



PROMOTING WOMEN'S

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

WITH ETHNIC GROUPS

IN THE MEKONG

EVALUATION HIGHLIGHTS





In 2015, CARE Australia conducted a strategic evaluation into our Women's Economic Empowerment programming in the Mekong. The evaluation was jointly funded by CARE and the Australian Government through the Australia NGO Cooperation Program.

This report is one of three reports to emerge from the evaluation, the other two reports being the Vietnam Country Case Study report¹ and the Laos Country Case Study report².

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

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

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

Acronyms

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

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1. Executive Summary

1. Introduction: Women's economic participation and empowerment is increasingly viewed as a key factor contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and gender equality. At the same time, ethnicity is recognised as the single greatest determinant of vulnerability in the face of economic change in the Mekong region. Ethnic groups in the Mekong region tend to be acutely affected by changes in the natural resource base; the inability to compete in new agriculture and new commerce; and rapid cultural change. As a result they are often among the poorest and most marginalised segments of society³. Women from ethnic groups often face multiple challenges due to lower levels of literacy; limited access to and control over resources; limited mobility; limited access to networks; restrictive socio-cultural norms and widespread violence against women and girls. The overall gender equality context in the four countries is improving, but remains a challenge for ethnic women. In many cases this is complicated by the remote location that they live in and the close knit communities – which can act as a source of resilience for women, while at the same time constricting change and progress.

2. Objectives of the evaluation: This evaluation was commissioned by CARE Australia to assess women's economic empowerment (WEE) impact of projects in the Mekong region that work with remote ethnic groups. It aims to:

- Provide evidence of impact towards women's economic empowerment by providing evidence on the impact of CARE's work in the area of women's participation and economic empowerment with ethnic groups
- Contribute to learning on how to design and implement approaches that will contribute to women's economic empowerment -
- Contribute to and grow the documented evidence base in the WEE technical space

The evaluation report consists of this synthesis report covering 14 projects in Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar, and country case study reports for Laos and Vietnam. The main focus of the projects varied by country and project and ranged from efforts to improve nutrition and food security (through improved and diversified agriculture techniques and inputs, access to land and nutrition knowledge and skills), livelihoods and economic security, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) to UXO clearance and citizen participation in decision making. Aspects of women's economic empowerment (WEE) were part of the projects' approaches, but WEE was not the primary objective in any of the projects.

3. Methodology of the evaluation: The evaluation consisted of a desk review of all 14 projects documentation and evaluations and qualitative field work for one project each in Vietnam and Laos. The desk review and fieldwork used framework for analysing and presenting results and this consists of domains of change around economic advancement (increase in income, assets, and wellbeing), power and agency (knowledge and skills, self-confidence relations – e.g. family and community decision making – control over financial and physical assets, ability to organise with others) and structures, resources and social norms.

The desk review assessed documentation and evaluations for 14 projects for:

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

³ REF: TOR

Field work consisted of qualitative primary data collection over a four week period in Laos and then Vietnam. Focus groups, key information interviews and stories of change interviews were undertaken in four communities in each country.

Projects included in the evaluation

LAOS

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

VIETNAM

- Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion in Natural Resource Management, Phase II - CASI II
- Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion in Sustainable development for northern ethnic minorities Phase III - CASI III
- Participatory Community Development Project - PACODE
- Social Inclusion Economic Enterprise Development Project - SIEED
- Thai Nguyen Women's Economic Collaboration for Development - ECCODE

MYANMAR

- Southern Chin Livelihood Security Project (SCLSP)
- Women's Initiative Network (WIN)

CAMBODIA

- Cambodian Highlands Food Security – CHIFS
- Pailin Food Security Project - PFSP

4. Findings and learning: The 14 interventions reviewed for this evaluation have implemented different combinations of programming approaches to promote women's economic empowerment with varying levels of success. Most interventions have combined activities to promote women's increased engagement in economic or income earning activities with activities to build women's power, agency and solidarity. The evidence of programming impacts discussed in Chapter 4 indicates that this combined approach is necessary to facilitate changes in women's agency (i.e. skills, knowledge, confidence), together with the changes in relations (e.g. with their husbands, with other women, with their communities) and structures (including social norms and formal institutions) that are needed to sustain women's increased agency over the longer term so that they are able to achieve increased economic participation and empowerment.

The experiences of many of the CARE projects in the Mekong consistently show that as women begin to take on a more active role in economic activities and so begin to earn income and contribute more to household finances, so they are also able to begin to play a more active role in decision-making processes of their households and communities, thereby achieving further agency. As men (and other women) begin to see women as skilled and capable income earners, so they tend to respect and value women's views and contributions more, in what has the potential to become a mutually-reinforcing "virtuous circle" process of social change. Transformative processes of social norm change take time and require the on-going engagement of women, men and community leaders in processes of dialogue and collective action.

Several approaches were found to be particularly successful when combined.

Village savings and loans associations (VSLA) and promoting enhanced production and access to markets were successful at enhancing women's access to finance and involving women in income earning activities, sometimes for the first time. VSLA also acted as solidarity and learning groups for women.

Organisation and association – women’s collective action. Women’s groups appear to have been successful as they enhance both economic advancement and power and agency, often addressing some of the more pressing barriers that women face when trying to earn an income.

Practically-based training and learning approaches. Two interesting approaches to training and learning were used in the projects. (i) Peer to peer learning and cascading learning through villages. This presented women as teachers and thought leaders, so not only enhanced whole village learning, but also enhanced women’s status in the community. (ii) Learning by doing and observing. This mainly consisted of women taking part in study visits (e.g. DFSP study visits to Paksong coffee production) or being included in activities.

Working with mass organisations such as CSOs and the women’s union. This enabled a scaling up of activity so that the project activities could reach further than the project and built in sustainability.

Gender training and engaging men in initiatives to promote women’s economic empowerment. The inclusion of gender training and activities to promote men’s engagement in some project implementation strategies can be seen to have contributed towards changes in social norms that define (and often constrain) opportunities and decisions open to women.

Integrating economic approaches with SRHR, hygiene, access to water and sanitation as appropriate for the context. Where projects have managed to integrate these initiatives into the WEE approach there has been a more favourable change to women’s lives and wellbeing. This appears to impact on women’s ability to work and earn an income.

5. Gaps in WEE approach: Projects that were difficult to assess or that had limited outcomes for women tended to have been based on insufficient gender context analysis. This often meant that the barriers to women’s income earning and WEE had not been sufficiently identified. This then led to responses that could have been developed further. For example there was limited focus on women’s enterprise management, market and value chain analysis capability. Very few of the projects supported the development and strengthening of market linkages for men and women. Access to financial services was limited to VSLA in most cases and very few women were graduated to accessing larger loans or mainstream financial services from banks. There was also limited focus on development of women’s leadership skills more widely in the communities.

There was virtually no approach to enabling women’s mobility. Though a small number of projects were improving road quality, there were no transport cooperatives or bus services included in the projects. Nor was there any approaches to develop cluster market places in growth villages.

Data for analysing the impacts and achievements of interventions in evaluation reports was limited. In particular there was limited information on:

- Financial services and VSLA: Very little data on repayment rates and overall loan size by person, how many people were borrowing and how money was invested either in business or other.
- Limited analysis of the gender context and barriers to women’s participation in income earning
- Reliable data on enterprise health and income
- Social norm changes around gender equality and changes in women’s self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Levels of VAW, alcohol and drug abuse (Myanmar was the exception)

6. Recommendations

(i) Ensure that a thorough gender context analysis forms the basis of all project designs.

(ii) Integrate gender equality and women’s empowerment throughout project activities and project management.

(iii) Develop a more comprehensive approach to promoting women’s inclusion in private sector development. Continue to work on combined approaches that include initiatives to improve women’s

economic advancement alongside or combined with initiatives to improve power and agency. This should be based on the analysis of what women need in order to develop their income earning potential.

(iv) Integrate approaches for engaging men in projects designed to promote women's economic empowerment in ways that will challenge and transform social norms around gender equality and women's rights and promote men and women's improved understanding of gender relations

(v) Develop WEE approaches that integrate methods to tackle violence against women and children, violence more broadly, and alcohol and drug abuse. This will need to be based on assessments of violence in remote ethnic communities, social norms and community support systems.

(vi) Enhance regional exchange and learning to develop good practice for improving women's economic empowerment among ethnic women in the Mekong (WEEEM). There are some good examples of holistic approaches to WEE and these need to be shared and developed across the region. A coherent regional approach with some high level WEE indicators would improve the communication of WEE results across the region.

(vii) Clarify and enhance CARE's role in civil society strengthening, advocacy and accountability. This an important aspect of ensuring sustainability. Because civil society is not very strong in the region, and also they are often co-opted by government through funding approaches, it might be useful to focus almost entirely on gender equality and strengthening women's voice in processes.

(viii) Develop approaches that enhance income distribution and income equality in villages making sure that income inequality is not increased. Also assess the development of income inequality as projects progress and monitor the social capital and inequality dynamic.

(ix) Strengthen project and programme-level M&E processes based on appropriate mixed methods approaches.

1. Introduction



Caption: Pa Ar Village in Lung Khung Commune in Bar Keo District where CARE is activating its WASH program. Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

This report presents a synthesis of the findings from a strategic, ex post evaluation commissioned by CARE Australia to assess the impact and relevance of a sample of projects and programmes in promoting women’s economic empowerment among ethnic minority groups in the Mekong region. Women’s economic participation and empowerment (see Table 2 for framework) is increasingly viewed as a key factor contributing to the achievement of sustainable development and gender equality, as women who are income-earners tend to invest their earnings in assuring the well-being of their families, and are then more likely to be able to influence processes of decision-making within and beyond their households. At the same time, ethnicity is recognised as the single greatest determinant of vulnerability in the face of economic change in the Mekong region. Ethnic groups in the Mekong region tend to be acutely affected by changes in the natural resource base; the inability to compete in new agriculture and new commerce; and rapid cultural change, as a result of which they are often among the poorest and most marginalised segments of society⁴. Women from ethnic groups often face multiple challenges in lifting themselves out of poverty due to their lower levels of literacy; limited access to and control over resources; limited access to networks and restrictive socio-cultural norms.

In this context, CARE Australia recognises the need for programming in the Mekong region designed to take account of the specific needs of ethnic minority women for enhanced economic participation and empowerment. Over the past ten years CARE has developed considerable programme experience in the Mekong region in the area of economic participation and empowerment with women from ethnic

⁴ REF: TOR

minority groups, based on the implementation of a range of projects and programmes which have consistently focussed on including ethnic minority women in economic activities and/or mainstreaming gender equality. However, there has been no overall system or consistent approach over that period for the assessment of programming impacts relating to women's economic empowerment to inform organisational learning or policy engagement priorities at the regional level. This ex post evaluation of a sample of projects and programmes therefore provided an opportunity for CARE Australia to undertake a retrospective analysis of a range of programming experiences, with a view to promoting learning and the development of strategic recommendations for future programming relating to women's economic empowerment among ethnic minorities.

1.1 Evaluation Objectives

The evaluation was designed for the dual purpose of ensuring accountability and promoting evidence-based learning for strengthening future programming. The specific objectives of the evaluation were:

- **To provide evidence of project/ program impact** through identifying and documenting the range of significant changes (intended and unintended) that have occurred in the lives of women from ethnic groups resulting from selected CARE economic empowerment interventions. (Accountability); and
- **To identify good practice examples** that demonstrate program impact and sustainability of CARE's interventions in addressing economic participation and empowerment in the lives of women from ethnic groups (Evidence-based learning); and
- **To make recommendations** that contribute to effective and sustainable women's economic empowerment strategies, and ultimately improve future program impact. (Evidence-based learning).

The evaluation outputs generated to meet these objectives include two country case studies for Laos and Vietnam, in addition to the current synthesis report. The synthesis report presents a discussion of the impacts and experiences of CARE projects and programs reviewed across all four countries covered by the evaluation: Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar. As such, it is structured to provide:

- A descriptive overview of the programming approaches adopted by the interventions reviewed that were identified as relevant for promoting women's economic empowerment (Chapter 3);
- A qualitative assessment of the impacts or significant changes found to have taken place in the lives of women participating in those interventions (Chapter 4); and
- An analysis of the effectiveness of CARE programming approaches for women's economic empowerment, including identification of examples of good practice (Chapter 5), which forms the basis for a series of strategic recommendations for future programming presented in Chapter 6.

The synthesis report therefore aims to provide CARE Australia and the relevant country offices with reference material which can be used both for reporting back to donors and other stakeholders (including – potentially - the communities, partners NGOs and local government actors involved in project implementation), and to inform the strategic planning of future programming interventions in the region. The country case studies present more in-depth analyses of specific projects in the two countries visited for fieldwork (see Section 1.2.2 below), together with material from the literature review for interventions in those countries. As such, they are intended to provide country-specific perspectives that are complementary to the broader analysis presented in the current synthesis report.

1.2 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation used a mix of methods to address the objectives of the TOR. These included: a desk review of project documentation from 14 CARE Australia projects across the four Mekong countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam) and in-country qualitative primary data collection for two of the projects – one in Vietnam and one in Laos.

1.2.1 Document review

As part of the ex-post evaluation a desk review of project literature for interventions in four countries within the region was undertaken (Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia and Myanmar). The evaluation covered 14 projects implemented with ethnic minority groups across a range of sectors including food security, sexual and reproductive health (SRH), livelihoods and natural resource management, and economic development. Projects sampled for the evaluation were valued at over USD 25 million and encompassed a range of different programming approaches based on the inclusion of women in project and program activities to varying degrees. Table 1 presents summary information for the projects and programs reviewed (see Annex 1 for more details), including a brief assessment of the extent to which each intervention focussed on issues of gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

The selection of projects favoured older initiatives that had an established record of documentation, including evaluations. Many of these initiatives preceded CARE's gender equality and women's empowerment guidance and policies and, therefore did not reflect current programming frameworks.

Table 1: Summary Overview of Projects and Programs covered by the WEEM Evaluation Desk Review

Project name	Budget (USD)	Timing	Objective	Gender and WEE approach
LAOS		2005 - 2014		
PFSCBP – Phongsaly food security and capacity building project	980,000	Oct 2005 - Oct 2009	To sustainably increase food security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas in two districts in Phongsaly Province	There is no analysis of gender or women's roles in the project document. Only nutrition and health activities specifically mention women.
LANGOCA - Reducing UXO Risk and Improving Livelihoods of Ethnic Communities	2,600,921	May 2007 – 30 June 2014	Reduce vulnerability of ethnic communities in Sekong province through integration of UXO and poverty reduction strategies	One output specifically mentions women, but the others are gender blind
PARUA II - Poverty alleviation in remote upland areas	1,612,000	March 2008 - May 2012	To sustainably increase livelihood security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas.'	Well planned approach to inclusion of women and based on good analysis of context in Prai culture
DFSP - Dak Cheung Food Security Project	1,700,000	April 2010 to December 2013	To Increase food security particularly of the poorest, through expanding and diversifying income and food sources reducing vulnerability to natural and market based shocks	Women are included in most activities. Specific women's groups – WINGS - to address workload and time poverty and integration of women into other decision making forums.
PRDP - Phongsaly Rural Development project	388,882	1st January 2012 – 30th June 2013	To increase food and nutritional security of the poorest at household and community levels through facilitating the development of food and nutritional strategies and meaningful engagement in wider decision-making processes at local levels affecting their future food security	Targeted approach to inclusion of women through women's groups and integration throughout activities
VIETNAM		2004 - 2015		

Project name	Budget (USD)	Timing	Objective	Gender and WEE approach
CASI II - Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion in Natural Resource Management, Phase II	3,539,689	2004 - 2009	Sustainable improvements in livelihood security of disadvantaged and natural resource-dependent people in rural areas who lack access to resources and influence over decisions that affect their lives.	Programme design based on a detailed analysis of gender issues (including livelihood constraints). Components designed to reach the poorest, particularly women. Specific women's livelihood component (LARCs) to address rights issues.
CASI III - Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion in Sustainable development for northern ethnic minorities in Vietnam, Phase III	3,563,568	2010 - 2015	Marginalised ethnic minorities in northern Vietnam are enabled to determine and realise their own equitable and sustainable development, with dignity.	A rights-based programming initiative designed to address ethnic minorities' limited access and barriers to productive resources, services and markets, with a particular focus on women and girls. Gender mainstreaming across all components informed by detailed analysis.
PACODE – Participatory Community Development Project	2,890,070	2005 - 2009	To improve living conditions of poor communities with a large Khmer population in the Mekong Delta.	Group-based approach designed to address the needs and interests of poorer women, with focus on improving health, income and access to water and sanitation. Included a component for enhanced access to credit through establishment of credit and savings groups.
SIEED – Social Inclusion Economic Enterprise Development Project	1,350,000	July 2008 – March 2012	Poor rural producers participate in and benefit from Vietnam's economic growth post World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession.	Targeted approach for inclusion of EM women based on analysis of livelihood constraints. Market driven and group-based strategy, involving capacity-building for natural resource based production activities and VSLA.
ECCODE – Thai Nguyen Women's Economic Collaboration for Development	1,344,000	March 2008 – April 2012	To contribute to poverty reduction for the rural population of Thai Nguyen province by ensuring access to economic resources and influence over decisions that affect their lives	Targeted approach for inclusion women. Market-driven strategy: enabling poor rural women and men to engage in group-based economic activities/ small businesses and VSLA. Combined with capacity-building of local agencies for a more business oriented and market-based approach
MYANMAR		2008 - 2014		

Project name	Budget (USD)	Timing	Objective	Gender and WEE approach
SCLSP - Southern Chin Livelihood Security Project	3,400,100	Feb 2008 – Jan 2014	To improve the livelihood security of targeted communities in Mindat and Matupi Townships, southern Chin State.	This project aims to address the health effects of undernutrition by increasing access to food and increasing income so that food can be bought. Livestock banks, women's groups and VSLA are used to build up women's confidence, while enhancing food security and income. Various Activity tasks were exclusively managed and implemented by women, supported by the village Women's Group together with Activity staff and partners.
WIN – Women's Initiative Network	356,812	2009 – 2014	to increase voices, decision making and social well-being of women in Northern Shan State, Myanmar	Very specific focus on women - this is a gender project. Mostly around SRHR, but also VSLA and inclusion in decision making. Community social norm change through training and community activities as well as women's inclusion in decision making aimed to contribute to improvements in women's wellbeing.
CAMBODIA		2008 - 2010		
CHIFS - Cambodian Highlands Food Security	649,992	May 2008 - December 2010	To improve livelihood security of vulnerable households in Ratanakiri Province.	Designed to support improvements in agricultural productivity and build capacity of local institutions for community development activities. No analysis of gender issues or women's roles. Indicators are phrased in terms of household level impacts and are not gender disaggregated.
PFSP - Pailin Food Security Project	782,902	Jan 2007 – Mar 2010	To minimise the vulnerabilities of target population (the poorest and most vulnerable of migrant families) by improving the food security and income opportunities.	Project focussed improved food security, income and strengthening local institutions to engage in and manage community development activities. Not designed to address gender inequality or promote WEE.

