



## COVID-19 Update June 2021

COVID-19 is likely to continue to have an impact on the implementation of the Gender Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT) Program and market conditions for some time. Vietnam's recent May-June 2021 outbreak has seen record daily highs, with the majority of all cases recorded nationally to date reported within the past two months.

As of June 2021, only a small percentage of Vietnam's population was fully vaccinated. Until a significant proportion of the population is

vaccinated, travel restrictions and social distancing measures will likely be re-introduced whenever there is community transmission. Vietnam is seeking to secure 150 million vaccine doses to cover 70% of the population, however, this target is unlikely to be met before 2022.

Over the past year, GREAT has supported tourism partners to build their domestic market, however the May outbreak and subsequent restrictions will likely impact the peak summer travel period (May – September). A ban on eating

inside cafes and restaurants will also likely dampen demand for vegetables, impacting agriculture GREAT partners.

GREAT will work with partners to revise or delay activities due to COVID-19 restrictions.

GREAT partners and team are working to re-schedule or arrange alternate or adjusted activities for the various training, workshops, trade fairs and study visits which have been impacted. Some partners have been able to switch to online training which, positively, has reportedly allowed more women to participate as they could better juggle competing demands of work and family.



### GREAT Partner Impact

COVID-19 continues to have an impact on partner project implementation, with 23% of agricultural and 22% of tourism activities being delayed. Given the focus of GREAT, most delays have disproportionately impacted women as they are often less likely to be able to access information, study tours and training than men.

Financial impacts have been acute for some partners due to changing market conditions, particularly in the tourism sector where loss of revenue has been as high as 70-90%. Sector-

wide, around 50% of those working in formal tourism roles have lost jobs. Within the agriculture sector, the passionfruit and vegetable value chains have been affected, with many of the cooperatives involved in GREAT activities reporting significant losses.

Specific challenges included:

- Businesses have had to scale down due to declining market demand (e.g. for vegetables) or shift to new products or new business models (such as handicrafts and tourism).

- Changing market conditions, including decreased access to goods and services.
- Certification processes (e.g. for organic cinnamon or tea) have been delayed as international auditors cannot travel to Vietnam.
- Tourism and handicraft trade fairs have been cancelled.
- Policy consultation workshops (District and Department Competitive Index initiatives) have been cancelled.
- Domestic and international study tours have been postponed.

<sup>1,2</sup> <https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/region/vietnam>

<sup>3</sup> <https://sggpnews.org.vn/health/vietnam-needs-150-million-covid-19-vaccine-doses-for-herd-immunity-91521.html>

Not all COVID-19 impacts have been negative. Some agriculture sector partners have reported greater access to domestic labour as people are not traveling to China for work. Others have reported that COVID-19 has prompted an assessment of business strategies, resulting in improved and more sustainable business models with a number of partners across both tourism and agriculture taking the step to digitise their systems and /or services.



## GREAT Beneficiary Impact

At the household level, an estimated 66% of agricultural beneficiaries have encountered difficulties due to COVID-19 interrupting production and crop-sales. Tourism was impacted more significantly, with 78% of tourism beneficiaries reporting an impact due to COVID-19 with a higher rate for women (79%) compared to men (73%).<sup>4</sup>

Evidence from GREAT's Midline Longitudinal Study and project level midline survey found that the impact on household income varied by sector with approximately half of all households reporting an increase in income, and half reporting a decline. However, an estimated 66% of agriculture beneficiaries encountered difficulties due to COVID-19 interrupting production and crop-sales. The impact on tourism was even more significant, with 78% of tourism beneficiaries reporting an impact due to COVID-19.

Positively, despite the impacts of COVID-19, GREAT project-related income increased, on average, by AUD 1,069 per household in 2020.



### COVID-19 and Women

The impacts of COVID-19 on women have been more pronounced with reports of lockdowns and economic pressures contributing to increased domestic violence in some of GREAT's target areas, a trend mirrored in emerging and anecdotal evidence globally.

Not all impacts on women have been negative. Men and women involved in some of GREAT's tourism, medicinal herbs and rice projects reported they were now earning incomes closer to home rather than migrating for work, and this has helped reduce household stress. In some households, men have reportedly been more active in household chores and productive activities as they have been unable to leave their villages for work.

