

# Aus4Equality|GREAT

Gender-Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism



## Progress Report January-June 2020



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# Introduction

This **Gender-Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT)** Program update presents an overview of Program activities undertaken between January and June 2020 and a progress update against Program objectives.

The global COVID-19 pandemic presented the **GREAT Program** with a number of challenges in the first half of 2020. It also provided opportunities for the Program to work with partners – businesses, NGOs, governments and communities - as they navigated the health, social and economic impacts of the pandemic. While COVID-19 resulted in delays and adjustments to Program activities, and those of our partners, we continued to seek influence through:



## GREAT Progress Against Targets – July 2019-June 2020\*

Indicator	Result	Target
Number of trained women having new knowledge and skills in agriculture, processing, tourism, and business	30,314	22,283
Number of women joining a cooperative or a business network (such as a collective group or group of common interest)	8,771	8,915
Number of women provided with productive resources and inputs with GREAT support	7,914	6,118
Number of women with increased income	Not available	11,717
Number of women appointed to take a leadership position in GREAT supported collective groups (112)	810	363
Number of women beneficiaries reported having increased confidence	Not available	9,374
Percentage of women beneficiaries of gender targeting interventions participating in household financial decision making	Not available	50%
Number of policy dialogues between government and businesses in which women participate	44	21
Value (in USD) leveraged from GREAT supported enterprises/cooperatives as results of co-investment with GREAT	USD 3.7 million	USD 3 million

\*The GREAT Program reports against annual targets committed by Cowater International to DFAT as detailed in GREAT's Annual Work Plan.

Between January and June 2020, nine new projects were approved including three innovation projects that began. Two partnership agreements with business partners were ended and one partnership was placed on hold. In summary:

**The Program was engaging with**



**49 partners across**



**52 partnership agreements**

**21**

**business partners,**

**16**

**government agencies and**

**12**

**included research agencies, training institutions, local and international NGOs and multilateral organisations.**



**30 partners were in Lao Cai**



**19 partners were in Son La**



**3 partners are working in Lao Cai and Son La**

**Up to June 2020, AUD 5.0 million (35%) of GREAT's partnership funding had been disbursed. Approximately 77% of the partnership agreement budget was committed.**



# COVID-19 Impact and Response

Vietnam's response to the COVID-19 pandemic was swift and effective and, while economic impacts have been significant, they were arguably not as severe as they would have been without the rapid national response. All GREAT program activities were affected in some way, but the extent of the impacts varied between sectors, partners and beneficiaries, with some even recording an economic gain.

While both the agriculture and tourism sectors were hit hard by COVID-19, the impacts on the tourism sector were abrupt and severe. Travel restrictions and social distancing requirements saw tourism numbers drop and demand for services diminish and household appetite to invest in the sector remains low. Between January and June 2020, 31% of planned GREAT activities in the tourism sector were delayed.

Within the agriculture sector, the vegetable sub-sector was severely affected as market demand declined, supply chains were disrupted and demand from major buyers such as supermarkets, restaurants and schools declined.

On an encouraging note, just over half of GREAT's partners remained committed to continuing to source from partners at pre-pandemic levels and in some cases sourcing increased. For example, Bac Ha tea Company increased revenue by purchasing tea from households that could not sell to traders due to COVID-19 restrictions and through the development of new markets. Son Ha (a cinnamon exporter) was also able to exceed its target by 16%. Three out of five women-led nurseries established and supported by

GREAT partner, Fresh Studio, that were in start-up phase had a combined revenue of VND 64,917,190, largely in line with what was planned.

COVID-19 impacts on program beneficiaries were considerable and, in some cases, severe. This was particularly the case for households involved in community-based tourism and homestays as overnight visitor numbers dropped considerably. Meanwhile, some tea and medicinal herb projects managed to maintain or even increase income for households.



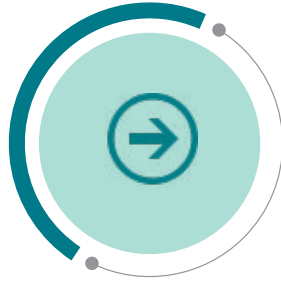
**B**ecause of the outbreak, training activities could not be carried out as planned. The tea markets have a lower demand that caused a reduced revenue. However, we continued to buy tea from the target households as committed. We will continue to sign a contract with households to keep our commitment in this project.