The majority of interventions reviewed were not specifically or explicitly designed to promote women’s economic empowerment, although several did aim to promote the inclusion of ethnic minority women in economic activities by means of a gender mainstreaming approach, while others included activities or components designed to promote positive changes in women’s power and agency.

Project documentation was assessed for the following:

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

Table 2 sets out the conceptual framework for recording results and progress towards women’s economic empowerment that was used to systematically record findings from the project and program documents reviewed. This framework uses the ICRW definition of women’s economic empowerment⁵ in combination with the three domains of change from the CARE women’s empowerment framework. The combined framework articulates the kinds of changes in agency, relations and structures that determine how and to what extent women are able to participate in and benefit from economic activities and opportunities. As such it can be seen as a means of “unpacking” the broader domains of change from CARE’s existing WEF in a way that focusses attention specifically on the economic aspects of women’s empowerment.

Table 2: Evaluation Analysis Framework - Women’s Economic Empowerment

Economic Advancement	
Economic activity	Increase in sources of income and income earning activity
Income	Increase in income, who earns and controls the income (including activity and decision making around sales)
Asset ownership	Land, livestock, equipment Whether owned by husband, wife, family or both
Access to financial services	Credit, savings, insurance, VSLA
Employment opportunities	Working for others, MSMEs, formal/informal
Household wellbeing	Changes in children’s education, nutrition, health
Power and Agency	
Agency (Power within)	
Knowledge and skills	Understanding of business, sales, marketing, or even basic arithmetic for recording income and expenses. Knowledge of and ability to use national language
Confidence and self esteem	Ability to speak up, be assertive and to make decisions. Belief in own abilities and value.
Aspirations	Ability to see beyond the current situation and aspire to increase economic activity or to generate different types of activity.
Ability to take advantage of opportunities	Sense of power and self-determination and authority to see opportunities and act on them

⁵ ICRW (2011) Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment. Definition, Framework and Indicators. Anne Marie Golla, Anju Malhotra, Priya Nanda, Rekha Mehra. ICRW

Relations (Power to, power with and power over)	
Decision making	Economic decision making around assets, income and expenditure; life and household decisions (including, for example, use of family planning).
Control of financial, physical or knowledge based assets	Sole or joint decision-making power over assets. Ownership of assets
Ability to organise with others	Ability to enhance economic activities and rights
Household relations	Including violence against women, men's engagement with and contribution towards household chores and childcare, male household members' and family support for and positive appreciation of women's engagement in economic activities.
Structures, resources and social norms	
Village social norms	Social norms, attitudes and behaviour in relation to women's economic activities and inclusion of women in decision making at village level (including and listening to their voices)
Institutional social norms	Including government institutions and organisations
Access to resources	Agricultural inputs, water, power, training and education resources
Markets and value chains	Inclusion of women in new roles (e.g. sales and marketing), social norms and information, leadership
Changes in the physical environment	Including time saving infrastructure and equipment, and physical changes and resources to improve security (e.g. UXO clearance)
Laws and policies	Changes in relevant laws and regulations to improve women's rights – particularly in relation to ownership of assets, business and access to finance.

1.2.2 Country Field Visits

The evaluation team undertook country field visits to Laos and Vietnam. The field visits provided the opportunity to supplement information obtained from country program and project documents through interviews and group discussions with CARE International staff, program and project partners; wider stakeholders and project participants. The visits were valuable for direct observation of program implementation, context and interaction with participants. Qualitative primary data collection took place over a two week period in each country. The field work focused on a project each in Laos and Vietnam and used similar methodology and adapted evaluation questions and tools. A full description of the methodology and its limitations can be found in the Country Case Study documents.

Table 3: Summary of fieldwork activity

	Laos	Vietnam
Project	Dak Cheung Food Security Project (DFSP)	The Thai Nguyen Women's Economic Collaboration for Development (ECCODE) project
Geographical area	Dak Cheung district, Sekong province, in a southern mountainous region	Dinh Hoa district, Thai Nguyen province in the northern mountainous region

Number of villages or communes	4 villages	4 communes
Number of focus groups	16 plus 2 test focus groups	24 plus 2 test focus groups
Key informant interviews	Village level Lao women’s union representative, village head, leaders of various groups, including irrigation group, coffee group, where relevant, teacher or health worker, WINGS leader and facilitator, government representatives	Commune and district level Women’s Union representatives, farmer trainers who had been involved in the delivery of project activities, village leaders and, where possible, individual members of the cooperation groups visited
Stories of change (SOC) interviews	6 in each of the first two villages and 3 each in the other two villages. Total = 18	2 in one village ⁶ .

1.3 Limitations

The process of data collection for the evaluation generated a considerable volume of primary and secondary material relevant to the analysis, but several factors need to be taken into account when considering the quality of the data from the reports. In particular it is important to recognise that the analysis and conclusions in this report are based largely on qualitative data. The fieldwork was entirely qualitative and most of the evaluations studied in the document review had either limited or no quantitative data. It is therefore important to bear in mind that while the synthesis report presents comprehensive information as to the nature of changes that have taken place in the different project and program contexts, and also aims to explore how and why those changes have taken place, it is not always possible to clearly attribute the findings to CARE’s work.

Analysis of project and evaluation documents in the deskwork was hampered by the variable quality of evaluation reports in all countries. A lack of gender disaggregated data was particularly noted in Cambodia and a small number of the Laos documents. This meant that, though projects may well have been designed and implemented to have an impact on women’s economic empowerment, there was not sufficient gender disaggregated data and gender analysis to be able to draw some of the detailed conclusions expected from the reports.

The following limitations of the fieldwork should be noted:

- **Sampling** – it was not possible to organise random sampling as the project and the village or commune heads were involved in choosing participants.
- **Non-participants** – the methodology was planned to include some focus groups with people who had not participated in the CARE project to be able to compare progress and change. This was not possible in Laos due to the number of overlapping projects and village size whereby the majority of villagers had been involved in some way. In Vietnam a number of non-participant FGDs were undertaken, but were from different communities so may not have been representative of the same population profile.
- **Language and interpretation** – Interpretation from Lao or Vietnamese into English and vice versa lost some detail along the way, particularly with word like “empowerment”, which had to be

⁶ During the fieldwork in Vietnam SOC interviews were scheduled to be held immediately after the FGDs but this did not work as by the end of a two hour discussion most informants were tired and unwilling to provide an additional individual interview. On the third day of the fieldwork the team attempted to address this problem by holding individual interviews in parallel with the FGDs resulting in the collection of two SOCs in one village.

translated as “strengthening” in Lao due to political issues. There were also multiple levels of translation in Lao as local languages differed by village.

- Culture of communications – the village and commune cultures influenced the way focus group participants communicated and there was a fair amount of peer influencing, particularly among the men in Laos. Interestingly this was broken up a bit when the spokes exercise was taking place.
- Attribution – The Lao study area had experienced a number of CARE projects, all of which influenced the change taking place in the villages. It was therefore not possible to attribute findings to just one project. In Vietnam it was clear that the ECCODE project had been implemented in a district which was experiencing an ongoing process of rapid economic development, the effects of which had inevitably influenced the outcomes of the intervention itself.

2. Regional context for ethnic women

The overall gender equality context in the four countries is improving, but remains a challenge for ethnic women. In many cases this is complicated by the remote locations that they live in and the close knit communities – which can act as a source of resilience for women, while at the same time constricting change and progress.



Caption: Pa Ar Village in Lung Khung Commune in Bar Keo District where CARE is activating its WASH program. Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

2.1 Laos

Laos has a population of 6.8 million, of whom 80% live in rural areas. Although economic growth in the country has averaged 7.9% over the last 5 years and poverty rates have steadily decreased from 46% of the population in the early 1990's to 28% in 2010, rural poverty remains a major challenge. The majority of the people in Laos who live in remote rural areas belong to ethnic groups, and there is a strong but complex link between poverty and ethnicity. Though non-Lao-Tai groups account for only one-third of the national population, they make up more than half of the poor. Remote ethnic groups face many challenges including: language barriers, geographic isolation and limited access to services like markets, education and healthcare. Rural and ethnic minority women face particular disadvantage, due to low status and unequal rights, opportunities and poor access to health and education. They are often confined to the household, with heavy workloads, and experience a high risk of gender-based violence. Women in remote ethnic communities also tend to have low levels of self-confidence and to lack support within the community or through social networks.

The five CARE Laos projects reviewed as part of this evaluation were all implemented in areas considered to be remote rural areas where ethnic minority groups make up a significant proportion of the population. Three of the five projects (the Phongsaly Food Security and Capacity-Building Project, PFSCB, the Phongsaly Rural Development Project, PRDP, and the Poverty Alleviation in Remote Upland Areas project, PARUA II) were implemented in Phongsaly and Sayboul in the north, while the Dak Cheung Food Security Project (DFSP) and LANGOCA projects were implemented in Sekong Province in the south. The northern upland areas of Laos are home to a range of remote ethnic communities including Prai, Khmu, Phounoy, different Akha, Tai Lue and Hor with diverse cultures, languages and customs. The southern province of Selong is home to remote ethnic communities of Talieng and Katu.

In some of these areas there were limited sources of income before the CARE Projects were started and much food was sourced from the forests and own cultivation, especially rice. There were different levels of food insecurity and poor nutrition in the provinces, with food shortages often occurring towards the end of the dry season in many villages. In Sekong province this phenomenon has led to chronic malnutrition with an estimated prevalence of moderate and severe stunting of 67.3%, with severe stunting prevalence of 31.3%⁷. Poor cooking methods and food hygiene also pose a problem for children's health and nutrition⁸.

Recently communities have opened out their connections with neighbouring villages and towns, not least because of the CARE projects, but also because of improved communications (roads) and services. This has led to more opportunities for women to come into contact with the Lao language and with people from other cultures. However there are on-going risks from unexploded ordinances (UXOs), a particular problem in Sekong province, but affects the whole of Lao, being the country with the largest number of UXOs in the world – affecting 25% of villages.

2.2 Vietnam

Vietnam has undergone a socio-economic transformation in terms of its development over the last 25 years and is now categorised as a lower middle income country, ranking 127 out of 187 in terms of the 2012 Human Development Index, with an average per capita life expectancy of 75.4 years and an average per capita gross national income of US \$2,970⁹. Economic growth in Vietnam averaged 5.8% over the period 2010-2014 and the national level poverty rate declined from 58% in the early 1990s to 14.5% by

⁷ CARE (2011), Dak Cheung Food Security Project. Participatory diagnostic on current nutritional understandings and traditional practices associated with food, infant weaning and feeding and associated health issues. Project report by Jill Moloney MIPH, Midwife, BN to CARE International in Laos (August 2011)

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ UNDP (2013), Human Development Report.

2008 and was estimated as being well below 10% by 2010¹⁰. However, poverty reduction in rural areas, where 71% of the population of 89.7 million live, has been slower than in urban areas, and the persistent poverty of ethnic minority groups is a major concern. Although Vietnam's 53 ethnic minority groups make up less than 15 per cent of the population, they accounted for 47% of the poor in 2010, as compared with 29% in 1998. Existing data show that 52% of the nearly 10 million people who are classified as ethnic minorities continue to experience poverty, hunger and food insecurity, while ethnic Vietnamese (known as *Kinh*) and Chinese households experience a poverty rate of only 10 percent¹¹. The incidence of rural poverty is spatially correlated with the distribution of ethnic minority populations and so is particularly high in the Vietnam's highland and mountainous areas, especially in the northern regions of the country.

The four CARE Vietnam programming interventions reviewed here were all implemented in areas where ethnic minority groups make up a high proportion of the population. Three of the four interventions (the ECCODE and SIEED projects and several components of the CASI II programme) were implemented in the northern mountainous regions of Vietnam, while the PACODE programme was implemented in the southern provinces of An Giang and Soc Trang, which have a large Khmer population. The northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam are home to a range of remote ethnic communities, including the Tay, Nung, Hmong, Dao and Thai, with diverse cultures, languages and customs. Some of these groups (e.g. the Tay and Muong) have achieved higher levels of assimilation with the *Kinh* ethnic majority and have similar lifestyles (e.g. patriarchal societies, lowland cultivators and good Vietnamese language skills) and so have been able to make more developmental gains than others¹².

Since the late 1990s the Government of Vietnam has implemented a series of programmes designed to address the poverty and marginalisation of ethnic minority groups. So, for example, Socio-Economic Development Programme for Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas Programme 135 Phase II (P135-II) for communes in mountainous and remote areas with special difficulty specifically targets the eradication of hunger and poverty reduction among Vietnams ethnic groups, by means of activities relating to preferential credit, agriculture production, provision of productive land for poor ethnic households, agricultural-forestry-fishery extension, vocational training, access to social services (health care, education, housing and clean water, legal support), infrastructure development and capacity building for community participation. Policies and legislation incorporating values of gender equality and participation, such as the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women and the Grassroots Democracy Decree have also been developed.

The existence of this supportive policy and legislative framework notwithstanding, women in Vietnam remain disadvantaged in terms of poverty incidence both as household members and as heads of female-headed households. Women have fewer opportunities of access to technology, credit and training, have less right in family decision-making and are paid lower than men for the same work, while often bearing a disproportionately heavy burden of housework. Women with limited levels of education are at greater risk of infant and maternal mortality. Domestic violence is widespread to the extent that over half of all Vietnamese women (58%) experience physical, mental or sexual violence at some point in their lives¹³.

Gender inequality is recognised as one of the key underlying causes of poverty among ethnic minority groups, as a result of socio-cultural practices which define and compound the vulnerability and marginalisation of ethnic minority women and girls. Among many ethnic minority groups women's status is largely defined by their reproductive, caring and household roles. Gendered social structures and strongly patriarchal norms and practices (including cultural norms around marriage) mean that ethnic women experience multiple deprivations which often take the forms of: unequal access to education and training; limited or lack of voice in decision-making within their households and communities; limited engagement and visibility/ recognition in the public sphere; limited access to productive resources such

¹⁰ World Bank (2015), Vietnam Overview: (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview>)

¹¹ Ibid. p 19

¹² Baulch et al, *Ethnic minority development in Vietnam: a socio-economic perspective*. World Bank Policy Research Paper. Washington, DC: World Bank. 2002

¹³ National Study on Domestic Violence against Women released in 2010 cited in UN factsheet on women

as land and credit; limited mobility outside the household, heavy workloads and an extended working day and high levels of domestic violence.

2.3 Myanmar

Myanmar is one of the poorest countries in South East Asia, along with Cambodia and Laos and is one of the 49 least developed countries in the world. The 2014 UN Human Development Index¹⁴ ranked Myanmar 150th out of 177 countries assessed, with an average life expectancy of 65.2 years, and per capita GDP of US\$3,998. Myanmar is ranked 83 in the Gender Inequality Index and women have very limited representation and influence in decision-making processes at the national level as they hold only 4.6% of seats in parliament, and have great difficulty expanding into traditionally male-dominated forms of employment. They receive lower pay than men for the same labour, and play no formal role in local village development structures. Reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, the trafficking of women and girls, drug use and environmental degradation are other important issues with significant gender dimensions, which often negatively affect the lives of women and girls living in Myanmar. Men have greater control over resources and access to decision-making than women, while there is resistance to recognising the potential of women at all levels and the vital role that they could play to contribute to development¹⁵.

There are 135 officially recognised ethnic groups in Myanmar, many with different customs and social norms, as a result of which it is hard to generalise about gender inequality among the different groups. Overall however, it is recognised that ethnic women living in remote communities have very little power and are not usually involved in community decision making. Because public services have low coverage and are poor quality, women suffer from poor sexual and reproductive health with maternal mortality rates estimated at 200 per 100,000 live births¹⁶

Projects reviewed by this evaluation were implemented in Shan and Chin states. Ethnic groups in Chin state where SCLSP is implemented, have a clan and patrilineal structure. The communities were animist, but are now 90% evangelical Christian. Men tend to be responsible for the heavy manual tasks, such as clearing land, and women are responsible for the remaining production tasks including weeding and rearing small livestock. Women are also responsible for reproductive tasks, caring and many aspects of community activities and have little decision making power or access to productive assets. However this is changing as there are more reports of women inheriting land. Family size is large and young people migrate to earn an income. In target communities of the WIN project drug use is widespread and was highlighted by women as being their issue of greatest concern, given the debilitating effect it has on their families (mostly male members), the financial impact, and the serious health threats associated with it.

2.4 Cambodia

Cambodia has made rapid progress in terms of national development in recent years and is now categorised as a country of medium human development. As such, it is ranked 138 out of 187 in terms of the 2013 HDI, with a per capita life expectancy of 63.6 years and a per capita gross national income of US 2,095¹⁷. In 2014, the estimated rate of real economic growth for the country was 7% and this positive trend is projected to continue at a slightly slower rate of 6.9% for 2015 to 2016¹⁸. The national poverty rate has dropped from 52% to 21% over the past decade and is now reported at just under 18% of the population, some 3 million people, with a further 8.1 million people reported as being near poor. The country has also experienced significant advances in human development, including improvements in literacy, nutrition and infant and maternal mortality.

Despite these achievements, Cambodia still ranks amongst the least developed countries, and a number of key challenges remain. While economic growth has been rapid, this has been achieved through a very

¹⁴ UNDP 2014 (<http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr14-report-en-1.pdf>), Human Development Report, UNDP.

¹⁵ Extract from WIN Project design document "Revised WIN Programme Document" November 2011

¹⁶ According to Trends in MMR 1990 – 2013, WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, The World Bank 2014

¹⁷ UNDP (2013), Human Development Report

¹⁸ World Bank (2015), Cambodia Overview: (<http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/cambodia/overview>)

narrow base, highly reliant on garment manufacturing, tourism, construction and agriculture, leaving Cambodia vulnerable to global and regional economic shocks, and natural disasters. Growth has not translated into sufficient employment growth to meet demand, has not been inclusive for women, and income inequality is growing. Human development indicators remain low relative to the region, and there are substantial disparities in health indicators, education outcomes and employment opportunities across different areas of the country. Poverty is predominantly a rural phenomenon, such that 90% of those categorised as living below the poverty line live in rural areas¹⁹.

Ethnic minority women in Cambodia are at risk of being left behind in national processes of economic change and subject to new vulnerabilities resulting from development. In particular, ethnic minority women are considered to have limited livelihood options, with many long standing options being eroded through loss of land or access to forests, coupled with inequitable participation in local market-based options. Where ethnic minority women take on jobs, these are largely on low-paid or undervalued areas of work. Ethnic minority women in Cambodia also experience a range of common vulnerabilities which include very low voice in decision making; inequitable education status; poor health; high levels of gender based violence; and very high workloads. Responses from the institutional, legal and policy environments are generally weak, ethnic minority and gender-blind, and often serve to reinforce discriminatory practice and exclusion²⁰.

