



CHANG/ING THE GAME

A collection of **impact stories** from the **GRAISEA Program**

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INTRODUCTION

Across Southeast Asia, agriculture continues to define levels of development, as well as the quality of life of poor and vulnerable people. An estimated 100 million smallholder farmers reside in Southeast Asia, while the sector employs 40% of the region's workforce.¹ The region produces 30% of the world's rice harvest² and 17% of global fisheries production.³ Imagine, then, a sector that generates billions of dollars and, yet, keeps its key workforce — millions of women and men smallholder farmers — in widespread poverty. The region is also highly vulnerable to climate risks, while women, who only account for 13% of land title holders or spend as much as 14 hours a day on unpaid care and domestic work, remain particularly vulnerable.

These are problems at scale that require solutions at scale, and finding solutions at scale has been the focus of the [Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in Southeast Asia \(GRAISEA\) program](#).

Supported by the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok, GRAISEA is a regional program aimed at improving the livelihoods of small-scale women and men producers by acting as a catalyst for the emergence of inclusive value chains and responsible business practices that respect human rights and drive women's economic empowerment and climate resilience.

This document aims to provide some examples of how GRAISEA 2 (2018–2023) was able to **impact agricultural markets, as well as support and empower vulnerable farmers and workers at scale**.

There are many more examples we could share, but these particular ones help show the diversity of GRAISEA's support. These range from influencing national processors and international buyers to develop more inclusive contracts and buy from farmers, to new national IT solutions to increase farmers' resilience to disasters and climate change, to prospective policy change to support social enterprises that could help hundreds of thousands of people, to innovative approaches to empowering cooperatives and women's rights organizations.

We hope that you enjoy reading these impact stories. We hope they inspire you in your own work, provide new ideas while highlighting the importance of thinking through sustainability and potential for scale at the beginning of all interventions.

For more information on these examples, and how Oxfam and its partners within GRAISEA are taking the examples forward, reach out to us at asia@oxfam.org.

Many thanks as well to all colleagues, partners, and market actors who have contributed to this document for their amazing core work and then for sharing it. Specifically, thank you to colleagues at Axfood, Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community, Development and Partnership in Action, International Collaborating Center for Aquaculture and Fisheries Sustainability, Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia, Minh Phu, Oxfam, PT ATINA, South Vina Shrimp, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and Weaving Women's Voices in Southeast Asia. This would not have been possible without all of your work.

¹ Mikolajczyk, S., F. Mikulcak, A. Thompson, and I. Long. 2021. *Unlocking smallholder finance for sustainable agriculture*. WWF Germany.

² IRRI. n.d. Transitioning toward equitable, profitable, and environmentally sound rice agri-food systems.

³ FAO. 2017. *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2017–2026*. <http://www.fao.org/3/a-i7465e.pdf>.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS LEADING THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Despite important increases for women in access to education and workforce participation in Southeast Asia, many continue to face gender-based discrimination, particularly violence against women and girls, due to women's lack of limited power. Though other allies are very welcome, a key driver for change to these underlying problems are well-resourced and empowered community women's rights organizations (WROs) that are empowering marginalized women and, together, campaigning for substantive change across the region. GRAISEA, led by the regional women's network [Weaving Women's Voices in Southeast Asia \(WEAVE\)](#), has focused here, supporting three community WROs in Cambodia, Indonesia, and the Philippines by raising awareness on feminist economic justice, ramping up their advocacy and influencing skills, improving their governance structure and financial management, and building networks of WROs across Southeast Asia.

This work has led to critical changes. The three community WROs are now better managed and have seen their membership and geographic reach grow. They are providing more services and support to their members, focusing more on their economic empowerment, and, crucially, recognized by local and national governments. Moreover, their work is increasingly leading to changes in government policy, where both national and local governments increasing their economic awareness and support to women. At the regional level, this has contributed to key commitments by the ASEAN Economic Community to

mainstream gender equality in its [2025–2035 Blueprint](#), involving WROs in the process.

Context: Persisting gender economic inequality resulting in violence against women

Women and girls are central to Southeast Asia's economic sectors. Women represent 44.4% of workers in the service sector, 39.2% in agriculture, and 16.4% in manufacturing particularly in the garments industry.¹ However, gender gaps in employment, wages, decent work, social protection, and safe workspaces continue to persist.

A [2016 analysis by WEAVE](#), a regional group of women's organizations and advocates, noted that despite the increasing access of women to education and workforce participation, they continue to experience poverty, wage, and promotion gaps in employment, as well as increasing incidences of exploitation and trafficking.

This is because while economic growth is providing more opportunities for women's economic empowerment, **gender hierarchy and violence against women persist in the families, communities, and workplaces.**

The same research highlighted the following: 63% of women are in vulnerable employment with low pay and inadequate security and social protection; women's unpaid care and domestic work remains unrecognized because it is not considered

as productive employment; women have less control over land and assets that consequently reduces their access to credit; and legislation to safeguard women's equal rights has not tackled entrenched social norms and practices, gender-based stereotyping, and customary laws and religious beliefs that justify violence against women.

Systems innovation: Well-resourced and empowered community-based WROs

There are many stakeholders working to address these challenges — from government agencies to progressive businesses to external donor agencies. However, addressing underlying issues of gender hierarchy and violence against women requires empowering women facing these issues to push for the changes they need; to have the ability to directly influence communities, policymakers, and businesses; and to be able to keep on doing this long after programs like GRAISEA end.

As GRAISEA 2 started, it became clear that **the key actors to represent marginalized women were community-based WROs.** Many WROs existed across Southeast Asia, but few represented the most marginalized women in rural areas, especially in agriculture, or supporting agricultural households.

The few here had developed organically, based on and driven by the everyday needs of their members and communities. Yet,



■ Phrav Chreb sifts rice at her home in Bor Pi village in Cambodia. Photo by Savann Oeum

they tended to have very limited budgets and no formal staff, no legal identity and local recognition, limited experience in providing services to their members or in policy advocacy, and limited networks with other similar WROs.

As such, GRAISEA aimed to support rural and agricultural WROs, with the view that if they were properly capacitated and resourced, they would be able to **take the lead to collectively address the underlying barriers to women's economic equality.**

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Implementation: Supporting WROs

Led by WEAVE, GRAISEA focused on three WRO areas of support:

- Building the specific capacities of a small number of highly potential community-based WROs
- Supporting broader networks of WROs in GRAISEA countries of operations

across Southeast Asia

- Advocating at the regional level to include the voice of WROs² in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025

This impact story focuses on the former: the support given to three community-based WROs that were actively helping women farmers without any legal recognition by local or national governments, and whose areas of work did not initially involve women's economic equality and gender-based violence.

- *Guyub Remen*, a group of women nano-entrepreneurs and farmers in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (supported by WEAVE member Kalyanamitra)
- *Grassroots Cross-Sector Network*, a group of women land rights defenders in Koh Kong, Kompong Chhnang, and Kompong Thom in Cambodia (supported by WEAVE member Silaka)
- *NAGSAKKA*, an organization that helps members access government funds/livelihood projects and advocates for genuine agrarian reform in Northern Quezon, Philippines (supported by WEAVE member WLB)

Support has involved:

- Raising awareness on women's human rights and on the agenda building of feminist economic justice grounded from the stories of marginalized women and gathered from partner communities
- Ramping up advocacy skills on (1) engaging local, national, and regional

policymakers to promote the feminist economic justice agenda to influence local and national policies and the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025 and (2) accessing local and national government programs

- Building capacity on governance, financial management, and workplan development
- Providing para-legal support to address cases of violence against women and girl children
- Networking and sharing of experiences with other WROs³

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Impact: Expanding WROs empowering their members

Support from GRAISEA and WEAVE has led to significant improvements in the capacity of the three WROs. All are now:

- Stronger and more sustainably managed, with better financial management and negotiation skills
- More focused on promoting feminist economic justice and addressing gender-based violence and domestic violence
- Providing more services to their members, ranging from group livelihood support to creating more safe spaces for members to share their experiences, regular trainings and knowledge sharing sessions on responding to gender-based discrimination and gender-based violence, and community outreach to address specific cases of discrimination

- Recognized by local and national policymakers, and increasingly starting to influence policymakers and improve access to government programs

For instance, NAGSAKKA provided a space for its members to process food and supported them to increase production and marketing. It also started to give advice in the community and to women migrant workers on how to address violence against women and girls, which local government officials are increasingly recognizing and referring people to NAGSAKKA.