**Chieng Di Company, Quarterly Report April - June 2020**

# GREAT COVID-19 Response and Recovery Plan



GREAT has put in place a COVID-19 Response and Recovery plan to support partners and beneficiaries to respond and recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19.



The Plan is focused on business continuity, support to the agriculture and tourism sectors, access to finance and loan restructure, digital literacy and access and gender-based violence.

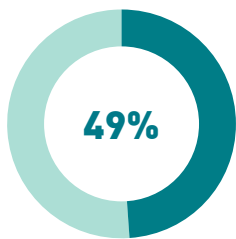


The Program also continues to monitor the economic impacts of COVID-19 on the agricultural and tourism sectors, the specific impacts on partners and beneficiaries and their responses. The Program releases regular COVID-19 updates which are available via the GREAT website.

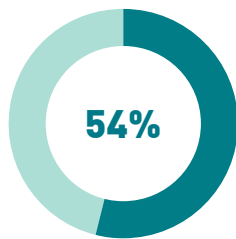
## Partners adapt and innovate

GREAT's partners are adapting to the health, safety, and economic impacts of COVID-19.

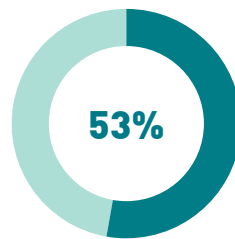
### Adaptation Method



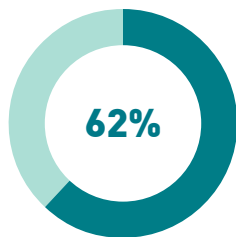
Created a new product or service



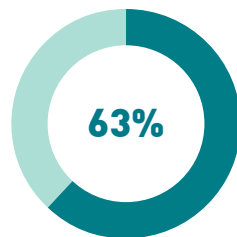
Developed or pivoted to new target markets



Applied technology to reduce costs



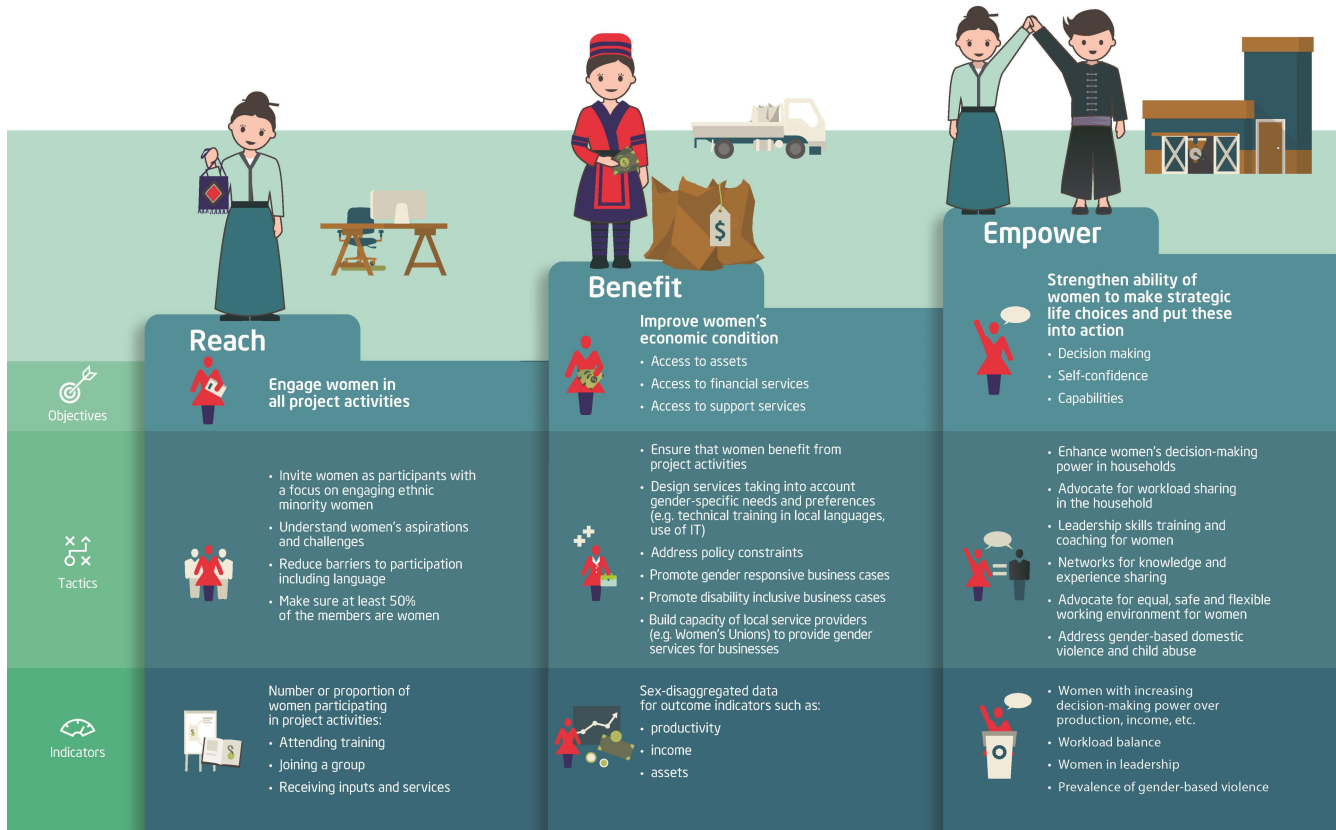
Increased collaboration to reduce logistics costs



