sekong Province. CARE project villages**



**Table 2: CARE project activities by field work village**

Name of village	Tanglou	Dakden	Tangyerng	Sangmai
<b>Total population</b>	246	489	447	205
<b>Year CARE engaged</b>	2010	2010	2007	2007
<b>Ethnic group</b>	Talieng Katu	Talieng	Talieng	Talieng
<b>DFSP</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>LANGOCA (end 2012)</b>			X	X
<b>PWED (until 2017)</b>	X	X	X	X
<b>CISS (end 2011)</b>			X	
WINGS under DFSP	X	X		X
new WINGS PWED (2013/4)			X	
Coffee processing group		X		
irrigation committee	(small)	X		
coffee planting (HH)	X		X	X

Within each village, four focus groups were conducted – two with women only and two with men only, each representing a mix of income and poverty levels. The villages were so small that all participants had been in contact with project activities of some sort. Nearly all of the women were Women income and nutrition groups (WINGS)<sup>10</sup> members. Men and women participants for the FGDs and KIIs were chosen by the village head and the WINGS coordinator one to three days before the evaluation team arrived in the village.

A participatory tool called “Spokes” was used for the focus groups. This involved the identification of key change areas that were then analysed by the group using a graphic representation to demonstrate the extent of change and the importance of each change. Focus group and interview tools were tested in Dak Vang. (See Annex 1 for full explanation of the tool).

Within each focus group one or two participants were identified for an in-depth interview to record their story of change. KIIs were undertaken at the village level with: a Lao women’s union representative; village leader, irrigation group leader; coffee group leader, WINGS leader and facilitator; government representatives and where possible a teacher or health worker. Tools for the focus group discussions and the interviews are available in Annex X.

## 2.3 Limitations

In Laos the research process and logistics worked well. However the following drawbacks and challenges to quality research were identified:

- (i) **Translation:** the diversity of languages spoken in the research areas meant that multiple layers of translation were required. Despite the presence of a facilitator with Lao language and an ethnic interpreter (Talieng) there was inevitably a loss of information and detail each time translation took place. Two of the villages spoke a third language which was not known by the ethnic interpreter. In this instance a FGD participant translated to Talieng for other participants. This was mainly an issue for the women as men were more likely to speak Lao.
- (ii) **Language:** the word “empowerment” or discussions about power were not permitted by government in Laos. So interpreters used the term “women’s strengthening” rather than “women’s empowerment”. This may not have had a significant impact, but will have changed slightly the research team’s understanding. However, both FGD facilitators understood and spoke English well enough to be able to take this on board.
- (iii) **Note taking:** Though the focus group facilitation was very good, the note taking lacked detail. This was supplemented by the team leader and the CARE representative sitting in on some of the focus groups. However this was not possible for all of them – particularly the men’s focus groups. A sound recording and transcript of the FGDs would have overcome this challenge. However this would have cost more money and could have inhibited the FGD participants.
- (iv) **Culture:** men’s FGDs were more challenging as there was difficulty engaging men in a discussion about their wives and the changes in women’s roles in the village. There was a tendency for peer influence within the groups, which meant that outliers would not speak up. Individual interviews with a small selection of men provided more detail.

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<sup>10</sup> Women’s Income and Nutrition Groups (WINGS) are the women groups set up by the DFSP project. They were a vehicle for bringing women together to build skills and confidence and also for the women to participate in project decision making. The WINGS used participatory techniques to identify and address work burden issues and to organise learning on nutrition and cooking.

(v) The **spokes methodology** worked very well and was enjoyed by the evaluation team and the participants. It was easy to understand and provided interesting results, some of which could be quantified.

(vi) **Desk review challenges:** the quality of Laos project evaluation reports was poor. There was a lack of quantitative data that could be drawn on to provide evidence of how well the projects had performed overall. There was also a lack of information about methodology and tools, which made it very difficult to assess the quality of information in the reports.

(vii) **Attribution:** attribution of findings to DFSP alone, is not possible as there are several similar CARE Laos projects that are either currently being implemented or are now closed. (See Annex X for a map of these projects). DFSP builds on the learning from LANGOCA and some villages have benefitted from other projects such as CISS. Recent or current projects, such as SFSP and PWED have similar activities to DFSP and are continuing the same work. Thus the field work has identified findings from current and past projects that have the same approach. It is evaluating the CARE Laos approach to women's economic empowerment rather than the project itself.

### 3. Desk review Findings

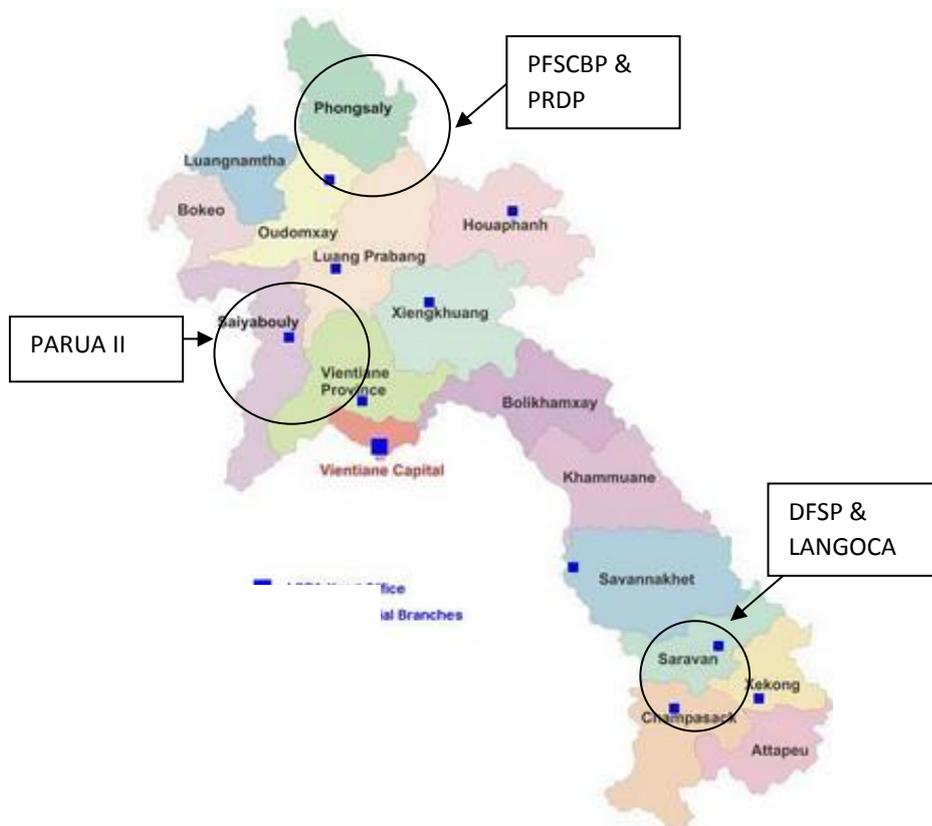


**Caption:** CARE team from Australia visited Phia Village populated by the Khamu people.

Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

Between 2007 and 2014 CARE Laos implemented five projects that aimed to address nutrition, livelihoods and security issues, together costing over 9 million Australian dollars (total AUD9,226,571). This section provides a summary of the findings from the desk review of the five CARE projects in Lao PDR. While none of the chosen review projects had a primary level objective focussed on women's economic empowerment (WEE), the majority of project approaches included some aspect of targeting women, or wider empowerment aims combined with livelihoods approaches. The desk review focused on collating and analysing evidence of progress and impact against the WEE framework at Table 1.

**Figure 2: Lao PDR Map with project locations**



### 3.1 Summary overview of the CARE Laos programming initiatives reviewed for the WEEM evaluation (Table 2)

<b>PFSCBP - Phonsaly food security and capacity building project</b>	
<u>Purpose:</u> To sustainably increase food security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas in two districts in Phongsaly Province	
<p>Target group: 7,400 participants in 1,050 households, many female headed, in 31 remote villages</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 31 villages in Samphan and Khua districts, Phongsaly province in the Northeast of the Laos</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> Oct 2005 - Oct 2009</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 980,000</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to food is increased through improved capacity of households to generate income by taking advantage of market opportunities</li> <li>• Improved health, in particular among children, and reduced workload on women, and</li> <li>• Capacity building of communities and local government bodies.</li> </ul> <p><u>Implementation and WEE approach:</u> Three pronged approach to addressing poor nutrition: income generation, food growing and health awareness and training. Income generation focuses mostly on livestock and NTFP. Food growing is only through home gardens. Women targeted approaches in this project focus on addressing women's time constraints, nutrition and their access to health services, which relates to wellbeing and decision making in reproductive health (agency). Project support to increase knowledge and capability around agriculture and livestock production as well as NTFP collection (honey) has resulted in increased economic advancement. However there is no indication of how women were included and what the impact on women has been. Only nutrition and health activities specifically mention women.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Livestock, cattle banks, vet services, marketing and trade</li> <li>* NTFP production and marketing</li> <li>* Income generation, tailoring and handicrafts</li> <li>* Water and sanitation</li> <li>* Nutrition knowledge and practice including vegetable gardens</li> <li>* Health awareness – SRHR and HIV</li> </ul>
<b>LANGOCA - Reducing UXO Risk and Improving Livelihoods of Ethnic Communities</b>	
<u>Purpose:</u> Reduce vulnerability of ethnic communities in Sekong province through integration of UXO and poverty reduction strategies	

<p><u>Target group:</u> Talieng and Arak, with lesser numbers of Ngkriang and other ethnic groups</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> Sekong Province: 20 communities in Lamarm and Dakcheung districts with an estimated total population of 6,500 persons</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> 21 May 2007 – 30 June 2012, extended to June 2014</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Fondation Suisse De Deminage (FSD), the World Food Program. Govt partners: Provincial and District Labour and Social Welfare Office (PoLSW), the District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (DAFO) and the Lao Women’s Union (LWU).</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 2,600,921</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce physical risks and livelihood constraints associated with UXO contamination</li> <li>• Improve rural based livelihoods amongst ethnic minority communities with a direct measurable impact on the wellbeing of women and girls</li> <li>• Build village and district capacities to identify and address livelihood opportunities and risks</li> <li>• Effective and efficient project coordination and management</li> </ul> <p><u>Implementation and WEE approach:</u> A project that works on livelihoods, health and UXO clearance, whilst building skills and capacity in communities and among government workers. LANGOCA has taken a fairly integrated WEE approach, which means that it is mainstreamed throughout the project activities: building up women’s knowledge and skills through integration into agriculture and livestock production activities – and thereby increasing their income earning potential. At the same time women’s voices are involved in decision making through a women's forum, which was intended to make sure that women's ideas and aims for livelihoods projects and clearance areas are taken into account. Barriers to agency and relations are also addressed through time saving technology, SRHR awareness and literacy and numeracy training.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* UXO clearance by community prioritisation, UXO awareness training, first aid for village health volunteers, finance for victims</li> <li>* Technology to reduce women’s workload</li> <li>* Improved vehicle access to villages</li> <li>* Trader market</li> <li>* Women’s Lao, numeracy and nutrition skills</li> <li>* SRHR and HIV awareness</li> </ul>
<p><b>PARUA II - Poverty alleviation in remote upland areas</b></p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To sustainably increase livelihood security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u> 11 villages - Prai ethnic group</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> All villages of the two Kum Ban Pattana (Village Development Groups) in Samet/Sayasana zone.</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase local government and private sector capacities to manage and deliver livelihood services in target Kum Ban Pattana, Sayabouly District.</li> <li>• Increase food security of poor and middle income households in target villages classified as poor by GoL</li> <li>• Improve ‘quality of life’ in target villages</li> </ul>

<p><u>Timeframe:</u> March 2008 - May 2012</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> WFP, local govt</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 1,612,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase Prai women's and men's ability to participate meaningfully in household and community development processes</li> </ul> <p><u>Implementation approach:</u> Multi-sector project with the aim to mainstream gender throughout. Addressing a range of health, practical, income and nutrition barriers. Strong emphasis on building capacity of the Prai people - both men and women. Well planned approach to inclusion of women and based on good analysis of context in Prai culture. PARUA Phase II was expected to have a positive impact on gender relations amongst the Prai and power relations between the Prai and outsiders. The PARUA II approach includes targeted and integrated approaches to WEE. Approaches to increase access to productive assets and income earning opportunities were targeted at households, but included women and thereby worked towards women's economic advancement. Women's power and agency were enhanced through improved knowledge, workload initiatives, decision making power in women's and community groups and access to health and education services. Some of these will also have aimed to have an impact on relations and social norms due to the interaction with local government decision making and accountability. Particular efforts to include Prai women as project staff were prioritised.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Village development groups for income generation MSMEs</li> <li>* Access to food and productive assets with a focus on the poorest 25%</li> <li>* Incomes from tea, livestock, NTFP</li> <li>* Better transport, health services and promotion</li> <li>* Water supply</li> <li>* Prai men and women participation</li> </ul>
<p><b>DFSP - Dak Cheung Food Security Project</b></p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To Increase food security particularly of the poorest, through expanding and diversifying income and food sources reducing vulnerability to natural and market based shocks</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u> All households in 20 villages – mostly Talieng and Katu</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> Sekong Province, Dak Cheung district</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> April 2010 to December 2013</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased productivity of household staple foods, fats and protein production systems.</li> <li>• Expanded income generating assets (livestock, coffee) of the poor, generating significant additional incomes.</li> <li>• Improved women's food utilization skills and reduced women's labour burden.</li> <li>• Strengthened village and District technical skills and capacities associated with project promoted food and income production systems.</li> </ul>

<p><u>Partners:</u> Government, Lao Women's Union</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 1,700,000</p>	<p><u>Implementation approach:</u> An integrated approach to improving nutrition through increasing sources of food and income and knowledge of cooking and nutritious eating, with women included in most activities. DFSP has a fairly integrated and holistic approach to WEE. Women's economic advancement was targeted by introducing new income earning opportunities (gardening, livestock, NTFP) and increasing access to time-saving assets. Power and agency were addressed through inclusion of women in technical capacity building (agriculture, water, and livestock), including study visits, and nutrition and cooking training. Relations and decision making power in particular were addressed through the women's groups (WINGS) and inclusion in village decision making.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Income generation and better nutrition through coffee and livestock, fish farms, vegetable gardens and fruit trees.</li> <li>* Women's nutrition and cooking training</li> <li>* Irrigation and rice farming</li> <li>* Coffee production and processing</li> <li>* WINGS group and women's workload reduction</li> <li>* Training and study visits</li> <li>* Road maintenance</li> </ul>
<p><b>PRDP - Phongsaly Rural Development project</b></p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To increase food and nutritional security of the poorest at household and community levels through facilitating the development of food and nutritional strategies and meaningful engagement in wider decision-making processes at local levels affecting their future food security.</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u></p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 28 targeted villages (10 new villages in Samphan District, 10 new villages in Mai District, and 8 existing villages in Khua District,)</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> 1st January 2012 – 30th June 2013</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office, Provincial Public Health Office, Provincial Planning,</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased community, women's &amp; farmer groups, and local NPA social capital and participation in planning, demand creation and model development for improved food security, nutrition and health outcomes in 3 districts in Phongsaly province.</li> <li>• Improved local farming systems which respond directly to women's priorities with main emphasis on (i) improved nutritional and food security, (2) income generation of products with high market potential, and (3) climate change adaptation</li> <li>• Strengthened NPA &amp; CARE cooperation in central-level policy engagement, and inclusion of CARE evidence-based models and lessons learned into key GoL rural development policies and programs and their implementation</li> </ul> <p><u>Implementation approach:</u> Integrated programme with agriculture, nutrition, farmer groups, health volunteers, women's groups and widespread capacity development and policy dialogue. The agriculture inputs are varied with a range of different crops offered to the villages. Targeted and integrated approach to inclusion of women through women's groups and integration</p>

<p>Investment and Cooperation Office, and Provincial Lao Women's Union</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 388,882</p>	<p>throughout activities. PRDP is has an important emphasis on structure and relations, while at the same time building women's income earning opportunities and access to services. Village level social capital and inclusion in public and planning decision making aims to improve women's inclusion in decision making and their access to services. Economic advancement activities not on focus on agriculture and food production (cash crops, NTFP, livestock and gardens), but also include financial literacy and market engagement and market information systems. Agency and relations are changed through farmer and women's groups.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Women's and farmer groups</li> <li>* Hygiene and water</li> <li>* Participation in planning</li> <li>* Training in financial literacy, market engagement</li> <li>* Animal banks, veterinary fund</li> <li>* Farming trials and NTFP, gardening and high value crops</li> <li>* Market information systems</li> <li>* Study visits for farmers and women's groups</li> </ul>
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## 3.2 Gender and Power analyses for project design

There is variable quality of gender and power analysis that has been used for project design. ***In the cases where there has been a more in-depth gender analysis at project design phase, usually using CARE's women's empowerment framework, this has resulted in a more appropriate approach to addressing constraints and barriers experienced by women and an integrated approach to supporting women's economic empowerment.*** The projects with less gender analysis tend to have a more targeted and one dimensional approach to women's economic empowerment – in that they potentially only address economic advancement (e.g. income earning) or limited aspects of power and agency (e.g. nutrition and cooking knowledge and skills). This kind of approach does not take into account the multiple levels of activity that need to take place in order to promote the changes that will contribute to women's economic empowerment. None of the project design documents have an in-depth gender and power analysis that includes an analysis of women's economic situation, activities and opportunities alongside analysis of women's agency and barriers related to structure, social norms and lack of access to resources.

In PSFCBP and LANGOCA (which started in 2005 and 2007 respectively) there is no gender analysis at all in the context section of project design document. However both of them have one or two outputs that target women:

- PSFCBP under Objective 2 has one output that mentions women *“Better nutrition knowledge and practice by establishing home gardens and training of women in villages on nutrition, food preparation and preservation”*
- LANGOCA has two outputs: Output 2.2: *“Women's workload reduced and improved production capacity. Expected Achievements: (i) Technologies for reducing women's workload introduced in a minimum of 20 villages. (ii) Minimum of 3 improved production technologies trialed and adopted by village women across 20 villages”* and Output 3.2: *“Increased life skills of women in 20 targeted communities. Expected Achievements: (i) Minimum of 1,000 women and girls have improved Lao, numeracy and nutrition skills and knowledge. (ii) Minimum of 1,000 women/ girls and minimum 1000 men have improved understanding of reproductive health and HIV/AIDs. (iii) District Health services and village health volunteers are reporting increase in women and girls requesting reproductive health services”*

Both projects have an approach to address women's time poverty and increase women's capacity and skills through training. However there is not an overall approach to women's inclusion in activities, nor a nuanced approach to supporting women's participation in decision making at household and village level. PSFCBP has activities to improve women's knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and other health areas, alongside training of health workers. However there does not appear to be a link between the health related barriers to women's participation in decision making and income earning. Consequently the women focused activities appear to be stand-alone approaches (see section xx for more detail).

This is in contrast to the context analysis and approach undertaken in PARUA II, DFSP and PRDP, all of which were started later (2008, 2010, 2012 respectively) and so benefitted from an evolution in CARE's approach to women's empowerment working at multiple levels. All three of the projects were based on a more in-depth gender analysis. However this analysis still lacked information about women's economic activities and opportunities, markets and value chains relevant to women, and detailed description of the economic roles of men and women. For example the PARUA II design document examines aspects of structure and relations in describing how the targeted Prai ethnic group is matrilineal, and that joint decision making takes place in the household, though there are strong restrictions to women travelling outside of the village unless accompanied by their husband. It also acknowledges women's heavy workload, and how this has deteriorated due to village re-location, village size policies and lack of access to land. The PRDP design document goes further by discussing how women suffer from a lack of social capital and exclusion from government decision making and planning processes; and how gender relations limit women's roles and access to resources. Neither of these provide a full analysis of women's economic and income earning situation and the economic roles of men and women in the villages.

Interestingly DFSP has approaches to inclusion of women throughout the project design document even though the context analysis in relation to gender is not complete. There are small amounts of contextual information peppered throughout the description of the proposed output and activities such as “*Within patriarchal Talieng society men play traditional roles in dealing with ‘outsiders’, however it is women who undertake key tasks associated with major technical interventions supported by DFSP (e.g. coffee cultivation and upland cropping).*” This type of information provides an important rationale for the creation and use of the WINGS (women’s) groups to enhance women’s voice and inclusion throughout the project activities.

It is clear that an in-depth gender analysis is essential in order to fully understand the barriers that women face when trying to earn an income and improve their financial and food security. It would be advisable to use gender analysis that encompasses both CARE’s women’s empowerment framework and the women’s economic empowerment framework shown in Table 1, section 2.1. In particular it is important to cover the aspects of women’s economic advancement: access to productive assets, income earning potential, access to financial services and employment opportunities. This will give important information that can be used to build appropriate approaches and a theory of change that can address all areas that contribute to women’s economic empowerment.

### 3.3 Characterising CARE Laos’ Women’s Economic Empowerment model

There are clear commonalities of approach across all five of the CARE Laos projects. The approaches aimed to contribute to:

Women’s economic advancement through:

- Initiatives to increase women’s agricultural, livestock and NTFP production capability
- Changes in social norms around “women’s economic activities” – such as earning an income and selling produce
- Explicit targeting and inclusion of women, especially women from ethnic minorities, in income earning activities and control over assets

Women’s power and agency through:

- Group formation to build women’s capability and confidence and to engage in economic activities and to address women’s workload through use of time saving and load bearing equipment
- Strengthening women’s knowledge and skills
- Inclusion of women in decision making at project and village level

#### 3.3.1 Commonalities in activities to promote women’s economic advancement

***Initiatives to increase women’s agricultural, livestock and NTFP production capability*** were included in all of the projects. The main approaches focused on:

- Enhancing the production and sales of garden vegetables by introducing new varieties, improving gardening techniques and encouraging sale of surplus. This was used in all of the projects – though PARUA II had more of a focus on cash crops, so gardening was for household tea production mostly.
- Improving diversity and management of livestock production – including fish ponds, small livestock with village based vaccination services.
- Introduction of cash crops, some domestication of NTFP and sales of NTFP for cash. This usually focused on rice, coffee, tea and other smaller cash crops. Women were often introduced to these activities for the first time.