Building on these, and due to its improved management, legal recognition, and ability to explain the importance of feminist economic justice, **NAGSAKKA recently won a PHP 170,000 (about USD 3,000)**



A woman coconut farmer from NAGSAKKA. Photo by Edward Bagasol

livelihood project from the Philippines' Department of Social Welfare and Development to run a convenience store that also sells snacks made by members.

The profit is then shared back to women members, while also creating jobs in the community. It now plans to build on this by setting up more stores for members in other areas.

Furthermore, after a year of negotiation and compliance with the requirements of the Department of Labor and Employment, NAGSAKKA was awarded PHP 1 million worth of equipment for the production of their sweets and delicacies.

In Indonesia, Guyub Remen has focused more on policy influencing. It was able to influence the Indonesian Ministry of Cooperatives and Small and Medium Enterprises to acknowledge the gender-blindness of its small and medium enterprise (SME) programs and commit to work with WROs to increase women's access to SME programs. It has also influenced the regional government to commit to help several small businesswomen to access the "Jakpreneur" program—a Jakarta program to assist SMEs.

At a more local level, local government officials are now providing capacity building to Guyub Remen to increase the quality of their products and improve their online presence. Officials have also provided halal certificates and business licenses to various products, which led to increase in sales.

In Cambodia, the Cross-Sector Network has focused more on capacitating women farmer leaders to look at their land rights campaign with a feminist lens, using the feminist economic justice agenda as a framework. This led to women farmer leaders becoming more confident in leading their campaign, and in educating more women land rights defenders on feminist economic justice.

The impact of these changes has been highly valuable and often life changing, in part explaining why the WROs have seen increases in their membership, as more and more communities ask to join.

NAGSAKKA's membership grew from 250 to 935 members, expanding from Quezon to the nearby province of Laguna, while Guyub Remen expanded from 375 to 430 members. Cross-Sector Network remains with 6,615 members, who are receiving more education on human rights and how to bring a women's lens to their land rights campaigning.

NAGSAKKA members highlighted how the support they received has allowed them to have increased freedom of mobility, negotiate with their husbands, leave violent relationships, and have more solidarity between women.

For instance, as one member said: **"I have learned to work and say no to my husband. I also helped him understand that he does not own me, and I do not own him. My husband first did not believe what I said to him but slowly he has become more understanding and supportive. Now he**

thinks what I am doing in NAGSAKKA is good because I can also help with the family income."

This work has also led to bigger regional changes. For instance, WEAVE has expanded its membership from six countries in Southeast Asia to seven, with new members in Malaysia and Thailand, while the ASEAN Economic Community has committed to have regular consultations with WEAVE on the feminist economic justice agenda, in part due to work by WEAVE to provide advocacy spaces for the community-based WROs to share the experiences of women and their work with key ASEAN bodies.

Building on this experience from GRAISEA 2, future plans for GRAISEA involve putting the work of WROs more central, with more resources and connection to Oxfam country work, such as in influencing the private sector.

¹ WEAVE. 2021. A feminist economic justice agenda for the ASEAN. Read [here](#).

² WEAVE launched its Feminist Economic Justice Agenda through an online regional dialogue with key sectoral bodies of the ASEAN on 29 July 2021. This was after three years of continuing capacity-building activities and gathering of stories from various communities in Southeast Asia. Read more here.

³ The three WROs were involved in the training and network building on feminist economic justice, which aimed to influence 38 more WROs in the seven member-countries of WEAVE (i.e., Burma, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Thailand).

RICE-ING TO THE OCCASION: SUPPORTING A STRONG UNION OF COOPERATIVES IN CAMBODIA

Though rice production and exports are rapidly growing in Cambodia, smallholder farmers who lead production are often not seeing the benefits. Cooperatives have a key role in helping their members not just to produce effectively together but also to negotiate for higher prices with governments and fairer government support. This is why it is common for development projects to support cooperatives, but, often, these programs struggle to achieve impact at scale and really empower cooperatives.

In Cambodia, GRAISEA has taken a new approach to improve the supporting ecosystem around cooperatives. Specifically, it has strengthened the Preah Vihear Mean Chey Union of Agricultural Cooperative (PMUAC) to better manage its finances and operations, as well as to provide enhanced services to its members, such as information to farmers on rice market prices and cooperative audits. This has not just empowered farmers but also contributed to the cooperative union, which has grown from eight cooperative members in 2016 to 25 in 2023, representing over 5,000 members.

Moreover, by the end of 2022, PMUAC was financially sustainable with dues from its members now exceeding costs. Since its establishment, 15 other cooperative unions have been established in Cambodia, which are actively learning from PMUAC.

Context: High potential but limited farmer power in the rice sector

Agriculture, led by rice production, represents approximately one third of Cambodia's GDP and employs 80% of its population.¹ Paddy production is increasing rapidly from 8 million tons in 2012 to 10.9 million tons in 2020.² Hence, the Cambodian government has laid out plans to promote the country as a "rice basket" and a major rice exporter.

However, the sector faces significant challenges, with productivity lower than neighboring countries, in part due to expensive fuel, limited transportation and port facilities, and less irrigation infrastructure. More importantly, smallholder farmers often have little power in rice markets, often lacking coordination,

struggling to find buyers and forced to sell at low prices.

Increasingly, farmer cooperatives are seen as the answer here, as they bring together farmers, making them more attractive to buyers and input sellers, and negotiating for better prices on behalf of their members. In this area, development organizations like Oxfam are prominent supporters.

Supporting cooperatives one by one, however, limits NGOs' impact to a small number of cooperatives. To be truly empowered, cooperatives require a stronger ecosystem of support.

Systems innovation: A union of agricultural cooperatives providing services and empowering members for a fee

For several years, Oxfam in Cambodia has supported the establishment and enhanced capacity of farmer cooperatives. However, in 2016, it started to consider building on this work by reaching out to more and more cooperatives and by increasing the sustainability of their impact through supporting the ecosystem around cooperatives.

In 2016, PMUAC was formed by eight agricultural cooperatives. It was the first cooperative union in Cambodia aimed at supporting its member-cooperatives in enhanced organic rice and other agricultural production. In 2017, GRAISEA led by [Development and Partnership in](#)

The evaluation team from the certification body Ecocert evaluates the production of organic rice together with PMUAC staff, internal inspector, and the agricultural cooperative leader of farmers in Khyang village, Khyang commune, Chey Sen district, Preah Vihear province. Photo by DPA



Action (DPA) started to support PMUAC's sustainability and expansion.

GRAISEA's vision was to contribute to build a strong agricultural union to provide valuable support, services, and voice for its members, as well as a model for other agricultural cooperative unions in Cambodia. Each cooperative paying for services received would ensure sustainability and that the union was providing value to cooperatives. PMUAC was interested in Oxfam's and DPA's support, as they felt their management capacity was low, and that this was an area where Oxfam could support them.

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Implementation: Influencing from financial responsibility to support to members

GRAISEA's support to PMUAC in 2017 initially focused on financial management, as concerns over financial records made this a key risk to PMUAC's ongoing work and reputation, and so support here was needed to build trust among members and other supporting partners. GRAISEA partner DPA provided training on financial management and supported the Provincial Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries to provide regular audits of PMUAC.

Following this foundational work, GRAISEA supported improved leadership at PMUAC, with training in areas such as developing business plans and leadership skills. It also built the capacity of PMUAC to provide financial policy support, including

bookkeeping, recording keeping, and regular audits of its member-cooperatives.

Eventually, GRAISEA's focus shifted to improving PMUAC's service offering to its members. It started to link PMUAC to more local buyers — such as Amru Rice, Signatures of Asia, and Golden Rice — whom PMUAC links to its member-cooperatives or it helps aggregate the cooperative sales to.

In 2023, GRAISEA also built the capacity of PMUAC to collect and update rice market information from across the province, such as the price that local buyers/collectors and millers are buying at, and share this with its members, so they are better informed and are more empowered in their buyer outreach and price negotiation.

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Impact: A cooperative union with a growing membership and national influence

GRAISEA's support has led to significant changes in PMUAC. It is financially stable and considered well-managed. Services that GRAISEA supported PMUAC to start providing to its members — such as on financial policies and audits, and linking to buyers — are still being provided by PMUAC after GRAISEA's support has ended. The provision of rice price information is also set to continue after the program ends.