Applied technology to expand markets and sales

# Progress Update: Empowering Local Women

## How the GREAT Program empowers Women



## GREAT applies a three-pronged approach to women's economic empowerment:



## Reach: Engage women in all project activities

Given the context and ongoing challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak, the number of people, including women and ethnic minority women, reached through GREAT interventions in the first half of 2020 was considerable. However, 24% of project activities planned for January – June 2020 did not occur due to COVID-19. The inability to hold larger community events particularly inhibited program reach through activities such as gender equality awareness sessions.

However, program reach via production and service groups remained strong, reflecting GREAT's focus on creating opportunities for women to join networks in efforts to advance their economic empowerment.

**477 groups established (73% of the end of program target) and 12,340 (61%) members are women, with 11,330 being ethnic minority women).**

Project beneficiaries have been involved in gender activities, including community events and gender trainings, in 12,358 instances, with engagement by women comprising 7,383 instances and engagement by ethnic minority women comprising 6,618 instances. Men positively accounted for 40% of participation, with GREAT continuing to monitor men's engagement to ensure it is appropriate.

## Benefit: Improve women's economic conditions

**Linking producers and enterprises/cooperatives:** To June 2020, a total of 3,674 farm contracts were signed between established groups of producers and/or individual households with enterprises or cooperatives. The contracts help ensure mutual commitments: business partners commit to buying produce from producers, and producers commit to selling produce to business partners in line with their quality requirements. The signed contracts include a provision for a fine to the enterprises/cooperative if they do not uphold their commitment and purchase from the households, increasing the position and power of producers within the relationship.

With projects that have had a stable market such as medicinal plants, tea and bamboo shoots, this mechanism has been effective. Business partners such as Loi Tuoi, Chieng Di and Fresh Studio consider producers as equal partners in the business who should mutually benefit. They report communicating regularly and transparently with producers, including sharing feedback from clients on the produce quality and they work with producers to address any issues.





Improving knowledge and capabilities: A number of partners have introduced agricultural standards and are now exporting produce with strict quality standards. These include Vina Samex (Fair Trade), Duc Phu (Ethical BioTrade Union) Son Ha (organic cinnamon), Bac Ha Tea (organic tea), Vina Tea (Rainforest Alliance), Chieng Di (Organic and GlobalGAP). Consequently, producers, including women, in these projects have been trained and coached to apply the required techniques to produce products that meet the required standards. In general, producers, particularly ethnic minority women in the vegetable sub-sector, faced the most challenges in meeting the required production standards.

In other projects, women have been trained to use new technologies. For example, the Red Dao Cooperative trained women to use Zalo (an online messaging video call app) and engaged them in groups on Zalo for regular communication. Producers in Xuan Nha commune were trained to use solar drying houses and homestay owners and service groups were trained in community-based tourism services including cooking, hospitality, dance, and social media marketing. The work undertaken in partnership with Action on Poverty in Vat Village, Moc Chau (see text box/insert) highlights the positive impact of improved knowledge and capabilities on women's economic participation and empowerment.

