



Empowering Women from Different Ethnic Groups Living in Remote Areas in Vietnam

REMOTE ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN (REMW) PROGRAM CARE International in Vietnam has identified the empowerment of women from different ethnic minority groups who live in remote areas as a key pathway to tackling the underlying causes of poverty and social injustice. This is achieved through initiatives at national and local levels, and through our work in strengthening partner and civil society engagement in the empowerment of ethnic minority women.

COUNTRY CONTEXT VIETNAM TODAY

Over the last two decades, Vietnam has experienced extraordinary growth and is now classified as a middle-income country. Economic progress has been remarkably well-matched by poverty alleviation and human development.

However, pockets of entrenched poverty and isolation remain, concentrated amongst different ethnic groups living in remote areas. These groups generally have less access to structural decision-making processes; financial, education and healthcare services; and economic opportunities. Ethnic minority communities also tend to reside in isolated mountainous areas or river deltas, and are largely reliant on agriculture; they are therefore more likely to be adversely affected by the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.

Within many ethnic minority groups, social conventions mean that women especially lack access to resources and choices. Discrimination and social isolation as a result of the combination of ethnicity and gender further reduces their access to legal representations or protection.

CARE International in Vietnam supports women of many different ethnicities to have a legitimate and respected voice in their households, communities and with authorities. CARE enables remote ethnic minority women to gain the knowledge, confidence and skills necessary to voice their opinions, and to access new and improved opportunities. As a result, they are also able to improve livelihood security, increase incomes, have equal benefits from development and are resilient to changing circumstances.

KEY IMPACT GROUP

REMOTE ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN are largely engaged in agricultural production, yet patriarchal societies in many groups and gaps within relevant policies mean that they often **lack ownership rights to their land**. Restricted by societal norms and a lack of education services, ethnic minority women have **limited access to markets** and have few chances to participate in paid employment. For those that migrate for work, lack of official and community support and protections renders them **vulnerable to exploitation**.

Traditional gender roles, and associated factors such as less access to education, often mean that ethnic minority women are **excluded from decision-making** within households or communities. They have little opportunity to express their views and concerns, and many policies that are important for ethnic minority women's lives **do not include specific interventions or indicators for ethnic minority women**.

The evidence base surrounding **gender-based violence (GBV)** within ethnic minority communities is small, but **prevalence is estimated to be very high**. Policies which address GBV do not yet take into account the specific needs of ethnic minority groups.

CARE International in Vietnam works to enable women from different ethnic groups who live in remote areas to participate equitably in the economy, to have a legitimate and respected voice, and become more resilient to change.



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HOW DOES THE REMOTE ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN PROGRAM WORK?



FURTHERING ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

CARE International in Vietnam works with civil society organisations and the government to secure land and forest access for remote ethnic minority women. CARE also supports women to maximise the potential of their available resources by increasing their access to financial services and markets, by facilitating connections with the private sector and developing their skills in financial decision-making. CARE also researches and promotes safe migration strategies for those who decide to relocate to find work.

TACKLING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE

CARE works with both men and women at the community level to develop common understanding about the perceptions and impacts of gender-based violence (GBV), and to enable families and communities to prevent and cope with violence. CARE promotes implementation of existing protections, whilst also promoting the development of GBV policies which are responsive to the specific needs of ethnic minority groups. CARE engages with men and authorities to transform the gender inequalities that lead to GBV.

RAISING ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN'S VOICE

CARE develops platforms for ethnic minority women to have a voice in decision-making by building the capacity of local civil society organisations, and developing and strengthening community-based organisations and networks. CARE also facilitates an enabling environment for these organisations by bringing evidence of the success and value of civil society engagement to the authorities at all levels, and engaging in policy and legal frameworks surrounding civil society in Vietnam.

BOOSTING RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE AND NATURAL HAZARDS

CARE International in Vietnam supports ethnic minority groups to become more resilient to the negative impacts of climate change. This includes supporting communities to conduct their own planning for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction, which specifically responds to differing gender roles. CARE also works with local partners and communities to promote sustainable natural resource management methods, and encourages communities to adapt or develop new livelihoods which are more resilient to climate change.



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How did community-based organisations enable Nhung to build a life for herself and her son?

In 2005, Nhung's husband passed away and she had to move back to her parent's house in Bac Kan province in the north of Vietnam. She had no land of her own, as her parent's land was passed to her brothers instead. She tried to earn money by buying food and selling it with interest, but this was time consuming and not very profitable.

"It is very difficult being a widow and raising my son alone. My parents supported me a lot, but they had little to give me."

Nhung became a member of the Livelihoods and Rights Club (LARC) which was set up in her community as part of CARE's Ethnic Minority Women's Empowerment project. Nhung has used the knowledge she gained from the LARC activities to do business; she has learned how to raise animals more effectively and how to sell them for higher prices. The microcredit scheme run by the LARC allows Nhung to keep her animals until she can get the best price for them, as she can borrow small amounts of money at low interest rates when she needs it. Recently, she made over 400 USD gross profit on a cow and her calf.

"I was classified as poor for a long time, but since 2013 I am classified as near-poor. I hope to be middle income soon. I try to earn and save as much money as possible, so I can invest in my son. I want him have a better live than I have; I want him to go to university."

Ten years ago, Nhung had very little to live on. Now, as a result of her increased and more stable earnings, she has been able to save her money and build a new concrete house for her and her son to live in, and continues to aspire for a better life for her family.

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