

*Our journey
together*





Kingdom of the Netherlands



OXFAM

*Our journey
together*

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Across the country, from Khao village in Lao Cai, where red silk cotton blossoms mark the seasons, to the hills of Thai Nguyen, the sandy plains of Quang Tri, and the cloud-covered Truong Son range, we have witnessed communities in motion, quietly transforming.

Change is visible in village meetings, in stronger community connections, and in the growing confidence of Tay, Nung, Dao, San Chay, Bru Van Kieu, and other ethnic groups.

In Khao village, farmers now organize collectively, calculate costs, and negotiate prices. In Dong Tien, women-led herbal cooperatives are preserving indigenous knowledge while bringing products to market. In Nam Hai Lang, communities, authorities, and businesses are engaging in dialogue to balance livelihoods and environmental protection.

A Bru Van Kieu woman speaks of bamboo, shoots, livestock and then of her ancestors' weaving craft, now fading away. Though the bamboo project has only just begun, she dreams of opening a weaving class to preserve this shared heritage.

In a small house in a fragrant herbal area, a husband once said, "One person working is tiring. Two people working is less tiring and happier." What seems like a simple

family remark reveals a deeper shift toward equality and partnership. The boundaries of "women's work" and "men's work" fade; whoever can do something does it, with the other naturally joining in. There are no rigid roles, only a shared goal of making life better.

The next morning, an elderly woman in her seventies quietly tends her green onion beds. There are no slogans of "organic farming," no signs of a "model garden", just the steady rhythm of someone who has lived through hardship and continues to nurture each plant with care.

These quiet, unspoken acts remind us that fairness, sustainability, and equality begin with small, persistent, everyday gestures.

This book brings together such stories from across diverse regions and experiences, highlighting three interconnected forces: active citizenship, collective action, and empowerment. Together, they show that building equality requires respecting local knowledge, strengthening capacities, and creating space for inclusive dialogue.

We invite you to the Fair for All project journey through these pages and encounter communities whose small, steady steps are shaping a more equal and sustainable future for all.



Acknowledgements

Reading each story in this book slowly, savoring every simple and heartfelt sentence, I felt a wave of intertwined emotions rising within me—joy, tenderness, and deep pride in the transformative journeys of the communities. Faces and smiles come vividly to my mind: Dung, the Tay woman from Lao Cai; Cuong and Ms. Hang of the San Chay ethnic group in Thai Nguyen; Mr. Chiem in Lao Cai; and Tuong, the Bru–Van Kieu woman from Quang Tri... Echoing in my heart is the gentle rhythm of the “Tac Xinh” dance of the San Chay people—graceful, lively, warm, and as close and peaceful as their everyday life, a life intertwined with the breath of the fields, mountains, and forests. I had the chance to experience this dance during my visit to the Dong Tien Agricultural and Community Tourism Cooperative in Thai Nguyen.

The journey that Oxfam and its partners have taken alongside communities across the provinces of Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, Quang Tri, etc. over the past five years—within the framework of the “Fair for All” Project—has given rise to many meaningful and deeply human stories. Throughout the journey, equality, fairness, and sustainability have all begun from small, every day, quiet, and persistent actions made by the women, by the men, by the mothers, by the fathers, by the wives, by the husbands, and by each member of the family and the wider community.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the partner organizations and technical support organizations: The Center for Sustainable development of mountainous communities (SUDECOM), CECM Training & Consulting Joint Stock Company (CECEM), Center for Development and Integration Social Enterprise (CDISE), Centre for Rural Research and Development (CRRD), Centre for Agrarian Systems Research and Development (CASRAD), and Institute for Social, Economic and Environment Research (ISEE).

The partner organizations and technical support organizations have persistently accompanied the

communities throughout this development process with deep commitment, attentive listening, and respect for indigenous knowledge, as well as the communities’ rich and diverse lived experiences, grounded in a belief in the values of fairness and equality. From this foundation, spaces where communities can take pride in their culture, knowledge, and lived realities; where they can exercise autonomy and cocreate their own development pathways in harmony with nature have been created. These organizations have walked alongside the communities in building capacity, fostering community development, and establishing equitable dialogue spaces where community voices are genuinely heard.

I would also like to extend my sincere thanks to the local authorities of Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, and Quang Tri provinces for creating favorable conditions and providing support to partner organizations and communities throughout the project implementation.

My heartfelt gratitude goes to the women, the men, the mothers, and the community members in Lao Cai, Thai Nguyen, and Quang Tri for placing their trust in Oxfam and its partner organizations, and for their proactive collaboration throughout the project journey—together shaping meaningful and human-centered stories.

As we bring the “Fair for All” Project to a close, I firmly believe that the autonomous spaces grounded in the values of equality, fairness, and sustainability will continue to be protected, cherished, and shared—through the persistent, everyday actions of the women, the men, the mothers, and every member of the community.

Nguyen Thu Huong

Senior Programme Manager – Good Governance
Oxfam in Vietnam

December, 2025

In Khao village, Luong Thinh commune,
Lao Cai province, an ancient red silk-cotton tree
has stood through generations.

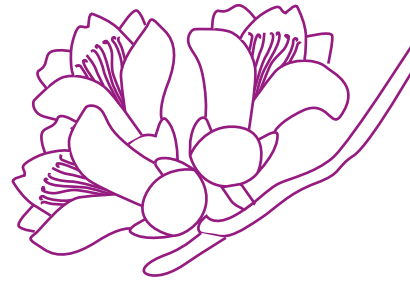
No one knows how old it is. A keeper of memory
and a witness to time.

When the project began, the villagers chose to
name their cooperative after it:

**The Khao Village Red Silk-Cotton Tree
Cooperative Group**



The project truly cares about us



My name is Luong Thi Dung, I am the head of the Cay Gao Lang Khao Cooperative Group in Luong Thinh commune, Lao Cai province

Before, my family's income came mainly from farming, raising livestock at home, and occasional hired work peeling cinnamon bark. My husband works far away, my child is still young, and I have to manage everything alone. The pressure was overwhelming. No matter how much housework I did, without an income I was labeled a "sponger." Participating in the project changed me completely.

Joining to gain knowledge

When the project first came to the village, I was skeptical. Previous projects only provided chicks, without building our knowledge. But when I began learning about livelihood models from this project, my trust began to take root. I decided to give myself a chance to improve my family's income.



Ms. Dung taking care of her poultry at home

The Cay Gao Lang Khao Cooperative Group was established, named after our village, Lang Khao, known for its ancient red silk-cotton tree. The group has 30 members - 28 women and two men. When it came time to choose a leader, no one dared to step forward, fearing the group would fail due to poor management. I thought, "I have to test my capability," and volunteered. Though I had no management experience, I had training and the courage to think independently, take action, and make decisions.

Becoming a group leader meant I had to become a connector and a role model. Elder women often can't ride a bike. So when our group organized a meeting or training session, I paired those who can ride a motobike with those who can't. I also influenced for moving training sessions to the village hall so everyone could reach there more easily.



To sustain the group, I set one guiding principle: fairness. All issues were discussed openly, with consensus, and no gossip. We met monthly, even when there was no business, simply to talk, share experiences, and feel connected. These meetings helped reduce isolation. Members exchanged solutions for raising chickens, and when selling, we agreed on prices together to ensure fairness.

The project supported only 12 livelihood models, though many joined hoping for financial assistance. I clarified that the group's purpose was learning. When one additional model became available, I proposed drawing lots. Everyone agreed. The result was accepted calmly, and transparency and fairness helped keep the group united.