**Access to productive inputs: A total of 10,147 women, including 7,016 ethnic minority women were provided with productive inputs such as fertilisers, seedlings, and loans up until June 2020. This is important as good quality inputs are not always available through local vendors, and poor inputs result in low yields of poor quality.**

Access to finance: GREAT has partnered with VietED and LienVietPost Bank to develop collateral-free loans, and has completed a baseline survey of household need for loans in the tea, vegetable, passionfruit, and ramie sectors in Son La. The next step is to select target sub-sectors in which partners loans will be provided to women.

**Up until June 2020, 1,151 jobs have been created through GREAT, with 840 jobs for women (350 full time and 490 part-time). 67% of these jobs were for ethnic minority women.**

Improving household and women's income: Before the COVID-19 outbreak, Bac Ha Tea company, Chieng Di Tea company, Vina Tea company, AOP, CRED (Bamboo), Muong Khuong Cooperative, Red Dao Cooperative and Sapanapro reported having generated profits for households that sold products to the company/cooperative and/or provided services. However, due to changing market conditions caused by COVID-19, only a limited number of companies were able to continue purchasing at the same level in order to maintain profit for households.



# Empower: Strengthen the ability of women to make strategic life choices and put these into action

While achieving gender equality takes time, GREAT has observed changes in awareness of gender equality issues among key program stakeholders and selected women leaders:



**An estimated 70,000 people were reached online and 3,094 attended a series of gender equality activities supported by GREAT in the lead up and coinciding with Vietnam Family Day on 28 June 2020.**



**5,000 women reported joint decision-making process for livelihood activities, family expenses or workload sharing, equivalent to 3,500 households. This is 29% of the 12,031 households currently participating in the Program.**



**Seven NGOs (CARE, Oxfam, SNV, Helvetas, CRED, AOP, ADC) conducted gender-focused interventions to shift gender norms within targeted households.**



**Up until June 2020, a total of 1,035 women, including 946 ethnic women have been nominated to take on group leadership roles.**

GREAT has also supported women to develop their entrepreneurship and business management capabilities through projects including with WISE and the Lao Cai Women's Union. Initial findings from a midline longitudinal study identified that study tours and exchange visits to the areas where women have been able to create change were highly effective, particularly for women who have not been able to leave their village before. In addition to building technical knowledge, women were often highly motivated when they saw firsthand other women being able to make changes or forge new paths or careers. This inspired women to believe in their own abilities.

A recent Joint Monitoring Mission has identified that women's access to the loans from the Revolving Fund in ADC-implemented Rice project in Chieng Yen Commune, Van Ho District in Son La province helped women increase their feeling of power and ability to make decisions. In the past, their names were rarely included as the primary person on loan certificates. They felt they were given the right and position to be responsible for receiving and managing the loan.

# Progress Update: Promoting Inclusive Business Partnerships

Applying a market systems development approach, GREAT is working to expand production, productivity, quality, market expansion and productivity in the agricultural and tourism sectors. The impact of COVID-19 has varied across these sectors and sub-sectors, resulting in mixed results for the reporting period.



## Production areas expanded and transformed to quality standards

By 30 June 2020, 17 agribusiness partners reported that production areas were expanded to 2,968 ha and that they were applying industry quality standards; this is 72% of the expected achievement by the end of the Program.

However, achievements vary by sector reflecting the impact of COVID-19 on markets. While the production areas of cinnamon, benzoin and highland tea have steadily expanded, vegetables, medicinal plants, and passionfruit projects have seen modest results due to circumstances such as planting seasons coinciding with the period of social lockdown and shortage of quality seedlings.



## Agri production sourced and its quality

Data from 12 out of 17 agribusinesses partners demonstrated that a combined total of 99,996 tons of produce has been sourced in the past six months, achieving 46% of the target in partners workplans. The low volume of produce sourced was partly due to market volatility but also because it was not the main harvesting season for passion fruits, medicinal plants, and cinnamon. It is important to consider full annual data sets to account for these seasonal variations.

Business partners in the tourism sector including Viet Tu, Lan Rung and the Red Dao Community have seen a sharp decline in the number of visitors and service users and consequently in revenue and profit.