In all five projects the food production and cash crop activities were combined with cooking and nutrition training in order to improve food security and healthy eating practice. The cooking was almost exclusively a woman’s realm and projects did not do much to challenge the gender roles in this area.

However a small number of men were trained to cook. Overall project evaluations were positive about the impact of these activities on nutrition outcomes and food security because of the increase incomes and access to a wider variety of food sources and types. However it is likely that these outcomes were only possible because of the other initiatives that were combined with these.

In particular the **changes in social norms around “women’s economic activities”** appeared to have been an important contribution to the increase in family income. Projects were able to **include women in income earning activities** that had previously only involved men. PRDP and DFSP were particularly committed to this approach and included women in all of the income earning and marketing activities. PRDP had an active approach to market analysis and market information systems.

**Women’s access to and control over assets** were promoted through women’s groups and associations – and this was particularly apparent in DFSP, PARUA II in Laos. Women were reported to have control of time saving assets such as carts and rice mills, though often these were also considered community or family owned assets.

### 3.3.2 Commonalities in activities to promote women’s power and agency

**Group formation** was used to include women in income earning activity, to build knowledge and capability through training and study visits and also, for women only groups such as WINGS in DFSP, to build women’s confidence and capability to participate in decision making. For example DFSP set up coffee groups in some villages to support nurseries, plantation, processing and marketing of coffee – which was a new cash crop for many of the ethnic communities. The DFSP groups always included one or two women. DFSP, LANGOCA, PARUA II and PRDP also formed women’s groups and addressed work burden barriers by using participatory processes in the groups to identify areas of heavy work burden and to prioritise action to address them (e.g. with the hand cards and rice mills).

**Strengthening women’s knowledge and skills was a key strategy of almost all projects** and appeared to be an essential part of changes seen in women’s participation in income earning and confidence building. Training and capacity strengthening was done through direct training and study visits which included women, as in DFSP, LANGOCA and PRDP; and through cascading, as in DFSP in PRDP. Training and capacity strengthening topics included:

- Financial literacy training by PRDP
- Technical agriculture and processing skills – which included women in DFSP (e.g. coffee processing), LANGOCA, PRDP
- Veterinary skills by PRDP and PFSCBP – but some of these did not include women.
- Language, literacy and numeracy training – LANGOCA
- Wellbeing training - Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), HIV awareness, hygiene, nutrition, cooking. PFSCBP provided nutrition and SRHR training. DFSP in provided training on hygiene, nutrition and cooking through the women’s groups. LANGOCA provided nutrition and SRHR and HIV awareness training.
- Life skills and gender training. Gender training was also provided in the region where DFSP was implemented, but it is likely that this was undertaken by SFSP, a follow project straight after DFSP. It was picked up in the fieldwork.

### 3.3.3 Commonality in efforts to change structure and social norms around gender equality

Nearly all of the projects **included women in decision making at project and village level**. This was facilitated by women’s participation in women only groups and smaller productive groups, where they could practice participation and build up their confidence in a safe environment and be involved in project level prioritisation. It was also facilitated by village heads encouraging women to come to village

meetings and enabling their participation. PARUA II had a targeted approach to building men and women’s ability to participate in local policy and planning processes, while the other projects mostly focused on women’s participation at village level.

Inclusion of government officials in approaches and trainings (for example DFSP). National and local government had to be involved in all project evaluations and were also involved in some project activities. Most projects aimed to build government capacity to take responsibility for some activities, but there were often limited funds within government to take this on. DFSP included government officials in gender training and community based approaches.

### 3.4 Successful approaches - Assessment of project impacts

All five projects reviewed demonstrated some level of impact on women’s economic empowerment. Successful approaches for achieving women’s economic empowerment combined the inclusion of women in economic activities and decision making, women’s empowerment and building of social capital through women’s groups, the decrease of women’s excessive workload and increase in women’s knowledge and capabilities through study visits and training. Not all projects were able to cover each of these areas, but all had some elements combined with other aspects of support to women, including improving access to sexual and reproductive health knowledge and services (PSFCBP)

#### 3.4.1 Women’s Economic advancement

##### Women’s economic activity and increase in income

All of the project evaluations demonstrate an increase in household income. Some increases are quantified – see Table 3 below. However there were no figures available for increases in women’s income.

##### Box 1: PRDP information on women’s increased income

Income generation interventions for women including cardamom, galangal, aquaculture, pig bank and goat bank. It was reported that women are not only involved in the mentioned interventions, but they also take responsibility in selling the commodities at the market (farm gate), mainly galangal, cardamom and fish. Most of the produced commodities are normally sold at the village. Women save money and maintain expenditure in almost all households of the target villages.

*“My family has better income and I can now feed my children better and send them to school”* Woman with six children in Kongat village

This is probably because families in ethnic villages consider all money and assets as jointly owned and CARE focussed on improving household income and food security rather than just women’s income.

**Table 3: Reported changes in income and wellbeing by project**

DFSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Average household income for a poor household went from 2,020 US\$ per year at baseline to 2,240 US\$ per year at evaluation.</li> <li>• Food and income activities had enabled significant development of food security and increases in household income.</li> </ul>
PSFCBP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 51.2% of the HH cash income is coming from livestock.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>From 166 households, cash income from sales of NTFP amounted to an average 26,8% of the cash equivalent of the rice deficiency in rice self-insufficient households</li> </ul>
LANGOCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Removal of UXOs has impacted on access to productive land by freeing up 114 in hectares Sekong province – which is now being used for farming</li> <li>91% percent of the groups and 82% of individuals said the project had a positive change or had improved their quality of life. Most people reported increased income</li> <li>110 FGD participants (couples) in seven villages report lighter workloads and more income</li> </ul>
PARUA II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>68% of households report that their food security situation has improved during phase II of PARUA.</li> <li>Average household monetary income increased by 27 % to \$589 while the cumulative national inflation rate was 23% over the same period.</li> <li>Increase in income is even more important for poor families since their mean value of income has increased by 69.2% from USD 124 to USD 211 and the median value by 60.2% from USD 64 to USD 102.</li> </ul>
PRDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The nutrition situation in the project villages has been significantly improved as a result from the increase of income and food production at HH level.</li> <li>Fish, goat, pig, vegetables, cardamom, and galangal contributed most to income generation – and these are all women’s activities.</li> <li>Goat bank increased community income and reduced risk for the poorest and most vulnerable.</li> <li>Women save money and maintain expenditure in almost HHs of the target villages.</li> <li>14 HHs in Phongsaly reported that have more income from selling of two cash crops.</li> </ul>

The majority of project evaluations provide information regarding new activities that have likely contributed to the increase in income (see Figure 3 below). Because this shows progress in the different areas in Figure 3, we can infer that the increases in household income are likely to have been partially caused by changes in women’s economic participation and advancement. This is particularly evident in DFSP, PARUA II and PRDP (see section 4 for further information).

Women have also contributed to the reported improvements in food security through the fish ponds and vegetable gardens (in PRDP and DFSP) and the diversified crop production (in PFSCBP and PRDP).

**Box 2: LANGOCA achievements – not sex disaggregated**

- (+) there has been a change in attitudes towards commercial activity, sales and making a profit (which before there was no interest in.)
- (+) Removal of UXOs has impacted on access to productive land – which is now being used for farming coffee, gardens etc.
- (+) 91% percent of the groups and 82% of individuals said the project had a positive change or had improved their quality of life. Most people reported increased income
- (+) All villages are now planting coffee which provide an alternative income
- (+) Fish and ducks also providing an income

### Asset control and ownership

There was no reported increase in assets specifically owned by women, though households increased livestock ownership through animal donation, livestock banks, vaccination and animal husbandry initiatives (DFSP and PSFCBP), with mixed results. At least one vaccination initiative was not perceived to be successful as animals were dying. However the goat and cattle banks in PSFCBP that are community owned were a successful way of ensuring that the most vulnerable groups benefit from assets and thereby protect from increasing income inequality in the villages.

Women also benefitted from time saving and workload assets – which were controlled by them through women’s groups, but were generally family or village owned.

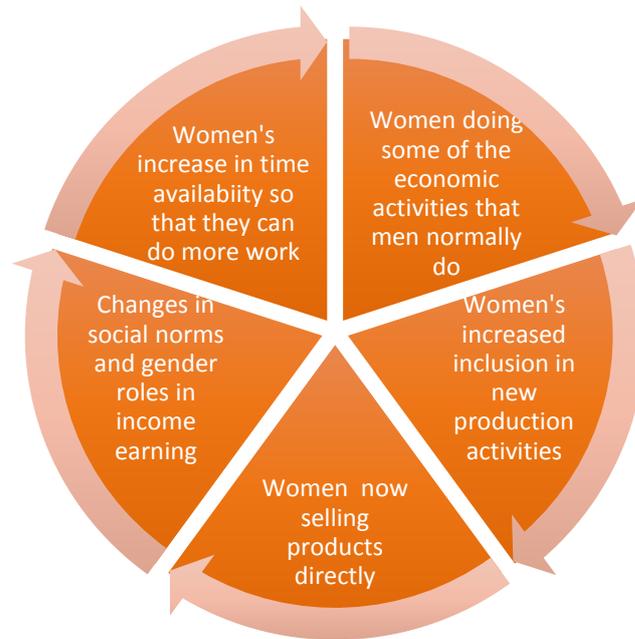
**Household wellbeing** All of the project evaluations reported an increase in household wellbeing – particular in relation to food security and better health. PRDP, PFSCBP, DFSP and PARUA II all reported an improvement in nutrition and food security including improvements in children’s weight, health and development. A majority of LANGOCA participants reported a better quality of life. Improvements were attributed to better food security and increases in income, but also to better knowledge around nutrition and health. **Time saving:**

Across all of the projects the approaches to addressing women’s heavy workloads and time poverty appeared to be the most effective and have a multiplier affect across other areas. All five projects provided assets to save time and workload, including hand carts for carrying wood and water, rice mills for processing rice for cooking and water systems to increase easier access to drinking water. This work not only resulted improved health and wellbeing of women, but also contributed to a change in norms around roles (see Box 2). Women in DFSP reported being able to have more sleep, to attend meetings and to be involved in more income earning activities.

#### Box 3: DFSP workload reduction initiative changes social norms

Collection and transport of firewood has traditionally been a woman’s job. Even when having to carry a baby or when coming back from a long day in the fields, women were required to find and carry the wood. DFSP introduced hand carts for the transport of wood and other items in order to reduce women’s workload and save time. During the evaluation women reported that not only are they able to reduce the time spent collecting wood (previously they collected wood everyday now one cart lasts for a week – see SOCs) but that with the introduction of a new piece of equipment, not traditionally seen as a man or a woman’s, (such as the basket), men are now sharing the task.

### Figure 3: Women’s contribution to increases in household income



### 3.4.2 Changes in power and agency

**Knowledge and skills:** All of the reviewed projects included some training, study visits or peer learning. The training was successful at increasing knowledge and skills in:

- nutrition and cooking
- improved and diversified food production and knowledge of markets
- group formation and management of tasks

Depending on the project there were varying levels of involvement of women in these activities. DFSP, PARUA II and PRDP all purposefully included women in training. However the PARUA II evaluation noted that the village head tended to choose men for the training, some women's participation was not as high as anticipated. In all projects there were cases of women being more involved in training that reinforced their traditional roles – such as cooking and nutrition. However, in others, such as the DFSP coffee study visits, women were introduced to new roles and were expected to cascade learning throughout the village. In these visits small groups of men and women (usually three men and two women) from each village went to Paksong, a well-developed coffee production area, to learn about coffee nursery production, plantations and marketing. PFSCBP and LANGOCA documents did not always clarify whether women or men were engaged in some of the activities, however the LANGOCA project had a specific objective to improve women's production capacity, so it is likely that the results reported in the evaluation covered both men and women.

Project evaluations do not measure the direct impact on women's knowledge and skills, but do report improvements in food production, which for women is usually related to the gardening and small livestock activities.

**Confidence and self-esteem:** The DFSP evaluation is the only report that specifically examines the issue of women's confidence and self-esteem: *"the participation of women in training has been a key factor in their increasing confidence levels and ability to exercise agency in their relationships within the household and the village"*. Whereas it might be expected that group and decision making involvement would have increased women's self-esteem in other projects, it has been overlooked as a significant outcome area.

**Decision making and organising with others:** Women’s involvement in decision-making has been an important process and result of several of the projects. DFSP, LANGOCA and PRDP have included women in key project implementation groups, such as water management committees, or coffee production committees. Whereas it is documented that women did not attend or participate in meetings before the projects, they now speak out in meetings and have a higher level of participation – which is an important result. Women have also participated in village level decision making in PFSCBP through the process of developing participatory action plans – however the quality and scale of women’s involvement is not documented.

The women’s groups, WINGS, in DFSP, brought women together and used a guided participatory decision making processes to support women in making decision together to change their lives. This process has enhanced women’s confidence and ability to make decisions and has improved women’s ability to work together to promote change. *“The establishment of the WINGS groups as a women-only space to examine key problems and issues that they face has enabled a strong sense of solidarity to develop”.* (There is more detail on the effectiveness of the WINGS in section 4).

**Household relations** were not explored in the evaluation documents, but was discussed at length in the field work and this is reported in section 4.

### 3.4.3 Changes in structure and social norms

Changes in social norms around gender equality and women’s roles in the community have not been well documented in the evaluation reports. The LANGOCA evaluation reported that people were able to think more about markets and earning an income and also to control their fertility, but this data was not disaggregated by sex. The evaluation report says that *“People are starting to think about business, especially coffee but also livestock. There is a better understanding that if villages produce products buyers will come to the communities. This is demonstrated by people now searching out coffee planting materials and expanding coffee gardens rather than waiting for project support.”* LANGOCA also appeared to have an impact on men’s effort to work on traditionally “women’s activities”, such as vegetable gardening.

#### **Box 4: PRDP includes women in implementation decision making**

At the project village level, women have been involved in the planning, implementing and decision making process of development activities in the village, and in particular at the household level. Ethnic women have been encouraged to participate in the discussion and training workshops held in the villages.

The involvement is not just at activity implementation level, but they also involve in the decision level including management committee for instance in the committee for Pig Bank, Goat, Crop Production Groups

#### **Box 5: DFSP changing attitudes about women’s capability**

The repositioning of women as “clever” is an important and significant step toward empowerment of women’s voices, plans and ideas. When these clever ideas has seen to lead to significant increases in the standard of living for the household, the new, more equal gender relationship becomes well established, and women are able to voice their ideas and opinions in decision making processes and have their ideas valued and respected.

Key changes to the structure were the physical changes, such as water access and hand carts, that resulted in women having more time (this has been discussed above). However it can be surmised that these changes will have paved the way for more systemic social norm change and this is discussed in the field work section. Other changes in social norms that were reported were around health and sanitation behaviour in PFSCBP.

However most of the reporting around social norms and structure in the project evaluation reports involved barriers to progress (see next section).

#### **Box 6: PFSCBP changes health and sanitation behaviour**

Report of changed behaviour in relation to use of latrines, boiling water and use of mosquito nets. From baseline 53,2% of households were boiling drinking water, and 63,1% were sleeping under mosquito net - there was a change to: 93,1% are boiling drinking water, 87,5% sleep under mosquito nets and 83,1% (of households in villages, where latrines are available) use latrines regularly.

### 3.5 Challenges and limitations

Challenges were not well explored in evaluation documentation. For example the PRDP report provided no information on challenges at all. PARUA II only had a final evaluation on the veterinary initiative, so information had to be extracted from the mid-term review only. So this section focuses mainly on gaps in approach, with some information on the physical and social norm challenges that projects faced.

As none of the projects had a primary objective of increasing women's economic empowerment, it is not surprising that there are quite a number of gaps in the approach. However without consulting the women in the communities it difficult to have a comprehensive assessment of the gaps across all of these projects. Section 4 will provide a fuller picture of the challenges and gaps that were experienced in the DFSP.

#### 3.5.1 Economic advancement challenges and gaps

While household economic activity and income increases were reported across all of the projects there was very little reported on women specifically. The context of many of these villages is such that it would be unrealistic for women to have independent income earning activity. Most activities are shared between husband and wife and the children. However it is important to record women's role and power within these income earning activities and to specifically address the power that they have within income earning activities.

None of the projects increased **access to financial services**, though two of the projects (LANGOCA and PARUA II) included a revolving fund, with mixed results. There was no analysis of access to or need for financial services in any of the project documentation, which indicates a fairly limited approach to economic development. To be fair, four of the projects were aiming to address under-nutrition and food insecurity through livelihood approaches, and one had a primary purpose of clearing UXOs while integrating with a livelihoods approach, so it is not surprising. **However lessons can be drawn from this limited approach** (see the field study for more details on the need for financial services). Hardly any of the projects were providing widespread business development services or training (e.g. training in bookkeeping, financial literacy or marketing knowledge and skills). PRDP provided training in financial literacy. Some coffee business training will have been done in LANGOCA and DFSP, but it is not well described and there does not appear to be any reporting of increase in women's knowledge and capability. This can act as a barrier to further increasing production and sales.

Only PRDP was supporting access to private sector markets, market engagement and bulk selling, even though there were several production groups involved in the projects. Neither were there many examples of cooperatives working as businesses. The private sector approach of the veterinary services in PARUA II

#### **Box 7: PARUA II generates business activity – but not for women.**

After training village veterinary workers (VVs) a micro-enterprise network of 26 VVs started to buy animal vaccines and veterinary products from PAFO in Sayabouly or from other VVs in the area. The animal vaccination alone has improved the income of the 26 active VVs by 2,696 \$ during the past year (vaccination campaigns only require a few days of work per year). Women generally did not participate in this activity and vaccinators tended to target large livestock, which were mostly cared for by men.

appeared to be effective as an income earning venture that also impacted on livestock profitability. However it did not appear to benefit women.

In general it can be concluded that women's income earning activity and ownership of assets was not necessarily supported unless it was specifically written into the project approach and supported with social norm change and capability building (as in DFSP). As a default women are often left out of opportunities.

### 3.5.2 Power and Agency

**Knowledge:** Language skills acted as a major barrier to women's inclusion in activities and was specifically mentioned in the PARUA II documentation. Prai women were unable to participate in many of the project activities due an inability to speak Lao (one third of Prai women cannot read, write or speak Lao) and this also hampered work on gender equality. Only LANGOCA projects was providing Lao language training or practice specifically for women.

In projects where cooking and nutrition training was provided, women were not always able to apply the knowledge. For example women in the PFSCBP project said they did not have access to the ingredients. The DFSP evaluation also stated that the women were not applying the cooking and nutrition training that they had received. Clearly, though, the learning from this is that it takes more than just one training to ensure a sustainable norm and practice change around cooking and nutrition.

### 3.5.3 Structure and social norms

Inequality in terms of time availability and roles has impeded women's participation in some of the project activities, for example in PARUA II women were rarely able to attend training that took place outside of the village and were often not chosen by the village head. However there was one example of men coming back from a 10 day training on mushroom production would pass on the knowledge to their wives, who then took over the mushroom production concern, which was normally located next to the house. This indicates a potential shift in focus of how training is provided – and in future the model of men passing on knowledge could be more formalised.

The LANGOCA evaluation report noted that some men do not like women's increased participation in public life and that there could be risks. *“There could be repercussions as husbands counter the intentions of gender training. Men have also been reluctant to let their wives leave the village to participate in project activities.”* This kind of risk and the attitudes of men do not appear to be addressed in any of the projects sufficiently.

Only small number of projects were linking with health and specifically family planning services, even though high fertility and poor health can limit women's economic activity

Approaches to address violence against women and girls were not included in any of the projects. In Laos a third of women have experienced violence and it is likely that the ethnic women are isolated from support. Violence impacts on women's ability to participate in economic, social and political activities.

## 4. Findings from the Field work: DFSP

### 4.1 Project Background

DFSP is a nutrition project with an objective *“to Increase food security particularly of the poorest, through expanding and diversifying income and food sources reducing vulnerability to natural and market based shocks”*. It was implemented in 20 villages in the hilly and remote part of Sekong Province in Southern Laos. The project used an integrated approach to addressing poor nutrition that encompassed:

- Improving income earning opportunities for men and women by introducing cash crops and supporting agriculture and irrigation, while at the same time encouraging sale of crops and surplus food produce
- Increasing sources and variety of food through livestock raising, gardening, NTFP, fruit trees and fish farming
- Improving access to markets through road maintenance
- Involvement of women in income earning and production through training, women’s groups and addressing work burden.
- Introduction of healthier eating through nutrition and cooking training through women’s groups

DFSP was implemented in the same region as LANGOCA and there was an overlap in 9 villages. So it can be assumed that LANGOCA was also responsible for some of the changes seen in the villages as this was implemented in the same area before DFSP. In addition there are three other relevant projects: PWED (ongoing), CISS (finished) and PFSP (now finished), which will have and continue to have an impact on the project area. (See Table 2 for a summary of project activities in the study area, and Annex 2 for a picture of projects in the region). PWED and PFSP have similar and relevant activities and so could be considered as a continuation of DFSP in many respects. CISS was a sanitation project and was only active in Tangyerng, but had an impact on the study findings. This section will refer to findings of results from DFSP, but with the understanding that this cannot only be attributed to DFSP and that wider action has also contributed.



