



CARE International in Vietnam Partnership Strategy

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Partnership Strategy¹

1. Background

1.1 Socio-economic profile

The rate of economic development in Viet Nam since the 1990s has been exceptionally rapid, and has remained unsurpassed by most developing countries. In 2010 Vietnam achieved middle-income country status. Economic growth is being driven by an expanding private sector, growing urbanisation and increasing migration. However, an estimated 16 million people still live below the poverty line. Almost 50% of the population does not have access to safe sanitation. Many poor and 'near poor' Vietnamese are vulnerable to recurrent natural disasters and climate change shocks. There are complex challenges to reforming the economy and financial systems and to overcoming infrastructure barriers. There are wide income disparities, social and gender inequality, and inequality in health care and education. Migrants, particularly women, are amongst the most vulnerable urban poor. There is a strong correlation between ethnicity, poverty and social exclusion. Around 52% of the nearly 10 million people classified as ethnic minorities (around 12.6% of total population) continue to experience poverty and food insecurity.

1.2 Civil society in Vietnam

Vietnamese civil society comprises nongovernment organisations (NGOs), civil society organisations (CSOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) along with government-affiliated mass organisations (e.g. the Women's Union and Youth Union) and professional organisations. Estimates of the number of CBOs vary from 100,000 to 200,000. Only some are registered. Lack of information and transparency about policies, laws and regulations and restrictions on freedom of expression are institutional barriers to the participation of local communities and citizens in development.

There are five main legal forms of "not-for-profit" organisations, each governed by different government decrees. They are social relief establishments, social and charitable funds, associations, scientific and technological organisations and international NGOs (INGOs). In June 2015, the Ministry for Home Affairs published a draft Law on Association (Decree 45). There are concerns that the draft Law does not adequately reflect the range of roles played by civil society actors and could constrain the space for the emergence of a more vibrant Vietnamese civil society. Nevertheless, many Vietnamese civil society actors have, in recent years, established their credibility and legitimacy as partners in development.

INGOs have been providing assistance to Vietnam for over six decades. Vietnam's Doi Moi policy started in 1986 and resulted in an increasing role for NGO cooperation. By 2010 there were almost 900 INGOs supporting development programs in Vietnam across a range of sectors. *Decree 93/2009/ND-CP* (under the auspices of the Ministry of Planning and Investment) provides a regulatory framework for the

¹ The partnership strategy was updated based on (a) a contextual analysis; (b) the CARE 2020 Global Program Strategy; and (c) a "partnership event" held in December 2015. The partnership event brought together various civil society actors (including current and potential future partners) and CARE staff to critique and redefine CARE's partnership approaches.

mobilisation of INGO resources and defines roles and responsibilities of state management agencies vis-à-vis recipient agencies and the INGOs. Research indicates that administrative burdens and delays in approvals are diluting the benefits of INGO assistance to targeted populations and adding opportunity costs for all project stakeholders (government and nongovernment alike).

1.3 A sector in transition

INGOs are in a transition period, as they adapt themselves to the context of Vietnam’s lower middle-income country status, to a potentially narrowing civil society space, to reorienting donor strategies, and to shifts in stakeholder coordination. Diminishing donor interest along with limited funding timeframes work against innovation and long-term development programming. There are though opportunities for INGOs (a) to develop more inclusive partnership arrangements (and to commit to capacity development, rather than piecemeal training activities); (b) to expand their roles as advocates in such areas as gender equality and social justice; to align their priorities with local, national and regional agendas; (c) to take on a brokering and facilitating role to bring together multi stakeholder and multi partnership interests; and (d) to multiply impact by promoting good practice and learning.

2. CARE’s 2020 Program Strategy

CARE in Vietnam’s long-term program strategy explicitly focuses on the empowerment of marginalised groups, particularly women. This is based on CARE’s own experience and global evidence that **addressing gender inequality** and empowering women is an effective strategy for **reducing poverty and tackling social injustice**. CARE focuses on achieving lasting impact for two key population groups:

Ethnic minority women in remote rural areas that lack equal access to land and capital; are often socially isolated and under-represented; and are vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters.

Socially marginalised people in urban settings (female migrants, sex workers, drug users, people living with HIV, people with disabilities, the elderly and sexual minorities) who often live and work in unsafe environments and are subject to stigma, discrimination, exploitation and abuse.

CARE’s Vision

We seek a world of hope, tolerance and social justice, where poverty has been overcome and people live in dignity and security. CARE International will be a global partner of choice within a worldwide movement dedicated to ending poverty. We will be known everywhere for our unshakeable commitment to the dignity of people.

Alignment with CARE Global Program Strategy

What roles?

