

# **IMPROVED CAPABILITIES AND RESOURCES**





# ROLE OF FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION INTERVENTIONS

Joint Programme: Promoting and Protecting Food Security and Nutrition for Families and Children in Bangladesh

Thematic Window: Children, Food Security and Nutrition

Main Participants: WFP (lead agency), FAO, UNICEF, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Save the Children, Helen Keller International, Action Contre la Faim, ICDDR, BRAC



Image courtesy of WFP

## 1. Introduction

The World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) have carried out a Joint Programme on Promoting and Protecting Food Security and Nutrition for Families and Children in Bangladesh (the Programme) to improve maternal and child nutrition in one of Bangladesh's most impoverished regions. The focus on women as the change agents for improving both food security and nutrition makes this program a unique initiative. This experience shows that although women's empowerment was not an explicit objective at the outset of the Programme, the community-level engagement to increase women's participation in food security and nutrition has been crucial to advance their rights, and that empowerment has been a very positive result of the Programme.

## 2. Initial Situation

The social status of women as compared to men, in families and communities, is considered one of the critical factors in explaining the reasons behind high levels of undernutrition in the region of Upazila, Bangladesh. Lack of education, learning opportunities, societal restrictions and access to resources are serious constraints that prevent women from bringing about changes in health and nutrition behaviours for themselves and their families. Men traditionally grow and purchase food; therefore, they decide what the family eats. Social and cultural factors also restrict women's participation in the social, economic and political spheres. These same barriers prevent women's mobility outside of their homes and limit their access to information and to the outside world.

**“At the beginning of the interventions, the status of women in the community was very low. The intervention is the first of its kind in the area, which attempts to make significant changes in women’s lives.”**

ASSISTANT PROGRAMME MANAGER AT WFP

## 3. Objective

The overall goals of the Programme were to:

- Contribute to the reduction of acute malnutrition and underweight prevalence among children 0-59 months and acute malnutrition in pregnant and lactating women; and
- Reduce the proportion of the population that is food insecure (i.e. those with inadequate calorie and nutrient intakes).

## 4. Strategy

Based on baseline survey evidence, the Programme was designed to take immediate steps to improve the nutritional status of women and children in the community and the overall food security of the larger community.

The joint interventions included the following:

- Enhancing food security through homestead gardens and income-generating activities;
- Managing malnutrition among families and children;
- Enhancing education in schools through school feeding;
- Promoting nutrition education in schools;
- Improved infant and young child feeding practices; and
- Prevention of micro nutrient deficiencies, particularly anemia among children.

## 5. Progress and Results

Women's empowerment was analysed through their active participation in project activities, which resulted in improved perceptions of themselves and the perceptions of others and contributed to Programme outcomes.

### CHANGES IN PERCEPTIONS

Perceptions of themselves. Programme interventions required women to take part in activities outside their homes. The Programme organized entire day trainings, visits to the outreach centers and courtyard sessions. These systematic interactions helped women to review and reconsider their self-image. They were able to overcome their inhibitions and became more confident, and their awareness of these changes made them feel proud of their accomplishments.

**“Now family members pay attention to my words.”**

TASLIMA, PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

Perceptions of family members. Women are now involved in a variety of activities that they were not involved in before. The training programmes have instilled in other family members a sense of confidence in the capabilities of the women. As a result, women are able to bring about changes in the diets of their families and improve the overall food security situation of their households. Women reported that mothers-in-law are beginning to give them credit for proper care of the children. This makes them feel more valued as members of the family and increases their self-worth.

### CHANGES IN HEALTH AND NUTRITION PRACTICES

A number of traditional beliefs that are detrimental to the health and nutrition of pregnant women and young children are deeply entrenched in the communities. The diets and movements of pregnant women are strictly monitored and both the quantity and quality of diets during pregnancy are restricted. In order to counteract these traditional beliefs, the

Programme organized regular sessions to promote healthy practices for pregnant and lactating women and young children. The training sessions provided women with information on what, how and why to feed their babies and how to take special care of them. It also provided information on diet diversity and the nutritional value of different food items. Following these sessions, women started to visit doctors more frequently and rely on medical information rather than depending on traditional beliefs.

### SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

*“I do not bother my wife regarding when and what to feed my baby as now she has more knowledge than me.”*

HELAL, HUSBAND OF PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

**Within the family.** Participants reported that major decisions such as purchasing, selling or mortgaging land, daughters' weddings or children's education were usually taken by men in the community. However, after their involvement in the Programme, women started taking part in some of these family decisions. Women appear to have increased responsibilities on certain issues such as feeding of children and daily meal preparation. Women are mainly responsible for homestead gardening. They follow the Programme's training and the guidelines provided by the Department of Agriculture Extension staff to cultivate their gardens. They also have increased control over the products, independently deciding to sell vegetables to their neighbours.

**Outside the family.** The community is largely conservative and traditionally does not provide scope for women's independent participation in social ceremonies or functions outside their homes. During the project women participated in activities outside their home and therefore interacted with people other than their families. Women who had participated in the homestead garden training felt that they had the freedom to ask for

support and to discuss any kind of issue with the Livestock Officer or the Department of Agriculture Extension Officer. Women used to avoid strangers in the communities, especially men. After the intervention they have become confident in expressing themselves in front of strangers.

### **INCREASE IN WOMEN'S MOBILITY**

Traditionally women travel only when accompanied by an adult male member of the family. Prior to their involvement in the project they could hardly move out of their homes or village. Their movements were restricted to neighbouring households or to their villages of birth. After the intervention, women started travelling outside of their homes to get health support for themselves and for their children. The most remarkable change is women's increased access to the health facilities. Although most of the visits were to the community clinics, the women interviewed seemed confident that they would be able to travel anywhere.

### **CHANGES IN THE MEN**

The evolving role of women in the communities is also accompanied by a subtle change in the men. Men became more receptive to their wives' knowledge and abilities and women reported that men were seeking their advice or inputs. Before the Programme men used to be the sole decision-maker when it came to purchasing food or seeking health care. After the Programme, women were increasingly having more influence and input in this decision-making process.

### **ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Women have become economically empowered through their vegetable gardening and goat rearing activities. They have benefitted both socially and economically by producing quality vegetables, sharing their acquired knowledge with family members and neighbours and

saving money through selling their vegetables. Homestead gardening has improved their household's food security and has also become an important source of nutritious food for their families. Depending on the size of their gardens, some women have sold vegetables and other garden items like vegetable seeds, which have increased their income.

*“Earlier I thought money should be kept with my husband. But after my involvement with the programme I have realized that I must have some resources in my hands. I have become aware.”*

RINA, PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT

## **6. Lessons Learned and Challenges**

The increase in knowledge does not automatically translate into changes in practice. In bringing about even subtle changes, women encountered resistance from family members. The process of change requires convincing family members, in this case, mothers-in-law who are traditionally the prime authority on household and child-care issues.

In Bangladesh's highly stratified society, where women are on the lowest rungs, it is not possible to bring about change in any arena without having elements of empowerment built into the activities. The integration of nutrition education and homestead gardens provided by this Programme provided the vehicle for changes in nutrition practices that contributed to improving food security in the families. Countering entrenched beliefs has not been an easy process for the women. Change involved working with mothers-in-law and other elderly women who were considered the authority on these issues in the communities.

The Programme was based in extremely remote rural locations where government facilities do not exist. Continued interaction with the outside world, through community nutrition workers and agriculture extension officers, helped women access knowledge and experience which otherwise would have been unavailable.

Mobility is considered an important indicator of women's empowerment. It reflects women's ability to access services and knowledge and requires interaction with people outside the family. Mobility is also an indicator of the families' and society's acceptance of women moving outside of defined parameters for personal or professional reasons.

An improvement in women's self-confidence has also increased their desire to be further involved in decision-making, especially in major issues such as children's education, marriage of their daughters and taking mortgage on the land.

The level of economic empowerment achieved by the women is directly related to the size of their garden. Women with a small piece of land are in a better position to have control over their income, as they are able to sell their products within the village. However, whilst commercial production increased the potential income generated, it also increased women's dependence on male members of the family to sell her products in the market.

## 7. Sustainability and Potential Application

The homestead garden approach is of particular relevance to Bangladesh where eight per cent of the land is considered homestead land. This report provided insight into how activities such as homestead gardening and nutrition education have an effect that is more far reaching than anticipated.

It underscores the need to expand the project design frameworks of food security and nutrition interventions that tend to be too focused on project outcomes, and less focused on the social factors that can determine the overall achievement of the project goals.

The comprehensive approach used for the multiple interventions in the Programme areas have been designed for both medium and long-term impacts so that food security and nutritional status are achieved, as well as sustained.

Efforts have been made to systematically include all partners throughout the entire programme lifespan and beyond. Regular involvement and participation of government ministries and local level organizations was also ensured from the beginning. This enables local institutions and stakeholders (both government and non-government organizations) to scale up, replicate and successfully expand the scope of the projects in practical ways.



# PRODUCTIVE PATRIMONIAL ASSETS BUILDING AND CITIZENSHIP PROGRAMME FOR WOMEN IN EXTREME POVERTY

Joint Programme: Productive Patrimonial Assets Building and Citizenship Programme for Women in Extreme Poverty in Bolivia

*Supporting Greater Economic Autonomy and Empowerment  
of Indigenous/Peasant Women Entrepreneurs in Bolivia*

Thematic Window: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Main Participants: UN: UNDP (leading agency), UN Women, UNIDO and FAO.  
Government entities: Vice-Ministry of Equal Opportunities (VIO)



## 1. Introduction

For the Government of Bolivia, poverty reduction is the highest priority on the National Development Plan agenda. In line with national priorities and international commitments to achieving the gender-related Millennium Development Goals, the Joint Programme on Productive Patrimonial Assets Building and Citizenship Programme for Women in Extreme Poverty (the Programme) has provided indigenous rural women from the poorest areas of Bolivia with sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families and is simultaneously strengthening their abilities to fully exercise their citizenship and political rights.

To achieve its aims, the programme has introduced seed and start-up capital, with some participants having also received venture and shared venture capital contracts. The Programme has built skills among women to improve the management of their businesses, the quality of their products and their marketing and uses facilitators to foster contact between women's enterprises and markets. The programme also employed a strategy to increase the exercise of women's citizenship and political rights through the provision of identity documents and citizenship education for women, communities and local authorities, ensuring land ownership is in women's names and guaranteeing their inclusion in housing programmes and the defense of their ownership rights.

The programme has created an institutional environment that is increasingly favorable to providing information to and educating members of rural communities, municipal governments and a variety of government and non-governmental institutions on the basic rights of women.

## 2. Initial Situation

In Bolivia, women's participation in the labour market, particularly in rural areas is low. In 2009, 77 per cent of women worked in the rural sector, 16 per cent in the service sector and only 6.4 per cent in manufacturing. Also, 63 per cent of women were family workers or unpaid apprentices, and 24.6 per

cent were self-employed. Only 9 per cent of women were formally employed and thus entitled to social security benefits (health and long-term insurance).

Rural poverty has also driven an increasing number of people to migrate to the cities, a trend which by 2007 had turned 13 per cent of the rural households into single parent households headed by women, thus worsening rural poverty rates. Poverty was also compounded lack of landownership, access to financial services or support to procure resources needed for economic activities, together with the enjoyment of full civil rights often hindered by lack of awareness and of identity documentation.

## 3. Strategy

The Programme has introduced an innovative strategy to provide assets for excluded rural families. The strategy consists of two interrelated elements. The first was through a non-reimbursable direct monetary transfer component that provided seed capital, startup grants, joint venture and risk capital. The second element was focused on training and advisory services, including: a) the development of suppliers who, once a market for their goods had been guaranteed, would ensure that the production of livelihoods for the families involved would be sustainable; b) the provision of housing; c) changing the procedures of land deeds to allow women to be sole owners or share property rights with their spouses, thus consolidating their right to own or inherit land; and d) legal and civic services providing identification documents and civic education for the full exercise of citizenship.

The Programme targeted poor women living in rural areas. The focus on tailored business assistance and technical training, combined with civic capacity strengthening and the full exercise of women's rights has proven effective. From the women's perspective, the value added of the Programme was the increased income that enabled them to better meet the daily needs of their families, including improved food security and child education. Also, identity documentation and organizational strengthening contributed to their stronger positioning and participation in decision-making in their homes and communities.

## 4. Progress and Results

The Programme contributed to reducing poverty by providing financial support and financing to women entrepreneurs, and empowering them in decision-making in family and community issues. Women in 2,507 Rural Economic Units (REU) received funding for an average of US\$1,407, and 212 collective REUs for an average of US\$7,582, with the participation of 4,445 women. The Programme improved employment rates or created employment for 4,640 women. Funding contributed to a substantial productivity growth, with reported incomes increasing by up to 50 per cent. In addition, nearly 2,000 women received basic management training and learned how to account for expenses and revenues in order to better understand how much money their businesses were making or losing, and many others received technical assistance to improve production. Participating women reported assigning an average of 63 per cent of their profits to address their children's needs and their family food needs. The remaining 37 per cent was used for their own needs or family savings. Prior to participation in the Programme, 63 per cent of the women were not qualified for financial services. By the end, all women in the Programme had access to services such as savings accounts, credit lines, remittances, and payment for services, among others.

The Programme has also enabled 12,817 women to fully enjoy their citizenship rights for the first time by helping them obtain birth certificates and identification cards, which are required to have access to bank loans and to exercise the right to vote. In the interviews conducted, 94 per cent of the women declared that they had progressed significantly with the support of the Programme.

The political advocacy and social control capacities of women's organizations have also been strengthened by contributing to increased rights awareness through leadership training sessions for women, and broadening their scope and participation in public life (unions, associations, etc.). Due to the lack of identity documentation and lack of information before the Programme was implemented, only 22 per cent of women participants voted. Today, 97 per

cent of them take part in local and national electoral processes. Equipped with identity documentation, the women are able to create organizations authorized for political participation. Thirty per cent of the women entrepreneurs who participated in training sessions on the exercise of citizen rights have been nominated for electoral lists for the election of community and productive organizations leaders. Out of the total candidates, 60 per cent have been elected. In addition, 15 per cent of the participating women are active involved in community organizations. Municipal authorities have also been educated on women's rights, and four municipal governments have projects underway to expand support to gender equality.

## 5. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- The Programme has shown that rural women can benefit significantly from direct support through non-reimbursable funding to strengthen their business, generate income, and improve their self-esteem and to be acknowledged as players in their own development process. This also translates into improved well-being for the family.
- The Programme has shown that capacity-building among women is best achieved by providing tailored, on-site, technical assistance that addresses a specific demand and by giving priority to practice. This kind of technical assistance generates important productivity leaps, whereby small businesses become medium-sized and even larger business initiatives.
- Capacity-building and awareness-raising activities addressed to political authorities and community leaders have proven to be effective to increase levels of support to the Programme and develop a favorable and gender sensitive environment.

## 6. Sustainability and Potential Application

The intervention methodology developed during the four years of the Programme (2009-2012) and

based on Bolivia's specific conditions will serve as the key blueprint for a new public policy framework design focused on reducing poverty and empowering women, according to UNDP Bolivia Deputy Representative Claudio Providas. The Minister of Productive Development and Plural Economy is already developing this policy. Due to the combination of focused financial support and public policy tools, findings, practices and lessons from the Programme can be applied in rural areas, medium-sized cities and suburban areas, with a focus on women in extreme poverty but also on other vulnerable groups, such as youth and the elderly.