**Caption:** Mrs Saeng 32, in Phonesaat Village, Khua District, Phongsaly Province, Laos. Mrs Saeng is married and has a 13 year old daughter named Deuan. She is a member of the goat bank and has a small garden. Photo credit: © Jeff Williams/CARE

The villages for the evaluation were chosen to represent a diverse set of situations, in terms of size, connectivity with the outside world, project experience and length of time with CARE projects. Table 5 shows a summary of different aspects of villages and implementing the evaluation in each village. Findings of the fieldwork are generalised across the villages, but examples of individual villages have been mentioned when they can illustrate the norm or differ from the general findings.

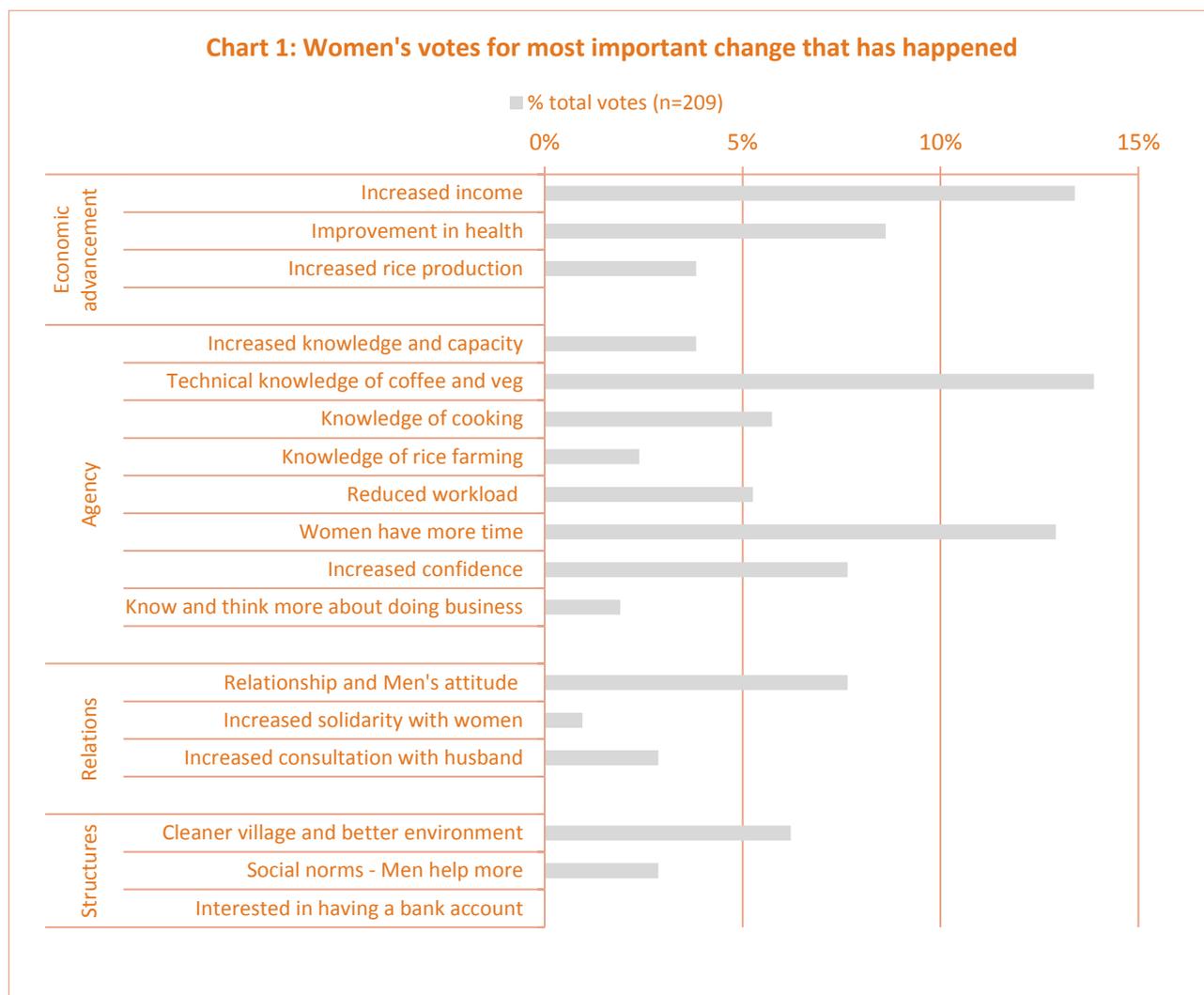
The social environment in the villages is highly connected and inter-dependent because of the remote locations, and individual languages and culture. This means that there is a high level of social capital, which in some villages acts to benefit the whole village through positive support systems. However there can be problems for women, or any excluded or marginalised group in this context. If there is are social norms that affect women negatively, such as an acceptance of violence against women or damaging treatment of women and children, it can be very difficult for women to escape or to act alone to change social norms because of the remote and tight knit environment. There can also be a risk to individuals trying to change power relations within the village.

**Table 5: Village context and evaluation experience**

Village	Tanglou	Dak Den	Tangyerng	Sangmai
Village size	246 people	489	447	205
Language and ethnic group	Talieng and Katu ethnic groups, many participants did not speak Lao or Talieng	Talieng ethnic group, many participants did not speak Lao or Talieng.	Talieng ethnic group and language, some Lao spoken by women	Talieng ethnic group and language, hardly any Lao spoken by women
Village location	To the west of Dak Cheung on a turning off the road to Tangyerng	Directly south of Dak Cheung, within 2 – 3 hour walking distance, but appeared to be isolated at the end of a road.	Directly west of Dak Cheung beyond the turning to Tanglou	Directly to the north of Dak Cheung with a 9 – 10 hour walk distance.
Type of road	Remote with a newly built first section of the road and difficult final section. The village was at the end of the road	Good road the whole way	Good road the whole way. There were road building activities on-going just outside of the village and construction workers were procuring products in the village.	Extremely poor road conditions, unpassable when it rains
Village facilities	Primary school, no latrines, water source built in village, village rice mill (provided by CARE).	Primary school, some latrines, village health worker (but we were not able to interview him/her), two rice mills, but owned by families (not by the village)	Secondary (very new) and primary school, health centre, accommodation for teachers, latrines for all houses, rice mill.	Dilapidated primary school, rice mill (broken when we visited)
Private sector activity	No shops, but some women and men trading within the village	One very small shop run by an elderly woman.	3 new looking retail outlets run by women	No visible village private sector activity and reports of very low levels of sales

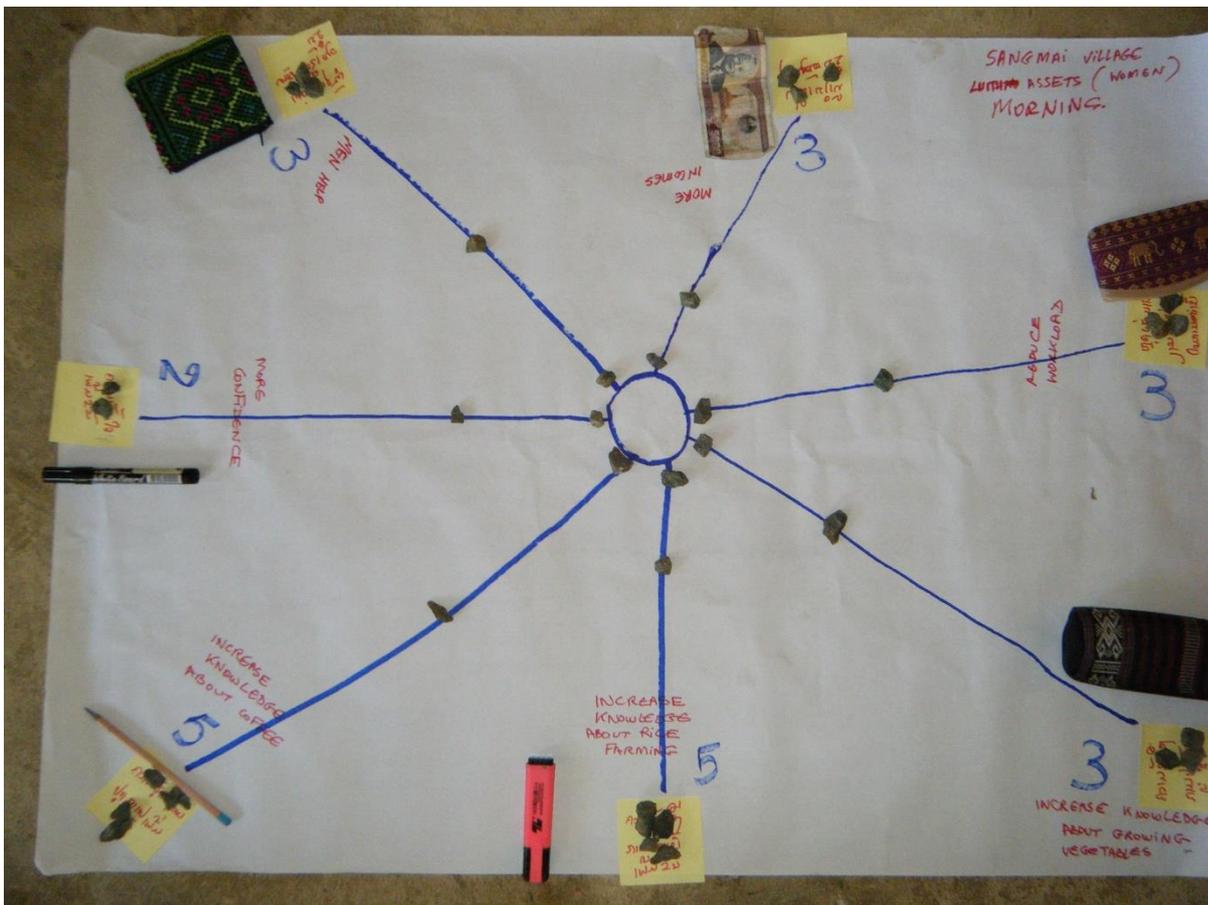
## 4.2 Successful approaches

Overall the findings of the field study indicate that DFSP contributed towards strengthening the economic empowerment of rural ethnic minority women in Dak Cheung. The success of this project in doing so, lies in the multi-level and integrated approach that promotes not only women’s economic advancement, but also women’s power and agency and whilst addressing structural and social norm barriers to gender equality. While not all barriers have been identified and tackled, there is evidence of a process that will provide sustainable and long-term change. The findings presented in the following sections are interdependent, and align with the original framework presented in Section 2. The chart shown here shows how important the changes are to women.



Though the findings in this chart come from the focus groups in all four villages, there are some results that were predominantly coming from just one village. For example it the “cleaner village and better environment” figure comes from Tangyerng only, demonstrating how important the latrines of the CISS project were, but also the effect of people taking responsibility for the cleanliness of the village. There were also differences in progress against each of these changes. For example in Sangmai, though the women identified increased income as an important change, they considered that they had not made much progress as income had only increased by a small amount.

### **Sangmai spokes exercise showing low progress on increased income**



#### 4.2.1 Economic advancement

- ❖ How has women's income earning and economic opportunities changed as a result of the project?
- ❖ What has contributed to women's increase in income and economic opportunities?
- ❖ Has this project contributed to women's economic and food security?

Women and men in all focus groups reported an increase in women's income earning activities as a result of the project. This included women's involvement:

- Cash crop production and sales – coffee nurseries and plantation, rice, cassava and other crops
- Sales of NTFP
- Sale of surplus garden produce and livestock
- Trading and retail

While it was not always possible to assess the timeframe of these changes, it is clear that project activities have contributed to a change in the type and volume of economic activity and a change in attitude around women's work.

#### Economic activity and income

Women in a majority of focus groups and in interviews reported that they were not engaged in income earning activities before the project and that they did not know about the range of products that could be produced and

sold. Their main role was to care for the home and the children and to work in the rice fields. This involved processing rice (by pounding for 2 – 3 hours at 3am in the morning), collecting wood and water on their backs, weeding and caring for the rice fields and collecting non timber forest products (NTFP) for consumption. Nearly all of the production was for consumption. Women rarely left the village and had little contact with outsiders or arena in which they could trade.

**Table 6: Primary economic and household activities by gender** – New activities for women introduced by the project are in bold

<b>Men only</b>	<b>Both men and women</b>	<b>Women only</b>
Knife and axe production	Sales of knives, spades and axes	<b>Retail shop (Tangyerng)</b>
Fence building in vegetable garden	<b>Coffee nursery, plantation and processing</b>	<b>Nutrition custodian</b>
Fence making in rice and coffee fields	Farming: peanuts, lowland and upland rice, pumpkins, cucumber	Cooking and housekeeping Caring for children
Wood cutting	<b>Fish farming</b> and catching fish from river	Labour exchange with other women
Wild life hunting (squirrels, tree shrews, deer)	<b>Fruit trees: jack fruit, logan, guava, mango</b>	NTFP collecting and <b>selling</b> – <b>Doklai</b> , pak nok, makaeng fruit, sweet bamboo, cardamom, ratten.
Livestock – Buffalo and cattle	Livestock – pigs, ducks, chickens	Vegetable garden – planting and watering (also children do this), <b>sale of vegetables</b>
NTFP – honey	Vaccinators	
Sell labour outside of village – building and farm work		

Focus group discussions revealed a change in types of activities, roles and responsibilities between men and women. Both women and men have become more motivated to produce certain crops, livestock and vegetables because they are more aware of both the market potential and the nutrition potential. All women focus group participants referred to having changed their attitudes towards earning an income and being involved in production. They almost always attributed this change in attitude to:

- Learning about production techniques through the project training – this has enabled them to produce more and to produce different types of crops, livestock and vegetables that can be sold
- Learning about the market value of some products that they did not know had potential before
- Having higher levels of confidence due to the training and the involvement in WINGS
- Having more time due to the time saving assets and technology (rice mills, hand carts and irrigation)
- Visiting other villages and Paksong and seeing how much money other people can make and how this has changed their lives

All project activities have included women, so they are active in production and marketing and sales. This has been particularly apparent with the vegetable gardens, where they used to only grow or collect one variety of veg, but now they grow several types of veg in the garden and sell the surplus in the market or in the village. The inclusion of women in mixed sex training activities has been an essential part of the change in attitudes around women’s participation and income earning. Men have seen women’s potential and the women themselves have seen how the power balance has shifted when they are able to join in traditionally “male” activities.

All of the evaluation focus groups with women participants identified an increases in income as a major and most important change that had happened as a result of the project. Tangerng, Tanglou and Dak Den participants all

said that there had been a medium to high level of increase in income. Sangmai was the only village where this change had been limited, though the women still voted that it was one of the most important aspects of the project. Increase in income was attributed to the new economic activities that had started as a result of the project and improvements in existing activities (such as rice farming).

There are three ways that women reported they were able to sell produce: (i) to other families in the village, (ii) at the market in Dak Cheung and (iii) to Lao and Vietnamese traders who come to the village. While women tend to sell more within the village, as they are not able to travel, they do sometimes visit the market in Dak Cheung to sell produce (particularly from Dak Den and Tangyerng). Women have also begun to trade within villages and set up small retail outlets with products from the wholesaler in Dak Cheung. There are now four retail outlets in Tangyerng. While the project has not directly supported the development of village trading and retail, women who had started trading referred to the project a source of information about trading and a boost in their confidence.

Vietnamese and Lao traders come to villages and are particularly interested in buying coffee and doklai (a product that is collected in the forest). Every village and focus group referred to both of these as fairly new channels and

**Box 8: Tanglou woman trader:**

I started trading in 2012. Before that I had a very small house and we were very poor. When the project started I became interested in earning an income as I saw women in other villages trading. Also my husband had done the gender training and he was very open to my new ideas. In fact he often encourages other men to change their attitudes too.

I really wanted a better house. One day I was talking with my husband saying that I had saved some money. Together we had the idea of trading goods in the village. I started by buying soaps, salt and biscuits and selling them in the village. I get money from selling chickens or ducks and when I have a lot of vegetables I keep some for the family and I sell the rest. I save all of the money. I give money to my husband to buy things from Dak Cheung. I cannot go as I don't know how to ride the motor bike. There is a wholesale shop in Dak Cheung. The wholesaler comes from Paksong. I keep the products in my house and the villagers come to my house to buy. Now we have a better house, but I would like to have a bigger house in the future, like the other villagers.

I write down the income that I make and also the costs of the goods so that I can work out how much profit I am making. I don't include the cost of petrol to get to Dak Cheung – if I did that I would not be making any money!

I think of other products to buy, but usually I don't have enough money. I would like to sell petrol for the rice mill and mobile phones top up cards, but I need information about price.

products for sale due to the project. Villagers were not aware of the huge market for doklai before the project and so have only just started collected and selling. This has been a good opportunity for women. However sales to external traders is often done by the men of the village, especially for coffee. There were differences in how this was done – some men said that their wives did not know about pricing or how to negotiate properly with traders, and that they did not speak enough Lao. Some women lacked confidence to trade directly with external buyers. However there were also a number of women who were trading coffee, recording income and making decisions about pricing. These tended to be the women who had taken part in a study visit to Paksong to see how coffee is grown and marketed. The project has also provided some basic bookkeeping training for coffee farmers.

Several women in Tangyerng mentioned selling to the road construction workers who were working just outside of the village. This highlights how important access to markets are to the village women.

The coffee processing group in Dak Den had two women members out of five. The women said that they were equally involved in all of the processing and decision making for the coffee – and that this was a result of the

Paksong study visit, which clearly had an impact on the role of women in the coffee business in all of the villages. Men and women nearly always reported doing income earning activities together and working in partnership to earn an income, rather than independently on separate economic activities. Coffee production and processing, vegetable gardening, livestock and NTFP have all clearly contributed to the increase in family income.

**Table 7: Examples of women contributing to income increases**

Women's contribution to income earning	Participant views
Women's increase in time availability	<i>"I am most happy with the rice mill, the cart and the vegetable gardens. It helps me to have time to myself. It is easier for me as I doesn't have to carry so much. I rest and sleep more (until 4 or 5am instead of 2am). I also clean the house".</i> Lao Women's Union rep in Tanglou
Women involved in traditionally "male" activities	<i>"In the past, women didn't have the opportunity to learn about how to do nursery for the coffee plantation, the techniques about cutting the branches of the coffee trees, or the selection of seeds. This is after attending the coffee training that women started to grow coffee as an income generating activity".</i> Tanglou woman.
Women's increased inclusion in production activities	<i>"I am now in the irrigation group – I manage all of the village volunteers to build and maintain the irrigation system. This has resulted in much higher yields in the rice production and I am proud to be part of that. I am not nervous about being in this group as you have no need to be afraid of anything if you want things to be better. We don't want our lives to be like before. I am very happy. I would like things to get much better in the future. Other women feel the same. Women are much better than before as they can now express themselves in meetings"</i> Woman irrigation group member, Dak Den
Women moving from production for consumption to production for sale and marketing	<p><i>"After attending the training and study tour in Paksong and Dakcheung, we gained some new knowledge. Now we think about doing business as we saw others earn money, so we want too also. We try to grow vegetables and raise more animals to sell to the trader ("middle man) in the village (fishes, ducks, chicken and the surplus of vegetables) who will sell to visitors and other villagers".</i> Tangyerng woman</p> <p><i>"What most significantly changes women's life is now they don't focus on subsistence food only, but they have now a business focus to increase the incomes for their own family and the community".</i> Tanglou woman</p>
Changes in social norms and gender roles in income earning	<i>"I feel confident about growing vegetables when compare with the past as I didn't know how to earn income then. In those days all income came from my husband."</i> Tanglou woman

### Asset ownership and wellbeing

As increases in income are notoriously difficult to measure in this type of project, income earning activities, expenditure and improvements in wellbeing have been used as proxies for this aspect of economic advancement. The information about this also reveals decision making around expenditure and wellbeing. In general there were examples of increased wellbeing in terms of nutrition and decision making around health and sexual and reproductive health and also an increase in education opportunities and assets as a result of income increases.

Women reported spending income on children's education, including secondary school and sometimes university; medicines; clothing; food products (including rice, salt and MSG); cooking utensils; housing (including new housing, house repairs and improvements); motor bikes or tractors.

Nearly all women reported that they were responsible for keeping the money that the family earned and that they kept savings in their house or by buying livestock (which they agreed with their husbands). None of the women who participated in focus groups or interviews had access to financial services or bank accounts for saving and borrowing money. A very small number of women were using their income to invest in new business opportunities, and would probably be able to expand their enterprise with access to financial services.

Nearly every woman in the focus groups reported an increase in wellbeing and health of their children because of improved nutrition and healthy behaviour. Most of the men were pleased by the increased variety and better tasting food. Other village actors had noticed a change in children's health, especially the village heads.

#### **Box 9: Using income for education**

*"I use the money I earn from selling coffee to send my children to study housing engineering in Pakse. I paid 8,000,000 Kip for the school fees and material for my children between October 2014 and January 2015. Some women also sent their daughters to study at the teachers' school in Salavan Province".* Woman, Dak Den

#### **Box 10: Improvements in wellbeing**

*"Before the project I noticed that the children had lots of diseases and infections. They had poor hygiene and dirty food. I have noticed changes in how they eat - they eat better food and they dress better."* Tanglou village teacher

*"The health centre has been in the village for 3-4 years. The women know about birth control, so do not have too many children. The activities have meant that they have more income, can buy more food and are healthier. Every house has a latrine."* Village head, Tangyerng

*"Children have more variety of veg to eat and women's cooking has improved. Also they have enough food. Children at school have complementary food. We now have clean water and know to boil it for drinking. The mortality rate has decreased and sickness has reduced. There are fewer malaria cases".* Village head, Dak Den

### **4.2.2 Power and agency**

- ❖ How have women's capacity, self-esteem, knowledge and skills changed as a result of the project?
- ❖ How have women's relative power and voice within the community and the family changed as a result of the project?
- ❖ What has enabled these changes
- ❖ Do women hold leadership positions in village committees/coffee groups?
- ❖ Are their voices heard and acted upon in the committee meetings?

