SOCIAL COHESION IN THE VALUE CHAINS
Founded in 1945, CARE is a global leader within a worldwide movement dedicated to ending poverty. We are known everywhere for our unshakable commitment to the dignity of people. CARE has worked in the Philippines since 1949, providing emergency relief when disaster strikes, helping communities prepare for disasters, and implementing sustainable livelihood projects.

About the Typhoon Haiyan Reconstruction Assistance (THRA) Project

CARE Philippines is implementing the Typhoon Haiyan Reconstruction Assistance Project (THRA) since 2015 to support the economic reconstruction of communities affected by Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in ten focus municipalities. By addressing the root causes preventing access to knowledge, skills, products and services, CARE’s interventions seek to contribute to the economic well-being of women and men living in remote rural areas where the economy and infrastructure were severely affected by Haiyan.

CARE’s project approach applies the Value Chain (VC) Development Framework to gain a deeper understanding of market dynamics, demand, supply, and inter-firm relationships, with an aim to promote ethical business practices and for producers to extract more value and facilitate the development of more equitable relationships and benefits in the value chain.

The THRA project uses the concept of Social Cohesion to determine its direct relationship with economic empowerment. Socially-cohesive communities have broader access to resources and opportunities leading to economic empowerment, and vice versa. This is the key assumption underpinning the need for a close examination of the meaning of this concept in communities.
Summary

Social cohesion in value chain contexts is achieved through changes in agency, relations and structure for women and men, as defined in CARE’s gender equality framework. The THRA project has enabled them to build their agency in developing self-confidence and ability to build relationships with others in pursuing their economic aspirations.

The project has also provided a conducive environment in navigating and addressing unequal power relations and disparities through bridging positive relationships and connections and working towards collective action. Through collective action, changes at the structural level is being realized which is the path to more profound transformative change.

Economic well-being and empowerment leads to more socially-cohesive societies and vice versa. The project recognizes that working on economic empowerment not only entails ensuring productivity and market efficiency and growth but addressing the unequal gender division of work in the three spheres (household, enterprise, community). Thus, economic empowerment, together with dismantling unequal power relations, leads to social cohesion and vice versa.

Enhancing the level of socio-economic cohesion among women and men along the value chains

The project has enabled the increase in social cohesion among women and men along the value chain, especially the smallholder farmers that the project is supporting. In the study conducted by external consultants, social cohesion is defined as “the capacity of community to accommodate diversity and minimize economic and social disparities that can marginalize certain groups, through ensuring the welfare of its members, enacting inclusive policies and promoting active citizenship” (Council of Europe 2004).

There are lots of economic and social disparities that women and men farmers are facing which are essentially gender-based and can marginalize certain groups. The major disparity identified in the social cohesion study is income poverty. CARE’s internal survey showed that men have higher annual income than women. This is perpetuated by the view that women’s income is only supplementary to men’s in the household. There is also a tendency to focus on women’s productive (paid economic activities) needs over reproductive (unpaid household management and care work) needs.

This may reinforce multiple burden on women and enforce bias for women who already enjoy a degree of freedom in their households that enable them to take on paid work over women who consciously choose to concentrate on full-time household management. There is also weakening of social bonds among women especially when the work is largely individual and home-based with limited opportunity to build their collective identity and action.

The project provides conducive environment to minimize economic and social disparities. Social cohesion in the lived realities of the communities is about social relationships to help each other and work together to fight these disparities.

The project has enhanced social cohesion among communities through the following:

- Agency building and norm shifting through household gender sensitization and gender mainstreaming in training and technical assistance;
- Establishing strong linkages among women and men across value chains through market-driven lead enterprise and value chain clusters;
- Increased ownership and collective decision making for farmers through common services facility provision;
- Encouraging participation in formal and informal decision-making spaces; and
- Leveraging government and private sector resources through community cooperation.
On the other hand, the household gender sensitization and values formation in particular touched on shifting behaviors to improve relationships of men and women in three spheres: household, enterprise, and community.

