



## Equality in the household as the starting point

Mrs. Trieu Thi May is a cinnamon farmer from Nam Det commune in Bac Ha district, a remote area in the highlands of Northern Vietnam. Nam Det commune has long been known for maize production and a lot of families in the area lived under the poverty line. When the first cinnamon tree seedlings were brought to the area in 1974, Nam Det commune has observed significant changes. Livelihoods has been improved and poverty has been gradually alleviated. However, do all people in Nam Det benefit equally from these changes?

The majority of the population in Nam Det commune comprises of Dao and Hmong ethnic minority groups where traditional gender norms are still deeply entrenched. Like many women in commune, Mrs. May often has to spend more time on household chores, which she has to combine with productive work in the cinnamon forest. Most women also have a limited role in decision-making over production activities, resources and household expenditures. Most of the time women are only allowed to have a say in “minor” decisions. Therefore, even though livelihoods at household level are much improved, women’s heavy workload and lack of decision-making power hinder them from fully benefitting from these improvements.

To ensure that women can equally participate in and benefit from economic activities, deeply entrenched gender norms in households, production groups and the community must be addressed. In 2016, a

consortium of SNV, Oxfam and CARE started the implementation of the ‘Women’s Economic Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chain Enhancement’ (WEAVE) project with funding from the Australian Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). The project aims to facilitate the enhancement of an inclusive and gender-response cinnamon value chain, with equal participation of and benefits for women.

In late 2016, Mrs. May and her husband decided to join the WEAVE project and expressed their interest to become part of a farmer interest group with other cinnamon farmers from the commune. Through a participatory process, May’s husband, Mr. Trieu A Lu was elected as the leader of the farmer group and May herself was elected as vice leader. In this role, they are responsible for running the activities of their farmer group, including organising group meetings.





Mrs. May and her husband sharing household chores  
Photo credit: Đỗ Mạnh Cường

Together with other members of their farmer interest group, Mrs. May and her husband participated in trainings on a wide range of topics, including cinnamon production techniques, leadership skills, women's rights and how to effectively operate in farmer groups. The couple also participated in facilitated dialogue sessions, in which they reflected on the division of labour and decision-making processes within their households. "I see a lot of changes among Dao women like me in the commune, since they participated in activities organised under the WEAVE project", says Mrs. May. The most significant change for Mrs. May is the boost of confidence that she gained from the activities. "I have gained a lot of knowledge from the trainings and group activities and now I believe that women have the same capacity as men. This insight really boosted my confidence."

However, to ensure that women can equally participate and benefit from economic activities, the changes in women themselves are not enough. To sustainably

address deeply entrenched gender norms, as the root causes for women's effective participation in economic development, it is important to engage men. For May's husband, Mr. Trieu A Lu, the facilitated dialogue sessions were an eye-opening experience. "Since the sessions I realise that our women have to bear so many responsibilities. They have to work on the field, they have to cook and they have to take care of our children. Before I joined the project, I often went out to drink with friends. However, now I believe sharing between husband and wife is extremely needed. Instead of drinking, I now often decide to share the work that needs to be done within our household with my wife." The changes in the household were also noticed by Mrs. May. "Since my husband participates in the trainings and dialogue sessions, he even encourages me to attend more social events to get more social knowledge. And while I am away he takes the responsibility for a lot of household tasks like cooking."

*The WEAVE project, implemented by a consortium of SNV, CARE and Oxfam, funded by Australian Government, aims to increase the women's economic participation and empowerment in agricultural value chains in rural areas of Vietnam; improve gender relations by reducing barriers that reduce the effective participation of women in economic development and benefits for women through the development of value chains and sustainable market access, while providing a favourable environment for women to grow their businesses.*

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