**Knowledge and skills:** Women in all focus groups talked about learning in four crucial areas: farming knowledge, business awareness, health and nutrition and gender. Dak Den and Sangmai women claimed there had been good progress in their knowledge of coffee farming and gardening. However in most villages women wanted to have more training or mentoring to progress their abilities in certain areas. A number of women complained about

their lack of ability to grow “beautiful” coffee plants and vegetables. However there were a number of other factors that also limited production (see Section X).

**Table 8: Evidence of women’s increased knowledge and skills**

Type of knowledge	Progress
<p>New farming knowledge - crop production, planting and care of fruit trees, livestock rearing and gardening</p>	<p>This is an important area progress for women in focus groups and interviews. It was particularly marked for the women in the coffee groups (including all of those that did the Paksong visit) and irrigation group. These women had passed on knowledge to others in their communities and were seen as technical leaders in coffee production, which had changed the village’s attitude towards them.</p> <p><i>“We have more knowledge about coffee processing now after being in the Paksong study visit. We know how to dry and use the grinding machine. When we came back from Paksong we explained all of this to the other villagers in a meeting”.</i> Women members of coffee group in Dak Den</p> <p>Other knowledge of rice, livestock, fish and vegetable production were referred to. However some women were having variable success with their techniques and felt they needed more help. This was affecting their confidence.</p> <p><i>“In the past we had very small gardens. When we ate fruit and vegetables we just threw the seeds on the ground and let them grow. What is new for us is the techniques to make a vegetable garden. The project gave seeds to us and advised us on how to dig the soil, how to grow the seeds, how to water them. We also received some gardening tools”.</i> Woman Sangmai</p>
<p>Business awareness, sales and marketing capability – understanding that some products had potential markets, where to sell products and pricing, how to negotiate with traders.</p>	<p>Nearly all of the women interviewed and in focus groups said that they had more commercial awareness as a result of the project training and visits. However there was limited knowledge about business practice. Even though some women were recording income and expenditure for their coffee, they did not know whether their activities were profitable, nor what to include in business accounts. They also lacked information on markets and prices.</p>
<p>Health, hygiene and nutrition knowledge and how to apply – cooking and knowledge of food groups, how to keep house and village clean</p>	<p>All women interviewed and in the focus groups referred to the nutrition and cooking training and felt they had changed their cooking practice significantly. Men also referred to better and tastier meals. However the women in Sangmai, also one of the most remote and poor communities, referred to finding it difficult to find sufficient ingredients. Women in Tangyerng were particularly pleased with the knowledge they had gained on health and hygiene and linked the tidy and clean state of their village to this and to the widespread ownership of latrines.</p> <p><i>“Before the CARE project installed the latrines we had to walk into the forest to use the toilet and it was not convenient. Now that we have the latrine it is much more comfortable and cleaner around our village”.</i> Tangyerng, man</p>
<p>Gender – ability to talk to husband, knowledge of rights, understanding of gender roles</p>	<p>Women and men in all focus groups referred to an increase in knowledge of gender equality and women’s rights because of the gender training. Men in particular said that they now better understood the</p>

	<p>hardships and difficulties that their wives were experiencing and were more motivated to help their wives and include them in decision making. About a quarter of the women said that they felt that it was easier to talk to their husband now that they know their rights. When men were unable to attend the gender training the women themselves taught them what they had learned in the gender training. Several men referred to this and had even changed their behaviour and helped their wives more.</p>
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Not only was the increase in knowledge connected with an increase in confidence and belief in themselves, but also some women were now seen of as an authority on certain issues (e.g. coffee farming and processing) and able to teach others because of the project activities. In every village there were women who had attended the coffee training in Paksong. In Dak Den there was a coffee processing group, who had learned the techniques in Paksong. These women had not only experienced the coffee business and processes first hand, but had also been expected to take part in disseminating that knowledge through the village – mostly through group sessions, but also as informal sources of information. This appeared to have changed their status in the village. Their knowledge and expertise demonstrated how valuable they were as participants in economic activity and as mentors to others. The Dak Den coffee group had to make decisions together, both men and women, so this was another area where norms were changed.

An unintended impact of the project was on women’s interest in education and their ability to access it. . A women from Tanglou was buying books with the extra income that she was earning from selling ducks form the project. She attributed her interest in education to the influence of the WINGS group. The school teacher was helping her with her studies and was teaching 10 other women who had not had an education, both Lao and academic subjects. This awareness of the need for women to be educated appeared to go hand in hand with their need to earn an income. This was recognised by the Village head in Tangyergn, who was also organising adult education lessons.

**Women’s confidence:** Evidence of increases in women’s self-confidence and self-esteem has been seen in the following areas:

- ✓ Willingness to attend village and project meetings
- ✓ Ability to participate in meetings and to talk to strangers
- ✓ Willingness and ability to lead processes and make decisions
- ✓ Self-care, cleanliness and tidiness

Men who participated in the focus groups reported that their wives participated in meetings, but that their wives were still too sometimes too shy to speak up – and this was often because of their limited Lao language skills. Other men had noticed that their wives found it easier to speak to strangers and to contribute to the project activities.

The women’s WINGS groups appeared to have provided women with the space to discuss issues among themselves, which had increased their ability to talk in meetings and to analyse problems in the village. Many women referred to the WINGS groups as a source of support and self-help.

Women attributed their increased confidence to:

- Inclusion in activities and meetings
- Increased ability to earn an income – and to be able to buy what is needed for the family
- Increased knowledge and ability to grow coffee and vegetables

- Support from their husbands and village head – knowing that influential and powerful men in the community are keen to include women in activities and for them to contribute to family income earning.

#### **Box 11: Women’s experience of increases in self-confidence**

**Participating in WINGS:** *“Now, women feel more confident when they have to give their opinion in the village or WINGS meetings organized by Care. They think that those meetings provide them good opportunity to speak Lao and consult each other about the project activities”*. Woman Dak Den

**Speaking with outsiders:** *“No I am less shy and in the past it was different because I didn’t know the Lao language. It is a bit better than before, but I still have trouble understanding. In the past my parents didn’t speak Lao at all. Now I want to speak Lao with the CARE officers. We understand everything, but can’t speak. We can express ourselves in Talieng”*. Samgmai, woman

**Earning an income:** *“Now, women feel more confident than before because they have the ability to earn more incomes on their own. In the past, they felt very discouraged and not confident because their husbands were the ones who brought money at home”* Tanglou woman

**Confidence and environment impacting on wellbeing:** *“A better environment: the house and the yard in front of the house are cleaner than before. Each household has latrines, which makes women’s life more comfortable than before and reduces the risks for women and the family members from being affected by diseases”*. Tangyerng woman

**Taking care of themselves:** *“Wives have improved their dressing up styles to be prettier and they can cook more delicious menus with more ingredient than the past”*. Man Tanglou

**Confidence increating abilities:** *“Before the project women were very shy. They would hide and let men talk. Now they do say hi to strangers and they take the initiative to (e.g.) sell vegetables”*. Male teacher, Tanglou

#### **Relations and decision making:**

In the past gender roles were clear and polarised – with men doing little or no work in the house and in certain “women’s” tasks and not involving women in decision making. In all of the FGDs both men and women talked about how men used to contribute little to the household workload, preferring instead to drink alcohol, sleep and hang out with their friends. The project caused a change in this behaviour with men taking more responsibility, treating their wives better and drinking less.

**Family relationships:** Women were particularly articulate about the improvements in their relationships with their husbands – saying that there was less arguing (and in one or two cases a decrease or cessation of violence), their husbands were more caring and contributed more to their workload. This was sometimes attributed to women’s increased income, but more often to the gender training. The gender training and WINGS had increased men and women’s ability to discuss a range of issues within the family and for men to accept women’s opinions. There appeared to have been a shift in the balance of power within relationships – but of course this would have varied from family to family. This had a marked impact on women’s participation in decision making – enabling women to have more power in family decision making and also in business and agriculture related decisions.

All men’s and women’s focus groups mentioned the gender training provided by CARE without being prompted. Overwhelmingly the change in relations was attributed to this gender training. An aspect of the gender training that had particularly struck a chord with interviewees was the inventory of different activities that men and women do. All of the men who expressed this said how they had felt quite sad when they had seen the heavy work

#### **Box 12: Changes in relations**

**Women becoming more assertive in relationships** *“Men used to cut the wood, but we would carry to the field and build the fences. Now we do less and men carry all of the heavy stuff. Before the project came I had to do everything by myself. The WINGS group has helped me a lot. I can ask for advice from my friends and about my studies and I feel more able to be assertive. Before attending the group I would not have dared to introduce the gender training to my husband.”* Lao women’s union rep Tanglou

**Women valued more:** *“Of course my husband loves me, otherwise he wouldn’t be with me, but he loves me a little bit more than before as I make a bit more money.”* Sangmai, woman

**Women participate in agreeing coffee and livestock prices:** *“Both my husband and I are able to sell the coffee, it depends on who is in the house when the trader comes. We always discuss and agree the price we want to sell for beforehand. Even when my husband sells a cow he will consult me on the price we would like to get”.* Woman, Dak Den

burden that their wives had had to bear. They had felt ashamed and wanted to help their wives. Some men also said that they had learned how they could earn more money if they worked together with their wives and that they could be more successful as a family. They had begun to see that their wives were valuable, particularly as they were contributing to earning an income for the family.

It is likely that the men would not have been so open to the gender training without the other project activities. Several women referred to their increased confidence as a result of participating in WINGS, or as a result of their economic activity, as contributing to their confidence in communicating with their husbands – and that this had enabled them to encourage their husbands to attend the gender training in the first place. It is very likely that gender training alone would not have had such a transformational impact on men and women’s relationships and behaviour. Though its impact on the project villages has been essential for all aspects of project progress.

**Other relationships:** Working relationships between men and women in project groups were also reported to be fairly equal – and this was attributed to constant communications (*“We don’t have disagreements as we discuss everything with each other”*, Irrigation group, Dak Den). Unsurprisingly observation of communications between men and women in these groups did not always reflect this sentiment, though women in general appeared to communicate confidently. Nearly all focus group participants said that women were more involved in village decision making as they were now attending meetings. This was partly because of the WINGS groups and encouragement from their husbands, but also was attributable to the role of the village heads in encouraging women to participate and speak up.

**Organising with others:** Women were included in all of the coffee production and processing and irrigation groups and were active members of the groups that were interviewed. The project approach of including women in active roles had worked particularly well, but also the support of the WINGS also appeared to contribute to

women's success in other groups. WINGS were also mentioned by many of the women who said they now attend village meetings. Nearly every focus group told stories of learning to speak up first in the WINGS, to organise with other women and to gain confidence speaking Lao and making decisions.

#### 4.2.3 Structure and social norms

- ❖ How have community and institutional social norms and attitudes changed as a result of the project or other activities?

The references to changes in men's behaviour and roles between men and women was so frequent in the focus groups and interviews that it could be said that there has been quite a large shift in social norms around gender roles. Changes that both men and women referred to included:

- ✓ Men carry wood or use the rice milling machine (though not pounding rice)
- ✓ Men involved in household tasks (e.g. clothes washing, caring for children when women go to meetings)
- ✓ Men drinking less alcohol
- ✓ Women included in village meetings and taking leadership roles in project groups
- ✓ Men and women making decisions together
- ✓ Men doing the heavy work that they did not do before (e.g. digging in the garden, putting up fences)
- ✓ Men and women helping each other
- ✓ Women involved in income earning activities – and that they are expected to earn an income to ensure food security and family health
- ✓ The villagers and village authorities are more receptive when women express their opinions
- ✓ Girls not getting married so early
- ✓ Women and men wanting fewer children

Though these changes look promising, there were indications that several of these changes appeared to be in the early stages and that more sustained effort would be required to ensure that progress continued, so it is important to understand the drivers of this change process. There were several key drivers of this overall social norm change:

- Both men and women were involved in the gender training. This meant that men were able to learn and drive some of the change, influencing other men in the village. Not all men attended the training in all villages, so there were still pockets of men who were either not aware of the training or who did not wish to change.
- The leadership of the village head was an important influence on men in the village on support for changes in attitude and gender roles. The village head helped to choose participants and to encourage women to join the WINGS groups, attend village meetings and to participate in training. Other influential men in the village, for example the school teacher in Tanglou, appeared to have an important role in leading the change in attitude.
- The wide scale inclusion of women in a range of activities and income earning roles both within and outside of the village played an important role in changing attitudes towards women. It is clear that the inclusion of women in crop production and gardening training and study visits has played an important part in social norm change around income earning roles. It has increased men's confidence in women's capability.

- The WINGS groups have enabled women to gain confidence and to practice communications skills in a safe, supportive environment. It has also given women the chance to drive changes and take on leadership positions.
- The encouragement of the district and province government officials and their support for gender equality and women's rights within the villages was mentioned a small number of times – but appeared to be crucial for legitimising the activities. Government officials who were interviewed as part of the evaluation expressed strong support of the project approach and the commitment to women's economic empowerment.
- The promise of increased income acted as a strong motivating factor for men. They consistently stated how pleased they were that their wives were now earning an income or supporting the increase in family income and know more about sales and farming. The potential for an increase in family income may have acted as motivation for the men themselves to change their behaviour and to work harder for the family.

### **Box 13: Changes in social norms**

**Men help more:** *“Men help grinding the rice. And we work together on the rice field. We have changed because of the gender training. The CARE officers came every 2 months to advise on gender. In the past men did help, but now they help more. Now men help with cutting wood and carrying wood. But not all of the time: I have to carry my baby on my front and the wood on my back. My husband sometimes helps me, but not all of the time. He goes to the forest to hunt animals. He has to get some animals to feed the family.”*

Samgmai woman

**Leadership of village head:** *“The village headman often says in meetings that he wants women to earn more incomes to make their life better.”* Woman Dak Den

**Husband and wife working together:** *“Before the project came, my wife and I were quite lazy. The husbands would always go out to drink. The wives were left in the house. After the project came here and I had training, my wife and I talk more with each other – we discuss and plan how to increase the family income. We had help from CARE and support them to run the coffee plantation. That is why we decided to join in with this project.”* Tanglou man

The economic activity of women appeared to have contributed to changes in attitudes about women's roles and girls' education, which in turn had impacted on sexual and reproductive well-being. Several women who were interviewed (many in their 20s or 30s) had got married as children (at the ages of 13 or 14) and had not been able to finish school. This appeared to have been a social norm in the villages and parents required their girls to get married early. Nearly every man and woman interviewed said that they now send both boys and girls to school and many intended their children to attend secondary school, even though 30% of women in the focus groups had no education at all (compared to 5% of men in the focus groups) and only one woman (0.8% of sample) had finished secondary school (compared to 9% of the men in the focus groups). Several women and men interviewed stated that girls get married in their 20s now as they are studying. Knowledge of contraception and reproductive rights had also changed women's attitudes about their roles and income earning potential – but there was still a long way to go in some villages for women to be able to realize their sexual and reproductive rights.

#### **Box 14: Harmful practices and violence**

**Early marriage:** *“I also use the money to buy books and study as I was not able to finish school. I got married at 14 years old because my parents arranged it.”* Tanglou, Lao women’s union representative

**Changes in early and forced marriage:** *“I was 16 years, and my husband was 19 years old when we got married. My parents forced me. I didn’t want to get married. Now I can’t force my children to marry as they want to study. It is up to them. I really regret that I was not able to get an education. When people from the project ask me something, I don’t know anything.”* Tanglou woman.

**Violence stopped:** *“The project made my husband change. We both attended the training on gender. He learned and after that when we went back home I asked him to help me. Now he doesn’t beat me anymore. Before the project my husband used to beat me and the children. He used to beat me so hard that I was sometimes bleeding and my children too. The project officers told him not to do it. Also the village head had a talk with him and the people from the district came and talked to him. Also I used to beat my children, but the teacher at the school told me that I shouldn’t do it, so I now have stopped also. Before we didn’t know that beating was bad, because we had not been to school. We thought that the violence was normal. Now I think that I must have been crazy! My children are much happier. I was scared that if I beat my children too much they might go crazy. There were other men who were beating their wives. Just a few of them.”* Tanglou woman

### 4.3 Challenges and gaps

- ❖ What has acted as a barrier to women’s income earning and economic opportunities?
- ❖ What are the social, economic and environmental barriers to progress in women’s economic empowerment?

#### 4.3.1 Economic advancement challenges

When women analysed the challenges they face they tended to talk about practical issues around production and sales. In general there remain a number of challenges related to production, access to markets and financial services.

**Production challenges:** The following challenges and barriers were identified by women:

- Low yields: limitation of food production volumes so there is no surplus to sell, the weather and soil is not good for coffee production (this depended on the location of the coffee plantations), for example in Tanglou and Dak Den the coffee does not grow well at village level and so the villagers have had to make plantations higher up and further away from the village. This increases the time spent getting to fields and the physical impact on women who have to take babies or children along with them. Other production issues included problems with pests and animals are animals that destroy crops and fish production, and problems with too many weeds and not enough compost (e.g. lowland rice in Sangmai).

- Physical infrastructure problems - fencing takes too much time and is not adequate enough – cows and buffalo come into coffee and rice fields and destroy the plants, veg garden is far from the water supply,
- Lack of support and human resources - lack of labour force as children are at school or college, not enough support for those who are new to coffee production, limited knowledge of rice production.

**Limited access to markets** – Women in villages that are far from Dak Cheung market or have very poor condition roads (e.g. Sangmai), have difficulty reaching the market. For women in Sangmai this was such an issue that they had limited their vegetable production as they were not able to sell all of their surplus produce. In other villages women complained that they were all growing the same vegetables, so were competing in a way that limited their sales potential. There are also women who are not able to travel to the market unless accompanied by their husband (e.g. Tangyerng).

**Problems with immediate food security** – Dak Den and Sangmai don't produce enough rice for consumption throughout the whole year. While it was the aim of the project to increase incomes from cash crops so that they could cover their food needs by buying food, there was sometimes a time lag in the generation of income. For example coffee plants take three years to mature before a crop can be harvested. Land and time need to be used to grow coffee and this sometimes means that families have to shift land from rice into coffee and spend more time on the coffee plantation than on food production. This means that for three years there may be a shortage of food production without an accompanying increase in income. Sangmai used to be self-sufficient in rice. When coffee was introduced some families used some of their rice fields, which has now reduced their rice production and they have less food security than before.

**Lack of access to financial services** – Several women wanted to be able to buy more inputs for their agriculture production, or to invest in their trading activities, but had no capital to do so. Money to invest in business activities usually comes from relatives and so is limited to families who already have some income or assets. Also women do not have a safe place to keep their savings.

#### 4.3.2 Power and Agency

While most of the women involved in the evaluation were confident that their **knowledge and abilities** had increased, men were not as confident of women's skills and knowledge. For example men thought that women had challenges with poor coffee planting skills, little knowledge of pricing and how to sell produce, poor trading and negotiation skills and inability to catch and sell large livestock (particularly that women don't know the pricing). This may have revealed a continued underlying prejudice or misguided belief about women's abilities. It also revealed a lack of understanding among the men of the role of the WINGS groups and how women were changing the way that they communicate with each other. The area that women and men concurred with was around women's **lack of self-confidence and inability to speak, read and write Lao**. This was a consistent challenge area that came up in nearly every focus group. Some women in each focus group would refer to their "shyness" about attending meetings or speaking up in meetings

#### Box 15: Difficulties with production

*"We have a lot of weeds in the rice field, so it takes a lot of time to get rid of the weeds. We have learned how to make compost, but we are not using it as we can't carry it to the rice field."* Woman Sangmai

*"I feel confident about growing vegetables when compare with the past I didn't know how to earn income, all incomes were from my husband. But for coffee plantation I feel less confident because the weather here is quite hot, it makes the coffee plant's leaves go yellow."* Tanglou woman

#### Box 16: How women save money

*"Income is much better than before as they grow veg better. We have learned about growing veg and also we sell in Dak Cheung. In the past we used to get 30,000 kip at the end of the year. Now we get 100,000 kip at the end of the year. We do record the amount we earn from coffee (but not for other products). We have a book where we record it all. We also know how much we spend and to reimburse debts. I borrow money from relatives. We save money in our homes."* Coffee group members, Dak Den.

because they did not feel that their Lao language skills were good enough. And though they thought they now had more opportunities to engage with outsiders and to speak Lao, they were still unconfident.

Women were keen to improve their **cooking and nutrition knowledge** further as some of them felt that they still needed support. The focus groups also revealed that there hardly any bookkeeping taking place and that the **basics of business management and marketing were not known by the women**.

There are still **some women who lack confidence** and find it hard to speak up in meetings and participate in the project and income earning activities. Quite often this was referred to be women in relation to their insecurity about technical agriculture and livestock knowledge and skills, but more often in relation to their Lao language skills. There was also an example of a Lao Women's Union leader lacking confidence and leadership motivation and skills (Sangmai). It would be important to assess what limits some women to make sure there is an inclusive approach to the project continuation, particularly for technical knowledge and Lao language skills.

