

FINAL PROJECT EVALUATION

EMPOWERED WOMEN FOR AN
EQUITABLE COFFEE VALUE CHAIN



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2 ACRONYMS

ANCP-Australian NGO Cooperation Program
DAFO- Department of Agriculture and Forestry
EW-EVC-Empowered Women for an Equitable Coffee Value Chain
GAP-Good Agriculture Practices
GOL-Government of Lao
LWU-Lao Women’s Union
MEWG-Marginalized Ethnic Women and Girls
MOAF-Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry
NGO-Non Governmental Organization
PSHEA-Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse
SAA-Social Awareness and Action
VEW-Village Extension Worker
VSLA-Village Savings and Loan Association

3 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Empowered Women for an Equitable Coffee Value Chain (EW-EVC) project, funded through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) was implemented in Sekong Province from July 2017- June 2022, with a goal of “Reduced poverty and improved access to food for remote ethnic

communities through women’s economic empowerment”. This project aligns perfectly with the CARE Laos priority of supporting women and girls through economic empowerment.

The overall goal of improving access to food for ethnic and remote communities through economic empowerment was successful with a significant increase in food consumption reported by the 12 villages assessed during the final project evaluation. There were six additional key findings noted by the final evaluation team;

1. The biggest impact was an increase in crop harvest and income for beneficiaries, on average an increase of 112% in harvest and 603% increase in income
2. The rise in income enabled a significant increase in food diversity and consumption
3. Changes occurred in workload distribution between men and women, with men taking on more chores and farming tasks than before the project
4. There was a change in perception of women in leadership, from a negative view to a positive view
5. Women are more empowered, especially in relation to making decisions on finances and how to save money compared to before the project
6. Management turn-over resulted in delays and incomplete activities

The project saw many successes, but overall the areas that were most successful were in the areas of gender empowerment, crop and financial increases and increased nutritional intake. Some of the challenges noted include staffing challenges; lack of long-term coffee expert, turnover with management, and unclear roles between partners, all resulting in some of the activities of the project not reaching completion by the end of the project. As with all projects at this time, the COVID-19 restrictions also caused delays and restricted access to project activities.

4 INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND

The Empowered Women for an Equitable Coffee Value Chain (EW-EVC) project, funded through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) was implemented in Sekong Province from July 2017-June 2022, with a goal of “Reduced poverty and improved access to food for remote ethnic communities through women’s economic empowerment”. This project aligns perfectly with the CARE Laos priority of supporting women and girls through economic empowerment.

The main goal of this project is “**Increased income and improved access to food for remote ethnic communities through women’s economic empowerment**”. This goal is supported by three main outcomes:

1. Ethnic minority women within the Arabica coffee value chain in Dak Cheung district (Sekong province) are empowered through strengthened technical and organizational capacities for improved productivity.
2. Ethnic minority women producers are valued and influential actors in the Arabica coffee value chain.
3. Ethnic minority women farmers benefit from increased income and profitability in the Arabica coffee value chain.

This project was designed with the long term programming goals of the CARE Laos office, in support of Marginalized Ethnic Women and Girls (MEWG); with an emphasis on supporting greater access to economic opportunities, resilient resources and dignified work. The project draws from nearly 10

years of experience in community development in the target areas of Dak Cheung and on the lessons learned from 20 years of promoting women-led rural development.

Background on Lao Coffee Chain

The coffee industry worldwide is booming, and the highest value beans come from small holder farms. However many small farms have difficulty maintaining a steady income from producing coffee. Lao PDR is the third largest coffee exporter in Southeast Asia. Though still a small player, coffee provides at least 40,000 families in seven provinces employment.¹ The area of the project site is suitable for growing high quality coffee, but has produced lower quality beans due to poor processing techniques. In addition to limited market access, there has been limited upkeep of the coffee chain and this resulted in reduced coffee income.

Dak Cheung is a remote district with a population of approximately 30,000 that rely on agriculture for their livelihoods. The people in Dak Cheung live in village groups and are scattered around the mountainous areas that are ideal for coffee growth. The communities are nearly all part of the ethnic minority groups, with high numbers of Katu, Alak and Tarieng among others. This means the people in Dak Cheung are part of a marginalized group and do not often have the same privileges as the majority people group. Members of ethnic minorities have higher levels of poverty and lower rates of education completion.

One of CARE's key global priorities is "Strengthening gender equality and women's voice". The CARE Laos team has particular priorities under this goal to improve the economic empowerment for MEWG. This project is a perfect example of this goal of supporting gender empowerment through providing access to greater economic empowerment for minority women in Sekong Province. The project combines the key values of women's empowerment and women's economic empowerment through education, training, mentorship, and support.