Record-keeping to support the family economy

The biggest change, and the one I value most, was learning how to plan. Before, I raised livestock without any calculations. I bought feed, raised chickens, and sold them without knowing how much I spent, earned, or whether I made a profit or loss. I kept no records at all.

Now it is different. The project taught me how to keep records. I know how much feed each chicken needs per day and the income from each batch. I wrote down the dates when I sold chicken, when I bought feed, and when I did preventive medicine.

Record-keeping has become extremely important. After each batch, I reviewed how much I spent on feed, chicks, and medicine, then adjust for the next cycle. I applied the same method to household expenses, and it has been very effective. I also shared this experience with other women.

More importantly, I learned from practice. By tracking disease-prone periods, I realized later batches needed stronger preventive care. In the most recent batch, while disease outbreaks spread across the village and many families lost chickens, mine remained healthy thanks to early vaccination and increased dosage. I now know how to choose good breeds, maintain a proper rooster-to-hen ratio, and I am no longer misled by traders as I once was.



Moving beyond the stigma of "sponger"

After some time in the project, my confidence grew. Before, I rarely spoke in meetings or shared my thoughts. Now I believe that even if I say something wrong, I can correct it, I just need to speak up. I dared to expand my work: the first batch was 100 chickens, the second 150, and I also tried raising ducks to test profitability. I dream of raising up to 1,000.

Speaking up has made me more confident in communicating with others. I now know how to find markets on my own, selling through Facebook and Zalo. I worry less about market access than before.

Most importantly, I am no longer as dependent as before. With income from raising chickens, I can manage household expenses myself instead of relying entirely on my husband's salary. Before, no matter how much housework I did, without my own income I was still labeled a "sponger." That pressure has lifted, and I am much happier now.

I have also learned to manage my time better. I take on additional work, like joining the village security team to earn more income, while arranging my tasks so that I still have time in the evenings to relax and play volleyball.



Ms. Dung participates in cinnamon pre-processing at her household

Funds must be set aside for restocking

Now I am thinking more about how the cooperative can continue after the project ends. Many older women are hesitant to invest. I encouraged them by saying: even when the project ends, life goes on and we still need to work and earn a living. To grow, we must restock. I guided everyone to set aside part of their earnings after selling chickens to reinvest in the next cycle, rather than spending everything on household needs.

Being part of the cooperative brings real benefits. If I raise 1,000 chickens, I cannot sell them alone. As a group, we buy chicks and medicine together at lower cost and support each other with vaccinations. I often prioritize selling other members' chickens or collect them for delivery when needed. This teamwork helps us maintain stable customers, such as nearby restaurant owners. The strength of the cooperative lies in a stable supply and loyal customers.



What I value most in this project is its genuine care. Previous projects only provided livestock, without closely following how households actually benefited. This project is different. They regularly checked on the chickens, provided disease treatment support, and distributed feed in small batches so they could visit often, checked for diseases, and offered timely assistance. This care built my trust and motivated me to keep striving. I hope other donors will show the same commitment, not only to our cooperative, but to others as well.



Ms. Ha Thi Hiep, Chairwoman of the Women's Union of Luong Thinh commune, Lao Cai province

Challenging gender stereotypes within the family

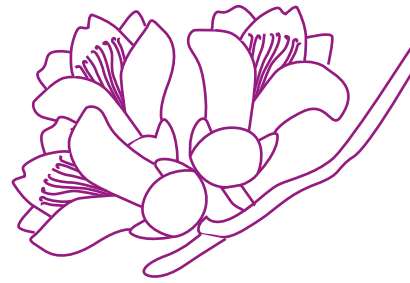
In our area, many poor and near-poor households continue to struggle due to age, poor health, and limited skills to improve their family income. Before the Oxfam-Sudecom project, disadvantaged households lacked the knowledge and skills to build sustainable livelihoods. Through training in business and livelihood development, households formed cooperative production groups and developed livestock and crop-based economic models, gaining practical skills to improve their incomes.

Among the group leaders, women like Ms. Dung (Cay Gao Lang Khao Cooperative Group) are very agile, applying the knowledge they were trained and sharing with group members and people

outside the group. This has been highly beneficial not only within families but throughout the village.

The biggest change I have observed among women in the cooperative groups, as well as among male participants, is the shift in gender biases and stereotypes within the family. Thanks to gender equality training, husbands now voluntarily take part in household responsibilities such as cooking, childcare, and even livestock raising. Sharing work and greater understanding within families have given women more time to participate in cultural and sports activities, such as performing arts and volleyball training. Women have also become more confident in communication and community engagement, while relationships within families show greater understanding and empathy.

*The project may end,
but the knowledge is
now mine*



Mr. Pham Ngoc Chiem, member of the Thanh Cong Livelihood Cooperative Group, Yen Binh commune, Lao Cai province

My name is Pham Ngoc Chiem. I joined the chicken-raising project around April last year (2024). We have lived on raising pigs, chickens, and ducks, but we often suffered losses due to disease.

The more I learn, the higher profit I earn

Before, only 70-80% of my chickens survived diseases. I had never learnt the techniques properly, but things has changed since I joined the project. Very detailed guidance on common diseases and outbreaks. I learned how to prevent diseases for my chickens. Now 90% of my chickens made it through diseases.



The project provided me with 72 chicks. Only four chickens died. The roosters weighed 2.5-2.7 kilograms, and hens 2-2.2 kilograms.

I used to feed and medicate randomly. Now I know which medicine and feed to use and how to apply them correctly. I also learned to select healthy chicks – those with strong legs, bright eyes, and healthy nostrils.

During brooding, I learned to balance warmth and ventilation by adjusting the temperature regularly. If it is too hot, chickens get sick, so I raise the enclosure and lift the heat lamp. If it is too cold, they huddle together, so I lower the lamp and add more bulbs to keep them warm. If it is too hot, chickens get sick, so I raise the

enclosure and lift the heat lamp. If it is too cold, they huddle together, so I lower the lamp and add more bulbs to keep them warm.

I truly enjoy learning. The more I learn, the more my knowledge grows, and so does my profit. I will continue to attend training whenever possible. I keep all the techniques in mind. I remember them well.

We agree on prices so we are not pressured

When it is time to sell, I supply chickens for weddings and banquets, they sold out quickly. Once a batch is sold, I restock and start a new one. Free-range chickens take about four to six months to reach market size.



My chickens are “clean” chickens. At first, I feed them commercial feed. When they reach about 0.7 to 1 kilogram, I gradually reduce the feed. When they reach about 1.3 to 2.3 kilograms, I further cut back on feed and increased corn and paddy rice, then slowly let them forage outside. By the time they are sold, the chickens are free of feed residue and taste better. My garden is over 100 square meters, providing enough space for them to roam and graze naturally.

Our cooperative group has more than 20 members across the commune, mostly elderly, sick, poor, or near-poor households. We joined the group to increase our income.

We usually meet every two weeks in the evening, around 8 p.m.

We get together to share experiences, visit each other’s homes to see how livestock is raised, and help anyone who is still learning. We also talk about which livestock brings better income without too much hard labor. These moments are useful and joyful, and after meetings we relax, singing and having fun together.

Sales depend on each household. Some sell to weddings, some retail, others to traders. While we raise livestock together, joint selling is not easy because each household has only two to three quintals of chickens, and we have not yet found a buyer to collect them all at once. However, we keep each other informed and agree on prices to avoid being pressured. Currently, roosters sell for about 100,000 VND (3.5 USD) per kilogram, while good-quality free-range hens sell for around 120,000 VND (4.6 USD) per kilogram.