The key to the sustainability of the Programme is local commitment and ownership. Two municipalities have agreed to continue providing identity documentation civic services with their own resources. Eleven municipalities have signed

agreements and provided resources to support women's businesses, and the Programme model is starting to be scaled up by the national Ministry of Productive Development and Plural Economy. Agreements have also been signed with five municipalities to co-finance and expand women's cooperatives. Further, the Department of Equal Opportunities has strengthened its regulatory tracking system to monitor changes in relation to women's economic empowerment.

## 7. Main Sources

Final External Evaluation Report for the Programme, 'Productive Patrimonial Assets Building and Citizenship Programme for Women in Extreme Poverty', Marcela Alcocer and Gustavo García,<sup>6</sup> consulting services. June 2012.

# WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN STABILIZATION AND CONFLICT PREVENTION IN NORTH KIVU

Joint Programme: Project to Support Stabilization and Conflict Prevention in North Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Thematic Window: Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

Main Participants: UNDP (lead agency), FAO, UNICEF, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Planning, OXFAM, ADRA, Caritas



## 1. Introduction

The Joint Programme “Project to Support Stabilization and Conflict Prevention in North Kivu” (the Programme) aimed to contribute to improved security and stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s troubled province of North Kivu. It adopted a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding based on conflict analysis. The focus was on community-based reintegration of returnees (ex-combatants and displaced persons) and survivors of sexual violence, improvement of absorption capacity and livelihoods, and community-based prevention initiatives. Special attention was paid to the needs, participation and empowerment of vulnerable women, including survivors of sexual violence, widows, women heads of households and poor women.

## 2. Initial Situation

The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is one of the poorest countries in the world. Human Development Indicators are among the lowest in the world. Added to the structural causes that underlie these data, years of conflict have severely affected the country and directly and indirectly caused over 5.4 million deaths since 1998; 45,000 people continue to die each month.<sup>18</sup> Insecurity still prevails in most of the country.

The issue of stabilization and peace in the eastern DRC remains a major challenge for the country. In the Beni Territory, which is the Programme intervention area, the displacement and return situation is as follows:<sup>19</sup>

Returnee and displaced households/persons		
	2009	2010
No. of returnee households	19.015	23.548
No. of displaced households	2.962	18.602
No. of displaced persons		89.223

<sup>18</sup> Mortality in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: An ongoing crisis, International Rescue Committee, December 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Bulletin annuel des statistiques sociales de la Province du Nord/Kivu, Ministère du Plan, Division Provinciale du Nord/Kivu, May 2011.

Especially worrisome are threats to women’s security in the face of military operations. With alarmingly high rates of sexual violence, women still largely assume the responsibility for caring and providing for children, which is affected by huge constraints in access to resources such as land.

The economic activities of the Beni Territory essentially depend on agriculture, livestock farming and trade. The agrarian system, dominated by subsistence agriculture, consists of small-scale farmers using traditional cropping techniques (hoes, machetes, coupe-coupe, etc.) with poor yields. The development of agriculture is constrained by the lack or poor state of the agricultural service roads, lack of improved seeds, fertilizer and agricultural supports, as well as lack of agricultural credit. The two major constraints to the development of livestock farming are the lack of veterinarian products and the continuous insecurity with the presence of armed groups who steal livestock.

At the social level, the prevailing situation in the health and education sectors is marked by the lack of infrastructure (dilapidated buildings that are no longer in compliance with building codes) and equipment.

The situation of women is also characterized by their absence at the decision-making level. Local traditions do not favor the inclusion of women in decision making because the main role attributed to them is to take care of children and household tasks.

It is in this context that in 2009, international partners set up a comprehensive programme aimed at the stabilization and reconstruction of the eastern DRC, the **Stabilization and Reconstruction Plan for Eastern Congo (STAREC) Programme**. Within the framework of this Programme, in 2009 the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) launched the Programme “Project to Support Stabilization and Conflict Prevention in North Kivu” aimed at the economic revitalization, restoration of social services and promotion of social cohesion as vectors of peace consolidation in the Beni Territory.

### 3. Objectives

The aim of the Programme was to contribute to improved security and stabilization in the Democratic Republic of the Congo's province of North Kivu.

### 4. Strategy

Through a holistic and multi-sectoral approach to conflict prevention and peacebuilding based on conflict analysis, the Programme intended to contribute to the safety and stabilization of population in North Kivu. In all of the community bodies on which the Programme relied (community support networks, sanitation committees, management committees, farmers'/producers' organizations, and more), an equal representation of women and men was required. With the aim of overcoming structural discriminations tending to exclude women from information and decision-making spheres, specific efforts were made so that would be involved in all phases of the Programme, from the initial analysis to planning, implementation and monitoring.

Multi-purpose Community Centres (*Centre Communautaire Polyvalente, CCPs*) were at the heart of the gender strategy developed by the Programme. The CCP is a holistic support service aimed at women's empowerment through the provision of social services such as psychosocial assistance, literacy and child-care, as well as the promotion of income-generating activities. As opposed to the domestic space, CCPs allow women to participate in the public sphere within their communities to influence local decision-making. Based on previous local initiatives, three new CCPs were built within the framework of the Programme. Women's participation in CCP management structures was actively encouraged. As a consequence, the supported CCPs have almost 50 per cent of women among their board members.

Multi-purpose Community Centres (CCPs) provide multiple psychosocial and economic services for the entire village community and particularly, for the survivors of sexual violence. Setting up psychosocial self-help groups within the CCPs allowed participants, both women and men, to reflect on conflicts

experienced at the community level and ways to overcome them by focusing on their specific gender needs. Twenty-three people, of whom 16 were women and 7 men, were trained to assist traumatized people, with a particular focus on survivors of sexual violence. As a result of their psychosocial and mediation assistance, a large number of persons who were marginalized and/or rejected by the family have been able to reintegrate communities. Survivors of sexual violence, grouped in the CCPs, received agricultural support (inputs and skills) for the implementation of agricultural activities carried out in these CCPs.

Community radio has played a key role in the promotion of gender equality within the targeted communities. The Joint Programme set up a new community radio station (in Isalé) and strengthened an already existing one (in Béni) with the goal of promoting dialogue on peaceful resolution of conflicts, peace consolidation and social reintegration within the communities. To achieve this, the Programme supported the creation of several listening groups and five Community Alliance Nodes (*Noyaux d'alliance communautaires, NACs*), composed of 50 per cent women, who were encouraged to have an active role in the community. The two community radio stations also included a large number of women/girls as journalists and in their Management Committees.

Community radio has effectively promoted discussion and reflection on women's rights and gender equality. As an example, members of listening groups reported that they changed their opinion on the schooling of young girls and early marriage following community radio awareness-raising broadcasts and the active participation of girls in the radio and listening group activities. This is a first step to promote equal opportunities for girls and boys in access to education.

To facilitate the understanding of women's situations and to address specific problems of protection, the Programme promoted the creation of young and women's forums, as spaces where women could openly discuss their concerns. In total, 20 women's forum and 11 young forum were put in place. Additionally, 21 Local Committees against Sexual Violence have been created.

## **REVITALIZATION OF LOCAL ECONOMIES AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

Within the framework of the CCPs, technical training and start-up equipment and supplies were provided to initiate income-generating activities. Supported income-generating activities (sewing and tailoring, baking, soap-making, embroidery, weaving, etc.) were largely run by women, especially women survivors of sexual violence. In total, 627 persons (488 women and 139 men) were involved in these activities linked to the CCPs.

Three markets were built in the Beni Territory. Markets not only serve as places for buying and selling produce, but also for social exchange, education and information. Each market is managed by a Community Committee, with almost 50 per cent women. For instance, one of the markets was provided with a storage warehouse for the unsold agricultural stock, which is very useful for women because they can keep their merchandise there upon returning from the market, thus saving them the trouble of carrying heavy loads over long distances.

Tenure security is essential in a territory where land access is very limited. Within the framework of the Programme, 43 land cession contracts were signed, allowing securing 172 ha for 3,124 households, of which 1,643 were headed by women (53 per cent). Farming these lands that are near to the villages has resulted in:

- Increased economic empowerment of women (widows, divorcees, heads of households, people living with HIV and survivors of sexual violence, etc.) who could then support their household needs (food, health care, education, etc.);
- Improved food security (increased food availability and accessibility) and the nutritional status of household members (notably through increased consumption of vegetables and the introduction of new crops such as soya);
- Reduced risks for the women from the remoteness and isolation of the fields. The plots farmed by the households were grouped together in a large site, so that women were not left alone in the field. Due to this secure land access, 624 women were then able to leave the dangerous Virunga Park.

Poor agricultural practices, common in the area, limit the development of the sector and can lead to a loss of production of around 40 per cent. With the aim of limiting these losses, households were trained in good agricultural practices and provided with tools and quality seeds. Training was addressed to both women and men, including the promotion of a more equitable distribution of farming tasks. The harvest assessments showed that farmers trained in good agricultural practices succeeded in tripling their production. Analyses on yield and revenue are currently being carried out in order to confirm these results.

Processing infrastructures reduce women's working hours and lighten the burden of their tasks, as well as increase productivity. The Programme set up 50 processing machines (corn mills, rice hulling machines, palm oil mixers), managed communally by the Farming Organizations, 60 per cent of which are run by women.

The Joint Programme promoted the creation and strengthening of Mutual Societies for Solidarity (Mutualités de Solidarité, MUSO). These are solidarity groups of savings and credit consisting of around 20 people each. It is a mechanism for attracting the microfinance institutions (MFIs) to cater to groups that, up to then, have had little or no access to these institutions. In collaboration with another project, Programme d'appui au secteur de la microfinance (PASMI, Micro-Finance Support Programme), there are now over 200 MUSOs (consisting of over 75 per cent women) in the Beni Territory. They have allowed women to access small credits to support their household needs, contributing to the construction of their homes, acquisition of small livestock, children's education and more.

## **IMPROVEMENT OF BASIC SOCIAL SERVICES**

The Programme supported the improvement of basic social services, notably in the health/hygiene and education sectors. Four health centers, one nutritional center and two health units were built and equipped. This allowed for the improvement of vaccination rates of children and antenatal care for women. In the Mbutaba Health Centre 2, for example, the use of maternity services increased from 30 to 50 per cent.

Similarly, the filtering of springs and development of sustainable water points (springs or wells) contributed to a considerable reduction in water-related diseases. The provision of 3,500 tiles for household toilets and the construction of toilets in schools and health centers has improved local sanitation in the villages. Girls and women assume most of the tasks concerning water and sanitation (water collection, cleaning of showers and toilets) and are the main users of these facilities, since they are responsible for accompanying their young children. Therefore, mainly women were consulted regarding the choice of site and type of infrastructures.

Girls' school enrolment was encouraged in the awareness-raising sessions for parents and through community radio stations. Awareness-raising sessions were held to sensitize fathers and mothers on the importance of education by concentrating on having adolescents continue their schooling after primary school and to inform them about issues of pregnancies and early marriage.

Literacy courses were attended by 103 people (84 women and 19 men). Learning how to read and write encouraged the women in the rural communities (an environment where most of the adults are illiterate) to actively participate in community activities. They can now read correspondence from their children and read posters in Kiswahili. Their participation in the life of the community has changed because they can read, understand awareness-raising themes and follow the immunization schedule of the children, among many others benefits.

## 5. Progress and Results

All actions carried out within the framework of the Programme (CCPs, Local Committees for Peace and Development, agricultural activities, community radio, markets) paid special attention to the promotion of women and girls' empowerment and the strengthening of their leadership and their participation in local decision-making spaces. The analysis of the collected data shows indisputably that the Programme has contributed to trigger changes in terms of women's position and gender

equality in the communities, even if these changes are still fragile and must be consolidated.

The observed changes can be grouped into three main categories: empowerment of women in controlling their own destinies, strengthening of women's skills and cooperation between women and men.

Women's participation in the Programme has helped them to recognize that they have value and can contribute substantially to the life of the community. One of the major achievements of the Programme has been to allow women to express themselves and their concerns within the community. In the Beni Territory, local customs did not allow room for women to express themselves. Only men could speak. CCPs and women's forums gave women an opportunity to talk about their problems and concerns.

Most of the activity in the CCPs, notably the income-generating activities, not only integrated many women (at times over half of the group), but were also led predominantly by them. This allowed women to have an impact on the decisions within these organizations and thus defend their interests within the community. The concept of parity has begun to be admitted and accepted in the community, including by the men.

CCPs and the linked income-generating activities are designed to empower women to take charge and be autonomous. It must be realized that in the Beni Territory, even if women contribute to the family budget through their work, they do not normally have access to it, nor are they consulted on how the men dispose of it. The Programme has not only supported women to start income-generating activities and, thus, put resources in their own hands, but also strengthened women's capacities to manage these resources for the benefit of the whole family. This is also translating into reshaping attitudes in the family, and resulting in greater respect by the men for their wives.

The population of Beni Territory, which is a rural territory, is predominantly illiterate, particularly the female population. One of the Programme's

main achievements has been its contribution to the strengthening of women's and girls' capacities as a result of their participation in technical trainings, training in management and literacy courses. Similarly, the community radio awareness-raising contributed to an increase in the enrolment of young girls and, in turn, to the reduction of early marriage. Also significant are the behavioural changes observed in men. In many cases, they are the first to encourage their wives to participate in community activities, notably in the CCPs and income generation.

## 6. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- **Win-win strategy.** The fact that women, through their activities, can contribute to the life of the family and the community, and the fact that they are no longer excluded from decisions regarding the use of money are signs of a development towards gender equality. This is therefore a component that needs further work so that women's empowerment will not be perceived by men as a loss of their power, but as a way for providing women with the means to contribute to the growth of the family and community for the benefit of all.

- **Community radio is a means par excellence to promote changes in rural areas,** where social and cultural traditions persist to the disadvantage of girls and women. Proof of this is the considerable increase in girls' enrolment in the schools following the awareness-raising sessions, community discussions, the campaigns on the importance of education for young girls and the information and discussions held in the community radio forums.

## 7. Sustainability and Potential Application

Social change is a long-term process. Thus, the behavioural changes triggered in the Beni Territory must be supported with respect to the weight of local customs. The role played by women within the structures where they are represented has to be consolidated given the traditional status of women in rural communities, which are characterized by resistance to innovations. To sustain the initial changes in the promotion of women and gender equality, further efforts must be made to support the CCPs and other structures and services set up by the Programme. Involvement of local authorities and civil society is of paramount importance.

# PARTICIPATORY FORMULATION OF THE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE SECTOR GENDER POLICY

Joint Programme: Development and Cultural Diversity  
to Reduce Poverty and Promote Social Inclusion

Thematic Window: Culture and Development

Main Participants: UNFPA (lead agency), UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNWTO, FAO and OHCHR, Ministry for the Coordination of the Natural and Cultural Heritage, National Secretariat of Planning and Development, Ministry of Public Health, Equality Councils



## 1. Introduction

The Joint Programme on Development and Cultural Diversity to Reduce Poverty and Promote Social Inclusion (the Programme) contributed to further the recognition and exercise of the rights of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women. Among other actions, the Programme supported the design and implementation of the Gender and Interculturality Sectoral Policy, where gender and intercultural approaches are addressed together. The Programme also contributed to the development of an innovative intercultural health system that includes the implementation of a culturally appropriate child-birth model. Through the Programme, several culturally and environmentally sustainable productive ventures were launched. These have created 1,500 income-generating enterprises, 800 of which are run by women.

## 2. Initial Situation

The 2007-2010 National Development Plan, the II Millennium Development Goals Report for Ecuador (2007), the Constitution of the Republic and the 2009-2013 National Plan for Good Living underscore the need to encourage awareness of and respect for cultural diversity as a means to contribute to a more inclusive society.

