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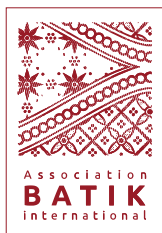


**WOMEN'S**  
EMPOWERMENT

**LESSONS LEARNED FROM**

**WOMEN'S CLUBS EXPERIENCE**

## PHU NU'S PARTNERS



Founded in 1998, **BATIK International** is a French non-profit organization that has been based in Vietnam since 2008. The organization develops sustainable projects in South Asia, Europe and the Mediterranean region to enhance the social and professional integration of vulnerable people. BATIK Int. has developed many projects promoting the economic empowerment of women.

<http://batik-international.org>



The **Centre for Development and Integration (CDI)** is a Vietnamese non-governmental, non-profit organization working for the rights of disadvantaged groups to build an equitable society that enjoys solidarity and sustainable development. Its mission is to make a contribution to narrowing social gaps and to finding solutions to social issues as they emerge through support, advocacy and capacity-building activities.

<http://cdvietnam.org>



Founded in 1976 and based in Vietnam since 1998, **GRET** is an international development NGO that does work ranging from on-the-ground projects all the way up to influencing policy, with the aim of providing sustainable and innovative answers to the challenges of poverty and inequality. Its professionals provide lasting, innovative solutions for fair development in the field and work to positively influence policy.

<http://www.gret.org.vn>

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# GLOSSARY

- ❖ **Local public services** ⇒ *Health centres and public schools.*
- ❖ **Service-providers** ⇒ *Cf. Local public services.*
- ❖ **Local authorities** ⇒ *The People's Committee of the province, district and/or commune and the governmental administration of the province, district and/or commune.*
- ❖ **Policymakers** ⇒ *The Vietnamese government, People's Committees.*
- ❖ **Local partners/  
local organizations** ⇒ *The Women's Union and/or the Labour Union.*
- ❖ **Local partners'  
representatives** ⇒ *Members of the Women's Union and/or the Labour Union who are involved in the project.*
- ❖ **Members of partners'  
structures** ⇒ *Members of the Women's Union and/or the Labour Union.*
- ❖ **The People's Committee** ⇒ *The Vietnamese Communist Party representation in the province, district and/or commune.*
- ❖ **The project team** ⇒ *GRET + the Women's Union (Vinh Phuc)/CDI + Labour Union (Hai Duong) + BATIK.*
- ❖ **Meeting and working groups** ⇒
- ❖ **The project's officers** ⇒ *Members of the project team who work on the field with the others actors.*
- ❖ **Staff** ⇒ *All the people employed by a particular organization.*
- ❖ **Administrative staff** ⇒ *All the people employed by a particular organization on the administrative duties.*
- ❖ **Women leaders** ⇒ *Members of a Women's Club that have been elected by theirs peers and trained by the project team to manage the regular activities of the club (meetings) and to be spokespersons advancing members' interests and opinions.*
- ❖ **Female migrant workers** ⇒ *The primary beneficiaries of the Phu Nu project; women coming from the rural areas of Vietnam to work in factories in the industrial zones of Vietnam.*

# GLOSSARY

- ❖ **Club members/the clubs' members** ⇒ *Female migrant workers who participate in the meetings and other activities organized by the Women's Clubs.*
- ❖ **Local stakeholders** ⇒ *Actors that have an impact on the living and/or working conditions of the female migrant workers. In the framework of the project, those actors are the companies, the landlords and the local authorities, on the district level.*
- ❖ **The local government** ⇒ *The Vietnamese government and administration's representation at the province, district and/or commune level.*
- ❖ **The (business) companies** ⇒ *Factories operating in the industrial zones where the migrant women work.*
- ❖ **Migrants** ⇒ *People coming from the rural areas of Vietnam to work in industrial zones (Cf. Female migrant workers).*
- ❖ **Migrants' representatives** ⇒ *Women's leaders.*
- ❖ **Provincial stakeholders** ⇒ *As local stakeholders, but at the province level.*
- ❖ **The landlords** ⇒ *The owners of the common housing areas where the migrant workers live.*
- ❖ **The other tenants (in the housing area)** ⇒ *Persons living in the housing areas, but who are not members of a club.*
- ❖ **Expert trainers** ⇒ *Persons identified by the project to educate the women's leaders on one of the specific subjects selected by the team. For example: doctors for health issues, lawyers or members of the labour union for the Labour Law, etc.*
- ❖ **Resource person** ⇒ *Persons from the public services and local partners that participate punctually in the meetings organized by the women's clubs on subjects in their field of expertise and work, to enhance the participants' knowledge of these subjects.*
- ❖ **Trainers** ⇒ *Cf. Expert trainers.*
- ❖ **A trained professional** ⇒ *Cf. Expert trainers.*

# GLOSSARY

- ❖ **Strategic guests** ⇒ *Cf. Resource persons.*
- ❖ **Facilitators** ⇒ *Those who lead meetings. For women's club meetings, these would be the women's leaders with the support of the project officers.*
- ❖ **Participants** ⇒ *Persons who are present during a meeting.*
- ❖ **Community** ⇒ *All the female migrant workers.*
- ❖ **The temporary leaders of the clubs** ⇒ *At the beginning of the project, some women were selected based on their motivation and involvement to be women's leaders. However, as the clubs had not been set up yet, they could not be elected. Before their confirmation by the club's members, there were only temporary women's leaders.*
- ❖ **Deputy leaders** ⇒ *Members of a Women's Club who are also elected and who assist the women's leaders in the regular management of the club. If a leader leaves the club, the deputy leader would replace her.*
- ❖ **Other external stakeholders** ⇒ *Cf. Local stakeholders*
- ❖ **Volunteers** ⇒ *Law students who participate in the women's clubs' meetings to provide support in term of knowledge.*
- ❖ **Beneficiaries** ⇒ *Cf. Female migrant workers.*
- ❖ **CGTV** ⇒ *"Confédération Générale des Travailleurs Vietnamiens" – The "Vietnam General Confederation of Labour" is the state-led workers union of Vietnam.*

# PART I. PHU NU'S SELF-MANAGED CLUBS

## 1.1. SOME BACKGROUND ON THE PHU NU PROJECT

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Following its adoption of the *Doi moi* (Renovations) policy in 1986, Vietnam has enjoyed a strong and stable growth rate of about 7%, which has significantly reduced the rate of poverty in the country. In 2010, Vietnam became a Middle Income Country (MIC). Nonetheless, difficulties remain, including a very high inflation rate, growing inequality among the country's 85 million inhabitants, high population growth (each year, 1 million young people join the labour market), the exponential expansion of cities (the country was 27.8% urbanized in 2008, an increase of 7.6% over 1989) and the growth of urban poverty and corruption. Also, the Vietnamese economy is heavily dependent on its ability to export manufactured goods, mainly on behalf of contractors from Northern countries. The shock of the Global Economic Crisis led to a decline in exports to the US, European and Japanese markets. To support growth driven by a strong export industry and a large workforce, over the past twenty years the country has encouraged the development of industrial zones in peri-urban areas. This has led to heavy internal migration, mostly from rural areas. 6.6 million people migrated within the country between 2004 and 2009. In 2008, the Vietnam General Confederation of Labour (VGCL) estimated that 70% of workers in industrial zones were internal migrants. In its report on internal migration published in 2015, the General Statistics Office of Vietnam stated that 13.6% of the Vietnamese population is internal migrants, those numbers going up to 17.3% for the population aged between 15 and 59 years old. Moreover, 19.7% of the urban population is migrant.

These migrants, usually low-skilled or unskilled, will work as workers in the industrial sector or join the informal sector. Informal work in Vietnam comprises two different categories: undeclared workers (street vendors, maids, construction workers, service sector workers, etc.) and informal factory workers with precarious contracts less than three months in

duration. These migrants greatly increase the population density of the locales in which they settle. This influx of migrant consumers causes migration from neighbouring towns to increase and boosts the informal sector. Finally, there are also significant transfers between informal and formal labour (especially due to the high turnover of factory workers), each feeding the other and the former sometimes being seen as a first step towards the latter.

In 2009, the general census of population and housing showed that women have become the majority among the internal migrants in Vietnam. They represent 54% of the flow of migrants. The vast majority are between 15 and 29 years of age, with a peak between 20 and 24 years. Most female migrants have no previous professional experience. They usually are unmarried and live alone. Women working in the formal sector are mainly employed in the textile and footwear industries. Female migrant workers are especially vulnerable to the risks of joblessness, low pay and poor working conditions, as they often lack the knowledge and skills they need to claim their rights.

The huge increase in population and industrial activity in these areas far outpaces the development of local services and infrastructure, leading to the development of pollution and poor living conditions for workers. The transformation of agricultural areas into industrial zones has led to massive changes in the organization of community life, with a negative impact on the most vulnerable populations, namely migrant factory workers. Local public or private resources for this demographic are available, but there is no effective link between such initiatives and infrastructure and services are often overwhelmed by the tremendous need. There is no comprehensive response to these transformations, as the phenomenon of "industrial migration" is a relatively recent development and local authorities have not

yet established a clear reference body responsible for the management of urban workforces.

Aware of these realities, a consortium of three organizations, namely **BATIK International** and **GRET** (two French NGOs) and the **Centre for Development**

**and Integration (CDI)** (a Vietnamese NGO), has been leading this project since 2014 with the aim of improving the “living conditions of migrant women living in industrial zones.”

## 1.2. THE PHU NU PROJECT'S APPROACH

The project targets two provinces that are heavily affected by the issues addressed by the project, which are the vulnerability of resident and migrant female workers in the formal and informal sectors in industrial areas due in part to inadequate management and the paucity of services available. The provinces of Hai Duong and Vinh Phuc are located in the Red River Delta, close to Hanoi (60 km), where, as in all industrial areas in the region, farmland has been transformed into industrial production zones. Hai Duong and Vinh Phuc have become two of the country's provinces most affected by rural-to-urban migration. Hai Duong is at the heart of northern Vietnam's economic triangle, which connects the provinces of Hanoi, Haiphong and Quang Ninh. Vinh Phuc is halfway between Hanoi and the remote mountainous regions. The population is around 2 million in Hai Duong, which has 250,000 workers, compared to 1 million in Vinh Phuc, which has 43,700 workers.

