



GRAISEA STORIES OF CHANGE

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Promoting a sustainable and inclusive rice value chain in Vietnam through multi-stakeholder initiatives that benefit women and men small-scale producers



COVER PHOTOS: OXFAM IN VIETNAM

Soc Trang and Angiang provinces are two key rice provinces in the Mekong River Delta, ranking first in terms of rice productivity in Vietnam.¹ In 2016, amid salt intrusion, water shortages, and an unfavorable climate, Soc Trang and Angiang still reached their annual average volume and productivity.² Out of total rice production, exports made up 30% for Soc Trang and 11% for Angiang. However, productivity and export gains are no longer translated into improved living standards for rice-growing households due to small-scale production, a fragmented value chain, unsustainable production practices, and dependence on low-priced markets.

FRAGMENTED RICE VALUE CHAINS AND LIMITED PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

Producers, with weak collective voice, limited negotiation skills, and small-scale production areas, cannot ensure they benefit fairly when contracting with traders (mainly middlemen) and processors. A lack of collaboration between producers limits their ability to link with big rice export companies, who are reluctant to cooperate, especially on investing in certified production areas. While the premium markets (i.e., European Union, USA) are increasing their requirements for certified rice imports, rice-exporting companies are struggling with unstable and unqualified supplies.

Likewise, the Sustainable Rice Platform (SRP) standard, which is becoming a more

popular way to open doors to high-priced markets, remains an unfamiliar concept for most small-scale producers due to their limited access to information and technical knowledge, lack of investment sources, and lack of a committed sourcing strategy by export companies.

The disconnect and mistrust will not be resolved if local governments and scientists are performing their supporting roles in a limited way. Women's role in the rice value chain also needs to be recognized. Women account for 50% of all rice producers in Vietnam, but they have limited access to resources and little decision-making power in all economic and social activities at all levels. They are also overburdened by unpaid care work and local social norms.

TOWARDS SHARED AND FAIR BENEFITS THAT RECOGNIZE WOMEN'S ROLES

Responding to these challenges, the Gender Transformative and Responsible Agribusiness Investments in South East Asia (GRAISEA) programme in Vietnam applies a multi-stakeholder approach to facilitate cooperation, shared benefits, and responsibilities to promote a sustainable rice value chain in the country. Oxfam works with the provincial Sub-department of Crop and Plant Protection to organize 15



■ During a multi-stakeholder workshop, women and men discuss their needs and expectations by using Diamond, which is a GALS tool. (Photo by Oxfam in Vietnam)



■ Representatives of Gentraco discuss gender-inclusive strategy for their company. (Photo by Oxfam in Vietnam)

producer groups and demonstrate SRP application in Soc Trang and Angiang. Oxfam also brokers and facilitates the fair farming contract between these producer groups and Gentraco—a leading rice company in Mekong Delta. Government authorities are also encouraged to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the contract, ensuring their shared benefits. Rice experts from Mekong Delta Development Research Institute and the Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development, meanwhile, are engaged to provide technical assistance on SRP practice and other innovative production technologies.

After 10 months, SRP has been applied to 222 hectares,³ with the participation of 200 producers under favorable farming contracts with Gentraco for a premium price that is 5% higher than the normal market price.

In a recent multi-stakeholder workshop, GALS (Gender Action Learning System)⁴ methodology was applied effectively to facilitate gender inclusive analysis and identification of issues, expectations, and action plans in a participatory and fair manner. Both women and men committed to work towards changing gender stereotypes in households and social norms in the community and in the value chain which, they believe, will motivate them to achieve the economic goal of compliance with SRP, for at least 60% of their rice production areas (~300 hectares).

Due to consumer demand, Gentraco and other private sector actors are willing to support sustainable practices. Gentraco also saw women’s economic empowerment as an important factor to achieve SRP compliance and promote a sustainable rice value chain. They also endorsed gender equality as a sustainable business strategy.

PROSPECTS AND LESSONS LEARNED

The goal of GRAISEA is to develop successful models involving both the private sector and smallholder farmers that demonstrate responsible, inclusive, and sustainable business practices. Addressing the challenges in producers’ capacity, the private sector’s commitment to inclusive business, and corporate social responsibility practice and legal frameworks requires more strategic interventions from all stakeholders who should play their roles in transparent and accountable multi-stakeholder platforms.

GRAISEA’s successful stories from the shrimp value chain have been told by inspiring small-scale producers who are energizing rice producers, especially women, to promote sustainable value chain governance. GRAISEA’s stories from its rice value chain initiatives focus on women smallholders who are delivering key messages on “Happy Family, Happy Rice,” which aim to influence and inspire others in the rice sector. Lastly, with GALS methodology, small-scale producers and women will be empowered to change their own lives.



IN FOCUS: HAPPY FAMILY, HAPPY RICE

Participating in the workshop and visualizing households’ needs, Ms. Le Thi Loc (left) from Soc Trang shared that better income does not ensure full happiness if she does not have a voice in planning her own family’s livelihood. Men also admitted that they would feel less burdened and more confident if they could make decisions together with their wives. Analyzing the challenges in SRP application, men recognized that women do not have technical training, so they [women] do not know what they need to do for SRP compliance. This is why women tend to disagree with their husbands in terms of investing more in production, which may even cause conflicts. In the workshop, women exhibited their competence in quickly getting to grips with rice production techniques and, at the same time, indicated that men and women should have equal opportunities and a shared voice for Happy Family, Happy Rice. (Photo by Oxfam in Vietnam)

¹ Productivity 6.0–6.5 tons/hectare against the average of 5.2–5.5 tons/hectare.
² In 2016, Soc Trang produced 2.2 million tons of rice, with 6 tons/ha productivity. Angiang, meanwhile, produced 4 million tons of rice, with 6.08 tons/ha productivity.
³ Under a memorandum of understanding, Gentraco will apply SRP to 500 hectares. In 10 months, they have covered 222 hectares or 44% of the target.
⁴ Developed by Oxfam, GALS is a methodology with a toolset and principles aimed at enabling community-led empowerment.

GRAISEA is a regional programme funded by the Government of Sweden. It aims to improve the livelihoods of women and men small-scale producers in Asia through responsible, gender transformative value chains and private sector investments.

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