The projects reviewed were implemented in Ratanakiri province and Pailin municipality of the Northwestern province. At the time of the CHIFS project design indigenous people in Ratanakiri province were considered to be marginalised and vulnerable because of their geographic location and lack of access to services, their inability to speak Khmer and chronic food insecurity. Population growth and several resettlement waves of Khmers from other parts of Cambodia had increased the population pressure in the province. Pailin municipality was acknowledged as one of the most mine and UXO casualty affected areas of the Cambodia. Since 1998, unclaimed fertile agricultural land has attracted large numbers of people to Pailin, such that new in-migrants in the years 1993 to 1998 constituted almost half of the province's population in those five years. Many of those migrants had been displaced by past conflicts or by natural disasters and were amongst the most vulnerable and poor of the Cambodian population. Several vulnerability analyses, field surveys and national statistics indicated that at the time of the PFSP design process nearly 70 % of Pailin's population was categorized as 'worst off' in terms of food security²¹.

¹⁹ CARE Cambodia (2014), Ethnic Minority Women (EMW) Program CARE Cambodia Priorities: 2014-2019. CARE Cambodia: August 2014

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Note: The CHIFS and PSFP project design documents do not provide any gender analysis of the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women in the two project working areas.

3. CARE Programming Approaches for promoting Women’s Economic Empowerment



Caption: Pa Ar Village in Lung Khung Commune in Bar Keo District where CARE is activating its WASH program. Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

This chapter presents an overview of the key programming approaches relevant to promoting women’s economic empowerment that were identified from the desk review of literature for the selection of 13 interventions across the region. As such, it provides the foundation for the assessment of evidence of programming impacts which follows in Chapter 4. Table 4 below maps out – by county and intervention – where the various programming approaches were utilised and so aims to give the reader a sense of which approaches were most widely implemented and in which combinations. The narrative that follows then gives a descriptive analysis of how the approaches were implemented by selected interventions in the different country contexts.

As noted earlier it is important to recognise that CARE’s thinking and programming relating to women’s empowerment and specifically women’s economic empowerment has evolved significantly in the time since some of the interventions reviewed were designed and implemented. Most of the more recent projects, such as WIN in Myanmar, PRDP in Laos and CASI III in Vietnam, have been designed using a more in-depth gender context analysis and so include components or activities specifically designed to address the barriers that women face in improving their income earning potential. Some of the earlier projects such as PSFP and CHIFS in Cambodia and PFSCBP and LANGOCA in Laos, had very limited gender context analysis and so appear not to have been designed based on an understanding of the barriers that women face in ethnic minority communities. Consequently these projects were not specifically focussed on promoting women’s economic empowerment, although they included women as participants in activities designed to promote economic development.

Table 4: Mapping of programming approaches for WEE by country and project

Programming Approach	Domain of Change	VIETNAM	LAOS	CAMBODIA	MYANMAR
<i>Promoting access to financial services through VSLA</i>	Economic advancement	All interventions: PACODE, ECCODE, SIEED & CASI	LANGOCA and PARUA II had some revolving funds	PFSP (Seed credit & savings groups)	Both projects (WIN, SCLSP)
<i>Facilitating the establishment of cooperatives or group-based small enterprises</i>	Economic advancement	ECCODE, SIEED & CASI	DFSP (Coffee groups), PFSCBP (Marketing groups and livestock banks), PARUA II (village enterprise)	No	SCLSP (community forestry), WIN (village level IGA)
<i>Enhancing production of cash crops, livestock, fish, horticulture and/or forestry</i>	Economic advancement	ECCODE, SIEED & CASI	All	Both projects (CHIFS, PFSP)	WIN
<i>Promoting access to markets</i>	Economic advancement	ECCODE, SIEED	DFSP, PRDP, LANGOCA	Both projects (CHIFS, PFSP)	SCLSP, WIN
<i>Increasing access to and control over productive assets (community, family or individual)</i>	Economic Advancement	No	PFSCBP, DFSP	No	SCLSP (advocacy and transfer process to gain control over forestry, access to land and livestock banks)
<i>Addressing women's workload</i>	Power & Agency	No	All	No	SCLSP
<i>Enhancing women's knowledge & skills</i>	Power & Agency	All	All	Both CHIFS & PFSP provided training to men & women	All
<i>Facilitating women's participation in local governance & decision-making processes</i>	Power & Agency	PACODE, CASI LARC	LANGOCA and DFSP (project and village level), PRDP	Not an explicit focus of either CHIFS or PFSP	SCLSP (forestry)

	(Relations & Structures)		(local government), PARUA II (Community level)		
<i>Women's groups</i>	Power and Agency, Relations and social norms		DFSP, PRDP		WIN, SCLSP
<i>Gender training for men and women</i>	Power & Agency (Relations)	ECCODE, SIEED to limited extent (leaders & partners)	DFSP	No	Both projects
<i>Capacity-building of CBOs and/or local partners</i>	Power & Agency (Structures)	All	PRDP, PFSCBP	Both projects (CHIFS, PFSP)	WIN, SCLSP
<i>Inclusion of government stakeholders in approaches & trainings</i>	Power & Agency (Structures)	CASI, PACODE and ECCODE, SIEED to some extent.	DFSP, PRDP	Both projects (CHIFS, PFSP)	No

3.1 Approaches for promoting economic advancement

Promoting women's access to finance has been a key strategy across the majority of projects reviewed in the region. In Vietnam and Myanmar this has been achieved mainly through the establishment of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), as well as through promoting linkages to the formal banking system, such as in ECCODE. So in Vietnam, the LARC component of the CASI II program in Vietnam mobilised a local government bank to increase women's access to credit; the PACCODE program also included a savings and credit component which provided financing for productive activities with small loans, and the ECCODE and SIEED projects also facilitated VSLAs primarily targeting women, both within cooperation groups and as stand-alone initiatives. In Myanmar, the WIN project and SCLSP both facilitated the setting up of VSLA primarily for women.

Cooperatives or group-based small enterprises were set up by projects in Vietnam and Laos in order to improve production, access markets or purchase inputs. For example the ECCODE project in Vietnam formed both formally registered collaboration groups and informal interest groups of men and women for the development of various income-generating activities, including livestock husbandry, tea cultivation, mushroom cultivation and rice noodle production. The SIEED project in Vietnam supported poor women and men from ethnic minority groups to form interest and collaboration groups and to engage in market-based production activities, as opposed to their traditional subsistence-based strategies. The majority of participants of interest and collaboration groups established by the ECCODE and SIEED projects were women. In Laos, the DFSP set up coffee groups in some villages to support nurseries, plantation, processing and marketing of coffee – which was a new cash crop for many of the ethnic communities. The DFSP groups always included one or two women.

Increasing production of cash crops, livestock, fish and horticulture was central to twelve of the fourteen interventions reviewed. The aim of this approach was to both increase levels and sources of income and to improve food security and sources of food. All of the projects except for PACCODE in Vietnam and WIN in Myanmar included some combination of activities to promote enhanced production based on:

- Improved crop production methods for crops such as rice, cassava, coffee
- Water harvesting and better water management and irrigation
- Improving post-harvesting techniques and value addition,
- Supporting extension services, including vaccination of animals
- Promoting and improving income diversification through home gardening, fish ponds, and livestock raising,
- Clearing unexploded ordinances (UXO) so that land could be used

The extent to which women were targeted as participants in these activities varied between projects. DFSP, LANGOCA and PRDP in Laos and all of the Vietnam projects had explicit targeting strategies to ensure women were able to take part in enhanced production activities. The CHIFS and PFSP projects in Cambodia were gender-blind in terms of their targeting strategies and had no indicators of gender-disaggregated impacts, although they did include women heads of household in project activities. The PFSP final evaluation reported commented that “there is a fair degree of project responsiveness to gender issues” noting in particular the relevance of homestead activities and the nutrition component to women's needs.

A small number of projects did promote women's access to and control over assets though it did not always take the form of individual women's ownership. The most common approaches were to ensure women's inclusion in community owned assets or group assets such as livestock banks (SCLSP in Myanmar, PFSCBP and PRDP in Laos) and forestry leases (SCLSP in Myanmar). Individual assets such as land were provided to poor and landless in SCLSP in Myanmar, but there is no information as to whether this was successfully transferred to women. In most of the ethnic communities major assets, including

land, were either family or village owned, so it would be rare for women to have sole ownership or control. With the exception of the CASI II LARCs there was little evidence of programming promoting women's land rights.

In some of the other interventions which were promoting increased agricultural productivity, women were encouraged to control assets such as horticulture gardens, fish ponds (in some cases). Families were also given livestock in some of the nutrition projects such as LANGOCA and DFSPP in Laos. This was usually small animals, such as ducks and chickens, as they were more acceptable as women's livestock. Labour saving assets such as handcarts were given directly to women by all of the projects in Laos directly. Rice mills were given to communities to manage with the involvement of women.

Control over some productive assets was promoted through women's groups and associations – and this was particularly apparent in DFSP, PARUA II in Laos and in WIN in Myanmar. Some examples of women owned small businesses were identified for the ECCODE and SIEED projects in Vietnam, and all of the women's VSLA groups are in theory women controlled assets (though this was found to differ in practice – see section 4).

Several projects in Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia aimed to **improve women's access to markets**, but this was done almost entirely by increasing or diversifying produce types, and in some interventions was not driven by market knowledge. For example, in Laos the sale of new non-timber forest products (NTFP) were introduced in communities where NTFP collection had previously been used for subsistence purposes. The DFSP encouraged villagers to collect and sell *Doklai* (a herb from the forest) as there was high demand among Vietnamese traders. Physical access to markets was a major constraint identified in many of the projects, and yet only a small number of projects had activities to address this and this was mostly to do with improvement of roads. Group activity sometimes aimed to facilitate procurement of inputs and marketing of produce in bulk, which should have enabled a different kind of commercial relationship with buyers.

3.2 Approaches for promoting women's power and agency

Strengthening women's knowledge and skills was a key approach for twelve of the interventions reviewed in Laos, Vietnam and Myanmar (see Table 4). Training and capacity strengthening was done with and through local civil society and community based organisations in the CASI II and PACODE programs, and the SIEED and ECCODE projects in Vietnam; through direct training and study visits which included women, as in DFSP and PRDP in Laos; and through peer-to-peer training or cascading, as in DFSP, PRDP, ECCODE. Training and capacity strengthening inputs included:

- Financial literacy training by PRDP in Laos
- Livelihoods training by LARC II in Vietnam
- Technical agriculture and processing skills – which included women in DFSP (e.g. coffee processing), LANGOCA, PRDP in Laos and ECCODE and SIEED in Vietnam
- Veterinary skills trainings by PRDP and PFSCBP in Laos (although some of these did not include women).
- Language, literacy and numeracy training – LANGOCA
- Wellbeing training - Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), HIV awareness, hygiene, nutrition, cooking. PFSCBP provided nutrition and SRHR training. DFSP in Laos provided training on hygiene, nutrition and cooking through the women's groups. PFSP Cambodia promoted good nutrition, diet diversification, better infant feeding practices, and positive health seeking behaviours. Nutrition education was implemented by model mothers in the community using innovative behaviour change approaches. LANGOCA in Laos provided nutrition and SRHR and HIV awareness training.

- Life skills and gender training. WIN in Myanmar provided interpersonal skills and life training and SRHR training for women through the VSLA. Gender training was also provided in Laos in the region where DFSP was implemented, but it is likely that this was undertaken by SFSP, a follow project straight after DFSP. It was picked up in the fieldwork.
- Building awareness of women's rights (e.g rights to land and basic services in LARC)

Women's groups were established by interventions in Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar as mechanisms for building women's voice and solidarity, and strengthening women's participation in decision-making processes both within and beyond their households. For example the Livelihood And Rights Clubs (LARCs) established by the CASI II program in Vietnam were established to increase women's awareness of their rights relating to civil law, land law and gender equality, as the basis for those groups to engage in local planning processes. The PACODE program facilitated a participatory process to enable poor, Khmer women organised into Women's Development Groups to contribute to Community Development Action Plans drawn up at village level for funding through the commune-level Socio-Economic Development Plan (SEDP). **Women's groups also aimed to identify and address barriers that women face** in earning an income and improving wellbeing, most frequently by introducing participatory processes in women's groups to identify work burden issues and find solutions. This was done by DFSP WINGS groups and women in many villages had been given handcarts and rice mills as a consequence. LANGOCA, PARUA II and PRDP also formed women's groups and addressed work burden barriers. In Vietnam women's groups were widely established as a mechanism for addressing access to credit as a barrier to women's economic engagement.

3.3 Approaches for promoting changes in structures and social norms

There was limited consideration of the social norms shaping gender relations in the project design documents and assessments reviewed for this evaluation, and the CARE women's empowerment framework was not widely referred to. Although five of the interventions reviewed were designed and being implemented prior to the development of CARE's WEF, it is nonetheless striking that the WIN project in Myanmar was the only more recently designed intervention that used the framework explicitly to identify expected project outcomes. Consequently there was limited information available on the programming approaches used for promoting changes in social norms and other institutions.

Projects in Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam however all included some form of **gender training with men and women**. WIN in Myanmar provided several forms of gender training.

- Couple's Forums: 57 couples took part in "couple's forums". Their feelings, desires, expectations and perceptions on domestic violence and family affairs surfaced through the discussions held during the forums. Good relationships and mutual understanding between husbands and wives were enhanced as a result, as well as husbands' understanding of and respect for their wives, helping to reduce conflict in the families.
- Men's forums and gender awareness raising sessions with village leaders, religious leaders, significant persons, youth, as well as married and unmarried men in all project villages. 497 men were involved in men's forums on a monthly basis.
- 40 male 'positive deviants' or role models, were selected to participate in six forums (3 each in Muse and Namp Kham). These men consistently demonstrated positive perceptions and attitudes towards women's empowerment in project forums. In Vietnam, the ECCODE and SIEED projects provided gender training exploring the concept of gender equality to local leaders at the village and commune level and to the staff of the partner organisations involved in project delivery rather than to the actual project participants.

The main programming approaches that focussed on promoting changes in institutions were:

(i) Capacity-building inputs with community based organisations and CSOs (e.g. ECCODE, SIEED, CASI II and PRDP), which in some cases included approaches to develop policy dialogue and accountability between government and CBOs (e.g. CASI II and PACODE in Vietnam).

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

Box 1: WIN – gender context analysis leads to holistic approach for promoting increased voice, decision making and social well-being of women in Northern Shan State, Myanmar

The project design was based on a very thorough analysis of the gender context and barriers to women's empowerment, which led to the theory of change that enabling women to participate in practical and livelihoods based activities can be an important way of opening the door for women's enhanced decision making and participation in community level decision making. Project implementation therefore focuses strongly on improving the economic advancement of women, while at the same time providing gender training to the whole community and working very specifically with men (particularly the community head/leader) to engage their support for the changes. This is the only project which has used the CARE gender framework to describe the changes that are planned.

4. CARE Programming Impacts on Women's Economic Empowerment



Caption: Scene setting photos of the facilities of the school and students at the school both in their dorms and in the garden.

The first day was spent in Bar Keo District in Northern Cambodia at Bar Kaev Lower Secondary School (LSS) where CARE is funding a Boarding House Scholarship program that supports ethnic minorities. CARE's program focuses on Education and WASH in Schools & Communities. CARE is giving selected members of the community including students, house parents and teachers cameras in an effort to document the project from the perspective of the community. This citizen journalism project will follow project participants over the next two years highlighting WASH and hygiene programs as well as the daily life of communities including their success and hardships.

Photo by Josh Estey/CARE Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

This chapter assesses the impacts and changes experienced by women participants of the 14 interventions reviewed. Given that the accompanying country case studies for Vietnam and Laos provide in-depth analyses of programming impacts in those countries, this chapter focuses on identifying commonalities reported across all four countries covered by the evaluation, while also providing some useful illustrative examples of specific project and program experiences.

4.1 Changes in Women’s Economic Advancement

Income increases: There was evidence of increases in income for the majority of the interventions (see Table 5), but most of the documentation reviewed did not specify whether the income was earned by women or men, but instead referred to household income increases. Because of the activities that women had been included in for most projects it seems reasonable to assume that where income has increased, women are likely to have played a role. However we have hardly any data on who was in control of the income. The two field studies in Vietnam and Laos indicated that household income and decision making is shared but that the level of women’s influence on household decision-making varies (see section 4.2 for further discussion of this issue).

For three of the Vietnam projects income increases for participant households were in most cases achieved due to a combination of improved technical knowledge and increased access to investment capital, which together enabled the timely and effective application of agricultural inputs for activities such as livestock husbandry, rice production and tea cultivation.

Box 2: SIEED impact of increased income

The SIEED final evaluation reported that the cooperation groups established by the project had been able to make continued investments to maintain their income earning activities, including the purchase of fertiliser and other inputs; as well as investing in other agricultural production and processing activities, such as the purchase of fertiliser for rice production and the purchase of a rice mill. Participants of the groups (the majority of whom were poor, ethnic minority women) had also been able to make purchases of household goods including televisions, fans, rice cookers, other household appliances and motorbikes.

Table 5: Summary of evidence of income changes by intervention

	<i>Increase in income levels</i>
	VIETNAM
ECCODE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 90% of collaboration groups reported and 10 – 20% increase in income. BUT some groups were not yet covering their investment costs and it is likely that the very poor were not able to participate in some of these activities. There may be RISKS to sustainability of income levels due to farmers’ lack of market understanding and established market.
SIEED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All participating communes reported income increases, with the Province-wide average increase being 17.35%, ahead of targets. In Dien Bien Dong District 20 out of 24 of group members reported income increases from 10% – 25%, with average increase in income was about 11% per year. In Dien Bien Dong district, interviews showed four (out of four interviewed) households had income increased from 15 – 40% and nine out of ten groups reported that their financial status improved. This has led to households reported being better able to cover the cost of schooling for children, make investments in agricultural production, and purchase new household goods and motorbikes. BUT for some farmers the remoteness of their village and their limited capacity (financial, physical or institutional) hampers their chances to make use of identified market linkages.
PACODE	Information on participant income levels was not available (programme logframe did not include any indicators referring to income).
CASI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Farmers’ improved knowledge of production techniques contributing towards improving incomes. Income improvements are not massive but important in helping to improve livelihood security (CASI II evaluation).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pig and chicken raising income increases were between 200% and 400% - though the starting point could have been very low.
	LAOS
DFSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average household income for a poor household went from 2,020 US\$ per year at baseline to 2,240 US\$ per year at evaluation. Food and income activities had enabled significant development of food security and increases in household income.
PSFCBP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 51.2% of the HH cash income is coming from livestock. From 166 households, cash income from sales of NTFP amounted to an average 26,8% of the cash equivalent of the rice deficiency in rice self-insufficient households
LANGOCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removal of UXOs has impacted on access to productive land by freeing up 114 hectares- which is now being used for farming coffee, gardens etc. 91% percent of the groups and 82% of individuals said the project had a positive change or had improved their quality of life. Most people reported increased income. 110 FGD participants (couples) in seven villages report lighter workloads and more income.
PARUA II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68% of households report that their food security situation has improved during phase II of PARUA. Average household monetary income increased by 27 % to \$589 while the cumulative national inflation rate was 23% over the same period. Increase in income is even more important for poor families since their mean value of income has increased by 69.2% from USD 124 to USD 211 and the median value by 60.2% from USD 64 to USD 102.
PRDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nutrition situation in the project villages has been significantly improved as a result from the increase of income and food production at HH level. Fish, goat, pig, vegetables, cardamom, and galangal contributed most to income generation – and these are all women’s activities. Goat bank increased community income and reduced risk for the poorest and most vulnerable. Women save money and maintain expenditure in almost HHs of the target villages. 14 HHs in Phongsaly reported that have more income from selling of two cash crops.
	MYANMAR
WIN	No data on income earning for the family or for women. This is primarily an SRHR project and VSLA was used mostly for risk mitigation and management (see below for VSLA results)
SCLSP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Average HH monthly income of the respondents increased nearly three times. Average monthly income of women headed households respondents increased nearly seven times. 100% of the WHHs who were interviewed had increased incomes as a result of the project, with VSLA activities being the most effective.