This increase in services has contributed to PMUAC's remarkable growth from eight cooperatives in 2016 to 25 cooperatives across Preah Vihear province in 2023,

representing 5,012 farmers (of whom 3,498 are women).

These changes seem highly sustainable as well. PMUAC, as of 2022, remained profitable, with member-cooperatives each paying an annual membership fee.

It is hard to determine the impact of GRAISEA's support, in part as key elements of support are more to general PMUAC functioning rather than services to farmers, while some of the biggest innovations are quite recent.

However, it is encouraging to see the achievement brought by PMUAC which provides key support to its over 5,000 farmer-members by: (1) supporting Internal Control Services that farmers need to sell organic rice for export, which helps 3,500 farmers access a premium of USD 45 per ton; (2) overseeing some contract farming agreements between cooperatives and buyers; and (3) providing credit and savings services to its members by acting as an intermediary between cooperatives.

While GRAISEA did not directly support these services, GRAISEA's interventions have led to significant improvements in PMUAC's financial management, business planning, organizational capacity, and leadership — allowing PMUAC's services to become more feasible, appropriate, and successful.

In addition, all 5,012 farmers have received rice price information from PMUAC via their cooperatives. This is allowing them to make informed decisions when

negotiating with buyers and is expected to lead to better prices.

PMUAC has also provided financial audits of three cooperatives in Sangkum Thmei District, which approximately represent 600 famers, and is expected to conduct audits of further cooperatives on request in the future.

The potential does not stop in Preah Vihear. Since PMUAC's establishment, 15 other cooperative unions have been established in Cambodia to provide service and support to their member-cooperatives — a process that GRAISEA actively supports through bringing other unions to see how PMUAC works.

The chair of PMUAC's supervisory committee was also recently elected as vice-chair of the Cambodia Agricultural Cooperative Alliance, the highest body representing agricultural cooperatives nationwide in Cambodia.

No other cooperative unions are as active yet as PMUAC, but it is still in its early days — and the role of cooperative unions seems increasingly established in Cambodia.

¹ International Finance Corporation. n.d. Transforming the Rice Industry and Building Export Capacity in Cambodia. Read here.

² Hem, C. n.d. Is Cambodian rice ready for the world market? <https://www.adb.org/multimedia/partnership-report2021/stories/is-cambodian-rice-ready-for-the-world-market/>.

'SHRIMP THE BEST': A NEW FORM OF INCLUSIVE CONTRACTING FOR SEAFOOD

For years in the Mekong Delta in Vietnam, processors have relied on middlemen for shrimp, leading to lower supply chain reliability for buyers and, more importantly, lower incomes but higher risks for farmers. In response, GRAISEA worked with an innovative processor, South Vina Shrimp (SVS), to try out a new approach to contract farming. Here, SVS commits to cooperatives to both buying their shrimp after harvest and at a premium, while also providing farmers key inputs and training. Through this model, at least 4,400 farmers have benefitted from higher incomes and lower risks. Alongside big improvements supported by GRAISEA in how SVS listens to and treats its workers, more and more businesses in the Mekong Delta are taking note of how to similarly make their procurement and staffing more inclusive.

Context: The challenge of shrimp farming in Vietnam

Driven by expansion in shrimp farming areas and rapid productivity growth, Vietnam is now one of the world's leading shrimp producers and exporters – with the Mekong Delta in Southern Vietnam its leading shrimp production area. Despite this rapid growth, however, the sector faces significant issues that limit not only further growth but also the degree to which farmers and shrimp processor factory workers are able to benefit.

A key underlying cause of this is the way shrimp are bought. Processors largely buy shrimp from intermediaries who, in turn,

buy from various and changing farmers who have low supply chain reliability – both for quantity and quality. At the same time, international buyers increasingly require assured high-quality shrimp, such as through certification on the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) standards.

For farmers, this model means uncertainty in market access and income. Farmers have limited negotiating power to push up prices and must contend with lower price due to lower shrimp quality and failure to meet all-sector standards. This is while they face the steepest risks in the value chain, in particular as climate change makes production significantly less reliable.

Moreover, while incomes from factory jobs are more secure for the largely female workforce in the shrimp industry, these jobs have also been historically of low quality, with significant health and safety concerns, unpredictable hours and overtime, and limited childcare support or flexibility.

Systems innovation: A new contract farming model

In response to this, [GRAISEA](#), through the [International Centre for Aquaculture & Fisheries Sustainability \(ICAFIS\)](#), reached out to various companies to pilot purchasing directly from farmer groups and workforce management.

One of these companies is the South Vina Shrimp (SVS), a newer shrimp processing

company, which had only opened its first factory in 2015. SVS used to depend on unreliable intermediaries, as it lacked its own shrimp ponds.

SVS is managing two shrimp processing plants. The one in Cà Mau Province is focused on mangrove organic shrimp farming, while the one in Bac Lieu is focused on selling ASC-certified shrimp to international buyers.

In Bac Lieu, there was an opportunity to support the company to develop a contract farming model focused on ASC standard compliance, whereby SVS directly sources shrimp from farmer cooperatives – leaving out intermediaries – based on pre-agreed contracts between the two sides.

The contracts include not only the date and price of sale but also a premium and the commitments by SVS to provide training and production inputs to farmer groups. For farmers, benefits of guaranteed markets, production support, and potentially higher prices are clearer. For SVS, the model has the potential to address their supply issues and allow them to reach ASC standard.

Implementation: Supporting SVS

When GRAISEA started working with SVS in 2018, contract farming was not widespread in the sector. SVS had not used such contracts before or directly procured from farmer groups. Initially, SVS was worried that the model would not



Shrimp farmers check their shrimp pond in Cà Mau Province, Vietnam. Photo by Nguyen Duc Hieu

work, and the farmers would not be able to stick to their commitments. GRAISEA spent time persuading the company directors of the benefits, such as a stronger and more stable supply chain, produce meeting ASC standards, and increased traceability of produce.

Contracts were initially tested with two cooperatives. **The terms included a commitment to purchase shrimp produced after harvest; a core price of 1–2% above current market prices and 3–5% above for ASC-certified shrimp; SVS to pay all ASC standard audit costs; and SVS to provide inputs to farmers, including annual training on ASC standards and quality control, 50% of seed costs for extensive farms and physical upgrades for intensive farms (e.g., improved sediment ponds and nets to enhance bio-security).**

To derisk the use of contracts for the first time, GRAISEA hired a consultant to train farmers on how to set up and manage cooperatives, and on the specific ASC production standards that SVS requires for its shrimp export markets.

As the model gained traction, GRAISEA decreased its investment in subsequent contracts with cooperatives, but it continued to link SVS to farmers. SVS and the farmers then managed the establishment and maintenance of the cooperatives and set up the contracts themselves.

Since 2018, GRAISEA has also been supporting working conditions at SVS's Bac Lieu factory, where over 600 people

work, by training middle management quality and human resource staff on key issues, such as on improving working conditions, labor policies, and international standards. GRAISEA also supported the annual labor negotiations between the company board and labor representatives.

Moreover, GRAISEA has also supported SVS to develop a female workers policy, including addressing sexual harassment and recruiting women into increasingly senior roles.

More recently, GRAISEA has supported SVS to establish a new mechanism to help staff share their views through the development of an employee feedback mobile application and a touch screen physical system for workers to highlight their satisfaction levels with varying questions posed. Feedback is regularly reviewed in monthly company directors' meetings. GRAISEA funded the mobile application, while SVS funded the touch screen computer.

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Impact: A more secure shrimp market and supply chain

By the end of 2022, SVS has established contracts with 10 cooperatives. This means that around 4,400 farmers now have more secure market access, and have benefited from trainings and inputs provided. Four of the cooperatives are now certified on ASC standards, while the others are on their way to be certified as well.

This model is viewed as highly sustainable, as it works in the interest of both farmers and businesses. SVS now has a more secure supply chain and is able to buy higher quality shrimp needed for international markets.

Indeed, SVS has been so convinced of the importance of securing the well-being of local farmers to its own success that it is now starting, with GRAISEA's support, to work with cooperatives to help them develop a natural disaster reserve fund, with contributions from the business. Five other businesses have also reached out to GRAISEA for support in establishing similar worker feedback mechanisms and are in the process of setting up such mechanisms.