5 METHODOLOGY

The consultants started with a desk review of all relevant documentation before drafting an inception report. During the review, it was evident that there was no baseline report or baseline data available for a number of the indicators. Due to this, several revisions were required of the inception report, most notably was re-defining the data collection expectations and timelines. The consultants needed to add extra data collection tools, and create additional interviews in order to capture the required data for the final report. The inception report was finalized on January 12, 2022. Data collection occurred from January 17, 2022, to February 11, 2022 and involved the consultants, CARE staff, project partners, beneficiaries, and government partners. The final Inception report can be found in Annex 2.

In relation to the overall project goal of "Reduced poverty and improved access to food for remote ethnic communities through women's economic empowerment" the data collection team focused on relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, sustainability, and impact of the project activities. In addition, questions of leadership, decision making, and partner participation were discussed during the interviews. The CARE gender program staff also identified key gender related indicators that were collected and reported.

¹ <http://www.fao.org/docrep/008/ae939e03.htm#bm03>

Ethical Considerations:

The consultancy team agreed to follow all CARE standards including the staff code of conduct, Child Protection, Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA) and social media policies. Additionally, the principles of voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy protections and do no harm. All participants were informed of their rights to voluntary participation as part of the data collection. In addition, the consultancy team worked with the CARE local staff to ensure that women were involved in all aspects of the data collection when possible. The team also reached out to ask people with disabilities and their families to be part of the reviews. All pictures and data collected for case studies were approved ahead of time with each participant, including signing social media/data consent forms.

Tools:

The consultants created a comprehensive set of tools in which to perform the data collection. The tools were reviewed by the CARE Laos project staff and CARE Laos gender team and edited as needed. All tools were designed in English and then translated into Lao by the data collection team. The tools below can be found in Annex 3.

Tool 1-Questionnaire for Government partners and project staff (DAFO, LWU,)

Tool 2- Questions for Private sector

Tool 3- Questionnaire for Village Extension workers (VEW)

Tool 4- Questionnaire for Village Authorities

Tool 5- Questionnaire for VSLA

Tool 6- processing group leaders and members

Tool 7- Questionnaire for coffee producers

Tool 8- Questionnaire for husband of coffee producers

Tool 9- Questionnaire for case study

Tool 10- Questionnaire for nutrition

Sampling

The sampling goal for data collection was 40% of total target beneficiaries, which is 12 villages out of 30 villages. This included six villages with processing centers and six villages without processing centers. The sampling for individual and focus group discussions were randomly selected for the consultant by CARE Laos.

Table 1: Actual number of samplings and methodology for data collection

No	Type of sampling	No. of sampling	Data collection method
1	CARE project staff	6 (5 female)	Online and in person
2	Government partners	6 (2 female)	Online and in person
3	Private sector	4 (1 female)	Online and in person
4	Community	223 (161 female)	In person
		Total 239 (169 female)	

Table 2: List of sampling from each village

List of Sampling from Communities		Ethnic
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No.	Name of village	Village Authority		Coffee producers		VEWs		Husband of coffee producers		Processing group leaders		VSLA		Nutrition		
		Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female	
1	Dak Vang	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	0	2	1	4	4	10	10	Talieg
2	Dak Yoil	1	0	5	4	1	1	0	-	2	1	-	-	-	-	Talieg
3	Khoun Sai	1	1	4	4	2	2	1	0	2	1	-	-	-	-	Talieg
4	Dak Euy	1	0	10	9	1	0	2	0	2	1	-	-	-	-	Talieg
5	Dak Duen	0	0	10	7	4	2	1	0	2	1	-	-	-	-	Talieg
6	Dak Den	1	0	6	6	2	2	2	0	3	3	2	2	10	10	Talieg
7	Dak Seng	1	0	8	6	1	1	2	0	-	-	12	12	-	-	Talieg
8	Dak Sa	1	0	10	9	3	3	2	0	-	-	-	-	10	7	Talieg
9	Ha ox	1	0	12	9	2	2	2	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	Katou
10	Dak Sieng A	1	0	8	6	2	2	2	0	-	-	5	5	10	7	Talieg
11	Dak Run	1	0	1	1	3	3	1	0	-	-	-	-	10	10	Yae
12	Dak Dieng	1	0	9	0	2	2	0	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	Talieg
Total		11	2	84	62	25	22	17	0	13	8	23	23	50	44	
Percentage (%)		100	18	100	74	100	88	100	0	100	62	100	100	100	88	

Limitations

Several aspects of data collection, such as the household nutrition surveys were not available for the final report because they were not adequately assessed during the baseline. Additionally, there was no baseline report available, which limited the consultant's ability to accurately assess some of the indicators against the end line data, and in fact, required the consultants to create their own measures for certain areas, specifically for the gender monitoring evaluations of leadership development and changes in female activities.