<sup>4</sup> GREAT Project Level Midline Assessment Draft Report, Mekong Research Development Institute, February 2021.

# GREAT COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan

GREAT developed its COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan in 2020 to help partners and beneficiaries respond to and rebound from the economic impacts of COVID-19.



## Agriculture Sector Support

The disruption to agriculture markets has impacted market demand and income for men and women farmers. GREAT is supporting COVID-19 recovery plans for agriculture partners, working closely with the Departments of Planning and Investment and Agricultural and Rural Development in Son La and Lao Cai Provinces.

Adaptations within the agriculture sector have included:

- A number of partners have shifted extension services online. For example, technical advice for bamboo shoot production is being provided via video rather than site visits and organic cinnamon production training has been provided to over 1,000 households.
- New testing of viability of new products to fill market gaps. For example, COVID-19 restrictions stopped the supply of imported Chinese rock sprouts (a leafy green vegetable). The Lao Cai Quality Control Division took steps to fill this gap in the market, and successfully trialled rock-sprout production, opening up a new domestic value chain with the potential to supply high-value urban markets in Vietnam.
- Partners switching to new crops to secure income for growers. For example, Think An Company is supporting passionfruit growers to diversify their income by producing other crops such as winter melons and bananas and by purchasing other produce such as pumpkins. The company is working to develop these value chains and open up new markets, ensuring growers are not solely reliant on the sale of passionfruit for income.



## Tourism Sector Support

The collapse of international tourism has impacted community-based tourism, home-stay owners and service providers. GREAT is supporting COVID-19 recovery campaigns in Sa Pa, Bac Ha, Moc Chau and Van Ho.

Response and recovery efforts have included:

- In Moc Chau, approximately 20 tour operators formed a business alliance and launched a product targeting the domestic market. More than 1,000 tour packages for community-based tourism destinations in Moc Chau have been sold to date.
- In Ta Phin Village, DCI Sapa improved landscaping and food menus and developed two short trekking routes to cater to domestic tourists. Homestays were supported with loans to align facilities and services to domestic tourists. Ta Phin subsequently attracted large school groups from Ho Chi Minh and Hanoi, with more than 500 visitors.
- A celebrity food blogger (Ms Phan Anh) worked with GREAT to develop a campaign which includes a series of video clips focused on introducing indigenous products produced by GREAT partners, tourism destinations in Vietnam's north-west (Moc Chau, Van Ho, Sa Pa and Bac Ha) and gender equality messages. The first series focuses on Moc Chau and Van Ho and will be launched in July 2021.
- A tourism club was developed in Bac Ha to promote the destination, particularly during the plum and pear blossom season. As a result, visitor numbers from mid-February to mid-March 2021 were solid, with VND 3-15 million in revenue generated for homestay owners. In Ta Van Chu Commune, households earned around VND 50 million from blossom garden ticket sales.



## Access to Finance

GREAT has supported partners to access revolving funds and formal finance options, however the COVID-19 pandemic has meant some households are unable to meet loan requirements. GREAT is working with these households to put support mechanisms in place.



## Gender-Based Violence

To address the potential greater risk of gender-based violence due to social isolation and lockdowns, GREAT engaged a local NGO, CSAGA, to run an awareness campaign. Women's Unions in Son La and Lao Cai have been trained on gender-based violence and communication techniques and GREAT staff, Provincial Management Unit personnel and partners received training on gender-based violence and prevention.

Following the training, CSAGA has provided ongoing support to the Women's Unions as they implement awareness raising campaigns on gender-based violence in conjunction with events focused on gender equality.



## Business Continuity

Partner activities have been severely disrupted and business profitability impacted. This impacts the ability of businesses to source products from women or to engage women as employees. GREAT has worked with all partners to assess strategies and plans, with capacity assessments of 10 heavily-affected businesses completed. Six businesses are receiving support to pivot to new markets and improve supply chain management capacity.



## Closing the Digital Literacy Gap for Ethnic Minority Women

COVID-19 has highlighted the digital divide between men and women, and between Kinh and ethnic communities. GREAT engaged KisStartup to work with households as they strive to utilise digital technology to improve productivity and incomes. This has helped generate in excess of VND 600 million in online revenue for participants.



**For more information on the GREAT COVID-19 Response, please visit:**

<https://equality.aus4vietnam.org/category/covid-19-update>