Increased access to financial services: In Vietnam, all four interventions (ECCODE, SIEED, CASI II, and PACCODE) reported that ethnic minority women had achieved improved access to credit based on the

establishment of successful VSLAs or similar group-based structures. The aggregate data available across the four programming interventions indicates that there is high demand for informal group-based savings and credit activities offered under the VSLA model. Although not included in the original project designs, VSLA was taken up in the ECCODE and SIEED projects at a relatively late stage of the project implementation cycle, and the ECCODE fieldwork found that 14 out of the 18 originally established VSLA were sustaining their activities without external support some three years after project close-out. In Myanmar, the SCLSP in Myanmar resulted in women being able to earn their own money through home gardening activities, small scale livestock breeding, cash crops cultivation, trading and other income generating activities, including providing small grants for small scale businesses such as grocery, cash crops cultivation and trading, and reported that this had been facilitated by the setting up of 52 VSLAs reaching 886 women and 200 men (see Box 3). The WIN project in Myanmar also resulted in increased access to financial services for a significant number of ethnic minority women as a result of the establishment of 62 VSLAs reaching 1,023 women and 57 men.

Economic activity, marketing and sales: Some evidence of women being involved in increased economic activity and increased sales of produce was reported for some interventions in all four countries, most notably the ECCODE, SIEED and CASI II in Vietnam, DFSP, PARUA II and PRDP in Laos, PFSP in Cambodia and SCLSP in Myanmar. These impacts were in most cases achieved through group activity, and sometimes involved new marketing channels. However some of the reports did not disaggregate data and so it was difficult to assess to what extent and how women had been involved. Where disaggregated information was available and in both of the field studies, there was both an increase in existing economic activity (e.g. horticulture, rice production, livestock) and – in some cases – the introduction of new activities, such as coffee nurseries and plantation. Women in the DFSP Laos area, who had previously not left the village or spoken to strangers, reported traveling to market (usually in the nearby town of Dak Cheung) and trading with Vietnamese and Lao traders who came to the villages. Women sold coffee to Vietnamese and Lao traders who travelled around the villages and there was some project effort to facilitate this.

Box 3: SCLSP VSLA in Myanmar

Economic Advancement

- Savings practice had gone from zero to all VSLA members (75% of the respondents from the visited project villages reported that they did not have saving practices prior to the project.)
- High probability of sustainability (86% of the interviewees expressed that they wished to continue the VSLA program due to the significant results gained by being members of the VSLA.)
- VSLA had been used for social benefit as well as investment (37% of the VSLA members had used their loans to cover
- Health related expenses; 28% for their children's education; 21% for social activities, and 14% for household requirements.)
- BUT Investment of VSLA loans in income generation activities or productive assets did not appear to be so apparent

Power and Agency

- Women's experience in VSLA groups had increased the capability to be involved in community decision making and their participation in VDCs had increased as a result.

Changes in social norms

- Women report that that their participation in the VSLA has been positively recognised by both their families and their communities – enhancing their status

In Vietnam, most of the ECCODE cooperation groups were supporting women to produce and sell products that they were already used to producing, with the informal (i.e. non-registered) interest groups engaging in production on a household basis. For these informal interest groups there was little or no evidence of collective procurement and marketing taking place. However the formally-registered

collaboration groups in which members have shared economic interests (i.e. shared investments and formal arrangements for profit-sharing), such as the Lang Chung tea cultivation group in Trung Hoi commune and the Phu Tien Mushroom cultivation group, were found to have developed as organized business enterprises with defined procedures for planning activities based on collective investments, production and marketing and formal accounting procedures, and in some cases to have achieved significant increases in production as a result (see Box 4).

Box 4: A successful small enterprise – the Phu Tien Mushroom Cultivation group

The Mushroom cultivation group was formally registered as a collaboration group in June 2011 with a membership of seven people from six households, four of which were classified as poor. The group has been under a woman's leadership since its establishment and was identified as a model illustrating women's empowerment and gender equity by the ECCODE project's final evaluation. At that time the group had not managed to generate sufficient income from mushroom cultivation to cover the high initial investment costs associated with the model, which had been raised through a combination of member contributions (the purchase of shares) and a 100 million VND bank loan from the Cooperative Alliance at the provincial level. The evaluation however suggested that strong demand and short supply of mushrooms in the local market would mean that returns to the group should be forthcoming in the longer term. The group has since developed as a successful small business, has managed to repay the initial loan, while expanding production to include a second type of mushroom. Group members reported achieving annual profits of 200 million VND (30 million VND per member household) in 2014 and were keen to talk about their aspirations for further expansion in future. The women involved in the group also emphasized the advantages of having stable employment and being able to work from their homes.

A further example of increased economic activity and sales of produce can be seen in the experience of the women of an all-female sweet potato production group supported by the SIEED project in Vietnam. This group showed considerable ambition as a result of their involvement in the group and had discussed plans to experiment with growing other crops such as tomatoes and eggplants. In pursuing this plan, they faced limitations in availability of finance and access to crop-specific training but intended to draw on the knowledge of farmers outside the group who had experience with these crops, in order to learn. This example demonstrates the willingness of women, empowered by the project, to pursue new ideas.

Improvements in wellbeing: Improvements in household well-being associated with increased income and increased economic activity were reported to varying degrees across most of the projects. In Laos improvements were seen in the areas of nutrition status and reduced workload associated with both domestic and productive activities (DFSP, LANGOCA), better hygiene and access to SRH services (PFSCBP, PRDP) and access to adult education (DFSP). In the PFSCBP evaluation women reported that their children have improved weight/age status, and are less prone to diseases. They considered vegetable production as one of the most important activities which had contributed markedly to hunger reduction, as well as increasing income through the sale of 80% of the vegetables produced.

In Laos, women's wellbeing was also found to have improved as a result of reduced workloads. The LANGOCA evaluation found that 100% of the villages were using the new gravity-fed water and so expressed the relevance and the positive reduction of workload in the household. In the two DFSP villages visited during fieldwork for the WEEM evaluation, both of which had received a water supply from the project, all groups reported less workload in hauling water. The provision of handcarts and rice mills, and the vegetable gardening activities by DFSP were also reported in the gender discussions, individual interviews, and village meetings to have reduced workloads (the latter being because there was a reduced need to find vegetables from the forest). In Vietnam, a range of positive impacts on household economic status and broader well-being as a result of improved household income were consistently reported by women and men participants of the interventions reviewed. In the case of the ECCODE project, some FGD participants reporting that their households had moved out of poverty as per the government

categorization since the time of the project's implementation. Others reported being able to make increasing investments in covering longer term needs such as children's education and improvements in housing.

Women's access to and control over assets: Evidence of women gaining access to new assets through project activities and as a result of their increased ability to make asset purchases due to increased incomes was found in roughly 70% (n = 10) of the interventions reviewed. In Laos, the DFSP and LANGOCA projects distributed hand carts and rice mills as time and labour-saving equipment under women's ownership or control. The PARUA II project distributed kitchen and hygiene kits to 1,483 families to reduce women's workloads of whom more than 50% reported that the kit enabled them to save time. Asset transfers of livestock (pigs and ducks) and fruit trees and vegetable seeds, all of which are culturally accepted as being under women's control, were carried out through the DFSP WINGS groups. The PFSCBP and LANGOCA projects also involved livestock production components, but there was no information in the project documents as to whether or how women had been involved in those activities. The LANGOCA final evaluation however noted that the livestock production activities had not been very successful with many deaths and a lack of effective veterinary support.

In Vietnam the CASI II program and the ECCODE, SIEED project evaluations reported that women and men participants had been able to use the income generated from their activities for investment in further productive activities (e.g. purchase of agricultural inputs associated with rice and tea production, livestock husbandry); for construction and the purchase of household goods, including productive assets such as ploughing machines, and other labour-saving appliances; and for covering household expenses relating to healthcare and education. During the field study of the ECCODE project for this evaluation women project participants highlighted the advantages of expenditures on labour-saving equipment in terms of their reduced workload. The Laos fieldwork also reported spending of increased income, but this was more likely to be on food and medical consumables by women and only rarely on housebuilding and equipment (usually by men). This was probably due to the much lower income of the region and the population. In Myanmar SCLSP supported landless households to have access to land for farming by advocating with local authorities and land owners to enable handover of productive lands to landless households, as a result of which a total of 150 landless farmers became land owners. This represented a 25% reduction in the number of households without access to productive land in the communities targeted for this activity.

The establishment of VSLAs by interventions in Vietnam and Myanmar also potentially provides a mechanism for increasing women's access to and control over financial and social assets in terms of aggregate savings and the potential for organization. However, the field study of the ECCODE project in Vietnam found that women VSLA members do not always control the workings of the VSLA as their husbands often play an active role in decision-making regarding the taking and use of VSLA loans.

4.2 Changes in Women's power and agency

All the projects reviewed in Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar have made a contribution towards positive changes in women's power and agency. It was not possible to make an informed assessment of the impacts of the CHIFS and PSFP projects in Cambodia on women's power and agency, as the reports reviewed for those projects contained little or no analysis of how those projects were or were not specifically affecting the lives of their women participants, i.e. the reports did not present gender-disaggregated information. Women from ethnic minority groups were participants of both the CHIFS and PSFP projects and so may have gained increased access to technologies disseminated by the project and strengthened market linkages. However, neither the design documents for those projects nor the final evaluations provide any detailed or substantive analysis of issues relating to women's empowerment, which has necessarily limited the attention given to those projects in the following analysis.

Knowledge and skills: Training provided to ethnic minority women by the projects reviewed has resulted in access to new and/or improved knowledge of agricultural production techniques (most projects across all four countries); better understanding of SRHR issues (the WIN project in Myanmar);

greater awareness of healthcare and nutrition (the WIN and SCLSP projects in Myanmar, the PACODE programme in Vietnam, the CHIFS and PFSP projects in Cambodia); and greater awareness of rights issues relating to land and legal entitlements (the LARC component of the CASI II programme in Vietnam). Several projects (e.g. WIN in Myanmar, PACODE and CASI II programmes in Vietnam) which implemented the VSLA approach reported improvements in women's financial literacy and financial management capacity, as was also found in the field study of the ECCODE project in Vietnam.

The application of this new knowledge has contributed to better food security and increased household incomes as a result of improved production (of livestock, staple crops, vegetables etc.) for both subsistence use and sale; improved health and nutrition behaviours; and women's increased involvement in decision-making at household and community level (see below). Examples of women who received training then taking on the role of training others or disseminating information were noted for projects in Myanmar (WIN) and Vietnam (ECCODE, SIEED and CASI), resulting in the increased status and authority of some of those women within their communities. In some projects however, the training provided appears to have reinforced women's traditional roles in cooking and nutrition (e.g. the DFSP project in Lao and the CHIFS project in Cambodia). In the Lao PFSCBP project both men and women were involved in some of the trainings in nutrition however some women reported being unable to apply the training due to lack of appropriate supplies.

Evidence of impact in terms of women's increased understanding of business, sales and marketing was found for a more limited number of initiatives which included capacity-building activities focussed on business development skills, as illustrated by the experiences of the PACODE programme in Vietnam and the LANGOCA project in Lao. The CHIFS and PFSP projects in Cambodia included activities to provide market information to project participants which were noted to have been effective in reducing the ability of traders to take a high margin. However, the lack of gender-disaggregated information available for those projects means that it is not clear to what extent women had access to or were able to benefit from that price information. The PFSP evaluation also noted that participants were not necessarily able to use price knowledge in cases where they had obligations to sell to middlemen due to existing loans.

Language skills were identified as a major barrier to women's inclusion in project activities for the DFSP and PARUA II projects in Lao. In the case of the PARUA II project Prai women were unable to participate in many of the project activities due an inability to speak Lao (one third of Prai women cannot read, write or speak Lao), which markedly hampered work on gender equality, but none of the projects in Lao appeared to be providing language training or practice specifically for women. In the PARUA II project women's access to training was also restricted by the practice of village chiefs selecting people (mostly men) to participate in trainings, in accordance with the prevailing social norm limiting women's mobility.

Box 5: LANGOCA introduced villages to new markets

The project has introduced production ideas aimed towards marketing and selling products. People are starting to think about business, especially coffee but also livestock. There is a better understanding that if villages produce products buyers will come to the communities. This is demonstrated by people now searching out coffee planting materials and expanding coffee gardens rather than waiting for project support.

Confidence and self-esteem: Women reported increased confidence as a result of their participation in groups established by the projects reviewed in Vietnam (all projects), Lao (DFSP) and Myanmar (SCLSP and WIN). Community-based groups such as the CASI II LARCs in Vietnam, the DFSP WINGS groups in Lao and the SCLSP VSLAs in Myanmar provide safe spaces in which women are able to build solidarity, identify needs and priorities, practice leadership and communication skills, and improve their knowledge and access to financial credit. The finding from the ECCODE field study that the majority of VSLAs established by the project with all-women participants had sustained their activities with minimal external support for three years since project close-out is a testament to the positive values of those groups for the women involved.

Women's increased confidence was then reported as a factor contributing to positive changes in women's level of engagement in household decision-making, in relations with their husbands and wider families, and – sometimes – in their participation in community meetings and social events. However, the issue of women's confidence was only addressed by one of the five projects reviewed in Lao and was not addressed in the Cambodia CHIFS and PFSP projects, other than by a comment in the CHIFS evaluation that winners of the cooking competition which had been used as an approach for targeting women for inclusion in project nutrition-related activities were *"clearly proud of their prize"* of being invited on cross-visits to other project sites. Confidence was still lacking in some women interviewed for the DFSP field study and it was mostly related to their lack of Lao language skills and the problems they were having with livestock or coffee and rice farming – that they were not doing as well as they had wanted to.

4.3 Changes in relations and social norms

In addition to the positive changes in women's individual agency discussed in section 4.2, the evaluation also found evidence of changes in terms of women's relations within their households, most notably relating to changes in workload and their influence in household decision-making.

Changes in workload: Access to labour-saving assets such as handcarts, rice mills and water systems was reported to have reduced women's workloads by participants of the DFSP, PFSCBP and LANGOCA projects in Lao, with positive implications for their health and well-being. The PARUA II project in Lao also provided support to reduce the workload of women through the distribution of kitchen and hygiene kits to 1,332 families, of whom more than 50% subsequently reported that the kit had been an effective time-saving measure. Changes in women's workloads and the household division of labour as a result of men helping more with household chores were reported by several projects in Vietnam, Lao, Myanmar. Gender training was identified as an important factor contributing to these changes in the DFSP project in Lao and the WIN project in Myanmar, while women's increased earning power was widely cited as a factor contributing to their increased influence within the household in case study of ECCODE project in Vietnam (see section 4.3 for further discussion). The findings of the Lao and Vietnam field studies however suggest that the extent to which men are helping more with household chores varies and that women in some contexts are still subject to very heavy workloads due to inequitable gender relations. So, for example women participants

Box 6: DFSP workload reduction initiative changes social norms

DFSP introduced handcarts with the aim of reducing women's work burden when collecting wood or water or carrying other produce. During the evaluation women reported that not only are they able to reduce the time spent collecting wood (previously they collected wood everyday now one cart lasts for a week – see SOCs) but that with the introduction of a new piece of equipment men are now sharing the task. It was observed that men liked using the cart as it was not traditionally seen as a woman's (such as the basket), and the novelty was welcomed.

Box 7: Impacts of the Myanmar WIN project's Engaging Men Initiative

As part of the WIN project's Engaging Men Initiative 57 couples took part in "couples' forums". Their feelings, desires, expectations and perceptions on domestic violence and family affairs were surfaced through the discussions held during the forums. CARE (also) conducted a series of men's forums and gender awareness raising sessions with village leaders, religious leaders, significant persons, youth, as well as married and unmarried men in all project villages. In all, 497 men were involved in men's forums on a monthly basis. In addition, 40 male 'positive deviants' or role models, were selected to participate in six forums. The attitude of men changed through the Engaging Men Initiative activities. Men's understanding of women's roles, capacities and capabilities increased, and the inter-relationship between women's empowerment, women's SRH needs, and village development was recognised. The number of men providing support to their partners in domestic chores, caring for pregnant partners and small children, and accompanying their partners while seeking SRH services increased.

of the DFSP project reported that alcohol abuse by men was still widespread and a cause of intra-household conflict.

Household decision-making: Women participants for the ECCODE, SIEED and PACODE projects in Vietnam, and the DFSP and PRDP projects in Lao reported that they had also achieved increased influence on household decision-making in relation to economic and financial issues. The WIN project in Myanmar reported an increased number of couples making joint decisions on birth-spacing as an outcome of the project's activities. Women's increased influence in terms of household economic decision-making was often the result of a combination of women's increased agency (knowledge and confidence) and women's increased economic contribution to household income and expenditure. In the case of the WIN project in Myanmar the combination of gender training and a specific initiative for engaging men was found to have contributed to changing attitudes and behaviours of men towards their partners and other women within their households and communities. However, in some contexts social norms defining the roles and accepted behaviours of men and women clearly remain a constraint on the extent of these changes in women's involvement in household decision-making, as documented in the case study of the ECCODE project in Vietnam (and see further discussion below).

Other than the reports for the WIN project and SCLSP in Myanmar, changes in social norms around

Box 8: Money equals power, SCLSP, Myanmar

The association between earning power and decision making at the household was acknowledged by men, who are reportedly contributing more to what are traditionally women's responsibilities in Chin, such as livestock raising, cooking, fetching water, and home gardening. In the FGDs it was discussed that decision making was now shared within the household, particularly about children's education and family healthcare. Contributions by women to the overall improvement of communities are appreciated, and men are considering the voices of women for decision making at both household and community levels.

gender equality and women's roles were not been analysed in much detail, if at all, in the literature reviewed for this evaluation. The fieldwork for the country case studies of the ECCODE project in Vietnam and the DFSP in Laos was however specifically designed to examine changes in social norms. The field studies identified the following changes in social norms as being associated with the implementation of those projects. Some of these social norm change processes were also reported for the SCLSP and WIN project in Myanmar (see Boxes 7 and 8).