It should be noted that this project experienced several rounds of turnover, so those who were interviewed, were not necessarily people who were part of the entire project. For example, the government staff such as the Lao Women's Union (LWU) and the staff from District Agriculture and Forestry Office (DAFO), who were assigned to support this project were inconsistent, and not always available to support the project activities as government activities take priority. CARE staff were also inconsistent, the staff who started with the project did not stay through the duration of the project, and the expert advisor that CARE hired to support with technical aspects on coffee also did not stay throughout the project. These staffing changing caused a limitation for data collection as it was very difficult to get information about the entire project. This is noted as one of the key areas of weakness in the project lack of stable project management and stable expert staff throughout the project.

Another limitation that should be noted is that of multiple participants being interviewed more than once for different roles in the project. Though the consultant tried to get others to interview, it was not uncommon that the same person who was part of the village leadership committee was also part of the VSLA group, and also one of the Village extension workers. This is a common phenomenon in Lao, as often those in leadership are members of the community that are literate, have some form of leadership role and thus are asked to take on multiple roles.

6 REVIEW OF THE INTENDED OUTCOMES

Project Goal: Increased income and improved access to food for remote ethnic communities through women's economic empowerment

Overall, villages that are part of this project have seen marked increases in income, and village chiefs report that because farmers have more access to a variety of foods and enough cash to buy rice for the entire year, the daily intake of nutritious food has significantly increased. The farmers that are part of the project and participated in the final review now have enough money to send their children to school and have begun to save money for future purchases such as vehicles or house improvements to make their homes more stable.

One chief reported that the farmers are now buying meat, fish, fruit and milk for children and is validated by the data in Tables 3-6 below. Previously, they could only afford meat once a month, but now they are purchasing it 3-6 times per week, signifying that the nutrition levels of children in these households will be improving. The following charts show the changes that have occurred in the dietary diversity from the beginning of the project until now. Some villages show a greater increase compared to others, and there was no clear indications on the reason behind this difference found during the final review. However, there may be differences on consumption based on the location of the village and the accessibility to markets.

Table 3: Change in fruit consumption

Fruit						
	Have you had an increase in fruit consumption for adults?			Have you had increase in fruit consumption for children under 5?		
Villages	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase
Dak Sa	1.8	4.1	128%	1.2	2.1	73%
Dak Sieng A	2.4	4.8	100%	1.4	2.8	100%
Dak Run	2.2	4.1	86%	.9	2.2	144%
Dak Den	1.6	3.3	106%	.9	1.8	100%
Dak Vang	1.3	2.9	123%	1	2.2	122%

Table 4: Change in calcium consumption

Calcium						
	Have you had an increase in calcium consumption for adults?			Have you had increase in calcium consumption for children under 5?		
Villages	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase
Dak Sa	2	3.4	70%	1	1.8	89%
Dak Sieng A	3	4.6	53%	1.9	2.9	53%
Dak Run	2.1	4.3	105%	1.1	2.5	127%
Dak Den	1.8	3.5	94%	1	1.8	80%
Dak Vang	1.9	2.8	47%	1	2.2	122%

Table 5: Change in fat consumption

Fat						
	Have you had an increase in fat consumption for adults?			Have you had increase in fat consumption for children under 5?		
Villages	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase
Dak Sa	2	4.3	115%	1.1	2.2	100%
Dak Sieng A	2.6	5.1	96%	1.7	2.7	56%
Dak Run	2.4	4.2	75%	.9	1.9	111%
Dak Den	1.9	3.6	89%	1	1.7	70%
Dak Vang	1.6	3.4	113%	.7	1.4	100%

Table 6: Change in protein consumption

Protein						
Villages	Have you had an increase in fat consumption for adults?			Have you had increase in fat consumption for children under 5?		
	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase	Average Before	Average Now	Percent Increase
Dak Sa	1.6	3.3	106%	.8	2	125%
Dak Sieng A	3	5	67%	1.8	3.1	72%
Dak Run	2.4	3.8	58%	1	1.7	70%
Dak Den	1.7	4	135%	1	2	100%
Dak Vang	1.7	3.8	124%	.6	1.7	167%

Nearly 100% of those interviewed reported that they are seeing lower levels of malnutrition in the community now that women have higher incomes and can purchase more food. The women interviewed reported that this is sustainable because they now know how to grow stronger crops with more yield, and this means that their children will continue to have better nutrition.

In terms of women’s economic empowerment, there have also been significant changes noted by the village chiefs. It was noted that previously, men did not help their wives, and women carried the majority of the workload, while men drank too much alcohol and did not respect women’s voices. Village chiefs reported that since the project activities, there has actually been a decrease in alcohol consumption by men, and an increase in men helping their wives with housework, especially the very hard work of clearing land for new crops.