I will use what I learned to teach others

Although any extra income I earn is quickly used up by medical bills, my life has not changed much financially, but my knowledge and confidence have grown greatly.

After finishing the project-supported flock of over 70 chickens, I restocked. Applying what I learned, survival rates stayed above 90%. I later raised batches of 400 and then 300 chickens, with similar results. Raising large flocks no longer worries me because I now understand proper care and medication.

I have shared my experience with others, including households outside the cooperative. Seeing my results, they asked for advice, and I even visited their homes to help set up enclosures. So far, four or five households have learned from me.

I believe the project's benefits will continue even after it ends. The knowledge now belongs to me, and I will keep learning and sharing it with others.





Ms. Dao Thi Kim Dung, Head of the Thanh Cong Livelihood Cooperative Group, Yen Binh commune, Lao Cai province

Finding joy in social change

My name is Kim Dung. I am the head of the Thanh Cong (meaning "successful") Livelihood Cooperative Group. I proposed this name, and everyone agreed. I wanted the livelihood support program to achieve the best possible results.

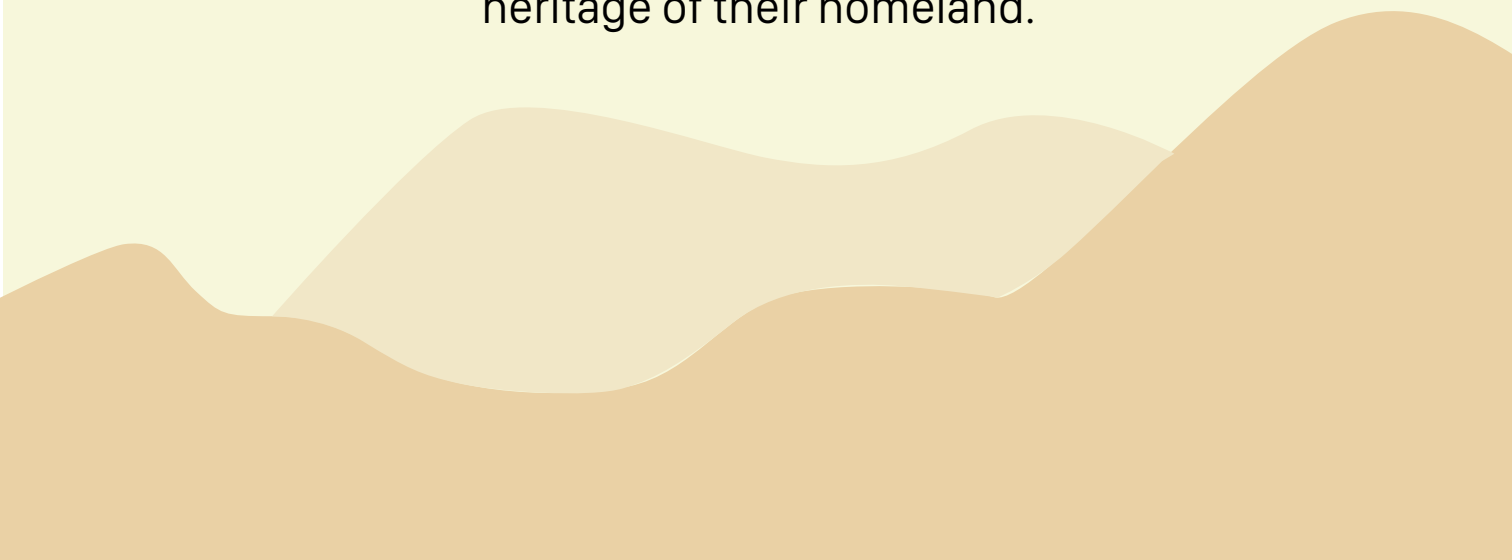
Previously, I worked as a village health worker and deputy village head. Since joining the cooperative, I have changed. I feel more responsible for the community and care more about those who are worse off. I help elderly members attend meetings, transport feed for them, and explain things they do not yet understand, including identifying chicken diseases. Helping others, even in small ways, makes me happy.

What brings me the greatest joy is the social change. In the past, elderly people and persons with disabilities felt inferior and avoided public spaces. Now they join the cooperative, earn income, attend meetings, and share ideas. They no longer feel shy or isolated, but actively take part in community life.

I will never forget a gathering at the end of last year, when after a meeting everyone suggested sharing a simple meal together. The meal was simple but joyful.

Although being a group leader brings no salary, I feel fulfilled. People trust and care about me. I will be there for them whenever I am needed. I sincerely hope the cooperative will continue.

In Phu Luong commune, Thai Nguyen province, the San Chay people have an incredibly fragrant "herb treasury." Together with the Tay, Dao, and Kinh in the community, they have distilled their indigenous knowledge to craft herbal pillows and various products made from the plants of their homeland. Today, these herbal creations are woven into community-based tourism, offered alongside the soulful melodies of Vi singing and the vibrant Tac Xinh dance, bringing visitors closer to the living heritage of their homeland.



One moment of courage, a collective journey



My name is Hau Thi Cuong, a member of the Dong Tien Agricultural and Community Tourism Cooperative, Phu Luong commune, Thai Nguyen province

I once timidly held the first herbal pillow made by our community and introduced it at a fair. Today, we speak confidently about our culture and our products, and people are beginning to ask about export cooperation.

At the beginning, we went out to collect herbs, dried, and roasted them to capture their fragrance, then turning them into herbal pillows, nasal inhalers, detox teas, herbal bathing leaves, and foot soaking remedies. Our first products were very clumsy. We even used hospital green fabric for the pillow cores. Customers told us it didn't reflect our ethnic identity, especially that of the San Chay people, so we changed to brocade fabric.

Together, we move forward

The early days were truly difficult. Before we became a cooperative, we had to buy fabric and pay others to sew, and after calculating costs, almost nothing remained. We then decided that each of us would contribute 500,000 VND (about 19 USD) to buy a second hand sewing machine for around two million VND (about 76 USD). Now, Trinh, our Deputy Director, both sells products and sews them herself, often without counting her labor costs, helping us save significantly on expenses.

When we first started, we were filled with fear that we wouldn't be able to sell anything. We kept asking ourselves, "Where will we sell them? Who will buy them?". The medicinal plants around us felt too ordinary. But then we began going to fairs, friends introduced our products to others, and nearly every customer praised the fragrance.

Even so, difficulties came in waves. We started with eleven members, but as challenges grew, three withdrew. There were moments when I felt discouraged and wondered if we could really continue. The hardest times were when nothing sold and the dried herbs lost their aroma. At one fair last year, we sold only about ten pillows in a day, earning around one million VND (about 38 USD), barely enough to cover travel costs. When there were no orders, everything seemed to fall silent, and production almost came to a complete stop.

But whenever partners placed orders for dozens of items, our motivation returned. We lifted one another up and kept going.

With support from the project, we gradually improved our packaging, added labels, and introduced our products on online platforms.





Ms. Cuong at a project training session

Diversity creates strength

Currently, the cooperative has nine members, and everything is planned together. When preparing for a fair and aiming to make around 100 pillows, we gather to discuss and agree that each person will contribute 10 kilograms of dried herbs. At times, we produce nearly 200 pillows, meaning each member brings 20 kilograms. We don't yet have a drying machine, so we still rely on the sun.

We work by sharing responsibilities, according to our strengths. I perform the Tac Xinh dance,

Hang sings folk songs, Trinh manages food, and Mien takes care of accounting. When visitors come, we sit together and decide who will cook and who will introduce the products, based on everyone's agreement.