Female migrant workers are especially vulnerable to the risks of joblessness, low pay and poor working conditions, as they often lack the knowledge and skills they need to claim their rights. Workers usually work ten to twelve hours a day, six days a week. They have limited access to public services and other facilities because they do not know where to find them and because stakeholders may not know their specific needs. This is not to call into question the quality of the work of the various public services, but these are often not suitable given the conditions many women face, such as tight schedules and difficulty accessing some services due to their status as migrants (unequal access). A survey led by the IRC in the framework of the Phu Nu project (2014) showed that the majority (84%) of migrant women had never used legal consultancy services, and that out of that segment, about 70% did not know where nor how to claim their rights.

The Phu Nu project's objective is to improve the living conditions and social inclusion of women working in the industrial areas of Khai Quang Industrial Park in Vinh Phuc Province and Nam Sach in Hai Duong Province. The project aims specifically to reinforce and empower female migrant workers who are less likely to have their social rights guaranteed. Through support for organizing self-managed women's clubs where migrant workers live so that they can have access to legal awareness education sessions, it reaches out to a great number of women. Such clubs are designed to raise awareness on social questions, such as workers' rights, health and gender equality. Located in shared dormitories, they are facilitated by women leaders and trained by the organizations conducting the project. Not only are the bearers of rights enabled to access information on their rights, but they are also empowered through these collective sessions to take the initiative to protect their rights.

The Phu Nu project aims to contribute to positive change and to have an impact on economic, social and local institutional dimensions in these two provinces. With the support of the Women's Union and the CGVT and the participation of local resource persons, the Phu Nu project has created self-managed clubs led by women with the purpose of spreading information on social rights, enabling women to share their experiences with one another women and identifying requests for local services.

The Phu Nu project's approach of using self-managed clubs is founded on the conviction that an **empowered community** is one that is confident, inclusive, organized, cooperative and influential.

- By “confident,” we mean working in a way that increases people's skills, knowledge and confidence and that instils a belief that they can make a difference.



- By “inclusive,” we mean working in a way that recognizes that discrimination exists, that promotes equality of opportunity and good relations between groups and that challenges inequality and exclusion.
- By “organized,” we mean working in a way that unites people around common issues and concerns in organizations and groups that are open, democratic and accountable.
- By “cooperative,” we mean working a way that builds positive relationships between groups, that identifies common messages, that develops and maintains links to national bodies and that promotes work partnerships.
- By “influential,” we mean working in a way that encourages communities and equips them to take part in and influence decisionmaking, services and activities.

There are various definitions and dimensions of empowerment

- ❖ **Economic empowerment:** Economic empowerment seeks to ensure that people have the appropriate skills, capabilities and resources and access to secure and sustainable incomes and livelihoods. Related to this, some organisations focus heavily on the importance of access to assets and resources.
- ❖ **Human and social empowerment:** Empowerment as a multidimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. This is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities and their society, by being able to act on issues that they define as important (Page and Czuba, 1999).
- ❖ **Political empowerment:** The capacity to analyse, organise and mobilise. This results in the collective action that is needed for collective change. It is often related to a rights-based approach to empowerment and the empowering of citizens to claim their rights and entitlements (Piron and Watkins, 2004)<sup>1</sup>.

### Main Results of the Phu Nu Project

- ❖ Since February 2014, the Phu Nu project has supported the operations of 30 self-managed clubs in Vinh Phuc and Hai Duong.
- ❖ 60 women leaders were trained to facilitate the clubs.
- ❖ Around 620 women regularly attend the meetings.
- ❖ 60 resource persons participated in the clubs' meetings.
- ❖ 60 representatives of the public services and landlords were made more aware of the migrant women situation.

<sup>1</sup> Source : ODI - <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/5500.pdf>

### 1.3. METHODOLOGY FOR DOCUMENTING OPERATIONS

The capitalization process in the Phu Nu project served to document the establishment and implementation of women's clubs in industrial zones. It aimed to preserve the lessons learned during the project in order to replicate those clubs in other locations, but also to question the practices engaged in during the project and to find ways to improve them.

Capitalization aims to preserve the experience of the person who conducted an activity. This means that his own opinion, ideas and point of view about what happened and how it happened are as important as the documents that have been established during the activity. To collect this subjective point of view, six interviews were conducted with members of the Phu Nu project team during the last semester of the project. Those meetings aimed at collecting experiences by way of targeted questions on different points relating to a given topic.

For each topic, the final report answered the following questions, which provided a description of the topic, an analysis of the activity and data on contextual specificities:

#### Description:

- According to you, what are the final objectives of this activity?

- What are the needs of the beneficiaries as relates to this topic?
- What are the results of the activity as relates to this topic?
- What tools were developed for making progress as relates to this topic?
- What steps is the activity related to this topic composed of?
- What material means were used by the project to conduct this activity?

#### Analysis:

- According to you, what are the key elements of the activity as relates to this topic?
- What are the obstacles encountered during the activity? What are the risks?
- What improvements could be made to the activity as relates to this particular topic? What are the prospects for this activity?

#### Specificities of the Context:

- Are there any cultural, geographic, religious or other elements that had an impact on the activity?

**The capitalization process studied the five different steps of the creation and operation of the self-managed clubs:**

1. Building the Capacities of Women Leaders
2. Creating a Women's Club
3. Running a Women's Club
4. Improving the Relationship between a Women's Club and Local Partners
5. Promoting the Role of the Clubs

# PART 2. OVERALL ANALYSIS

The results of the Phu Nu project show us that the creation of women's clubs is relevant to migrant women in terms of the improvement of their living conditions. In theory, the object was to develop women's empowerment, meaning to develop their capacities to act and advocate for change in their situations. Practice has since shown us that as long as people are not aware that they have rights, they will not be in a position to defend them. The acquisition of power by women is not straightforward. Several conditions have to be met to begin the process of propelling those migrant women from awareness to action.

## 2.1. MEETING THE CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

### 1) Improving Women's Knowledge of Their Rights and of the Context in Which They Live

Empowerment is linked with the acquisition of means for the change of a situation by the individuals themselves, through teachings, incentives for personal development and well-being, etc. It is by using those means that a seizure of power is possible. Development of a critic awareness leads to becoming aware of the mechanisms behind situations of vulnerability.

The central activity of the women's clubs was to inform female migrant workers of their rights, with the help of outsider speakers, and to develop their ability to act to improve their living conditions, mainly as regards housing and access to public services.

*"I feel more confident in asking the company for benefits for myself and other workers." - Nguyen Thi Phuong, women's leader in Hai Duong.*

Furthermore, representatives of labour unions underlined those clubs' role as intermediaries, which has permitted them to identify the expectations and needs of workers who are not affiliated to a union. Those workers used to lack information

on very practical situations (maternity leave, the overtime system, rights regarding holidays, etc.).

*"The employers receive feedback from workers so that they can improve and develop." - Ngo Thai Phuong, Production Director in Hai Duong.*

### 2) Reinforcing Individual and Collective Power for a Social Transformation

Access to knowledge also permits a person or group to develop internal strength (self-confidence). Changes in one's situation depend on his ability to feel himself strong enough to carry on living or functioning in new ways. Collectively, this translates into the ability for a group to organize itself to achieve a common goal.

*"I was a quiet person and I didn't socialize ... Now, I feel more confident standing in front of a crowd." - Nguyen Van Tuan, club leader in Hai Duong .*

Through the organization of informational meetings inside the clubs, women have the feeling that it is possible for them to make choices and to exercise greater control over various aspects of their lives. Through collective mobilization, this feeling can lead to a real mastery. Collective power can indeed have an effect upon social and economic stakes in a community, but also more globally upon the public authorities. However, empowerment is a long and variable process: individuals do not change constantly—their behaviors vary according to their personal history and several external factors (political, social or economic). As such, it has to be underlined that collective empowerment cannot exist without its individual counterpart; the links between those two aspects of power is decisive to producing change.

*“A lot of the women leaders have expressed their desire to exchange and share their stories with each other. They see the training sessions as times to gain new knowledge about the topics, but also to get to know each other better and to create a network among themselves.” (See the “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders” card)*

*“Women should be encouraged to share their issues and questions among themselves first, in order to seek support from their colleagues. ... [In the framework of the Phu Nu project, a] Facebook page was established in 2016 so that female workers could share their concerns and discuss them.” (See the “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders” card).*

### 3) Relying on Women Leaders

Individual development is facilitated by the group, but the group also progresses according to the abilities of its individual members. It is crucial to attend to this development at several levels. Support for the rise of women leaders is not an end in itself; it is a means of ensuring the continued empowerment of the workers.

*“The clubs have been designed to be sustainable, and the most important asset for their success in this regard is the ability of their members to manage themselves. ... The main element in the successful management of a club is a motivated trained leader.” (See the “Creating a Women’s Club” and “Running a Women’s Club” sheets).*

To support this process of change, women leaders take on some responsibilities for the group, such as speaking in public to defend the interests of the club, communicating with and raising the awareness of the public authorities and companies on the problems of the female migrant workers, networking with different actors and meeting with the stakeholders. The project team underlines the importance of supporting the women leaders with specific training and personalized support.