Women themselves who are part of the project and were interviewed for the final data collection reported that they have higher levels of financial knowledge since beginning the project, with knowledge on how to save money, how to work in a group, how to do calculations and how to manage their own groups and money.

EOP Outcome 1: Ethnic minority women within the Arabica coffee value chain in Dak Cheung district (Sekong province) are empowered through strengthened technical and organizational capacities for improved productivity.

1.1 Ethnic minority women have the knowledge and skills on improved coffee production and quality

Village authorities report that women have improved skills on how to expand production of coffee, and how to increase the volume of the harvest. Some villages have seen significant increases in production, such as from 700kg to 1,700 kg per harvest. Another village reported they have increased from 30 sacks per harvest to 80 sacks per harvest. Villages surveyed for the final review showed an average increase of 112% increase in coffee production.

Additionally, women from the project reported they have learned key skills and knowledge on how to prune trees for the highest output, how to wash and dry the beans, how to process and how to add value to their beans. The villages with processing groups are able to get higher outcomes from their crops after learning how to process and care for the beans.

1.1.1 Coffee producers have access to extension services on coffee garden cultivation

A total of 63 (44 female) people were trained as the extension workers from 14 different villages. This means that all the people in these 14 villages have sustainable access to a village extension worker (VEW) in their own community and the coffee producers

theoretically have access to the extension works also. However, because the extension workers did not receive as much training or mentorship as the original intention of the project, there are still gaps in the communication between coffee producers and extension workers. This is demonstrated by the fact that 25% of the VEWs did not know what their role as a VEW was in relation to the project.

There is equal decision-making power and division of labour between women and men in households

This outcome has seen high levels of success as noted by women in the VSLA groups. For example, now that women are able to save money, they are able to make decisions regarding where finances are spent, decisions like choosing to send their child to school or paying for healthcare needs. One member noted that her savings was able to cover an emergency cost for a family member, which gives her more economic empowerment and status within the family.

"I was very proud to have savings that could cover emergency payments for my family when necessary."

-VSLA member

Another key success is that women in the VSLA groups are learning to manage money, and are being given more voice and ability to make decisions regarding purchases for the households.

In addition to women, 100% of the husbands and men who were interviewed during the final review confirmed that there have been changes in the workload distribution between men and women. On average, men surveyed reported a 70% increase in the amount of household work they are now doing compared to before. The most common chores that men have begun are; rice milling, laundry, caring for children, cooking with wives, collecting firewood, carrying water, feeding animals, supporting housework when wives are at meetings or trainings. This list is significant, as several items, such as carrying water, caring for children, and cooking are traditionally women-only chores. In a matter of a few years, there has been a dynamic shift between men and women in terms of chores and job sharing. This is a positive sign that the gender equity goals of this project have been realized.

1.1.1.1 Coffee producers organized in women led production groups

This was successful with 17 coffee groups representing 15 villages functioning. 59 (34 female) model farmers were trained as part of this activity.

1.1.1.2 Key farmers trained as extension workers on coffee garden farming (GAP)

This aspect of the project was not completely successful. The initial goal was for extension workers to have a 3 month training, and then follow up with DAFO for mentorship training. However, at the final evaluation, 25% of those asked did not understand the role of the VEWs. It was clear that the VEW were meant to carry on what they learned to others in the community, which happened, but to a lesser extent than the project intended. Those trained were successful in setting up demo plots and encouraging others to join the processing group but did not perform any of the other aspects of the VEW role. In total, 1,335 (765 female) were trained on GAP farming techniques but did not receive certification.



Figure 1: Women processing coffee

1.1.1.3 Strengthened technical skills of coffee producers from 30 target villages on coffee garden cultivation (Good Agricultural Practices (GAP))

This activity has been successful in that beneficiaries from 30 target villages have attended the strengthened technical skills from the GAP training. In total, 1,335 (765 female) trained on GAP farming techniques but did not receive certification.

1.1.1.4 Strengthen gender negotiation skills increase women and men awareness on gender equality, engaging men and boys to challenge social gender norms in doing housework and making decision

Not completed, no SAA trainings occurred during the project. However, 100% of VSLA members report that they have seen high levels of positive change in gender equity, from changes in support of coffee production, clearing weeds, to increased support with household chores. Some husbands are supporting in collecting fire wood, laundry and taking care of children, which is highly significant as those job have always been very clearly aligned as jobs of women and not men. This outcome is considered to have been highly successful.

1.2 Ethnic minority women have access to the farming inputs and financial resources required for improved coffee garden production and management

Not completed during the project. There is no clear data concerning the reason for the delay of this activity, however it can be assumed that it is a combination of COVID-19 delays and staffing/management challenges.

1.2.1 Coffee producers collectively mobilize and manage financial resources for farming outputs

This activity was partially successful with 32 (15 female) people trained in October 2021.