For farmers, they now have higher income security, increased overall farming productivity, and a more powerful voice, as they work together in farming cooperatives. The incomes of the 4,400 farmers have roughly increased by 10–15%.

For workers, they feel more empowered to share their grievances and recommendations with SVS. This led to specific changes, including reduced working hours for breastfeeding mothers, expanded maternity leave, and free food in the company canteen. Going forward, these new approaches to contract farming and enhanced company worker feedback mechanisms could be real game changers for the broader shrimp sector.

TOWARD BUYERS BUYING AND SUPPORTING SHRIMP FARMER COOPERATIVES

Despite a booming shrimp sector in Vietnam over the last decade, the situation has not improved much for smallholder farmers, who, with little coordination or support, remain price takers in a sector increasingly hit by climate change.

Oxfam's research demonstrated the value, both for farmers and the private sector, of buyers supporting farmers in forming and strengthening their own cooperatives from which they sourced. In 2017, GRAISEA worked with Minh Phu, the largest shrimp processor in Vietnam, to launch this model as part of a new social enterprise within Minh Phu — a specific subsidiary that provides guaranteed products for the market and technical support to smallholder shrimp farmers with the idea that if successful the model could be expanded further across the business.

So far, Minh Phu's support to local producers has benefited around 5,000 households, including women. These farmers have received more technical

training and support on production and technology, as well as a clear and stable demand for their produce from Minh Phu. Since then, farmers have seen stable net income growth and reduced market and climate risk. Minh Phu plans to expand this model further, while more recently GRAISEA started to support Minh Phu around improving factory working conditions.

Context: Smallholder shrimp farmers receiving little support or market reliability

Shrimp production in Vietnam is booming. In 2021, for instance, Vietnam earned nearly USD 4 billion from shrimp exports to become the second largest shrimp exporter in the world.¹ This was even with difficulties due to COVID-19 and disrupted supply chains. Post-pandemic, with US and EU markets reviving, and new-generation free trade agreements, exports are expected to keep on rising.

However, the sector faces major challenges to continued growth. Processors struggle to procure the shrimp they need due to low farm productivity, inconsistent quality shrimp, and the unreliability of supply. In addition, farming increasingly needs to be accredited to stringent international standards to access export markets.

The situation is even more challenging for smallholder farmers, who are not just held back by low productivity but also by their limited coordination in selling to local traders and buyers, which has resulted in their minimal market power and low incomes, despite their key role in high value international value chains.

Moreover, climate change is visibly making these issues worse in the Mekong Delta, as rains are more erratic and risks of salinity in ponds increase. Often, farmers have little training on how to respond.

Systems innovation: Shrimp processors supporting farmers to set up cooperatives to source to them

Oxfam's research has suggested that increasing incomes and resilience of shrimp farmers requires an operational model where farmers collaborate as members of strong and well-organized cooperatives, which are then supported by private sector buyers who provide not only a guaranteed market for production but also consistent technical and administrative support.



A shrimp farmer in Cà Mau, Vietnam, checks his harvest. Photo by Nguyen Duc Hieu



A fresh harvest of shrimp in Ca Mau, Vietnam.
Photo by Nguyen Huu Thong

Implementation: From supporting cooperatives to improving working conditions

Oxfam, then led by [Centre for Marinelife Conservation and Community Development \(MCD\)](#) as GRAISEA partner, shared with Minh Phu a model for mangrove shrimp harvesting, and worked with the company to map out the value chain for shrimp from mangrove forests and develop a structure for a social enterprise.

In 2017, Minh Phu then launched this social enterprise, a specific subsidiary of the company, to try out this new model of providing a guaranteed market and technical support to smallholder shrimp producers, with the idea that if successful the model could be expanded further across the business.

The first steps of GRAISEA with Minh Phu and MCD involved helping the current inactive farmer-group to become a more organized cooperative through training on management and operational capacity of cooperatives. The cooperative also

received technical support on cultivating practices, such as climate change resilience techniques and multi-cropping of shrimp and rice, as well as support to safe food production standards.

With MCD's support, **Minh Phu signed contracts with smallholder shrimp farmers to commit to buying 100% of outputs and provide training.**

As the partnership progressed, it became clear, however, that women were not sufficiently benefiting. They suffered from hard conditions in factory operations and little involvement at the farm level. In 2016, MCD and Minh Phu started to provide a training program on Corporate Social Responsibility to improve women's working condition in the factory. Then, the work pivoted in 2022, led by the [Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry \(VCCI\)](#), to help mobilize the participation of women in training, cooperative management, and farming/trading decisions.

The partnership also moved to factory workers, and GRAISEA, led by VCCI, trained Minh Phu's middle managers on how to improve workplace safety and support women into leadership roles.

In 2022, Minh Phu then covered the costs for assessment and certification for cooperatives on a new Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) group standard, where 252 households passed in the rice-shrimp model. This effectively means that the cooperatives and Minh Phu can find export markets for all shrimp – and Minh

Phu passes on a premium payment to cooperatives for ASC-certified shrimp.

Impact: Big changes in Minh Phu social enterprise but limited sector-wide change

So far, **Minh Phu's support to local producers has benefited around 5,000 households, including women.** These farmers have received more technical training and support on production, technology, and cheaper inputs, as well as a clear and stable demand for their produce from Minh Phu. Since then, **farmers have seen stable net income growth and reduced market and climate risk.**

Of these, 252 households have been certified on ASC's group standard, the first farmers in Vietnam to do so, for which they have received a sales supplement.

At the factory workplace level, managers have improved awareness and knowledge of occupational health and safety, and are better able to identify risks. This has led to significant workplace improvements for the 6,700 employees, such as more regular equipment inspections, safer workstations, enhanced information sharing and communication between managers and workers, and reduced working time for pregnant women and new mothers.

The benefits are clear for the farmers and for Minh Phu. For Minh Phu, the model has meant it can access a more stable and high-quality raw material source, making it

more competitive and profitable due to higher quality. As a result, it can increasingly access new markets with high standard requirements, such as EU, North America, and the Middle East. As such, the new model appears highly sustainable.

Minh Phu plans to take this further, for instance, with plans to provide free or low-cost childcare services to employees, and to increase the number of farming households it supports to reach ASC and other standards.

At the same time, however, the anticipated knock-on effects from the social enterprise to other parts of Minh Phu have not happened yet, much less the wider system. The ongoing story of the Vietnam shrimp sector's first social enterprise and the role of Oxfam are not over yet.

¹ An, T. 2022. Vietnamese shrimp top in world but still has weaknesses. VietnamNet Global (accessed 28 June 2023). <https://vietnamnet.vn/en/vietnamese-shrimp-top-in-world-but-still-has-weaknesses-810675.html>.

ALTERING TRADE: WORKING TOWARD A SHRIMP SECTOR THAT BENEFITS FARMERS

As a maritime country, the government of Indonesia has a commitment to a sustainable ocean economy or 'blue economy' to support the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to conserve Indonesia's marine ecosystems until 2030. With the spirit of SDGs, development agenda, such as sustainable and inclusive business, requires partnership among civil society organizations (CSOs), government, and the private sector. Since 2018, GRAISEA has been working in Indonesia toward inclusive and responsible shrimp value chain, collaboratively between CSOs, government, the private sector, farmers, and communities. The project is aimed at complementing the national agenda to achieve SDGs through smallholders' empowerment, especially women.

A key element has been to collaborate with shrimp processor PT ATINA to develop a new business model. Here, PT ATINA has invested in a commission-based farmer coordinator model to provide technical support and a secure market to farmers in return for more reliable and higher quality shrimp for export. Over time, this has evolved considerably. Collaboration has expanded to improving working conditions for factory workers, while PT ATINA has scaled up the farmer model without program support with farmers in other parts of Indonesia.

The benefits to smallholder farmers have been high, with increased productivity, climate change resilience, and market access for more than 1,930 farmers, as well as improved working conditions for

280 workers. The next step is to make this the norm for the private sector in Indonesia.

Context: The challenge of shrimp farming in Indonesia

Thanks to its wide coastline and warm tropical climate, Indonesia has, over the last decade, become a major global producer and exporter of seafood. This is most evident in shrimp, where, driven by growth on farmed shrimp, Indonesia is now consistently in the top five countries for production and exports. Exports reached 240,000 tons in 2021,¹ driven by demand in the USA followed by Japan, and the government is committed to a 250% growth in shrimp exports from 2020 to 2024.