*“Becoming a facilitator for a group requires a set of capacities and self-confidence. As the project aimed to ensure the sustainability of women’s clubs, the women leaders had to develop certain abilities:*

- *all the abilities needed to facilitate a women’s club, i.e., to manage all the logistical aspects, to have enough relevant knowledge and to provide support to other women.*
- *the ability to play a key role in building and maintaining a close relationship*
- *a sufficient capacity for self-confidence.” (See “Build the capacities of Women Leaders” sheet)*

The project team relied on the landlords’ knowledge of the women to identify potential women leaders, especially motivated and dynamic women in the housing areas. However, the democratic designation of women leaders by club members acted

as a strong motive force behind the cohesion and collective identity of the group.

#### 4) Improving the Well-Being and the Spiritual Life of Women by Way of Leisure Activities.

Beyond their primary objective, which was to raise awareness and inform migrant workers of their rights, the clubs became places of socialization for migrant workers and privileged spaces for free speech and leisurely meetings between equals.

Having migrated because of economic incentives, the women move often alone. They do not necessarily know other residents in their housing area when they move in. Then, they face harsh working conditions (with a high volume of work and few holidays). Those two factors can contribute to increasing isolation and a feeling of vulnerability for those women.

“When I first arrived in the industrial zones, it was quite a hard life because the work was new, the daily routine was not easy and I didn’t have any friends, I didn’t know what to do other than staying alone in my room.” - Nguyen Thi Phuong, women’s leader, Hai Duong.

“I did face difficulties when I arrived. I didn’t know anyone and my life was just a routine: after work, I just came back to my boarding room, had a meal, rested, then had another meal and went to work.” - Duong Thi Thuy Linh, women’s leader, Vinh Phuc.

Most such testimonies from women describe a limited social life in the boarding houses, far from their relatives and their points of reference. The clubs thus became places of leisure for those women who worked the majority of their time and who could not participate in other activities. For

local partners, it was important to keep this balance between social and cultural well-being to fight isolation.

Facilitated playfully, the clubs’ sessions helped create a relaxed ambience. This environment and the organization of timely events (for Tet, for sport competitions, etc.) attracted new members. The idea was to keep this dynamic going and to propose new activities, as requested by the women.

#### 5) Working with the Local Stakeholders to Find the Answers to the Problems of the Migrant Women.

The empowerment of migrant workers is fragile and difficult to sustain, as it depends on individuals, but also on their surroundings and society’s values. In a strategy for change, it is important to know and to understand the background of those women and to identify opportunities for them to improve their situation, as well as the threats that can hinder them. The clubs have been linked with local actors such as the Labour Union or the Women’s Union. Besides the specific expertise they can bring in, the combination of the approaches of the mobilized actors allowed them to find answers to the problems faced by female migrant workers.

“Having experts with practical knowledge of the subject appeared to be a real advantage ... They could indeed understand more easily the issues and how to solve them by using concrete examples.” (See the “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders” card)

The intervention of the project’s partners was essential to adapting the training to the constraints of the women, taking into account their availability, the accessibility of teaching spaces and the necessity of adapting teaching methods to an uneducated audience.

*“The cooperation between the project team and the local partners (the Women’s Union and the Labour Union) was really useful. Their theoretical and practical knowledge of the migrant worker’s issues, with a specific gender-based perspective, is also valuable, as they contribute to a better tailored and more relevant training.” (See the “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders” card)*

## 6) Developing a Better Acquaintance with the Migrants’ Situation.

Those actors’ collaboration further permitted the clubs to develop the knowledge of local actors of the specific problems faced by the migrant workers. Indeed, their condition of vulnerability was still not yet well-known by local stakeholders and the population at large.

*“Some trainers do not really grasp all the difficulties and specific needs of the migrant workers... The project team has to spend time with the trainers to explain to them those specificities and needs, and has to ensure that their trainings will be well adapted.” (See the “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders” card)*

Working groups, on a local scale, serve as a relay for migrant women. Those spaces gather different actors linked with migrants (public services, landlords, unions) to share problems they face, but also means of action, by sharing the resources and knowledge of each. They are also places for creating strategic alliances, as a better knowledge of those challenges eases the mobilization of local actors.

*“A strong network of resource persons and other external stakeholders such as landlords can provide support to the women’s clubs’ activities. Women’s leaders should not be left alone to run the clubs; they need to rely on those supports to gain confidence and to acquire the skills they need to carry out properly their role. Becoming a leader is a process that must be carefully facilitated by the project team and resource persons.” (See the “Creating a Women’s Club” sheet)*

*“The first one is the lack of interest that the local partners can have in working with women’s clubs. ... They can also not consider the specific situation of female migrant workers as a priority in their mandate.” (See the “Improving the Relationship between Women’s Clubs and Local Partners” sheet)*

In this case, **landlords can be a source of information** and support on the problems faced by the migrants workers. Typically, the workers do not talk about their issues with their companies, but they usually feel comfortable to talk about them in the housing areas, and with the landlords. During multi-stakeholders meetings, landlords can raise awareness to other stakeholders (such as the Trade union, Dolisa, even companies) about the lives of migrant women workers so that they better understand the situations that they face.

*“To develop those bonds, and to set up the basis for a real framework for cooperation, the project team has reunited working groups. Those groups discussed problems raised by the clubs and tried to find solutions. Those meetings are thus really useful as they help to find solutions to improve the living conditions of the target groups of the project, but also create a relationship of understanding and cooperation between the actors.” (See the “Giving Credibility to a Women’s Club” sheet)*



“Direct communication helps employers and workers to understand each other better.” - Mr. Vu Duc Khien, Hai Duong social insurance

However, dialogue with actors is a long process that requires preparation, especially for the female workers. They have to be trained (including in terms of self-confidence), before they can engage in a process of negotiation with other stakeholders, in order not to be intimidated and to carry on representing the collective’s voice.

## 2.2. CHALLENGES TO ADDRESS

Women’s clubs are an answer to the deficit of information on the rights faced by female migrant workers. The first changes have already manifested themselves in terms of the women’s power to act. This means women leaders voice their opinions in meetings with actors, the use of public services has seen a slight increase, etc. For those changes to continue and to become more pronounced, challenges have to be addressed:

### The Problem of Women’s Availability

Throughout the course of the project, the women’s clubs have been faced with turnover in their membership. When participation was constant, women were often tired. It was thus crucial not to overload their schedule with club meetings. Communication is important to make women understand the benefits of regular participation. Indeed, most of the women were afraid to discuss their problems with local partners.

At first, the project team revised its strategy by refocusing its messages on real situations encountered by women, approaching their task with a theoretical framework. Then, alternatives were implemented to lighten the content of sessions with playful activities or with the help of external resources. Then, word of mouth was used by the women themselves to encourage new people to join the club.

“However, the best strategy to overcome this difficulty is to create relevant, interesting and useful meetings. Women’s leaders have to plan and prepare the meetings and their contents and to be able to seek support from the project team and resource persons if needed.” (See the “Creating a Women’s Club” sheet)

In future, the availability of women leaders may be addressed by an improved allocation of different responsibilities among women leaders and by a selection of themes for the women’s clubs as close as possible to their practical and daily needs or difficulties that they face in their lives..

### Clubs’ Empowerment

The project’s support has to come within the scope of an empowerment approach from the beginning, giving the women leaders autonomy in the preparation of the clubs’ meetings. Even if this choice means a delay in the progress of the project and personalized support, it is a guarantee that the women will be able to facilitate clubs without relying on the project’s team. The process of the empowerment of the clubs is long and unwinds step by step: the acquisition of knowledge, the development of self-confidence, the delegation of responsibilities and the management of the clubs.

*“The women’s leaders can start by being in charge of the material organization of the meetings: preparing the venue where the meeting will happen, informing the members of the date of the meeting and making sure that the needed material will be available. They should be involved from the beginning with the preparation and planning of the content of the meeting, and can at first do the introductory speech for the session and facilitate ice-breaking activities, such as games and songs.” (See the “Creating a Women’s Club” sheet)*

*“From there, they can take up more responsibilities, such as getting in touch with the resource person needed for a meeting, ensuring that he comes, facilitating a part of the presentation and then managing the design and implementation of the session as a whole.” (See the “Running a Women’s Club” sheet)*

### Developing Collective Strategies

The rise of women leaders shows that empowerment is on the march. Collective power is indeed developing more slowly, but it has fed upon collaboration with other actors. It is important to go further in this process by more closely collaborating with stakeholders (such as unions or women’s associations) and by raising awareness of the largest

number of the problems of migrant women to find new supports. The networking of women themselves and of the clubs is an initial response to this issue.

### CONCLUSION:

In a cross-field approach, close and regular support is necessary for the empowerment of women, in order to be able to intervene on technical questioning and to encourage the women leaders. Setting up a relationship of trust with them facilitates the women’s freedom of expression and stimulates them to get involved with the project. This support can take several shapes: regular meetings, coaching, trainings, etc.

*“This follow-up is central to the empowerment of the women’s leaders, as it supports them in their learning process to become agents of change in their communities. The project team provides two sets of activities for this regular support: coaching and knowledge updating.” (See the “Creating a Women’s Club” sheet)*

*“A real trusting relationship must be established between the team and the women to ensure that they feel they can rely on the team to help them to face their problems.” (See the “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders” sheet)*



# PART 3. PRACTICE SHEETS

1. *Building the Capacities of Women Leaders*
2. *Creating a Women's Club*
3. *Running a Women's Club*
4. *Improving the Relationship between a Women's Club and Local Partners*
5. *Promoting the Role of the Clubs*

## 1

### BUILDING THE CAPACITIES OF WOMEN LEADERS

#### I. DESCRIPTION



#### OBJECTIVES, NEEDS AND RESULTS

The **Objective** of the training of women leaders is to give them all the abilities they need to facilitate women's clubs. They should be able to manage all the logistical aspects of club meetings, have a good knowledge of the topics discussed and be able to provide constant support to other women by answering their questions. It is also important that they are able to play a key role in building and maintaining a close relationship between women's club members and their landlords. Finally, they have to be confident enough of their knowledge and competence to be able to speak out in meetings with local authorities, companies, landlords and service providers.