1.2.1.1 Increased collective actions by women-led Producer groups to procure coffee farming inputs through a voucher system designed to build market/trader analysis skills and stimulate the local market

Not completed during the project. There is no clear data concerning the reason for the delay of this activity, however it can be assumed that it is a combination of COVID-19 delays and staffing/management challenges.

1.2.1.2 Remote ethnic women's savings secured through VSLA groups

This outcome was successful with 10 VSLA groups established and operational and will be able to continue running the group after the project has completed.

This outcome has also been successful as reported by village leadership that women have more access to these savings accounts when there are emergencies or when they need to save money for children to attend school or for large purchases such as motorcycles. From the VSLA groups who were interviewed during the final evaluation, ranging from 7-17 members per group have taken out loans, the loans range from 100,000 Lak to 500,000 Lak each and have had 100% loan repayment on time.

1.3 Ethnic minority women producers are more deeply integrated into the Arabica value chain through value addition opportunities

1.3.1 Coffee producers have access to extension services on high quality coffee processing

Completed with 17 producing groups currently functioning.

1.3.1.1 Coffee producers organized in women led processing groups

This was successful with 14 women led groups currently functioning as a result of project activities.

1.3.1.2 Strengthened technical skills of 11 coffee processing groups

This activity was successful in that there were 12 villages who had coffee processing groups at the time of the final project review, with people from age 17-67 represented. They received some training on how to process and wash cherries, how to produce higher level coffee, how to prune for increased production, how to use processing equipment, and compost training. However, these groups are still not successful with self-management. They did not receive training on fixing the processing machines, nor where to source the equipment they need if it breaks down or if it needs to be replaced.



Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 2: Coffee processing

1.3.2 Coffee processing groups collectively mobilize and manage financial resources for value addition

This activity was successful with a total of 32 people (15 women) attending training on financial resources and value addition.

1.3.2.1 Investment for coffee processing quantified at group level

14 wet processing centers have been constructed with the capacity to support villages to process their own coffee beans and over 470 hectares of coffee plantations completed. This activity was successful, however during the final evaluation, it was clear that no education was given on where to purchase equipment if the community wished to do so, also, there was no education on how to perform upkeep on the equipment for processing or how to fix the equipment if it breaks.

1.3.2.2 Grant system designed and implemented in each women led processing group for required procurements

Not completed during the project. There is no clear data concerning the reason for the delay of this activity, however it can be assumed that it is a combination of COVID-19 delays and staffing/management challenges.

EOP Outcome 2 Ethnic minority women farmers benefit from increased income and profitability in the Arabica coffee value chain.

This project saw significant change in the income and profitability for the farmers in the selected villages. One village saw a production increase from 800 kg per 1/2 hectare plot to 2 tons per ½ hectare plot, while another saw an overall increase from 4 tons of harvest to 8 tons per harvest.

Table 7: Increase in coffee harvest

Village	Before	After	Change (% increase)
Dak Yoil	30 sacks	80 sacks	167%
Dak Seng	5 sacks	14 sacks	180%
Ha Ox	20 sacks	23 sacks	15%
Dak Sieng A	8 sacks	15 sacks	86%

In terms of financial gains, the following chart demonstrates the financial changes in different villages. However, it should be noted that there was a significant rise in coffee prices in the past year which inflated the amount of money that the villagers received. The reason for the inflated prices for year 2021-2022 is unclear, however, such high increases should not be expected for similar projects.

Table 8: Income increase

Village	Before	After	Change
Khoun Sai	2,000,000 lak	20,000,000 lak	900% increase
Kay Euy	6,000,000 lak	40,000,000 lak	560% increase
Dak Den	150,000 lak	6,000,000 lak	390% increase
Dak Run	600,000 lak	4,000,000 lak	560% increase

2.1.1 Coffee producers effectively negotiate and trade their production at fair prices.

Partially met. Women interviewed during the final evaluation did not report any changes or increased ability to negotiate fair price for their products. However, village leaders report that they have seen an improvement in the way that women know how to compare prices to ensure better value for their beans. It is possible that the women do not believe they have changed, but a change is noted by village leadership, so this may be a lack of self-awareness by the women involved in the project. More training is needed for women to understand

how to negotiate, how to promote the uniqueness of their coffee products and how to find buyers for the coffee, not waiting for buyers to come to their village.

2.1.1.1 Platform established to connect women led producer and processing groups with other actors of the value chain such as traders/roasters/private sector

Not completed during the project cycle. Women are working to process their own coffee, but they are not using established women-led coffee producing groups.

2.1.1.2 Women led processing group trained on coffee grading, negotiation skills, marketing, SME development and financial literacy

Not implemented during the project.

