

Gender equality through VSLAs in Vietnam

AWEEV

In Vietnam, women are joining together to push for positive shifts in communities and markets.

The *Advancing Women’s Economic Empowerment in Vietnam (AWEEV)* project works with VSLA members and their communities in poor rural and ethnic minority areas to increase women’s participation in paid economic activities. **Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs)** form the basis of efforts to connect women farmers with value chains and build strong networks of women leading change in their communities.

What challenges prevent ethnic minority women from connecting with markets?

The heavy and unequal burden of unpaid domestic and care work on women in Vietnam prevents many working-age women from obtaining improving their economic situation. The 2020 Labour Force Survey found that, on average, women in Vietnam spent nearly twice as much time per week on this as men.*

For women in ethnic minority communities, cultural norms regarding women’s traditional domestic work roles may exacerbate this further, while their remote locations mean they have fewer options for reducing this burden than those in urban areas. This compounds the challenges ethnic minority women already face in improving their economic situation. Despite working in agriculture, remote ethnic minority women lack equal access to land and capital, and thus have limited opportunity to make decisions which affect their lives. Limited voice in homes and the wider community can limit their ability to ensure changes meet their needs.

However, when access to microloans is combined with deep engagement on the impact of discriminatory social norms, households and communities see the potential opportunities created by women participating in markets. As a result, women are taking on new roles and leading positive change.

**For more information, see AWEEV’s studies on unpaid domestic and care work.*

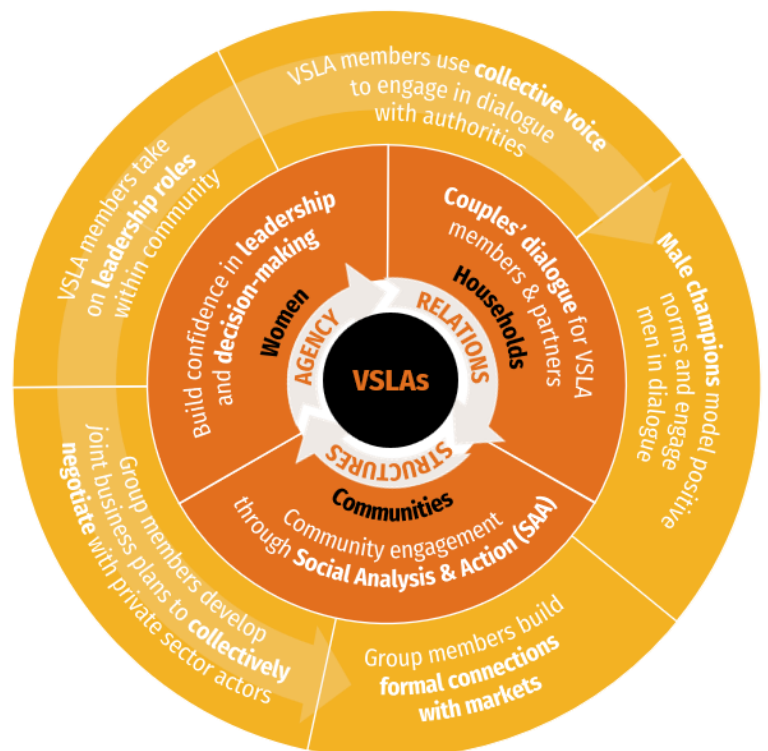
How is AWEEV promoting gender equality?

Within communities, AWEEV focuses on shifting harmful and discriminatory social norms which limit women’s ability to engage in economic activities, with a strong focus on structured dialogue between different individuals and groups.

The confidence, leadership and opportunities women gain from this is encouraging VSLAs to push for broader change.

Within value chains, AWEEV supports VSLA members to form networks and use their collective voice to engage with market actors, enabling women to progress from savers to entrepreneurs.

All of this is underpinned by deep engagement with civil society organizations on addressing systemic gender inequities within communities and markets.



↓ 1/6 Reduction in time women spend on unpaid domestic and care work.

AWEEV goes beyond standard VSLA savings groups and livelihoods training to address root causes of gender inequality.

- **Deep reflection on gender with staff & partners** through [Social Analysis & Action \(SAA\)](#) and extensive training on facilitating gender dialogue.
- **Couples' dialogue** on labor division and decision-making in livelihood production to address power dynamics within households.
- Within communities, Social Analysis & Action (SAA) groups engage men and women together in **dialogue on harmful and discriminatory social norms**.
- Male champions **engage other men in the community in dialogue** about the social norms affecting women's ability to earn income, particularly those relating to unpaid domestic and care work. This builds a network of support for women's economic participation and decision-making.
- VSLAs act as a platform for women to come together and use their **collective voice to engage local authorities in dialogue** on their specific needs as women farmers. This provides women with opportunities to lead change beyond their VSLA groups.
- VSLA members who cultivate similar crops, such as tea or peanut, develop joint business plans so they have a **collective voice to negotiate** with others in the value chain and ensure they receive a fair price.
- Connections are built between women from VSLA groups and companies, such as a tea factory, to develop **formal relationships with buyers**. These promote understanding of quality standards by VSLAs members so they can provide a reliable supply of consistent quality and quantity while ensuring women have access to a consistent buyer for their product.

CARE Vietnam recognizes the vital importance of ensuring commitment to gender equality among partner staff given the key role they play, so the project includes an intentional focus on gender responsive technical assistance to partners. Following a quick capacity assessment, all partner and project staff went through two levels of support. The first used Social Analysis & Action to promote self-reflection and dialogue, allowing staff the opportunity to consider their own potential biases and how this might impact their work. The second level built skills and confidence to work on these challenging topics.



120%  Average household income increased from baseline to mid-term review.

Adaptive management

AWEEV placed a strong focus on adapting to the context, customizing actions right down to community level. Each VSLA experiences different social norms based on their location, ethnic group, economic situation and other factors specific to the members of the savings group.

Community-level gender dialogue through [Social Analysis & Action \(SAA\)](#) enabled groups to identify the specific norms preventing women from increasing their income. Rather than applying a standard set of activities across all project areas, actions are tailored according to group priorities in their individual communities. Plans are continually adapted to make the most of new opportunities for dialogue within communities and with power-holders.

84% Women reported having meaningful participation in economic decision-making in the household.

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