**Needs**-Migrant workers in the industrial zones usually have a poor level of awareness of their rights and are not well informed about the social and legal protection they are entitled to. Also, they are not usually confident enough in their abilities and are often discouraged at the prospects of seeing their situations improve. Moreover, the project aims to build autonomous women's clubs that will support migrant women in the long run. Women leaders' empowerment will pave the way for the project's

sustainability in order to improve the women's living and working conditions.

As a **result** of the project's activities, women leaders are now more confident in their capacities and have realized that they can be agents of change and development for themselves and for the other migrant workers. They have a good knowledge of the topics addressed by the project (labour law, health-care, etc.) and are able to organize and facilitate club meetings with the support of the project team. Women leaders also meet several times members of the Labour and Women's Unions, representatives of the local authorities, of the service providers and of the companies. They now are able to make the claims of migrant workers heard and to instigate constructive dialogue with those representatives.



#### TOOLS AND STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION

#### The Identification of Women Leaders

In Vinh Phuc, the identification of women leaders was done with the support of the landlords, as they knew the women living in their housing very well.

The project team focused on women who were active, confident and willing to get involved in this programme. It is very important to explain them what is expected from them as women leaders.

Indeed, being a woman leader is very time consuming, as it involves attending trainings, facilitating the clubs and providing close attention to the other women's issues on a daily basis. Even more important than their abilities, their motivation has to be very strong, because they do not earn money for this work (they are only compensated for their travel expenses and communication costs around 100,000 VND in Vinh Phuc and 125,000 VND in Hai Duong). In seeking to identify potential women leaders, the project staff paid careful attention to the availability of the women leaders and their understanding of what would be expected from them.

In Hai Duong, it was much easier for the local organization (CDI), which worked with the Labour Union, to identify women leaders and explain what a women club was. Indeed, the Phu Nu project has started in this province on the basis of a former Oxfam project which had already initiated women's clubs.

As the project team has a better knowledge of those women, it is easier to identify women who have the capacity to assume this role. But it is also important that the clubs' members be involved in this selection through a vote. In Vinh Phuc Province, women in the clubs are informed of this vote session by landlords at first, and then by the Women's Union, which organizes and conducts it with GRET. In Hai Duong, the first potential women leaders were identified by CDI and the Labour Union. The vote was planned by CDI with the agreement of women and of the landlords too. This local organization was also in charge of informing female workers about this vote. Two to three women agreed to apply. As one of the main objectives is to ensure the sustainability of those clubs, it is essential that their members be able to select among themselves their leaders through a democratic process. At the beginning of the vote session, women leaders' tasks are explained to the women of the clubs so they can choose two women leaders per club, on the basis of their availability and motivation, which are the two principal criteria for the women's preliminary selection.

**Engineering Training:** At the beginning of the project, the Phu Nu team undertook a diagnostic process in order to identify women's needs. This study's conclusion was in accord with CDL's previous field experience. Thus, three main topics appeared as priorities to be discussed in training sessions: labour law, healthcare and club facilitation skills.

- **Labour Law:** This topic includes the following subjects: social insurance, health insurance, unemployment insurance, labour accidents and work-related diseases. Those topics deal with the everyday lives and work of migrant women. By teaching them how to claim their rights and how to benefit from the social and legal protection provided by Vietnamese law, women leaders can support female workers facing every problem they might encounter.
- **Healthcare:** This topic includes the following subjects: care for pregnant women, home-based care for children and sexually transmitted infection (IST). Sexual education in the Vietnamese education system is superficial. Moreover, migrant workers usually leave school at an early age and are often lacking in reproductive health awareness. Teaching them about such topics allows for an improvement in their quality of life and helps to protect them from diseases and threats that might be of serious consequence if not given proper care.
- **Club Facilitation:** This topic includes the following subjects: making a general plan for club meetings, group facilitation skills and fostering participation, methodologies used in group meetings, developing club meeting agendas, preparing for meetings and using visual supports. Becoming a facilitator for a group requires a set of capacities and self-confidence. As the project aimed to ensure the sustainability of the women's clubs, the women leaders had to develop certain abilities.

Those three topics were identified thanks to the initial diagnostic, but then, the nature of training still depends on women's further needs. Three training manuals have been developed, one for each topic. Each woman leader has received a copy to help her facilitate the club's meetings.

**Trainings:** The sessions have been organized into three courses, each one day in duration and addressing one topic. They have been held on Sundays to guarantee that the women can participate. The cooperation between the project team and the local partners (the Women's Union and the Labour Union) was really useful. Indeed, the support provided, in terms of substance and logistics, eased the preparatory work and improved the quality of the trainings, as they could share their experience with them.

For each topic, expert trainers have been identified and recruited by the project team. Having experts with practical knowledge of the subject matter appeared to be of real benefit, as the women did not receive an extended formal education and could understand more easily the issues and how to solve them by way of concrete examples.

The training sessions have been based on case studies adapted to the situations that migrant women workers face and PowerPoint presentations, but also on games and role playing in order to foster women's participation and sense of ownership. Leaders' capacities have also been assessed so as to evaluate their progress and their knowledge.

Finally, evaluation sheets from the training sessions have been filled out by the participants, in order to improve the future sessions.

About **30 women leaders were trained** (two per club) in at least two topics, and sometimes in three. Due to their work schedules, the project team had to organize several sessions. Around twenty women leaders regularly attended the trainings. Some active members also benefited from coaching from the project team.

**Regular Support for the Women Leaders:** Around 7-10 days after each training session, the project team (GRET and the Women's Union in Vinh Phuc, and CDI and the Labour Union in Hai Duong) provides regular support and feedback to the women leaders, according to the report written at the end of each training session, to help them get to feel more confident with their skills. The project team participates in the clubs' meetings and provides advice and insights for the facilitation of those activities. This follow-up generally lasts two weeks, from the writing of training report, sending it to all the stakeholders, adding their comments and preparing feedback on the content of the training. This step is central to the empowerment of the women leaders, as it supports them in their learning process to become agents of change in their communities.

**Support tools** have been developed throughout the project to provide support to the women leaders. Handbooks that summarize the topics and provide women leaders with updated information have been produced. Games to warm-up club meetings have also been shared with them, and they receive clear instructions by way of check-lists of things to prepare for a club meeting, from logistics to

substance and facilitation. Finally, flash cards that summarize some of the topics in a pictorial form have been developed and distributed to them, to be used as notes during the sessions.

A **Facebook** page was established in 2016 so that female workers could share their concerns and discuss them. Around 100 women use this Facebook page, which is maintained by GRET and CDI. They appreciate discussions on that dedicated space which they have even conveyed to other women who are not taking part in the clubs. This contributes to informing women beyond the women's clubs.



**Partnerships with Local Organizations:** The project is being conducted in coordination with two local organizations, the Women's Union and the Labour Union. Those partnerships are important, as they help us by providing valuable tools to identify needs (such as activity reports) and to work with the women leaders. Their theoretical and practical knowledge of the migrant workers' issues, with a specific gender-based perspective, is also valuable, as they contribute to better-tailored and more relevant training. Their support allows the activities to be conducted more easily, thanks to their relations with local authorities, which permits them to obtain their approval and to organize workshops in an excellent framework.

**Cooperation with the Landlords:** The landlords live in the same area as the women we are working with. Their knowledge of them, as well as their concerns about their living and working conditions, is a real asset, as can they help us to tailor more precisely our activities and facilitate the identification of women's leaders. Their support is also very important for the sustainability of the women's clubs, as they help the women's leaders to feel more confident in their roles.

**Expert Trainers:** The trainings aim to be adapted and relevant to the migrant workers' needs. The facilitators should thus have a strong understanding of their audience and provide solid training that shall be thoroughly assimilated by the trainees. Trainers should be selected according to their background in specific theoretical topics, but they should also have practical experience in the field and clear

understanding of the issues faced by the women. For example, among the trainers selected by the project, we can find a member of the local Labour Union or staff of the provincial healthcare service.

## II. ANALYSIS



**Dynamic and Participative Teachings:** Most trained women are young and active, and can be easily bored by formal and long presentations. It is consequently important to include active pedagogy in the sessions, such as games, to encourage their participation and to keep them involved. Trainees should be motivated to regularly participate, to share their ideas and opinions and to discuss with the trainer and with each other. Such trainings will help them to stay more focused on what they are learning, but also to develop their self-confidence.

**Time for Exchanges and Discussion among Themselves:** Many of the women leaders have expressed their desire to exchange and share their stories with each other. They see the training sessions as times to gain new knowledge about the topics, but also opportunities to get to know each other better and to create a network among themselves. Thus, the training sessions shall be adapted to include those discussion times, as they are essential to their interest in their role, but will also be strong supports during their activity as leaders.

**Follow-Ups by the Project Team:** The follow-up is also a key element in the success of women's capacity building. The project team provides two sets of activities for this regular support: coaching and knowledge updating..

The **coaching** is done 7-10 days after the training (as everyone can read the training report and understand women leaders' needs) by supporting leaders in their facilitation of the women's clubs, by giving them advice on how to proceed with those activities and by taking part in the club meetings to back them up. The project team members also take time to share with them their difficulties and to support them in finding solutions. Reminders or **updates** are punctually provided to the women leaders through short sessions, individually or collectively, in the event of developments in one of the topics (often,

in the labour law field) or if some new topic is identified by the project. This is an opportunity for leaders to improve their knowledge of those fields, to exchange more extensively with the trainers and among themselves and to feel more confident of their capacities.



**Turnover of the Women Leaders:** As most migrant workers do not have stable jobs, it is common for some of them to leave the area where the project is being conducted. Even if there is no definitive solution to this issue, some mechanisms can be implemented to better reduce the consequences of the loss of a leader.