2.1.1.3 Coffee market information is available and accessible to coffee producers

This activity was partially successful with coffee producers having access to multiple different coffee market players in Lao nationwide. However, not all groups have access to market buyers, especially the smaller groups, who have limited access and still relied on the CARE Laos staff to be intermediaries. The key groups that were part of the project include:

1. Kafepa
2. Café Nomad
3. Start Ducheng Coffee Khamsavath
4. Sihomespresso
5. Sailomyen Café and Hoste
6. Coffee Consumption
7. JT import and export trading
8. Le Trio
9. Forest coffee
10. Thai Trader

2.1.1.4 Analysis of certification scheme completed

Not implemented during the project.

EOP outcome 3 Ethnic minority women producers are valued and influential actors in the Arabica coffee value chain.

3.1 Improved gender equitable attitudes and behavior in women-led producer group households and communities

The project had many successes in the area of improved gender equity within the communities of the project. For example, 100% of men interviewed report they have increased their contribution to household labor and farming support by 70%. Women from the VSLA groups also noted that men are giving more support with household chores and helping with farming. In addition, women report that men are listening to women's voices when it comes to finances and money management.

“Now men are helping in every process of coffee production, especially clearing weed/grass in the garden. They are also supporting housework.”

-VSLA member

3.1.1 Improved gender power relations and workload sharing within households

This change in household power relations was noted by both the members of the VSLA groups and by the village authorities. Household chores were noted to be shared, women report that husbands have been helping with chores more frequently, such as carrying firewood and water, in addition to helping with childcare so that women can attend meetings. Beyond the change noted in house, men have also supported more in the farming activities, clearing land and transporting products from the land to the village.

3.1.1.1 Gender and Power Analysis

This activity was successful with multiple workshops given through the project. The project implemented workshops on gender roles with 30 villages from 2018-2021. During the post-workshop debriefing, 22 women coffee producers met to analyze gender issues and discussed the labor division of women in families and how to educate women and children on these topics.

3.1.1.2 Gender Strategy and Action Plan developed and implemented on household and community level

The discussions by the women led coffee producers groups were discussed after the gender trainings and a strategy was developed by the women to address and reduce the gender gaps that existed in the villages. Additionally, mainstreaming gender plans were part of the activities in all 30 of the villages as part of the programming.

3.2 Supportive and inclusive policies reflect women producer interests and needs for the Arabica coffee value chain

Throughout the project, the district authorities were creating policies to facilitate and broaden the ability for women to be successful in the coffee chain. One such policy is the development of tax exemption for the transportation of coffee from city to city where the coffee must be taken to be sold. According to the project staff, these ideas and policies are still undergoing formulation and may be implemented. These ideas and policies are still being discussed and formulated even after the project is complete.

3.2.1 Promotion of inclusive and gender sensitive coffee value chain integrated in district annual development plans and local practices.

See results from 3.2

3.2.1.1 Local GOL staff sensitized on women-led value chain development

Not implemented during the project. There is no clear data concerning the reason for the delay of this activity, however it can be assumed that it is a combination of COVID-19 delays and staffing/management challenges.

3.2.2 Promotion of an inclusive and gender sensitive coffee value chain development during coffee value chain related debates from local to national levels.

Not implemented during the project.

7 CROSS CUTTING THEMES

Gendered Impacts

According to a gender power analysis performed by CARE in 2018, there are significant barriers to women's active participation in the coffee value chain. Among the barriers include women's

autonomy, decision making power, marketing and overall production. These barriers were taken into account when reviewing the activities for the EW-EVC project. This project has worked to decrease these barriers, in particular having success with the VSLA groups.

Women who are part of the VSLA groups have reported higher levels self-confidence in their ability to manage finance groups, and to save and loan money within the group. This leads not only to benefits for the women involved, but also for the families of the women involved. One VSLA member noted that she had used her savings for an emergency medical need of a family member.

“ I am so proud that my savings could be used to cover an emergency payment for my family when necessary”
-VSLA member

The VSLA member who was able to support the payment is now seen differently by the men in her family and she has gained autonomy and a higher ability to support her family.

Another VSLA member noted that husbands are now listening to their wives more on financial decisions and accepting women as part of the leadership of the family. VSLA women note that they can use the money they save for important things, such as paying for their child’s school fees.

Another key barrier for ethnic minority women in Lao PDR is that of unequal workloads between men and women. This was addressed as part of the trainings and activities of the project. Both men and women addressed these changes in the final review of the project. Men report they have increased their support in household chores and farming by 70% compared to before the project. In fact men have taken on doing “traditional women jobs” such as caring for children and fetching water.

Finally, there has been impact in the perception of women in leadership. Men surveyed for the final project review noted that they now consult with their wives for big decisions, in particular with finances. 100% of these men also reported that women can be good leaders, and that they now listen to women’s advice. These are significant changes in traditionally conservative villages where women were not typically seen as leaders.