- Communities accepting and encouraging women to engage in different types of income earning activity, including travelling outside of the village and marketing produce (both ECCODE and DFSP).
- Women and men thinking in a more commercial way and understanding trade, markets and commerce – so that they are looking for

opportunities (DFSP and – to some extent – ECCODE).

- Women in leadership roles and engaging in community decision making and being accepted and listened to by the community – including being thought of as “clever” and “capable” (Both).
- Women attending more events outside of the household, such as training, social events and meetings (Both).
- Men changing their behaviour – helping more in the house, drinking less, doing traditionally “women's” tasks such as rice milling (Both).
- Men and women helping each other out and making decisions together more – whereas previously it was the man making decisions alone (Both).
- Better health seeking behaviour around hygiene, nutrition and SRH – including men and women wanting fewer children (DFSP).
- There was some evidence of change in norms around violence against women and early marriage (DFSP).

Social norm change is thought to take place when the whole community reaches a tipping point of change, whereby a majority of people change their beliefs and behaviour in such a way that women are empowered and gender roles are more equitable. In the case of ECCODE and DFSP there has been a

combination of programming elements or approaches that have worked together to generate the norm change highlighted above. These include:

Women's inclusion in income earning and "male" economic activity. Most of the projects aimed to include women in income earning activities to a greater or lesser extent. This approach alone has not generated the social norm change, but has been an important contributing factor when combined with other approaches.

Gender training that included men and women (in ECCODE, DFSP and CASI II) had provided an important catalyst to change social norms whilst women were already engaging in economic activity. For men in Laos it was the first time that they had thought about their wives workload. Nearly every man and woman in the DFSP focus groups referred to the gender training as an important aspect of the change that had happened, particularly in the household. Gender training was rarely mentioned in the ECCODE focus groups as that project had only carried out gender training with local leaders and project staff, who were supposed to then model attitudes and behaviours in support of gender equality in their communities. Interviews with key informants carried out during the field study of the ECCODE project indicated this had happened to some extent as most key informants were clearly aware of the importance of promoting gender equality. There was however less evidence of impact of the gender training among project participants who were not community leaders, although women and men in several focus groups did talk about the advantages of sharing work. A more explicit focus in the ECCODE project on exploring gender roles and relations might have been a more effective way achieving whole village social norm change.

VSLA and other group-based activities (such as WINGS in DFSP, Laos) developed women's awareness of their rights and provided a supportive environment within which to learn communication and negotiation skills. In Vietnam, the CASI II Livelihoods and Rights Clubs (LARCs) combined building women's awareness of their rights with VSLA activities. This combined approach provided a practical mechanism for enabling women to develop income earning activities and achieve economic advancement, which was reported to have resulted in groups becoming more active participants of local planning processes. This example illustrates the linkages between agency (increased knowledge & access to economic opportunities) and changes in relations and structures. The ECCODE experience of VSLA raises an interesting issue about the value of groups and group activity for women and their role in the social norm change process. It appears that women are able to achieve more with the VSLA than men partly because of their limited power and control outside of the group. So they have an enhanced incentive to remain part of the group and to make it work.

The WIN VSLA experience in Myanmar also highlighted the importance of group work that is linked to

Box 9: ECCODE VSLA promotes norm change especially for women

Men's acceptance of and support for their wives' participation in the VSL groups, as widely expressed in the FGDs with the husbands of women VSL group members, was also identified by WU representatives as a significant achievement and a real change in mind-set, given men's initial resistance to the idea of their wives joining these and other groups. Members of the Trung Hoi tea cultivation collaborative group, which has established an internal savings and loan fund for its members based on the VSL model, commented that in their group women are more active than men in buying savings shares. This is an interesting observation which, when taken in conjunction with the finding that three of the four VSL groups that did not sustain were those involving men, suggests that the VSL approach is possibly more advantageous to women than to men. This could be because it provides a mechanism for women to begin to exert greater control over household financial resources, in a way which is consistent with the prevailing social norm that women can only take decisions independently of their husbands for relatively small expenditures.

access to finance for women to increase their confidence and be able to become agents of change themselves. This is an important approach for attaining social norm change around SRHR as it is very much in women's interests to improve SRHR and be able to do this as a whole village.

Box 10: WIN in Myanmar – how VSLA has helped to change social norms

- The VSLAs helped improve people’s access and reduced barriers to SRH services.
- Female family members were able to access loans to address their families’ immediate financial needs,
- Their families and communities developed confidence in female family/community members’ abilities to manage their financial needs.
- VSLA members disseminated information on SRHR to their respective village members during social gatherings and informal meetings.
- Women gained considerable confidence by being involved in VSLAs, as were happy to show off the leadership and management skills they had learned through project-led trainings.

Influential individuals, men and women, in communities were supported to lead champion gender equality. In some interventions these champions or role models the village head and women’s union leaders (as in DFSP and ECCODE). Elsewhere (e.g. the ECCODE and SIEED projects in Vietnam – see Box 11), this role was taken on by women who were successful cooperation group leaders and entrepreneurs.

Men’s realisation of the household-level economic benefits resulting from women’s participation in the economic activities, VSLA and groups has been a positive motivating factor for changes in men’s attitudes and behaviours. Men were proud of their wives’ new skills and happy that they were contributing to the household income.

The positive progress of social norm change associated with a combination of both economic and social

Box 11: Women leaders influence others in SIEED, Vietnam

Women’s inclusion in groups and in new economic activities appeared to have influenced other women and the way they were viewed by the village. SIEED, Vietnam - Interviews found evidence of changes in the social position of women within groups and more broadly within families and communities. Some of the most successful groups, including the BBC group and the Black Duck group had very successful and entrepreneurial female leaders. The project’s approach has favoured ‘showing’ rather than ‘telling’ meaning the project provided relatively little in terms of training or activities to empower women. Instead, groups with strong female role models and women in management positions are likely to have provided positive and empowering images which will be remembered. The greatest source of direct female empowerment through the project is likely a result of greater economic empowerment from increased female-generated income.

initiatives within the projects was evident from some of the evaluations and the fieldwork. It was however clear from some reports and from some participants in fieldwork focus groups that this is still a work in progress.

The LANGOCA project in Laos noted that training provided by the project had encouraged some women to increase their participation in public life and that this was a behaviour that some men did not like. The risk of such women potentially facing repercussions from their husbands resisting the changes being promoted by the project’s gender training initiative was identified as something that was not being addressed by the project.

Also there were still issues around power relations (in CASI II evaluation see box) and from alcohol abuse and men not contributing to the workload in Laos. This does highlight the sometimes huge gulf between “knowing something” and “acting on it”. People often are not able to change behaviour overnight and psychological factors play a role. Community and group support and continued village and local government leadership seem to be important for some of the most difficult issues, such as violence against women and children (Lao example).

Box 12: The CASI II evaluation on the limitations of gender training

“Internal gender reports to CARE from both the COS and PWM components for example, which both featured gender training, indicated shifts in men’s behaviours towards women and a slightly more equitable division of household labour as a result of gender training activities.” The evaluation team also observed that impressions from the field in the CEFM component indicated high levels of female participation in traditionally male-oriented activities such as agriculture and forestry models. The evaluation nonetheless concluded that *“while the evidence suggests that some change in practice, behaviour and approaches from duty bearers (at household and village level) has been achieved through CASI approaches (e.g. RBA interventions such as advocacy and gender equity training), however limited, changes in power relations have been much more difficult to bring about.”*

4.4 Changes in formal institutions and networks

The project documentation reviewed identified structural changes in formal institutions and networks providing a more supportive and enabling environment for women’s economic empowerment that included: the establishment of community-based organisations and groups; women’s increased participation in local government institutions and development planning processes; and capacity-building of partner organisations. These structural changes are closely linked to changes in agency and relations that have been discussed in sections 4.2 and 4.3.

Establishment of community-based organisations and groups: the review found that project established community-based organisations and groups involving women had in some contexts become important elements of local institutional landscapes and were promoting positive changes in women’s economic advancement and increased power and agency. For example, DFSP, LANGOCA and PRDP in Laos reported women had taken active roles alongside men in key project implementation committees such as village water management committees and coffee growing cooperatives, although the extent to which the women participating in those institutions were able to influence decision-making outcomes was not analysed in great detail in the project reports reviewed. The PFSP project in Cambodia facilitated the development of Farmer Cooperatives (FC) which were also reported to have provided farmers with useful forums for networking and discussing ideas, problems and solutions. Although some cases of spontaneous replication of the FC model were noted in the project’s lessons learnt report, information concerning the extent and nature of participation of women in those cooperatives was not provided.

By contrast, the effectiveness of establishing all-women groups as a mechanism for promoting women’s increased participation within their households and communities was consistently highlighted for several interventions, including the CASI LARCs and the PACODE WDGs in Vietnam, the DFSP WINGS groups in Laos, and the SCLSP VSLAs. The findings of the ECCODE project field study in Vietnam also highlight the potential long-term sustainability of such all-women groups which can serve as multi-functional community assets by mitigating financial and health risks, as well as promoting women’s solidarity and social skills.

Some interventions also established community-level structures to promote women’s improved access to basic services. So, for example, the WIN project in Myanmar supported the training and activities of Auxiliary Mid-wives to provide SRHR information and services at the community level. The ECCODE and SIEED projects in Vietnam both developed networks of Farmer Trainers to provide technical support on improved agricultural production methods to the members of the cooperation groups established by those projects. While the effectiveness of these structures during project implementation was highlighted, in the evaluations of those projects a question remains regarding the capacity of these structures to sustain in the absence of project funding. Farmer trainers interviewed during the ECCODE project field study indicated that they were in some cases still providing encouragement and informal support to the groups they had worked with during the project’s implementation cycle but commented on the difficulties of doing so with limited or no resources.

Participation in local government institutions and development planning processes: Women (who in many cases were also members of community-based groups and committees) were reported to have increased their presence and in some cases participation in local (i.e. village and commune level) government institutions and processes as a result of project activities in all four countries (see Table 4). The level of detail of information provided concerning the quality and scale of women’s participation for the different projects was however variable and it was not always clear to what extent women’s increased participation in those institutions and processes had influenced resource allocation outcomes in favour of women’s needs and priorities. In the case of the CASI II programme in Vietnam for example, the final evaluation concluded that the power and impact of CBOs established tended to be limited to the local or commune level; and that although women’s participation in decision-making processes and forums at those levels had increased, facilitating meaningful changes in power relations with duty-bearers to ensure real accountability was a considerable challenge. As noted in section 4.3, in some contexts, the persistence of social norms prescribing participation in public life as primarily a man’s role acted as a constraint on the extent of this structural change, as found for the LANGOCA project in Laos.

Table 6: Women’s increased participation

	Information by project
VIETNAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PACODE: 327 Women’s Development Groups (WDGs) established. WDG members participate in development planning processes at community and commune level. 75% of community priority projects were implemented of which 179 were integrated into the commune Socio-Economic Development Plan. • CASI II: Women participants of Livelihood And Rights Clubs (LARCs) were reportedly engaging more actively in local planning processes to influence resource allocation decisions. Women’s participation was reported to have improved both in quantitative terms, with more women attending meetings which were previously almost exclusively attended by men, as well as in qualitative terms, such that <i>“women now actively speak their opinions, sometimes even more actively than men”</i> (Woman LARC participant Hoa Binh province).
MYANMAR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WIN: 20 VDCs were established with 213 members, including 77 women. Communities have demonstrated recognition of and increased respect for women’s capacities and their ability to take part in community affairs. The project observed that community and village leaders now heed the suggestions and opinions of female community members, especially in relation to the activities/events/suggestions for the Community Learning Centers (CLC). • SCLSP: 20.8% of women interviewed are members of VDCs, and reported that having participated in disseminating and adopting EAFPs/NRMPs, as well as in conducting saving and loans and income generation activities.
LAOS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DFSP: Women members of the management committees established to run project activities (e.g. coffee cooperatives) not directly implemented via WINGS women’s groups are positioned in a powerful role at the center of community life, and significantly elevate their position with regard to the pre-existing gendered political structures within the village. • LANGOCA: The Project enabled women have a stronger public role. Before they did not speak in meetings or did not even attend. The gender approach of the project has had strong impacts with specific women taking on leadership roles as members of the village development committee, key participants in activity groups, and members of the water management committees, and thereby providing positive role models for others.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PRDP: At the project village level, women have been involved in the planning, implementing and decision making process of development activities in the village.
CAMBODIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PFSP: VDC planning committees are about 30-40% female.

Capacity-building of partner organisations: Examples of partner organisations that had participated in project capacity-building activities replicating approaches for promoting women’s economic empowerment were reported for all four projects in Vietnam and for the WIN project in Myanmar. For example, following close-out of the SIEED project in 2012, the Vietnamese NGO that had been responsible for delivery of the project was engaged by several other development projects in the northern mountain province of Dien Bien, on a fee-for-service basis, to implement the SIEED approach for establishing and supporting cooperation groups to engage in improved agricultural and forestry production activities. The WIN project in Myanmar provided gender training and awareness to government and CSOs that are working with the villages, which contributed to changes in the levels of resources and support being provided to those communities.

A number of the projects reviewed included a focus on facilitating participatory planning processes with local government authorities to encourage greater responsiveness to and involvement of local

Box 13: WIN in Myanmar uses training of NGOs and government to tackle GBV

The project conducted leadership trainings for 30 women, basic gender trainings for 17 women, and Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Legal Awareness training for 19 women from MWAF, with technical assistance from the Youth Legal Clinic - a local NGO founded by a group of lawyers. The aim of the trainings to the MWAF was to scale up their capacity for effective cooperation and implementation of their activities. In addition, CARE provided GBV and case referral trainings to eight medical doctors (5 F, 3 M) as well as ten Continuous Medical Education (CME) trainings for 67 health staff (45 F, 22M). Gender awareness training for the DSW was also conducted by CARE in PhaAn Township.

communities, and different interest groups – including women – within those communities, in grassroots development initiatives. The outcomes of these participatory processes for the capacity development of project stakeholders and partners reportedly varied. For example, the CASI II programme’s work by means of a participatory visioning exercise with the Women’s Union in two remote, northern mountainous provinces of Vietnam was reported to have resulted in the uptake of a more socially inclusive approach to working with local communities by the WU. In Cambodia however, the project evaluation found that the participatory planning process implemented by the CHIFS project had proven very time-consuming and had not been well understood in some of the villages where it had been implemented. The experience of the CHIFS project highlighted the challenge for projects working to promote a democratic model of state service provision in Cambodian highland rural areas where communities tend to be more familiar with an influence/ patronage-based model of service delivery, and the consequent risk of communities misunderstanding the role of an NGO such as CARE. The implications of this analysis were that projects such as CHIFS working in remote communities may need to invest in building awareness of the

The Myanmar Gender Equality Network (GEN), was CARE’s implementing partner and CARE was also a member of the network. At the request from Department of Social Welfare (DSW), GEN assisted the DSW to develop a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (NSPAW) (2013-2022) in 2013. NSPAW was then launched in October 2013 in Nay Pyi Taw. Government Officers, Parliamentarians, and development agencies participated in the workshop that followed. The NSPAW operational plan will be developed in 2014. CARE supported (and is still supporting) developments in the land legislation law. In addition, the Anti-Violence against Women law is currently being drafted. It will be supported by VAW research currently underway, and is expected to be finalized by the end of 2014.

responsibilities of the state as a provider of basic social services before attempting to implement participatory planning methods.

4.5 Mapping impacts in relation to CARE programming approaches

The 13 interventions reviewed for this evaluation have used different combinations of programming approaches to achieve a range of purposes, not all of which were directly related to WEE. This means that it is not possible to provide a rigorous comparative assessment as to which programming approaches have had most impact in the different country contexts. However, based on the qualitative evidence compiled for this evaluation Table 6 below presents a broad-brush mapping of how and why the different programming approaches outlined in Chapter 3 have contributed to the impacts identified in the earlier sections of this Chapter. As well as mapping the contributions of the different programming approaches to women's economic advancement, power and agency, and changes in relations and structures, the table also identifies some key limitations of the various programming approaches.

This broad-brush mapping exercise suggests a pattern whereby the impacts of programming approaches to facilitate the establishment of cooperatives and/or group-based small enterprises, to promote enhanced production of cash crops, livestock etc., and to promote access to markets have tended to be more focused on women's economic advancement. By contrast, the impacts of the other programming approaches identified from the interventions reviewed have tended to be focused more on aspects of women's power and agency, including aspects of relations and structures. This is not to say that those approaches would – if implemented in isolation – necessarily result in those impacts. In fact, it is important to recognise that the impacts achieved both in terms of economic advancement and power and agency appeared for most interventions, to be due to the combination of different programming approaches focussing on the economic and social aspects of women's economic empowerment. The following chapter of this report looks in more detail at the learning questions concerning the extent to which CARE's different approaches can be considered to have achieved sustainable economic participation and empowerment outcomes in the lives of ethnic minority women including the identification of examples of good practice and gaps or limitations of the approaches.