Objective 8 of the National Development Plan commits “to affirm and strengthen national identity, diverse identities, plurinationalism and interculturalism.” According to the Plan, “inequality and exclusion of the indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples, lack of respect for their collective rights and a liberal approach to diversity have borne deep economic and social impact.” The opportunities to access social goods and services are determined by a person’s cultural and racial origin, place of residence and sex.

It is estimated that nine out of the ten persons who self-define as indigenous and seven out of the ten who self-define as Black are poor. Ethnic-racial discrimination further compounds gender-based discrimination. There are gaps between men and women regarding access to productive resources and to social, cultural and economic opportunities. Indigenous women show lower enrolment rates

in all school levels than indigenous men, and the highest illiteracy rates. The number of schooling years for indigenous peoples is 3.7 years, compared to a national average of 7.1 years, while the average for indigenous women is 2.7 years.<sup>20</sup>

The child mortality rate for indigenous children is 59.3 and 32.6 for Afro-Ecuadorian children, while the national average is 25.8. Indigenous women suffer more problems connected with pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, family planning and access to gender-based violence services. While at the national level 74.2 per cent of births are assisted by professionals, only 30.1 per cent of indigenous women receive professional care. The national rate for use of contraceptives is 61.9 per cent, compared to 26.5 per cent for indigenous women. These indicators are relevant to the high incidence of maternal mortality among indigenous women due to structural factors, such as poverty, malnutrition and low education levels, and to social and cultural factors, such as racism and discrimination, present in health and education systems, which hinder women’s access to reproductive health services.<sup>21</sup>

In spite of this context marked by a legacy of inequality and discrimination, in recent years the country has taken important steps regarding the acknowledgement of the individual and collective rights of the indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples, and of the rights of women. Important institutional mechanisms have also been established to foster and guarantee these rights through Equality Councils.

In the same vein, the Joint Programme on Development and Cultural Diversity to Reduce Poverty and Promote Social Inclusion aims “to advance social inclusion by bridging the gaps created by discrimination and strengthening the exercise of the rights of indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio peoples and nationalities, under the mandates of the Constitution and the National Development Plan for Good Living.”

<sup>20</sup> Joint Programme: Development and Cultural Diversity to Reduce Poverty and Promote Social Inclusion; see [http://mdgfund.org/sites/default/files/Ecuador%20Culture\\_JP%20Signed.pdf](http://mdgfund.org/sites/default/files/Ecuador%20Culture_JP%20Signed.pdf) (in Spanish).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

The Programme focused on three lines of action: (i) design of intercultural policies to promote equal opportunities for all peoples and nationalities; (ii) support of productive cultural initiatives to foster cultural revitalization, organizational strengthening of the communities and sustainable livelihood building; and (iii) production of disaggregated statistical information about Ecuadorian cultural diversity to guide public and private decision-making.

In view of the double discrimination suffered by indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women (ethnic and gender discrimination), the Programme adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy to counterbalance the causes and consequences of this double discrimination.

### 3. Objectives

The gender mainstreaming strategy of the Programme aimed to “strengthen the exercise of rights to reduce discrimination and promote equal opportunities for groups excluded for reasons of ethnicity or gender through the design of intercultural public policies that take into account the strategic interests of women, particularly indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian.”

### 4. Key Actors

Eight United Nations agencies participated in the Programme: UNFPA, UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF, UN Women, UNWTO, FAO and OHCHR.

The main Programme partner was the Sectoral Heritage Council, formed by the Ministries for the Coordination of Heritage, of the Environment, of Sports, and of Culture; the Alfaro City Corporation; the National Institute of Cultural Heritage; and the Government Council of the Special Regime of Galápagos. The Ministries of Tourism, Health, and Education, the National Water Secretariat (SENAGUA), the Secretariat of Peoples, Social Movements and Citizen Participation, the Institute for the Eco-development of the Amazon Region (ECORAE), the Ecuadorian Institute of Intellectual Property, the Ecuadorian Railways Company, and the

National Secretariat of Planning and Development participated as associated members.

The National Secretariat of Planning and Development (SENPLADES), as the public institution responsible for a participative, inclusive and coordinated national planning, played a key role in the inclusion of a gender perspective in national policies.

The Equality Councils included the Corporation for Afro-Ecuadorian Development (CODAE), Council for the Development of the Indigenous Nationalities and Peoples (CODENPE), Council for the Development of the Coastal Montubio People (CODEPMOC), and the Transition Commission for the National Council for Women and Gender Equality (CDT).

### 5. Strategy

The gender mainstreaming strategy adopted by the Programme focused on five main lines of action:

1. Supporting the Ministry for the Coordination of the Natural and Cultural Heritage (MCPNC) to design its gender and interculturality sectoral policy;
2. Implementing a culturally appropriate child-birth model;
3. Strengthening indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women’s organizations;
4. Promoting the visibility and dissemination of the works of indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian writers; and
5. Supporting culturally and environmentally sustainable productive ventures.

### 6. Progress and Results

#### GENDER AND INTERCULTURALITY SECTORAL POLICY

MCPNC adopted the Sectoral Gender and Interculturality Policy in 2011 to promote equal opportunities for the indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio nationalities and peoples, with a special emphasis on women. A trailblazer in Latin America, this policy resulted from a participatory

process involving several institutional and social actors. The Interculturality Committee (Mesa de Interculturalidad) played a key role in this regard, by spreading the issues to other ministries.

One of the most innovative and significant aspects of this policy was the articulated integration of the “Gender” and “Interculturality” approaches, which required all programmes and activities to factor in both dimensions. The policy document begins by providing the rationale for a gender and an interculturality policy, and then presents a conceptual analysis for the combination of the two approaches and a diagnosis of the sector. Finally, the document defines the policy principles, objectives, guidelines, policies, programs and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, together with the policy budget, the compliance matrix and the evaluation of indicators. The Gender and Interculturality Policy is built upon seven priorities:

- Bridging the exclusion, racism and gender gaps;
- Strengthening intercultural dialogue with a rights and gender-based approach;
- Strengthening the systems and concepts on health and illness used by indigenous, Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio nationalities and peoples;
- Promoting, safeguarding and preserving the natural and cultural heritage, and the sacred sites located in ancestral territories;
- Strengthening and promoting ancestral sports to preserve cultures and foster interculturality;
- Including nationalities and peoples and their ancestral knowledge in cultural heritage management, sustainable management of biodiversity, food sovereignty and climate change adaptation; and
- Promoting social and political participation in the heritage sector of representatives of the Ecuadorian nationalities and peoples.

The policy discussion process showed the need for a stronger gender and interculturality approach in national planning tools. Accordingly, a Toolbox for the Implementation of Gender and Interculturality Approaches was developed and included in the

Guidelines for Sectoral Policymaking, prepared by SENPLADES.

The implementation phase began in 2011 with the participation of the institutions that take part in the Sectoral Heritage Council and the future Equality Councils: CODAE, CODENPE, CODEPMOC and CDT. Several difficulties emerged in the process, due to institutional instability and the permanent change of the staff defined as focal points in the heritage sector entities, and of the representatives of some Equality Councils. Other factors affecting the process were the scarce knowledge of gender and interculturality shown by the heritage sector staff and the public sector at large, the compartmentalization of gender and interculturality knowledge within the future Equality Councils, and the difficulty integrating both variables of analysis. Finally, in the institutional political culture there was some level of resistance to change, to address the problems suffered by large sectors of the population, such as women and “the others.”

### **CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE CHILDBIRTH MODELS**

Indigenous women have traditionally given birth in their homes with the assistance of midwives, their mothers or their mothers-in-law. They have been reluctant to use health facilities, where attention is centred around the doctor and their ancestral traditions (such as the birthing position, clothing, food and beverage, family participation, placenta handling and traditional medicine) are not respected. In order to counterbalance this reluctance, the Ministry of Public Health designed an innovative intercultural health system that includes a culturally appropriate childbirth model. The implementation of this model involved the following:

- Building or adapting more suitable delivery rooms that replaced the traditional hospital rooms with places where women can choose a birthing position adapted to their traditions and beliefs.
- Training and awareness-raising activities for the administrative and healthcare staff, midwives and community operators. The following training materials were developed to this end:

Methodological Guide to Culturally Appropriate Maternal Healthcare, Awareness-raising Modules in Culturally Appropriate Maternal Healthcare for Healthcare Staff and Knowledge Strengthening Modules for Ancestral Midwives (in Spanish). The Taking Care to Live Well (Cuidémonos para vivir bien) flip charts were particularly well received. These were designed for each of the country's regions (the Coast, the Highlands and the Amazon) and included sexual and reproductive health information with an interculturality and rights-based approach for the peoples and nationalities living in the three regions. They also contained information on prevention of family violence, sharing family chores and implementing emergency family plans, among others.

- Community information and awareness-raising campaign under the motto "Childbirth, just like at home."

There are currently ten services working under this intercultural reproductive health model (compared with the six services initially planned in the Programme) and progress has been made for its implementation in the rest of the country.

The culturally appropriate childbirth model has motivated a higher number of women from different communities to seek assistance in healthcare facilities, not only for pregnancy checkups, but also for childbirth. According to available information, in Río Verde (Esmeraldas) a monthly average of five women gave birth in a healthcare facility in 2007, while today almost 18 women per month seek this assistance. In 2010, healthcare facilities in Shushufindi, Limoconcha and Cascales (Sucumbíos) dealt with 397, 39 and 35 childbirths, respectively, while in 2011 the number of cases increased to 433, 63 and 40, respectively.

There was some initial resistance to the new model, particularly on the part of the traditional doctors. However, after a process of awareness-raising and training, a significant portion of the healthcare sector supports and is adopting this model. The new staff, and particularly the young professionals completing their intern year working in rural areas,

is more open and eager to commit to the change of paradigm that comes with the intercultural health model.

An important challenge is the high level of rotation of the healthcare staff, which requires a permanent awareness-raising and training effort for the new staff. To avoid this constant repetition, the concept of intercultural health should be included in the curricula of the health-related specializations and in the medical schools.

### **STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-ECUADORIAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS**

The Programme supported organizational strengthening and design and implementation of advocacy agendas for provincial, regional and national indigenous and African-Ecuadorian women's networks and organizations.

One of the projects implemented aimed to strengthen the grassroots organizations of women associated to the Confederation for the Chimborazo Indigenous Movement of the Peoples of the Puruwa Nation (COMICH). The project included a training programme on collective rights and indigenous women's specific rights that covered the following topics: food sovereignty, the Water Law, Riobamba nationality and interculturality, leadership and organizational management and family violence.

### **VISIBILITY AND DISSEMINATION OF THE WORKS OF INDIGENOUS AND AFRO-ECUADORIAN WRITERS**

With the aim of recovering memories and knowledge, in 2010 several literary workshops were organized with indigenous women writers from Ecuador and other Latin American nations. The results were compiled in the anthology "It dawns in our lives" (Amanece en nuestras vidas), published in Spanish, Kiwcha and Shuar.

In 2011 the International Meeting of Women Writers and Poets of Indigenous and African Origin of Latin America and Ecuador was organized, with the participation of 22 women writers from Ecuador, Mexico, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua. The results are compiled in the document

## Corporation of Women Artisans of Nízag

**Income generated by the Nízag weavers has contributed to their empowerment within the family and community.**

In Riobamba and in other areas the men, who at first refused to authorize women's participation in the local meetings, have eventually accepted their participation in the group of weavers. This attitude is stronger among those who have migrated or lived outside of the community.

The potential for empowerment of the income generated by these ventures needs to be assessed in connection with women's capacity to control this income. Although some women declared that the husbands kept part of the income, most of the women prioritized the family expenses, particularly their children's, and used the money for books and notebooks, clothes and shoes. It is worth noting that only a few used this income to meet their own needs. Thus, although women have gained more control over their income, the total family income remains in the hands of the heads of the family.

This resistance to change the gender power relations and the tension it creates can also be seen in the community. The income generated by the organization in charge of the venture goes through the community government but is managed by the association on the basis of a mutual agreement. However, this relationship is complex and charged with tension, as the males in power positions are consciously or unconsciously resistant to women's autonomous resource management.

The change in the role of women within the family and their participation in the public sphere of the community and the world outside the community through the group of weavers has called into question the patriarchal system, with its values and traditional mechanisms of family and community income control.

"A Necklace of Stories and Moons. An Anthology of Poetry by Latin American Indigenous Women" (*Collar de historias y lunas. Antología de poesía de mujeres indígenas de América Latina*).

### SUPPORTING CULTURALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUSTAINABLE PRODUCTIVE VENTURES<sup>22</sup>

The Programme supported 28 productive ventures, selected on account of their viability, cultural revitalization of the indigenous and African-Ecuadorian peoples, environmental sustainability and gender equality. In addition to receiving financial support, the participants took part in a training programme that covered the following topics: organizational

strengthening, leadership and participation, the rights of women, peoples and nationalities and project design and management.

Out of a total of 33 activities organized for the 28 participating ventures, 14 dealt with agricultural production, six with craft-making, eight with community tourism and five were culture-related. The available information shows that 1,500 income-generating occupations, 800 of which were managed by women, were created by these initiatives.

For the participating women, the ventures not only represent a source of income: through the ventures they feel useful and committed to the development of the organization and the community, thus improving their self-esteem. Leadership has been strengthened, particularly among the women

<sup>22</sup> Excerpts taken from the Programme Final Evaluation Report. Available at: <http://mdgfund.org/sites/default/files/Ecuador%20-%20Culture%20-%20Final%20Evaluation%20Report.pdf> (in Spanish).

that lead or coordinate the ventures. Also, the new economic role played by women entrepreneurs has given rise to changes in family and community roles and relationships, not always without tension.

## 7. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- The combination of gender, interculturality and the new concept of heritage as key elements of a public policy bears great potential for the process of bridging social, cultural and economic gaps in Ecuador.
- The debates arising from the preparation of the Gender and Interculturality Sectoral Policy underscore the need to institutionalize this policy within the Ministry for the Coordination of the Natural and Cultural Heritage and its subsidiary entities, not only at the centralized government level but also in the territories.
- The initial resistance to the intercultural childbirth model shown by most healthcare staff has abated and today many professionals feel engaged with the project and support the process. The constant awareness-raising and training efforts have been key to winning over initial distrust. To consolidate the programme's achievements and further progress in the implementation of the model, the awareness-raising campaign needs to be continued and expanded to the rest of the country at all levels: healthcare staff, health community operators, women's groups and the community at large.
- The young doctors currently completing their intern-year working in rural areas where the culturally appropriate childbirth has been implemented have shown greater openness to

the new model. This is doubtless a great opportunity to position and disseminate the intercultural reproductive health model in the country.

- It is important that the concept of intercultural health is increasingly introduced in the initial education levels of all healthcare staff and in the curricula of medical schools and health-related specializations.
- The evaluation of the productive ventures supported by the Programme shows that they have contributed to the empowerment of the participating women by increasing their self-esteem, improving their knowledge of women's rights, affecting decision-making within the families, negotiating participation in meetings, increasing access to markets and forms of political representation and increasing negotiation power with other organizations or state institutions. However, there is a need for a deeper analysis of issues such as the access to and control of assets (home, land, livestock, tools), decision-making at home, representation in local power spaces and forms of negotiation.

## 8. Sustainability and Potential Application

Given the positive results achieved by the Programme, the Ecuadorian State has decided to move to a second phase, financed by national public funds. This commitment illustrates the real and potential impact of the Programme, and the need to carry on the work until concrete and permanent changes are achieved in the living conditions of the indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian population, and particularly of the women.