“(Before) men are drinking alcohol every day, so they always have conflict with the family because men are not listening, but now they are listening to women more than before and involve women in decision making process or asking women opinion on important issues.”

-Village Leader

Sustainability

This project has created sustainability in several ways, but most notably in the increased capacity of farmers to grow more coffee and have a more stable income. The increased finances will ensure that families have access to increased nutritional diets, especially for children. Another sustainable change is that of gender norms in relation to workloads of men and women. It is expected that men will continue to support women more with daily chores and farming support.

The VSLA groups were asked if they felt confident to continue to manage the groups once the project was over. On average, from 1- no confidence to 10 very confident, the groups averaged 8.5 on ability to continue running the VLSA groups without the project. This is a positive sign that the project was successful in training the groups, and that they will be sustainable after the project is over.

There are other areas that have the capacity to build sustainability, but were not added to the trainings. This included activities such as maintenance of the processing machines, quality control, coffee grading and access to market chains. Those areas need more focused training added to the project to ensure that they are sustainable.

Efficiency and Value

The project is spread across 30 villages, which is significant when one considers how remote many of these villages are, with minimal or no road access, especially during wet season. Additionally, many of these villages speak ethnic languages and require additional translation and cultural support. The teams are aware of budgetary restrictions and many of the villagers provide labor for free to support the aims of the project. The office in Dak Cheung keeps budgetary costs low by sharing with another project implemented by CARE Laos that focuses on gender based violence.

Relevance and Effectiveness

The project has significant relevance as one of the key priorities of CARE Lao is women's economic empowerment. This project focuses on empowering women to enable them to have enhanced economic independence through education during VSLA groups, trainings on how to increase crop yield and through supporting enhanced production of coffee cherries. The project was not as effective as expected due to staff changes and management challenges described elsewhere in this document. Though the project was effective in supporting increased economic opportunities, it was not effective in mentoring and supporting small business creation in the form of VEWs.

Disability Inclusion

Unfortunately, there was no disability inclusion in this project. In these remote villages, there must be significant steps taken to ensure that people with disabilities are able to attend meetings, be part of the activities and use the coffee processing system. However, as multiple families in the community are receiving higher incomes, and having more accessibility to food, this does positively affect other members of the community, such as those with disabilities.

8 ANALYSIS OF KEY FINDINGS

- 1. The biggest immediate impact from the project is the increase in crop harvest and the increase in income for the families that were part of this project.*
Average increase in harvest production was 112%.
Average annual income increased by 603% since the project started.
- 2. The increase in income did have an immediate effect on the food diversity and purchasing habits of the families that were part of the project. It should be expected that this change will have long-term impact on the children in these communities.*
Fruit consumption average increase of 107% for adults and 108% for CU5 (Children Under Five).
Calcium consumption average increase of 74% for adults and 94% for CU5
Fat consumption average increase of 98% for adults and 87% for CU5
Protein consumption average of 98% for adults and 17% for CU5
- 3. A key change resulting from the project is a change in norms in relation to workloads between men and women.*
Women coffee growers reported they have seen an increase in husbands and men supporting division of labor, both in farming and in the household chores. Men self-report

they have increased their effort by 70% in terms of supporting their wives with chores and farming.

4. *In relation to gender roles, there has also been a marked change in the perception of women in leadership roles.*
100% of men report that they have increased their support for women in decision making regarding finances and now have greater respect for women in leadership roles. Men report that women can be good leaders for coffee production groups.
5. *Women are empowered, and have increased confidence and ability to manage finances.*
VSLA women report high levels of self-confidence after joining the VSLA training and feel empowered to save money and to make finance related decisions.
6. *Management turn-over resulted in delays and incomplete activities.*
Project partners (Government of Laos, coffee buyers, beneficiaries) reported that staff turnover caused many delays and lack of follow up resulting in activities not being completed or not done at all. Additionally, the lack of a stable coffee expert reduced the efficacy of the project according to DAFO and project staff. Traders report that changes with CARE staff caused confusion and delays.

9 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

1. *Management and oversight of the different groups should be revised, and additional training added to ensure the next project is more successful.*
For example, the roles are not clear between the processing groups, the marketing groups, the VEWs etc. Each group should have its own specific training, and each group should understand how they function apart from the other groups. During this project, there was confusion between the different groups, and the training was the same, not specific to each group.
2. *There must be clarity of the different roles between coffee growers and VEWs and these different roles should receive different trainings.*
The current project gave the same training to the coffee growers as the VEWs, but they are intended to be different, with the VEWs receiving more training as service provide and has more technical skills on coffee growing and processing to provide more practical support to coffee growers. Each group must have a clear understanding of their role.
3. *The marketing group must have specific training on their role and how to reach out to buyers.*
At this time, the marketing groups have had unclear expectations on their role, and they were not trained on how to search for new buyers, instead they relied on the CARE team to bring buyers, or for the buyer to come to their villages.
4. *The processing groups need to be trained on how to manage the group, why a group collective is beneficial and should focus on how women can lead and manage these groups.*
The groups did not receive training on managing the processing center, such as the timing of crop harvest and which family can use the facility when, this caused many issues and delays. The group was also not trained on the benefit of selling as a group, not only to the highest bidder who came to the village.