## Shared values in existing inclusive business models

It has been a struggle for business partners to minimise business losses due to COVID-19 whilst abiding by farm contracts with households as much as possible. GREAT has assessed that at least 12 out of 18 business partners have been able to deliver shared value relatively well with households covering aspects including advancing quality input supplies, technical training, and sharing fair economic benefit with households.

Following GESI training and other gender responsive preparatory activities, six business partners, mostly export-oriented businesses such as Son Ha, Vina SAMEX, Duc Phu, Chieng, Vinatea, want to implement more gender responsive policies in business practices. GREAT will work with CARE, SNV, and Helvetas to develop a gender audit framework to implement pilot activities.



## Assessment of business solutions

GREAT has supported partners, particularly cooperatives, to better organise production and provide technical guidance and business management support to members through the following activities:

- 1 Developed and disseminated simple guidelines for selecting group members, as well as forming and running groups.
- 2 Helped business partners review existing members and facilitate group activities.
- 3 Worked with an agriculture partner to pilot the formation of 'on-the-spot' technical support groups.
- 4 Worked with two agriculture partners to discuss modified business models to respond better to disease risks.
- 5 Encouraged partners to engage local technical experts who are based in the village to provide better support where relevant.
- 6 Provided further technical assistance/consultants to support business partners to improve their supply chain management so they could strengthen their business in the expansion phase, diversify products, or market in response to COVID-19 impacts.
- 7 Supported cross-learning between relevant NGOs that conduct regular group activities linked with business plans and allow for the introduction of advanced techniques to foster groups and strengthen production skills for producers.

# Progress Update: Improving Sector Governance and Policy

Tangible results on policy improvement and coordinated sector governance at community, district, province and national levels have been achieved despite COVID-19-related lockdowns providing limited opportunities for consultation with stakeholders to share experiences for policy improvement, and sub-sector coordination.

## Government agencies reinforce policies and enact plans, regulations and services that enable more inclusive socio-economic development

Evidence of improved sector governance and policy include:

- Over the last year, there were 44 instances of policy engagement between government and businesses in which women took part, compared with a target of 21 instances.
- Women represented 52% of participants, a positive outcome given the typical over-representation of men in these types of forums.

Ethnic minority women made up 38% of total participants and 74% of all women, indicating that GREAT and partners can do more to make sure the voices of ethnic minority women are being heard.

## Van Ban District upscaling plan for bodhi forest area

A proposal for upscaling 1,000 ha of bodhi forest area for benzoin resin (an ingredient for incense making and perfume) in Van Ban district, including 502.6 ha of new plantation and 431.2 ha of forest re-generation, was developed by the Van Ban District Forest Control Division. Supportive district policies including the government funding of VND 33 billion for the plan enabled Vietnamese and international businesses and households to invest in this emerging high-value sub-sector. Women were actively involved in consultation at commune level.

## Van Ho District upscaling plan for bamboo forest to support bamboo shoot production

Son La Province and Van Ho District authorities have acknowledged the potential of the emerging bamboo shoot supply chain in the District. The District has developed a scale-up plan for a production area of 1,000 ha bamboo shoots as a key alternative to timber forest product in Tan Xuan, Xuan Nha and Chieng Xuan communes and to replace low-value corn production by using provincial resources from the New Rural Development Program and Forest Development Fund to support the project. The scale-up plan will improve the forest cover and increase annual incomes for 700 local households who live in remote communes with limited alternative income generation opportunities.

## District and Department Competitiveness Index (DDCI)

In May 2020, Son La and Lao Cai Provincial Peoples Committees released their first ever DDCI reports that measure the local economic performance of all districts and departments. Indicators including gender equality, e-government and sustainable development have been included in the report to help guide broad and sustainable policy improvement across every district and department in the two provinces.

A decision by the Lao Cai Provincial Peoples Committee to use DDCI results as one of Key Performance Indicators for assessing the performance of individual district, departments and leaders in Lao Cai is an important step in promoting business environment reform.

The involvement of the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry in providing feedback on the DDCI methodology has helped publicise the advantages of the gender responsive DDCI methodology to other provinces. GREAT plans to organise online sessions to share the DDCI methodology and results with other interested provinces for replication.



