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Addressing Social Marginalisation in Urban Settings in Vietnam

SOCIALLY MARGINALISED PEOPLE (SMP) PROGRAM CARE International in Vietnam has identified the empowerment of socially marginalised people, particularly women, 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 women's empowerment.

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, increased urbanisation has also exacerbated structural and social inequalities and vulnerabilities. Growing populations of marginalised people in urban areas, particularly women, are at risk of multiple forms of exploitation, and are facing profound social and political exclusion. These groups often live and work in unsafe environments, and lack access to essential protections and services.

CARE has identified sex workers, people of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, female migrants, people living with HIV and people who inject drugs as amongst those most at risk from exclusion. Members of these groups have dangerous living and working conditions and are subject to stigma, discrimination, exploitation and abuse. Many are effectively 'hidden' populations, lacking in representation and protection as a result of social conventions and stereotypes, or because of a lack of responsive legal and policy frameworks.

Through the Socially Marginalised People program, CARE International in Vietnam works with these groups to promote their equitable access to decent work, legal identity, adequate protections and health services, to ensure that they are able to benefit equitably from the positive impacts of development.

KEY IMPACT GROUPS

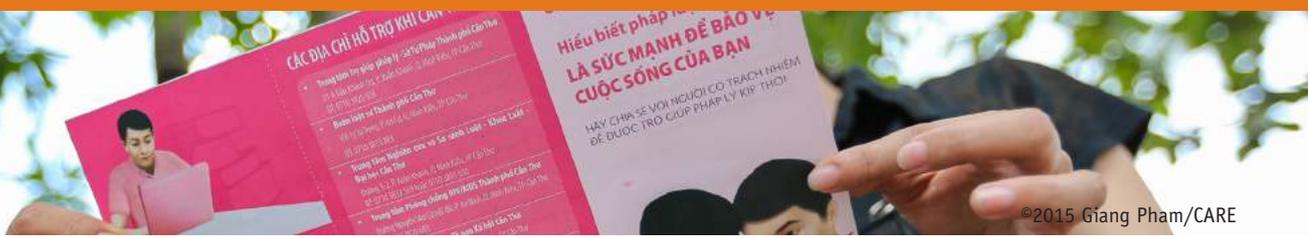
SEX WORKERS experience a web of interlocking practices that often leaves them exposed to **exploitation and gender-based violence** and **unable to access health and legal services**. They are unprotected and vulnerable to harassment and abuse, at risk of HIV/AIDS, and suffer **social marginalisation due to the stigma** attached to the illegal nature of their work.

PEOPLE OF DIVERSE GENDER IDENTITIES AND SEXUAL ORIENTATIONS are gradually gaining acceptance in Vietnam, but individuals still face significant levels of **stigma and discriminatory practices**. They can be subject to abuse by duty bearers, and can access **limited protections** that address their specific circumstances.

FEMALE MIGRANTS may work in the formal sector, such as in garment factories, or in the informal sector such as domestic workers. The specific vulnerabilities and risks faced by this group are wide-ranging, but they are all likely to experience: **unstable incomes**; limited access to services; **unsafe work environments** and lack of access to labour protections; **inadequate housing** conditions; and high risks of exploitation and violence. Their migrant status exacerbates these issues as they are often invisible, and lack familial and community-based support networks.

The SMP program also prioritises **PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV** and **PEOPLE WHO INJECT DRUGS**.

CARE International in Vietnam seeks significant and lasting change for those experiencing multiple forms of exploitation or the denial of basic rights, such as the rights to decent work or freedom from violence.



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HOW DOES THE SOCIALLY MARGINALISED PEOPLE PROGRAM WORK?



ENSURING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SERVICES

CARE International in Vietnam works to promote access to existing health, financial, social and legal services for socially marginalised people by improving their knowledge of available options. CARE also works to reduce the level of exclusion from these services that these groups experience by promoting the effective implementation of the law, addressing service provider and gatekeeper attitudes, and promoting accountability of duty-bearers.

RAISING THE VOICE OF SOCIALLY MARGINALISED PEOPLE

CARE fosters the further development of civil society organisations (CSOs), groups and networks which work for and represent the interests of socially marginalised people. This includes strengthening their technical capacity, and facilitating the effective engagement of CSOs in policy dialogue and decision-making at all levels.

PROMOTING ACCESS TO DECENT WORK

CARE works with both the government and private sector to promote effective implementation of labour laws, and improve access to training and employment. CARE also addresses issues of stigma, discrimination, and sexual harassment in the workplace, and supports workers to understand and access their labour rights.

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 the effective implementation of existing protections, including by engaging men and duty bearers, and supports local CSOs to improve access to GBV-related services. CARE is also strengthening the evidence base about GBV in Vietnam, which is then used to engage in national-level policy dialogue.

BOOSTING URBAN RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Urban areas in Vietnam are mainly concentrated in low-lying deltas and coastal areas, which are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and natural disasters such as typhoons and floods. CARE works with both the authorities and urban communities to support adaptation, prevention and preparedness measures which enable at-risk populations to become more resilient to the negative impacts of climate change.



©2015 Ngo Thị Mộng Linh

“I am proud to be a pioneer for women like me”

Linh is from the Mekong Delta in southern Vietnam. At the age of 14, despite working long hours to support her family whilst also studying, she had to leave school to enter full time work. At 17, she migrated to Ho Chi Minh City in search of more profitable work.

In Ho Chi Minh City, the opportunities were not as Linh expected. She worked in various shops and cafes, and eventually was drawn into sex work by the woman who owned the coffee shop where she worked. Linh rented a room with some friends, who were using drugs; she also began to use, and soon became addicted. After one of her friends died from an overdose, Linh resolved to get clean, but it was not easy. Getting married and having a child gave her the strength to stop using drugs for good.

“At night I worked in a bar, which meant I had to please the customers and drink endlessly. I lived in a rented room with some friends who were using drugs; I did not realise what was happening but I got addicted too.”

“Now I help women’s club managers and leaders of the Vietnam Sex Worker Network to support and protect many socially marginalised women in my country, by presenting ideas and raising the voice of female sex workers in national forums.”

Linh joined a We Are Women (WrW) club, an initiative supported by CARE and funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, which works to enable female sex workers across Vietnam to participate in policy dialogue about protection for sex workers against violence. The club also acts as a networking and support resource for the women, and holds training sessions on various life-skills. Linh developed her leadership skills and became the head of the WrW club, as well as a committee member for the Vietnam Sex Worker Network. She is now directly involved in national-level policy dialogue about the rights of female sex workers.

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