5. *Ensure that the project has the right technical advisors who can adjust the training as projects continue.*

This was a key area that was lacking throughout the project, the technical support was not consistent, which caused delays and lack of sustained mentoring and training. Additionally, as the project continues, there needs to be different trainings. The care of plantations when they are new is different compared to the care of four year old trees. These updates and changes need to be added to the curriculum.

6. *The VSLA curriculum and training needs to adjust as the VSLA groups become more advanced.*

The VSLA groups are now 3-4 years active, and they need updated training. For example, new topics such as profit sharing have begun to occur, and the groups need guidance on how to manage these finances. Additionally, there can be further training to support increased women's engagement in the leadership of the village and more discussion on creating gender equity within families.

7. *Government partners need more training in order to continue the activities and support after the project ends.*

Government partners report they did not receive enough capacity building to ensure they can continue to support the project activities after the program ends. The next phase of the project should have a stronger emphasis on capacity building of local partners.

8. *There needs to be more training and education on the purchase, maintenance, and repair of all the process equipment such as mills.*

The beneficiaries reported they were not sure where the processing machines can be bought or replaced pieces can be purchased. There was no education given on how to maintain this equipment.

9. *Project teams and beneficiaries must carefully choose which areas of the village should have coffee processing activities and give education on grading coffee and quality control to ensure quality production.*

Due to lack of understanding of the overall process of coffee processing, the villages did not pick ideal situations for the mill placement and coffee producing spaces. More education on the overall process needs to be supported from the beginning of the project. Additionally, training needs to be given on coffee grading and quality control to ensure a good product.



10. *There needs to be education on how to manage the groups (VSLA, Coffee Producers etc.) once the project is complete.*
 For example, there is no budget for maintaining the activities of the group, no admin fund or management funds for purchasing notebooks or equipment for the activities. The beneficiaries reported without equipment from the project, they may not be able to continue because they were trained with equipment (stationary and other tools) that were not sourced in the villages.

11. *Project activities need to include education on the fluctuation of coffee prices, ethical trading and pricing and the reason why the villages need to work together.*
 Coffee produces left groups during a season of especially high coffee prices in order to make more money with no understanding of the long-term benefits of group processing and ethical value chains.

12. *Future projects need to support direct communication between growers and traders.*
 Traders complained that communication all had to go through CARE Laos, leading to delays and confusion, and is not sustainable as a long-term solution.

13. *Clear project goals will support better collaboration between all partners*
 Beneficiaries, DAFO and traders were all unclear on coffee producer groups compared to farmers and VEWS compared to model farmers, and other confusion on the project goals led to missed opportunities.

10 CONCLUSION

The Empowered Women for an Equitable Coffee Value Chain (EW-EVC) Project funded through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) has been implemented in Sekong for five years and the goal of “Reduced poverty and improved access to food for remote ethnic communities through women’s economic empowerment” has seen high levels of success. In particular, success in the key areas of improving coffee harvests, increasing the amount of income for coffee growers, improving the nutritional levels of communities and securing more autonomy for women in the area of financial literacy and empowerment.

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13 ANNEXES

Annex 1- Inception Report



Final%20Draft-Inception%20Report-Care%

Annex 2-Table form summary of indicators



MEL-Project%20log-frame-Final%20Evaluation

Annex 3- Tools for interviews and data collection (all 12 on one sheet)

Government and Staff	Private Sector	VEWs
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 Updated-TOOL%201 -Government%20and%	 Updated-TOOL%202 -%20Private%20sectc	 Updated-TOOL%203 -VEVs.docx
Village Authority  Updated-TOOL%204 -Village%20authority%	VSLA  Updated-TOOL%205 -%20VSLA.docx	Processing Group  Updated-TOOL%206 -Processing%20group
Coffee Producers  updated-TOOL%207- coffee%20producers%	Husband of Coffee Producers  Updated-TOOL%208. %20Husband%20of%	Case Study  Updated-TOOL%209 -%20case%20study.di
Nutrition Questions  updated-Tool%2010- %20Nutrtion%20ques	Project Goals and Indicators  Annex%2011-update d.xlsx	Care Global Indicator  Annex%2012-%20CA RE%20global%20indi