Vice Chairman of Lao Cai Provincial People’s Committee, Mr Hoang Quoc Khanh

Distinguished guest, ladies and gentlemen

- I am delighted to be here today to open the GREAT Symposium - “Engaging Women In Markets: Scaling up Local Successes Nationwide”

- Today is an opportunity to reflect on the successes of the GREAT program in engaging women in markets in Lao Cai and Son La Provinces.

- Today also provides an opportunity to look forward, together, to share this success and apply it at a national scale
  - so that we benefit more businesses through strengthening market connections and, most importantly, empower more women to participate in the economy.

- I enjoy speaking Vietnamese, but to have a deep discussion on today’s topic, I would like to continue in English.

- Vietnam has experienced tremendous growth in recent decades, lifting tens of millions of people out of poverty. However, there are still pockets of poverty that persist.

- Lifting people out of poverty is critical for economic growth.
  - For Vietnam to achieve its ambitious 2045 goal to become a high-income country, every citizen needs the opportunity to participate to their fullest potential.
  - Addressing gender inequality in ethnic minority communities allows this opportunity.

- I acknowledge the commitments of the Government of Vietnam to implementing this last mile development agenda
By approving three National Targeted Programs focused on disadvantaged rural, mountainous and ethnic minority communities

- By updating the National Strategy on Gender Equality

  • Australia is deeply committed to supporting these inclusive agendas, and they are issues close to my heart.

  • GREAT focusses on inclusion and poverty alleviation, GREAT is ensuring that women, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities are not left behind.

    • So that they too can benefit from Vietnam’s extraordinary progress.

  • When women are involved in the economy on more equal terms with men, everyone benefits

    • In 2018, McKinsey estimated that Vietnam could add USD40 billion in GDP by 2025 from improving gender equality.

  • Let me share with you an example to highlight what this looks like in practice.

  • Later today you'll watch a video that looks at the progress of a bamboo shoot cooperative in Van Ho District in Son La.

  • I visited this cooperative last month and spoke with the women leaders who shared their story.
Ms Nguyen, a proud Thai woman, and her neighbours, used to collect bamboo shoots from nearby natural forest and sold these to local markets. This was providing low and unstable incomes.

With a small amount of support from GREAT, Ms Nguyen and many women in her community have transformed their livelihoods.

GREAT support the women establish a bamboo shoot cooperative which gave them more power to negotiate with buyers of their bamboo shoots.

We also supported the women’s technical farming and leadership skills which allowed them to start a nursery, understand how to process their raw bamboo shoots and build their cooperative.

When I visited the cooperative, there were six employees there – processing and packaging the bamboo for export to Taiwan and Japan. An incredible achievement that has provided a stable and increased income.

With training, their business management skills and their confidence expanded.

The approach of the GREAT program isn’t charity, it is about creating a strong market that can benefit many people.

- It is very clear that investing in women and women’s business delivers a strong return on investment
  - and broad socio-economic benefits for the community.
International evidence demonstrates that increased incomes for women, results in better education for children, and better health of the family.

- Knowing this, I'm proud that GREAT has improved the incomes of over 15,000 self-employed women in Son La and Lao Cai.
- GREAT has generated many other successes and lessons
  - And we are keen to share these with you
- Today's Symposium is an opportunity to share these lessons
  - and to consider how ideas can be nurtured and expanded in a second program phase, or in other provinces across the country.
- The implementation of Vietnam's three National Targeted Programs provides an immediate opportunity to do this
- I am pleased to advise that Australia and Vietnam are preparing for a second phase of the GREAT program, to be delivered through to 2027
- Through the second phase of GREAT, Australia will continue to support Lao Cai and Son La provinces to effectively implement the three National Targeted Programs.
- We are also pleased to provide technical assistance and share lessons with central agencies so that successes can be adapted and applied nationwide
  - I am very pleased to see so many of you here today
  - And we are looking forward to discussing with you in detail how best to support you in implementing your own programs.
• I wish you all good health and successes

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