Women Sangmai and Dak Den are still having challenges with their **heavy workload and time poverty**. This is related to:

- Having too many children to take care of – nearly all of the men and many women referred to the heavy burden of caring for young children. While men had previously mentioned that they sometimes help with the children, there is still an overall belief that caring for children is primarily women's responsibility.
- Having to pound rice as there was limited access to a rice mill – this was only happening in Dak Den where the village had not been provided with a project rice mill. There were two rice mills owned by families in the village and these were hired out to the villagers. However nearly all of the women focus group participants in that village referred to the high price of milling.
- Carrying firewood and water as there are no hand carts. Again this was happening in Dak Den as the village was too hilly for hand carts and no other technology was available.

### Structure and social norms

As mentioned before, there is still more sustained effort required to ensure that village wide social norm change progresses. Though the gender training along with the other project activities had made an impact on most men and women in terms of gender equality, some focus group participants referred to continued problems between men and women when negotiating responsibilities and work. Both women and men had stories of **some men who were not contributing fully to the family workload, mostly because they are drinking alcohol, waking up late and not helping their wives**. There were also some examples of women who are not interested in nutrition and are not healthy. There appeared to be a particular problem in Sangmai, where women were continuing to suffer from heavy workloads with little help from their husband, and sometimes this was due to alcohol related and other un-diagnosed illnesses. There was also a lack of trust for modern health services, with more use of traditional healers. These problems could have been result of Sangmai's remote location, limited access to health facilities or markets and variable contact with other villages.

#### Box 17: Difficulties cooking

*"It is difficult for us to use the new cooking techniques that we were taught. We don't have all of the ingredients, so we are not so healthy. We can't do what they taught us."*  
Sangmai, woman

#### Box 18: Some men still not helping

*"Men are not helping so much because they drink alcohol and they are sick. They make their own alcohol. When my husband is drunk he gets up quite late and I have to care for the children and carry the water. He won't help me."* Sangmai woman

*"Wives have suggested that we change our behaviour, sometime we do, sometime we don't because we want to meet friends, if we don't drink, we can't speak Lao fluently."* Man Dak Den

#### **Box 19: Traditional beliefs and health in Sangmai**

*"I am scared to go into the forest alone because of ghosts and spirits. Sometimes people in the village get possessed by spirits and they don't know how to get rid of them. It has happened to my husband. He can't work as he has been ill since May 2014. He can't even speak. He just walks around. When he drinks he can speak, but it is rubbish. There is no doctor here. He fell from the house twice when he was drunk and he keeps on drinking. One of my children was sick from a snake bite. I took him to the hospital and they wanted to give him an injection, but I wouldn't let them as I was worried. We have a traditional doctor who blows on the wound. He is getting better, but he can't walk". Because my husband is ill I have to do everything as my seven children are all too young. I don't have any money nor anything to sell. I did have one chicken, but after my child got ill I had to kill it as a sacrifice to make things better." Sangmai, woman 1 with 7 children.*

*"In the past my husband didn't help me so much and he used to drink a lot. But now he is sick and he can't work. So he helps in the home. He went to Sekong to get some medicine and now has gone to Paksong for a month to see a traditional healer. I think he and other men get problems with their stomachs. I don't have any help and the coffee plantation has weeds". Sangmai woman 2 with 8 children.*

In the focus groups men were asked to identify whether their wives and other women in their family experienced challenges or barriers to earning an income or being involved in economic activity. The most interesting finding of this exercise was that the men had a lot of difficulty in thinking about the challenges that their wives might have. When they were asked to think of solutions on how to address the challenges, the men again found it difficult going from problem identification to solution. There were very few original ideas and many of them revolved around what the men themselves could do, rather than wider changes that might take place. The experience of this exercise was repeated in nearly every men's focus group. It demonstrates a continued lack of awareness by men of their wives challenges in earning an income and their work burden. This further indicates the need for continued efforts to change social norms and to continue much of the activities in this project.

**Beliefs and norms around family planning** were also seen to be a challenge by both men and women and, again, particularly in Sangmai. While all focus groups had some mention of the burden of caring for children and how this limits women's mobility and time to be involved in income earning activities, there was a high level of knowledge of family planning. However there did not appear to be high utilization rates, except where there was a health clinic in the village (Tangyerng). Women in other villages have to travel to Dak Cheung to access family planning services, though occasionally a village health worker will visit. However this was clearly not frequent enough as several women referred to unintended pregnancies. There were also a number of myths around family planning techniques, especially long term and permanent methods (believing it can cause illness and cause women to be unable to work). This indicates a lack of family planning counselling and advice for women and men.

#### **Box 20: Too many children limits women's participation**

*"The village head man also supports us and encourages us to get more income for the family. He wants us to reduce our workload and increase our income but it is difficult as we have so many children." Sangmai woman*

*"It is difficult to increase our income as we have many children. Contraception is dangerous for our health. Some women had injections and they got sick. Some women said it was very painful. So we don't want to use contraception. We don't want to have a permanent methods as then we won't be able to work in the fields. There is no health facility here, so if we have the injection and we get sick, there is no one to take us to hospital. So we are worried" Sangmai woman.*

## Contextual challenges

The lack of health services in three of the villages was clearly affecting women's health and access to family planning. This is a major issue for women's inclusion in income earning activities and the norm change around gender roles that is required by this. The doctor who works in Tangyerng does provide family planning services, and also advice on nutrition and hygiene, so there is potential for surrounding villages to visit that clinic instead of going to Dak Cheung. However she has never visited a WINGS group or participated in any of the project activities. This link with health services appears to be missing from the project.

### Box 21: Maternal health in remote villages

*"If there was an opportunity for me to solve the challenges women face in our village? I would work to make our health situation better – the hardest moment a women faces is when she gives birth in our village. In our village we do not have the equipment or medicines needed to make it safe for women – for that women need to travel to the district and we do not have the transport. Previously we had a midwife who was trained in the district but she has since left the village'. There is some financial support from the government to go and give birth in the district – money for transport and dorms rooms and food....but actually women have to go there for two weeks before the baby arrives...that is a long time to be away from the house...who will care for the other children...who will work in the vegetable garden? Most women do not want to be away from home for that long..."* Lao Women's Union leader, Sangmai

### Box 22: Sangmai gold mining and spending choices

*"A Vietnamese gold mining company came here and gave £30,000 (30million kip per hectare) for the right to dig on 12 hectares of my land. The digging started in Jan 2014 and it is still going on. The land will be unusable after they have finished. I have kept some of the money and my wife sometimes asks me for money. But I don't have transport and my coffee crop is not matured yet".* Sangmai, man

Mining has not only caused uncertainty for villages that have to move due to government orders, but also a sudden and unsustainable influx of cash to some villages affected by gold mining, with associated destruction of their land. Gender issues in Sangmai are being affected by the gold mining situation, with women suffering most. Further investigation of the negative effects of this situation are needed.

The road quality and road maintenance and building are having an impact on women's ability to earn an income. In Sangmai, where the road is almost impassable for much of the year, the women hardly leave the village and are not able to access nearby markets. In Tangyerng, where the road construction workers are buying produce, this seems to be benefitting women.

**Government limitations and sustainability** – Though both national and local government are supportive of the project's gender and women's economic empowerment approach, there is a lack of expertise and funding to sustain this type of support directly from government. This could threaten the sustainability of the approach as there is still a lot more sustained effort required. A short term solution to this would include a much closer relationship with government officials.

## 5. Learning about the approach and gaps



**Caption:** Mrs Se 33, married with 3 daughters and owner of pigs which are kept just outside the village. Na Village, Khua District, Phongsaly Province, Laos. Photo credit: © Jeff Williams/CARE

**Learning question 1:** To what extent do CARE's approaches and models achieve sustainable economic participation and empowerment outcomes in the lives of women from ethnic groups? For example, are strong member-based associations an effective way to promote the rights of ethnic minority women so they can advocate for change? Does raising marginalised women's awareness of their rights and entitlements to available resources and challenging discrimination lead to economic empowerment?

**CARE's approaches in all of the projects have contributed to women's economic empowerment, though the projects that target women and integrate women into all activities; and measure results for women have had more success (PRDP, DFSP).** There is no one element that can be said to lead to empowerment or economic participation – it is rather the combination of approaches that have led to sustainable change for women. In particular the learning and inclusion in activities have had an impact on women's economic participation. The following lessons can be drawn:

- ✓ **Women appeared to learn through a combination of being taught, by doing and by observing and this was more effective when they travelled outside of the village.** Remoteness definitely limits women's economic activities even more than men's as they are more tied to the village and the house. Women who have experienced other villages were more open minded and confident about trying new ways of earning an income and they were more commercially aware. **Physical access to markets is**

**essential for women to progress with income earning activities.** Women who live closer to the market are able to sell more. Also when buyers come to the village the villagers have little negotiating power, and this is even worse for women who may not have access to relevant information. Different sales models and access to markets and buyers need to be explored. **Women need ongoing technical agricultural, gardening and livestock training and support** – whether for livestock vaccinations, location of coffee plantations, ability to produce compost for rice etc. Some women appear to lack confidence in their ability to produce cash crops and food produce and this could undermine the progress that is made to change attitudes around women's roles. It is therefore essential that good quality technical advice and on-going support is provided to women during the project. Constant feedback should be sought and approaches adapted to ensure that there is success with livestock rearing, fish farming, vegetable and agricultural production and productivity.

- ✓ **Further progress in women's economic activities and income earning potential could be achieved with more of a focus on private sector initiatives.** While PARUA II supported the start-up of micro-enterprises, which led to an increase in income, and PRDP improved understanding of markets, these were isolated initiatives among the portfolio, and overall there is a lack of market analysis and marketing capacity strengthening. This is not entirely surprising as the reviewed projects were mostly focused on food security, health and UXO clearing. However this has limited women's ability to access markets and to understand how production choices and sales location are essential for a successful enterprise. It has also meant that the projects have not been able to take strategic approaches to market access, linkages and physical markets.

**Learning question 2: How does gaining increased access to, and control over, economic resources, lead to socio-cultural changes at the individual, family, community levels?** *For example, can women's economic empowerment help challenge dominant myths around the economic participation of women (e.g. in many countries women are viewed as not being capable of managing small-scale business)? Does promoting women's economic empowerment through increased skills, access to credit and increased awareness of economic/employment opportunities lead to both economic advancement and increased agency?*

**The combination of women's inclusion in income earning activity, women's groups and gender training has resulted in a change in beliefs and social norms around women's economic activity, their capability and decision making power.** While the context of remote villages and very tight knit communities means that there is limited income earning, or businesses, that are "owned" entirely by women, women's inclusion in income earning activities has definitely changed people's beliefs about women can and should be doing. This change in beliefs and behaviour is the key to a sustainable change. In DFSP and PRDP women's involvement in decision making at family and village level, combined with their inclusion in income earning activity has led to reported social norm change and an awareness of gender equality and human rights.

This inclusion in income earning activity in DFSP, LANGOCA and PRDP has in turn contributed to a change in gender roles and a change in the balance of power in family relationships. While this has not been possible in all families there were a significant number of stories of women controlling the family money and making decisions about purchasing a range of items. There was also evidence of an increase in joint decision making between men and women both within the family and in the community.

**The gender training, time saving initiatives and WINGS in DFSP provided an essential contribution to change, though without the inclusion of women in economic activities, training and village meetings, this change would possibly have been limited.** It was the combination of these approaches that have made a difference. Having said that it was clear that a significant change took place for men and women as a result of the gender training. At that point it seemed that men had already observed that their wives could be important actors in improving family income, and women had already participated in the WINGS groups and so had increased their confidence to talk in groups and interact in problem solving. However the simple and yet powerful method of discussing gender roles, workload and fairness had a big impact on nearly all of the men involved in the study.

***The inclusion of men in women's activities and in learning new ways of earning an income together has been an important part of the social norm change in several projects.*** Activities where men and women have participated together, such as the Paksong study visits, have made a big difference to men's attitude towards women's income earning activity. When men have not been included, for example in the cooking and nutrition activities, or in understanding the role of the WINGS groups, men have not been fully involved of the change process and have not be able to play their part in the changes that need to take place, for example in nutrition and cooking practices. This was also apparent in one or two of the desk review projects.

***Joint ownership and decision making between men and women has been promoted by the project's inclusive approach that is focused on the household rather than through action focused on the individual.*** The focus groups and interviews revealed that there is not much distinction between the husband and wife in terms of ownership and power over money. Both men and women project a strong belief that money is earned "for the family" even though the individual's behaviour does effect the family. Before the project it appeared that men were either not aware of or not challenged about their behaviour when it was damaging to family wellbeing. The awakening of men's awareness and women's understanding of their rights and ability to challenge men has provided an important push for the change process.

***Some initiatives, such as the livestock banks in PFSCBP and PRDP, have used approaches to address inequality within the village, whereas others have not addressed the risks.*** Income inequality is apparent in every village and this is normal. If the inequality increases in such a close knit community the social capital may be affected negatively and this could have an impact on project effectiveness. The pig, cow and goat banks are a good example of redistribution that also enhances a private sector approach. In all projects the community owned rice mills and the sharing of carts between families also enhances social capital and levels out the "playing field". The WINGS groups in DFSP enhances women's solidarity and cooperation between women around certain problems, which can increase equality.

***Leadership and role models have been important ingredients for success in changing norms around gender equality.*** For example, in DFSP, the village head, the deputy and the Lao women's union have had an important influence on the level of success in each village. It has been possible to see how the two villages with the strongest and most capable village heads appeared to have the most organized and developed project activities and village groups. Their capacity, motivation and drive is really important and should be fostered within the project. Other key individuals such as the village teacher (as seen in Tanglou) and the health worker (who was present, but not so much involved in Tangyerng) could have potential to play an important role in social norm change.

***Social norm change around women's income earning roles and nutrition practices is work in progress.*** These kinds of processes can take a long time and there are sometimes barriers that re-emerge. The evidence shows that some men still have negative attitudes to their wives attending meetings or leaving the village. The Prai have particular issues around women's mobility. There is also evidence that some women still don't know what to cook, don't want to change their methods or don't have access to ingredients. So it can't be assumed that the process is complete. ***Champions and influential people in the village*** (such as the village head, teacher or healthcare professional) are likely to be an important factor to support and sustain change processes.

**Learning question 3: What examples of 'good practice' can be identified from CARE's economic empowerment work that demonstrate effectiveness and sustainability in addressing economic participation and empowerment in the lives of women from ethnic groups?**

***The combination of economic and social approaches has been a key to the effectiveness CARE's work on economic empowerment in Laos.*** This has enabled a more sustainable change as the social aspects have increased women's power and agency and have begun to address some of the barriers related to gender inequality in economic activity. At the same time the economic aspects have enabled women to start earning an income and to take a part in economic decision making. All of the reviewed projects contain some combination of the following initiatives:

- ✓ ***Initiatives to enhance women's income earning*** by increasing their ability to produce and sell agricultural, garden and livestock produce. This has meant building women's technical knowledge of agriculture, gardening and livestock, while at the same time building commercial awareness of the potential of cash crops, selling of surplus food and selling NTFPs. The inclusion of women in training initiatives such as study visits and courses while at the same time given them roles in cascading training through the village has increased women's status in the villages and their value within the family. Livestock banks, used in PRDP and PFSCBP, appeared to be an effective way for increasing very poor women's access to food production and income earning potential as it enabled shared ownership, responsibility and benefit for livestock.
- ✓ ***Initiatives for women to form women only groups (e.g. WINGS) and to become part of mixed gender groups*** (e.g. Coffee processing groups, livestock bank groups). The groups have enhanced women's confidence, knowledge, ability to negotiate and communicate with peers (men and women), and to take part on village and project decision making. The increase in confidence appears to also extend to sales activities – with more women able and willing to leave the village to access markets. Notably in projects where there were no women's groups (e.g. PARUA II) the progress that women were able to make was limited.
- ✓ ***Specific approaches to change social norms around women's and men's roles and gender inequality.*** The DFSP fieldwork demonstrated how the gender training had had a transformational impact on men's and women's attitudes and behaviour. This had supported the other project elements and had potentially contributed to a more sustainable change. Leadership of village heads and other influential people in the village was also found to be an important aspect of the social norm change around gender.
- ✓ ***Initiatives to improve wellbeing through reduced workload and improved nutrition, sanitation and access to sexual and reproductive health services.*** These initiatives are particularly important for women's economic empowerment in the Laos context. Women whose workload had decreased and nutrition had improved reported feeling more energetic and having more time to themselves to and earn an income. In the DFSP fieldwork women rated improved sanitation and village and household cleanliness as important aspects of the changes that have taken place in their lives. This highlights how hygiene and access to latrines can have a positive impact on women's self-esteem and feelings of self-worth, which are important for women to be able to function as equals to men in income earning activities.

## 6. Recommendations



**Caption:** Villagers sell broomgrass to traders that visit the village for a 6 week period around February. Kunglith Village, Khua District, Phongsaly Province, Laos. Photo credit: © Jeff Williams/CARE

This section of the report presents a series of strategic recommendations which have been drawn from the findings of the literature review and field study for CARE Laos:

**(i) Ensure that a thorough gender context analysis forms the basis of all project designs.** This should follow the CARE Empowerment Framework and the Women's economic empowerment analysis framework shown in Table 1 of this report. In particular it could include analysis of the following:

- ✓ Women's economic activities, opportunities and barriers to income earning – including economic, practical and social barriers (e.g. gender inequality, high fertility, workload, knowledge of business and marketing, financial literacy, current economic activity and income)
- ✓ Analysis of existing and potential markets and outlets for current produce (e.g. agricultural) and new products (e.g. coffee, SIM cards)
- ✓ Access to financial services – including savings and credit, but also health insurance and leases
- ✓ Decision making and power in the family and in the community with respect to income earning and other aspects of women's lives

- ✓ Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and violence against women and girls (VAWG). ( this could include fertility, desire to limit number of children, how women manage childcare and childbirth and associated health risks; assessment of access to services and decision making power over women's own bodies; VAWG prevalence and impact on women and their ability to earn an income and make decisions)
- ✓ Existence of feminist or women's groups or support networks (e.g. the Lao Women's Union) and assessment of their capability
- ✓ Institutional, legal and regulatory framework (this might include laws around inheritance and land ownership, women' rights and sexual and reproductive rights; also it might include government and project institutional gender equality and safeguards of women's rights)

**(ii) Develop a more comprehensive approach to promoting women's inclusion in private sector**

**development.** This should be based on the analysis of what women need in order to develop their income earning potential and could potentially include:

- ✓ Business development services – building up bookkeeping, management and leadership knowledge and skills, marketing and market analysis expertise and experience
- ✓ Technical skills in design and production (e.g. food processing, handicrafts, equipment), agriculture, services (e.g. motorbike maintenance, hair dressing) and introduction of new technology products and services (e.g. SIM cards, solar powered lamps, motorbike rental services, transport services etc)
- ✓ Access to financial services such as savings and loans and insurance through VSLA, formal banking system, mobile money
- ✓ Enhancing access to markets through making market connections (e.g. through Fairtrade), addressing physical and gender barriers to accessing markets (including innovative approaches to sales models, communications and physical market places).
- ✓ Introduce private sector approaches that encourage collaboration and joint ownership within and between villages in order to enhance inclusion and income equality, while at the same time enabling bulk purchasing of inputs and bulk sales (e.g. cooperatives)

**(iii) Ensure training has a long term approach and that it is appropriate for women.** This should be based on women's needs and, where possible and beneficial, should be integrated with men's training. In some case, such as gender training. Gender training in particular could include children too to ensure that social norm change is takes place through whole families. When developing training approaches it is important to recognise that learning and changes in practice are not linear and often need a long term view. Evidence has shown that a shortfall in achievement affects women's confidence. Training planning should be based on need, but could include training gender, nutrition, SRHR, Lao language, literacy and adult education, and technical and business training. Training approaches could include:

- ✓ Long term time frames with repetitive sessions
- ✓ Mentoring and continued technical support
- ✓ Integration of life skills into technical skills training
- ✓ Extensive study visits as these appear to be most effective due to peer learning and observation
- ✓ Cascading between men and women, throughout villages and between villages (cascading is particularly important when women are not yet able to leave the village for training and needs to be more purposefully planned from men to women).
- ✓ Inclusion of the support of key village influencers such as the village head, teacher or health professional

**(iv) Support village, district and province champions for gender equality and women's empowerment**

- ✓ Enable village heads to improve their effectiveness and leadership of change processes

- ✓ Strengthen the capability of Lao Women's Union representatives by ensuring they have a role on the projects and that they know what they are doing. Provide leadership training
- ✓ Support government champions to visit villages and to provide moral and technical support to gender equality approaches

**(v) Produce a strategic approach to inequality and exclusion in the remote ethnic communities.** It is important to consider the whole community with respect to increasing income because these remote ethnic communities are so closely knit and have high levels of cohesion and social capital which is part of their survival and success strategy. Approaches that increase the income of a small number of people while leaving the rest in poverty will increase income inequality, risk breaking up the social capital and damaging overall long term development prospects.

**(vi) Analyse and monitor the risks associated with social norm change, alcohol consumption and violence against women and children.**

- ✓ Ensure there is a system for women to talk about violence in the family (maybe through women's groups or with health workers) and to address through support systems and access to justice
- ✓ Raise awareness of alcoholism within a health context and provide access to services
- ✓ Monitor men's attitudes towards women's changing roles and ensure men's fears and concerns are listened to in order to avoid backlash and violence

**(vii) Address structural and enabling environment barriers** such as institutional gender inequality in government services, project design and management, discriminatory laws or public sector practice

- ✓ Connect the local services with the project activities in order to improve access to health, education and WASH services and to maximise impact for women's economic empowerment
- ✓ Consider WASH initiatives that are women focused in order to support women's confidence building and family hygiene
- ✓ Monitor and raise awareness of local and national policies and implementation of women's rights legislation in relation to customary law in ethnic areas

**(viii) Strengthen project and programme-level M&E processes based on appropriate mixed methods approaches.** The material reviewed for this evaluation suggests that it could be useful for CARE Laos to work towards establishing a set of standardized outcome-level indicators to be measured across programming initiatives which share a common focus on women's economic empowerment. Indicators would need to be defined to reflect changes in women's economic advancement (e.g. income, expenditure and asset ownership), and power and agency, and so would include attitude and behaviour indicators defined to measure aspects of relations (e.g. household decision-making, incidence of domestic violence) and structures (social norms). The consistent use of these indicators in baseline and end line surveys would enable a more detailed, quantitative assessment of the extent and nature of programme achievements across the country office portfolio. The role of qualitative evaluations would then be a complementary one of exploring how and why change has taken place, resulting in an overall more compelling body of evidence concerning the effectiveness and programming approaches.

