

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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