There is increased valuation of domestic work, shared labor at home and in the enterprise, as well as more socially cohesive formal and informal relations within and across VC nodes. Although it is a long way to go, the project is contributing to farmers’ journey to transformative change through dismantling and changing the unequal gender division of work in families, enterprises and communities and thus leading to more socially-cohesive society.

**Establishing strong linkages among women and men across value chains through market-driven lead enterprise and value chain clusters**

The project has facilitated the building of enterprise and value chain networks and linkages. CARE’s 2018 survey showed that majority of respondents (97%) were able to develop market linkages at the barangay (36%) and municipal levels (62%). While many farmers have already been part of farmers’ associations before, the project enabled them to engage in larger-scale and diversified enterprise activities and in specific commodity value chains.

The project has allowed interaction of farmers within and across (horizontal and vertical linkages) the value chains. Within the value chains, farmers can help other farmers in giving planting materials, in land preparation, in informal financial lending, and in exchanging knowledge in agricultural techniques. Some communities have utilized existing social capital, practicing “bayanihan” or community volunteerism in farm and community activities. Abaca farmers trek up on the mountains in groups, plant abaca together, share tools and implement, harvest and strip fibers together, and carry the extracted fibers together down the mountain.

In vegetables and herbs value chains, a strong social cohesion between women and men have been developed through the communal demo farms. Men shared experiences of helping fellow women farmers in laborious tasks, sharing tools, as well as giving them additional tips in farming. The same is true among women farmers, herbs groups in particular, that have solidified their relationships.

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**Stories of Partnerships, Shared Leadership**

In 2015, the Pitac Upland Farmers Association (PUFA) from Barangay Pitac, Tibiao. They were only three leaders then and none of them were ready to take on the leadership. PUFA then approached, Jujian Agustin, pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines (UCCP), a Christian denomination in their area to take the lead. They trusted him, and they were impressed with his sincerity and leadership in the church. Pastor Jujuan worked on all the documents so that their association would be registered with the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). He proved to be a worthy president who inspired his association members. In 2015 the Sustainable Livelihood Program of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) aided them in their first project of planting bananas.

After Haiyan, all the bananas were destroyed. PUFA was then called by the Municipal Government of Tibiao to attend a Municipal Stakeholder’s meeting. They were advised to expand to abaca production in their area. CARE provided assistance for the establishment of abaca plantation and provision of farm tools, fertilizers and abaca corms.

The engagement of the organization in different activities with specific government agencies such as Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), Department of Social Welfare and Department (DSWD), National Irrigation Authority (NIA), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) and for other specific projects like CARE complement each other. Weaving institutional partnership keeps their members excited of the possibilities. The increase in members’ participation is, for them, telling of the positivity from these partnerships, and how a strong sense of social cohesion aids their association to grow and develop.
Agency building and norm shifting through household gender sensitization and gender mainstreaming in training and technical assistance

The package of training and technical assistance has enabled men and women to build their agencies – being confident to pursue their individual and collective economic aspirations and developing their abilities to make connections and relationships with other players along the value chain – laying the groundwork to achieve social cohesion.

In seaweed value chain, women farmers used to plant individually but through community organizing of CARE, they have learned to share planting materials and tips for planting. In cassava value chain, practice of bayanihan (cooperation) in planting cassava in communal farms like in the case of Liberty Farmers’ Association, use of common service facilities like the solar dryer in Parag-um, and formal lending within association members of Baruguhay Sur Farmers’ Association have strengthened social ties.

To date, there are 193 community-based organizations that are part of the clusters. The input supply cluster supplies vermicompost, organic fertilizers and planting materials to the production cluster. Within clusters of similar functions, for example in processing, the abaca strippers supply to knotters and twiners. The knotters and twiners, in turn, supply to handicraft weavers.