## Annex 1: Tools

### **DFSP EX POST EVALUATION - FOCUS GROUP WITH WOMEN**

**NOTE FOR FACILITATORS:** Questions in bold below are your opening questions. These questions are designed to encourage discussion and story sharing by the participants. Questions as bullet points are specific ‘probing’ questions that you can use to find out more information based on participant’s initial responses.

Ask for specific examples as much as possible – do not take “yes” or “no” or one word responses for an answer – ask for more information. Record quotes that can be used to illustrate a point.

### **FACILITATOR INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS**

Thanks for coming to meet with us today and for and sharing your time to discuss the work in your village.

I am XXXX and this is the focus group note taker XXX

We are here today to better understand whether and how women have benefitted from the economic development and nutrition work undertaken with CARE in this village. We would like to hear about how your lives have changed as a result of working together with CARE. The information and ideas discussed today will help CARE Laos understand how their work has enhanced women’s income and control over their lives and what needs to be improved or expanded further. The information will also be used to report back to our donors so that they have confidence to provide more money for such projects. .

Everything that we discuss today is confidential. Though we will be writing notes in order to remember the main points, no information will be presented by name in the final report. It will all be anonymous. We would like to have a conversation and I will start this by asking questions. There are no ‘right or wrong’ answers and we will not be judging each other during the discussion. I just want to hear about people’s different experiences. If there are questions that anyone does not feel comfortable answering, they do not have to answer. .

There will be refreshments at the end of the meeting. If you have not already filled in all of your information on the participant sheet, please do come and fill in at the end.

## FACILITATOR QUESTIONS for participants

Main question	time limit	Probing questions
<p><b>1. Introductions – please tell the group your name and what activity/ies you do to earn money or produce food for your family and yourself.</b></p>	10 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you farm or have a kitchen garden?</li> <li>• Do you sell produce in the market?</li> <li>• Do you collect and sell forest products?</li> <li>• Are you involved in a coffee plantation?</li> <li>• Any other activities?</li> </ul>
<p>Overarching spokes question: What are the most important and significant changes that have taken place for you in terms of your income earning, healthy eating, overall capability and confidence and the opinion and support of the community.</p>		
<p><b>2. From the activities that you have just mentioned – are any of them new to you that you did not do before? Do you own any equipment or property (e.g. land) to help you with these activities that you did not have before? Why did you start these activities?</b></p> <p>(this includes income earning, growing and producing (livestock, fish, crops etc), collecting and processing forest products, crafts and food production and sales, ownership of equipment and land etc).</p>	20 mins	<p><b>Activities to earn income</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What economic activities were you involved in before the project and how has this changed?</li> <li>• In what activities are you using new information and ideas that you have been taught about?</li> <li>• If you are selling where do you sell your products? How do you know where to sell?</li> <li>• How have you increased your income if at all? How are you measuring and recording this?</li> <li>• How do you save money or food produce for the future?</li> </ul> <p><b>Assets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What assets (equipment, land etc) do you have now that you did not have before?</li> <li>• Are the assets owned by you or by your husband or family, or the village?</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. How has your opinion of yourself and your abilities changed over the last three years since the project started? Why or how do you think you have changed?</b></p>	20 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you feel more confident, have more knowledge? – give an example of the increase in confidence or knowledge and how this happened.</li> <li>• Who makes decisions in the family? Are you more able to make decisions? Why is this?</li> <li>• Do you have better skills and resources to feed your family? – Please describe?</li> <li>• Does your husband or other family members expect you to do things that they did not before? In what way?</li> </ul>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has your relationship with your husband or the rest of your family changed at all?</li> <li>• Do you feel more confident to participate in and speak up in village meetings?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. What do the village people and your family think about women working and earning money in these new ways? Is this different from how it was before the project?</b></p>	15 mins	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How have women in the village overall changed over the last 3 years?</li> <li>• What do men think about women working for an income?</li> <li>• Do you get any support from your husband? E.g. investment, selling, buying, moral support, help in the house or with the child care? Please give a specific example.</li> <li>• How does your family support you?</li> <li>• Are there any groups or organisations that have supported you to earn an income?</li> <li>• <b>Do you feel included in village decision making? Are you listened to?</b></li> </ul>

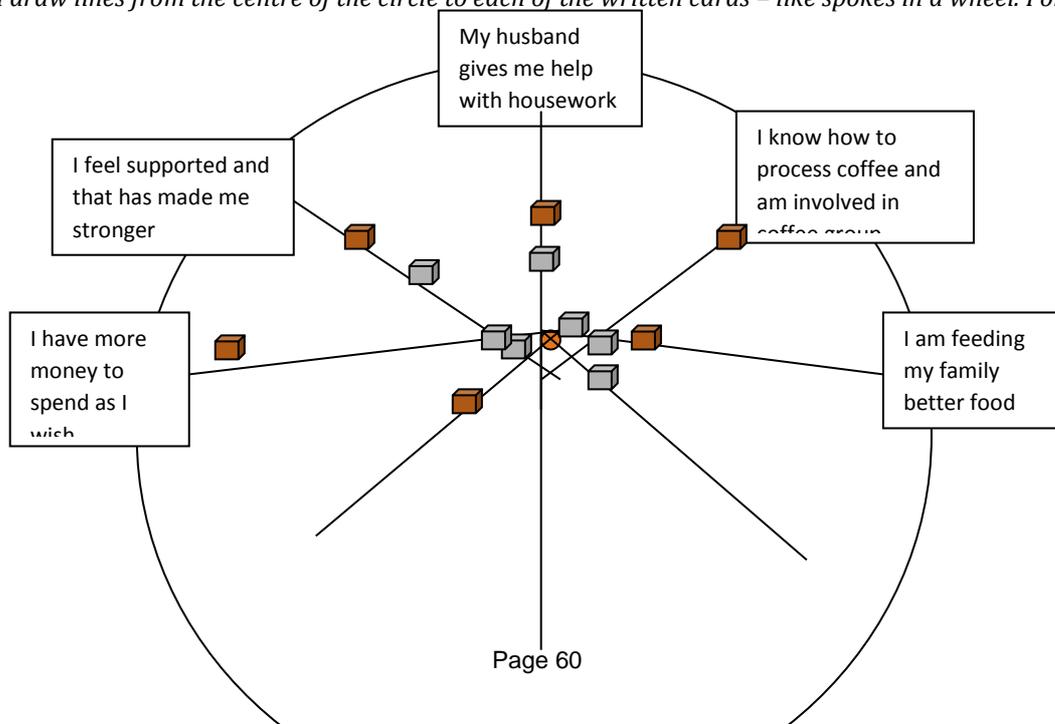
**5. Now start the SPOKES exercise with information that has come out of the discussion in questions 2, 4 and 5. (60 mins)**

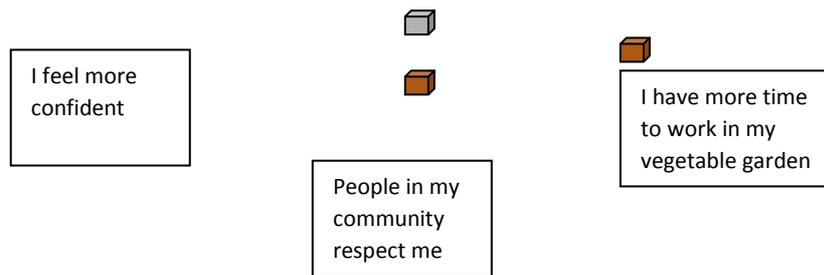
**Out of all of the issues we have been discussing just now – what are the most important and significant changes that have taken place for you in terms of your income earning, healthy eating and overall capability and confidence.**

*Instructions to facilitator for SPOKES*

(i) *With the women decide on symbols to represent 8 – 12 of the main changes to women’s economic advancement, power and agency that have taken place and arrange them in a circle. Symbols will include physical things that you find around you or that you carry with you. Allow the group to agree which symbols represent which change, and the note taker should write what each symbol represents in their notes. Keep referring back to the meanings and get the group to remember the meanings of the symbols*

(ii) *Then draw lines from the centre of the circle to each of the written cards – like spokes in a wheel. For example:*





(iii) Then the group will use markers to indicate how much progress has been made. There will be two different colour or different type markers. (e.g. black and white stones). One of the markers will indicate where the women were before the project started. The other will indicate where they are now in relation to progress. The women themselves need to discuss together and agree where the marker should go – relating the decision to their own lives. They will place the marker nearer the symbol if there has been progress and they are closer to reaching their goal with this issue – and further away from the symbol if they are far from achieving the goal.

e.g. if they are involved in a coffee plantation – if they were not involved in the project before they would put the marker the furthest away from the symbol (e.g. in the centre of the circle.) To assess the progress and where the other marker should go you might encourage them to discuss whether they have been involved in decision making, are they being paid for their work, are they pleased with the progress or do they need to see more progress.

The group has to agree on the level of progress – e.g. that if half the group are getting no help in the house from their husband, but the rest of the group are getting some help they might agree that progress is about half way along the spoke (see picture above. The closer the stone or sweet is to the box the more progress has been made.

During this discussion you should explore the barriers that the women have faced:

<p><b>What are the barriers that you have experience when trying to earn an income or reaching any of these goals? Has this become any easier during since the project started?</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything about being a woman that limits you from earning an income? Give examples. (this could include things like “I am not as confident as men”, “ women don’t have the same skills”, “people in the village don’t think women can do these things”, “I am too busy to earn an income”, “I don’t have seeds for my garden” etc)</li> <li>• What are your biggest fears and worries when earning income? (could include violence from partner or other family member, UXO, hunger, safety of my children etc).</li> <li>• Do you need your husband’s permission to have your own enterprise or to go to work or to sell products in the market in Dak Cheung? Has this changed at all since the project started?</li> <li>• Do you have more or less time to do everything you need to in the day? Give specific examples. (e.g. equipment now saves time, husband helping with wood collection or housework etc)</li> <li>• Do you feel like you are supported by family members, your husband or other people in the village? Give examples. (this support could include childcare, investment in business, help to sell products, moral support, group support from WINGS for example. etc)</li> </ul>
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*(iv) Finally - vote for the most important of the change areas – or initiatives that have changed your lives. Which one has been most important to you and had the most impact in improving your life? Each participant is given three stones to vote with. She can put the stones on any of the boxes – or all three on one box.*

**6. What do you think CARE could do to further improve women's income and support their participation in decision making in the home and community?**

**At the end ask for 2 volunteers to come back to tell their stories about the top three voted for changes.**

They need to be able to explain how the change came about – what was involved in the change, who supported it and why it is so important to them.

**Method for collecting and recording the story of change.**

We would like to know exactly how the change happened. The issues to be explored in the story are:

- Actual change in economic wellbeing and nutrition wellbeing
- Self esteem, self belief and aspirations
- Learning and knowledge – including business, marketing, prices etc
- Relationships with family and husband
- Experience in WINGS and in other community groups

What do you think you were like before the project started – tell me what your day was like and how you felt during your day? Was there anything you were concerned about or scared of?

Has that changed? How has it changed? Tell us what happened with all of the details. What roles did people in your family take? Were you happy about it? What have you learned, what are you doing differently? Are people in the community different?

Before the project started did you feel confident? Were you able to speak out in meetings, discuss any issues with your husband? Do you think that has changed at all? Tell me how it has changed – give me an example of how you now communicate with your husband.

How has your economic and farming activity changed? Before the project did you know about markets for your agriculture products, livestock and different gardening and cooking techniques etc? What new things have you learned?

How much do you earn each week on average? By how much has this increased over the last three years (if at all)? How do you manage the finances of your little business?

## DFSP EX POST EVALUATION - FOCUS GROUP WITH MEN

**NOTE:** Questions in bold below are your opening questions. These questions are designed to encourage discussion and story sharing by the participants. Questions as bullet points are specific ‘probing’ questions that you can use to find out more information based on participant’s initial responses.

Ask for specific examples as much as possible – do not take “yes” or “no” or one word responses for an answer – ask for more information. Record quotes that can be used to illustrate a point.

### FACILITATOR INTRODUCTION TO PARTICIPANTS

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I am XXXX and this is the focus group note taker XXX

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### FACILITATOR QUESTIONS for participants

Main question	time limit	Probing questions
<b>1. Introductions – please tell the group your name and what activity/ies you do to earn money or produce food for your family and yourself.</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do you farm, have a kitchen garden or own livestock?</li> <li>• Do you sell produce in the market?</li> <li>• Do you collect and sell forest products?</li> <li>• Are you involved in a coffee plantation?</li> <li>• Any other activities?</li> </ul>
<b>2. We would like to understand how income earning and food production activities have changed over the last three years?</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How were you and your family earning an income or producing before the project? Can you describe the situation?</li> <li>• What is the situation like for you and your family now? What is different? Can you give me an example of a change or difference that has been important to you?</li> <li>• What new activities are you involved in since the beginning of the project?</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. Now we would like to discuss how women have been involved in these or other income earning activities.</b></p> <p><b>What new income earning activities are women involved in?</b></p> <p><b>Thinking of your wife or your sisters - please share some examples or stories of how their ability to earn an income or to produce food has changed over the last three years.</b></p>	<p><b>30 minutes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what way have women’s knowledge and skills for earning an income changed over the past three years? Can you give me an example of this change?</li> <li>• How are decisions made in the household? Has it always been that way or has anything changed? Please give examples of how this has changed (e.g. school fees; what to plant when and where; health clinic visits)? Are there any decisions that only men can make? Can you give me an example?</li> <li>• What is the role of women in village meetings? Please give an example of how this might have changed. (<i>e.g. more women come to meetings; women speak more; women have their own groups that make decisions about community issues</i>)? What has changed? What was it like before?</li> <li>• Do you think women feel more confident, or have more knowledge?</li> <li>• Are you and your family eating healthier food – please describe?</li> <li>• Are women earning more money and growing food?</li> <li>• How is the relationship with your wife and the rest of your family?</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. What do you think of these changes that women have experienced?</b></p>	<p><b>10 minutes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How well are women doing some of the things they have been taught? E.g. cook new types of food, process coffee, sell products in the market?</li> <li>• What do you think about the WINGS groups?</li> <li>• Does anything worry you about the changes in women’s activities?</li> <li>• What do you think about women earning their own income?</li> <li>• Should women be able to decide what to spend money on?</li> <li>• Do you support your wife or other female family members to earn money or improve the food that the family eats.</li> </ul>

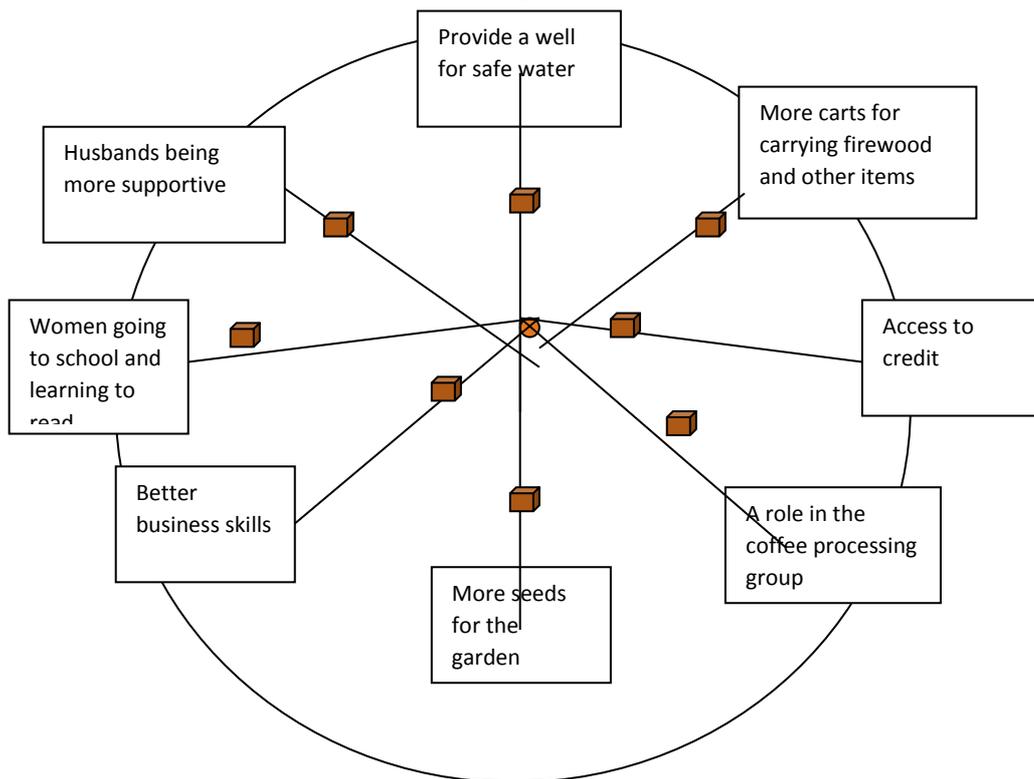
**5. Now start the SPOKES exercise with information that has come out of the discussion in 6. (60 minutes)**

<p><b>What do you think women find most difficult? What stops women from participating and earning an income and <u>how do you think this could be changed?</u></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything about being a woman that limits them from earning an income?</li> <li>• Do women in this village ever get beaten or experience violence from their husbands or other family members?</li> <li>• Does your wife need your permission to have her own enterprise or to go to work?</li> <li>• Do beliefs about women's role in the community make it difficult for women to earn money or produce food?</li> <li>• Are there any groups or organisations that have supported women to earn an income?</li> </ul>
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*Instructions to facilitator for SPOKES*

(i) Identify symbols to represent the **main suggestions for addressing women's difficulties** from the discussion of the question above. Arrange them in a circle. Symbols will include physical things that you find around you or that you carry with you. Allow the group to agree which symbols represent which change, and the note taker should write what each symbol represents in their notes. Keep referring back to the meanings and get the group to remember the meanings of the symbols

(ii) Then draw lines from the centre of the circle to each of the written cards – like spokes in a wheel. **FOR EXAMPLE:**



(iii) Then discuss whether any progress has been made for women and how close they are to the suggestion being achieved. This has to be discussed as a whole group so that all of the men can give their opinion in relation to their own lives – e.g. if men think women need more of a role in the coffee processing group – then discuss why they have not been able to do this so far and what needs to change to reach the goal. What would they like to see done

*differently in this initiative so that they would benefit more? Then place a marker (stone or sweet) along the line from the centre to demonstrate how much progress has been made and how happy they are with the change process. The group has to agree on the level of progress – e.g. that if half the group think women already have some role in the coffee processing group, but the rest of the group are think that women might go to meetings, but they do not participate or make any decisions then progress is about half way along the spoke (see picture above. The closer the stone or sweet is to the box the more progress has been made.*

*(iv) Finally - vote for the most important of the suggestions for changing women's lives and ability to earn an income. Which one would be the most important for your community? Each participant is given three stones to vote with. He can put the stones on any of the boxes – or all three on one box.*

**At the end ask for one volunteer who has experienced a particular change in attitude and a change in the way the family is organised. They should come back to tell their stories.** They need to be able to discuss their own attitudes and opinions of women's participation and contribution to the village and family economy.

### **Method for collecting and recording the story of change.**

We would like to know exactly men's wives/sisters lives have changed, how this happened and what are men's attitudes to these changes. The issues to be explored in the story are:

- Actual change in economic wellbeing and nutrition wellbeing
- Self esteem, self belief and aspirations
- Learning and knowledge – including business, marketing, prices etc
- Relationships with family and husband
- Experience in WINGS and in other community groups

What do you think your wife was like before the project started – tell me what her day was like and she behaved during the day? Was there anything she was concerned about or scared of? What did you think about her then?

Has that changed? How has it changed? Tell us what happened with all of the details. What roles did people in your family take? Were you happy about it? What have you learned, what are you doing differently? Are people in the community different?

Before the project started did your wife feel confident? Was she able to speak out in meetings and discuss any issues with you? Do you think that has changed at all? Tell me how it has changed – give me an example of how you now communicate with your wife.

How has your wife's economic and farming activity changed? Before the project did she know about markets for her agriculture products, livestock and different gardening and cooking techniques etc? Have you supported her to gain new knowledge to sell produce? Do you sell produce jointly?

Do you think your attitude towards your wife has changed during the project? What do you think about her money earning activities? What do you think about her confidence and ability to communicate with you and with other people? Is there anything that concerns you or worries you about the changes?

## Semi-structured Interview guide – DFSP Ex Post evaluation

- Local government officials (including District Agriculture and Forestry Office)
- Representative of Lao Women's Union
- Village leader
- Farmer group leaders, cooperative or coffee processing group leaders/manager
- Women's group facilitator (WINGS)
- Health worker and/or teacher (this is to hear whether there has been any health changes since the start of the project and also whether they have noted changes in social norms, women's attitudes etc)
- Community group leader and or irrigation group leader.

Explain that we are here to evaluate the project impact on women's economic empowerment – and what this means. The time will take between 60 – 90 mins.