Now, this growth means that around 1 million people are estimated to be part of shrimp farming activities, including around 80,000 to 90,000 farms² – the large majority of which are smallholder farmers cultivating black tiger shrimp in extensive, lower technology approaches.

However, despite this growth, the sector faces significant challenges that limit the potential for future growth and the gains for smallholder farmers. The [International NGO Forum on Indonesian Development \(INFID\)](#)³ in 2022 highlighted key human rights abuses, such as frequent land grabs by large companies, clearing out mangrove forests and smaller farmers; and the denial of the rights of workers in shrimp processing, who are largely women.

Furthermore, climate change is increasingly harming the sector through uncertain rain patterns, heavy rainfall, and increasing temperatures. Perhaps the most pervasive issue, especially when compared to other countries in Southeast Asia, is that Indonesian shrimp farmers tend to have much lower productivity and incomes, in large part due to less farmer organization and reliance on intermediaries to connect farmers with buyers. For instance, though contract farming is becoming increasingly prevalent in shrimp farming in Vietnam, it is not a common practice in Indonesia.

Systems innovation: Shrimp processors investing in farmer supply chain coordination and assistance

This lower productivity and coordination challenge is not one that only impacts farmers. It severely holds back the potential growth of shrimp processors and exporters, especially those focused on extensive tiger shrimp processing. Businesses are clear that there is global demand for Indonesian shrimp, but they struggle with a lack of stable supply and the high costs of coordinating with large numbers of farmers, and so they fall back on intermediaries.

In discussions between GRAISEA and PT ATINA, a potential solution became clear: **for shrimp processors, such as PT ATINA, to increase investment in their supply chains to support experienced farmers to take on an additional role as coordinators of small groups of around 50–100 farmers.**



A farmer in Sidoarjo, Indonesia, inspects his shrimp farm. Photo by ASIC

PT ATINA would then support the coordinators to provide technical support to farmers to improve their productivity and help farmers come together and sell their harvests as one to PT ATINA.

Though common in other countries, such a model is new and a real innovation for Indonesia, where processors tend to lack knowledge on the farmers they buy from and rely on intermediaries. It promises a stable and high-quality supply for processors, as well as farmer level traceability. It also provides an extra income for coordinators. Additionally, for smallholder farmers, it would allow them to increase their technical expertise, productivity, and market access all in one go.

..... **Implementation: Collaboration with PT ATINA**

To influence the overall shrimp sector in Indonesia, the GRAISEA way has been to

test models with leading companies and use this to influence others. As such, GRAISEA carried out a business survey in 2018 to identify companies not just focused on profit but also on improving the lives of workers and farmers. PT ATINA came as a natural fit.

PT ATINA itself is a shortened version of the company's full name, PT Alter Trade Indonesia, a name which reflects its mission to not just be profitable but do good. This is not surprising as PT ATINA was set up in 2003 by Alter Trade Japan, a grouping of Japanese consumer cooperatives aiming for fairer global trade.

Over the last twenty years, PT ATINA has built up its operations to now be one of the leading shrimp processors in Indonesia – in Pinrang in South Sulawesi, and in Sidoarjo and Gresik in East Java – with a particular focus on extensive black tiger shrimp. Around 1,500 smallholder farmers PT ATINA supplies from are based in Pinrang, while its main processor in East Java employs about 200 people.

When GRAISEA reached out to PT ATINA, PT ATINA knew that it wanted to increase its connection, knowledge of, and support to farmers. PT ATINA saw this as something that could set it apart from its competitors, but it was not clear how. GRAISEA then assisted PT ATINA to think through and trial this new approach, while motivating and inspiring them with its potential to benefit farmers.

Work started in 2018 to develop an effective farmer group model. Initially the

program tried to support two farmer groups of 600 farmers each, based on the groups governments had formed in the past. However, these were too large, while for PT ATINA these made less business sense as they were also selling to other buyers.

The next successful adaptation focused on smaller groups – in the end 23 – each overseen by a sub-coordinator receiving commission from PT ATINA and six overall coordinators. Coordinators would support PT ATINA to pass its quality standards and technical support to farmers, and farmers to aggregate their shrimp and sell to PT ATINA.

This process allowed farmer sales to PT ATINA to become more dependable, with prices shared with farmers via coordinators in advance of harvests – rather than the more previous on-the-spot negotiations with intermediaries.

Over time, this model became the foundation for more and more support from PT ATINA and enhanced relations between the different stakeholders. For instance, PT ATINA started to provide coldboxes to producers' coordinators to effectively store and minimize farmer shrimp wastage. PT ATINA connected coordinators to high quality shrimp input providers (for instance, of seed and feed additives) to then connect to farmers.

PT ATINA also started linking coordinators to a Japanese development fund (i.e., the Asian People's Fund) for them and farmers to access soft loans.



■ A woman shrimp farmer in Pinrang, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, shows the black tiger shrimp she produced in her farm. Photo by ASIC

GRAISEA supported this enhancement of the model, for instance, by funding water quality measurement instruments for coordinators.

As the model became more important to PT ATINA, the company became increasingly convinced on the value of increasing investment in farmers. It likewise expanded the role of its small Internal Control Systems (ICS) team, ensuring that teams in all three areas receive regular trainings, and then pass on knowledge through coordinators to farmers, for instance, supporting coordinator use on the measurement instruments.

This work largely followed the environmental standards set by the [Asian Seafood Improvement Collaborative \(ASIC\)](#), another GRAISEA partner. In 2020, the collaboration expanded to also include supporting PT ATINA on ASIC's new social and gender standards. This is a work in progress, but GRAISEA has already supported PT ATINA to set up safeguarding and grievance policies across its factories, while coordinator contracts with PT ATINA need to be approved by their wives, which improves gender equality in the household and extends its influence in society.

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Impact: A more secure shrimp market and supply chain

By the end of 2022, PT ATINA has been using the model to reach 1,132 farmers it sources from in Pinrang.

These farmers are now receiving increasing production training, as well as access to new technology and equipment and better quality inputs.

The farmers have experienced significant increases in productivity and have more secure market access. **With PT ATINA increasing shrimp purchases in 2021 by 67 tons from 2020, incomes have increased by 68%, which translates to nearly USD 522,000 increased revenue for farmers.** Average farmer incomes are estimated to have increased nearly 10% in the last year alone. However, there is also evidence that farmer input costs are also increasing.

Of particular importance, farmers are more resistant to the effects of climate change, with improved networks to access support, including the coordinators and PT ATINA's ICS team — while key inputs are much more available (e.g., more climate change-resistant fry).

Further, though early on, changes on safeguarding and grievance policies have so far benefited 280 staff.

The impact though has not stopped there. **The new model is very popular at PT ATINA and highly sustainable**, as it helps ensure the quality and reliability of shrimp for processing; the traceability, which is more and more important to international buyers; and the social impact that is so important to PT ATINA.

As an example, **on its own PT ATINA has expanded a similar model to its operations**

with farmers in East Java, with a focus on increasing training on cultivation techniques to farmers, which has benefited several hundred more farmers.

In Pinrang, PT ATINA continues to build on and adapt its model, for instance, through trying to connect it to government climate change officers to ensure weather updates reach farmers. Perhaps, most importantly, PT ATINA similarly does not want to remain the pioneer firm carrying out this model, but rather wants other businesses to follow suit.

The next step for GRAISEA and PT ATINA is now sharing this model with more businesses, for instance, through the Oxfam-sponsored Indonesia Seafood Conference in December 2022, based on evidence that the model is not just fairer for farmers but also good for businesses.

¹ Kuepper, B. and S. Geurts. 2022. GRAISEA Supply Chain Links, Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Profundo (unpublished).

² QED. 2022. Climate change KAP and financial analysis regarding risk mitigation among shrimp exporting processors (unpublished).

³ INFID. 2022. Business and human rights in the fisheries sector: The role and support of stakeholders in shrimp aquaculture. <https://www.infid.org/storage/app/uploadspublic/62c7b6/18b/62c7b618be621474578608.pdf>.

