

Through the storms toward resilience: **Stories of inspiring women**

The “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province” project





A session to assess the technical support needs of the residents in Dien Huong Commune, Phong Dien District, Thua Thien Hue Province. Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

About the Project

COVID-19 has posed significant impacts on the national economic and social situation in Viet Nam. Vulnerable groups such as poor people, women, children, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities were the most affected. Rural laborers in Thua Thien Hue province, particularly women farmers, were not exempt from this hardship.

Oxfam in Vietnam and the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue (RCS TTH) province, with support from the New Zealand Government, implemented the project “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province.” The project covered six communes of Phu Gia, Phu Dien, Giang Hai, Vinh Hung, Phong Chuong, Dien Huong in three districts of Phu Vang, Phu Loc and Phong Dien, from 1st September 2023 to 31st July 2024, with a budget of more than 4.94 billion VND.

After almost one year, the project has effectively supported 1,511 poor and near-poor women farmers, of whom 221 are people with disabilities, helping them and their family to recover and develop sustainable livelihoods. The women farmers participating in the project attended 30 agricultural technical training courses tailored to their needs. 1,000 women farmers received direct cash assistance of 3.2 million VND/person to restore their livelihoods. This assistance was provided in accordance with a family livelihood recovery plan which was appraised by the project for implementation feasibility.

This publication documents short stories about the women with whom the Project was fortunate to collaborate, support, and witness significant transformations.

Thua Thien Hue, July, 2024



A new beginning



Le Thi Huong has improved her income thanks to the chicken farming model.
Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

After the COVID-19 pandemic, Le Thi Huong and her husband returned to their hometown from Ho Chi Minh City, burdened with hardships. “Life was extremely rough, almost like we were left with nothing,” she recalled. The pandemic had devastated their fruit trading business in the city. With their meager savings gone, they and their two children moved back to Phu Dien Commune, Phu Vang District, Thua Thien Hue Province, and start over in a small hut with help from neighbors. “I sold odds and ends at the local market, and my husband ran any errands he can find. When the situation improved a bit, he started driving for hire, but it was still very unstable,” Huong remembered.

Change began when Huong was selected by the local community and authorities as one of the 1,500 recipients of support from the project “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province,” funded by the New Zealand Government and implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue. Through agricultural technical training courses, Huong acquired poultry management skills, along with financial support to develop a chicken farming model. This not only improved her family’s income but also changed her outlook and approach to poultry production. She bravely invested in better breeds, proactively vaccinated against diseases, thereby enhancing the economic efficiency of her chicken farming model.

“At first, I was skeptical about whether participating in training would really help. But it turned out I learned many new things from those sessions,” Huong proudly pointed at her flock of chickens. “Look, I’ve been raising them for almost a month now and haven’t lost a single one, unlike before when I didn’t know better.” She calculated that with the VND 3,200,000 capital support from the project, after this batch, she would earn nearly VND 7,000,000. “That’s enough for now, but surely I’ll increase it later, and then bit by bit, life will become more stable,” she beamed with hope.

Building back with hope



Officer of the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue province visited Ly after the financial aid.

Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Nguyen Thi Ly, a farmer from Phong Chuong Commune, Phong Dien District, found herself grappling with the compounded hardships of her mobility disability and the disruptive impact on her livelihood. “When healthy, I would gather crabs and snails to sell for some income to cover medical expenses. However, during the pandemic, all such activities halted, and daily life became incredibly challenging,” Ly recounted.

Ly then participated in the “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province” project, funded by the New Zealand Government and implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue. Chosen through a transparent community-driven process, she reflected, “As a single woman with a disability and facing severe hardships, I joined the project thanks to the community’s selection. The community’s support during the selection was overwhelming, with unanimous agreement at the village meeting facilitated by detailed information from the village head. Everyone understood the process, and even those not selected felt positive about it.”

“This project is different from other support packages. It provided more than just financial aid, it offered knowledge.”

Despite her mobility difficulty, the project team ensured Ly could fully engage in the training sessions. “The organizers were exceptionally considerate, providing me with handouts to take home, and instructors who were not only helpful but also accessible for any further assistance,” she smiled.