1. Please can you explain your role in this project and on-going projects in the Dak Cheung region (if any), or your role with the communities.
2. What do you think has changed in this village/ these villages in the district over the last three years?
3. How have women been involved in these changes?
  - Have they been included in meetings, committees and associations?
  - Do they have new roles?
  - Are women earning more money?
  - Do they own more assets now?
4. How have women changed as a result of projects in their communities? – give me some specific examples of these changes.
  - Do they have more income?
  - Do they have more knowledge – what kind of knowledge?
  - Are they more involved in household decision making?
  - Are women more confident? Do they speak up more?
  - Can you give me an example of a woman in your community/ district / organisation who has taken on a leadership role as a result of this project?
5. How have the attitudes of people in the village in general changed
  - Do they respect women more?
  - Do they have different views about what women's roles should be?
  - Are they aware of the contribution that women and girls can make to the prosperity of the village?
  - Do the attitudes of people in the village ever stop women from earning an income or improving their lives? – give specific examples
6. What do you think has been the most valuable aspect of projects that have changed women and their communities?

- Leadership
- Project activities
- Training
- Women's groups (WINGS)
- Gender training
- All of these or a combination of things – which combination...

7. What do you think of the changes that are taking place?

- Do you agree with the changes?
- Do you think there are any risks involved in these changes?
- Do you think women can make good leaders?

8. Are women and their families healthier and more educated?

- Are more children going to school?
- Why do you think this is? What is the main cause?
- Do you think women have changed their cooking and food preparation behaviour? Are the families eating healthier meals? Do they have more access to vegetables and protein?
- Do couples have access to family planning – (for health workers) which methods do you have here in your clinic? Does everyone in the village know about FP?

9. What has your organisation / village / office done to help women's progress?

- Are there many women leaders in your organisation?
- How does your organisation ensure that women have opportunities?
- Has this changed at all as a result of the project?

10. Do women still have problems earning money and feeding their families?

- What kinds of problems do they have and why?
- Are some of their problems anything to do with people's views of what women are capable of or what their role should be?
- Do women own assets?

11. What would you suggest to improve the situation for women? What more can be done?

- To improve their decision making in the village and in the family – to be heard and to contribute.
- To own their own assets
- To be supported and encouraged by people in their community



## Annex 3: Field evaluation participant information

Chart 1: Total respondents

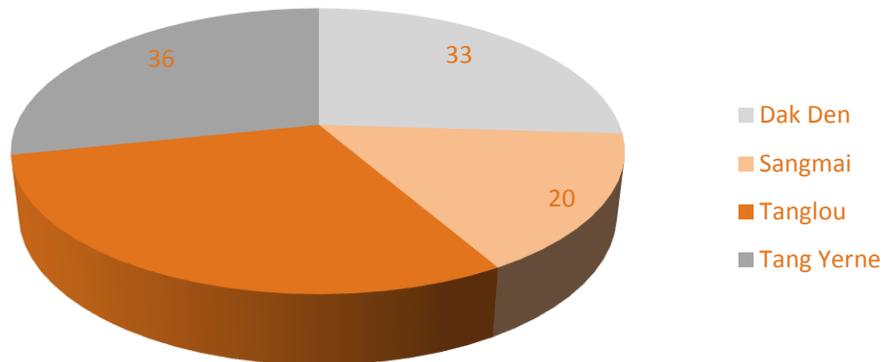


Chart 2: Male/female responses by village

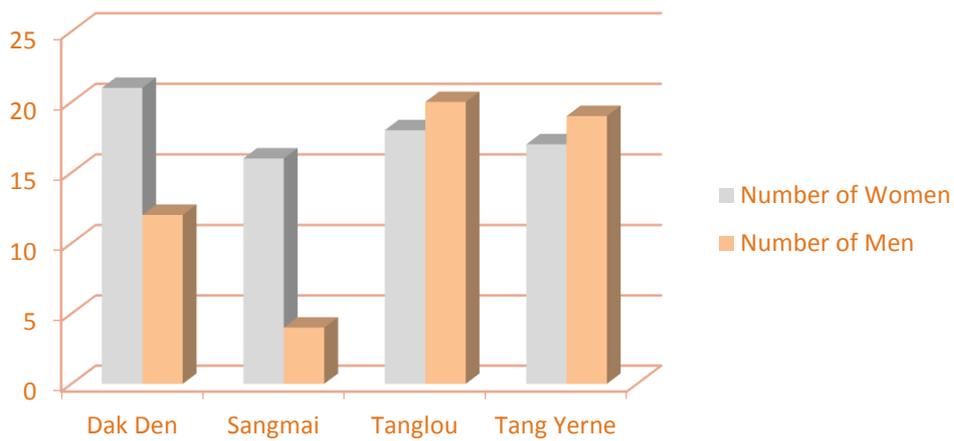


Chart 3: Respondents Age

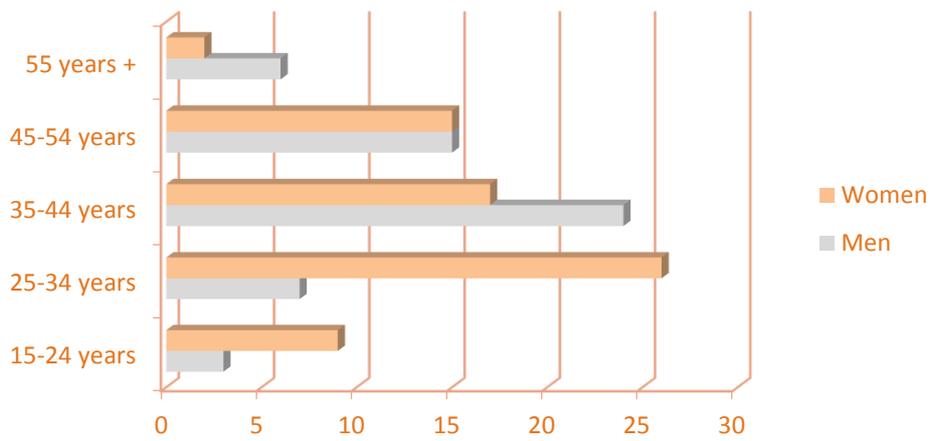


Chart 4: Number of children per person

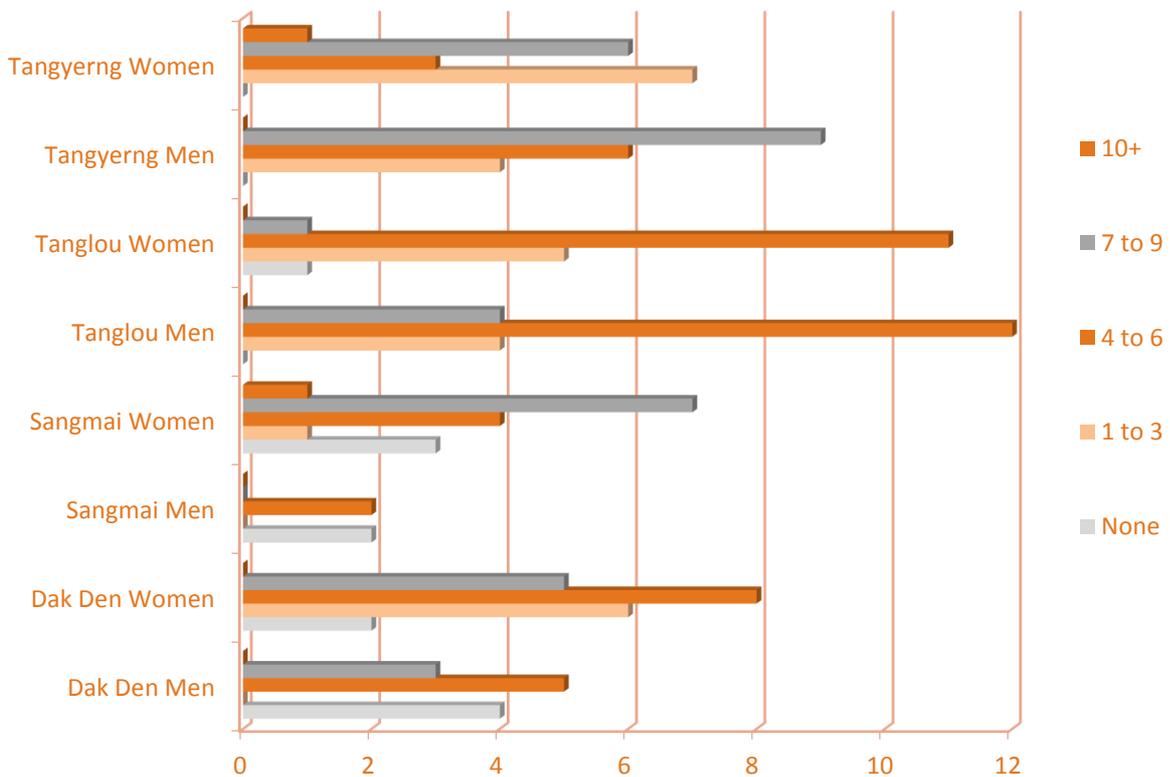


Chart 5: Sanitation

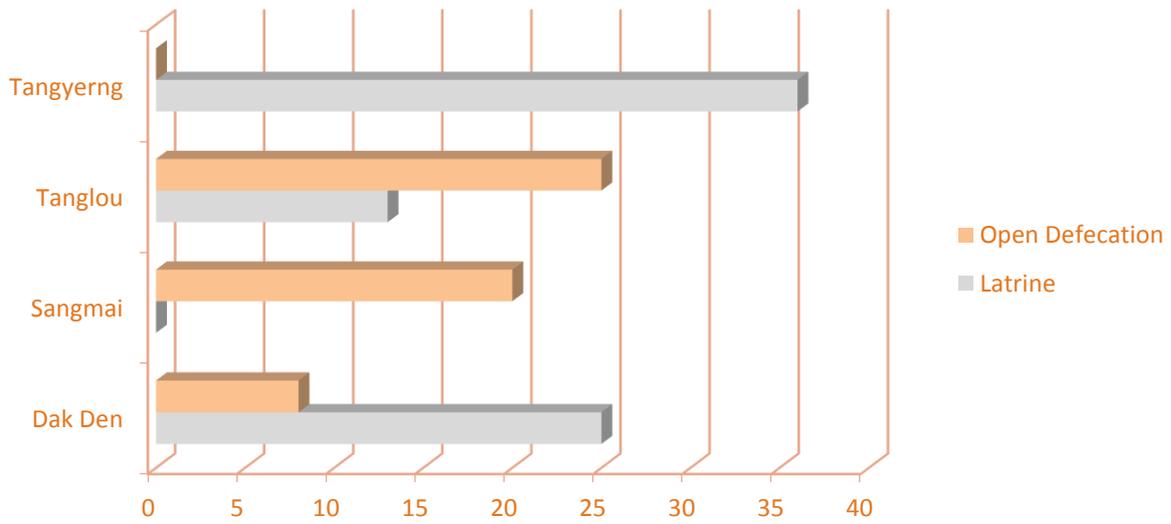


Chart 6: Distribution of Assets

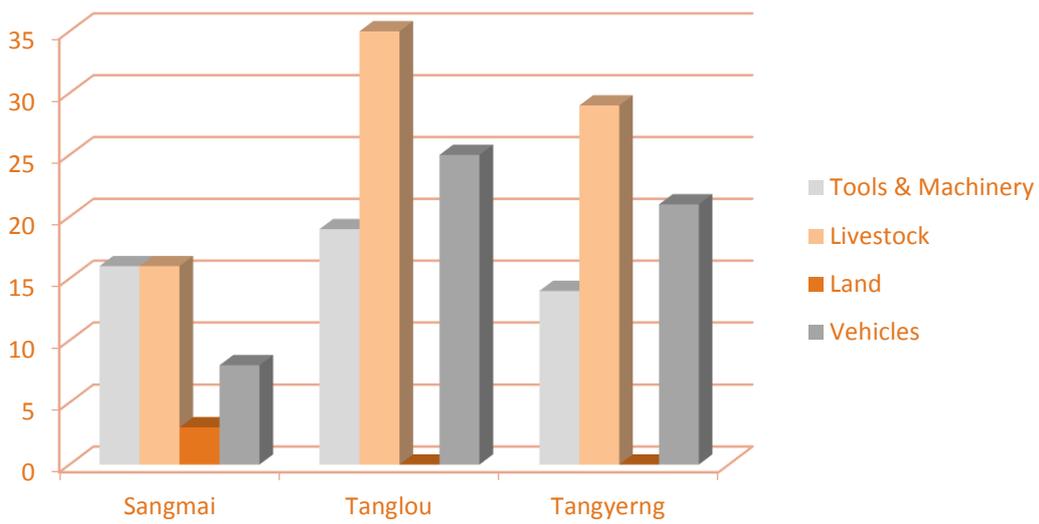


Chart 7: Education level of participants in Dak Den

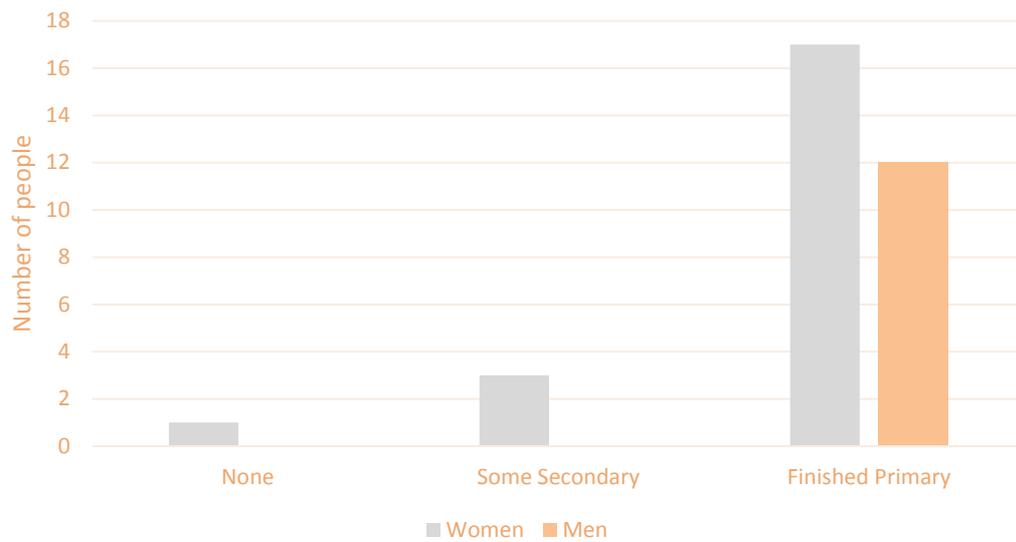


Chart 8: Education level of participants in Sangmai

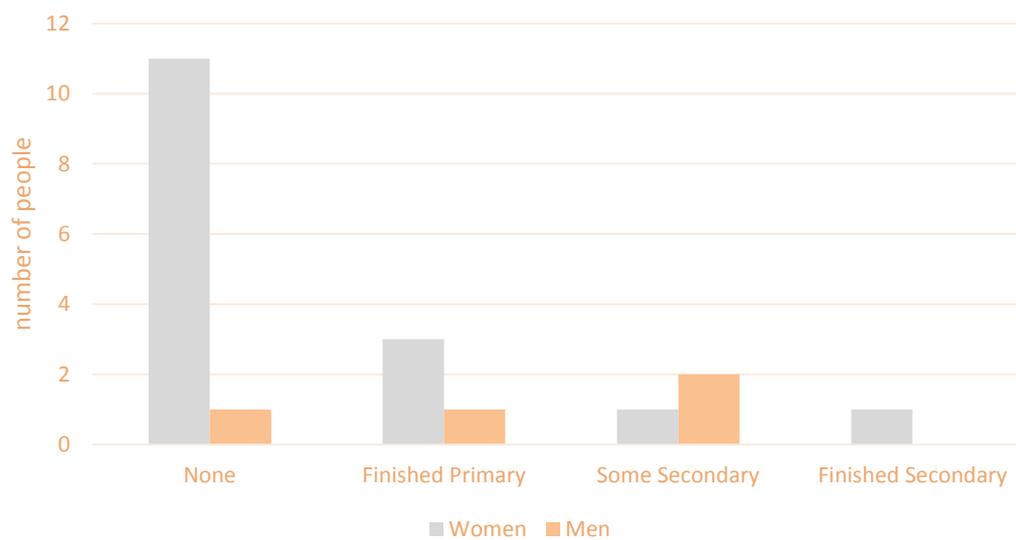


Chart 9: Education level of participants in Tanglou

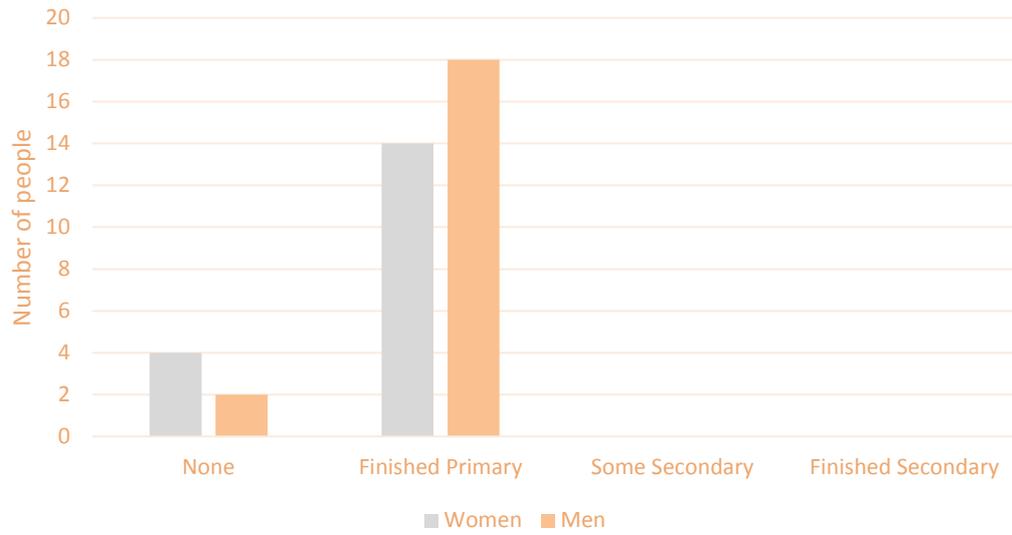
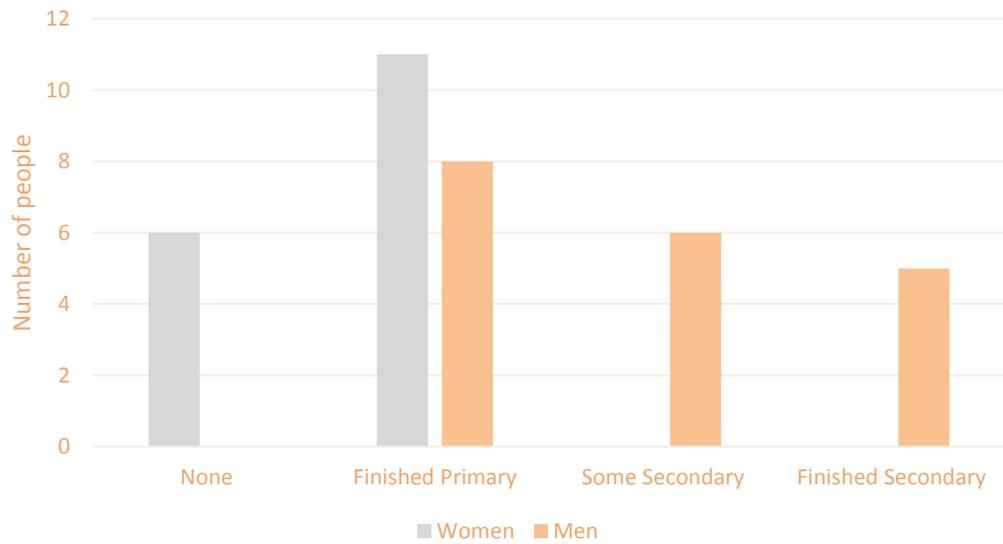


Chart 10: Education level of participants in Tangyerng



## Annex 4: Story of Change Interviews

**Village:** Tanglou Village

**Name:** Ms Innalee

**Occupation:** rice field; woodcutter, coffee grower

**Assets:** buffalo, motorbike, pigs

**Interviewer:** Josie and Vang

**Date:** 24/01/15

Ms. Innalee is 29 years old and is married with six children. **Innalee started working with CARE in 2010 after CARE held a meeting in her village** to explain the project '*CARE held a meeting in the village and all the women were invited to attend*'. Over the last four years Innalee believes her family has experienced a great number of changes.

*'Before the project each day was very hard work – I used to wake up at 2am so that I could pound enough rice for our meals – I would spend most of my day pounding rice – in the morning for lunch and again in the afternoon for dinner. Since the village received a rice mill as part of the CARE project I am now able to process between 30-60kg of rice which lasts us for an entire month – it takes me one hour to process this much rice!'* Innalee now wakes at 5am each day and finds herself with **more time to work in her vegetable garden and the rice fields with her husband**. She also **believes she is less stressed**, *'I am still working hard but I have time to stop and talk with others and laugh with my children during my day'*.