## Draft Provincial Decision to support community-based tourism development and infrastructure development

The Department of Culture Sport and Tourism in Lao Cai submitted a draft decision on promoting community-based tourism initiatives for Provincial Peoples Council approval. The draft was discussed with community, commune and district authorities and relevant government agencies such as police, border military, travel agents operating in Bat Xat district.

The draft covers the following:

- infrastructure development in tourism sites
- loans for community-based tourism service development
- developing cultural performances/clubs at tourism site
- traditional vocational skills transfer by artisans
- marketing
- introducing a survey on sector performance

Ethnic minority women were consulted in developing the draft policy, with GREAT providing advice to ensure women's voices were being heard and considered.

## More coordinated actions between business and government in sub-sectors

Through GREAT's sector steering forums, coordination between businesses and government (Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, district authorities) in the vegetable sub-sector (mostly in Son La Province) has resulted in:

- stronger government commitment to improving master planning for vegetable production areas;
- increased government investment in infrastructure for irrigation, electricity, and roads to support private sector investment.

Major constraints identified by business partners in Son La (disease and reduction in market demand) are being addressed through the passionfruit sub sector forum. NOMAFSI has introduced suitable technology to test the pH level to select soils suitable for passionfruit growing to reduce the disease risk for farmers.

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development in Son La will develop standards and procedures for seedling control and information provision to help farmers access better quality seedlings.

## Leveraging government support for upscaling effective market-based solutions

Active engagement by the Son La Steering Committee in ongoing GREAT projects has made it possible to engage more with commune, district and provincial authorities for policy advocacy and upscaling plans utilising public funding for broader impact.

Upscaling the bamboo plantation areas:

- Van Ho District has worked with CRED on the bamboo plantation area upscaling plan.
- It will also link recently established cooperatives with the provincial One Commune One Product Program (OCOP) to further develop markets and the cooperatives' business capacity.
- More coordination for sector development:
- Through the Provincial Steering Committee structure in Son La, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development has become more active in working with Moc Chau and Van Ho district authorities and businesses to solve identified issues in the vegetable, ramie, and passionfruit sectors such as infrastructure development for vegetable production areas.
- In Lao Cai, strong engagement with district authorities from the beginning of the project has been critical during the project's implementation. The expansion of Lao Cai's Steering Committee composition to include district authority representatives has helped mobilise government support for project activities such as community-based development in Bat Xat and Bac Ha districts. Engagement of Steering Committee members in joint project monitoring will be further strengthened in the coming period to further leverage government support.

## National Assembly Resolution on the National Target Program for Ethnic Minorities Areas for the Period 2021-2025

GREAT has advocated for the application of market-based approaches with relevant ministries, e.g. MARD and MOLISA, in the design and related guidance for the new National Target Program for Socio-Economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas (NTP-SEDEMA). GREAT will continue to advocate for more outcome-based approaches, block grant funding, and decentralised decision making to ensure the National Target Program will maximise its support for the economic empowerment of ethnic minority women.

# Program Learning and Knowledge Generation

## Unpacking complexity through implementation, adaptation, evidence collection and learning

After one year of project level implementation by GREAT partners, we are gradually understanding and unpacking the complexity across market constraints, geography, specific products, different ethnic groups, and the intersection with gender equality. Solutions that have worked when piloted in one area with one ethnic group, for example with vegetables, tea or tourism, need to be modified when upscaling to other communities with the same or different ethnic minority groups.

There is also evidence that economic benefit alone is not sufficient to motivate local households to adopt new practices in agriculture and tourism. There are social and cultural factors affecting households and women in making economic decisions. For example, young Mong women from Sapa did not want to participate in a three-month training course offered by Lan Rung on embroidery skills in another province, despite an allowance being paid and all costs being covered. There was a reluctance to travel elsewhere for training, due to cultural and social factors, despite this opening up regular income earning opportunities.

## The importance of creating networks for women

Facilitating networks and linkages between women in different communities has helped to expose women to examples of successful practices and role models which can increase their confidence and be an inspiration to drive change. Study tours and exchange visits to the areas where women have been able to create change were highly effective, particularly for women who have not been able to leave their village before. In addition to building technical knowledge, women were often highly motivated when they saw firsthand other women being able to make changes or forge new paths or careers.