By looking for clubs members that are active and dynamic, even if they are not leaders, the project team and the club members themselves can anticipate the leaders moving out and identify successors. Those potential new applicants are then submitted to the vote of the members and trained to become leaders afterwards. However, as it is not possible to provide a full training to those successors, the project team has to coach them more intensively. They should provide them with the formal knowledge they would need as leaders, accompany them in the clubs' meetings more actively and devote more time to exchanges with them.

**Discouragement of the Leaders:** It can also happen that some leaders feel overwhelmed by their role and wish to quit this function. The project team should be always aware of the doubts and difficulties of those women and share with them regularly to respond to their concerns and fears. The members of the project team have to listen to their difficulties and provide support to find solutions. It is really important that for at least the first two or three years, the women leaders not feel alone in the implementation of their tasks. A real trusting relationship must be established between the team and the women to ensure that they feel they can rely on the team to help them to face their problems.

**Misunderstanding of the Women's Specificities by the Trainers:** Some trainers do not really grasp all the difficulties and specific needs of the migrant workers, or are not really aware of the necessity of adapting their presentations. As we have seen

before, training for the women leaders has to be carefully thought through and adapted in order to be successful. The project team has to spend time with the trainers to explain to them those specificities and needs, and has to ensure that their training will be well adapted. The team's members have to attend training days to follow the situation and to modify the agenda of the session if they feel that the training is not suitable.



### IMPROVEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

**The Environment of the Teaching and Sharing Sessions:** The training sessions in the project have taken place in formal meeting rooms. The project team feels that those workshops would be more efficient in a more friendly and simple environment, such as a mat on the floor of the Culture House of the area. Women leaders have to feel like they are sharing a pleasant moment with all the participants, and that they will be able to exchange and discuss things among themselves.

**Better Anticipation of Turnover:** Turnover is the main difficulty faced in the creation of women's clubs and in speeding up the process of developing strong and autonomous women leaders, as it weakens women's abilities to undertake such a role. It is consequently important that the project team be aware of the possible turnover of women. This has to be anticipated in order to identify quickly a successor and to organize, if possible, a transition.

**Encouraging Leaders' Support among Themselves:** The training sessions allowed the women to get to know each other better and to create a network among themselves. This network is a real asset for the daily lives of the participants in those activities, but also for the sustainability of the women's clubs. Women should be encouraged to share their issues

and questions among themselves first, in order to seek support from their colleagues. In Hai Duong, it happened that women leaders prepared for and hosted together meeting events, but their collaboration was not developed beyond that.

This network can also help successors to acquire the capacities they need to assume leadership positions.

Finally, the constant support they can find in this network will have an important effect in their self-confidence, as they will feel that they belong to a group that is motivated to become an agent of development.



### LOCAL CONTEXT

**The Proximity of the Training Sessions to the Housing Areas:** For safety reasons, women are not eager to go too far from their living places to participate in events. The project organizing training sessions should keep that in mind and choose places close to their houses.

**Working time and hometowns:** Even if the workers are migrants, most of them come from nearby districts within the same province. However, their working schedules (12 hours a day) do not allow them to travel back to their hometown.

When they finally have some free time, migrant workers prefer to visit their family instead of attending to training sessions or other project activities. The team has to take that into consideration when they organize those events and explain them carefully what will be their interest in participating. Training sessions also have to be spaced out in time. If they are on three Sundays in a row, there is a risk that the majority of them will choose to go back to their hometowns rather than to participate in the sessions.



## 2

## CREATING A WOMEN'S CLUB

## III. DESCRIPTION



## OBJECTIVES, NEEDS AND RESULTS

The **objective** of the creation of a women's club is to provide to the women a private space where they can raise their concerns about their lives and gather information about issues related to their condition as migrant workers. They can share ideas within this framework, regardless of their age, origin, social rank or any other quality that may create distance between them. Men can also be invited to participate if they are interested, under the condition that they respect the women's concerns and issues. Those men are usually from surrounding areas, or they are the husbands of members.

Women's clubs act as a forum where women can exchange, discuss policies related to workers and express their opinions on working and living conditions regarding their managers, policymakers, business companies and local authorities.

Those clubs are also important places for socialization, where women can meet each other and get more familiar with the other tenants of the housing area they are all living in. As a matter of fact, in those housing areas, women rarely get to know their neighbors.

Finally, women's clubs are a space for entertainment, cultural exchanges and relaxation for the workers, who do not have a lot of time in their daily lives to do anything other than working, whether for companies or for themselves (daily chores, etc.). Cultural life is very important for the individual's well-being.

The **needs** that can be tackled by women's clubs are numerous for the female migrant workers.

First of all, women face **poor living conditions**. Housing areas are often poorly equipped in terms of basic facilities, such as toilets or showers. The isolation of women's rooms is insufficient, especially in consideration of Vietnam's climate. During the rainy season, flooding is common.

Improving the daily lives of migrant workers should also take into account **social life**. Women underline the loneliness they feel in their housing areas, where they do not have a lot of opportunities to meet people and to spend time with them. They are often too tired to participate in any extra activities, as they often work more than twelve hours a day.

As they are not well informed of their **social rights**, they do not know what they can ask from the companies or from public services or even how to ask it. This lack of information has several causes. First of all, the female migrant workers come from a rural and uneducated background. If they had access to primary education, only a few of them went to secondary, and almost none any further. Therefore, they are often unaware of their rights or health protection, in particular in sexual and reproductive health. So, when they move into the industrial zones, they do not have better access to such knowledge, considering the lack of resources and means of information. Public or private services are not always sufficient to cover the needs of female workers in the area and are not always adapted to the specific problems of migrant workers.

In addition to their lack of knowledge of how to search for this kind of information, women also have a big concern regarding their **self-confidence**. Most of them do not feel like they are respected as people within society in general. Women's clubs can, by connecting them with other persons sharing the same issues, allow them to organize themselves and give them assets to gain this respect and self-confidence.

The **results** of the operations of the women's clubs of the Phu Nu project in regard of those needs are convincing. Indeed, the clubs managed to remind and inform women everywhere about their rights, improve their self-confidence and participation in social life, and ease the feelings of loneliness they felt.

Women's clubs cannot be the only answer to guaranteeing better living and working conditions. Women can use the clubs to document their difficulties and draft proposals to improve those conditions

in their relations with companies and landlords. The clubs can contribute, but the companies and landlords should play their part in changing those conditions as well.

Today, at the end of Phase 1 of the project, they feel more at ease in their daily lives. Networks have been created among the inhabitants of housing areas, allowing them to exchange on their problems and to find support from other workers. They are also more informed about their rights and about the confidence to ask for them. Finally, club meetings are also an opportunity for them to relax and enjoy a small cultural life that provides a much-welcome change from their daily working life.



Before even thinking of creating such clubs, it is necessary to train women leaders. (see the sheet “Building the Capacities of Women Leaders”).

Several elements must be defined prior to the launch of a club to ensure the proper management of the club in its first months:

- The **Name** of the women’s club: most of the time, it is related to the location where it operates, but it can be something different as well. Names provide a feeling of ownership to a group and this feeling is important to break the workers’ loneliness and to ensure their motivation to participate in the meetings. Thus, it should not be overlooked.
- The **Objective** of the women’s club: What the club is going to do and why it is operating. The answer to this question must be precisely described and understood by every participant that will be a part of the club’s life. This will give club members a good idea of what the club is going to do and what it can provide, and it will help the other stakeholders with their interventions.
- The **Content** of Club Meeting Activities: This also must be defined beforehand, in order to help the women leaders to gain experience. It will also provide concrete arguments to the club’s members that can encourage them to participate.
- **Participants**: Creating a list of the several facilitators who can be mobilized in the meeting and

who are an important asset for the daily life of a club will help women’s leaders to organize their meetings and to find support on subjects they wish to talk about but do not feel confident enough to facilitate.

- The **Logistical** Aspects of the Club: Finally, there are some elements that must be defined prior to the launch, in the interest of a smooth launch in the first months of the existence of the clubs. The size of the clubs must be defined, as the numbers of members will have an impact on the activities that would be conducted and on the numbers of leaders that would be needed. The launch date for the club could also be defined in collaboration with the several actors listed prior in order to ensure their participation. The club launching day schedule should also be defined in collaboration with those stakeholders.

**The Club’s Launch Day:** A specific event should be organized for the launch of the club, as it will provide a formal framework for it. This is important, as it will give more reasons for members to get involved in it. The launch day should then be organized as a specific conference, with the involvement of a large range of stakeholders, such as the Women’s Union and Labour Union, the local authorities, landlords and members of public services.

As for the planning, several elements should be taken in consideration for this event:

- A careful and complete explanation of the reason, objectives and activities that will be conducted within the club’s daily life. Expectations in terms of the implications of the members should also be defined, in order to understand what they would have to do.
- The presentation of the decision to create the club and the formal implementation of this decision.
- The Introduction of the temporary leaders of the clubs (who have been selected prior to the launch on a voluntary basis). There should be at least three persons: a president and two substitutes. It is to be noted that their position should be confirmed by a formal election in the next club meetings, to ensure the democratic nature of the club.
- The temporary president of the women’s club should explain the rules of the club and present

the activities scheduled for the next semester. This step is important, as it will help the president to fulfill her role as leader of the club and will provide concrete inputs.

- An exchange between the members of those presentations (both on the decision on the creation of the club and activities planning) should be organized and facilitated by the president of the club. Women's members are encouraged to participate in the daily life of the clubs and their implication and motivation are a determining factor in a club's success.
- A question-and-answer round should also be planned.
- In conclusion, a reminder of the several topics that have been presented must be done, and also an agreement on the date of the next club meeting. It should also be specified that during this meeting, a formal election of the leaders has to be organized.
- Some more relaxed moments should be included, such as songs and music, in order to make the event more welcoming and not too demanding for the participants.
- There is a membership to the clubs
- An executive board is set so that clubs can meet on a regular basis, according to an action plan.
- Internal regulations are drafted and cover the objective, the modalities, the roles and responsibilities of the board.