# GENDER MAINSTREAMING STRATEGY IN THE PRO-POOR HORTICULTURE VALUE CHAIN IN UPPER EGYPT (SALASEL) MDG-F PROGRAMME

Joint Programme: Pro-poor Horticulture Value Chains in Upper Egypt

Thematic Window: Development and the Private Sector

Main Participants: UNDP (lead agency), ILO, UN Women, UNIDO, Egyptian Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Investment, Farm Associations, Post Harvest Centres



Empowering  
Egyptian Women



Horticulture: Winning the  
Fight against Tomato Pests



## 1. Introduction

The Pro-poor Horticulture Value Chain in Upper Egypt (SALASEL) Joint Programme (the Programme) aimed at enhancing the efficiency and productivity of the horticulture sector in Egypt and improving the working conditions of small farmers and agricultural workers, especially women, along the various nodes of the value chain. The Programme adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy that cut across all programme areas, while focusing on raising awareness among the farming community about gender-related issues and inequities; mobilizing Women Committees within the Farm Associations and strengthening the capacities of women working in the Post-Harvest Centers.

## 2. Initial Situation

The rationale for the intervention is grounded in a number of realities, the first one being the significant presence and critical role of women in a key sector of Egypt's economy: agriculture. Agriculture and farming provide a livelihood for 55 per cent of Egypt's population and employ 30 per cent of the labour force. The 2012 World Development Report on Gender Equality and Development indicates that 46 per cent of Egypt's female work force is employed in agriculture.<sup>23</sup> Women perform agriculture and farming-related activities on family owned land as unpaid labour, as well as for non-family members, as paid workers. Women form the majority (75 per cent) of the work force involved in harvesting, handling, sorting and packing processes within the post-harvest centers (PHCs). Over 40 per cent of people working in agriculture or fisheries are women. However, women have little control over land or productive resources, even if they own the assets.<sup>24</sup> Women's working conditions and the benefits that they receive from their labour are neither commensurate with their role in the work place nor with their responsibilities at home and in the community. Furthermore, the increased phenomenon of men's migration in search of gainful work has eroded traditional gender-based roles in rural areas. Yet,

traditional gender norms remain tenacious, the result being that women and girls are at a disadvantage in both the public and private spheres.

The second reality is the persistence of regional disparities in Egypt's economic growth detracting from progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), particularly MDG 3. Poverty in Egypt, according to the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, is on the rise. In Upper Egypt, poverty rose in both urban and rural areas from 21.7 per cent and 43.7 per cent, respectively, in 2008-2009 to 29.5 per cent and 51.4 per cent in 2010-2011.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, the dissimilar role and status of women as compared to men is most evident in Upper Egypt. The mobility of women, their access to education, infrastructure, social and health services and their control over resources is even more restricted than that of their counterparts in the Delta or in urban governorates.

This situation justified the implementation of the Pro-poor Horticulture Value Chain in Upper Egypt Joint Programme, which aimed at enhancing the efficiency and productivity of the horticulture sector in Egypt and improving the working conditions of small farmers and agricultural workers, especially women, along the various nodes of the value chain.

## 3. Objectives

The objective of developing a gender mainstreaming strategy in the Programme was to empower women within export supply chains by making sure they add value to the supply chains in new and measurable ways, and to ensure that these interventions would result in improvements to their standards-of-living and their role within their families and rural environments.

To measure the success of the mainstreaming process five specific indicators were defined:

- Number of Women Committees activated in the targeted Farm Associations (FAs);
- Number of women assisted by the Women Committees to start/upgrade a business;

<sup>23</sup> World Bank. World Development Report: Gender Equality and Development. 2012.

<sup>24</sup> See: <http://rwac-egypt.blogspot.se/2012/03/rural-women-in-egypt-how-much-can-we.html>.

<sup>25</sup> See: <http://www.egyptindependent.com/news/govt-poverty-rate-increased-252-percent-population>.

- Per cent average increase in the number of women joining the FAs;
- Per cent of FA revenues allocated to the Women Committees; and
- Number of women receiving assets through the project.

## 4. Key actors

The most important actors in this project were the FAs, which are the primary partners. FAs are provided a comprehensive development package by all UN agencies involved in this project, namely UNDP, UNIDO, ILO and UN Women, together with national counterparts like the Egyptian Ministry of Industry and Trade and the Ministry of Investment.

UNDP ensured that effective and equitable business partnerships were forged between small farmers and the private sector, and built the productive capacities of small farmers by contributing to equipping the PHCs both directly through availing a small grant to each FA, and indirectly by facilitating cost-sharing arrangements between small farmers and private investors. Moreover, UNDP strengthened the capacity of FAs in terms of governance, financial management and business planning.

UNIDO aimed at enhancing the horticulture supply chain in Upper Egypt and strengthening its linkages to export and domestic markets, which is of utmost importance to the economic development of Upper Egypt.

ILO's key comparative advantage in entrepreneurship and enterprise development is the ability to conceptualize and articulate the employment dimension of enterprise development to design policies, strategies and programme interventions that place productive and decent work at the heart of enterprise growth and productivity.

UN Women's contribution cut across all programme areas while focusing on raising awareness among the farming community about gender-related issues and inequities.

## 5. Strategy

The gender mainstreaming strategy developed in this Programme was an adaptation of the Gender Equity Model (GEM) developed by the World Bank in 2001. GEM aims at promoting and guaranteeing gender equal opportunities in the labour market through the establishment of voluntary public private partnerships between the government and companies. Companies that receive the GEM seal (GES) use it as part of their marketing strategy. The GEM model and the process of certification are designed for all types of organizations, regardless of size, sector of business, or geographical location. The government provides technical support to the participating companies/ organizations that commit to the implementation of actions in the following areas: personnel selection and hiring; career development, including training and promotions; family-work balance and equity in benefits; prevention of sexual harassment; and finally, promoting a non-sexist public image through company advertising campaigns.

GEM was first piloted by UNIFEM and the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) in Egypt in 2007, in partnership with the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the General Authority for Investment, the Ministry of Man Power and Migration and the National Council for Women. A total of 10 medium and large size companies participated in the programme. The success of the pilot was such that, in 2010, the Government decided to establish a new Gender Equality Certification Unit to scale up the model to include additional companies in the manufacturing sector, while also replicating it in the agri-business sector. The objective was to add value to the supply chain of horticulture sector, by addressing inequities in the working conditions of women, who are the primary actors in the chain.

The Programme adapted the GEM model to the horticulture sector in Upper Egypt by focusing on three critical axes:

- Gender sensitization of the management of the Farm Associations (FAs).
- Reactivation and mobilization of the FAs Women Committees around the issue of women's work and economic empowerment.
- Capacity development and awareness-raising of female workers within the Post-Harvest Centers.

The reactivation of the Women Committees served two main purposes. To start with, it reinforced and expanded the impact of the awareness-raising activities beyond the scope of the FAs to include additional community actors and beneficiaries. Furthermore, it helped strengthen the commitment of the FAs to women's economic empowerment, and imbued the process of gender mainstreaming in the operations and services of the FAs with the ethos and notions of accountability.

In that context, the Programme trained committee members to advocate and implement interventions aimed at rural women's economic empowerment as well as at reinforcing women's presence in the public sphere. It also provided assistance in developing the structure of the Committees, formulating the criteria for the selection of candidates and supporting the FA electoral process to guarantee a participatory approach to community development.

Topics covered in the technical trainings included post-harvest technologies, packing and packaging, a safe working environment and good hygiene practices, as well as self-esteem and time management. For awareness-raising, traditional training modules were used together with three info-graphics and four short films. Info-graphics are 3-4 minutes animations that explain a message in the simplest and most persuasive way to those who are literate and illiterate. The first info-graphic introduced the concept of equal opportunity in general; the second focused on equal opportunity in recruitment, hiring and career development; the third concentrated on the work environment and issues of harassment. The gender equality message was introduced through these info-graphics in a compressed form and in a culturally sensitive manner. Combined with the info-graphics were five-minute visuals portraying women performing jobs that are unusual in the Egyptian context, such as taxi driver, car park attendant, mini bus driver, butchers, etc. These visuals were used also in the Post-Harvest Centers as a tool to raise awareness about qualifications and the fact that women and men often can do the same job equally well.

## 6. Progress and Results

### GENDER SENSITIZATION

The management of all six FAs participated in the gender sensitization trainings. Participants confirmed that, as a result of the sensitization and acquired knowledge, the FAs had become more inclusive and better positioned to reach out to women. Proof of which is a significant increase—almost 70 per cent—in the number of women members in the six FAs targeted by the Programme.

### REACTIVATION OF WOMEN COMMITTEES

To date, six Women Committees have been activated and five have already run their elections, electing seven women per Committee. Each of the Women Committees has conducted a community needs assessment based on guidelines provided by the Programme and work plans have been developed accordingly to include priority actions addressing the specific needs of the women in the respective communities. In Gaaffar, the Women Committee launched an advocacy campaign to install water pipes. In Beni Suef, the Women Committee has succeeded in lobbying local authorities and mobilizing community stakeholders to resolve the problem of garbage accumulated in front of houses and schools. Similarly, the Committee succeeded in lobbying for the paving of the main road leading to the village. Furthermore, the reactivation of the Women Committees has motivated its members to speak up on behalf of the workers in the PHCs as well as other women in the community. In Qena, for example, the Women Committee is working on formalizing the status of 30 female and 15 male workers in the PHC.

Major achievements include assistance provided by three Committees to 40 women, enabling them to upgrade or start a small business. The impact of the support provided to women's income-generating activities is still not apparent. However, it is expected that the condition of women beneficiaries and their families will improve as a result of the added income from these businesses as well as from the asset transfer component.

In terms of empowerment, women in the Committees appreciate the prestige they gain in the community through their involvement in the committees. They also feel that they are tasked with expressing “the voices of women” in their communities, and accordingly feel responsible to ensure that the expectations of the women that they represent are met. However, Women Committees still have some weakness in terms of governance and budget. So far, none of the FAs have allocated resources to the Women Committees, mainly due to the precarious condition of the economy.

#### **CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND AWARENESS-RAISING**

Even if it is too early to gauge the full impact of the mainstreaming process on the situation of women, preliminary findings indicate that the technical trainings received by the women have increased their productivity and led to the adoption of hygienic handling and packaging practices, which means a safer work environment.

Analysis of the discussions following the showing of the info-graphics confirmed the added value of the visual in conveying messages—both the explicit message and the more implicit one in relation to gender—and in generating reflection and discussion around gender inequality and women’s rights. The reactions of men participating in the sensitizations are reflective, rather than defensive, which is an auspicious start to any attitudinal change. However, promoting changes in gender relations is a long-term process that requires sustained efforts to address the root causes and the structural consequences of inequality.

*“Parents treat their sons differently from their daughters, thereby perpetuating the social norms and behavioural patterns that support gender inequality.”*

MALE PROGRAMME PARTICIPANT AFTER VIEWING INFO-GRAPHICS ON GENDER EQUALITY

## **7. Lessons Learned and Challenges**

- The strength of the mainstreaming intervention resides primarily in the link between the social and the economic benefits brought to enterprises, which is critical to the willingness of enterprises to dedicate time and resources to participate in the trainings and to effect the necessary changes to ensure gender equality in their procedures and operations. In the case of PHCs, the motivating factor is the economic return accrued from training women on agro-industrial processes.
- Varying literacy levels of the participants (men and women) and the deep-rooted male dominated culture of Upper Egypt were important challenges that the Programme had to overcome when adapting the mainstreaming methodology.
- Visuals were much more effective in conveying messages than lectures, which require an attention span that is difficult for participants to sustain for an extended period of time.

## **8. Sustainability and Potential Application**

This gender mainstreaming process can be described as constituting a “promising practice.” The evidence collected shows that the process is effective in achieving progress towards intended gender equality and women’s empowerment. It also shows that under the proper circumstances, mainly if there is expressed political will and a measure of economic stability, the process has potential for replication and scaling up in both urban and rural settings.

The tools developed and tested in the Programme are works in progress. However, the approach adopted by the Programme should definitely inform government efforts at motivating the private sector to play a strengthened role in integrating women in the economy. Addressing both men and women and presenting the persistence of discriminatory practices in the public and private spheres as a broader community issue are highlights of this Programme, and the lessons learned from such experience must be taken up in future programming.



# LEAVE NO WOMEN BEHIND

Joint Programme: Leave No Women Behind

Thematic Window: Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Main Participants: UNFPA (lead agency), WFP,  
Ministry of Women's Affairs, Bureaus of Women Affairs,  
Regional State governments of Amhara and Tigray



## 1. Introduction

The Joint Programme “Leave No Woman Behind” (the Programme) is an integrated programme aimed to empower women in the Amhara and Tigray regions. It stems from the recognition of the various dimensions of women’s poverty and responds with a holistic approach of complementary interventions, integrating economic empowerment with access to reproductive health, literacy and behavioural change at community level. Women participating in the Programme are targeted by all the intervention areas, which results in rounded improvement in their lives. Implemented through local structures, the Programme strengthened pre-existing capacities and contributed to building the Government’s service delivery capacity.

## 2. Initial Situation

Ethiopia suffers from some of lowest gender equality performance indicators in sub-Saharan Africa. While remarkable progress has been made in several of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), it is lagging behind in MDG 3. The Global Gender Gap report 2010 ranks Ethiopia at 121 out of 134 countries in terms of the magnitude and scope of gender disparities.

Women and girls in Ethiopia are strongly disadvantaged compared to boys and men in several areas, including literacy, health, livelihoods and basic human rights. They also suffer from low status in their society and lack social support networks. Manifestations of discrimination against women are numerous and acute:

- The morbidity rate of 75.5 per cent for women, against 25.5 per cent for men; the maternal mortality of 590/100,000 live births; and adult HIV prevalence of 1.9 per cent for women, against 1.0 per cent for men, are indicators of persisting gender inequalities in the area of health and life expectancy. Overall, women’s health has been adversely affected by poverty, poor nutrition and restricted access to health care services due to financial constraints and cultural beliefs. Contraceptive use among

women is low at 20 per cent, and only 10 per cent of births were attended by skilled health personnel in 2011. Moreover, 28 per cent of women of reproductive age are chronically malnourished, with the problem being particularly acute in rural areas.<sup>26</sup>

- Ethiopia appears to be on track to achieve gender parity in primary school enrolment by 2015, but the gender gaps are still larger in rural areas. Furthermore, gender disparity increases at higher levels in education, where the enrolment of adolescent girls is lower than boys.
- With regard to women’s participation in economic life, the 2005 National Labour Force Survey reveals that women represent 47 per cent of labour force in Ethiopia, with highly unequal participation: 68.5 per cent of employed women were unpaid family workers and 24.8 per cent were self-employed in informal jobs. In addition, women’s illiteracy and inability to meet the initial payment required to qualify for agricultural credit has limited their access to credit facilities. The Programme-supported baseline survey indicates that only 6 per cent of rural women have access to credit and 1 per cent have vocational skills training. Moreover, despite the widespread involvement of rural women in agricultural work, there is a persistent belief that “women don’t farm,” which discounts their vital contribution to Ethiopia’s key economic activity.
- Traditional attitudes, beliefs and practices that reinforce harmful gender roles contribute to constrain women’s participation in social development. Harmful traditional practices, including female genital cutting (national prevalence rate of 74.3 per cent) and child marriage disproportionately affect rural women and girls.

The Government of Ethiopia is explicitly committed to the achievement of gender equality. The Constitution clearly stipulates the rights of women and the Women’s Policy of Ethiopia reiterates the Government’s commitment to gender equality. The

<sup>26</sup> Ethiopian Demographic and Health Survey, 2011.

revised Federal Criminal Code and Regional Family Law support measures on different forms of gender-based violence, including child marriage and female genital cutting. In addition, the national poverty reduction strategy has included “addressing gender inequality” as one of its eight pillars.