## Increasing engagement with market actors to develop emerging sub-sectors

Ramie and bamboo shoots are two emerging sub-sectors in Son La and Lao Cai provinces supported by GREAT. To date, partners have successfully introduced sustainable production and harvesting management practices, created business linkages with farmers, and introduced seedling services and advanced processing techniques. These sub-sectors are proving to be economically viable and environmentally sustainable and are attracting business interest to invest in expanding production areas. Importantly, households have an opportunity for higher incomes long-term, compared to traditional crops, projecting 10 years for ramie and up to 30 years for bamboo shoots.

The active engagement by private sector partners will be critical to growing these sub-sectors, including marketing and product development, technology transfers to develop nurseries and improve processing, expanding plantation areas and effectively engaging farming households. GREAT has identified three promising locally based businesses; however, their current business capacity needs to be further strengthened to play an effective role in growing ramie and bamboo shoot harvesting. GREAT will support these businesses through engaging business management consultants to provide advice on processing, marketing, business planning and business management.

## Competitiveness of indigenous products aimed at niche markets

Analysis of COVID-19 impacts on businesses and households shows that some indigenous products, including Sen Cu rice, Te Rau rice, cinnamon and highland Shan tea, have relatively stable, niche markets. There is an opportunity for GREAT to continue to support these partners to further enhance the capacity of producers to participate in these niche markets and identify other indigenous products where GREAT's approaches could be replicated.



## Adapted strategies for more vulnerable products to minimise the economic loss for involved households.

Vegetables and passionfruit production faced significant challenges following the COVID-19 outbreak. Perishable and short-term vegetables, such as cabbages and lettuce, are vulnerable to weather conditions, especially heavy rain. To mitigate this, enclosed glasshouses, low-cost netting or better planning is needed to prepare for the rainy season. GREAT is supporting vegetable partners to apply technical solutions, adjust their production plans and introduce more rain resistant crops, such as pumpkins.

Due to disease, the passionfruit sector has been hard hit in Son La, impacting vines and productivity. GREAT is discussing with partners to identify technical and business solutions to overcome the challenges facing both farmers and anchor businesses. Nafoods is testing new disease-resistant passionfruit seedlings on a small scale before formally introducing it to farmers. GREAT will assess the feasibility of these plans, with an understanding that the planting of passionfruit on a wide scale may have to stop if no feasible solutions are identified.

## Policy for WEE

GREAT is working to support partners on effective policy implementation that improves outcomes around women's economic empowerment. To ensure more effective policy development, the Program is developing a WEE policy framework to support partners and government agencies to implement more inclusive policies that are also practical within the Vietnamese government context.

GREAT has recognised the need to provide more practical gender advisory support to projects. This includes support to DCCI action planning for local districts and departments to ensure they have increased capacity and awareness of gender and pragmatic actions they can take to make planning more inclusive of women and ethnic minorities. GREAT is also providing support to the Department of Culture, Sport and Tourism in Lao Cai to make sure that policies are inclusive but also practical within a Vietnamese Government planning context.

The Program will continue to advocate for gender to be a cross-cutting issue in the implementation of the National Target Program for Ethnic Minorities Areas for the Period 2021-2025, rather than a stand-alone component.



# Program Steering

## Project Management Unit partnerships and program governance

There is good cooperation between GREAT and the PMUs in both provinces, with PMUs taking an increasing role of supervising and supporting partners. PMU members have become confident in assessing partners' plans and performance and providing timely and useful support and guidance to partners including connections with local authorities. In Lao Cai for example, the PMU has liaised with local authorities to support a survivor of gender-based violence to enrol in an education program. They have also been active in field discussions with Sapanapro to address poor progress. The PMU in Son La has been active in monitoring and supporting partners to speed up project implementation.

Through the PMU and Steering Committee, project implementation challenges such as the geographic constraints in Son La have been addressed to respond to partners' business requirements. The proactive engagement of the Son La Steering Committee members has demonstrated their keen interest and understanding of market-based approaches to empower women and they have helped mobilise government support when needed. Lao Cai will follow this good practice once the new members of the Steering Committee are in place.

## New projects approved

Between January and June 2020, six new projects focused on policy and sector governance were approved. These projects will help strengthen GREAT's policy influence at the national level (through the UNDP project supporting the National Target Program for Ethnic Minority Areas) and the provincial level through the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development Lao Cai and the Department of Culture and Information Moc Chau projects.

