

Empowered Women for an Equitable Coffee Value Chain



Coffee farmers are checking the quality of parchment.

BACKGROUND

Coffee is the main source of household income in Dak Cheung District of Sekong Province in the south of Laos. Located in the highlands with its rich soils and specific climate, Dak Cheung is suitably positioned to produce coffee and other cash crops. However, its coffee yields less of a profit because of poor processing and production techniques which results in a spiraling cycle of farmers not investing the necessary time and resources required to improve the quality of their crop.

Those small scale farmers, composed mainly of ethnic communities, are particularly at risk of sliding into poverty as the subsistence farming practices they rely on become increasingly unfeasible. This will worsen gender inequalities and the livelihood of remote ethnic women. With poverty rate as high as 40%, Dak Cheung is one of these vulnerable communities, especially as road construction between Sekong Province and the Vietnamese border progresses, which is expected to increase trading investments from larger corporations.

CARE has been working in Dak Cheung for the last ten years, focusing particularly on women economic empowerment and financial inclusion. In establishing and promoting women-led community based organizations, CARE has worked with women to address imbalanced household workloads, income generation and to improve nutrition outcomes. The Empowered Women for Equitable Coffee Value Chain project, draws on this experience, aiming to equip women farmers with the skills and knowledge they need to fully participate in economic opportunities and household and community decision-making.

GLIMPSE



Location
Dak Cheung District,
Sekong Province

TimeFrame

July 2017 – June 2021

Beneficiaries

3,400 people (74% women);
30 villages

Partners

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry (MAF), Lao Women's Union, Le Filantrophe, Le Trio Café, Coffee Producers Cooperative (CPC)

OBJECTIVES

Women farmers are technically and commercially empowered with the technical knowledge and skills to produce and process quality coffee.

Donor agencies

The Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade




OUTCOMES

- **Organize a collective enterprise of Ethnic Minority Women-led producer groups to improve coffee production and quality**
 - Build on previously established Women's Income and Nutrition Groups, apply Linking Agriculture, Nutrition and Natural Resources (LANN) approach to nutrition improvement purpose and coffee production for 30 mixed-sex women-led coffee producer groups
 - Identify and train Village Extension Workers (VEWs) (3 to 5 VEWs per village) in 3 villages. (VEWs) to act as role models who will provide technical support for their groups
- **Ensure access to farming input and financial resources needed to improve coffee production and management**
 - Actively involve women producers in purchasing farming products and equipment to strengthen investment in the process and knowledge of markets
 - Reinforce technical knowledge and capabilities through coordination of women VEWs
 - Formalize village-level coffee producer groups and management
 - Support women coffee producer groups for pathway of qualifying Fair Trade Certification and organic certification
- **Establish a marketing approach to integrate Dak Cheung into the coffee value chain**
 - Identify trustful partnerships with buyers and fair markets to secure higher incomes for better quality coffee
 - Carve new commercial channels in the private sector and negotiate fair partnership contracts

IMPACTS

The new infrastructure for the coffee processing has just been built on the outskirts of Dakvor village, which is surrounded by coffee plantations. The aim is to advance the production from the simple selling of red berries towards processing of coffee parchment. Ms. Silinta is 29-year-old and she is one of the leading women embracing the introduction of new technologies for coffee processing. Together with her family, she has been cultivating coffee for almost a decade. Besides rice, coffee is the most popular cash crop to grow in Dakvor a village. Grading the berry is the first of many steps in the coffee processing. Once the low quality berries have been removed, the better ones are processed. This turns the red berries into parchment.

Since Silinta and her family started growing coffee, they have only sold the red berries. For her the improved processing is new, but she already learned how to use it by spending about one week practicing the processing at a Coffee Producers Cooperative, jointly with other women from neighbouring villages. The fact that parchment has a higher value than the red berries is not a novelty for the villagers. They simply couldn't afford to invest in the equipment and the construction of the processing centre, In addition, drying facility were constructed allowing the producers to reduce the moisture content below 12% as required by the buyers. This was hardly possible before.



Ms. Silinta is proud to pick the berry in her farm during coffee harvesting season.

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