While there is general political will and commitment to address gender inequality, there has been limited capacity to fund and implement community-based interventions targeting vulnerable women. Generally, services have been skewed toward the wealthy, those living in urban areas, and adult men.

The Programme was conceived and designed to respond to the above challenges, with efforts to support social mobilization; access to reproductive health and HIV prevention services; life skills and literacy; and livelihoods. It has focused its interventions on the Amhara and Tigray regions, two of the most vulnerable of the country, with severe land degradation and a prolonged history of emergency assistance by the government.

### 3. Objectives

The Programme aimed to:

- Increase enjoyment of human rights at grassroots level through strengthened government efforts in promotion and protection of human rights and community empowerment, with special emphasis on adolescent girls and women.
- Strengthen regional efforts to strategically address gender disparities in literacy and educational attainment, sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence (GBV).
- Improve access to and demand for quality, gender sensitive and integrated reproductive health care, including HIV/AIDS prevention services at all levels.
- Increase enjoyment by target women and their family members of improved and sustainable livelihoods, with increased income, improved food security and enhanced resilience to shocks.

### 4. Key Actors

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) have been the participating UN agencies. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and Bureaus of Women Affairs (BoWA), through its regional and district offices, have been the lead and coordinating government partners for the Programme.

The Programme did not establish parallel implementation mechanisms; rather, it was integrated into the government decentralization system. The responsibility for implementation lied with the Regional State governments of Amhara and Tigray. The financial management system was also integrated in the Ethiopia public financial management system.

At the regional level, a Programme management team composed of focal persons from the regional Bureaus of Health, Education, Agriculture, Finance and Women’s Affairs (as lead) had the responsibility for implementation, monitoring and technical backstopping. At woreda/district level, line offices of the same bureaus were responsible for direct implementation. At village level, community based associations, like women’s associations, and government staff, such as health extension workers and agriculture and development agents were responsible for the mobilization of communities, selection of programme beneficiaries and implementation of activities.

The decision to implement the Programme through existing institutional structures and government staff has helped to create local ownership and to pave the way for sustainability.

### 5. Strategy

The Programme recognizes the various dimensions of women’s poverty and responds with a holistic approach of complementary interventions that combine livelihoods, access to education, access to health services and social mobilization. Women participating in the Programme are targeted by all the intervention areas, which results in all-rounded improvement in their lives.

Implemented through local structures, the Programme strengthens pre-existing capacities and contributes to build government's service delivery capacity.

### **SOCIAL MOBILIZATION**

The Programme recognizes that improving the status of girls and women requires changing the beliefs, attitudes and behaviour of community members, including men, boys and traditional and religious leaders. To encourage such change, it utilizes the Community Conversation (CC) approach, which is a process of engaging communities in an interactive discussion about cultural norms and values. Through participation in the CC series, individuals are empowered to think critically about issues such as gender equality, HIV/AIDS, harmful traditional practices, family planning and more. This interactive discussion allows participants to explore the way their behaviors and values, and those of their families and neighbors, affect others' lives. Through the Programme sites, 400 CC facilitators were trained to recruit community members and engage them in discussion, twice a month, for a period of one year.

Members of CC groups have often come to consensus about stopping harmful traditional practices, like child marriage and female genital cutting, and have agreed to take collective action against those practicing it. Moreover, on the individual level, CC graduates are making dramatic changes in their own homes and families for greater gender equality.

### **LITERACY AND LIFE SKILLS**

Women who cannot read or write are often marginalized by their communities and are unable to fully participate in social and economic development. In its literacy and life skills program, Leave the Programme targets women who have not been engaged in other adult education programs.

These women are invited to join adult literacy classes, where they acquire basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics. They also receive life skills education on a wide range of issues, including

sanitation, hygiene, health and livelihoods. The national Functional Adult Literacy Manual is used, ensuring consistency and quality.

Literacy graduates are often beneficiaries in other Programme components and their newfound skills in reading, writing and math contribute to their success in livelihoods. Women participating in the literacy program have become strong advocates for education in their communities, and local teachers report that the newly literate mothers are especially supportive of their children's education.

Leave No Women Behind also supports local schools and functional adult literacy centers with additional supplies, such as exercise books, black boards, benches, chalk and stationery, and provides adolescent girls with sanitary napkins to help improve their school attendance.

### **HEALTH**

The Health Extension Workers (HEW) program is a government strategy where trained community women go house to house and teach other women about 16 basic health extension packages. The Programme strengthens this government programme.

HEWs regularly participate in Community Conversation sessions to provide information about reproductive health and harmful traditional practices. Women and girls have separate groups, where they discuss family planning, gender based violence, HIV/AIDS, maternal health, seeking anti-natal and post-natal care and safe delivery. Members of the government initiative Women's Development Groups, who have their own focal point for promoting reproductive health in the community, often assist the HEWs with outreach.

In parallel with such interventions to create demand, the Programme also strengthens the supply side of reproductive health service delivery. It supports district authorities to buy drugs, obstetric equipment and other reproductive health materials for health posts and health centers. These drugs and services are provided to women free of charge. In addition, the Programme regularly sponsors trainings of HEWs

and other health staff on gender-sensitive reproductive health service provision, to ensure that women receive the highest quality care possible.

## LIVELIHOODS

The establishment of rural savings and credit cooperatives is part of the Government strategy. However, few women join them, because women generally have limited access to assets that make them eligible. Few also have skills to engage in income-generating activities. As a consequence, the Government strategy usually caters to the needs of male farmers.

The Programme interventions target women who do not have sufficient access to government interventions. Based on community agreed criteria, poor and vulnerable women are selected by their communities to participate in livelihood improvements activities. They receive training on the basics of income generation, followed by training on a specific income-generating activity of their choice. Local Development Agents assist them in making their choice, and provide them with continual technical support (appropriate technology, market information, business management, book keeping, cooperative management, etc.) as they build their new business venture. The selected women also join a savings and credit cooperative and are required to save for a specific period of time before they take a loan (at a low interest rate) from the cooperative's revolving grant fund.

At the same time, the regional Agricultural Bureaus are supported to conduct a succession of Training of Trainers for their staff and development agents, in order to train women on income-generating activities and credit cooperative management.

## MAINSTREAM STRATEGY: RESONANCE EFFECT

As a mainstream strategy, the Programme promotes what has been called the “resonance effect:” once a woman has been empowered through her participation in the Programme, she often becomes the Programme’s strongest advocate. She wants to share her newly acquired knowledge and provide advice to her family, friends and neighbors.

## Criteria for Selection of Livelihood Candidates

- Resident for more than 2 years
- Aged 18 years and above
- Ability to engage productively in an income-generating activity
- No bad credit or history of debt
- Willing to participate in all Programme activities
- Willing to share experiences with other women

Out of the above criteria, priority is given to landless women, female heads of households, school drop outs, women living with HIV/AIDS, women with disabilities and women with no chance of accessing other credit opportunities.

The Programme harnesses the power of the resonance effect by encouraging beneficiaries to share their new knowledge and insights with other members of the community. Thus the new ideas and information are accepted and internalized, not imposed by outsiders, making the Programme’s impact all the more sustainable. For instance, in the Community Conversation series, each participant is expected to communicate what he/she has learned with 10 other people; in the Livelihoods program, each woman reaches out to 6 other women.

## 6. Progress and Results

The Programme reached 11 districts throughout the Amhara and Tigray regions. From February 2009 until February 2012, it engaged over 100,000 women and adolescent girls. Key achievements include:

- Reduced prevalence of child marriage
- Reduced stigma and discrimination against women living with HIV/ AIDS
- Reduced prevalence of harmful tradition practices, including female genital cutting

- Increased access of voluntary counselling and testing for HIV/AIDS by the community
- More equitable division of labour at the household level, as reported by CC participants
- Increased number of deliveries attended by trained health professionals
- Increasing number of women using family planning and pre- and post-natal care
- Increased attendance at Programme-supported schools, particularly among girls
- Newly fostered culture of saving among the participants and in the larger community
- Good return rate on loans

These key achievements are illustrated in the stories and quotes that follow.

## REDUCED PREVALENCE OF FEMALE GENITAL CUTTING

*“There were efforts before to stop harmful traditional practices, but the Community Conversations has made a difference because we learn scientific information. The Health Extension Workers come and share their in-depth knowledge, and that helps us to decide. I have a 10 year old daughter and I've decided to not have her circumcised, because of what I learned here.”*

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS PARTICIPANT

## REDUCED PREVALENCE OF EARLY MARRIAGE

### **The Girls Must Decide: A Father's Campaign Against Child Marriage**

**When Yenew Zeleke first joined the Community Conversation series in his village, he had a plan for his family. Married and a father of 5 children, Yenew had already arranged the engagement of his ten-year-old daughter to an older man. He believed that child marriage was a necessary part of his culture.**

**While in CC sessions, Yenew learned new information about harmful traditional practices, including child marriage. Health Extension Workers spoke about the connection between child marriage and obstetric fistula, and painful memories were stirred in Yenew: he had once taken care of a relative who suffered from fistula.**

**Armed with this new information, Yenew made a drastic decision: he cancelled the impending marriage of his ten-year-old daughter. He then enrolled all of his children, including the girls, into school. “Girls must be educated first and then they will decide who they want to marry,” Yenew said. “I arranged the marriage of two of my daughters, when they were 7 and 10 years old, but this is not going to happen to my other children”**

**Webete Adgo, Yenew’s wife and mother of his children, is overjoyed by his change of heart. She herself was forcibly married to an older man when she was 13, and she later ran away from her first husband. She states, “I wish the society was informed about harmful traditional practices during my childhood. If the husband is more than 18 and the wife is young, sexual intercourse is so hard.”**

**Webete also reports that after joining the CC series, she and her husband speak more freely about household decisions, and even share domestic chores. She is also now using family planning and participating in other Leave No Woman Behind activities, including literacy classes and livelihood training, all with the full support of her husband.**

**“**We had a lot of resistance to ending female genital mutilation. If a girl isn't circumcised, how would she get married, how would she have intercourse? The Health Extension Workers came to Community Conversations and gave us a lot of scientific information, especially about complications during delivery. It took a long time to convince us, but we don't circumcise our daughters anymore.**”**

MALE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS PARTICIPANT

#### REDUCED STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS AND INCREASED VOLUNTARY COUNSELING AND TESTING FOR HIV/AIDS BY THE COMMUNITY

##### No More Stigma: Living Openly and Educating Others about HIV

Today TekleHailu, age 35, is a successful businesswoman and a valued member of her community. Both of her business ventures, fattening sheep and the local café that she owns, are thriving. She says that her involvement with Leave No Woman Behind has been transformative: “In just two years’ time, I am a different person. I feel so strong, with a bright future.”

In 2009, Tekle was diagnosed with HIV. A single mother of two, Tekle recalls, “It was a desperate moment. I was hit the hardest when I thought about my children. Are they going to face the same hardship in life? I was really confused.” Some of her neighbors suspected her status, and would avoid her and her children.

When she was identified as a Programme beneficiary, she was unsure about participating: “I didn’t believe that I had the capacity to repay and did not want to pass the loan to my children. Thanks to the advice of development agents, that loan changed my life.” With the money, Tekle bought 10 sheep, raised the herd to 24 sheep, and sold 8 sheep. She then reinvested the money into a local cafeteria. With her profits, she is sending both of her children to school.

Thanks to adult literacy classes, Tekle can now write her name and do basic math. Tekle also attends CC sessions, where she shares her experiences and encourages fellow villagers to be tested for HIV. “Only five women [in our village] had declared our HIV status when the CC sessions began. We openly gave our testimony about living with HIV and repeatedly taught others the importance of voluntary testing. Today we are 24 people openly living with HIV,” Tekle says.

#### CHANGING GENDER ROLES AND DIVISION OF LABOUR OF HOUSEHOLD CHORES AND CONTROL OF HOUSEHOLD ASSETS

**“**Before, at the end of the day, after coming from work, women used to wash our feet. But now they don’t have to do it anymore.**”**

**“**Now I help my wife when she is cooking and I can also cook.**”**

**“**I arranged the marriage of two of my daughters, when they were 7 and 10 years old (this last one also FGC victim) but this is not going to happen to my other children.**”**

A GROUP OF MEN PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS IN AMARA

### **INCREASED SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH-SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND USE OF HEALTH SERVICES AMONG GIRLS AND WOMEN**

Trainings and discussion groups led by health extension workers were used to improve the knowledge of adolescent girls and women on sexual and reproductive health issues, and CC sessions helped to change attitudes and norms. All these efforts combined with additional health supplies and training of health staff on gender sensitive service delivery, resulted in:

- Slightly increasing trend in women delivering at health centers and health posts assisted by a trained health professional.
- Significantly increasing number of women using family planning and maternal health services.
- Improved quality and easily accessible reproductive health service, which is able to respond to the created demand.

*“Before the Community Conversation series, pregnant women wouldn't come to the health post. They would just say, 'St. Mary will help us.' What I say to them in CC sessions is, 'St. Mary is also at the health post.' Now the women see [the Health Extension Workers] at the CC meetings and they feel comfortable with us. Before, they were afraid to come. They thought they would be operated on, or something bad would happen. But now, at least six women are having their babies at this health post each month.”*

**MASHOAMARE, HEALTH EXTENSION WORKER**

## **Delivering in a Health Facility for the First Time**

TewresAmare, age 35, was engaged in her local Community Conversation sessions when she learned that she was pregnant with her seventh child. Soon after, Tewres received a visit at home from both her local Health Extension Worker and a Women's Development Group representative. Tewres recalls: “Once it is known in the CCgroup that you are pregnant, the Health Extension Worker and Women's Development Group representative come to your home and tell you about the importance of delivering in a health facility. Throughout my pregnancy, my Women's Development Group representative has continued to visit me, to follow up on my health”.

In her previous pregnancies, Tewres did not seek out any medical services: “I delivered my 6 children at home because I didn't have any other knowledge, and that was supposed to be the way that you do it,” she says. But she now visits her local health centre regularly for antenatal services, and she plans to deliver in a health facility. When asked why, she replied: “The health workers give us good advice. They can provide painkillers if we need them, or even blood. They can save our lives”.

Tewres says that her seventh child will be her last, and that she will resume family planning after this pregnancy. She also wants a different kind of life for her 18-year-old daughter. She says, “I want my daughter to have fewer children than I did. She must use family planning. When you have many children, your health suffers, and you can't afford to care for them.”

**“**When I first started the literacy class, I didn’t know about the use of education and I thought it was a waste of time. I used to tell my children to not spend time studying at home. My husband was also surprised and thought it a waste of time when I started going for literacy classes. But now I have learned to write my name, I can read letters. Now I make sure my children go to school always. My husband also asks me to read his letters. He is happy with my learning and he has also joined the Leave No Women Behind community conversation meetings.**”**

A WOMAN PARTICIPATING IN ADULT LITERACY TRAINING IN TIGRAY

## Three Generations, One Goal: Empowerment through Literacy

Nearly 50 women are crowded in a classroom. Some women are elderly and bent, their walking sticks leaning against the desks. Other women are nursing their babies as they scribble in notebooks.

Whatever their age, all of the women are here for the same purpose: to learn to read and write. They are students in literacy classes supported by Leave No Woman Behind. And their newfound literacy is complemented by their economic and social empowerment in other areas: many of the women are participants in other Programme interventions, such as livelihoods and the Community Conversation sessions.