### The Planning of the Operations of the Clubs:

The first step in the creation of a women's club is to identify the most appropriate place for meetings. According to their work schedules, women will not make an effort to come if the clubs are too far from their housing. So, it has to be convenient for the majority of people who attend to the clubs' meetings.

For the launch of the club itself, a suitable venue to gather the club members and strategic guests must be found. It is not mandatory that the place be a formal meeting room, as it has been observed that members are more comfortable in less formal venues and closer to their living areas. It can be organized inside the housing area, on the condition that it is big enough, or in another place such as a cultural house.

In the framework of the Phu Nu project, all meetings have been set within the housing area of the clubs' members, as it is easier for them to participate this way. As the sessions take place during the evening or on Sundays (depending on the schedules of the members), it's better for the migrants if they do not have to move too far.

A simple carpet can be put in a shared space, with some fruits and food, to provide a cozy and welcoming space.

No legal authorization is required to operate women's clubs, because they meet directly inside women's housing. In Hai Duong, the Labour Union had to approve the project activities first, then the landlords gave their approval. The only condition was to follow Vietnamese law, that is to say that people must not gather in order to criticize the government or to organize strikes against it.

The Women's and Labour Unions and the landlords informed women about the creation of the club. Because women trust and respect their landlords a lot, they were very supportive actors in promoting the women's clubs. It is very important to tell the women that they can actually improve their situation by attending to those clubs and that the People's Committee is really supportive of the project, so they want to come and see.

For this event, a short document summarizing the purpose of the clubs can be realized by the project team and distributed to the female migrant workers by the Women's Union or a local organization.

For the regular work of the club after it has been launched, a venue within the living area can be identified. Around one week is necessary between the identification of a place and the launch event. First clubs' activities can start two or three weeks after their launch.



## IV. ANALYSIS



The main mean of success for a women's club will be the personality, the capacities and the motivation of the **women leaders**. The dynamic of the club will rely on their commitment, as they will be involved in all the aspects of the daily life of a club, from the organization of the meetings to the facilitation and training of the members. Furthermore, the final objective of the creation of a women's club is to be autonomous with a strong leader can carry those tasks out.

Thus, it is important to proceed with a very cautious selection of the women leaders, and to brief them on the tasks they will be expected to carry out. Trainings to develop their role are also really important and a key element of the success of a women's club, as it is developed in the dedicated part of this manual.

A strong **network of resource persons** and other external stakeholders such as landlords can provide support to the women's club activities. Women's leaders should not be left alone in charge of the club, but they need to rely on those supports in order to gain confidence and to acquire the skills needed to carry out properly their role. Becoming a leader is a process that must be carefully supported by the project team and resource persons.

Finally, **members' motivations** to join the club, participate in the meetings and be pro-active during them is primordial. Without women's will to involve themselves in those programs, clubs cannot work. The project team has to be available to spend time with them to exchange on their issues, explain to them the benefits of those activities and to support leaders in their duties.



The main difficulty in setting up a women's club would be the general **lack of motivation** and time constraints of the female migrant workers. Most of them work six days a week and twelve hours a day.

On top of their regular schedules, they also have to do their housework once they get back to their housing, and sometimes they have to take care of their children as well. Women's club meetings can appear to them to be time-consuming events where they have to stay focused on complex issues and exchange on topics that can be difficult to understand. When debating between resting and coming to meetings, they often choose the former.

To overcome this difficulty, as said before, a good practice is to provide close support to leaders to help them encourage their clubs' members. Detailed explanations of the advantages of those meetings are also a useful asset in raising the motivation of the female migrant workers. However, the best strategy for overcoming this difficulty is to create relevant, interesting and useful meetings. Women's leaders have to plan and prepare each meeting and its contents and can seek support from the project team and resource persons if needed. The facilitation of the topic must be thought to be entertaining and the topics must be presented in a coherent way. Songs and games, as well as an approach aimed at facilitating participation, have to be included in order to make the meetings less boring and tiresome.

Another difficulty is the **turnover** of female migrant workers, which can threaten the existence of a women's club. As they are very young, there are lot of external and personal issues that can make workers move out of a housing area, where the clubs meet. This could be a wedding, a new job, a pregnancy or even a transfer within a company to a new location. Considering the very large number of female workers and housing areas in industrial zones in Vietnam, creating a women's club in every housing area would require great means.

To deal with such turnovers, the first good practice is to always have women that can replace women's leaders. However, if a replacement has to be made, the project team and resource persons should give increased support to these new leaders to help them with their new tasks. To deal with the turnover of participants, the leaders and club members should organize meetings on a regular basis in order to involve newcomers to the housing area and introduce them to the women's clubs' meetings.



### IMPROVEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

The main improvement that could be made to support the creation and longevity of a women's club after its inception is to link it with other actors, including the public authorities and civil society. This can be done by involving those

persons in the planning of meetings in a support role. They can also work with the project's team to help prepare launching sessions.

Such collaboration from the beginning would be a valuable asset, as much for the women leaders themselves, who can find in them a reliable support to help them in their tasks, as for the clubs' activities in general, as future networks can be built on the basis of those affiliations.

## 3

### RUNNING A WOMEN'S CLUB

#### DESCRIPTION



#### OBJECTIVES, NEEDS AND RESULTS ACHIEVED BY THE PHU NU PROJECT

**Objectives:** A women's club's primary objective is to be a place where migrants can meet and share about their problems. They will receive information (and training for women leaders) about topics that impact them and will be able to ask questions to relevant resource persons. They can also raise problems they face during their daily lives and use those meetings as an opportunity to search for solutions.

The women's club is also the basis of all the exchange, negotiation and advocacy activities that might be carried out. The clubs are the direct contacts for the beneficiaries and thus the primary source of data, ideas and proposals.

A more global objective is the empowerment of the women's clubs' facilitators (women leaders). The project should aim to see the clubs run by themselves at the end of its intervention. The clubs have to be designed to be sustainable; therefore, their members must be able to manage them on their own.

**Needs:** The requirements of achieving those objectives include material needs and interpersonal skills.

With regards to **material** needs, a club will need a minimum of financial resources in order to organize meetings and to welcome its members. The members will also need some money to pay the resource persons invited for the training. During the course of the project, those costs are covered by the project budget. However, to ensure the sustainability of the club, a way for the club to be able to fund its costs has to be found.

Regarding **interpersonal** skills, it is important to create a link between the members upon which to build the club. Migrant women need to be sure that they can trust and rely on each other. If such bonds can be built, then they will be more likely to exchange with each other during the clubs' meetings and will be more eager to work together.

Another link has to be built to insure the smooth running of the club-contact with resource persons. In the end, they must be able to work together without relying on the project. Women leaders should be able to identify which resource persons would be the most relevant to talk about a given theme and contact them to arrange for their participation in the relevant meeting. Also, the resource

persons must be interested in participating in those meetings and must respond positively to the clubs' requests.

**Results:** As of today, the women's clubs still depend on the project's funding to run regularly. It is difficult to implement money earning activities, as members already work twelve hours a day. Even if the project has not found a sustainable solution as of today, the team has thought that a good solution might be that local partners could fund the clubs. As the women's clubs are an essential source of information regarding the problems and daily struggles of the female migrant workers, the long-term presence of the clubs would be a very good asset for local authorities, women and labour unions.

The **link** between the members is there and it is strong. The migrants know each other better today, and are not afraid anymore to express their ideas or to ask questions. This is a very good point for the stability of the clubs, as the strength of the clubs can only come from the motivation of their members.

However, a big problem is still the **turnover**, which is high in the industrial zones where the Phu Nu project has been implemented. As they are young, female migrant workers often change jobs or get married and move. As they leave, the bonds get weaker and new members have to be recruited. That means that the links have to be rebuilt from scratch. A solution that could be foreseen is to hold a welcoming session every semester, where club's activities could be presented to newcomers to attract their interest.

Finally, regarding the link between the clubs and **resource persons**, the results are positive. Involved from the start with the project, resource persons are interested in participating in the meetings and sharing their knowledge with the female workers. They often give their personal contacts to the leaders and make themselves available to answer their questions. Women leaders do not hesitate to communicate with them when they need their support.



### TOOLS AND STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In the framework of the project, it appears necessary for all project stakeholders to keep records of what is discussed in the clubs' meetings, the questions asked, number of participants, etc. That is why a specific tool has been developed to help with the follow-ups to the meetings. A **notebook** has been given to every club, in which the leaders take note of the agenda, the minutes and the participants for every session. This is used also as a reminder of what has been talked about, but also as a great source of information for advocacy and negotiation activities.

For the **back up/support** during the meeting itself, two formulas have been tested. The first one is that members of the project team are present and provide advice and information to the facilitator (the leader) in order to help them with their tasks. The second one is that volunteers are recruited from Vietnamese civil society (usually students in university) to help the women.

Each solution has its advantages. When the team provides its support, the women leaders can rely on a professional trained in facilitation who also has knowledge in the various topics that could be discussed. This helps them in providing more complete and precise training to the members. However, this formula has to be implemented carefully, as it can reduce the self-confidence of the leaders if the members of the project team intervene often. The support should be less and less present so as to help the women leaders take charge of proceedings.

Concerning the solution of finding volunteers, even if they are less skilled in facilitation techniques, they often have a good knowledge of the topics that are discussed. They can provide another type of support, much more like the resource persons, but also a self-confidence boost. As the women leaders are often young, and so are the students, a bond can be created between people coming from different backgrounds. Those exchanges will help both sides

to have another view of their situation and can create an emulation that would be profitable for both.



About the schedule, the clubs' meetings are held **every six weeks at most and ideally every four weeks at least**. This is not a clear suggestion that every four weeks is the best timeframe, but it is the shortest that is recommended in order not to tire or bore the members. The frequency should be adapted depending on the subject being discussed (for example, if a topic has to be dealt with during two sessions, it is better to have a short timeframe between the two sessions). A delay of more than six weeks presents the risk that the members will lose their motivation. Consequently, the frequency of the meetings should be within those limits.