Table 7: Overview of how CARE programming approaches in the Mekong region have contributed to WEE impacts and limitations

Programming Approach	Contribution to Women’s Economic Empowerment	Limitations
<p><i>Promoting access to financial services through VSLAs</i></p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> In Vietnam, flexible access to VSLA loans helped women to increase the productivity of their agricultural IGAs by enabling the timely purchase of inputs at key points of the production cycle. In this way VSLA activities facilitated the development and effectiveness of cooperation groups as mechanisms for their members’ economic advancement.</p> <p><u>Power and Agency:</u> In Vietnam and Myanmar VSLA membership was also found to have contributed significantly to enhancing women’s power and agency. The VSLAs provide safe spaces where women interact, develop confidence and leadership skills, as well as increased financial management capability.</p> <p><u>Relations & social norms:</u> Interventions in both Vietnam and Myanmar found that, as women were able to increase their access to credit through the VSLAs and were able to use their loans to address their families’ needs, so their families and communities developed greater confidence in female family/community members’ abilities to manage their financial needs, thereby contributing to processes of social norm change.</p> <p><u>Structures:</u> In both Vietnam and Myanmar, the VSLAs appear in most cases to have developed into well-respected and self-sustaining local institutions.</p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> Small loan sizes limit extent to which VSLA membership can support business development.</p> <p><u>Relations:</u> Women VSLA members are not always the decision-makers regarding taking and use of loans. There is a risk that the benefits of VSLA membership are co-opted by male relatives.</p> <p>Economic Advancement: A lack of access to financial services (either through VSLA or other) in the Laos projects (notably DFSP) has been a drawback in Laos and that this has limited some women’s ability to expand their small businesses or to manage risks and cycles</p>
<p><i>Facilitating the establishment of cooperatives or group-based small enterprises</i></p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> Qualitative evidence from projects in Vietnam (ECCODE, SIEED & CASI) indicates that the establishment of formally registered cooperation groups has enabled women’s increased engagement in economic activities, as a result of improved technical knowledge and enhanced access to credit (mostly through VSLA – see above).</p> <p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> A few notable examples of successful women-led group-based enterprises engaging effectively in innovative IGAs (e.g. the ECCODE project example of mushroom cultivation, the SIEED sweet potato cultivation group).</p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> Establishment of informal interest groups provided an effective mechanism for delivery of training to women (and men) participants, but in most cases these groups have not sustained collective production or marketing activities beyond the lifetime of the project.</p> <p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> Enabling cooperation groups to establish effective market linkages has proved challenging, especially for projects working with very poor people in remote contexts.</p>

	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> In most cases however, cooperation groups were established with a focus on improving production of traditional on-farm economic activities. This approach facilitated the uptake of new knowledge by participants (women and men) but did not necessarily increase the diversity of economic opportunities open to EM women.</p> <p><u>Economic advancement and wellbeing:</u> Livestock banks in PFSCBP and PRDP were a successful example of group enterprise for food security while at the same time addressing inequality. These particularly benefited the poorest families as resources were jointly managed and learning and benefits were shared, thus reducing the risks associated with enterprise.</p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> Project experiences in Vietnam consistently highlighted the need for a stronger focus on market analysis and capacity-building for business development skills to enable EM women’s sustainable and effective engagement in economic activities.</p> <p><u>Economic advancement:</u> Group initiatives to manage coffee processing and sales did not go far enough in DFSP in Laos as most coffee production families were not benefitting from bulk sales and joint purchasing of inputs. Also, while some women were negotiating prices and selling the family coffee, there did not appear to be a widespread involvement of women in the sales of coffee.</p>
<p><i>Enhancing production of cash crops, livestock, fish, horticulture and/or forestry</i></p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> In Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia interventions implementing this kind of approach based on the provision of technical training were reported to have contributed to increased economic activity and to have encouraged increased engagement in market-oriented production.</p> <p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> In all four countries the relevance of project activities to target communities was ensured by providing support for a range of different on-farm production activities.</p> <p><u>Power and Agency & Structure:</u> Women in the DFSP field work explained how their confidence had increased since taking on additional production activities and being able to sell produce. Women’s involvement in the activities also changed the way they were viewed in the village.</p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> For some projects (including the PFSCBP and LANGOCA projects in Laos and the CHIFS and PFSP in Cambodia) the lack of gender-disaggregated data meant that it was not possible to assess the extent to which women had participated in or benefited from increased production of cash crops etc. There was virtually no accurate measurement of women’s income in any of the projects assessed.</p> <p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> For the ECCODE and SIEED projects in Vietnam, some production activities proved more successful than others in terms of their economic impacts and sustainability. Some production activities were encouraged without being based on an effective market analysis, which led to problems of local market saturation and falling prices.</p> <p>Evaluations of the ECCODE and SIEED projects in Vietnam however noted that the investment required to participate in some of the livelihoods activities may have excluded poorer households</p>

<p><i>Promoting access to markets</i></p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> SCLSP in Myanmar and PRDP in Laos either promoted access to markets or developed direct market linkages for farmers and farmer groups. This has improved the sustainability of women's income (which had increased by 7 times as a result of the project in Myanmar). Market chain analysis has also been fed into project development in order to address the problems around remote villages' access to markets in SCLSP.</p>	<p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> Limited consideration of markets was identified as a weakness and constraint on the sustainability and impact of the CASI, ECCODE and SIEED interventions in Vietnam. For example, the ECCODE project was found to have focussed more attention on raising productivity than on developing market linkages up to year 3 of its four year implementation period. The final evaluation of the CASI II programme documented several cases in which the expansion of successful IGAs led to the saturation of local markets and falling prices to producers.</p> <p><u>Economic Advancement:</u> In Cambodia, the provision of market information by the CHIFS project was identified by project participants (Community Development Officers) as an effective way of reducing the margins being taken by traders. The project's final evaluation however questioned the long term sustainability of this approach.</p>
<p><i>Addressing women's workload</i></p>	<p><u>Wellbeing, relations:</u> All of the projects in Laos had practical initiatives to address women's workload, which mostly focused on providing equipment. This was found to have an impact on women's wellbeing and their ability to participate in meetings and training. Men's change in attitude around household work meant that men started doing more household tasks and so contributed to a reduction in women's workload, improvements in wellbeing and better household relations. WIN in Myanmar contributed to changes in men's attitudes around household work also and this reduced women's workload and contributed to women's participation in project activities and overall improvements in relations and changes in social norms.</p>	<p><u>Wellbeing:</u> some workload reduction initiatives did not work as it was not possible to introduce some of the equipment in certain settings (e.g. handcarts in very hilly villages, or rice mills when a house or two already had a rice mill). This meant that women were still suffering from exhaustion and work overload. There did not seem to be innovative ways of solving these situations.</p>
<p><i>Enhancing women's knowledge & skills</i></p>	<p><u>Power & Agency:</u> Project experiences from Vietnam, Laos and Myanmar show that targeting women specifically for training has been an effective starting point for changes in community attitudes (of both women and men) relating to gender roles and women's capabilities. Combining training</p>	<p><u>Power & Agency:</u> Women's access to training has in some cases been constrained by social norms limiting mobility and/or participation in public events (LA, VT).</p>

	<p>of bookkeeping and leadership with training about SRHR through the VSLA groups were an effective way of cascading knowledge to the whole village in Myanmar (WIN).</p> <p><u>Power & Agency:</u> Women who have been able to apply new knowledge effectively in economic activities, in raising their voice to claim rights, in accessing SRH services and advocating for fulfilment of their rights have become role models in (and sometimes beyond) their communities (VT, LA & MY).</p> <p><u>Relations & Structures:</u> Women taking on roles as peer or cascading trainers (e.g. in DFSP in Laos, MY, VT) also act as role models of empowerment and have, in some cases, progressed on to leadership roles in local institutions.</p>	<p><u>Power & Agency:</u> Language skills have been a barrier to women's inclusion in some training activities (LA).</p> <p><u>Power and Agency:</u> Women's confidence in Laos was compromised when the training had not given them enough on-going support, and they felt that they were not successful at producing good quality coffee or vegetables.</p>
<p><i>Facilitating women's participation in local decision-making processes</i></p>	<p><u>Power & Agency/ Relations & Structures:</u> Membership of women's solidarity groups and VSLAs provides a mechanism for the transfer of knowledge and the building of skills and confidence among women members, and was reported in several contexts in Vietnam, Myanmar and Laos as a factor contributing to women's increased participation in local decision-making processes. The groups provide safe spaces for women to practice the social and leadership skills needed for engagement in public life.</p> <p><u>Power & Agency/ Relations & Structures:</u> Some women who worked as peer trainers in the ECCODE and SIEED projects in Vietnam reported that their experience as trainers had given them the confidence to subsequently seek election to local political office. This illustrates how increased knowledge and capacity – this time at an individual level – can facilitate women's increased political participation.</p> <p>WIN</p> <p><u>Power and Agency / Structure:</u> SCLSP in Myanmar evaluation reported that 20.8% of women interviewed and nearly half of the women in the household survey are members of village development committees (VDCs), that they participated in project and management tasks. This had contributed to</p>	<p><u>Relations & Structures:</u> In Vietnam, the CASI II program final evaluation concluded that while the existence of women's solidarity groups had resulted in increased awareness and participation, their influence remained limited to local or commune levels, and that power relations of those groups with duty-bearers had not changed significantly.</p> <p><u>Relations:</u> In Laos, the LANGOCA project noted that training provided by the project had encouraged some women to increase their participation in public life and that this was a behaviour that some men did not like. The risk of such women potentially facing repercussions from their husbands resisting the changes being promoted by the project's gender training initiative was identified as something that was not being addressed by the project.</p>

	women's participation in project and village decision making and had contributed to a change in attitude towards women's roles	
<i>Gender training for men and women</i>	<p><u>Relations and Structure / Social norms:</u> DFSP and WIN in Myanmar both included gender training as part of a range of initiatives that changed social norms. WIN in Myanmar offered couples forums which improved understanding and participation of men on the promotion of Women's Empowerment (WE) and decision making related to SRH needs. CARE also conducted a series of men's forums and gender awareness raising sessions with village leaders, religious leaders, significant persons, youth, as well as married and unmarried men in all project village. As a result, men's understanding of women's roles, capacities and capabilities increased, and the inter-relationship between women's empowerment, women's RH needs, and village development was recognised. the number of men providing support to their partners in domestic chores, caring for pregnant partners and small children, and accompanying their partners while seeking SRH services increased.</p> <p>Gender training in DFSP in Laos contributed to an increase in men's understanding of women's work burden and a fairly widespread change in behaviour around household and other "traditionally women's" tasks.</p>	<p><u>Relations and Structure (Social norms):</u> there is evidence that gender training alone would not have had the same effects; and that it was the combination of the gender training with training to enhance women's technical and income earning knowledge and potential and their inclusion in a range of activities that led to the overall change in social norms.</p>
<i>Capacity-building of CBOs and partners</i>	<p><u>Relations & Structures:</u> Partnering with Mass Organisations (MOs) such as the Women's Union (WU) in Vietnam enabled outreach to grassroots, offered scope for scale-up of approaches and potentially provides a mechanism for strengthening the voice/ influence of ethnic minority women in local governance and decision-making processes. Some examples of the wider replication of CARE approaches were reported (e.g. CASI II LARCs, PACODE).</p>	<p><u>Relations & Structures:</u> In Vietnam, the role of the MOs as providers of policy feedback to government was found to be inherently limited by the fact that MO staff receive their salaries from the state and their activities must be approved by the state. Similarly, in Cambodia</p> <p><u>Relations & Structures:</u> In case of the ECCODE project in Vietnam, the WU expressed strong interest at the District and Provincial levels in the wider replication of the VSLA approach but had been unable to do so due to lack of technical and financial resources. This may have been partly due to the inclusion of VSLA at a relatively late stage of the project implementation cycle.</p>

<p><i>Inclusion of government stakeholders in approaches & trainings</i></p>	<p><u>Relations & Structures:</u> The provision of gender training by the ECCODE project in Vietnam to village leaders and commune officials appeared to have contributed to increased understanding and appreciation of the positive value of women’s economic and political participation, thereby contributing towards a supportive institutional context for the project’s activities.</p> <p><u>Relations and Structure:</u> Women’s participation in decision making forums (such as community development committees and project management) in Myanmar was complemented by gender training of government officials and CSOs which enhanced and supported the social norm change in the communities.</p>	
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5. Programming for WEEM in the Mekong region: Concluding Reflections on the Learning Questions



Caption: No caption available, from Vietnam folder. Photo: © Josh Estey/CARE

This chapter of the report presents an analysis of the key learning points that can be drawn from the discussion of programming approaches and impacts in the preceding chapters. Some of the richest learning from the WEEM evaluation came from the field studies of projects in Laos and Vietnam. These field studies provided valuable opportunities for exploring change processes, including those relating to social norms, and the linkages between economic and social programming approaches, as the basis for an in-depth understanding how and to what extent those projects had impacted on the ethnic communities involved. The analysis presented here is structured around the learning questions identified in the TOR for the WEEM evaluation and – where possible - draws on material from both the field studies in Laos and Vietnam and the broader literature review of 13 interventions.

5.1 Effectiveness of CARE Australia's programming approaches for women's economic empowerment

Learning question 1: To what extent do CARE's approaches and models achieve sustainable economic participation and empowerment outcomes in the lives of women from ethnic groups?

As mapped in Table 4 the 14 interventions reviewed for this evaluation have implemented different combinations of programming approaches to promote women's economic empowerment with varying levels of success. Most interventions have combined activities to promote women's increased engagement in economic or income earning activities with activities to build women's power, agency and solidarity. The evidence of programming impacts discussed in Chapter 4 indicates that this combined approach is necessary to facilitate changes in women's agency (i.e. skills, knowledge, confidence), together with the changes in relations (e.g. with their husbands, with other women, with their communities) and structures (including social norms and formal institutions) that are needed to sustain women's increased agency over the longer term so that they are able to achieve increased economic participation and empowerment. Here we consider how and why selected programming approaches implemented by the interventions reviewed have been particularly effective in contributing to the impacts on WEE delivered by CARE programming in the Mekong region.

VSLA: The programming approach of VSLA stands out as an approach that was consistently found to have contributed towards improvements in ethnic women's economic advancement and power and agency, including positive effects on women's relationships within their households and communities. There are multiple reasons for the effectiveness of this approach. Firstly, VSLA provides a practical mechanism for addressing ethnic minority women's limited access to credit up to a certain point, which in many contexts represents a critical barrier to WEE. The direct economic benefits of VSLA membership provide a strong incentive for women's participation in the groups and are recognised by both women and men. This encourages the support of male household members for women's participation in the VSLA, thereby fostering changes in social norms that define and constrain women's economic participation.

At the same time the VSLA provides a safe space and mechanism for women to develop new skills and knowledge, including financial literacy, leadership and communications skills. As women become more confident and are able to develop IGAs based on use of savings and loans, so their increased agency leads to changes in their status and roles within their own households and sometimes beyond. The experiences of the programming interventions Vietnam and Myanmar reviewed for this evaluation indicate that these changes can take several forms including women's increased involvement and influence in household decision-making, reduced violence against women, the more equal division of household workloads and/or women's increased participation in public life. As illustrated by the case of the WIN project in Myanmar and PACODE in Vietnam, the VSLA also provides a forum for programming engagement to address broader issues relating to WEE such as women's sexual and reproductive health, and nutrition and hygiene practices. The achievements of these interventions clearly reflect the mutually-reinforcing linkages between the economic and social dimensions of women's economic empowerment.

However, while the VSLA programming approach represents a potentially effective and self-sustaining mechanism for starting to address barriers relating to women's agency, relations and structures, the experiences of interventions reviewed in Vietnam suggest that the approach also has important limitations, especially when implemented with women only. Critical limitations of the approach are that i) VSLA loans are relatively small and so are often not enough to support business development beyond a certain scale; and ii) there is a tendency for male relatives to seek to control women VSLA members's decision-making regarding the taking and use of loans, thereby limiting the extent to which women really are meaningfully empowered as a result of their participation in the groups. The experience of the WIN project in Myanmar suggests that the VSLA approach needs to be combined with gender training (see below) to more effectively address the structural barriers of social norms that constrain progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

Gender training: A second programming approach that stands out in terms of impacts on women's power and agency, including aspects of relations and structures, is that of gender training. Interventions that implemented a gender training approach in Laos and Myanmar which involved engaging men and women in shared analysis of issues such as violence against women, women's SRH and household divisions of labour were found to have facilitated positive changes in men's attitudes and behaviours on those issues. In this way, the approach of gender training appears to have been an effective mechanism for challenging and changing social norms which represent key barriers to WEE. Gender training appears to have been particularly effective when combined with programming approaches involving training, support for increased engagement in economic activities, and the establishment of women's groups (especially VSLA), i.e. other activities which provide an entry point or incentive (often economic) for women and men's participation in the gender training.

So for example, the DFSP field study found widespread acknowledgement by women and men's focus groups of the role that gender training had played in changing social norms and behaviours at the village level. For men, the changes identified were often mentioned alongside an appreciation for women's new income earning roles. The gender training had encouraged men to put more effort into family income earning and to understand that this meant reducing women's workload and supporting women more. While the changes identified in the DFSP context – particularly around the issue of alcohol consumption by men - appeared to be dynamic and under continual negotiation, the finding that women are now more involved in those negotiations reflects a potentially significant positive change in gender relations. The Engaging Men Initiative by the WIN project in Myanmar, which included couples forums, men's forums and the identification of role model men, was similarly reported to have resulted in increased numbers of men providing support to their partners in domestic chores, caring for pregnant partners and small children, and accompanying their partners while seeking SRH services. By contrast in Vietnam where gender training had only been carried out with village leaders, it was found that social norms such as those defining women's role in household decision-making were relatively slow to change and represented persistent barriers to WEE.

Promoting enhanced production and access to markets: The widely implemented programming approach of promoting enhanced agricultural production (including forestry and horticulture), which in Vietnam and Laos was combined with approaches to facilitate the establishment of group-based enterprises and/or promoting access to markets, has in some cases led to the development of successful women owned enterprises and cooperatives. In other cases it has enabled women who have previously only grown subsistence produce to grow and produce more and to sell some of their produce. The ethnic context and remote communes, villages or homesteads has meant that most income earning and ownership of productive assets have been at a household level – with family rather than individual ownership. So while increased income cannot always be solely attributed to women's inputs, the interventions implementing these approaches have increased women's economic participation.

These impacts have been achieved by:

- Including women in a broad range of economic activities, including those traditionally considered as men's roles, and building women's skills and knowledge relating to agricultural production and processing techniques. While some interventions have adopted women-focused targeting strategies for selecting participants (e.g. ECCODE, SIEED in Vietnam and WIN in Myanmar), others have been implemented by a gender mainstreaming approach (e.g. CHIFS, PFSP in Cambodia and DFSP, PRDP in Laos). The lack of quantitative gender-disaggregated data for the interventions implemented by gender mainstreaming however precludes analysis of whether and how the impacts of those interventions on women and men participants may have varied.
- Including men alongside women in project activities designed to promote increased economic engagement and providing gender training, which together have led to changes in men's attitudes regarding women's income generating capabilities and activities and role in decision-making.
- Incorporating activities designed to address barriers to WEE alongside activities designed to promote enhanced production and access to markets. Examples include: initiatives to reduce women's workloads and time constraints; initiatives to promote increased access to financial services either

informally through VSLAs or by facilitating linkages to formal financial institutions; initiatives to promote improved access to SRH services for women; and initiatives to promote improved hygiene and sanitation infrastructure and behaviours to ensure better nutrition outcomes, reduce household healthcare costs and loss of income generation opportunities. By addressing key barriers to WEE, these interventions have enabled women to take up opportunities for economic participation that they might otherwise not have been able to.

- Building village, government and CSO structures (e.g. women's solidarity groups, VSLAs etc.) to support gender equality and women's voices over the medium to long term. The CASI II LARCs are an example of the way in which building women's increased awareness and understanding of their rights can promote increased economic and political participation.

Overall however, the effectiveness of promoting enhanced production and access to markets appears to have been mixed, particularly for interventions being implemented in remote areas with poor transport linkages. Interventions in Vietnam and Laos experienced considerable difficulties in facilitating the establishment of the market linkages required to ensure sustainable demand for women farmers' products. In some cases, farmer groups suffered reduced incomes and losses due to the over-production and therefore saturation of local markets for certain products. These experiences highlight the importance of grounding the development of future WEE programming interventions in appropriate processes of market analysis to direct the sustainable development of economic activities being undertaken by women producers.

5.2 Access to economic resources leading to socio-cultural changes

Learning question 2: How does gaining increased access to, and control over, economic resources, lead to socio-cultural changes at the individual, family, community levels?