Innalee believes her family has also benefitted from her participation in the project *'Before the project we collected food from the forest and boiled it with salt – even though I would spend the time I had after pounding rice and working in the field I only ever managed to collect a small amount'*. However after attending a training with CARE, **Innalee established a vegetable garden – the garden now provides a diversity of food** including salad greens, beans, onions, cassava and morning glory. With technical assistance from the CARE **the family also built a fish pond which now provides a steady supply of fish throughout the year – enough to feed the family and share with relatives**. The family has also increased rice production using techniques learnt through CARE trainings. Innalee believes that **better rice production together with her vegetable garden has meant the family has more stable food sources** throughout the year and this in turn has led to a healthier family, *'now we eat a greater variety of vegetables and fish along with our rice and my children are much more healthy and have gained weight – even I have gained weight and am more beautiful! My children used to fall sick with fever and cold very often, but now they are more active and do not fall sick'*.

Innalee's **family income has increased through the sale of surplus vegetable and fish production**. Innalee sells her vegetables in her village or in Dak Cheung town and although Dak Cheung is difficult to access Innalee believes she can get a reasonable price for her produce there. Reaching Dak Cheung means walking over the course a day or travelling on a neighbour's motorbike and sharing the cost of petrol. The **family has used the increased income to purchase basics** such as salt and cooking oil as well as food during the wet season when the vegetable garden is not producing enough to meet the family's demands. **Decisions on how to spend the**

**family income are made by Innalee and her husband together, although Innalee herself keeps the money and manages the household budget, 'I keep the money myself and when my husband wishes to buy something then we discuss it together and we have to agree and of course it is the same for me'.** Innalee believes that her **ability to bring money into the family from her own work has led to a better relationship with her husband, 'Before I joined the project I had to request money from my husband for every need in the house – even for salt – but now I am earning money myself and so I can be part of the decision about how to spend money. We are much happier and my husband is happy that I can make money too'.**

Outside her family though Innalee feels it is more challenging to share her thoughts and opinions, *'of course women can speak but they can only be heard by other women'*. Innalee believes **this is due to the language barrier that many women in the village face, 'we only speak our language so we rely on the men to translate for us when we speak (into Lao) at meetings where there are local government or district government officials – we also have to wait for translation of what others are saying – it doesn't always happen'.**

**Village:** Tanglou Village

**Name:** Mr Soukvisay

**Occupation:** rice field; woodcutter, coffee grower

**Assets:** buffalo, motorbike, pigs

**Interviewer:** Josie and Vang

**Date:** 24/01/15

Mr. Soukvisay is 29 years old and is married with three children. **Soukvisay started working with CARE 2010 after CARE held a meeting in his village** to explain the project *'CARE held a meeting in the village and explained we could learn about growing vegetables and raising animals'*. **Soukvisay remembers the meeting because it was one of the first times women were included in the village meetings.** Since then Soukvisay believes his family and Tanglou village has experienced a great number of changes.



*'Before the project our lives were very hard – we started each day at 3am and after a small breakfast of steamed rice, walked for 3-4 hours to reach the forest where we would collect food, firewood and water. It took us a long time to do this – we walked very slowly because of the heavy load'.*

Workload *'Before working with CARE, my wife would pound rice between 3 to 4 hours every day and even then she was only able to produce meals for two days. Since receiving the rice-mill from CARE we are now able to process many kilos at a time and in just one hour we have enough to produce meals for ten days'*. When asked whether men process rice Soukvisay laughs *'before men did not help with processing the rice but now that there is a machine – yes of course we help with this!'* Mr. Soukvisay's family also received a handcart from CARE which they use to collect water and wood, *'we do not need to go to the forest each day anymore – one cartload of wood will last us for one week so we have much more time to work in our rice-fields and gardens and care for the children'*.

*'Before the project we collected food from the forest and boiled it with salt – the time available for collecting food was not much as most of our time was spent working in the rice field. My wife was also busy collecting wood and water and caring for our children'*. However after attending a training with CARE, **Soukvisay and his wife established a vegetable garden – the garden now provides a diversity of food** including cucumber, beans, onions, lemongrass and morning glory. With technical assistance from the CARE **the family also built a fish pond which**

**now provides a steady supply of fish throughout the year – enough to feed the family and share with relatives.** Soukvisay's wife attended a training on nutrition and food preparation and now he believes that their diet is much better *'My wife learnt about how to cook healthy meals using many vegetables and onions and garlic – she is making much more interesting and delicious meals than before!'*

Soukvisay believes that **the combination of a reduced workload and better diet has led to positive changes in the health of his family** with his wife and children gaining weight and falling ill less frequently, *'previously my wife was thin and tired all the time. My son was also tired because we had to go to the forest for many hours the children had to travel with my wife – but now with the handcart we are able to collect water and wood much more easily and quickly – my wife and children have gained weight – my wife is beautiful again and my son does not fall sick anymore'*.

**Soukvisay's family income has increased through the sale of surplus vegetable and fish production and the sale of livestock such as pigs,** *'CARE provided us with one female pig since then I have sold 10 pigs – for a big pigs I get 1.5 million kip and for a small pig I can get 500,000kip'*. **Mr Soukvisay and his wife has also recently established a new small business** buying products such as beer, ovaltine, and cigarettes in Dak Cheung to sell in the village.

The **family has used the increased income to purchase basics** such as salt and cooking oil as well as food during the wet season when the vegetable garden is not producing enough to meet the family's demands. In addition **the family is now making more long-term investments, for example purchasing materials to rebuild the house and add a steel roof as well as children's school fees and materials. Decisions on how to spend the family income are made by Soukvisay and his wife together because his wife manages the household budget,** *'my wife is the one who knows much money we have made and how much we have spent, she records it all but she shows me the money and the once we have agreed she goes to buy the rice and salt. I am proud to have a wife like that. Previously I was the one to train her but now she has knowledge to contribute to the family also and she is the one to train me'*.

For Soukvisay the changes have also been personal. **After attending a gender training Soukvisay started to help his wife in caring for the children and collecting firewood and water.** When asked why he changed his behaviour Soukvisay says *'it made sense to me that if you want to have more income and a better family life then you have to work together with your wife. Previously I made my own decisions about buying alcohol and left my wife to work in the house and look after the children – I didn't care and would just go out and not think about the family income. But now together with my wife I discuss our problems and make decisions together – we talk about how to store food and about what products we should buy in Dak Cheung town and sell. We are happier'*. Soukvisay is less sure that his wife is participating in village meetings because although she attends she is quiet because she does not speak Laos.

When asked about the future of his family **Soukvisay smiles and says he feels confident that the family will be strong in the future.** However **he has concerns about the poor road infrastructure connecting the village to Dak Cheung** which limits his family's ability to increase their marketing and trading. Soukvisay is **also concerned about maintenance of the rice mills** because although they are still working no one in the village has the skills to repair them. Soukvisay says **he would be interested in offering repair services as a small business if he received training.**

**Village: Tanglou**

**Name: Seng Davon**

**Information: Primary education, married, 6 children**

**Occupation: fishpond and trading**

**Assets: motor bike, tractor & buffalo.**

Before the project my wife and I knew nothing. We didn't know how to dress or how to talk to people. We didn't know how to sell or that we could sell produce. My wife used to hide when there was a village meeting.

When we married she was 18 years old and I was 22. We have six children, two boys and four girls. We both worked in the rice field and collected forest products. We didn't go anywhere at that time. We both took care of the house together and we had parents to help with the house when we lived together. We did make decisions together. But sometimes my wife used to yell at me. Some men in the village used to beat their wives and cheat on them. I have never beaten my wife and I only have one glass of alcohol a day.

The project has made a difference to our lives. We are now involved in a lot of activities. We have pigs, a fish pond, a vegetable garden and a cart for carrying things. We also have a coffee plantation and a rice paddy – but not as much as before. We have more comfort in our lives because we have more income. I got to town to sell products, and my wife doesn't go as she is very busy. Sometimes when there is a holiday I take my wife to Dak Cheung to visit.

When my wife tells me to go and sell some products I do go to Dak Cheung as the villagers in Tanglou are not able to sell much of their products here. After I have sold the vegetables I buy salt and spices. I report to my wife the amounts that I have spent, but we don't write it down. Sometimes my wife can buy products herself in the village from Vonsai, who brings products from Dak Cheung to sell in the village. She is the wife of the teacher and has her small shop.

I would like my wife to earn more money, but I am worried about her marketing skills as she doesn't know how to negotiate and she can't read. I learned to trade and negotiate by myself by visiting other villages and seeing how their lives have changed. I try and do the same as others to earn more money. My wife is shy to communicate with people outside of the village as she doesn't speak Lao. I would like her to study, but we don't have the money. I have started to teach my wife Lao, so she is better than before, and she does understand quite a lot now.

In relation to the project activity my wife is now smarter and is more confident with me and in the village. Now she does go to village meetings and even tells others her opinion. Also there is more understanding between me and my wife. Ever since the gender training we have been getting on better with each other. I didn't go to the gender training, but my wife did and she came home and told me all about it. She told me that we have to share the tasks and earn income together to have a stronger family. She seems more confident as she did not used to dare speak out to me about anything before the project. It was great because the village head encouraged my wife to attend the gender training and he identified women in the village by name so that they had to go to the meetings.

All of my children go to school. My oldest boy is 15 years and has a disability. He is at secondary school in Tangyern. I felt so bad for him having to walk to Tangyern, that I have lent him my motor bike. I now have to walk everywhere – but I feel good as he is getting an education. My other children are at primary school in the village. My children help in the house and my daughters are able to carry the water now we have a cart.

I have no worries about the changes in the village. The more we change, the better our lives will be. I will keep the traditions and the customs, but I think they may slowly disappear. One example is that we used to think that strangers could not enter our house. But now we don't think that is true anymore. This is better so that we can welcome people into our houses.

**Village:** Dak Den Village

**Name:** Ms Mon ne Vong

**Occupation:** Upland rice farming, coffee plantation

**Assets:** none recorded

**Interviewer:** Josie and Vang

**Date:** 27/01/15

Ms. Mon ne Vong is 40 years old and is married with no children of her own. Mon Ne Vong **has been working with CARE since 2010**. Over the time Mon Ne Vong has been working with CARE she believes her family have experienced significant change.



*'Before I started working with CARE our lives were hard – I would wake every day at 3 am to pound rice and do my work around the house before leaving to work in the rice field. I also had to spend between 3 to 4 hours a day collecting water'.*

Since that time Mon Ne Vong believes her family has benefitted from her participation in the project. **Her family income has increased and that this is mainly due to the production of coffee**. Mon Ne Vong has three coffee gardens – they vary in maturity from 10 years; 4 years and 1 year old. Coffee gardening was not a new activity for Mon Ne Vong as she previously worked as a labourer on a coffee farm in Paksong – it was there that she first learnt about growing coffee and brought seeds home to experiment and see she could grow coffee. However **after attending a training with CARE in Paksong Mon Ne Vong believes her techniques have improved**, *'before I did not have the formal training an understanding in how to plant and grow the coffee but now I can see the change in my production – it is much higher than before which is why we decided to plant another garden'*. **Mon Ne Vong's harvest last year was her most successful to date – she was able to sell the total harvest from two gardens for 12 million kip**. However this year Mon Ne Vong is worried what the harvest will be like as the weather has been changing and becoming much warmer than is normal. Mon Ne Vong is also interested to start growing higher value varieties but she is not sure where to source the seeds from.

Mon Ne Vong **sells to Laos traders who come from Sekong and to Vietnamese traders who come from Dak Cheung Town to Dak Den to buy the beans**. **Mon Ne Vong shares information on current market prices with other villagers and together the village agrees in advance how much they will sell their beans for**, *'I have relatives living in Paksong and so I call them to find out what the current market price is for the beans and then we compare that with the price the trader offers us'*. **Mon Ne Vong does not feel she could negotiate with the traders directly** and prefers to let the village tax committee negotiate directly with the traders *'because once the traders have paid our money, the committee takes tax for the village fund and then shares out to the villagers'*. The village fund is used to support village needs such as purchasing food during difficult times for vulnerable families. **Mon Ne Vong does not feel she has the ability or confidence to sell her products directly in Paksong or Dak Cheung**, *'there are many challenges to that idea'* she says *'firstly it is too difficult for me to transport the product I have to town – the roads are no good and I do not have any transport unless I share a motorbike with my husband or a neighbour. Secondly to sell in town I need documents to show the tax department and I don't know how to get those documents and I cannot read or write. Finally I am also afraid to take my product to Paksong or Dak Cheung – what if no one buys from me? It's too risky for me to do that – there is no way to know if I will be able to sell'*.

Mon Ne Vong has **used the income from coffee to meet basic household needs** such as salt, cooking oil, and soap. However together with her husband they have also **made longer-term investments such as rebuilding the house and paying the university fees for Mon Ne Vong's niece** who is studying in Sekong, *'I don't have children of my own so I support my niece- it makes me happy to do that'*.

Mon Ne Vong and her husband **make decisions about how to spend the family income together**, *'we discuss together as a whole family. I married my husband when I was 13 – he was an orphan and he needed someone to help him look after the house. He is a kind man and he now lives with me and my family – so I discuss with the whole family, not just my husband, what the family needs are and then decide what to buy'*.

Mon Ne Vong also believes **her family is more food secure since she started working with CARE**, *'Before the project we collected food from the forest and boiled it with salt – even though I would spend the time I had after pounding rice and working in the rice field I only ever managed to collect a small amount'*. However receiving equipment and seeds from CARE and **after attending paddy improvement training provided by DAFO** Mon Ne Vong **started using new techniques** in how she planted and maintained the paddy – **the paddy field now produces 20 bags compared to 9 bags before the project. The family now has enough rice to last the year whereas previously it last for only 6 months.** Mon Ne Vong was unsure whether the irrigation system in the village was part of the CARE project or not, but she believes it has made a difference to her productivity, *'with the irrigation we can now produce more rice twice a year'*.

**Village:** Dak Den Village

**Name:** Ms Phet Sa Vanh

**Occupation:** Vegetable garden, coffee garden, lowland rice farming

**Assets:** none recorded

**Interviewer:** Josie and Vang

**Date:** 27/01/15

Ms. Phet Sa Vanh is 41 years old and is married with six children. Phet Sa Vanh **has been working with CARE for a long time – she believes it may even be since 2002 until now.** Over the time Phet Sa Vanh has been working with CARE she believes that both herself and her family have experienced such significant change that *‘today we are completely different to what we were before CARE’.*



*‘Before I started working with CARE our lives were hard – I would wake every day at 3 am to pound rice and do my work around the house before leaving to work in the rice field. We had no understanding or way to make an income at that time – we relied on our labour in the field and on the food we could collect’.*

Since that time Phet Sa Vanh believes her family has benefitted from her participation in the project. Phet Sa Vanh believes **her family income has increased since she started working with the CARE project and that this is mainly due to the production of coffee.** Phet Sa Vanh has three coffee gardens. Coffee gardening was a new activity for Phet Sa Vanh but **her husband attended a training** with CARE in Paksong. Phet Sa Vanh would have liked to attend the training in Pak Song but she was not able to travel because she needed to look after the children and house, so her husband attended for the family. However **Phet Sa Vanh’s husband was quick to share the knowledge he gained during the training and together they agreed to establish their coffee gardens one by one.** It took three years before they could harvest their first crop from her first garden. Phet Sa Vanh’s last harvest sold for 5 million kip which is a significant amount - Phet Sa Vanh proudly shared that **she grows a combination of higher value coffee varieties (‘white’ beans) and standard varieties (‘black beans’) and that she mainly sells dried beans which have a higher value than the fresh cherries.** Only occasionally will Phet Sa Vanh sell her coffee cherries directly in Dak Cheung town when she is in urgent need of money for supplies.

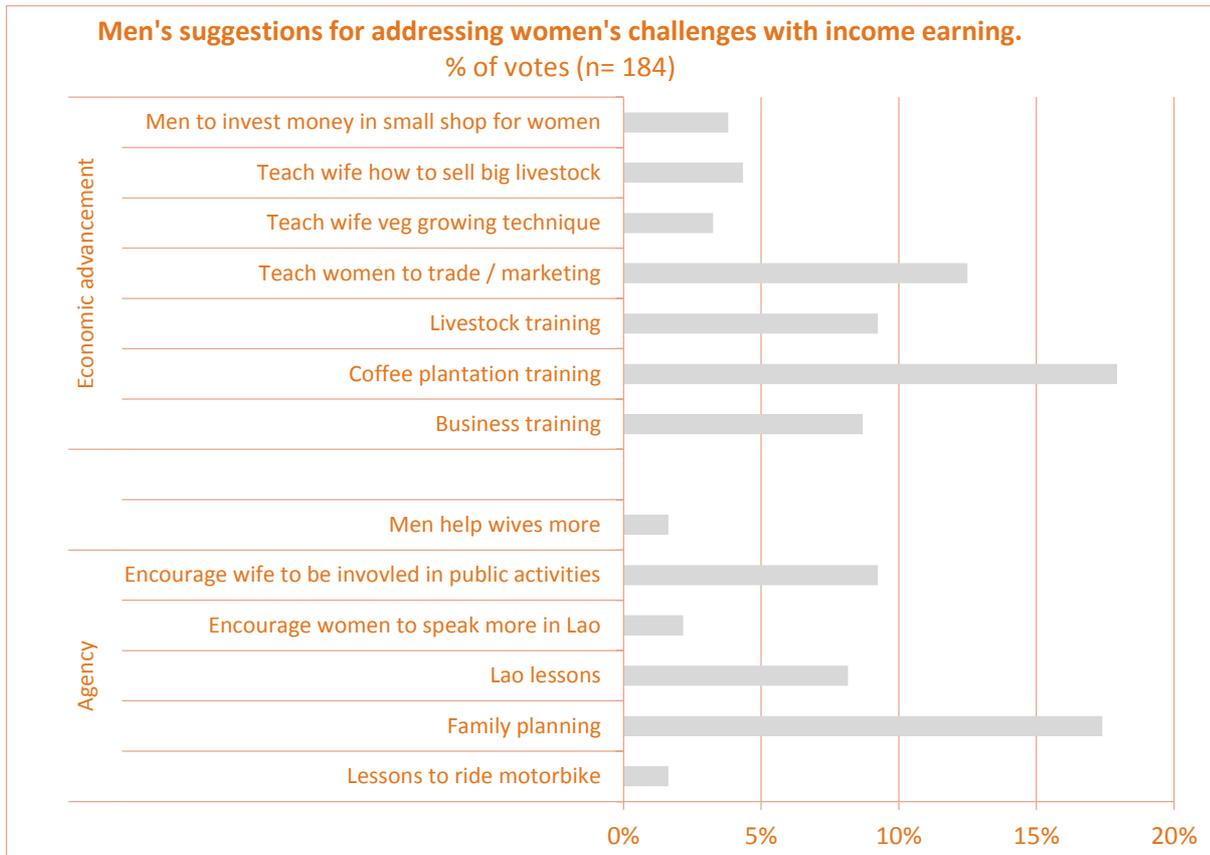
Phet Sa Vanh **sells to Laos traders who come from Sekong and to Vietnamese traders who come from Dak Cheung Town.** Phet Sa Vanh **agrees in advance with other villagers growing coffee how much they will sell their beans for** – either by tank or by kg, *‘we can agree to sell for between 85000kip-92000kip/tank (one tank = 10kg)’.* Phet Sa Vanh does not feel she could negotiate with the traders directly and prefers to let the village tax committee negotiate directly with the traders *‘because once the traders have paid our money, the committee takes tax for the village fund and then shares out to the villagers’.* The **village fund is used to support village needs such as purchasing food during difficult times for vulnerable families.**

Phet Sa Vanh has **used the income from coffee to meet basic household needs** such as salt, cooking oil, and soap. However together with her husband they have also **made longer-term investments such as rebuilding the house and paying high school and university fees** for their three daughters. Phet Sa Vanh and her husband have also **invested in their asset base to increase their agricultural productivity including buying a small tractor and hiring labour in the rice field** so that they have more time for their coffee. They have also purchased a number of pigs and are breeding piglets to either barter or raise and sell, *‘we can barter piglets for diesel or we can raise a big pig and sell it to other villagers for ceremonies for 2.5 million kip’.*

Generally Phet Sa Vanh and her husband **make decisions about how to spend the family income together**, *'we discuss together what the family needs are and we both decide what to buy. For example, I saw another family using the small tractor and I convinced my husband to buy one for our family'*. Phet Sa Vanh also says that she has made a small income from selling her surplus vegetable produce in Dak Cheung town. She mainly uses the money earned from selling her vegetables to buy household items and small dried goods. **The money that she earns from selling vegetables is for her to manage and spend as she decides. However money earned from the coffee and the sale of pigs must be discussed together with her husband as it is 'family money'**.

Phet Sa Vanh also believes her family is more food secure since she started working with CARE, *'Before the project we collected food from the forest and boiled it with salt – even though I would spend the time I had after pounding rice and working in the field I only ever managed to collect a small amount'*. However **after attending paddy improvement training and once CARE had rehabilitated the irrigation system in Dak Den, Phet Sa Vanh started using new techniques** in how she planted and maintained the paddy – **the paddy field now produces 20 bags compared to 5 bags before the project. The family now has enough rice to last the year whereas previously it last for only 6 months.**

## Annex 5: Quantification of votes in Spokes exercises from focus groups



## Annex 6: Bibliography

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## ABOUT CARE

CARE works with poor communities in developing countries to end extreme poverty and injustice.

Our long-term aid programs provide food, clean water, basic healthcare and education and create opportunities for people to build a better future for themselves.

We also deliver emergency aid to survivors of natural disasters and conflict, and help people rebuild their lives.

We have 70 years' experience in successfully fighting poverty, and last year we helped change the lives of 72 million people around the world.



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This Laos Case Study Report is part of CARE Australia's Women's Economic Empowerment with Ethnic Groups in the Mekong Region Evaluation. For the Vietnam Case Study Report and Ex-Post Evaluation Report, please visit [www.care.org.au/what-we-do/lessons-impact/](http://www.care.org.au/what-we-do/lessons-impact/)