One of the oldest women in the room is FeleguKiros, age 56. She recalls that she did not attend school as a child and was instead forcibly married at age 15 to an older man. When her local leadership approached her about joining literacy classes, she remembers that she felt grateful: “I want to read and write like others can,” she says. “There has never been a program like this before, for women as old as me, to learn.” Now she can already read and write her name, and is proudly able to put her signature on documents.

Another student is ChekoluTegen, a 36-year-old single mother of four children. In addition to attending literacy classes, Chekolu is a participant in the Community Conversation sessions, and she has received diverse income-generating activities trainings and a loan from the local cooperative. Now she is fattening and selling sheep, and has recently started to produce and sell local beer (areki).

Chekolu says that the literacy classes have contributed to the success of her business ventures. She explains: “I’m confident in running my business, because I can now do simple math and write down my savings. I’m so proud of myself, that I can generate my own income and look after my children.”

Her participation in the directed CC discussions has made another dramatic impact on her life: she says that before she joined the group, she was not using family planning services. But now she is using Depo-provera, and says that she undergoes HIV testing regularly.

She is also an active member of the local Women’s Development Group and goes door-to-door in her community to promote family planning and safe delivery. She says: “Before Leave No Woman Behind, I was scared to talk in front of others. Now it’s different. I feel comfortable expressing myself to my community.”

The youngest student, AmbenesGetewye, is 16-years-old. After reaching Grade 5, Ambenes dropped out of school last year to get married. She and her husband are participants in the CC discussions, and after attending one of the 12 sessions they have made an important decision together. She explains, “We’ve decided that we only want 2 children. We think that’s enough.”

### **IMPROVED LIVELIHOOD OPPORTUNITIES THROUGH CAPACITY BUILDING AND ACCESS TO CREDIT, RESULTING IN INCREASED ASSETS AND REINFORCED WOMEN'S SELF-ESTEEM**

Around 7,928 women have had access to skills training and a loan from a revolving fund and started small income-generating activities. The Programme supported the establishment of 77 savings and credit cooperatives and trained women with basic financial and business management skills and leadership. A total of 79 per cent of the cooperative leaders are women. The access and ownership of resources has boosted their self-esteem, changed gender relationships in the household and improved the status of women in the community.

### **Lakech Asrat**

**Lakech Asrat is a 28 year old woman with 3 children. She and her husband own 1/8th of a hectare of farmland, which was their main source of income. Lakech used to supplement the family income by engaging in petty trade. She was selected to be a beneficiary of the livelihood component in the Programme and joined a savings and credit cooperative. After being trained in cattle production, she received a loan of 2,500 birr and started shoat fattening. With the profit, she also rented additional farmland and bought an anti-weed sprinkler tool, which she rents out for 400 birr per day to boost the family income.**

**Lakech has also learned to read and write and basic mathematics by participating in the adult literacy classes.**

**She also attends community discussions on issues of HIV/AIDS and family planning facilitated by a mentor. She has attended antenatal care at the health post in the village during her last pregnancy. Talking about the benefits of the program, Lackech says, "I have stopped taking loans at high interest rates from money lenders. And I have reached out to four other women, communicating what I learnt in the Programme and recruiting them to join the Community Conversation programs."**

### **COLLABORATION AMONG GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS**

The Programme's integrated approach has also encouraged internal collaboration among sectors of the Ethiopian government, including Agriculture, Health, Women's Affairs, and Education.

*“When we first started the programme, we were confused—we hadn't worked together like this before. We started to talk together and that helped us to fill in the gaps. Now I can speak confidently about what my colleagues are doing, and refer other women to them. Before, I just knew my own activities.”*

**WOREDA (DISTRICT) OFFICIAL IN THE LIVELIHOOD SECTOR**

*“The integrated approach has brought a total shift in our working culture. We do not work separately anymore—we meet regularly and we can make sure that our efforts are coordinated. Together we can make a change more quickly.”*

**WOREDA OFFICIAL**

## **7. Lessons Learned and Challenges**

### **OVERALL**

- Using an integrated approach is a savvy investment to yield maximum return on funds and human resources. Each Programme component reinforces and complements each other, creating synergies among sectors and empowering women in a holistic way. The Programme's integrated approach is also consistent with, and in turn reinforces, government Programmes and messaging about social and economic development.

- The lack of a baseline has posed a challenge in subsequent Programme monitoring and evaluation. Similarly, the lack of a pre-existing exit strategy is a current challenge.
- The integrated approach has encouraged multi-sectoral collaboration and coordination within the Government. Officials interviewed expressed overwhelming enthusiasm for this new multi-sectoralism, saying that it enabled them to have a greater impact in a shorter period of time.
- Multi-sectoral coordination is a greater challenge at the regional level. Despite initial hiccups, multi-sectoral coordination is working well on the district level, possibly because of the smaller scale means more opportunities for familiarity.

#### **SOCIAL MOBILIZATION: THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION SERIES**

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- By including men in the CC series, the Programme has engaged entire communities in a constructive and directive dialogue about gender equality. With men engaged as advocates and allies for women's empowerment, change is more deeply rooted and sustainable.
- A well-trained, skilled facilitator is of paramount importance to the successful implementation of a CC group. Without the guidance of a skilled facilitator, groups can flounder, and might even reinforce harmful attitudes and behavior.
- Between the CC series and the work of the local Women's Development Groups, there is a consistency of messaging around the issues such as reproductive health, hygiene and sanitation and education. As locals are hearing the same ideas from different trusted sources, the messaging gains increased legitimacy and there is a greater chance of adoption by the locals.
- CC facilitators reported that doing door-to-door visits to participants, particularly in the early weeks of the CC series, was helpful in improving attendance.

#### **LITERACY AND LIFE SKILLS**

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- The link between literacy and livelihoods is especially strong, with several women stating that their newfound literacy and numeracy has enabled them to build successful businesses.
- Educating women has had the unintended but welcome consequence of engaging mothers in their children's education. As the women become literate themselves, they are convinced of the value of education for their children, and in turn become advocates for education in their communities.
- Moreover, school attendance rates have improved in communities where the Programme is contributing materials, including sanitary pads for girls.

#### **HEALTH**

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- The CC series is a key platform for sharing health information within the community. The presence of Health Extension Workers at CC meetings, providing information and dispelling myths about family planning, HIV and FGC, has made a difference.
- By regularly attending the CC sessions, the HEWs also become familiar with various members of the community and are able to follow up where needed. For example, when a woman is pregnant, the HEW can visit her home and encourage her to come to the health post for antenatal services and safe delivery.
- While generating increased demand for reproductive health services, it is essential to improve the supply and quality of services available.

#### **LIVELIHOODS**

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- Keeping interest rates comparatively low and not requiring collateral for loans has made credit more accessible for the poorest and most vulnerable women. While other livelihoods programs, with their high interest rates and collateral requirements, tend to favor wealthier women or men, Leave No Women Behind is unique in its targeting and prioritization of poor, female-headed households.

- Livelihoods beneficiaries need continuous follow-up and technical support by the local Development Agents to ensure success. Resources, such as transport and allowances for the Agents to visit the beneficiaries, should be continually allocated for such follow-up.

### **RESONANCE EFFECT**

Once a woman has been empowered through LNWB, she often becomes the Programme's strongest advocate. She wants to share her newly acquired knowledge and provide advice to her family, friends and neighbors. It is important to capitalize on this effect and foresee the increased demand for services.

## **8. Sustainability and Potential Application**

The Leave No Women Behind Programme is an innovative and unique program in Ethiopia, already tested for its effectiveness and impact. The Programme directly addresses the needs of the community in a holistic approach through improving the opportunities and potential of girls and women, and involving in the process the community male members, educators, health staff, women's associations and the cooperatives. In addition, the involvement of community leaders in decision-making, and the inclusion of opinion leaders have strengthened community ownership of and confidence in in the Programme and the Programme's credibility. At the same time, the Programme is institutionalized, implemented by and through the government structures. It works towards capacity enhancement of the regional governments and does not establish a parallel implementation system. Instead, it uses the financial and operational management systems of the Government of Ethiopia and builds on the Government's capacity to deliver services. In brief, the Programme has the potential to be sustainable beyond its lifespan, based on strong ownership and commitment at all levels and its catalytic nature to response to gender equality and women's empowerment.

At the time of writing, a sustainability strategy is being drafted and discussed with all implementing

partners at different levels. The strategy consist of strengthening existing structures, like the savings and credit cooperatives, to sustain themselves and continue when the Programme phases out, and reaching an agreement on smooth handover of Programme components like the adult literacy and Community Conversations. Some activities, such as procurement of drugs and supplies to health posts and centres will need financial support to continue after the Programme funds end. Therefore, the strategy also includes advocacy actions to involve and engage sympathetic donors.

Some quick facts on sustainability:

- In Amhara region, CC groups continue to meet after graduation, to discuss progress on community action plans. The CC facilitators lead the graduated groups, with no payment or stipend. That the groups continue to meet highlights the people's commitment to the CC process and their belief that it is beneficial to the community.
- The cooperatives are largely self-sustaining with the revolving fund, which indicates longer sustainability in general.
- A huge demand has been created in the community for the Programme's livelihoods package, including livelihoods trainings and access to loans. This intervention requires the most upfront resources (financial and otherwise). This initial investment to train the women and provide loans needs to be considered in the scaling up strategy.

Regarding potential for replication, the Programme strategy and approach is simple, structured, clear on what to do, who to target and how to address gender equality. Thus, the message is easy to replicate. The Programme has created a huge demand for expansion into other regions, and to increase the number of participating women in each community targeted. Beneficiaries and implementers alike stressed their desire to expand the Programme to reach more women. Such demand is indicative of effectiveness of the Programme's approach, but poses questions about how to scale up in a sustainable manner.

# WOMEN FINDING THEIR WAY

Joint Programme: Human Development for Youth:  
Overcoming the Challenges of Migration through Employment

Thematic Window: Youth, Employment and Migration

Main Participants: UNDP (lead agency), FAO, ILO, IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA, UNODC, Ministry of Labour and Social Security, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Farming, National Centre for Employment Training, Foundation for Rural Entrepreneurial Development (FUNDER), credit cooperatives



Youth, Employment and Migration

YouTube



## 1. Introduction

The Joint Programme on Human Development for Youth: Overcoming the Challenges of Migration through Employment (the Programme) contributed to generating decent employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for vulnerable youth aged 15 to 29. Among some of its actions, the Programme developed skills-training programmes for employability and self-employment, and provided financial assistance through credit cooperatives, rural savings and a seed fund. In addition, it provided technical assistance and support to young men and women to implement their business plans. At the same time, it implemented awareness-raising activities on gender, employment and the prevention of violence. Girls and women represented 45 per cent of the total youth who participated in the Programme's capacity-development processes, access to credit and entrepreneurialism.

## 2. Initial Situation

Honduras is one of the poorest countries in the Americas. Poverty affects 72 per cent of the population, and in rural areas the situation is particularly serious, specifically in the western area. Over half of the population, around 4 million people, live in extreme poverty and their income cannot cover the basic food basket, while the rest of the population who live in poverty (over 1.5 million people) can pay for food but cannot cover their basic needs in education, health or housing.<sup>27</sup>

The Honduran population pyramid shows a base consisting predominately of youth, with 67 per cent of the population less than 29 years of age. Youth unemployment and underemployment are pressing problems: over half of the unemployed population are under 24 years of age, while 40.7 per cent of employed youth are self-employed in the informal urban sector, i.e. with precarious jobs earning income below the minimum wage, without social protection, with long work days and with low or no union representation. This situation especially affects women, as reflected by a higher participation

of women in the labour force than men, and a large gender pay gap: US\$5,828 average income earned by women compared with US\$9,835 earned by men.<sup>28</sup>

In the past two decades, Honduras has experienced a considerable increase in emigration abroad. In 2012, 57 per cent of Honduran emigrants were men and 43 percent women. Nevertheless, although there are fewer women who migrate, various studies indicate that they are the most exposed to risks during journeys, including sexual violence and sexual trafficking. Similarly, in the homes where their companion has migrated, women have to take on both reproductive and productive roles, increasing their workload.

Based on this analysis, the Programme adopted a strategy for generating opportunities of employment and entrepreneurship for vulnerable men/boys and women/girls aged 15 to 29 years. The Programme set the initiative goal of 30 per cent female participation in the employment and entrepreneurship programmes. This goal, as shown below, was widely exceeded, reaching 45 per cent.

## 3. Objectives

The goal of the Programme was to contribute to creating decent entrepreneurship and employment opportunities for vulnerable youth between the ages of 15 and 29.

To achieve this, the Programme was structured into three main areas of activity:

- Increase the capacity to place young men and women who are vulnerable and have a high migratory potential into decent jobs.
- Strengthen the national and local institutional frameworks for the promotion of decent employment for youth, with an emphasis on potential emigrants and/or returned migrants.
- Strengthen the leadership capacity, ties and identity of young men and women and their participation in creating a vision of local development based on equality and shared principles and values.

<sup>27</sup> Informe de Desarrollo Humano 2009. UNDP, Tegucigalpa, Honduras.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

## 4. Key Actors

Seven United Nations agencies were responsible for the Programme implementation: UNDP, FAO, ILO, IOM, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNODC. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security was the main government partner of the Programme.

Other actors included:

- Relevant Ministerial Departments, in particular, the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock Farming, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Governance and Justice through the Directorate General of Migration and Foreign Affairs, the National Youth Institute and the National Institute for Professional Training (INFOP);
- The National Center for Employment Training (CENET), responsible for providing skills training for employability and self-employment;
- The Foundation for Rural Entrepreneurial Development (FUNDER), which coordinated the participating rural cooperatives and savings in the Programme and provided technical assistance to young men and women entrepreneurs;
- The four credit cooperatives through which credit was channeled in the urban areas: Cooperativa Mixta de Mujeres Ltda (COMIXMUL), Cooperativa Mixta Unidas para Progresar Ltda (COMUPPL), Cooperativa de Ahorro y Crédito Fronteriza Intibucana Ltda (COACFIL) and Cooperativa Mixta Regional Gualema Ltda (COMIRGUAL);
- The local governments of 23 municipalities of the Departments of La Paz, Comayagua and Intibucá.

## 5. Strategy

The Programme was implemented in three Departments, La Paz, Intibucá and Comayagua, two of which, La Paz and Intibucá, are characterized as rural, with a predominantly Lenca indigenous population. The Programme is aimed at vulnerable youth, who lack training and specialized skills and who do not meet the minimum requirements to

be granted credit by the financial institutions. With the aim to “increase the capacity to place young men and women who are vulnerable and have a high migratory potential into decent jobs,” the Programme developed the following strategies:

- **Strategy for Promoting Employability,** focused on job placement, which included the following actions:
  - Analysis of the training institutions for employability;
  - The creation of Local Youth Employment Boards;
  - Creation of Multi-service Offices (MSOs) for the promotion of employability and entrepreneurship at the municipal level;
  - Skills training for job management;
  - Agreements with local companies; and
  - Internships for trained young men and women.
- **Strategy for Entrepreneurial Development,** focused on self-employment, through the following processes:
  - Analysis of productive chains with strong potential;
  - Professional training in business management;
  - Financial assistance through: (i) a credit fund managed by credit cooperatives and rural savings; and (ii) a Seed Capital Fund managed through the Mayors’ Offices; and
  - Technical assistance and support to improve productive processes, marketing, etc.
- **Gender Awareness Programme**
  - Training workshops for youth, institutions and local businesses.
- **Solidarity and Productive Remittances Programmes,** aimed at community development, which include:
  - The organization of Committees of Family Members of Migrant Workers;
  - The establishment of communication with United States of America consulates;

- The establishment of communication with Honduran migrant workers' organizations in the United States of America; and
- The identification of social and productive projects.