TWO STEPS FORWARD AND ONE STEP BACK IN CHANGING RICE PROCUREMENT IN PAKISTAN

Rice production is key to the livelihoods of millions in Pakistan; yet, all too often, smallholder farmers and agricultural workers are a long way off earning a living income that would allow them to afford a decent standard of living.

GRAISEA worked with the Swedish food retail group Axfood — the second largest player in the Swedish food retail market with a market share of approximately 21% — to see how improved procurement by Axfood and sending the right signals to intermediaries could help address this challenge. This included supporting farmers and national processors to reach Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) production standards and to pilot a living income supplement.

Programming support to SRP standards has led to many farmers benefiting from increase in income, while Axfood committing to source rice certified against the SRP standard promises to help many

more. The living income pilot proved to be more complicated than anticipated and, in conjunction with the closure of Oxfam in Pakistan, Axfood and the other participating companies decided to not continue with it. Local processors though are continuing to pay supplements as a direct consequence, while Axfood is committed to paying a rice living income in the long term and in further influencing the SRP standard to require payments to farmers that meet living income needs.

Context: Rice productions systems that fail to benefit smallholder farmers

Across Asia, there are about 400 million people engaged in growing rice on 144 million smallholder farms. These farms account for most of the rice grown in the region. However, earning an adequate living from rice is hard for small-scale farmers. They often have limited access to

buyers, bargaining power vis-à-vis other actors in the chain and are price-takers. They are increasingly having to manage the impacts of climate change, which increases risk and uncertainty. Furthermore, across the region, the work of women is often unsafe, unrecognized, and unpaid.

Though key for livelihoods and food security, growing rice can also have important negative environmental impacts, as it often uses a lot of water in contexts where little is available, and can have high carbon gas emissions.

Focusing on Pakistan, one of the GRAISEA countries of operations, **research in Punjab showed that farmers selling rice for export make an income of only approximately 515 Euros per year**, a long way off earning a 'living income' needed to afford a decent standard of living for all household members.

Small-scale farmers receive no more than 10% of the end retail price, while by far the largest share of the total value-added is captured by international retailers.¹

Systems innovation: International retailers changing their procurement systems to support smallholder farmers

The GRAISEA experience suggested the need for changes in how international buyers procured rice from Pakistan in order to ensure the sustainability of the sector and wellbeing of farmers.



Women farmers/laborers manually transplant rice seedlings in paddy fields in Punjab province, Pakistan.
Photo by Oxfam in Pakistan

In particular, it suggested the need for:

- International retailers to influence their suppliers to support smallholder farmers and processors to enhance their production standards and working environments to ensure higher farmer yield and income, and reduced CO₂ emissions and water use; and
- International retailers to provide, via intermediaries, an additional income supplement to farmers who make income less than an appropriate living income benchmark.

The vision for change was businesses adopting these enhancements to procurement. Though these changes could present significant costs to them, the incentive is that they align with many business commitments to sustainability and responsibility, while supporting more stable and higher quality supply.

GRAISEA and Oxfam could bring value as trusted partners to call out to businesses what needs to change, as well as to provide technical support through deep knowledge of the inclusive business approach, the value chains they work in, and connections to communities.

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Implementation: From farmer productivity to addressing living income

For GRAISEA, a natural partner for this work was Axfood, a leading food retail

group in Sweden that had collaborated with Oxfam before and had made significant commitments toward more responsible and sustainable business practice. Axfood commissioned a study on risks in its supply chains, and was looking for ways to address these. A particular concern was its rice supply chain in Pakistan, with large concerns around climate impacts and human rights abuses.

Rice in Pakistan was a core focus of then emerging GRAISEA program, and conversations started in 2016 around how Axfood and GRAISEA could collaborate to address these concerns.

At this time, the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) had recently been established, in part both to support smallholder farmers and reduce the environmental impacts of growing rice.

The collaboration initially focused on technical support to farmers in the Punjab region of Pakistan to reach SRP standards. Axfood co-funded GRAISEA, who, in turn, funded the national NGO Association for Gender Awareness and Human Empowerment (AGAHE) to support farmers to establish collective grower organizations.

AGAHE provided these organizations training on key techniques to achieve the SRP standard, and on how to address gender norms and set up gender policies to encourage women's participation and leadership in groups. At the same time, GRAISEA built up the knowledge of national exporters on the SRP standards

and helped them develop inclusive contracts with smallholder farmers, including the provision of technical support and inputs to farmers, while Axfood continuously signaled to suppliers the importance of rice reaching SRP standards.

However, in 2020, Oxfam carried out a research that showed that productivity gains from enhanced production techniques would not be sufficient for smallholders farmers, and that a small premium payment was needed for farmers to achieve a living income.

Oxfam convinced Axfood that it could address this gap with a small additional payment, and to pilot an income supplement to farmers in two seasons (i.e., the 2020/21 and 2021/2022 rice growing seasons), with the intention that, if successful, Axfood would scale up the initiative, and other businesses would start to copy it. GRAISEA calculated the living income top-up that needs to be paid, made the case for the inclusion of workers, and via AGAHE helped a national processor to identify which farmers should receive the top-up and to disburse the top-up itself. The approach was documented, highlighting significant operational challenges.²

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Impact: Policy changes at Axfood and ongoing influencing of SRP

The new approaches at Axfood have significantly benefited smallholder farmers in Pakistan. Axfood's support to Oxfam-led

Farmers uprooting rice for transplantation.
Photo by Oxfam in Pakistan



programming was key to GRAISEA's work to help **establish 25 grower organizations, with 164 women taking on leadership roles in groups and 769 smallholder farmers increasing their income.**

More importantly, based on the success of the pilot, Axfood has committed as part of its procurement to move all of its own premium private label rice basmati procurement to the SRP standard. This should mean 750 rice farmers in Pakistan producing SRP-certified rice for export to Axfood, and in return receiving ongoing support on productivity standards from buying processors.

It is hard to estimate the likely impact, but the SRP website suggests its standard use allows farmers to earn 10% higher net income, reduce water use by 20%, and cut

greenhouse gas emissions by up to 50%.³ If this goes well, they will require SRP standards for other own-label rice they buy.

The living income pilot has been more challenging. Around **65 farmers benefited each year, through Axfood and another European retailer paying a premium of 25–30% on top of the regular market price, totaling to USD 44,780.**

This considerably closed their living income gap, and farmers used the premium to cover their basic needs and invest in more sustainable farming practices. About 156 agricultural laborers also received a top-up supplement.

However, Axfood and the other retailer decided not to immediately continue it, in part due to pilot operational challenges and

Oxfam ending its operations in Pakistan. This is a concern to Oxfam and a limitation to this work.

Axfood, Oxfam, and other partners worked together to share the lessons from the pilot with the wider sector and other businesses,⁴ while one national processor continued paying a premium of 30% above market prices to smallholder farmers to ensure stable supply. Early evidence suggests that other millers are following their lead and paying higher prices to farmers.

Axfood itself is still committed to paying living income in the rice sector in the long-term. It sees this as a specific limitation of the SRP standard, as does GRAISEA, and together the two will try to influence SRP to include living income in its standards.⁵

¹ Segal, R. and M. Le. 2019. Unfair harvest: The state of rice in Asia. Oxfam. Read [here](#).

² Alestig, M. 2023. Price interventions as a part of living income strategies: Lessons learned from piloting a price premium mechanism for basmati rice farmers in Pakistan. Oxfam. Read [here](#).

³ SRP. n.d. Our impacts. <https://sustainableice.org/our-impacts/> (accessed on 15 August 2023).

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ Alestig, M. 2023. Paying a fairer price to farmers: 5 questions about our pilot project. Oxfam Sweden. Read [here](#).

AWARE HERO: A NEW I.T. SOLUTION TO DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN VIETNAM

Vietnam is one of the most climate change vulnerable countries in the world, with its farmers regularly exposed to typhoons, droughts, and heavy rainfalls that are a real threat to life and can devastate incomes.

One of the key challenges in Vietnam has been poor information, as individuals and local government officials lack up-to-date information on disasters and the appropriate response. Taking advantage of technology trends, Oxfam worked with the Vietnam Disaster Management Authority (VDMA) to develop a new mobile phone-based software application to address this gap, and ensure individuals and local government officials have the most up-to-date and localized information — literally at their fingertips.