Clubs' meetings are organized with members of the **project team**. They support the women leaders in the organization of the meetings, helping them to define the content of the meeting if it was not determined by members at the end of the last meeting or in Facebook discussions, and to make sure that they do not forget anything about the organization procedures. One or two weeks are necessary for the preparation of the meeting. As they are two per club, women leaders usually work in pairs for preparing the topics, even if only one can ultimately host the meeting (due perhaps to differing work schedules).

A club meeting hosted by two women leaders in Vinh Phuc costs 500,000 VND (22 USD): 300,000 VND is spent on drinks and fruit and the women leaders receive 100,000 VND each (4.43 USD) for their travel expenses and some communication costs. In Hai Duong, a club meeting costs 550,000 VND (24 USD): the same amount is for welcoming the participants and each woman leader receive 125,000 VND (5.50 USD). The project team also has a compensation of 50,000 VND for its travel costs.

However, a club meeting costs 300,000 VND more (13.30 USD) when a **resource person** is invited for

one to one and a half hours of participation. Those resource persons are identified and contacted by the Women's and Labour Unions, according to the club members' suggestions and topics which have to be deepened. For instance, CDI asked the Legal Counsel Centres to come to some meetings, so that they might better advise the women. However, this was more expensive to organize.

In general, a club meeting lasts **one hour and a half to two hours** and attracts approximately fifteen people. The project team attends to the club's meetings to frame the session and make sure information is transmitted well.

Women leaders **inform** club members and local partners of the next meeting by phone, via the Facebook page or by going door to door. It is also important to mobilize members to attend a club meeting in different ways, through the landlords, the Women's Union and the Labour Union, interesting topics, etc. During the first three club meetings, it is recommended the project team help women leaders to communicate about the next meeting to make as many people aware as possible. Women leaders can rely on the project team if they need to be advised on something.

## ANALYSIS



The main element in the successful management of a club is a **motivated trained leader**. A lot of factors will depend on the will of this woman to conduct her tasks and to play her role as facilitator, spokesperson and mediator between the members and the other actors.

This means that the selection of those women must be done carefully, and their motivation for carrying out this role must be tested. Their role, as well as what it will mean for their daily lives, has to be explained to them (see the sheets "Building the Capacities of Women Leaders" and "Creating a Women's Club").

If the women's leader's motivation is high, and if she understands the objectives of the club, she will be able to manage it daily and to facilitate the meetings. This motivation has to be supported by the project team, to make sure it does not fade away.



### RISKS AND OBSTACLES

The first obstacle is the high turnover of members: as migrant workers are a very itinerant population, it is difficult to keep hold of the same members and leaders all throughout the existence of a club. The solution is to have deputy leaders chosen from among the club members at the same time as the women leaders are elected. Their role consists of providing assistance to women leaders on meetings' organization, as well as integrating newcomers moving into the housing area. The club must be considered a structure that will give training to the members and collect their ideas and suggestions.

The second obstacle is the difficulty of motivating the housing area's inhabitants to participate in all of the meetings, as they will often choose whether or not to come depending on the topic. This is indeed an understandable attitude, but it can weaken them in the long term, as if they are not informed about some matters their input might be less relevant. Also, sometimes, they may not clearly understand what the topic is about, and will not be interested just because of the title.

To solve this problem, the topics have to be explained to the members by the leaders when they inform them about a session, and they should try to motivate them to participate.



### IMPROVEMENT AND PERSPECTIVES

After the first phase of the implementation of the club project, the clubs shall be supported in achiev-

ing autonomy from the project team. This could be done in several steps. The first step would be the creation of a women leaders group. This group would gather all the women leaders in a province, and would be a place where they can organize among themselves and collaborate on mutual action. Then, responsibilities can be transferred, little by little.

To begin with, the daily organization of the women's clubs should be planned by both the project team and the clubs' leaders, with the various responsibilities shifting more and more from the project officers to the clubs' leaders and members. The final objective should always be to create autonomous structures.

The women leaders can start by being in charge of the material organization of the meetings: preparing the venue where each meeting will happen, informing the members of the date of each meeting and making sure that the needed material will be available.

They should get involved with the preparation and planning of the content of each meeting, and can at first do the introductory speech for the session and facilitate the ice-breaking activities, such as games and songs.

From there, they can take up more responsibilities, such as getting in touch with the resource person needed for a meeting, ensuring that he comes, facilitating a part of the presentation and then managing the design and implementation of a session as a whole.

As for the participation of the local partners or public authorities, their support for the long term of women's clubs, both with financial means and official recognition, should be strengthened.



## 4

## IMPROVING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN A WOMEN'S CLUB AND LOCAL PARTNERS

## DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES, NEEDS AND RESULTS  
ACHIEVED BY THE PHU NU PROJECT

**Objective:** Creating links with the relevant stakeholders in an area helps to develop more efficiency and sustainability in the women's clubs' operations. Through those links, female migrant workers can seek support more easily on a regular basis and solve problems they might face on a personal or professional level as well.

The main objective of a women's club is to create a supportive environment in which women can be part of the local civil society, can become aware of their legal rights and can receive the support they deserve. By creating those links, the project team can raise the local authorities' awareness about female migrant workers' needs and thus advocate for more suitable policies from the local government, the public services and the companies.

**Needs:** Local stakeholders have a scarce knowledge and understanding of the very specific needs of migrant workers, although they impact their daily lives through their political decisions.

Migrants do not have the same access to public services (schools, health facilities, local insurance, etc.) as people who are registered as residents in the industrial areas. Because they are women, they also need to deal with certain gender-specific issues, such as unwanted pregnancy, security, women's rights and health services such as gynaecology or obstetrics. Companies do not enforce many working laws, which makes the migrant workers' situation even more vulnerable. Local authorities, public services and companies are the only ones who can drive their demands because of their legitimacy and the influence they have on policies impacting migrant workers' lives. However, this administrative staff is not very familiar with most of those difficulties or does not see how it can improve the situation of the migrant workers.

By allowing women's clubs to share their points of view and ideas with those relevant stakeholders, the project can pave the way to open discussions in order to improve the local situation as a whole.

Another need that should not be overlooked is women's leaders' lack of knowledge on technical topics, such as labour law or health issues. On the contrary, those local partners often deal specifically with one of those themes and can provide technical support in the preparation and facilitation of meetings aimed at raising awareness.

**Results:**

In the framework of the Phu Nu project, several links have been created between the women's clubs and local partners. There are two levels of involvement in the project.

- The Women's Union in Vinh Phuc and the Labour Union in Hai Duong are **co-partners** of the project. The staff is involved in the women leaders' training and in the regular follow-ups on their activities. They also support the project and the women's clubs in their linkages with other local partners, such as local authorities, people's committees, public services and companies. In general, women leaders refer at first to a member of the project team who has a good relationship with the Women's and Labour Unions. However, it has happened that women leaders in Hai Duong have shared their concerns directly with them when they thought this was necessary.

Their support in the implementation of the women's clubs is critical, as they provide their knowledge of the field, allowing the project team to adapt its activities to specific needs. They also allow the project team to meet the resource persons who could be interested in providing support to the women's leaders. Finally, they are a strong ally to the women's clubs in their dialogue with the other relevant provincial stakeholders and support their claims and suggestions.

The local authorities and the People's Committees have been linked to the project thanks to the

Women's and Labour Unions. Their legal knowledge and relationship with the administration are a strong asset to advocate for Vietnamese law to favour the female migrant workers. Also, as resource persons, they can raise awareness about specific state policies that can have a big impact on workers' lives, such as maternity leave or social and unemployment insurance. Finally, they can intervene as mediators with the Women's Union and the Labour Union to help women's clubs to find solutions.

- The **local public services** are, in the Phu Nu project, the health centres and the public schools. Most of the female migrant workers have a very poor knowledge of health issues and on best practices to reduce the risks of disease and infection. There also is a real lack of information about reproductive health and ways to avoid unwanted pregnancies. Moreover, the opening hours of nearby local hospitals do not often match with female migrant workers' free time.

Female migrant workers also have to face another unpleasant situation regarding their children's education. Indeed, public schools are too small and not equipped as they should be to welcome and teach every child. Thus, female migrant workers have no choice other than to send back their children to their parent's villages. This situation is not something desirable, neither for the children nor for their mothers.

Thus, links between the public services have been established to receive training on topics such as health and family planning, but also for women's clubs to be able to raise public services' awareness of their specific needs. Indeed, as women lack of information about public services, their access is still difficult for them. Moreover, the processes of applying for public services require more time than they have. That is why they often go to private clinics and spend more money. Even if all the issues mentioned above have not been resolved, there is now **better knowledge** among health services and schools of those situations, and some **updates** about those services have been made in order to respond to the women's concerns.

- Finally, the last important local partners are the **companies**. As employers, they have a very big impact on the women's daily lives, both professionally and personally. Creating opportunities

for dialogue between women's clubs and companies' representatives is important, as it will be an occasion for both sides to agree on solutions.

However, in the Phu Nu project, this relationship was the one the team had the most difficulty in creating. Companies do not feel the need to go through an external structure such as the project to have dialogue with their employees. They believe they already have all the tools and approaches they need.

However, the project team contributed to changing their points of view by demonstrating the advantages of including an external voice in discussions with their employees. Companies like VinaKorea in Vinh Phuc actually found this mediation work quite useful. However, some enterprises don't dialogue with NGO because it is their policies not to engage with NGO. This can be overcome when engaging with an enterprise as a project under the umbrella of local authorities. So the project team is an external voice that can be tolerated when it works within the framework of a project under the umbrella of inside voices from local authorities.