Our cooperative includes members from five ethnic groups: San Chay, Nung, Dao, Tay, and Kinh, each bringing different herbal knowledge. Working together has also changed my family. My daughter in law now works with me, and my son, though busy with his own job, still joins our Tac Xinh dance performances.



Ms. Cuong participates in the traditional Tac Xinh dance

I deeply cherish my culture, it is our identity and a source of profound pride. The Tac Xinh Hai Tu dance of the San Diu people, now recognized as a national intangible cultural heritage. Whenever I wear traditional clothing, I feel a quiet confidence.

Each ethnic group here carries its own cultural identity. For the San Diu people, that spirit lives in the Tac Xinh dance and antiphonal folk singing, songs once exchanged between young men and

women. I grew up listening to elders sing and tell stories, but few young people know these songs now.

The Tac Xinh dance, performed in traditional dress, reflects agricultural life. A man and a woman dance together, reenacting the journey of our ancestors, from searching the hills for fertile land, to clearing fields, sowing seeds, waiting for the harvest, and celebrating abundance. Through ritual movement,



the dance gives thanks to the earth and the deities for a bountiful year. At night, couples would stand quietly in a corner, singing back and forth. If their voices and hearts matched, they would become husband and wife.

Since performing the Tac Xinh dance, I have changed profoundly. I used to be very shy, afraid to speak in front of a crowd. Interviews terrified me. I still remember the first time I held up a pillow

and tried to introduce it, my voice barely above a whisper, fearing it would not be accepted.

Today, alongside my sisters, I confidently share both our products and our culture. Through the project and the guidance of our support partners, I found my voice. I now feel proud when our products are welcomed, proud that I dared to bring them to market, secure orders, and create meaningful work for my community.

Collective motivation

We are mostly women. This project supports entrepreneurship among ethnic minority women, though some heavy tasks remain challenging. In winter, sourcing materials from Cao Bang requires men to help load goods, and we are grateful for that support, especially from Hong, Trinh's husband, who has stood by us every step of the way.

Today, even with orders of 200-300 pillows a month, we still struggle to keep up. Yet our ambition is growing. We want to expand, reach further, and recently, someone even approached us about an opportunity to export.

What I most hope for is support to purchase an essential oil distillation unit. Lemongrass grows easily and abundantly here, and extracting oil would help us



increase income. I love its scent. We also grow holy basil, but we currently lack the equipment to process it.

I hope future projects will continue to care, connect, and support us, with guidance to develop new products and reach wider markets. Our collective

motivation has helped us through challenges, and I believe we will continue working together even after the project ends.



Ms. Cuong in her family's herb garden



Mr. Nguyen Van Huan, former Chairman of the People's Committee of Yen Lac commune (former), a project companion officer

Our women are leading the way

When the cooperative was first established, my greatest concern was its sustainability. I felt I needed to stay in every detail to keep it running. Over time, my role shifted from giving direct instructions and assigning tasks to offering guidance and advice, so the group could solve problems on their own. I remained closely connected, working alongside the cooperative through every step.

The most significant change, however, is within the women themselves. Before, they lacked confidence, were unfamiliar with procedures, and did not yet feel a sense of ownership. Today, they take responsibility, follow tasks through, and truly see the cooperative as their own. I believe they are now fully capable of managing both their work and the cooperative together.

I will go all the way



My name is Hoang Thi Hang, Director of the Dong Tien Agricultural and Community Tourism Cooperative, Phu Luong commune, Thai Nguyen province

I am a San Chay woman. My parents had 14 children, but only five survived. Life was very hard then. When we fell ill, there were no nearby hospitals, only long walks to the city. I once walked to Thai Nguyen while sick, and at other times to Dinh Hoa, just to reach a small clinic.

Those shaped my deep commitment to healing through local herbal medicine. My family was poor, and I completed only grade 7, but I was determined to follow the path of Traditional Medicine. I began studying and participating in related activities in 2009. In 2013, I was officially admitted to the commune's Traditional Medicine Association. From then on, I began collecting medicinal leaves to help treat illnesses in my community.

The first four million dong

In the beginning, we decided to create products grounded in our locality. I focused on developing something that carried the identity of local medicinal plants while still meeting market needs. We created herbal pillows as a gentle alternative to massage. That was how the first herbal pillow was born.

For the first time, we joined a fair in the former Phu Luong district. There were four of us, and we brought 50 handmade herbal pillows. We wore our traditional ethnic costumes as we sold them, and many visitors stopped to ask questions. One foreign couple immediately bought ten pillows. At that time, each pillow cost 80,000 VND (about 3 USD), ten sold in one moment. The next day, other exhibitors, drawn by the fragrance, began buying as well. By the end of the two-day fair, we had sold all 50 pillows and earned four million VND (about 152 USD). It was an incredibly exhilarating feeling, far better than staying home to pick tea leaves.

When I returned, I told the group, "If we can develop this, we should continue." I carefully screened the raw materials, they had to be safe, non toxic, and free of chemicals. Everyone agreed to move forward, and the group elected me as leader. That was when I truly realized it would not be easy. The responsibility was heavy.





Experimentation

In 2024, when we pursued OCOP certification, the cooperative received strong support from the commune, especially from Tuan, the former Party Secretary of Yen Lac. We achieved three star OCOP status.

Learning from the project officers made a tremendous difference. We gained practical knowledge. I asked many questions. For example, my holy basil plants had failed before. One expert advised digging square holes, planting the seedlings, and leaving grass around them. I followed his method and planted two plots for comparison. Now, the plants are growing very well.

Once we had fragrant pillows, we wanted the scent to last longer. When herbs were only sun dried and stuffed inside, the fragrance faded quickly. I had to experiment, trying many times on my own. We realized we needed a way to extract and preserve the scent. While others use steaming, we chose a method that fit our local conditions. This is a tea growing area, and we have tea roasting machines. Knowing how tea fragrance is preserved during roasting, we adapted that technique, replacing the herbs into the rotating tea roasting machine. That became our solution.

The more carefully the fragrance is extracted, the stronger and longer lasting it becomes. Our pillows can keep their scent for six months, even up to a year.

As a group, we were determined to improve our herbal blends. At first, the mixtures were unbalanced: too much holy basil, too little lemongrass, or the other way around. We committed ourselves to refining the formulas. There are eight of us, and all eight worked side by side to get it right. I clearly defined the proportions: for example, three kilograms of lemongrass, two kilograms of holy basil. Passionflower is very light, so we use only 100-200 grams.



Ms. Hang checking lemongrass quality before herbal processing



Passing ancestral knowledge to the younger generation

I want to train the younger generation and pass on my experience to members like Cuong, Ngoc, Trinh, and Mien. As I grow older, it is important that everyone in the cooperative can carry on the work.