- Humanitarian action
- Promoting lasting change & innovative solutions
- Multiplying impact

How?

- Strengthening gender equality and women’s voice
- Promoting inclusive governance
- Increasing resilience

What impact?

- Support 150 million people from the most vulnerable and excluded communities to overcome poverty and injustice

The program strategy highlights three priority areas: enhancing the voice of women, empowering women economically and ending gender-based violence. Gender Equality, Humanitarian Action and Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction are cross cutting themes in all our programming.

3. Partnership principles

Working in partnership has always been closely linked to CARE's core principles and development practice. CARE Vietnam forms partnerships on the basis of "**shared vision, shared values**" and holds itself accountable to modelling the following principles.

Open and respectful communications

We strive to use clear and concise language in our written and spoken communications. We recognize the importance of minority, local languages. We value the knowledge and experience of different groups. We ask questions to explore their views. We seek mutual understanding in our interactions. We treat our partners fairly and work with patience.

Gender equality and diversity

We actively promote gender equality and diversity. We create spaces to ensure women's voices are heard and to ensure women can participate in and contribute to decision-making forums. We practice non-discrimination in our work.

Adaptability

We recognize the strengths, potential and complementarity of our partners. We believe the dynamics of partnerships can and should change over time. We are open to new ideas from our partners. We practice mutual learning and improvement. ^[1]_[SEP]

Transparency

We understand that transparency supports ownership of the partnership relationship, and ownership of the outcomes. We are transparent about the use of resources. We ensure there is clarity about information and shared responsibilities. We engage partners in priority setting, strategy planning, and donor reporting. We reflect together on shortcomings and challenges and opportunities.

Results focused

We hold ourselves accountable for achieving results. We set objectives, define roles and deliver on our commitments. We share responsibility for achieving the agreed outcomes with our partners. We make timely decisions. We commit to resolving difficulties. ^[1]_[SEP]

4. Why partnerships

CARE defines partnership as *a purposeful relationship, with clearly defined objectives, that engages the strengths of different actors to contribute to positive impacts for marginalised and vulnerable groups.*

The purpose of working in partnerships is twofold:

- a. To engage with a wide range of stakeholders to bring about desired **significant and lasting change** through our programs.
- b. To **multiply impact** (by scaling up good practice, influencing policy and practice and shifting behavioural norms and attitudes).

More specifically we seek:

- To ***mobilise and extend the capacity of civil society actors*** so that they can address fundamental development problems and contribute to civil society.
- To ***partner with the government*** to promote changes that poverty and social injustice.
- To actively ***contribute to expanding the enabling environment*** for civil society.
- To ***leverage knowledge and impact-based evidence*** to support ***policy dialogues***.

To achieve these aims, we recognise that:

- We must strengthen CARE's capacity to work in ways that are both ***efficient*** and ***effective*** (achieve the desired results).
- We must increase the range and forms of our partnership relations. Refers to different partnership modalities (e.g. operational, collaborative, strategic, and non-resource based relationships) and to different partnership actors (e.g. with CBOs, CSOs, national to local-level government bodies, the private sector and the media).

For example:

CARE Vietnam affirms its commitment to partner with the Government of Vietnam in the design and implementation of pro-poor development policy and programs. We will continue efforts to strengthen national-level government partnerships, including the People's Aid Coordinating Committee (PACCOM) and sectoral ministries also linked to our advocacy work. At a provincial, district and commune level, CARE will continue its partnership with People's Committees and representative organisations, such as the Women's Union and Youth Union and governmental bodies responsible for health, agricultural, forestry or economic and community development.

CARE Vietnam is committed to partnerships that support an enabling environment for civil society organisations. This commitment recognises positive trends over the past decade where citizens are increasingly organizing themselves around shared interests. Our approach will be to support civil society groups to evolve and to be responsive to poverty and social marginalisation. At the same time we will draw on evidence-based dialogues to show case the positive contributions of civil society groups to development.

Some civil society organisations require strengthened capacity in areas such as developing strategies for social change, for constituency representation and for engaging with the government and donors around the development agenda. Our work in this domain will emphasise organisational resilience, in addition to consideration of the operating space.

Recognising that the private sector is a key driver of change, CARE Vietnam will develop private sector engagement strategies as a means to promote positive impacts for marginalised groups e.g. promoting responsible practice in interactions with local communities, creating dignified work opportunities for marginalised groups and promoting innovation that adds value to economies in which the private sector operates.