The findings of the desk review and fieldwork support the theory of change that gaining increased access to, and control over, economic resources, can lead to socio-cultural changes at household and community levels (to some extent at least). The experiences of many of the CARE projects in the Mekong consistently show that **as women begin to take on a more active role in economic activities and so begin to earn income and contribute more to household finances, so they are also able to begin to play a more active role in decision-making processes of their households and communities, thereby achieving further agency.**

This is not to say that involvement in income earning and access to economic resources are the only contributing factors to changes in women's power and agency. These kinds of changes are also driven by a combination of women's increased knowledge, confidence and therefore strengthened voice, and changes in social norms defining how women are seen by others – including their husbands, families, neighbours and communities. **As men (and other women) begin to see women as skilled and capable income earners, so they tend to respect and value women's views and contributions more,** in what has the potential to become a mutually-reinforcing “virtuous circle” process of social change.

However, the experiences of these programming initiatives also indicate that there are limits to the progress to be made and impacts that can be achieved by projects designed to promote WEE by working with women alone. Involving women in training and capacity-building activities, enabling them to build stronger social networks through group membership structures, and facilitating their access to IGA opportunities are important ways of promoting women's economic advancement, power and agency, but are not enough to bring about the structural changes in formal and informal institutions required to create an enabling environment to facilitate and sustain advances in women's economic empowerment over the longer term.

Transformative processes of social norm change take time and require the on-going engagement of women, men and community leaders in processes of dialogue and collective action. So, for example, the ECCODE and DFSP field studies identified the widely accepted social norm that women are only able to take independent decisions about small household expenditures whereas men usually have the final say in decisions relating to larger expenditure or there had to be joint decision making. Comments by women members of ECCODE VSLAs suggesting that it is often their husbands who are

leading the household decision-making process regarding the taking and use of loans also reflect this social norm, and indicate the need for programming interventions to work with both men and women to explicitly explore and challenge such persistent culturally-accepted attitudes and behaviours.

The field study findings also highlight the different ways in which men and women interpret and respond to changes in social norms, as illustrated by the views of DFSP and ECCODE project participants concerning women's increased self-esteem and confidence. In both the Laos and Vietnam contexts, men were happy that their wives were cooking better food and dressing better, and noticed that their wives were participating more in meetings and social occasions. By contrast, women in those contexts were more likely to link increased self-esteem and self-confidence with their newly gained agricultural abilities and other knowledge and connection with the outside world.

The DFSP and ECCODE field studies also found that gender-based violence (GBV) was reported by women project participants to have decreased as a result of improved standards of living, as well as changes in the way women and men relate to each other. In both contexts however, GBV was raised as a significant problem faced by many women in their day-to-day lives (despite not having been addressed specifically in the research in recognition of the potential sensitivity of the topic). With the exception of the WIN project in Myanmar, GBV was not an issue that any of the interventions reviewed had attempted to address. These findings highlight the need for future WEE programming to include a specific focus on understanding and challenging the social norms relating to GBV, which represents a critical barrier to the achievement of women's empowerment.

5.3 Good practices from CARE's work to promote WEE in the Mekong region

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

Elements of good practice can be found in many of the reviewed projects, but are particularly evident from the experiences of more recent projects that adopted a more holistic approach to WEE based on a good quality context and gender analysis. The following aspects of approaches across the region have been particularly successful:

1. Organisation and association – women's collective action. Women's groups appear to have been successful as they enhance both economic advancement and power and agency, often addressing some of the more pressing barriers that women face when trying to earn an income. If the groups are based on more formal enterprise or long term VSL they are also likely to become important village institutions that continually remind people what women are capable of. There were three types of groups in these projects. (i) VSLA in combination with training – building skills, knowing rights, accessing credit and building savings (ii) Cooperatives or form group based businesses – which have potential for enhancing efficiencies, creating bulk and access to markets for small producers (iii) WINGS or women's groups, which are solidarity groups that use participative problem solving techniques to address barriers and to build women's capabilities.

2. Practically-based training and learning approaches. Two interesting approaches to training and learning were used in the projects. (i) Peer to peer learning and cascading learning through villages. This presented women as teachers and thought leaders, so not only enhanced whole village learning, but also enhanced women's status in the community. (ii) Learning by doing and observing. This mainly consisted of women taking part in study visits (e.g. DFSP study visits to Paksong coffee production) or being included in activities. The study visits in particular were cited as transformational for the small number of women who attended. It was also important this was a mixed male and female activity as it enhanced women's status further and maybe provided a way of challenging social norms limiting women's mobility.

3. Working with mass organisations such as CSOs and the women's union. This enabled a scaling up of activity so that the project activities could reach further than the project and built in sustainability. It supports social norm change if CSO and mass organisations support gender equality in all of their activities. It also provides a potential mechanism for policy feedback from community members at the grassroots level to local government institutions as part of a process of civil society strengthening

4. Gender training and engaging men in initiatives to promote women's economic empowerment.

The inclusion of gender training and activities to promote men's engagement in some project implementation strategies can be seen to have contributed towards changes in social norms that define (and often constrain) opportunities and decisions open to women. The fieldwork in Laos and the WIN, Myanmar report highlighted the transformational effects of gender training for both men and women in terms of their understanding of women's workloads.

5. Integrating economic approaches with SRHR, hygiene, access to water and sanitation as appropriate for the context. The field work underlined how SRHR, water and sanitation barriers can act as time and workload constraints for women, but can also limit women's self-confidence. Where projects have managed to integrate these initiatives into the WEE approach there has been a more favourable change to women's lives and wellbeing. This appears to impact on women's ability to work and earn an income.

5.4 Challenges and gaps

Women's economic advancement has sometimes been limited by an incomplete approach to addressing some of women's barriers. Notable gaps were:

- A lack of leadership capacity strengthening. The DFSP evaluation showed how important village and women's union leadership and change agents (such as teachers and doctors) are to the success of programming approaches for WEE. In the villages where there was weak leadership the project had not made so much progress. Not enough emphasis has been given to developing the capacity and commitment of these people within the project.
- Limited focus on strengthening enterprise management skills. In Vietnam the formally registered collaboration groups had increased business management skills, but individual women from the informal interest groups mostly had very limited enterprise capabilities. In Laos there was virtually no effort to improve women's enterprise capability and many women were not even recording their income and expenditure. This was limiting women's ability to understand whether they were making any profit from their business and to plan for the future.
- Limited market and value chain analysis capability within projects and among ethnic women. Women in Laos and Vietnam had found that they were all trying to sell the same produce as they had been all given the same technical skills and information. However they were not able to assess what was most likely to sell and what channels would be the best. There was also limited efforts to add value to primary agricultural products.
- A lack of focus on the development and strengthening of market linkages for men and women. This is linked to the previous point. However ethnic groups cannot develop the market linkages based on knowledge alone. Ethnic minority communities are likely to have limited networking with wider national and international buyers. Though some buyers come to the village for coffee, the villagers have limited negotiating power as they have no other sales channels.
- Lack of a graduated approach to women's access to financial services. Women participants of the ECCODE project and others in Vietnam complained of the small loan sizes in VSLA and how this was limiting the potential of their enterprise. In the Laos projects there was no support for VLSA or access to financial services within the reviewed projects. Several women thought that they could grow their enterprise more with further investment.
- Virtually no approach to enabling women's mobility. Though a small number of projects were improving road quality, there were no transport cooperatives or bus services included in the projects. Nor was there any approaches to develop cluster market places in growth villages.

Data for analysing the impacts and achievements of interventions in evaluation reports was limited. In particular there was limited information on:

- Financial services and VSLA: Very little data on repayment rates (only PACCODE provided this) and overall loan size by person, how many people were borrowing and how money was invested

either in business or other. No discussion on links with formal banking system, except for the ECCODE project in Vietnam.

- Limited analysis of the gender context and barriers to women's participation in income earning
- Reliable data on enterprise health and income
- Social norm changes around gender equality and changes in women's self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Levels of VAW, alcohol and drug abuse (Myanmar was the exception)

6. Recommendations

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

- ✓ Women's economic activities, opportunities and barriers to income earning – including economic, practical and social barriers (e.g. gender inequality, high fertility, workload, knowledge of business and marketing, financial literacy, current economic activity and income)
- ✓ Analysis of existing and potential markets and outlets for current produce (e.g. agricultural) and new products (e.g. coffee, SIM cards)
- ✓ Access to financial services – including savings and credit, but also health insurance and leases
- ✓ Decision making and power in the family and in the community with respect to income earning and other aspects of women's lives
- ✓ Sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and violence against women and girls (VAWG). (this could include fertility, desire to limit number of children, how women manage childcare and childbirth and associated health risks; assessment of access to services and decision making power over women's own bodies; VAWG prevalence and impact on women and their ability to earn an income and make decisions)
- ✓ Existence of feminist or women's groups or support networks (e.g. the Lao Women's Union) and assessment of their capability
- ✓ Institutional, legal and regulatory framework (this might include laws around inheritance and land ownership, women's rights and sexual and reproductive rights; also it might include government and project institutional gender equality and safeguards of women's rights)

(ii) Integrate gender equality and women's empowerment throughout project activities. In general this should take into consideration the following:

- Including women in all training and income earning activities.
- Enabling women to travel outside of villages and to make contact with other people. This can be supported with transport and social norm approaches
- Ensure ethnic women are employed as project staff (e.g. Build on the work of PARUA II where they give scholarships to ethnic women and build capacity to employ them on the project team).

(iii) Develop a more comprehensive approach to promoting women's inclusion in private sector development and continue to work on combined approaches that include initiatives to improve women's economic advancement alongside or combined with initiatives to improve power and agency.. This should be based on the analysis of what women need in order to develop their income earning potential and could potentially include:

- ✓ Business development services – building up bookkeeping, management and leadership knowledge and skills, marketing and market analysis expertise and experience
- ✓ Technical skills in design and production (e.g. food processing, handicrafts, equipment), agriculture, services (e.g. motorbike maintenance, hair dressing) and introduction of new technology products and services (e.g. SIM cards, solar powered lamps, motorbike rental services, transport services etc)
- ✓ Access to financial services such as savings and loans and insurance through VSLA and formal banking. This should include a graduation from small loans and savings through VSLA to the potential of larger loans and more secure savings in formal banking system. New technology should be explored – such as mobile money, mobile based credit ratings

- ✓ Enhancing access to markets through making market connections (e.g. through Fairtrade), addressing physical and gender barriers to accessing markets (including innovative approaches to sales models, transport, communications and physical market places).
- ✓ Introduce private sector approaches that encourage collaboration and joint ownership within and between villages in order to enhance inclusion and income equality, while at the same time enabling bulk purchasing of inputs and bulk sales (e.g. cooperatives)

(iv) Integrate approaches for engaging men in projects designed to promote women's economic empowerment in ways that will challenge and transform social norms around gender equality and women's rights and promote men and women's improved understanding of gender relations. This can include gender training, but also can mean involving men in traditionally women's activities such as cooking and nutrition through role model man approaches, and engaging men (and women) in couple-based dialogues on issues relating to child rearing, water, SRHR, hygiene and sanitation. This could also include financial management and financial literacy discussions for men and women so that they are able to build up understanding of how women are just as capable of making decisions about large scale expenditure as men. This will encourage women to think bigger and to better understand finance and financial services.

(v) Develop WEE approaches that integrate methods to tackle violence against women and children, violence more broadly, and alcohol and drug abuse. This will need to be based on assessments of violence in remote ethnic communities, social norms and community support systems.

(vi) Enhance regional exchange and learning to develop good practice for improving women's economic empowerment among ethnic women in the Mekong (WEEEM). There are some good examples of holistic approaches to WEE and these need to be shared and developed across the region. A coherent regional approach with some high level WEE indicators would improve the communication of WEE results across the region. **(vii) Clarify and enhance CARE's role in civil society strengthening, advocacy and accountability.** This an important aspect of ensuring sustainability. Because civil society is not very strong in the region, and also they are often co-opted by government through funding approaches, it might be useful to focus almost entirely on gender equality and strengthening women's voice in processes.

Annex 1: Summary overview of CARE projects in Laos, Vietnam, Myanmar and Cambodia

LAOS	
PFSCBP - Phonsaly food security and capacity building project	
<u>Purpose:</u> To sustainably increase food security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas in two districts in Phongsaly Province	
<p>Target group: 7,400 participants in 1,050 households, many female headed, in 31 remote villages</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 31 villages in Samphan and Khua districts, Phongsaly province in the Northeast of the Laos</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> Oct 2005 - Oct 2009</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 980,00</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to food is increased through improved capacity of households to generate income by taking advantage of market opportunities • Improved health, in particular among children, and reduced workload on women, and • Capacity building of communities and local government bodies. <p><u>Implementation and WEE approach:</u> Three pronged approach to addressing poor nutrition: income generation, food growing and health awareness and training. Income generation focuses mostly on livestock and NTFP. Food growing is only through home gardens. Women targeted approaches in this project focus on addressing women’s time constraints, nutrition and their access to health services, which relates to wellbeing and decision making in reproductive health (agency). Project support to increase knowledge and capability around agriculture and livestock production as well as NTFP collection (honey) has resulted in increased economic advancement. However there is no indication of how women were included and what the impact on women has been. Only nutrition and health activities specifically mention women.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Livestock, cattle banks, vet services, marketing and trade * NTFP production and marketing * Income generation, tailoring and handicrafts * Water and sanitation * Nutrition knowledge and practice including vegetable gardens * Health awareness – SRHR and HIV
LANGOCA - Reducing UXO Risk and Improving Livelihoods of Ethnic Communities	

Purpose: Reduce vulnerability of ethnic communities in Sekong province through integration of UXO and poverty reduction strategies	
<p>Target group: Talieng and Arak, with lesser numbers of Ngkriang and other ethnic groups</p> <p>Geographical coverage: Sekong Province: 20 communities in Lamarm and Dakcheung districts with an estimated total population of 6,500 persons</p> <p>Timeframe: 21 May 2007 – 30 June 2012, extended to June 2014</p> <p>Partners: Fondation Suisse De Deminage (FSD), the World Food Program. Govt partners: Provincial and District Labour and Social Welfare Office (PoLSW), the District Agriculture and Forestry Offices (DAFO) and the Lao Women’s Union (LWU).</p> <p>Budget: USD2,600,921</p>	<p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce physical risks and livelihood constraints associated with UXO contamination • Improve rural based livelihoods amongst ethnic minority communities with a direct measurable impact on the wellbeing of women and girls • Build village and district capacities to identify and address livelihood opportunities and risks • Effective and efficient project coordination and management <p>Implementation and WEE approach: A project that works on livelihoods, health and UXO clearance, whilst building skills and capacity in communities and among government workers. LANGOCA has taken a fairly integrated WEE approach, which means that it is mainstreamed throughout the project activities: building up women’s knowledge and skills through integration into agriculture and livestock production activities – and thereby increasing their income earning potential. At the same time women’s voices are involved in decision making through a women’s forum, which was intended to make sure that women’s ideas and aims for livelihoods projects and clearance areas are taken into account. Barriers to agency and relations are also addressed through time saving technology, SRHR awareness and literacy and numeracy training.</p> <p>Key activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * UXO clearance by community prioritisation, UXO awareness training, first aid for village health volunteers, finance for victims * Technology to reduce women’s workload * Improved vehicle access to villages * Trader market * Women’s Lao, numeracy and nutrition skills * SRHR and HIV awareness
PARUA II - Poverty alleviation in remote upland areas	
Purpose: To sustainably increase livelihood security among poor ethnic groups in remote upland areas	
<p>Target group: 11 villages - Prai ethnic group</p>	<p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase local government and private sector capacities to manage and deliver livelihood services in target Kum Ban Pattana, Sayabouly District.

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

<p><u>Timeframe:</u> April 2010 to December 2013</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Government, Lao Women's Union</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 1,700,000</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened village and District technical skills and capacities associated with project promoted food and income production systems. <p><u>Implementation and WEE approach:</u> An integrated approach to improving nutrition through increasing sources of food and income and knowledge of cooking and nutritious eating, with women included in most activities. DFSP has a fairly integrated and holistic approach to WEE. Women's economic advancement was targeted by introducing new income earning opportunities (gardening, livestock, NTFP) and increasing access to time-saving assets. Power and agency were addressed through inclusion of women in technical capacity building (agriculture, water, and livestock), including study visits, and nutrition and cooking training. Relations and decision making power in particular were addressed through the women's groups (WINGS) and inclusion in village decision making.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Income generation and better nutrition through coffee and livestock, fish farms, vegetable gardens and fruit trees. * Women's nutrition and cooking training * Irrigation and rice farming * Coffee production and processing * WINGS group and women's workload reduction * Training and study visits * Road maintenance
<p>PRDP - Phongsaly Rural Development project</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To increase food and nutritional security of the poorest at household and community levels through facilitating the development of food and nutritional strategies and meaningful engagement in wider decision-making processes at local levels affecting their future food security.</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u></p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 28 targeted villages (10 new villages in Samphan District, 10 new villages in Mai District, and 8 existing villages in Khua District,)</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased community, women's & farmer groups, and local NPA social capital and participation in planning, demand creation and model development for improved food security, nutrition and health outcomes in 3 districts in Phongsaly province. Improved local farming systems which respond directly to women's priorities with main emphasis on (i) improved nutritional and food security, (2) income generation of products with high market potential, and (3) climate change adaptation

<p><u>Timeframe:</u> 1st January 2012 – 30th June 2013</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Provincial Agriculture and Forestry Office, Provincial Public Health Office, Provincial Planning, Investment and Cooperation Office, and Provincial Lao Women’s Union</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 388,882</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened NPA & CARE cooperation in central-level policy engagement, and inclusion of CARE evidence-based models and lessons learned into key GoL rural development policies and programs and their implementation <p><u>Implementation and WEE approach:</u> Integrated programme with agriculture, nutrition, farmer groups, health volunteers, women’s groups and widespread capacity development and policy dialogue. The agriculture inputs are varied with a range of different crops offered to the villages. Targeted and integrated approach to inclusion of women through women’s groups and integration throughout activities. PRDP is has an important emphasis on structure and relations, while at the same time building women’s income earning opportunities and access to services. Village level social capital and inclusion in public and planning decision making aims to improve women’s inclusion in decision making and their access to services. Economic advancement activities not on focus on agriculture and food production (cash crops, NTFP, livestock and gardens), but also include financial literacy and market engagement and market information systems. Agency and relations are changed through farmer and women’s groups.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Women’s and farmer groups * Hygiene and water * Participation in planning * Training in financial literacy, market engagement * Animal banks, veterinary fund * Farming trials and NTFP, gardening and high value crops * Market information systems * Study visits for farmers and women’s groups
<p>Vietnam</p>	
<p>PACODE - The Participatory Community Development programme</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To improve living conditions of poor communities with a large Khmer population in the Mekong Delta. PACODE especially addresses the needs and interests of poorer women by focusing on improving the health, income and access to water and sanitation for those women and their households.</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u> Over 5000 poor, rural households in 8 communes with a</p>	<p><u>Specific objectives:</u></p>