## Sub-sector partnership steering

Four sub-sector groups were formed and met on a regular basis. Each group is chaired by an industry expert (NOMAFSI for tea and vegetables, Hanoi University of Pharmacy for medicinal plants) or GREAT (tourism, cinnamon). Sub-sector issues being addressed include master planning for vegetables, public infrastructure investments and access to quality seedlings (medicinal plants).

## People with disabilities



**“I have improved my perspective on people with disabilities and I need to pay more attention to creating opportunities for people with disabilities in our project.”**

Participant from Van Ho at GREAT's Promoting Inclusion of People with Disability Workshop

Workshops were held in Son La and Lao Cai promoting the inclusion of people with disabilities in GREAT's Project Supply Chains. Facilitated by IDEA, a local Disability Services Organisation, the workshops attracted 110 participants including partners and PMUs. The workshop covered barriers and measures to enhance the inclusion of people with disabilities and the development of an initial plans to include people with disabilities into GREAT partner projects. IDEA and GREAT will continue to support partners with specific interventions to implement their plans.

# Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning

GREAT's monitoring, evaluation, research and learning activities are designed to generate timely evidence, monitor progress, learn from Program implementation, and identify effective strategies emerging from GREAT. Key achievements included:



**COVID-19 impact surveys:** Two COVID-19 impact surveys were designed and implemented to understand the impacts on business partners.



**Development of a Knowledge Management Plan and production of learning products:** A Knowledge Management Plan that identifies learning approaches, topics and key learning activities was drafted. Initial knowledge products on Market System Development and Linking Producers and Businesses were in the process of being finalised.



**Partnership-level baseline assessments:** Three partnership-level baseline assessments were conducted for Van Ho Medicinal Plants, ADC and Stevia projects.

## Looking Ahead

Responding to the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 at both a sector and business level will remain a priority for the Program. While COVID-19 has prompted adjustments and adaptation across all elements of Program implementation, it has not detracted focus from the Program objectives. It has, in fact, highlighted the importance of pursuing these objectives and, the Program will continue to pursue the following:





**Luong Thi Hong Tuoi and the Thai ethnic minority farming community of Vat Village have, in recent times, relied on tourists to supplement their incomes; but despite the recent downturn due to COVID-19, their prospects are much better now than even just a few years ago.**

Like many rural villages, farming around Vat village was hard work for Tuoi's family, and there was little reward. Tuoi said: "My family's income was based on agriculture, so it was only enough to spend on daily expenses."

Spending all their time trying to farm just to survive meant Tuoi, and most families in the village, did not have the capital to invest in tourism. It was not until 2019, when Action on Poverty (AOP) started its community-based tourism project in the village, GROW, and with support from GREAT, that things rapidly changed.

"I was quite shy, but after participating in the project's training I am much more confident, especially when communicating with partners and clients", Tuoi stated. The income of households participating in the project has been significantly improved compared to before. Tuoi's family's income over the Lunar New Year was more than VND 70 million Vietnam [AUD \$4,147]. This figure is equivalent to the income for the whole year of 2018 when she was not involved in the project. AOP's project aims to benefit as many people in the village as possible and to empower its women. "The most obvious change is that women in the village can assert themselves and feel more confident", said Tuoi.

## Action on Poverty Case Study

"We have also received help from our husbands with housework. For example, my husband formerly never washed dishes, because it was considered a woman's job. Now, because I must do other work, he shares in house chores, such as washing the dishes and cleaning." They also share the work related to guest stays. Tuoi oversees welcoming guests and cleaning while Thuy, her husband, shops for food and cooks.

**"What makes me happy is the beaming smiles of our guests when they come back and notice the improvements", concluded Tuoi.**

Luong Thi Hong Tuoi and 15 other homestay owners in Vat Village are partnering with AOP and GREAT to implement the GROW community-based tourism project in Moc Chau, Son La. Project activities include skills development in hospitality, business and marketing, capacity building for women in group leadership, market linkages with travel agents and tour operators, a credit facility for households to start or upgrade their homestays and gender equality awareness for men and women. The project is expected to economically benefit 450 women, mainly from the Thai and Muong ethnic groups, as well as improve their confidence and financial literacy.