The production and processing clusters have become suppliers of fresh and semi-processed products to marketing sub-consolidators and lead enterprises that the project helped establish. Sub-consolidators have a big role to play as 53% of farmers said sub-consolidators is their main market, followed by walk-in buyers (11%) and institutional buyers (6%). Farmer-producers showed strong unity by committing to contribute to the volume requirements of buyers instead of selling individually to the public market.
They also ensured that their products are of good quality and free from impurities and tampering. Through working with the clusters, members treat each other as family and they not only value the focus commodities as a source of income, but also as a social and emotional support system. The lead enterprises also ensure trust of its members by exhibiting strong leadership and avoiding self-serving interests. These examples show strong value chain governance. Farmers’ journey to transformative change is enhanced through the lead enterprises and value chain clusters set up, the leaders and members championing it, and the programs and services being delivered. The project also noted that equality and empowerment do not solely rest on market efficiency and growth, and measures to bring about women’s empowerment is not limited to their integration into productive labor. In fact, economic empowerment, together with dismantling of unequal power relations, leads to more socially-cohesive societies and vice versa.

Increased ownership & collective decision making for farmers through common service facility provision

The project has been able to mobilize both existing and newly-formed groups, formal an informal, to individually and collectively gain access and manage common service facilities (such as demonstration farms, greenhouses, drip irrigation, cassava solar dryer) and farm tools and equipment (such as soil cultivator, cassava granulator and chipping machine, and abaca stripping machine). Limited access to such assets or resources have previously made it difficult for farmers to achieve agricultural productivity. Farmers have learned to be good stewards, instill ownership, and promote camaraderie for their mutual benefits. They also have a hand in decision making on its design, utilization and maintenance for sustainability.

Encouraging participation in formal and informal decision-making spaces

There are 221 women representatives to the Municipal Development Council (MDC) and many of them are also active in participating in informal working groups and decision-making spaces. They are also presidents of farmers’ associations. As part of a socially-cohesive group supported by the project, they are able to push for policies (i.e. ordinance to enforce a system of collection and delivery of household and market waste in support to community vermicomposting facility in Leyte) and leverage resources (financial support for the establishment of herb processing center and provision of garden cultivator in Iloilo) that will contribute to the development of the industry value chain.
Eufre Farmers’ Association in Antique was able to lobby for the construction of an abaca processing center. Amahit Farmers’ Association in Leyte was able to acquire a cassava tractor. Poblacion Southeast in Iloilo was able to acquire agricultural inputs, mulching sheets and trellis.

Breaking through Community Distrust

Rhea decided to transfer to San Remigio from Iloilo in 2015. It was mostly a personal decision: her parents owned a piece of land there and none of her siblings wanted to manage it, and she had just separated from her husband. But she was also struck by the poverty in the area and thought that maybe she could do something to help. She recognized that she is not well-off herself but she is doing better than her San Remigio neighbors who do not own land. When she heard about the CARE THRA-Abaca Value Chain (AVC) project, she thought it was a good opportunity for the women to have paid work. The project called for interested people to be trained in handicraft-making, and eventually be integrated into the value chain.

Soon after the training, Rhea formed a collective of abaca handicraft makers. With her previous experience of working in government and non-government organizations, Rhea was familiar with the process on legal registration, operational management and the like. She knew it would not be easy since establishing a livelihood-based group was also a new venture for her, but she knew it could make a difference in the lives of poor women in her community. Yet as noble as her intentions were, the local people did not trust her because she was a dayo [not a native to the place]. Rhea later found out that the women who expressed interest in joining her were discouraged by other people, saying that she would just use them to raise funds then run away with the money. While Rhea knew that part of this narrative was because of the negative experiences of people with cooperatives before, she could not help think that it was largely because she was a dayo.

Rhea persevered. Over time, 30 women joined her in the collective and they are now making a living from making abaca handicrafts under the CARE THRA-AVC project. Rhea was proud to say that despite their small number, their group is solid and trust each other. The women are earning their own income, some to complement the wages of their other household members, while others stand as the main breadwinner of their families. They are excited to work together towards developing their products, and collectively contributing to the further developing of the Abaca Value Chain.
Vegetable farmers in Lemery, Iloilo enjoy their good harvest of vegetables showcased in the First Vegetable Harvest Festival in the municipality. (Photo by Dennis Amata/CARE)