

Planning for gender equality in Vietnam

Between July 2012 and December 2015, CARE implemented a community-based adaptation project in Vietnam's Mekong Delta region. The "Integrated Community-based Adaptation in the Mekong region" (ICAM) project aimed to increase the capacity of communities to plan, adapt and respond to climate change and disasters.

CARE is well known for a long-term program approach that is grounded in ensuring that persistent inequalities in the relations between women and men are systematically addressed. This project was no different: through the use of participation and gender-responsive programming meaningful and active involvement of community members, partner organisations and government was created. In particular, CARE worked at a community level to ensure that women, especially ethnic minority women, were able to actively participate in the program and affect decision-making within their communities.

A Gender Action Plan was developed and implemented to support the achievement of gender-responsive goals. This plan formed the backbone of action to promote gender equality, and ways to measure progress. The plan included a variety of measures, including:

On-going investment in capacity building: CARE ensured a gender balance in community-based adaptation (CBA) trainers and facilitators (at provincial, district, and commune levels), with representatives across different organisations; it provided specific training for trainers and facilitators on gender, and gender-sensitive facilitation skills, as well as the integration of gender issues into other topics; and it organised an annual sharing and learning event, with specific sessions and documentation on gender.

Gender balance in activity implementation arrangements: CARE ensured that there was gender balance in all its activities; it held separate sex focus group discussions, facilitated by men (for men's group) and women (for women's group) to ensure that men and women had equal voice; it encouraged both male and female participants to speak equally in plenary discussions; and it ensured the times and locations of meetings and their venues were suitable for both men and women to maximise participation.



Gender was considered as part of the analysis of different livelihood options in the project. Credit: CARE.

Gender-sensitive CBA planning tools for village CBA planning: CARE integrated gender issues and questions into all its CBA planning tools; staff and partners reflected on differential needs and capacities after each exercise of the CBA planning; formats of action plans and CBA planning reports clearly reflected gendered needs and capacities and aim to

capture gender analysis; and it shared reports made on the planning process with key CBA decision makers in the commune and district to ensure they recognise the importance of gender considerations in planning processes.

As a result of CARE's project, communities and local authorities have improved capacity to undertake gender-sensitive analysis and planning for CBA and disaster risk reduction (DRR), and civil society (in particular, the project's partner, the Women's Union) has a solid foundation for the scale-up of community-based, equitable and gender-sensitive adaptation in the Mekong Delta.

The story of Ma Rim

One woman who benefitted from CARE's forward planning on gender equality in its project, was Ma Rim. Ma Rim is a Cham woman from An Giang province. Living and working on the rivers for decades, and being affected increasingly by volatile weather, has made life difficult for Ma Rim.

But in September 2013, Ma Rim, along with other Cham women, joined one of the many village climate change adaptation meetings organised by CARE, together with the local Women's Union. During these meetings, the women enthusiastically discussed past, current and future weather and climate trends, how they impacted their daily lives and community in different ways and what people could do about it. "Participating in these exercises was fun but has also taught me a lot about how and why the weather changes so much lately and how my village will be affected," says Ma Rim. "Since we had that meeting, I now know what to do and I listen more frequently to weather forecasts."

"Cham men and women are now more equal and I am more involved. I value the importance of knowledge and education much more, and I will pass this on to my children."

The village meetings also had an encouraging impact. "As an ethnic Cham woman, I have not previously been able to join these community meetings – and missed out on a lot of information. In the past, Cham women were always staying at home and not going to school. We were told what to do by our husbands."

Fortunately, things are changing for the better and meetings such as the ones supported by CARE have contributed to this change. Ma Rim confirms, "It's been very helpful for all of us Cham women. Now Cham men and women are more equal and I am more involved. I value the importance of knowledge and education much more which I will carry on to my children."

Success factors for enhancing resilience through gender equality

- A dedicated and competent management team that promoted a sustained focus on gender equality and women's empowerment
- Committed national staff who were keen to learn about and support gender equality and women's empowerment
- Use of community-based adaptation and disaster risk reduction as an entry point to address gender equality
- Targeting both women and men in gender and leadership training
- Promoting gender-responsive livelihood models
- Consistent efforts by field officers to encourage the attendance and active participation of women in project activities

- Separate focus groups discussions for women and men in project activities and participatory activities
- Partnering with the Women's Union who had unrestricted access to women in all communities.
- Confident and experienced women mobilisers within the community.

Glossary

CAPACITY BUILDING: Action to build the strength, attributes and resources available to individuals, communities, society or organisations that can be used to achieve agreed goals.

COMMUNITY-BASED ADAPTATION: CBA is an integrated approach, combining traditional knowledge with innovative strategies that not only address current vulnerability to climate change, but also build the resilience of people to face new and dynamic challenges.

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: DRR is a systematic approach that analyses and manages the causal factors of disasters through: reduced exposure to hazards, reduced vulnerability of people and assets, wise management of land and the environment, and improved preparedness for adverse events.

GENDER: Attitudes, feelings, and behaviours that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex.

GENDER EQUALITY: The equal enjoyment by women, girls, boys and men of rights, opportunities, resources and rewards.

GENDER SENSITIVE: Actions that recognise and respond to people's different gender-based needs and constraints.

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE: Actions that actively seek to build equitable social norms and structures in addition to individual gender-equitable behaviour.

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This case study was written by Charlotte L. Sterrett and is one of a series of cases studies based on learning from CARE Australia's disaster risk reduction and community-based adaptation programming in the Asia Pacific region in 2011-2015. The purpose of these case studies is to highlight and provide examples of the practical use of CARE's Gender Equality Framework in resilience-related programming.

Figure 1: CARE's Gender Equality Framework