### **MULTI-SERVICE OFFICES (MSOs)**

MSOs are the core of the intervention model proposed by the Programme, since they are responsible for coordinating all of the local services of job placement and entrepreneurship, and connecting them with youth. The MSOs maintain a database with the curriculum vitae of the women/girls and men/boys who seek jobs, which is linked to the platform of job offers of the Ministry of Employment. Furthermore, the MSOs identify the youth who wish to be micro-entrepreneurs, guide them in training provided by the Programme, and finally, monitor their enterprises. The Programme is linked with the Mayors' Offices for the creation of MSOs within the municipalities, which is a key element for sustainability. As part of the Programme, four MSOs were created, whose operations were entirely assumed by the Mayors' Offices.

### **FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

The Programme provided financial assistance to young men and women who wished to initiate an enterprise and who had a viable Business Plan. This assistance adopted two methods:

- A Credit Fund, operated through credit cooperatives and rural savings; and
- A Seed Capital Fund operated through the local administrations in coordination with the MSOs.

Furthermore, youth participating in the Programme received technical capacity building and assistance to develop their Business Plan, which was subsequently revised and approved by the credit cooperatives, rural savings or the MSOs, as a pre-requisite for being granted credit.

#### **Credit fund**

The Programme created a youth-friendly Revolving Fund, i.e. without the requirements normally requested by financial institutions. In urban areas,

this fund was channeled through credit cooperatives, while in the rural areas it was channeled through rural savings.

In urban areas, the fund was managed by four credit cooperatives: COMUPPL, COACFIL and COMIRGUA). Two of these cooperatives, COMIXMUL and COMUPPL, are founded by and for women. However, within the Programme, they also provided loans to mixed entrepreneurial associations (i.e. consisting of men and women).

In total, 246 youth accessed credit to initiate their own business: 129 women individually, 106 men individually, and 11 mixed entrepreneur associations. The total amount granted was approximately HNL5.5 million: HNL3 million for women and HNL2.5 million for men. The following table shows the number of young men and women beneficiaries by cooperative.

Cooperative	No. of entrepreneurs			Total per cooperative
	Women	Men	Mixed associations	
COMIXMUL	43	0	8	51
COACFIL	13	18	2	33
COMIRGUAL	20	16	1	37
COMUPPL	53	72	0	125
<b>Total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>246</b>

In rural areas, support for entrepreneurship was provided through the project Emprende Joven Rural (Rural Youth Entrepreneurship), implemented by FUNDER. Rural savings were in charge of funds allocation. Forty-five rural savings were selected, and a revolving fund was allocated for a total of HNL7 million. This fund benefitted 505 youth (220 female and 285 male).

#### **Seed Capital Fund**

The Mayors' Offices of Marcala, Comayagua and La Esperanza, in coordination with the respective MSOs, were responsible for the management the Programme's Seed Capital Fund, amounting to a HNL3.5 million. This non-refundable fund was aimed at supporting businesses that had already

been established but that needed improvements to continue operating. The MSO was responsible for assessing the businesses. Participants included 320 youth, of whom 167 were men and 153 were women.

### **GENDER AWARENESS PROGRAMME**

In its original design, the Programme did not consider gender equality as a cross-cutting theme, but rather, this theme was confined to an Output focused on “awareness-raising to promote the sustainable participation of young women in the labour market within the framework of the Programme and to combat gender stereotypes.”

With this aim, a manual on Gender, Employment and the Prevention of Violence was developed, which served as a basis for conducting a series of five workshops on the following themes:

- Gender, the promotion of peace and job placement;
- Promotion of employment with a gender approach;
- Participation, organization, planning, motivation by achievement and effective communication;
- Training of trainers on the culture of peace, gender-based violence and interculturalism; and
- Training of trainers on culture, migration and local development.

At first, training was provided to a very limited number of youth, who were not involved in other components of the Programme. Later, this strategy was revised in order to provide a wider coverage and greater impact to the training. In this way, the training was expanded to male and female community leaders, youth participants in other components of the Programme, male and female trainers and decision-makers and local leaders. At the end of the process, a total of 521 women/girls and 660 men/boys had participated in the workshops.

## **6. Progress and Results**

### **MULTI-SERVICES OFFICES (MSOs)**

The respective Mayors’ Offices were completely responsible for the four MSOs created within the Programme. All of them operated with a budget

from their own municipalities, and three were integrated within the physical and administrative structures of the municipality. Furthermore, the MSOs began to assume tasks previously developed by the Programme, such as: training for employability and for entrepreneurial development; assistance in the revision of business plans of the young men and women; facilitation of credit management with the credit cooperatives and rural banks; support in the set-up and operation of entrepreneurship; and coordination with the State institutions for technical assistance to the enterprises. At present, four women in the area, who were trained by the Programme, are responsible for the coordination of these four MSOs.

### **EMPLOYABILITY AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS**

A total of 871 youth, of whom 40 per cent were women/girls, improved their skills to access the labour market. In turn, 825 youth (52 per cent female) have more tools to create and manage their own business. As a final outcome of the training processes, a total of 438 business plans were created.

### **CREATION OF RURAL YOUTH MICRO-ENTERPRISES**

A total of 544 rural youth (45 per cent female) accessed microcredit managed by FUNDER and received training and technical assistance to start their own business. As a result, 371 new enterprises were launched, of which 326 were carried out individually and 45 in associations.

### **CREDIT-WORTHY YOUTH**

Traditional banks consider the youth population to be high-risk, especially young women and youth from rural areas, because they do not own assets and they are prone to migrate. Consequently, it is difficult for them to access formal financial services. For example, prior to the Programme, FUNDER worked only with adults, mainly men. However, now, young men and women make up part of its target population. In the same way, the credit cooperatives partners of the Programme have observed that most youth pay back their loan and that the credit default index within the Programme was very low, which served as an incentive to integrate this segment of the population in its portfolio of possible clients.

## **EMPOWERMENT**

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As shown, the Programme did not have in its design a strategy for mainstreaming gender. Despite this initial gap, the Programme managed to correct its focus and thus reach a high percentage of women and girls through its training, technical assistance and credit. At the end of the process, approximately 45 per cent of the entrepreneurial activities driven by the Programme were run by women/girls.

The Programme has not undertaken a rigorous analysis on its impact on gender equality and women's empowerment. However, various quantitative data demonstrate that the Programme triggered personal, familiar and social empowerment processes of the participating women. Therefore, and as was shown by various women involved in the training and entrepreneurship activities, the fact of having set up their own business and having generated their own income has significantly contributed to improving their self-esteem and their position within the household.

## **7. Lessons Learned and Challenges**

### **PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG WOMEN**

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Even without an initial gender mainstreaming strategy, the participation of women/girls in the Programme activities practically equaled that of men/boys. This shows that, despite the numerous barriers facing young women, they have a strong desire and motivation to access paid work and to become economically independent. To respond to these demands, any youth employment programme must, above all, re-examine the pre-conceived notions on the interest and availability for employment of women and, subsequently, set out measures aimed at eliminating the barriers or imbalances that limit their access in terms of family responsibilities, less economic and social capital and gender stereotypes, among others.

### **EMPOWERMENT**

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Gender equality issues must be integrated as a part of an overall holistic programmatic approach. The

lack of a gender strategy initially undermined the potential of the Programme to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. At first, the awareness-raising workshops on gender, employment and the prevention of violence were disconnected from other components of the Programme. The subsequent targeting of a much wider public, including men/boys and women/girls beneficiaries of the financial assistance and capacity-building programmes for entrepreneurship, strengthened the comprehensiveness of the empowerment processes promoted by the Programme. The experience also demonstrates that it is possible to adjust programmatic approaches during implementation to accommodate changes, as well as to deliver stronger results.

### **FINANCIAL SERVICES FOR YOUTH**

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The programme showed that with due supervision and support, young women and men can be credit-worthy. The credit cooperatives and rural banks participating in the Programme have shifted their initial orientation, focused almost exclusively on adults, to opening their credit portfolio to youth. Nevertheless, particularly in the case of the rural banks, it was observed that there was a need to develop management handover strategies, which would give more weight to the youth and women.

## **8. Sustainability and Potential Application**

The MSOs have already been absorbed by the Mayor's Offices, which constitutes a strong guarantee of sustainability of the Programme's activities. An example of this is the agreement reached by the MSOs and the ACCESO Program of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), through which the latter is committed to monitor the young men and women micro-entrepreneurs initially supported by the Programme.

Currently, the Ministry of Labour is replicating the experience in other areas of the country, with funds provided by the Government of Taiwan.

# TAKING A VALUE CHAIN APPROACH TOWARDS LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Joint Programme: Green Production and Trade to Increase Income and Employment Opportunities for the Rural Poor

Thematic Window: Development and the Private Sector

Main Participants: ITC (lead agency), FAO, ILO, UNCTAD, UNIDO, Viet Nam Trade Promotion Agency (VIETRADE), Viet Nam Handicrafts Exporters Association (VIETCRAFT), Department of Agriculture and Rural Development

MDGs in Viet Nam

YouTube



## 1. Introduction

The MDG-F Joint Programme on Green Production and Trade to Increase Income and Employment Opportunities for the Rural Poor (the Programme) set out to strengthen the sericulture value chain in Quy Chau district of Nghe An province in Viet Nam. It paid special attention to the strengthening of the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative, a group of women weavers belonging to the Thai ethnic minority. The cooperative was supported to enhance its productivity and profitability by improving its managerial, organizational, technical and marketing skills; increasing the availability of local raw materials; and strengthening local support services. This has contributed to enhanced women's confidence, better acknowledgement and support by male community members and ultimately, increased income for the Cooperative members and improved employment opportunities for women in the community.

## 2. Initial Situation

Reducing poverty and improving livelihoods in rural areas and among ethnic minority communities has been a continual challenge in Viet Nam, despite its status as a middle-income country since 2010. In rural areas of Viet Nam, agriculture remains the most important economic sector. However, the income generated from farming is often not sufficient for smallholder farmers to reach an income level above the national poverty line. The collection and processing of natural raw material from forest areas and the production of handicrafts, mostly undertaken at times when farm work slows down, constitute some of the most important sources of additional income for farmers. In fact, it is mostly the additional income generated from handicraft production that determines whether or not the smallholder farmer can lead a life below or above the national poverty line. Between 65-80 per cent of the household craft producers are women. Craft production is predominantly practiced at home and women can therefore combine it easily with their other responsibilities, such as farm work and family care.

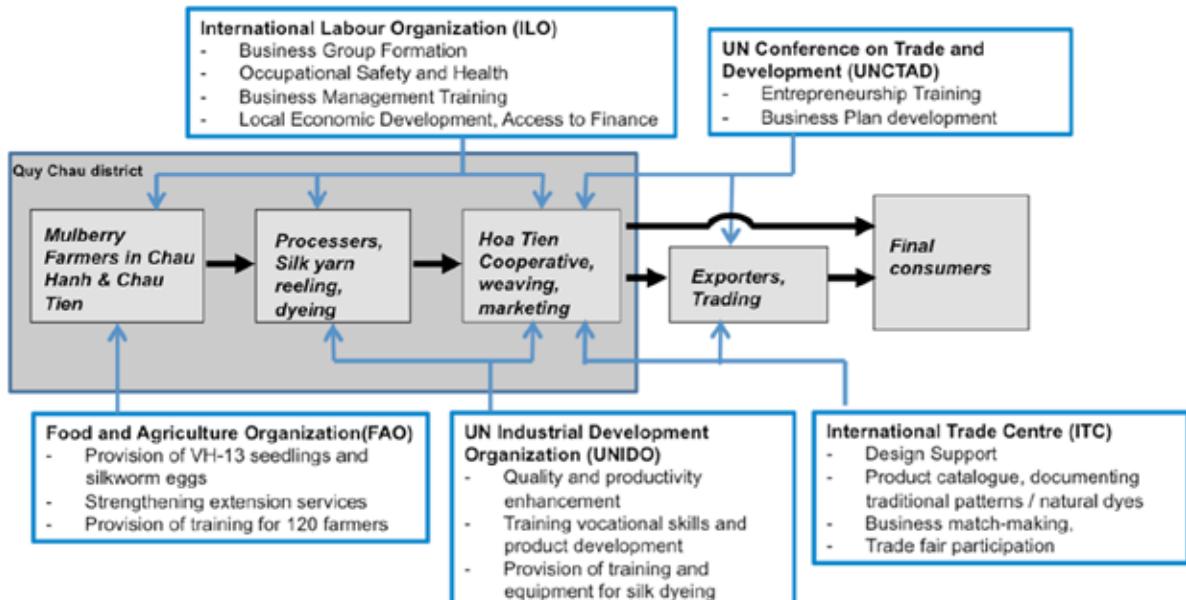
There is overwhelming evidence that, since women are mainly responsible for ensuring the well-being of their family, women's economic empowerment

has a direct impact on the overall quality of life of their family and can contribute to poverty reduction and accelerated economic growth. However, opportunities for women to start and expand successful businesses are still limited. Women face obstacles to obtain technical and managerial skills due to their limited access to education and technical training. Although training programmes on starting or improving a business are available in Viet Nam, most of them are designed for those with a certain degree of formal education, and they are less suitable for low-income women. Moreover, access to finance is very limited for poor people, especially women. Furthermore, women tend to work significantly longer hours than men, being responsible for a variety of tasks, including agricultural work, managing small businesses and being the primary caretaker of the family household. This leaves them little time to attend training, seek support from networks and institutions to improve their business or commercialize their products outside their villages. As a result, many low-income women face a continuous struggle to increase their income from their business.

Recognizing the need to increase income and to promote employment opportunities for the rural poor in Viet Nam, in 2010 the Government of Viet Nam and the United Nations launched a Joint Programme on Green Production and Trade to Increase Income and Employment Opportunities for the Rural Poor. The Programme supported the handicrafts sector, recognizing its importance as a major source of income for smallholder farmers and landless poor, especially women, who, as already mentioned, represent the majority of household crafts producers.

## 3. Objectives

The Programme aimed at increasing family income while preserving the handicrafts cultural tradition. It used a value chain approach to develop better integrated, pro-poor, and environmentally sustainable "green" value chains, by enabling poor raw craft material growers and collectors and grassroots handicrafts and furniture producers to improve their skills and products, and linking these to more profitable markets.



Within the handicrafts sector, value chains of particular importance and relevance to poor were considered for upgrading. Bamboo/rattan, sericulture, sea grass, lacquer ware, and handmade paper were selected as the target value chains.

This report presents the experience in strengthening the sericulture and brocade value chain in the Quy Chau commune district of Nghe An province. People in Quy Cahu belong to the Thai ethnic group, one of the 54 ethnic minorities in Viet Nam. The majority of participants in the workforce in the sericulture sector are women, who do all the labour involved in brocade weaving. This report focuses specially on the process of strengthening of the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative.