Ms. Hang with community members at a project training session

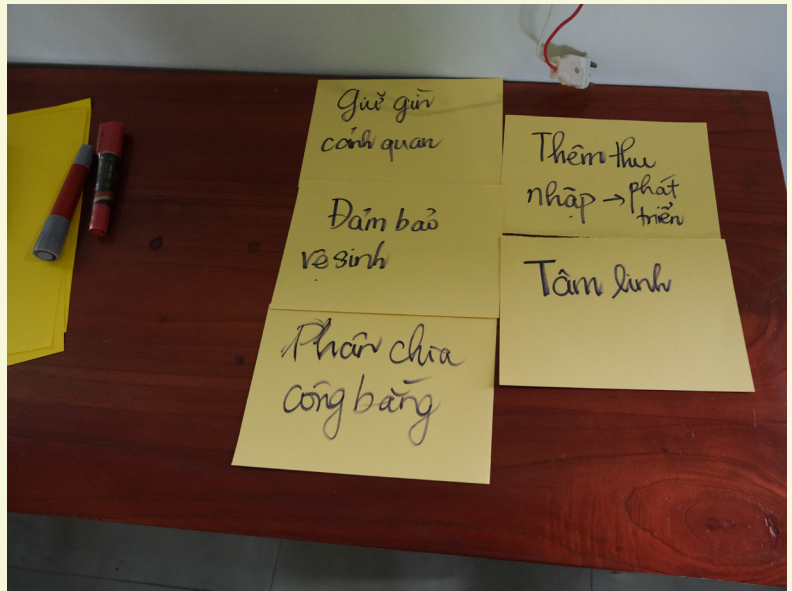
The younger members have progressed very quickly. Cuong, Trinh, Hien, and Ha have all improved greatly. Before, they didn't recognize many of the plants; now they know them well. I no longer need to go into the forest myself, I simply say what is needed, and the cooperative gathers everything on their own.

Progress comes through training and shared learning. Knowledge is passed on as we learn from one another and guide each other. Even when I am away, the cooperative runs smoothly. Once, when a delegation arrived unexpectedly while my husband and I were absent, the younger members handled everything perfectly. They are responsible and committed.

My dedication goes beyond Traditional Medicine. Through this work, I continue to promote my ethnic identity by teaching the Tac Xinh dance and Hat Vi singing. During summer breaks, I gather children to learn Tac Xinh. They are enthusiastic, and we encourage them with simple treats like candies or snacks.

I feel confident about the products we have developed and hope to combine them with community based tourism. Visitors could enjoy foot soaks, herbal baths, and steam therapies. When guests feel tired and seek Traditional Medicine care, our cooperative is ready to serve with foot soaking basins and herbal tools made from San Chay formulas.

In tourism, we maintain our own boundaries to preserve culture. Everyone has different preferences. If visitors want loud entertainment or singing parties, that is not what we offer. But if they want peaceful landscapes, to listen to Sang Co singing, or to watch the Tac Xinh dance, we can welcome them wholeheartedly. We will focus on identity and the culture of the San Chay people.





Ms. Hang participates in the traditional Tac Xinh dance

I sincerely hope the project team will continue supporting us. I still need guidance, like the step by step support Tuan once gave so we can do things properly and succeed.

I will continue for as long as my health allows. I am grateful to have joined this project and to develop products that truly align with my profession and my passion.



Wooden paintings in Ms. Hang's family stilt house

She dries them, I collect them

I participated in building the cooperative from the very beginning. For me, work must be something you enjoy to do it well. My wife and I work side by side. I truly love all the herbal products we make: inhalers, massage products, foot soaks, and herbal pillows. I have also planted large areas of medicinal herbs in our garden.

Recently, I stepped back temporarily from the cooperative. Our children have moved out, and when one of us goes to work, the other stays home to manage the household. When my wife joins long

training trips, I take care of everything at home and help collect herbs when she dries them.

I continue learning as well. I recently joined a soil improvement course, something I had never experienced before, even at over sixty. I now let weeds decompose naturally instead of spraying them, allowing the soil to regenerate. This way, our medicinal plants grow pure, without chemical fertilizers.

Ninh Van Sau, Ms. Hang's husband.



Mr. Nguyen Viet Hoang, Project Officer and Researcher, Center for Research and Development of Agricultural Systems (Casrad), Institute of Food Crops and Food Plants - Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences

I learn so much from the community

I work as a research officer, with a broad background but a deep focus on ecological agriculture and soil health - restoring land to its natural vitality.

Over the past two years working on community projects, I've gained a great deal of professional and life experience. By working closely with

communities, I've learned to draw on their preserved indigenous knowledge, much of it closely aligned with ecological agriculture. Although ecological agriculture is often seen as a new approach and wasn't part of my formal training, the community itself became my teacher. Through them, I came to truly understand what ecological agriculture means in practice.



I've changed as well. Growing up in the city, my parents said I lacked independence. Working with communities pushed me to integrate, adapt, and grow; and I discovered that adaptability is my strength. As a researcher, I focus on uncovering

each community's unique strengths to support sustainable livelihoods. When livelihoods are secure, people are better able to preserve their knowledge and culture.

We work together



Ms. Hoang Thi Trinh, Deputy Director of the Dong Tien Agricultural and Community Tourism Cooperative, Phu Luong commune, Thai Nguyen province

My name is Trinh, Deputy Director of the Dong Tien Agricultural and Community Tourism Cooperative. Since joining the projects, my husband and I have gone up into the forest, crossed streams, and worked alongside the cooperative to make herbal pillows.

I began participating in the project around 2023. We were determined to establish an agricultural and community tourism cooperative, which was officially launched in May 2024.



When it comes to sustainable tourism, we know it's a complex journey. We are simply doing this to create additional livelihoods and income. The province continues to guide us in tourism development. We've received valuable support from teams at Oxfam, iSEE, CASRAD, and others. They took us to places like Mu Cang Chai (formerly Yen Bai province), and showed us how to improve facilities and develop tourism.





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Ms. Hoang Thi Trinh and Ms. Luong Thi Ngoc, members of Dong Tien Agricultural and Community Tourism Cooperative, Phu Luong commune, Thai Nguyen province

I always remind myself to move slowly and use what we already have, so we don't fall into debt if visitors don't come. Since forming the cooperative, we've shifted from working alone to working together. One message brings everyone together. We've become like a family, sharing work, meals, responsibility, and making decisions together with care.



Crossing forests to collect herbs

The journey to have our products accepted was not easy. For the first two years, we worked without any profit. We worked together all year, whenever someone called in the group, we went, yet at year's end, there was nothing to show. Many times, I used my own money, spending over ten million VND (about 380 USD); even now, the cooperative still owes me.

Still, I refused to give up. I said that even if everyone else quit, three of us - Hang, Mien, and I would continue. I believe failure is inevitable; success never comes all at once.

To secure raw materials, we traveled far and worked exhaustingly, often collecting herbs without knowing who we would sell them to. We left early, returned late, and ate rice balls in the forest. I remember stopping my pickup truck on dangerous mountain passes like Deo Gio, Deo Giang, even Deo Tai Hoi Sin to cut herbs whenever I saw them. By the end of those trips, the entire truck, front to back, was filled with herbs.

Working with herbs has seeped into my blood. I'm deeply passionate and we can't afford to miss any source of raw materials.



Creating jobs for the community

Working with the cooperative has increased my income, not by much but enough to encourage me. What matters most is that I don't have to give up farming. I adjusted my routine, using midday breaks and evenings to sew herbal pillows. In summer, I stay home during the hot afternoons and return to the fields when the sun softens. Compared to farming, this work feels manageable.

We also create jobs for local people, guiding them to chop and sun dry herbs like mugwort, which we buy at 30,000 VND (about 1 USD) per kilo. Even herbs gathered from the forest, we purchase them all.

My husband, Hong, works with us too. He drives us to collect herbs and picks dinh lang whenever he sees it. He even grows medicinal plants in our yard, the herbs have gotten into him as well.

I still remember preparing the documents for OCOP certification for our herbal pillows. Before, if someone handed me a pen and paper, I wouldn't even know where to start. But step by step, I learned to complete the paperwork. Some documents had to be submitted many times, and I followed through until the end. In the end, our product was approved, and I learned how much I was capable of along the way.