Oxfam supported to pilot this in three provinces in 2019 and 2020 and, seeing the success and government interest, fully handed the application over to the

government in 2021. As a result, the VDMA has selected the advanced functions of the application to upgrade their existing platform. Since then, the program's wildest expectations have been surpassed and the Vietnamese government has now rolled out this upgraded platform to all 58 provinces in the country, with a lead user identified in all 9,000 Vietnamese communes.

Measurement is ongoing on specific impacts, but it is already clear that during recent major storms in Central Vietnam and drought and saltwater intrusion in the Mekong Delta, the application has had a key role in enhanced government and individual disaster response.

Context: An outdated disaster information system for farmers

According to the Global Climate Risk Index,¹ Vietnam is one of the countries

most vulnerable to climate change and disasters, such as typhoons, heavy rainfalls, droughts, and landslides.

These disasters cause great loss of people's lives, properties, and agricultural production.

It is estimated that approximately 70% of the population who lives in coastal areas and low-lying deltas in Vietnam are exposed to the risk of flooding, while a 1-meter sea level rise is modelled to lead to 5% land loss, 7% destruction in agricultural activities, and 10% loss in GDP. The poor, rural, and agricultural households are expected to bear the brunt of rising temperatures, with estimates of climate events reducing agricultural income by 65–70% in poor households compared to 33–35% in rich households.

In this context, proper information is particularly important. Historically, weather and disaster forecast has been provided by the government's [National Center for Hydro-Meteorological Forecasting \(NCHMF\)](#), and disaster early warnings have been provided by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

They then provide these forecasts to the VDMA, which oversees overall disaster response. The VDMA then passes guidance on to provincial level government authorities.

However this process — by fax and email — could take days due to all the different approvals needed, not to mention that rapid changes in weather patterns meant



Troops help harvest rice before the typhoon.
Photo by TTXVN

that information was often out of date by the time it was received.

Similarly, information provided to the general public was intermittent, generally included on radio and television twice a day. This meant that many people did not see the updates, and the updates themselves were often outdated.

In addition, information provided in both paths would not be localized, for instance, it would provide the same information for the whole Mekong Delta, a vast and highly diversified area, leaving officials and local farmers unaware of the local weather trends.

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Systems innovation: Supporting an online digital platform to improve government services

Fortunately, new technologies provide a powerful new opportunity to address disaster information challenges, in particular, the rapid use of the internet. In 2022, internet usage rates in Vietnam are at 79%,² with 73.5% of people using smartphones.³ In rural areas, on average, every household has one smartphone with an internet connection.

At the same time in Vietnam, there are key government ministries with the mandate and capacity to improve disaster information delivery, with the growing numbers of disasters making it increasingly clear to them of the need to do so.

In this changing context, a new solution seemed possible: **an online platform to ensure key government agencies and as many people as possible receive up-to-date and locally relevant information on impending climate risks.**

In this new model, the NCHMF continues to generate real-time forecast and disaster warning information. This is now complemented by individuals being able to update the weather status or disaster situation where they are. This information is fed into an online platform managed by the VDMA. This means the VDMA is better informed and can make quick disaster responses for specific regions.

This platform can be accessed and provides regular updates to local government officials across Vietnam on the latest disaster updates, so they can inform people at risk in their provinces and implement appropriate responses.

Individual users can also access the platform to get the latest information directly. Particular functionality can be included to specifically help farmers at most risk to disasters and climate change.

Overall, such a platform is cheap and fairly easy to run, as it requires few personnel to operate as the inputs are automatically updated in the platform. It also clearly fits the mandate of the VDMA, as they improve their ability to fulfil their mandate to support individuals and disaster management officials to make decisions in emergency situations.

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Implementation: Step-by-step development of an online disaster information platform

In 2019, Oxfam reached out to the VDMA about the potential of developing an online disaster information platform. The VDMA had the clear mandate to provide disaster warning information to government officials and the public. They did this by running a national program on raising awareness and knowledge of disaster prevention for the community. However, this was more traditional and mass media-focused. The VDMA expressed clear interest in the potential of upgrading their system with new technologies.

Following this, Oxfam worked with the VDMA and an information technology (IT) company to develop a disaster warning software application called PCTT (in English, 'Aware Hero'). Oxfam developed the concept note, detailed application design, and funded the IT company.

GRAISEA, in particular, contributed through technical leadership, thinking through the relevance for farmers, and ensuring specific functionality for farmers in providing daily weather forecast to every commune.

Aware Hero was developed to automatically access forecast information from the national weather and disaster forecasting agency and from application-authorized users/updaters, who are currently only government officials, as the

application still lacks capacity to handle too many people inputting data.

The information source is then filtered by the VDMA and transmitted to general users in areas where natural hazards and disasters are occurring. Here, 'users' mean both authorized users (i.e., government officers) and local citizens. The disaster prevention agency also compiles bulletins advising how to respond to each type of disaster and distributes them to application users.

Information provided relates to all types of disasters and users, but specific functionality is also included for farmers. Navigation paths within the application are specifically for farming, while specific guidance is provided around how disasters would likely affect farming and relevant response.

For instance, a tracked drought will lead to guidance being shared to users that crop farming should be delayed by the suggested time and specific drought resilient seeds should be used; or for salinity intrusion, that canal water should be tested and not pumped into fields.

The development happened in three phases. In the first phase, disaster prevention regulations and guidelines were incorporated into the software and developed into a demo application. This was tested by VDMA disaster prevention experts and calibrated to be technically sound.



The launch screen of the app includes the weather forecast and guidance of disaster risk reduction for every type of disasters. In other pages of the app, you'll find hourly forecast from NCHMF and contact details developers and government authorities.

In the second phase, Oxfam supported the VDMA and the IT company to conduct a trial in two cities and provinces: Hue and Quang Nam.

In the third phase, after testing results in two provinces, Oxfam and the VDMA conducted training for 50 disaster managers at the provincial, district, and commune levels in three provinces: Quang Nam, Ha Tinh, and Quang Binh.

The Aware Hero app was transferred to the VDMA in March 2021, and the main functions were integrated into VDMA's platform.

Impact: Application scaled up from 3 to 58 provinces

The uptake and growth of the updated platform has been even more than expected, due to both the tragic increase in the frequency of natural hazards and disasters, as well as the drive by the VDMA to ensure the country is best able to respond to these adversities.

Notably, the VDMA has now scaled up the use of their updated platform from three provinces to the whole country. **There are 9,000 communes in Vietnam, and each**

has an official application user trained on the application who helps lead the commune official response to the natural disaster.

In addition, there are over 40,000 application users (it is available on CH Play and IOS store), who use it to receive regular updates on daily weather news, disaster information, and implications for farming practice. Demand has actually outrun supply.

The application, as currently designed, can only accept 50,000 users, so further use is being limited, while it is being upgraded and its support team being increased, with further external support.

It is hard to measure the impact of the application, and work is ongoing to identify this. However it is clear that during the major storms in Central Vietnam and the drought and saltwater intrusion in the Mekong Delta in 2020, 2021, and 2022, the application played an important role in transmitting disaster warning information and disaster response to affected localities.

Specifically, during the drought period in the Mekong Delta in 2020, through the application, government officials were

provided with early warning information that drought and saltwater intrusion would occur in early 2020. They then advised farmers to start the growing season a month later and promoted use of drought resistant seeds. **This led to 80% of rice being grown later than normal, and this rice was not damaged by drought.**

More recently, during Super Typhoon Noru in September 2022, the application played an important role in providing regularly updated forecast information to disaster prevention officers in Central Vietnam. This contributed to improved planning and response direction, and resulting in zero casualties.

¹ Eckstein, D., V Kuznel, and L. Schafer. 2021. *Global climate risk index 2021*. Germanwatch. <https://www.germanwatch.org/en/19777>.

² World Bank. 2022. Individuals using the Internet (% of population) - Vietnam. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=VN>.

³ Dharmaraj, S. 2022. Vietnam targets 85% smartphone usage by 2022-end. OpenGovAsia.

FOCUSING ON THE PRESENT: GETTING CLOSER TO A NATIONWIDE BILL ON SOCIAL ENTERPRISES IN THE PHILIPPINES

Social enterprises (SEs) are the missing ingredient for a sustainable economy that works for all. They close the gaps across the agricultural value chain, benefiting thousands of smallholder farmers and women across the Philippines. However, they face significant barriers, in particular a lack of support from national and local government policies.