<p>large Khmer population located in An Giang and Soc Trang provinces</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> An Giang and Soc Trang provinces (southern Vietnam)</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> 2005-2009</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Women's Union; Paediatric Hospital No. 1 of Ho Chi Minh city; Energy Conservation Research and Development Centre (Ho Chi Minh city NGO).</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 2,890,070</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women in the program area, including poor Khmer women, have knowledge and access to services and participate actively in community development processes. • Communities, the Women's Union, NGOs, and local authorities have the capacity to plan and implement participatory community development activities in areas with a large Khmer population. • An institutional structure exists for exchange and dissemination of experiences from poverty reduction in communities with a large Khmer population. <p><u>Implementation approach and focus on WEE:</u> The PACODE project worked to improve the health, income and access to water and sanitation for poor women and their households. Women participants were expected to gain increased confidence and to participate actively in community development processes through their involvement in project activities. By promoting improved health through better hygiene practices and access to clean water, it was expected that project participants would also benefit from reduced time and financial costs of healthcare, and so have more time to engage in productive activities, leading to increased household income. The project included a savings and credit component which provided financing for productive activities with small loans, as a mechanism for improving the economic situation of participant households and enabling women to become more independent and assertive as income earners. The programme was not designed to promote WEE but was expected to impact on WEE in the longer term as the result of this combination of activities. <u>Key activities:</u> Micro Finance, Health, Clean Water and Efficient Energy</p>
<p>ECCODE - The Thai Nguyen Women's Economic Collaboration for Development project</p>	
<p><u>Purpose:</u> 12,000 poor women and men in eight communes in Thai Nguyen province have improved their income and influence on economic decision-making through membership of rural cooperation groups.</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u> 12,000 working age people (2,000 households); 1,300 of 2,000 trainees will be women; 84 secondary beneficiaries from partner organisations.</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 8 communes in Dinh Hoa district of Thai Nguyen province.</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> March 2008 - April 2012</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> The Cooperative Alliance of Thai Nguyen province; Women's</p>	<p><u>Results:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest groups, collaboration groups, and "new-style" cooperatives formed and supported to pursue production and business opportunities. • The management and technical capacity of local organisations to undertake demand-driven cooperation group development activities, credit services and policy feedback enhanced. <p><u>Implementation approach and focus on WEE:</u> The ECCODE project worked on enabling poor rural women and men to form groups to engage in income generating activities; to develop their own group-based businesses; and to access credit/ financial services based on a targeted approach for the inclusion of ethnic minority women. The project's group-based approach, which involved the establishment of informal interest groups as well as formally registered cooperation groups, was intended to promote the establishment of structures to support market-driven livelihoods diversification and development. The project also involved a focus on building the capacity of local partners (the Women's Union) responsible for supporting the groups to</p>

<p>Union of Thai Nguyen province; Centre for Advancement of Community Empowerment and Partnership.</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 1,344,000</p>	<p>facilitate a more business oriented and market-based approach to development. As such the project was primarily focussed on promoting WEE. <u>Key activities:</u> Formation of formal and informal groups for the development of various income-generating activities, including livestock husbandry, tea cultivation, mushroom cultivation and rice noodle production; capacity-building for groups and partner organisations; facilitation project participants' improved access to credit through VSL groups, capacity-building for SPB and the establishment by WU of Fund for Poor women.</p>
<p>SIEED - The Social Inclusion Economic Enterprise Development Project</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> Poor farmers in 15 remote northern mountains communes benefit equitably from marketing of selected products regionally and nationally and sustainable farm/forest production systems. Community Centre Development (CCD), Women's Union (WU) and Farmers' Union's (FU) capacity to support community groups and their access to markets improved.</p>	
<p><u>Target group:</u> Women and men and their dependents of 8,745 households (51,715 people), of which 83.7% are ethnic minorities.</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 15 communes in 3 districts of Dien Bien province.</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> July 2008 - end March 2012</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Local NGO - Community Centre Development (CCD); Associates: Women's Union (WU) and Farmers' Union (FU)</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 1,350,000</p>	<p><u>Results:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Market linkages secured by collaborative groups for selected value chains with fair distribution of benefits locally. • Collaborative groups managing a diversity of environmentally sound and integrated farm and forest based enterprises. • Business support services established by CCD and accessible to farmers and their organisations. • Women's Union and Farmers' Union responsive to demands of producers. <p><u>Implementation approach:</u> The SIEED project focused on developing market-led approaches to add value to production and processing activities undertaken by poor rural households while at same time maintaining or enhancing environmental quality. Poor women and men from ethnic minority groups were supported to form interest and collaborative groups and to engage in market-based production activities, as opposed to their traditional subsistence-based strategies. Support structures for remote communities were developed through a focus on capacity-building of the local partner (CCD - the only NGO operating in the province) to deliver a range of services. Overall the SIEED project's targeted approach for the inclusion of women was similar to that of ECCODE but with a more explicit focus on market linkages. As such it was an intervention that was explicitly designed to promote WEE.</p> <p><u>Key activities:</u> Formation of formal and informal groups for economic initiatives, including initiatives relating to non-timber forest products, on-farm and off-farm production; promotion of market linkages based on participatory value chain analysis; capacity-building for partner organisation (CCD) in value chain analysis and business development services; capacity-building for WU and FU in member services and rights.</p>
<p>CASI II - The Civil Action for Socio-economic Inclusion in Natural Resource Management, Phase II programme</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> Sustainable improvements in livelihood security of disadvantaged and natural resource-dependent people in rural areas who lack access to resources and influence over decisions that affect their lives.</p>	

<p>Target group: Groups of poor, rural people, many belonging to ethnic minorities, and staff from partner organizations.</p> <p>Geographical coverage: COS, LARC, CEFM and PWM components in 4 northern provinces of Bac Kan, Hoa Binh, Son La and Thanh Hoa, and CODE component in the southern province of An Giang; civil society strengthening components (VUSTA, VNCB and ENABLE) across all field sites and in Hanoi, with coordination from Hanoi-based PDCF structure.</p> <p>Timeframe: 2004 - 2009</p> <p>Partners: Local civil society organizations engaged in poverty reduction at various levels, including CBOs, farmers' cooperatives, non-government organizations (NGOs) and mass organizations.</p> <p>Budget: USD 3,563,568</p>	<p>Specific objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mass organizations (MOs), VNGOs and CBOs are providing appropriate and relevant services to the rural natural resource-dependent poor that enable them to improve their livelihoods. • MOs, VNGOs and CBOs facilitate participation of the rural natural resource-dependent poor in decisions that affect their lives. • MOs, VNGOs and CBOs promote sustainable natural resources management based on community needs and involvement. <p>Implementation approach and focus on WEE: CASI II worked by means of a rights-based approach in partnership with local organisations, including Mass Organisations (MOs), Vietnamese NGOs, community-based organisations and professional associations, to support the development and capacity of emerging civil society in Vietnam. The programme was structured as a series of interlinked and coordinated components designed to support community-based initiatives relating to natural resource management and sustainable economic development planning. The programme design was based on a detailed analysis of gender issues (including livelihood constraints). CASI II aimed to reach the poorest, especially women and ethnic minorities, mainly in the northern mountainous regions of the country, with a view to improving their participation and voice in their own development. The programme was also designed to increase access to relevant resources and services essential for sustainable livelihoods by building the capacity of poor community groups and local service providers. It included a specific women's livelihood component - the Livelihoods And Rights Clubs (LARCs) – see below for details.</p> <p>Programme components: Community Organisational Strengthening (COS, 2004 – 2006); Livelihoods and Rights Clubs (LARC, 2004 – 2009); Community Development (CODE, 2004-2006); Community Empowerment for Forestry Management (CEFM, 2007 – 2009); Participatory Watershed Management (PWM, 2007-2009); Vietnam NGO Policy Feedback (VUSTA) project (2004-2006) and Vietnamese NGO Capacity-Building component (VNCB,2004-2006) continued as Effective Networking for a Better Learning Environment component (ENABLE,2007-2009) and the Programme Development and Coordination Facility (PDCF).</p>
<p>LARC II - The Livelihood and Rights Clubs Phase II, Component of CASI II</p>	
<p>Purpose: Poor women in Hoa Binh and Bac Kan provinces have improved their livelihoods and are actively addressing rights issues.</p>	
<p>Target group: Women of poor rural households belonging to the Muong ethnic minority, and partner organization staff.</p> <p>Geographical coverage: 34 villages in Lac Son district, Hoa Binh province.</p>	<p>Results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livelihood and Rights Clubs and their activities in Hoa Binh province and in 4 communes of Bac Kan province operational, sustainable and benefiting poor ethnic minority women. • Hoa Binh and Bac Kan Women's Unions have the capacity to facilitate, support and replicate women's livelihood and rights clubs.

<p>Later extended to 2 other districts in Hoa Binh district and replicated in Bac Kan province.</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> January 2007 - December 2009</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Women's Union (Bac Kan & Hoa Binh province);; VNGOs - Centre of Legal Research and Services (LERES) and Agriculture and Forestry Research and Development Centre for Northern Mountainous Region (AFRDC).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> National women's union has agreed to upscale LARCs as a valuable model for women's empowerment. <p><u>Implementation approach:</u></p> <p>Provision of livelihoods training (what's this?) and project-funded credit scheme. Provision of trainings and legal education to improve poor women's rights awareness. Advocacy activities (which are noted to have resulted in improved access by poor women to credit programs from the local govt bank). Capacity-building for partners on participatory establishment and operation of LARC.</p> <p>Focus here is on building women's agency, enhancing access to resources (credit) and building capacity of (redefining) institutions. In this way the LARCs can be considered as an intervention that was designed to promote women's empowerment in the broader sense, but which included activities to promote WEE.</p>
<p>Myanmar</p>	
<p>SCLSP - Southern Chin Livelihood Security Project</p>	
<p><u>Purpose:</u> To improve the livelihood security of targeted communities in Mindat and Matupi Townships, southern Chin State.</p>	
<p><u>Target Group</u></p> <p>13,400 inhabitants of the 75 participating villages in Mindat and Matupi townships. The project has targeted a total of 3,326 households, including 708 women headed households (WHH) and 619 people living with disabilities (PWD) (309M, 310F) in vulnerable households</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage</u></p> <p>70 villages in Mindat Township, and 17 villages in Matupi Township, in Southern Chin State</p>	<p><u>Objectives</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capacity Building - To build organisational and general management capacity of local organisations Increased production and income - To increase household income and production levels through adoption of improved practices Water, sanitation and health - To facilitate health improvements through better access to water and sanitation, and associated health training <p><u>Implementation approach</u></p> <p>This project aims to address the health effects of undernutrition by increasing access to food and increasing income so that food can be bought. Livestock banks are used and women's groups and VSLA to build up women's confidence, while enhancing food security and income. Various Activity tasks were exclusively managed and implemented by women, supported by the village Women's Group together with Activity staff and partners. These include savings and loan groups, selected income-generation activities and livestock banks. Such tasks enabled women to gain in confidence and give them the opportunity to demonstrate explicitly to male community members the type of contribution they are capable of making to the welfare of the</p>

<p><u>Timeframe</u> February 2008 – January 2011</p> <p><u>Partners</u> WFP, CBOs at village level, Department of Health (DoH), other government partners including the Forest Department, the Myanmar Agriculture Service, and the Livestock, Veterinary and Breeding Department</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD3,400,100</p>	<p>community, in addition to their vast range of existing productive and reproductive activities that generally go un-remarked. This aimed to build women’s capacity, enabling them to better meet their practical gender needs, and raise their status within the community, contributing meeting their longer term strategic gender needs. Through participatory planning and monitoring, care was taken to ensure that such initiatives do not merely add further to women’s existing burdens. The introduction of labour-saving technologies for women will also help address this risk, as will the construction or improvement of water supply systems and the gradual shift to intensified, more sedentary forms of agriculture that will be supported by the Activity.</p> <p><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Community-Based Organisations are established or strengthened (e.g. village development committees and women's organisations, technical working groups for WATSAN, agriculture and health). * Collaborative networks among stakeholder organisations are strengthened – particularly to develop links within and between villages and links with markets and commercial actors * Capacity building through village, farmer and groups * Planning of farming and village sustainability and new farming methods trialled (e.g. to improve soil quality). * Access to land for landless or land-poor households is improved * Establishment of roadside markets and agro- processing. * VSL groups and livestock banks * Design and installation of community level water and sanitation infrastructure * Community knowledge of health, hygiene and nutrition is raised * Community forestry, community seed banks and establishment of permanent farms; * Advocacy for land rehabilitation/development process for landless or land-poor households; increase access to land
<p>WIN – Women’s Initiative Network</p> <p><u>Purpose:</u> To increase voices, decision making and social well-being of women in Northern Shan State, Myanmar</p>	
<p><u>Target Group</u> 3,000 women from 1,200 households, living in 20 rural villages across the</p>	<p><u>Objectives</u></p>

<p>townships of Muse and Nam Kham who are experiencing vulnerabilities related to economic insecurity, water access and reproductive health issues. Specific focus will be placed on addressing the needs of female-headed households or households where the woman is de-facto head of household. All adult women be given the opportunity to participate in project activities.</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage</u></p> <p>Muse and Nam Kham Townships in Muse District in northern Shan State</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> 2009 – 2014</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 356,812</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reduce barriers in accessing quality SRH care and information in order to increase voices and decision making of women for their bodies and family health care • To increase men’s positive engagement to promote women’s empowerment • To increase effective and efficient internal and external program learning <p><u>Implementation approach</u></p> <p>This project was changed from a harm reduction project to an SRHR project in 2011 in order to better address the barriers that women are facing. VSLA and SRHR training alongside other empowerment activities. The approach is based on a very thorough analysis of the gender context and barriers to women's empowerment and the design is based on the CARE Gender framework. It is based on the theory that enabling women to participate in practical and livelihoods based activities will be an important way of opening the door for women's enhanced decision making and participation in community level decision making. The approach, therefore, focuses very much on improving the economic advancement of women, while at the same time providing gender training to the whole community and working very specifically with men (particularly the community head/leader) to engage their support for the changes.</p> <p><u>Activities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Combined VSLA and SRHR training * Interpersonal communication and life skills training * SRHR service delivery and auxiliary midwife training * Education and events with community leaders and members to enhance social norm change * Discussions and workshops with civil society * Policy influencing and lesson learning on SRHR
<p>Cambodia</p>	
<p>CHIFS - Cambodian Highlands Food Security</p>	
<p><u>Target Group:</u> Indigenous people in Ratanakiri who are marginalised and vulnerable because of their geographic location and lack of access to services,</p>	<p><u>Objectives:</u></p> <p>Specific objective 1: Operational and management capacity of targeted community groups and local partners is strengthened.</p>

<p>their inability to speak Khmer and chronic food insecurity. The poorest 70% of 2,733 families (12,324 persons) / (6,114 women) in villages covered.</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 25 villages in 6 communes of Kone Morm District, Ratanakiri province.</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> May 2008 - December 2010</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Provincial departments of Rural Development, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishery, Water resources & Land Management; Commune councils, VDCs and Support Committees; CARDI Research centre (technical support) & Highlanders Association.</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 649,992</p>	<p>Specific objective 2: Vulnerable Households in Kone Morm District of Ratanakiri province have improved access to resources, appropriate technologies and markets by the end of the project (2010).</p> <p><u>Implementation approach:</u></p> <p>The CHIFS project aimed to promote economic advancement as means of improving food security. The project's focus on capacity-building at commune and provincial level was intended to promote power and agency at these institutional levels. However the project had no direct or explicit focus on women's economic empowerment in any of its purpose, objectives, results or activities. The OVIs of the project logframe were not disaggregated by gender. The project's targeting approach for the selection of participants focussed at the household level and so was apparently based on assumption that all members of participating households would benefit from a household's inclusion in the project.</p> <p>Project activities were arranged around six components as follows: identifying poor and vulnerable households by using participatory community tools; local capacity building enabling Commune Councils, Village Development Committees and village elders to identify, plan, design and manage CHIFS initiatives and other development activities in their communities; improving management techniques in agriculture; improving access to input and output markets; improving agriculture water management practices; improving household food utilisation and consumption of micronutrient and protein rich foods.</p>
<p>PFSP - Pailin Food Security Project</p>	
<p><u>Target Group:</u> 5,500 migrant families (25,235 persons) comprising the population of targeted villages in the project working area. The project specifically targeted the estimated 70 % that includes the poorest and most vulnerable of the new migrants' families. Targeted direct beneficiaries comprise of farmers, landless people, female-headed households, disabled,</p>	<p><u>Objectives:</u></p> <p>PFSP's overall purpose was to minimise the vulnerabilities of target population by improving the food security and income generating opportunities. The specific objectives of the project were:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) The operational and management capacity of targeted community groups and local government partners to manage PFSP initiatives is strengthened. 2) Food security amongst 5,000 farming households in the Sala Krau District of Pailin is sustainably improved by the end of the project (2009). <p><u>Implementation approach:</u></p>

<p>demobilised soldiers, and households with children < 5 years and pregnant / lactating women.</p> <p><u>Geographical coverage:</u> 4 communes of Sala Krau district, Pailin Municipality, North western Provinces, Kingdom of Cambodia. 43 villages in 4 clusters.</p> <p><u>Timeframe:</u> January 2007 to December 2009</p> <p><u>Partners:</u> Provincial Dept of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery (PDAFF); Cambodia-Australia Agricultural Extension Project (CAAEP).</p> <p><u>Budget:</u> USD 782,902</p>	<p>The PFSP approach was similar to that of the CHIFS project: it was an intervention designed to promote improved food security for a vulnerable population based on the promotion of improved agricultural production practices, including improved water management practices, and improved access to input and output markets, together with improved understanding of nutrition, hygiene and feeding practices, by means of an integrated, multi-sectoral approach. PFSP also included a focus on building the capacity of local institutions, namely Commune Councils and Village Development Committees to identify, plan, design and manage PFSP initiatives and other development activities in their communities.</p> <p>Women were specifically targeted as participants in project activities relating to nutrition and hygiene behaviours (which included the identification of model mothers to work as Village Health Volunteers and the organisation of cooking competitions) but project activities to promote increased economic engagement were targeted at the household and community levels. With the exception of an indicator referring to women's increased consumption of vegetables, fish and meat products, the PFSP logframe indicators were not gender-disaggregated. As such the project's implementation approach was described as one of gender-mainstreaming, rather than as a project focussing directly or specifically on promoting women's economic empowerment.</p> <p>Project activities were arranged around six components which included: identifying poor and vulnerable households by using participatory community tools; local capacity building enabling Commune Councils (CC) and Village Development Committees (VDC) to identify, plan, design and manage PFSP initiatives and other development activities in their communities; improving management techniques in agriculture; improving access to input and output markets; improving agriculture water management practices; improving household food utilisation and consumption of micronutrient and protein rich foods through better understanding of nutrition, hygiene and feeding practices.</p>
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