Thanks to the project’s timely support, Ly revitalized her farming operations, which significantly boosted her income and improved her quality of life. With the knowledge acquired from the training, she is optimistic about the upcoming agricultural season, expecting better yields and higher profits from her crops and livestock. Her eyes lit up with gratitude and hope as she thanked the New Zealand Government, Oxfam, the Red Cross, and local authorities for their support, which was instrumental in not just her recovery but also many others in her community.

As recorded by Ho Dinh Vang, Chairman of the Red Cross Society of Phong Chuong commune, Phong Dien district, Thua Thien Hue province

Restoring livelihoods with confidence



Loi learned more about pig farming techniques thanks to the training sessions.
Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

Ngan Thi Loi, a farmer from the Thai ethnic group living in Moc Tru Village, Phu Gia Commune, Phu Vang District, faced numerous challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the outbreak, she and her family primarily relied on selling scrap and small-scale livestock farming. With a large family and an elderly mother to care for, life was a struggle for her. As the primary breadwinner, Loi felt the sting of the pandemic acutely: “The pandemic brought everything to a halt, from our small businesses to our daily lives.” When the COVID-19 pandemic began to wane, she returned to her scrap trading and cattle tending, but still struggled.

In October 2023, Loi joined the project “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province,” funded by the New Zealand Government and implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue. “I didn’t expect the project to provide so much valuable knowledge. Initially, I thought receiving financial support was all about it,” Loi shared.

She participated in all training courses on agriculture and livestock techniques, particularly enjoying the pig farming techniques, from feeding and care to disease prevention. “The instructor taught us how to plan for effective livestock farming. The lessons were very clear and everyone understood them well,” she noted. With the 3.2 million VND support from the project, she bought piglets and livestock feed. By applying the knowledge she gained, she is confident about her plan to expand her pig farming. Loi estimates that in about 4.5 to 5 months, she will sell the pigs and earn approximately 8-9 million VND.

Regarding the selection of participants for the project, Loi shared that although only 20 households were chosen from some hundred others in her village, the community was good about the decision because the selection process was transparent. “The village leaders and various local organizations selected participants based on the project’s criteria, compiled a list, and consulted each female farmer who wanted to participate.”

As recorded by Nguyen Thi Xiu, Chairwoman of the Red Cross Society of Phu Gia commune, Phu Vang district, Thua Thien Hue province



A cash distribution session for female farmers in Phong Chuong Commune, Phong Dien District, Thua Thien Hue Province, jointly delivered by RCS TTH, Vietnam Post, and Oxfam in Vietnam. Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

Out of the woods



Sau and her family's growing herd of cows. Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

For Ho Thi Sau, a farmer in Vinh Hung Commune, Phu Loc District, the COVID-19 pandemic brought compounded difficulties. As the breadwinner of the family and caregiver to her chronically ill husband, Sau recalled, “I did any job that was offered. I had to raise chickens, while the kids helped with cattle tending. We struggled to earn enough for rice and medicine for my husband and to provide for the education of our three children, but it was never enough.”

Thanks to the support of the “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province” project, funded by the New Zealand Government and implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue, Sau had more opportunities to improve her family’s economic situation. She joined the project through a transparent and open selection process in the village. “They were very thorough. Only women were selected, then priority was given to those with disabilities, those from poor or near-poor households, and those households needed to have the capacity to work,” Sau recounted.

“After being selected, we participated in training on agricultural and poultry production techniques, aquaculture, and how to plan for production. Then the project granted us the cash assistance,” she explained.

In addition to the financial aid provided, she borrowed more money from others and purchased two female cows for breeding. Not long after, the cows gave birth, and now her family has three cows. She plans to keep the two mother cows and sell the calf for about 14 million VND after one year. “I hope the herd will grow so that my family have a better life,” she said, her eyes sparkling with hope.

“I hope there will be more projects like this to help many rural women overcome difficulties and aim for a better future,” Sau stated in her thank you to the project.

As recorded by Duong Thi Ly, Chairwoman of the Red Cross Society of Vinh Hung commune, Phu Loc district, Thua Thien Hue province

The dawn after storms

Mai Thi Cam, a poor female farmer from Giang Hai Commune in Thua Thien Hue Province, has faced considerable hardships since her youth. As a single mother, she raised her disabled daughter and later took on the care of her grandchild. Her life grew even more challenging when the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, severing her already sporadic income from odd jobs. “Previously, I could still do light jobs to earn a living. Sick as I was, I tried everything to provide for my daughter and grandchild. But since the pandemic started, no one hires anymore,” Cam recalled.