## 4. Key Actors

**The Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative**, integrated by women weavers belonging to the Thai ethnic minority

**The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of Nghe An province**, which provided technical training and guidance

**Viet Nam handicrafts exporters association (VIETCRAFT) and Viet Nam Trade Promotion Agency (VIETRADE)**, the two national implementing partners of the Programme

**The five UN agencies responsible for the Programme: FAO, ILO, UNIDO, UNCTAD and ITC**, whose inputs were structured along the value chain and are visually illustrated in the figure above

## 5. Strategy

The Programme used a value chain approach to improve the livelihoods of the people in Hoa Tien, through the strengthening of the sericulture and brocade value chain. As the first step, a detailed value chain analysis was conducted at the start of the Programme, which allowed identifying various challenges at different stages of the sericulture and brocade value chain.<sup>29</sup> Based on this analysis, a comprehensive and integrated plan for support was developed. The plan included promotion of decent work practices, technical skills training, gender equality and entrepreneurship development, access to business support services and finance, and access

<sup>29</sup> See: [http://greentrade.org.vn/userfiles/Sericulture\\_Final.pdf](http://greentrade.org.vn/userfiles/Sericulture_Final.pdf).

to markets. This was combined with initiatives to enhance the capacity of relevant institutions to promote women's empowerment and workers' rights, and to increase women's participation and leadership in the value chain. Strengthening of the Hoa Tien Cooperative was a key element in the process. Each intervention is further explained in detail below.

### **STRENGTHENING THE CAPACITY OF HOA TIEN COOPERATIVE LEADERS AND MEMBERS**

Traditional beliefs and customs around brocade production are handed down from mother to daughter through the generations. In recent years, however, the traditional brocade activity of ethnic groups has been endangered as young women are increasingly being attracted to income-generating opportunities in the larger cities or province capitals. In 1997, the women weavers of Hoa Tien Village formed an informal group with the goal of dealing collectively with orders from customers. However, the group faced many difficulties because of poor management skills. After this experience, a cooperative was formally established in July 2010 by seven women leaders (which is the minimum according to Vietnamese law), with some 200 other women supplying their products to the Cooperative leadership for collective trading. The Cooperative's managers are elected by commune leaders and cooperative members. However, they had never received training in cooperative management, and were often faced with their own limitations in the management and operation of the cooperative, limited access to finance, and other challenges.

The Programme supported the strengthening of the Cooperative by improving their technical, managerial and marketing capacities. The Hoa Tien Cooperative leaders and members participated in a wide range of capacity building activities, with trainings on topics such as Business Group Formation, Entrepreneurial Behavior through EMPRETEC, Requirements and Opportunities of Fair Trade, and Effective Trade Fair Participation. They also participated in the Gender and Entrepreneurship Together for Women in Enterprise (GET Ahead) training, aimed at promoting enterprise development among women in poverty who want to start or are already engaged in small-scale business. Within the framework of this training, participants

were encouraged to reflect on gender roles and identify specific challenges they face as women, such as heavy workload due to household responsibilities combined with income-earning responsibilities, and to discuss how they could overcome these challenges to succeed in their businesses. The Business Group Formation training dedicated a special session to discuss gender equality and women and men's roles, in order to enhance the participants' awareness on the division of workload, decision-making and income within the family and in business groups, as well as understanding of the importance of gender equality in general.

### **STRENGTHENING THE GENDER-RESPONSIVE CAPACITY OF LOCAL SUPPORT INSTITUTIONS**

While the Nghe An province had a policy for supporting handicraft production and encouraged the preservation and development of brocade, their support was limited. Besides, from a gender point of view, they did not fully recognize the specific challenges faced by women producers in growing a business, including low education, limited mobility, insufficient knowledge on managing a cooperative and the need to balance time between business and household responsibilities.

In order to improve the capacities of key local support institutions to provide gender-responsive services, the Programme conducted several Training of Trainers workshops addressed to the staff of provincial institutions including the DARD, the Provincial Cooperative Alliance, the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs and the provincial Women's Union. Participants were trained to become trainers on key topics such as Strengthening Business Development Services (BDS), Business Group Formation (BGF), Occupational Safety and Health (OSH), and Gender and Entrepreneurship Development and Gender Equality. Gender was mainstreamed in all these topics, so that the new trainers could provide business training to local producers by integrating gender issues in each topic. They also learned participatory training methods to increase the effectiveness of the training for beneficiaries, especially those with limited formal education. Following the training of trainer's workshop, local institution organized trainings for the producers.

## **INCREASING THE AVAILABILITY AND QUALITY OF RAW MATERIALS**

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Despite a tradition of planting mulberry for silk production for weaving, the production of local mulberry in Hoa Tien went down in recent years. With the introduction of cheaper silk, cotton, and wool yarns from China and Laos, the locally produced silk prices had dropped and many households had replaced mulberry trees with sugar cane. In order to ensure the quality of silk yarns and to keep a stable supply, many households were eager to go back to mulberry production and silkworm rearing. However, they lacked capital to purchase seeds and the required knowledge and skills to choose a suitable variety of mulberry seedling to grow the trees.

In order to revitalize the cultivation of mulberry trees, the Programme provided 160,000 mulberry seedlings of a high-yielding hybrid variety to some 75 households in Quy Chau district. The new variety mulberry trees have grown well, with plants and leaves being significantly larger than the mulberry variety being used before. Additionally, and in cooperation with the local DARD, the Programme trained approximately 100 farmers in proper planting, cultivation and harvest of mulberry trees, as well as in the use of fertilizers while minimizing environmentally damaging pesticides.

## **INCREASING PRODUCTIVITY THROUGH SAFETY IMPROVEMENT IN THE WORK AND HOME ENVIRONMENT AND PRODUCTION PROCESS**

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Based on the findings of an assessment on the working conditions in the sericulture and brocade production, the Programme conducted training on OSH. First, DARD's officials were trained to become qualified OSH trainers. Then, they trained women weavers in Chau Tien and other communes, including twenty women from Hoa Tien Cooperative, on how to improve productivity by creating safe and more efficient working conditions. Following the training, the Cooperative implemented a number of improvements, such as placing all the tools needed for weaving within arm's reach, using a chair with a backrest when possible to avoid back pain (e.g. for sewing), adding a soft cushion to be more

comfortable when weaving for extended periods and consistent use of protective equipment.

## **STABILIZING AND IMPROVING QUALITY OF NATURAL DYEING**

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In order to ensure that dyeing of silk yarn would result in consistent and colourfast fabric, the Programme provided the Hoa Tien Cooperative with a professional dyeing machine. Cooperative members were trained to use the machine effectively and safely. This allowed the group to produce higher quality and quantity of silk fabric more quickly.

## **PRODUCT DIVERSIFICATION**

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Support was provided to expand and diversify Hoa Tien Cooperative's product range, which had been limited to traditional designs. National and international designers worked with the group to develop new products suitable for the international market.

## **FACILITATING THE MARKET LINKAGES BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL MARKETS**

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In order to raise the profile and competitiveness of Viet Nam as a top exporter of high quality handicraft products, the Programme supported the handicraft exporters association VIETCRAFT in the promotion of an international trade fair entitled Lifestyle Viet Nam. In 2012, the fair attracted 1,700 visitors, including over 1,300 buyers from Europe, up from 300 visitors in 2010, and provided an opportunity for handicraft producers and shops to establish business relationships with potential buyers within and outside of Viet Nam. Several Programme participating companies, including the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative, participated in the fair.

In order to diversify their customer base, the Programme facilitated linkages between Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative and exporting companies based in Ha Noi. Linkages were established with Greencraft, a fair-trade exporter, and Kana, a company managed by a female entrepreneur. The Programme also supported both companies in terms of product and market development. Ultimately the

creation of mutually beneficial business linkages offers the best prospects for sustainability beyond the Programme duration.

### PRESERVING CULTURAL HERITAGE

Despite frequent production of the brocade products by the Thai women in Chau Tien, the traditional meanings of different patterns depicted in the weavings were not always fully known or remembered by the producers. Recognizing the importance of documenting intangible cultural heritage for the Thai people themselves as well as for Viet Nam, and recognizing the value that the intangible cultural heritage can add to traditional handicraft products in national and international markets, the Programme documented the traditional patterns of the different ethnic minority groups, including the Thai group from Quy Chau. The patterns were carefully redrawn and their meanings were documented, thus contributing to the preservation of the rich ethnic minority cultural heritage of Viet Nam.

## 6. Progress and Results

### INCREASED CONFIDENCE AND BETTER NEGOTIATION POWER BY THE COOPERATIVE BOARD MEMBERS

As a result of their participation in various trainings and trade fairs, Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative members, especially the Board Members, gained renewed confidence in working and communicating with people outside of Chau Tien commune. They are now better able to negotiate with customers with confidence. They travel to Ha Noi to deliver their products at least once a month and actively participate in festivals or trade fairs held locally or nationally to find new customers. In addition, with increased confidence and negotiation skills, the Cooperative members have gained new clients from different cities in Viet Nam as well as from other countries such as Japan.

The women from Hoa Tien are also more active and play increasingly important roles in their community. The Board Members of Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative are actively teaching weaving technique as well as basic business skills, such as

cost and price calculation, to other women who could not join training organized by the Programme.

*I highly appreciate the support to sericulture and brocade production in Hoa Tien. I can see that women are feeling more confident after training and they have more active participation in local affairs. With increased confidence, two members of the Cooperative ran for the commune people's council election in 2011 for the first time and have been elected. Perhaps this may be one of the impacts of the programme support.*

MR. LU VAN NHI, VICE CHAIRPERSON OF CHAU TIEN COMMUNE

### INCREASED JOBS IN THE LOCAL AREA THROUGH THE INCREASED SALE OF THEIR PRODUCTS

Thanks to its participation in trade fairs, the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative could connect and negotiate with national and international buyers to receive new orders. This has translated into more brocade production and, consequently, more jobs. For example, a woman in Chau Hanh, another village group supplying products to the Cooperative, has more than doubled her production in one year. With the increased sales, the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative is expanding its membership: Three new women weavers joined the cooperative in 2012, and there are plans to expand with 10 more members during the next 3 years.

### INCREASED INCOME FROM BROCADE WEAVING AMONG COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

Gradual increasing of orders from customers, combined with reduced material and production costs due to increased availability of raw materials and improvements in the production process, has translated into more benefits to Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative members, an increase of 125-167 per cent in their average income from

2009. In addition, each household is managing their finances better by monitoring the cash flow and regularly allocating some money for saving to prepare for emergencies or future expenditures.

### **INCREASED INCOME FROM MULBERRY CULTIVATION**

Increased income was also achieved by reducing the expenditures for raw materials, as the weavers were able to produce silk yarns using the mulberry leaves and silkworms grown locally. The availability of local raw material was particularly important for the Hoa Tien Cooperative, which is located far away from the nearest city (200 km) and not easily accessible. While the local production is not yet able to secure sufficient silk for the whole production, the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative sources 40 per cent of the required silk yarn locally at present, and they hope to increase to 50 per cent in the future.

An interesting type of barter trade has also emerged in the community. Those without mulberry trees trade their silk worms to receive the mulberry leaves necessary for raising silk worms, while women with mulberry farms trade leaves for silk worms.

### **Mrs. Lang Thi Kieu**

**Mrs. Lang Thi Kieu is a widow from a poor household who lives with her two sons and daughter-in-law in Chau Hanh commune. Building on previous experience, and supported by the Programme, Mrs. Kieu is growing mulberry trees in a small plot of land of 600 m<sup>2</sup> along the riverbank. The trees produce sufficient leaves to feed one round of yellow silk worms, producing 11 kilograms of cocoons, which, in turn, generate about 1.1 kilograms of silk yarn worth about VND715,000 (equivalent to USD34).**

### **INCREASED SUPPORT TO WOMEN BY MEN IN BROCADE PRODUCTION AND HOUSEHOLD RESPONSIBILITIES**

While the community has had a tradition of men and women sharing workload, decision-making and income to support each other, men's involvement in the brocade production had been limited, as it was traditionally considered to be the domain of women only. However, with the increased realization of the importance of the brocade production for income generation and improved livelihoods, men are now more actively supporting women in sericulture and brocade production as well as household responsibilities.

*“Although the Programme focused on women craft producers, its support has been useful for me as well. My wife shares with me new knowledge and skills to improve our livelihood. For example, with new knowledge on household finance, we are managing our household finance better, and we are able to allocate VND 1 million per month for saving. Sericulture is an important source of income. When my wife is busy with the brocade production, I take care of preparing meals and cleaning. I even help with some of the finishing process of the brocade products.”*

**MR. LU TRUNG HUY, HUSBAND OF THE COOPERATIVE'S ACCOUNTANT**

### **INCREASED CAPACITY OF LOCAL SERVICE PROVIDERS AND LINKAGES ESTABLISHED**

Local institutions have been strengthened to provide support to local women and men to improve local enterprises and promote gender equality. Provincial officials are now able to identify and address gender-specific constraints in their work. Additionally, by having the officials train rural women entrepreneurs, a strong linkage between the local service providers and the Hoa

Tien Textile Cooperative has been established. As a result, for instance, the Cooperative Alliance regularly supports the Cooperative by sharing information on trade fairs and subsidizing the fee for trade fair participation.

## 7. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- **The handicrafts sector as a driver for local development.** Policy makers tend to give priority to the development of heavy industries and to overlook the handicrafts sector and rural small-scale enterprises. However, the Programme has proven that supporting the traditional handicrafts sector that has high cultural values can contribute to create jobs and promote local economic development in rural areas that are lagging behind in terms of social and economic development.
  - **Women's economic empowerment is good business.** The handicrafts sector employs mostly women. Supporting rural women's enterprises at different stages of the value chain is particularly meaningful and effective in empowering women and, thus, increasing family income and well-being and promoting local economic development.
  - **Gender analysis is a must.** In order to ensure that value chain upgrading activities contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment, gender analysis should be conducted at the beginning of the Programme, so that inequalities in terms of opportunities, decision-making, workload and income can be properly addressed during the implementation. The Programme did not carry out such a gender analysis. Lack of information on gender relations did not cause much difficulty in the case of the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative, since the Chau Tien community is relatively more advanced than the average Vietnamese community in terms
- of gender equality due to the tradition of the Thai ethnic group. Nevertheless, this situation should not be taken for granted. When gender inequality is prevalent, there are high risks that women are unable to fully benefit from support interventions. Men may restrict women's participation in training or market activities, or women may be faced with increased workload or may not be able to exercise control over the additional income generated from their businesses.
- **Men's involvement. In this Programme, capacity building interventions targeted only women.** However, for future interventions it is recommended to target both women and men, conducting gender awareness training for all the actors involved in the value chain and ensuring men's involvement in promoting gender equality.
  - **Working as a group contributes to increased productivity and profitability.** By organizing female producers to form a cooperative and strengthening this cooperative, the women managed to improve their business by lowering their production costs through collectively purchasing raw materials and reducing transportation costs through organizing collectively a trip to sell products at trade fairs and markets. Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative members contributed to create jobs locally, and they actively transferred new knowledge on business and weaving skills to women in other villages as well as fellow villagers interested in joining the Cooperative. Transfer of new knowledge and skills to women in rural areas by women from within their community is particularly useful in ethnic minority villages as they speak the same language and can communicate smoothly. It also contributes to boost women's self-confidence and to increase women's respect within their communities.

## **8. Sustainability and Potential Application**

Comprehensive support provided to strengthen the sericulture value chain in Chau Tien brought many positive changes in the lives of women and men in the village, including increased income, improved working conditions, improved local income earning opportunities and enhanced confidence among women. With their improved knowledge, skills and networks, it is hoped that Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative will continue to improve their business activities while maintaining an important tradition. The model of strengthening value chains that have women as predominant actors can be an

effective approach in empowerment of women and improving their livelihoods when conducted in collaboration with various agencies bringing their respective expertise to bear.

Although running a business is never without challenges, and the women from Hoa Tien will continue to face new challenges in the future, they are now equipped with new skills and knowledge, as well as networks and business linkages established through their participation in the Programme. With renewed confidence, they are ready and able to manage the Hoa Tien Textile Cooperative successfully and continuously improve the income and livelihoods of the Cooperative members and their families.