Customers are our greatest motivation

Our biggest motivation comes from our customers. Their calls push us forward: "Sister, I need five pillows!".

The feedback makes it all worth it. Customers say the pillows are fragrant and help them sleep better. That happiness builds my confidence, step by step. I've come to believe that everything I've struggled through has become my strength.

Once I commit to something, I go all the way. As long as I have health and ability, I will keep going. We work together as a cooperative, while each household remains independent. The road ahead is still long but looking back, I know I've overcome so much already.





Mr. Nguyen Van Hong - Ms. Trinh's husband, Phu Luong commune, Thai Nguyen province

Two people working is more joyful

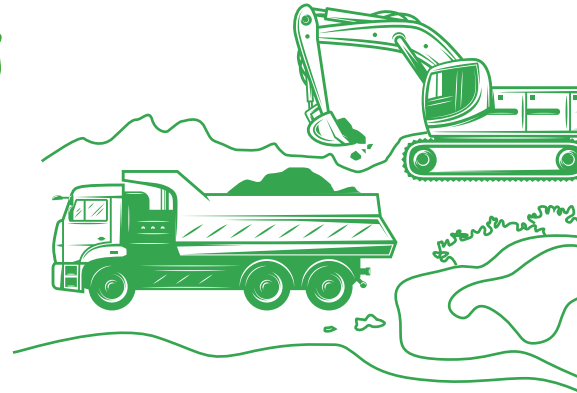
Of course I support my wife, we work together, because two people working is happier and less tiring than one alone. Whenever she needs to go somewhere, I drive her. I travel to different villages too, knowing where to find what we need.

I can't bear to see plants like perilla or ming aralia go to waste. We gather them, process them, and turn them into products. Each harvest season brings a little extra income for our family. To me, seeing value in grasses and plants around us and turning them into livelihoods is truly meaningful work.

Flowing through Nam Hai Lang commune, Quang Tri province, the Thac Ma River has long been a site of mining. Local authorities, community, and businesses have worked to balance development with safety and livelihoods of local people through ongoing dialogue. Some efforts have succeeded, the mining company has withdrawn from parts of the area, restored the land, and supported local infrastructure, while others continue, driven by a shared hope for safe and sustainable development.



*Working together helps
all sides understand
one another better*



*Mr. Bui Van Sinh, Vice Chairman of the People's Council,
Nam Hai Lang village, Quang Tri province*

Since the two-tier local government model was introduced, I have become more involved in the project. Moving beyond oversight, I now better understand it through direct participation.

My name is Bui Van Sinh, Vice Chairman of the People's Council of Nam Hai Lang commune, Quang Tri province.



Community monitoring is highly effective

Resource extraction by mining companies is sensitive in our commune. When the company arrived, it worked with the former Hai Chanh authorities to consult local residents about sand and gravel extraction from the Thac Ma River, which runs through what are now the Hai Chanh and Hai Son areas of Nam Hai Lang commune.

Residents were deeply concerned. I understood that. Mining near homes poses risks to the environment, particularly household water sources upstream and downstream. Riverbank erosion was another major concern. While some embankments have been built, much of the Thac Ma River remains vulnerable, putting farmland and homes at risk.



Because of these concerns, local people became highly proactive in monitoring the company's activities. Before the project began, the commune's role was limited to coordinating consultations and gathering public opinion, while technical assessments were left to external experts. At the local level, we could only anticipate risks, not fully evaluate them.

Community monitoring has proven deeply valuable. Generations of living by the river have given residents an intimate understanding of

floods and erosion, knowledge gained through lived experience. Some of what they shared surprised me: forms of ancestral, folk knowledge that science cannot yet fully explain and that formal assessments often overlook.

Some aspects genuinely surprised me, forms of folk knowledge passed down through generations. Much of this lived experience cannot yet be fully explained by science and is often overlooked by formal environmental assessments.



A household living space in an area frequently affected by flooding

A typical example is flood forecasting. Today, there are standardized flood warning levels, but people in my hometown have their own methods of prediction, closely tied to nature. They say, "When that flower blooms, a flood will come." That plant grows naturally in our area, and the knowledge has been passed down through generations.

What moved me most was the community's deep bond and solidarity. When livelihoods are at stake, people step forward fully and without hesitation. This unity extends far beyond this project, it has revealed itself time and again during floods, natural disasters, and most recently the COVID 19 pandemic. In difficult moments, people share, support one another, and stand together to overcome hardship.



The role of women is significant

Throughout the monitoring process, women have played a particularly important role, not only in project oversight, but in community life as a whole. Their voices are increasingly confident and responsible. Mothers, sisters, and daughters bring strong knowledge, strengthened through training and capacity building support. When women participate in monitoring and persuasion, their impact is especially powerful.

I participate in the community monitoring group overseeing the mining company's extraction activities, working primarily with local residents. I often work in Tay Son hamlet with people like Thang, Thuy, and the women there. There are many participants, too many to remember all their names.

At times, conflicts have arisen. These were not major conflicts, but they reflected a lack of consensus between the company and local residents. Specifically, disputes emerged over extraction locations. The company proposed multiple sites. For sites far from residential areas, people agreed. But there was one particularly sensitive location, very close to where people live, and residents firmly opposed extraction there.

When conflict arose, our foremost priority was mobilization and explanation, ensuring social and economic stability. The commune requested that the company temporarily suspend extraction at that site. We needed to work with all parties to ensure a balanced alignment of interests.

At present, the company has accepted the temporary suspension of extraction at that location.



Mr. Bui Van Sinh, Vice Chairman of the Nam Hai Lang commune People's Council, Quang Tri province

Only by talking can we understand one another

Personally, by participating directly with everyone, I have come to better understand people's needs, and my work has become more effective. Had I not participated or participated less I would not have fully grasped the legitimate concerns and aspirations of local residents.

Through open and harmonious dialogues, many issues can be resolved. If the approach is hesitant or distant, problems become more difficult and complicated. Working together helps all sides understand one another better.

As understanding deepens and relationships grow, progress accelerates. What once took days can be resolved in hours, cutting hidden costs in time, travel, and effort.

In my role as a state management official and People's Council representative, overseeing social issues, especially sensitive areas like natural resources, minerals, and the environment, effectiveness depends on trust. By staying close to all stakeholders, I can strengthen that trust and carry out oversight more meaningfully.



Mr. Nguyen Van Luu, a member of the monitoring group in Nam Hai Lang commune, Quang Tri province

Harmonizing interests to grow together

Here in Quang Tri, the sun is harsh and the rain is heavy. The climate is extreme. Making a living is already difficult. People also lack legal: environmental law, marriage law, among others. Seeing this. When a project with the Commune Women's Union began, I joined the training right away.

My colleagues and I found the project very meaningful. This program equips both women and men with essential knowledge and practical skills.

Our community monitoring group works well because we stay close to the ground and respond

quickly. We advise residents while also supporting commune leaders, working together for our community's development. When the company's project began, we kept everyone informed. If concerns arised, we met. I made sure leaders first understand the people's will.

I carry people's voices to the leaders and bring the leaders' perspectives back to the people, so both sides can understand each other. In doing so, we strengthen unity and build our community together. We are not a source of conflict; we are a bridge. And in the end, it is this unity and harmony that allows our local economy to grow and thrive.



Ms. Le Thi Hong Thuy, Chairwoman of the Nam Hai Lang commune Women's Union, Quang Tri province

Every voice matters

Everything began in 2023, when the commune Women's Union helped establish our first community monitoring group. That was my first time working with Oxfam.