Aware of her family’s day-to-day struggle for survival, the local community and authorities extended their help. With some initial support of piglets and feed from a poverty aid program, she borrowed a little capital to start pig farming. At first, due to her lack of experience, she only made a profit of 600,000 VND per pig.

Then Cam received support from the “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province” project, funded by the New Zealand Government and implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue.

Cam participated in training courses on livestock management, where she learned skills in effective animal care, from constructing pens to selecting breeds and preventing diseases. With a cash grant of 3,200,000 VND from the project, she decided to purchase larger, vaccinated piglets, minimizing disease risks and increasing economic efficiency. By applying the knowledge gained from the training, Cam expected to earn a profit of about 3,000,000 VND from the four pigs she raised over four months. Though not a large sum, it provides the necessary boost to inspire and instill confidence in her.

With a gentle smile, Cam said: “I am grateful for the project. It helps my daughter and me have enough food to eat, clothes to wear, and money to buy medicine when we are sick. I am so happy!”



Mai Thi Cam photographed during a visit after the financial aid.
Photo courtesy of RCS TTH



The pig herd Cam invested in with the capital support from the project.
Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

As recorded by Tran Thi Phuong Ha, Officer of the Statistics Office in charge of the Red Cross Society in Giang Hai commune, Phu Loc district, Thua Thien Hue province

A more stable reality



Van (in the middle) led a group of officers to visit her field. Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

Nguyen Thi Dieu Van, a farmer from Thanh Huong Dong village, Dien Huong Commune, Phong Dien District, Thua Thien Hue Province, comes from a family facing economic difficulties. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, her family's income primarily came from rice farming and raising pigs and chickens. Her husband worked as a construction laborer whenever he could find work. During the pandemic, her family tried every possible job to generate income, from growing rice and vegetables to raising livestock and making fishing nets, yet their financial situation remained unstable.

She pointed to the rice field in front of her house, "Now the rice looks lush, but back then, we had to let it go fallow because the costs of fertilizers and pesticides were high, and we couldn't sell the rice," she recalled.

When the "Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province" project, funded by the New Zealand Government and implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue, was introduced in Dien Huong to assist impoverished female farmers, she was chosen by her community and the local government to participate. "There were 150 households participating in the training, but only 125 women were selected."

Dieu Van, accustomed to traditional labor-intensive farming, was initially anxious about the training, but gradually she found the knowledge very applicable and beneficial. With the financial aid of 3.2 million VND from the project, her family could partially cover the costs of ploughing, soil preparation, and purchasing rice seeds and fertilizers. "At first, my family planned to cultivate just two more plots, but thanks to favorable weather and timely support from the project, we boldly expanded to four more. Now, my rice field, cared for with techniques learned from the training, is thriving. By the end of August, I'll harvest. After all expenses, given the current rice prices, I expect to profit about 7-8 million VND. I plan to continue cultivating rice on this land in future seasons to increase my family's income," she joyfully shared.

As recorded by Ho Quang Tong, Chairman of the Red Cross Society of Dien Huong commune, Phong Dien district, Thua Thien Hue province



Yan (in the striped shirt) led a group of officers to visit her field.
Photo courtesy of RCS TTH

After a year of implementation, the “Restoring and enhancing resilient livelihoods after the COVID-19 pandemic for poor and near poor female farmers in disadvantaged communes in Thua Thien Hue province” project has contributed to ensuring social protection and alleviating the burdens caused by the COVID-19 pandemic for the residents of six communes across three districts: Phu Loc, Phu Vang, and Phong Dien. The support is expected to enhance adaptability for women and vulnerable groups, providing a foundation for sustainable livelihood development in the future.

The project’s success is due to effective cooperation between the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue and the local authorities and partners, with a focus on putting the interests of the people at the center. Oxfam in Vietnam deeply appreciates the timely and humane support from the New Zealand Government to Vietnam during both the response and recovery phases of the pandemic; we also thank the Red Cross Society of Thua Thien Hue and our local partners for their collaboration throughout the project implementation, which has brought practical and long-term benefits to the people.

A special thank goes to the community members who participated in the project. Their active and enthusiastic involvement has brought meaningful changes to the community.