To promote SEs as a poverty reduction strategy, the Poverty Reduction through Social Entrepreneurship (PRESENT) Coalition has been advocating for policies and programs for years. The legislative process is a long one, but with GRAISEA support, the coalition has been able to navigate its way through Congress, convince more legislators, and empower more civil society partners than ever before. This has all meant that a national bill to support SEs is currently being debated in Congress, while for the first time ever, a local government unit plans to launch its own SE program. Nothing is certain with legislative advocacy, but a

national policy for SEs in the Philippines now looks more likely than ever.

Context: Need for an enabling policy environment for SEs

As social-mission-driven and wealth-creating organizations, SEs in the Philippines have immense potential to alleviate poverty and pursue sustainable development. SEs strive to benefit and transform the lives of marginalized sectors, such as farmers, fisherfolk, workers in the informal economy, women, youth, and indigenous people, as economic actors. Many SEs in the Philippines are already key players in strategic agricultural subsectors and value chains, such as coco coir, muscovado sugar, organic rice, coffee, cacao, banana, and bamboo.

However, despite their social impact, SEs face numerous challenges that restrict their potential to thrive and grow. SEs commonly deal with limited access to

financial and human resources and burdensome operational requirements. They also bear the brunt of risks and impacts when disasters and pandemics strike, often without the necessary support to recover and rebuild to continue their social missions. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic not only pushed back millions of Filipinos into poverty, but it has also abruptly disrupted SE operations and, worse, set back the sector's development gains.

In response, a network of SEs, advocates, NGOs, CSOs, and academics established in 2012 the PRESENT Coalition to advance a vibrant ecosystem that harnesses the power of social entrepreneurship to alleviate poverty in the Philippines.

Systems innovation: PRESENT as platform for a vibrant SE sector

Since 2012, the PRESENT Coalition has been pushing for the enactment and implementation of the PRESENT Bill – a policy framework that codifies social entrepreneurship as a strategy for poverty reduction and, later, inclusive recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Key provisions of the bill include setting up the National PRESENT Program, which will focus on identifying and developing key economic subsectors with growth potential and where SEs that engage the poor can flourish. Supporting SEs in the coco coir subsector, for example, could create an estimated 3 million jobs throughout the country.

Marivic Dubria walks through their family's 2-hectare farm in Sitio Balutakay in Bansalan town, Davao del Sur. Dubria is among the farmer trainees of Coffee for Peace, a social enterprise that is a member of the PRESENT Coalition, which is a partner of Oxfam Pilipinas under the GRAISEA Program.

Photo by Roy Lagarde



The bill also provides support programs and incentives to empower SEs. These include enabling SEs' access to hybrid financing and fair and ethical markets, integrating social entrepreneurship in the national education system, and prioritizing SEs in government purchasing.

However, the PRESENT Bill has remained pending in Congress for the past 10 years. The arduous process highlights the Coalition's crucial role in continuing its advocacy to push for the PRESENT Bill and strengthen the SE sector.

Fortunately, **collective action and collaboration lie at the heart of the PRESENT Coalition**. Although voluntarily, the coalition members have been actively contributing their expertise, resources, and networks to advance the advocacy and activities of the Coalition.

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Implementation: Strengthening policy advocacy and influencing efforts

GRAISEA's support has also proved to be significant, especially in putting forward gendered provisions for the bill, as well as in sustaining and strengthening the Coalition's capacity to advocate for the PRESENT Bill and further bolster the sector post-pandemic.

With GRAISEA's support, **the PRESENT Coalition further raised its policy lobby ante in the 19th Congress (July 2022–June 2025)**, conducting policy forums, briefings, and lobby activities with key

senators and representatives at the beginning of the Congress.

Notably, the Coalition organized an SE Trade Fair at the House of Representatives in February 2023, which resulted in **successfully engaging at least 20 new legislative champions for the PRESENT Bill**.

Complementing the legislative lobby, the coalition has also engaged executive departments and local governments for a PRESENT policy and program at both national and local levels. Through GRAISEA, the Coalition hired a policy consultant who drafted the templates for a Resolution and Local Ordinance aligned with the principles and provisions of the PRESENT Bill.

GRAISEA's support has also been instrumental in the Coalition's sector-building and advocacy work, funding educational and promotional campaigns, which have contributed to raising public awareness and support for SEs and the PRESENT bill pending in Congress.

In October 2022, the PRESENT Coalition in partnership with the Ateneo Center for Social Entrepreneurship and the [Institute for Social Entrepreneurship in Asia \(ISEA\)](#) brought back the National Social Enterprise Conference 2022, which gathered over 100 representatives from SEs, civil society, businesses, and government.

Overall, the Coalition, with GRAISEA's support, has engaged and empowered over

500 CSOs, SEs, and advocates to learn more about social entrepreneurship.

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Impact: Advancing social entrepreneurship for poverty reduction in the Philippines

With strengthened lobby efforts and effective mobilization of the SE sector, the Coalition was able to secure gains for the recognition and inclusion of social entrepreneurship in national and local policies.

Within the first year of the 19th Congress, **the PRESENT bill gathered the support of 56 legislative champions from across political parties at the Senate and House of Representatives**, increasing the chances of the PRESENT Bill getting passed in the said Congress.

In the Senate, the Bill was deliberated in a Joint Committee Hearing on Trade, Commerce, and Entrepreneurship; Subcommittees on Exports and Investments Development, Economic Affairs; Social Justice, Welfare, and Rural Development; Ways and Means and Finance presided by Senator Juan Edgardo "Sonny" Angara on February 16, 2023. On this Committee Hearing, the Senators formed a Technical Working Group (TWG) or a Sub-Committee on PRESENT to tackle and harmonize the different versions of the Bill in Senate.

Between March and April 2023, ISEA and the PRESENT Coalition became resource persons and submitted position papers

ISEA meets with the Pasig City local government unit to explore possibilities of a City Ordinance that would support SEs as vehicles for sustainable livelihoods and poverty reduction. *Photo ISEA*



and inputs for the consideration of the Committee Secretariat. To date, ISEA and the PRESENT Coalition are awaiting the substitute bill that will be further deliberated and approved for a 2nd hearing by the Senate Joint Committee.

On May 30, during the House of Representatives Committee on Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) hearing, a proposal from Representative Joeman Alba to create a TWG on the PRESENT Bill was agreed upon and its first TWG meeting was set for August 15, 2023.

The PRESENT Coalition is hopeful that this significant movement in the legislative process in the past months will lead to the passage and implementation of a PRESENT Law in the Philippines.

With an estimated 164,000 existing SEs in the country, a PRESENT Law could potentially benefit more than 100,000 people in strategic agricultural subsectors through direct employment alone. Additionally, SEs' community development initiatives could extend the benefits to a broader population, potentially reaching hundreds of thousands more.

While the legislative process is ongoing, the PRESENT Coalition has also made significant progress at the executive side. In December 2021, the Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise Development Council (MSMEDC) passed Resolution No. 3, Series of 2021, officially recognizing SEs as "partners of the government in poverty reduction, acceleration of the SDGs, and inclusive recovery from the COVID-19

pandemic". This landmark policy not only institutionalized a definition of SEs but also reflected the Council's support to engage SEs in developing appropriate programs and services for the sector. Further, this landmark issuance also serves as an important reference in the PRESENT Bill's deliberation in Congress.

Parallel to these national initiatives, the PRESENT Coalition is also working with the local government of Pasig City for the passage of a local PRESENT ordinance. As of May 2023, the ordinance has undergone its first Committee Hearing at the Local *Sanggunian* and has now been forwarded to a TWG arrangement for further deliberations.

The coalition and the Pasig local government unit are also co-developing a sustainable livelihood program anchored on social entrepreneurship for the City's socialized housing beneficiaries. This localized PRESENT policy and program could potentially create employment opportunities for around 2,400 households directly.

The legislative process may be slow and long. But the Coalition's journey toward an enabling policy for SEs is marked by determination, collaboration, and collective aspiration for inclusive poverty alleviation. The support of partners, such as Oxfam and GRAISEA, helped in sustaining the Coalition's advocacy and sector-building work.

GRAISEA is a regional programme funded by the Embassy of Sweden in Bangkok. This collection is an attempt to document the many successes that the program has achieved during its implementation.

For more information about GRAISEA, visit our website [here](#).