We participated in monitoring Minh Anh Company's sand and gravel extraction along the river, focusing on one key question: after five years, would the land be restored as promised?

We organized direct dialogues. The women most affected spoke up - clear, strong, and assertive. It was then that we truly felt the parties were able to talk to one another.

In the end, Minh Anh Company fulfilled its commitments. When the contract ended, they restored the land, returned the site, and

supported local infrastructure: electricity, roads, and livelihoods. They did what they promised.

Seeing this, people's trust grew. At first, when I went door to door, many were skeptical. They said, "Maybe the women are just doing this for show. Once the company finishes, it will leave without fulfilling its commitments." But the results proved otherwise.

We succeeded. I felt proud and confident that even without external support, we can still monitor effectively. With support, we can do even better (laughs).

I used to think the Women's Union's role was simply to provide livelihood support. But through Oxfam's project, we now see the value



of knowledge and emotional support, and the vital role women can play.

After the training, I told the women: "You have the right to speak in every village meeting." Women are citizens, just like men - every voice matters. In the past, many believed women didn't belong in those spaces. Now, women are speaking up with confidence.

Through the project, I have changed a great deal. I am more confident speaking in front of others. Working with Oxfam teams and partners, I have learned so much. The project staff are young, yet full of energy and dedication. I often tell myself: they are human, they work hard, so can I. Step by step, through this journey, I have transformed myself.

The project is still in its early stages, delayed by storms and floods. Our community group has 15 members: 10 women and five men. We may not have deep technical expertise, but through training, we now understand monitoring better.

Despite the challenges, we keep going. I visit households, listening to them. I asked: "If you could speak to the authorities, the company, or the Women's Union, what would you say?" In this way, the Women's Union becomes a bridge for dialogue.

I believe that with persistence, all sides will eventually come together and listen to one another.

In Truong Son commune, Quang Tri province, the Bru–Van Kieu people live amidst stone quarries. Fruit trees once failed to thrive, choked by dust, forcing villagers to trek deep into the forest for bamboo shoots.

Then, they have begun cultivating bamboo closer to home, with promising growth. Though not yet ready for harvest, a quiet hope has taken root: the revival of their ancestors' fading bamboo weaving craft.



I sell clean bamboo shoots, what is there to be afraid of?



Ms. Ho Thi Tuong, member of the community group involved in the bamboo shoot cultivation project, Truong Son commune, Quang Tri province

My name is Ho Thi Tuong, people also call me Le. I am Bru Van Kieu. Before the project, my life was bound to upland fields, swidden plots, with farming as our main livelihood. But the hardest, most exhausting work was going deep into the forest to collect bamboo shoots.

When the project came, I joined immediately

During bamboo shoot season, I went alone into the forest, far from home. First 7 kilometers, then 10, sometimes even 15. On the way back, I carried the shoots myself, heavy loads of 30 to 40 kilos at most, or 10 to 15 in the dry season. It was exhausting, but hardship is something we are used to. To make a living, we go wherever the forest still has shoots, moving from place to place.

Now, being part of the bamboo shoot cultivation project, I feel both happy and relieved.



Landscape of a local stone quarrying area

I see that this project fits our area well. This is an important lesson for development projects: projects should listen to local people – ask what they need, what they want to grow. When they asked me, I joined right away. The project guided us in choosing bamboo varieties suited to our land.

Our land has many stone quarries, and the air is thick with dust. If we grow fruit trees like oranges

when they flower and dust settles on them, making it hard for fruit to grow and stay clean.

But bamboo is different. It also helps hold the soil, preventing erosion along the river and streams where we live. At the same time, it brings extra income, we can sell both bamboo shoots and bamboo poles.



Dust from local stone quarrying covers nearby vegetation

My family received support from the project: seedlings, fertilizer, and hands-on training. The guidance was very detailed: how to plant, how wide and deep the pits should be, the spacing between plants, when and how much to fertilize, and when fertilization is no longer needed. I learned so much.

The first year was the hardest. Heavy rains here often lead to flooding, and young plants can rot and die, not because of poor seedlings, but because of too much water. But once the bamboo grows taller than a person, after about one and a half to two years, it becomes strong. From then on, the more rain it gets, the better it grows.



When we joined the project, we worked together, guiding each other in planting techniques. The support in sharing local resources made a big difference. Those who started earlier, like Tam, shared what they had and lent young bamboo plants to others. Each of us contributed a bit of knowledge, a bit of labor, and our own experience. The work became lighter for everyone.



Ms. Tuong uses social media livestreaming to expand product distribution channels

Collaborating with the cooperative

I believe growing bamboo shoots this way is very good. They are among the cleanest products, no spraying, no chemicals. And we ourselves enjoy eating them too (laughs).

We were also trained to process bamboo shoots: making canned, dried, and ready-to-eat products. The key is we linked up with a cooperative. If we want long-term growth, we have to link together.

Before, when I collected wild shoots, I sold them on Facebook or at the local market; hard work, but small returns. Now, we see a clearer path forward.

Selling to the cooperative is more profitable. It helps maintain our product's quality and brand, and working together is far more better than selling alone. Since joining the project, my income has improved, and the work is much less exhausting.



Ms. Tuong and her peer use social media livestreaming to expand product distribution channels

Through selling on Facebook and at the market, I've grown more confident. I'm no longer shy. Now I speak up and promote my products with ease.

I often share selling tips with other women in the group. I told them: "If work is scarce, we can rely on the forest. Check demand first - post, see who

wants to buy, confirm orders, then go collect. If it doesn't sell, we share it among ourselves and ship together."

What makes me happiest is being heard. I feel trusted.



Using short-term gains to support long-term plans

I learned how to use short-term gains to support long-term development. Previously, I planted lemongrass, supported by seedlings and fertilizer from another project. When the lemongrass declined, I interplanted acacia. Now, after selling the acacia, I plan to interplant bamboo shoots with lemongrass. Lemongrass yields quickly while bamboo takes one to two years, but once it grows, it can be harvested for a lifetime. It's easy to plant

and care for. As long as there is land, I believe every household can grow it.

My husband also supports my participation. He says: "Just join. Joining means learning more". Compared to before, I no longer have to search for bamboo shoots or go deep into the forest. The project will end, but this work must continue.



Mr. Ho Van Suu, Ms. Ho Thi Tuong's husband,
Truong Son commune, Quang Tri province

A dream of expanding the bamboo garden

My wife and I work together. We dig the soil together, hoe together, and fertilize together. We rarely hire anyone. It is our land, so we know it well.

The project supported our family with two rods of land for bamboo planting. Right after planting, floods came. Survival rates were only about 90 percent, with losses due to prolonged flooding. The land is near a stream, so many plants died from inundation.

Previously, I had planted bamboo shoots on my own but failed. I planted dozens of plants, but nearly all died. The seedlings were bought online, at 40,000 VND

(about 1.5 USD) per plant—quite expensive. I tried twice, and both times they died. The problem was seedling quality, which I did not understand at the time. The roots looked real in photos, but they were not new roots and lacked strength.

Now, seeing the seedlings provided by the project grow very well, I understand. The seedlings met standards proper age, sufficient roots before being given to us.

The bamboo shoot model suits our area very well, especially with a cooperative in place. If people can plant at scale, there will be stronger market opportunities.

The cooperative guides us in both cultivation and processing, from semi-processed to ready-to-eat products. We've been trained to make sweet-and-sour shoots, pickled shoots, crispy pickles, and dried shoots. People are very enthusiastic to learn as we are now learning techniques for crispy pickled shoots and dried shoots. Now, the cooperative is even working toward OCOP certification, opening the door for further growth.