5. Partnership lessons

Analysis and reflection on our partnership practice in the past has highlighted key lessons:

Invest in ensuring clarity of purpose, and roles and responsibilities

- Investing at an early stage in achieving a mutually agreed purpose and roles and accountabilities is a key success factor. These agreements should be negotiated up front and then written into a Partnership Agreement document or Partnership Contract. Because partnerships evolve over time into new forms of relationships, periodic reviews should be undertaken and, where appropriate agreement documents should be updated. For example, in the set up phase, CARE might take the lead on partnership management and provide high levels of support and oversight. Overtime, the partner will likely take on more of these responsibilities. We also recognise that not all partnerships are the same, and the level of support provided will vary according to the partner type and modality.

Invest in robust partner selection processes

- Our experience suggests that at a project level, it is important to invest in partnership selection processes, so as to identify partners that can complement and add value to the work and to ensure that government and civil society partners are “fit for purpose” (they can fulfil the required expectations). It also ensures that we do not set up unrealistic expectations. CARE will regularly review and update its capacities, tools and systems for partner selection.

Commit to managing the relationships

- We recognise that establishing effective partnerships requires a sustained commitment to trustful relations. We are careful to not perpetuate unequal power relations in our partnerships and to not impose our agenda or personal views onto others. We thus commit to asking our partners for feedback about how well we are doing. We do this formally (through annual partner review meetings) and informally (in our regular interactions).

Seek out harmonised approaches that are mutually beneficial

- CARE Vietnam has piloted and developed innovative and positive approaches to partnership and community mobilisation. However this “learning” currently sits at the level of projects and our sectoral teams. In order to elevate our practice, we recognise that our approaches need to be more coherently linked at programmatic levels, harmonised across CARE Vietnam, and be more strongly evidence based around good practice.

Put in place systems and processes that enable partnerships

- CARE will not be able to achieve equal and effective partnerships as long as its systems, procedures and policies do not properly reflect its partnership principles. Current systems are overly focused on a control and compliance approach that is reflective of sub-grantee relations. CARE’s Finance and Administration systems will be strengthened, to ensure they are more enabling of different types of partnership relationships, and the programmatic outcomes sought, while also ensuring that CARE Vietnam is able to maintain stewardship of donor funds.

6. What we bring to our partnership relations

CARE's contributions to its partnership relations are as follows:

<p>Organisational Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct participatory organisational / institutional assessments and develop Institutional and Organisational Strengthening (IOS) plans. • Provide follow up capacity building in areas identified, for example, Governance, HR, financial management, program quality, and strategic planning and business planning. • Support establishment of community-based organisations – particularly Village & Savings Loans Association – through trainings and an accompanying CBO Manual). • Share learning on fund raising and support proposal-writing skills. • Share best practice organisational systems and processes relevant to organisational effectiveness and efficiency.
<p>Influencing policy formulation & implementation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and disseminate evidence of best practice. • Support Advocacy capacity building (e.g. training in advocacy, strategy planning, communications and M&E), disseminate good practice approaches to support evidence-based policy analysis, policy briefs and voice. • Participate in and support alliance building and networking (EMWG, CCWG, GBV etc.) to influence policy dialogues.
<p>Bringing new approaches and techniques</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce and adapt new techniques in Women's Economic Empowerment (e.g. results-based monitoring, outcome mapping and the Women's Empowerment Index), Gender, gender-based violence and climate change reliance. • Help in developing models and technical guidelines based on partners' experience. • Advocate for replicating new approaches with civil society organisations. • Share new approaches with partners on request (resources available).
<p>Networking</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate connections between civil society organisations to promote learning exchanges, coalition building etc. • Participate in and contribute to working groups e.g. the Ethnic Minority Working Group, Climate Change Working Group, and the Gender-based Violence Network to learn more about our impact populations and to influence policy dialogues. • Help civil society organisations communicate with and link to INGOs/UN agencies, Donors and national-level government to increase their voice and visibility. • Participate in and contribute to CARE (and other) regional and global forums to share and learn about best practice and bring these back to our partners.
<p>Mobilising resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish links between partners and donors through donor meetings, events and co-branding. • Provide training and follow up coaching on proposal writing • Engage in shared project design (including where the partner is the lead). • Engage early on project concepts (both those that come from Care and those that come from the partners).
<p>Engaging with the private sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help partners identify what they can offer to a private sector engagement and vice-versa • Identify potential private sector partners (within Vietnam and beyond). • Link identified companies with partners based on mutual areas of interest. • Invest in new private sector engagement strategies and share learning (new approaches and techniques) with partners • Refine CARE's PSE Strategy and share with partners. • Introduce and adapt approaches / techniques to support CARE's program focus areas (Women's Economic Empowerment, Gender equality, GBV, climate reliance etc.).