Bamboo shoots brings in a long-term income. Unlike acacia, where after four years the return barely covers the investment, bamboo, once established, is resilient. After two or three years, it can be harvested, and whenever needed, we can sell shoots to support the family and our children's education.

Seeing my wife's dedication, I want to grow more. Now that we have good seedlings and the right techniques, I plan to expand. My dream is to grow this bamboo garden into something much larger.



Mr. Ho Van La, participant in the bamboo shoot cultivation project, Truong Son commune, Quang Tri province

Technical support is extremely important

I had never grown bamboo before. This is my first time. My family joined the project in the hope of escaping poverty. The seedlings were provided, so we didn't have to invest upfront, which already made us happy. More importantly, the project staff shared their technical knowledge. It's extremely important. Farming without technique is meaningless. Working blindly only makes you poorer.

Now, we work around our homes, which is less exhausting. Before, we worked as hired laborers. In the future, a day of tending our crops and harvesting

bamboo may earn more than a full day of labor elsewhere. We no longer have to go deep into the forest. Even in rain or storms, we can stay nearby and harvest what we need.

We started small, following the project's guidance. If it works, we'll expand. It's an opportunity—so we try. And when I began planting, I realized it felt simple, nothing to be afraid of (laughs).



Ms. Ho Thi Son, member of the community group participating in the bamboo shoot cultivation project, Truong Son commune, Quang Tri province

A longing to revive bamboo weaving

Beyond bamboo shoots, mature bamboo can be used to make pens or for weaving. The Bru Van Kieu people have a rich tradition of beautiful and durable bamboo weaving. It lasted through our grandparents' generation, but by ours, it has faded.

I hope that one day, we can open a weaving class and bring this craft back to life. Through bamboo shoots, we begin to see bamboo not just as a livelihood, but as a way to restore and carry forward the cultural identity of the Bru Van Kieu people.



Finding crops for a quarry-affected area



Mr. Nguyen Viet Tam, Chairman of the Truong Xuan Bamboo Shoot Cooperative

My name is Nguyen Viet Tam, Chairman of the Mang Giang Truong Xuan Cooperative (HTX), Truong Son commune, Quang Tri province.

We needed an alternative livelihood

Living in Hang Chuon village, Na Lam, in the middle of a mineral extraction area, we have long endured dust and constant noise. When fruit trees bloom, dust settles on the flowers; pollination fails, the blossoms fall, and there is no fruit. Vegetables, too, are covered in dust, making farming ineffective.

We needed another livelihood - one that could withstand the impacts of mining.



A water truck spraying the road to reduce dust from mineral transport

My story, and that of the Van Kieu community here, began in October 2022, when the Truong Xuan Bambooshoot Cooperative was formed. It started with seven members, six women and one man, five Van Kieu and two Kinh. We shared one goal: creating jobs for ethnic minority communities.

Since then, local people have stayed closely connected with the cooperative.

In early 2025, the Center for Rural Research and Development introduced the project Supporting Livelihoods in Mining Areas. The cooperative quickly agreed to join. Looking back, it has brought clear results: benefiting both people and the society. Bamboo planting protects the environment while creating jobs and income.

At the start, our biggest challenge was choosing the suitable households: those with land, commitment, and willingness to participate. Once selected, we moved forward.

Personally, I have changed a lot. Through training, many things became clearer. I listened, applied what I learned, and built practical models. Only then did people truly trust and join me.

From the cooperative's perspective, our responsibility has grown. We must understand the project clearly, communicate it well, and stand closely with our members.

What I value most is learning by doing. Beyond providing seedlings, the project walks alongside the people. And I believe that only when we are truly committed will our members place their trust in us.

Wholehearted support builds trust

So far, the project has supported 12 households to plant 750 clusters of four-season bamboo across about 15,000 square meters. Bamboo helps shield against dust in mining areas. Its shoots grow underground, protected by natural layers, ensuring food safety. For communities like ours, it is an ideal livelihood solution.

I remember the early day clearly. For over a month after planting, I couldn't sleep or eat well, afraid the people might struggle or the bamboo might fail. Every day, I went out to check, guiding each step. Accompanying people closely is not easy.

But with support from the community, the cooperative, the project, authorities, and businesses, things were better managed. And as we took on greater responsibility, people placed more trust in us.

Van Kieu families are encouraged as they watch the bamboo grow each day. This crop not only protects the environment but also brings income. Even during slow farming periods, fertilizing and weeding can generate earnings. Four-season bamboo can be harvested within two years, lasts for decades, and provides a continuous source of income.



Mr. Tam weighing salt for bamboo shoot processing



Cooperative members processing bamboo shoots

From raw bamboo shoots to processed products

Once the bamboo took root, we moved into processing and building a brand. The cooperative has transformed. We were trained to produce different bamboo shoot products, with support for quality testing. The project also helped us develop a full product identity: packaging, labels, and leaflets. With traceability and certification, our products gained greater trust from consumers.

This support has been essential. It has raised the value of our products and opened doors to wider

markets. Before, we sold only on a small scale, at local markets or as raw goods to traders. Now, with clear branding and identity, our products are easier to promote and can reach much farther.

The project also supported us in completing the OCOP certification documents. It was a challenging process, we had to revise it three or four times due to policy changes across management levels. Now, the documents have been submitted and is awaiting approval.



Working on this project fills me with hope. I want products made by Van Kieu people to reach wider markets because when they do, it brings pride and joy to our community.

As the project comes to an end, the cooperative will build on what we've achieved. We will continue to stand with local people, providing technical support so they can grow better and benefit more.





Mr. Pham Mau Tai, Deputy Director, Centre for Rural Research and Development (CRRD)

Bridging communities and enterprises

Through the project's training, I gained clearer insight into how we support communities.

We realized it's not enough to focus only on local people or the impacts of mining. Support must go further. So we changed our approach. Now, we

bring all sides together: community, authorities, and businesses to address the problem. Environmental protection cannot rely on people and government alone; it requires businesses to step in as active partners. The goal is for enterprises to become partners, rather than place them in opposition.



Ms. Tran Thanh Hien, Chairwoman of the Women's Union of Trung Son commune, Quang Tri province

Shifting toward gender equality

This model has created real impact by creating local jobs for women. Many have families and young children, so working far away in factories for entire weeks was not an option.

Since joining the project, women have grown more confident. Through training, especially on gender equality, they've gained knowledge, skills, and the courage to speak up. I've seen a clear shift: stronger voices and greater confidence.



After planting bamboo, market options have expanded. Shoots can be sold fresh, pickled, or dried. Many women now sell directly on Facebook: posting their products, setting prices of 20,000–30,000 VND (about 0.8-1 USD) per kilo, and shipping. Le and a few others have done this successfully.

We've also learned from ethnic communities unique ways to process bamboo shoots. In the lowlands, we peel and boil them. But here, shoots are boiled whole, with the skin on. Afterward, they are torn to eat, sweeter, naturally yellow, less bitter, and more appealing to buyers.

We have learned many valuable things from the local women.

This book is dedicated to all who have taken part in the project, each in their own role. Our journey together has been marked by tangible achievements and new transformations, emerging like bamboo shoots pushing through the earth.

We take pride in having walked this path side by side, and we embrace our shared responsibility to carry it forward. Together, we continue to weave a vibrant tapestry of this beautiful land - one that celebrates diversity, equality, and humanity.





Kingdom of the Netherlands



Quang Tri Provincial
Women's Union