### Tools and Steps of Implementation

As stated above, the basis for creating those links consists in having strong bonds with a local partner at the beginning of the project, as this will be a link with the other stakeholders and will help to develop the relationships between women's clubs and local partners. The project team has to be very attentive to maintain good relations with local partners by seeing them regularly (at least once a month). Those meetings will keep them connected with the project's activities. The other stakeholders are updated as needed, according to the progress of the project. The Labour Union is a former partner to CDI. In the Phu Nu project, GRET and BATIK International directly identified stakeholders. Those two organizations brought them onto the field, meeting women in their housing and at work to better understand their situation.

The first activity, in which they can intervene, in particular the local authorities and the public services, is the **training of women leaders**, to present their works and how they can support female migrant workers in their daily lives. Thus, the leaders would know the persons they could ask for

assistance. This can also reduce the fear the women leaders might have of bothering them.

Further on in the implementation of the project, they should be invited to participate often in the **women's clubs' meetings** as resource persons, in order to share their knowledge on specific topics and to support women leaders in their facilitation. This will help to make training sessions more complete and interesting for the club's members. It will also reduce the gap between them, allowing the female migrant workers to feel more confident when they are in their presence.

In order to create and maintain links between the women's clubs and local partners, **biannual meetings** can be held at the provincial level. They are useful to the pooling of working groups' discussions. During those meetings, with the support of the project team, women's clubs' leaders are encouraged to expose the issues and difficulties raised during club meetings and the solutions that have been found. Those proposals are used as a basis for discussion, exchanges and negotiations to achieve a consensus on how those solutions could be adapted and integrated by the local partners in their policies.

On the same level, the Phu Nu project organizes an **annual seminar** that gathers all the partners and women leaders from both provinces. This event is an opportunity to present what has been done during the past year and to explain what is going to happen in the next year in each area. This meeting is important, as this is a way to be transparent about project activities regarding the partners, who will feel more trusting if they know what the project team has done. Also, it will be a space for exchanges and discussion, allowing them to contribute to the project activities and to ensure their conscious participation in those activities. This annual seminar has to be carefully planned and must allow exchange and discussion.



### MEANS

As explained above, the first step to creating a relationship with local partners is to create a strong relationship at the beginning of the process. In the Phu Nu project, the team chose two partners with

the Women's Union in Vinh Phuc Province and the Labour Union in Hai Duong Province.

This decision was made for two reasons. At first, because those **structures are highly relevant to the Phu Nu project's topics**. The Women's and Labour Unions' mandates deal with several difficulties female migrant workers face in their personal or professional daily lives, such as relationships between workers and companies and the enforcement of the law on those matters. Their involvement in the Phu Nu project also helped to give some credit to the project in the eyes of the other partners.

The second reason is that organizations which are part of the project team used to **work beforehand in those areas with those partners**. Trusting relationships are important, as everyone should be fully aware of what is going to be done and how it will be done. Also, those prior relationships are important, as they allow more efficiency in the exchange of ideas.

It is therefore a very strong asset to create, before starting any project activity, a relationship with one or both of those stakeholders within the area of intervention. And, as the women's clubs will be created with their support and intervention through training and facilitation, there will naturally be a strong relationship with them from the beginning.

For the other partners, as seen before, having strong ties with one of the stakeholders is very important, as they will be used as an introduction. As the project is already working with an actor they know and interact with, they will be more receptive to the project activities and their need for support and assistance.

### ANALYSIS



### KEY ELEMENTS

The first important element is to create a **relationship of trust and exchange between the project team and the local partners**. At first, this is this link that will condition the relationship between the clubs, which would be perceived as part of the project and thus can be transmitted later to the club's leaders themselves.



The whole process of running women's clubs should be thought of with the sustainability of the clubs in mind, and strong bonds between women leaders and the local partners' representatives are among the assets most important to ensuring that. That is why it is important that the project team be open to **suggestions** from the local partners and consider them not just as resource persons or relays for its advocacy activities, but as **allies** in the effort to achieve the objectives of improving female migrant workers' living and working conditions.

The project team should always be **transparent** about its objectives and ideas and share with its partners the details of its activities. This will help to gain their trust on one hand, but also will show why they are important for the success of the women's clubs. Moreover, this cooperative atmosphere will help in improving the quality of the activities, ensuring a more accurate relevance.

If those relations between the project team and the local partners can be established on this basis, the creation of the relationship with the women's clubs should be easier. The local partners will get to know the leaders and the members better, and the leaders will become more accustomed to them. They can then get to trust and understand each other better, and for the local partners, become more interested in providing strong support.

### RISKS AND OBSTACLES

There are several difficulties that can be encountered when creating those relationships.

The first one is the **lack of interest** that the local partners may have in working with women's clubs. They may think that there are better or more efficient ways to improve the situation of female workers than involving them in women's clubs. They may also not consider the specific situation of female migrant workers as a priority in their mandate.

The second problem that may arise is the difficulty club members and the local partners' representatives may experience in arranging to meet each other due to their **busy schedules**. As a matter of fact, both work during the day, and female migrant workers are only available for project activities and club meetings in the evening, after their

working days and daily chores. This means that the local partners' representatives have to be available during those hours, after their daily working hours and during their personal free time.

Here again, a clear explanation of the advantages of participating in these activities and for themselves as persons shall be made. Efficient relationships may be built on basis of the willingness of local partners' representatives to involve themselves in those activities side by side with the women not just because it is their job but because it is a valuable personal engagement.

Finally, as with others topics, the **turnover of women** is a risk that cannot be avoided. The relationship between club leaders and members and local partners will be built on mutual personal knowledge. If the members of the clubs often change, the bond will get weaker, and the local partners will come to see the clubs as objects rather than a group of women and personalities. The best way to deal with this problem is to integrate this problem into the club's structure and functioning, by having a process where the members that are leaving the housing area are replaced by newcomers. Thus, there should always be members inside the club that know the local partners' representatives and can introduce the club members to them.

### IMPROVEMENT AND PERSPECTIVES

There are two improvements that could be made based on the experience of the Phu Nu project:

#### 1. Include the Companies in the Process More.

As stated above, the project faced several difficulties in getting them involved in the club's activities. More adapted presentations of the specific situation shall be delivered to the companies. The local authorities and public services have involved themselves in the project because supporting female migrant workers is part of their mandate, and they saw the advantages this had for the completion of their activities aimed at running the women's clubs. But for the companies, the advantages they could get were less obvious, but not less important on both sides.

For the companies, it could be interesting to get them to see the women's clubs meetings and trainings as a good way to exchange with their employees

and understand their needs. Maybe at first, the idea of having to reduce the working hours of their employees or to give them more rights and guarantees in their work could appear as an obstacle to their productivity. That is why the project team should cautiously address the subject by demonstrating that the companies could have more dedicated and motivated employees, a boosted production and a better stability of their work force if they provide softer and better working conditions to them. This contributes to fostering a more transparent relationship between the companies and employees. In Hai Duong, the project team noticed a first step by the companies, who tried to communicate more with their employees regarding, for example, the level of productivity they expected.

## 2. Further Reinforce the Involvement of Local Partners in the Women's Clubs.

So far, they have acted as resource persons, relays and supports for the women's clubs' leaders and members. But they could become members or semi-members in some capacity and see the women's clubs as structures, not only dedicated to the improvement of a specific part of the population, but as a way to improve the working and living conditions of a population working in the industrial sector as a whole.

However, this idea should not be implemented until women leaders have been trained and have come to feel confident enough to assume their positions as leaders. But in the long term, this solution could resolve a lot of the difficulties encountered by the project team.

To respond to the need to put internal migrations of workers as a priority in the political agenda of local authorities and partners, the project team has to be very precise as to why those situations have to be taken into account by the local stakeholders, by explaining for example that this rural exodus phenomenon in Vietnam is not a temporary occurrence, but is the beginning of a deep social change

in the country resulting from its development. It was not done in the Phu-Nu project, but it would be a relevant idea to prepare a detailed presentation on this phenomenon and what may be its foreseeable consequences over the longer term, in order to involve those actors in the project objectives and philosophy. This preparatory and presentation work should not be overlooked by the project team, but should be considered as one of the most important preparatory tasks when launching the project and women's clubs. The clubs can have a real purpose and effect on women's daily lives only if they are part of a larger network of stakeholders that can provide them with support and serve as relays for their needs and claims.



The main specificity that has been observed by the project team during the implementation of the women's club is that people coming from the same province tend to stay together and do not open up to the other workers living around them. There is a deficiency in direct communication between the inhabitants of the same area, and most of the time, workers would give priority to phone communication with distant relatives. There is almost no community spirit between the residents of the same area.

This could be a problem for their relationship with local partners who mostly come from other provinces. That would be one of the women's clubs' purposes, to try to create this local community spirit between the inhabitants of an area and their local partners by encouraging participants to get to know each other better.

Personal relationships between all the stakeholders are a strong asset for efforts to attain the objectives of the project, but also as a way to improve the female migrant workers' daily lives.

## 5

## PROMOTING THE ROLE OF THE CLUBS

## DESCRIPTION

OBJECTIVES, NEEDS AND RESULTS  
ACHIEVED BY THE PHU NU PROJECT

**Objectives:** The final objective of the Phu Nu project is to support female migrant workers in identifying and defining issues, finding answers and then presenting their proposals to the relevant stakeholders and partners. In order to achieve this objective, they need to be skilled in advocacy methods on topics that affect them, but must also be able to engage in dialogue with their partners, such as public services, companies, landlords, etc.

In order to encourage exchanges and discussions between the women leaders and those project stakeholders, initiating a framework with some established debate rules is also a necessity. All the actors have to know the beneficiaries and have to be aware of their situation in order to understand what the issues raised are and what solutions could be efficient and effective. They also have to consider those women relevant partners with whom they can carry out activities and whose ideas have to be taken into consideration.

Finally, all of them need to have a framework for dialogue, so that their discussions can be more constructive.

**Needs:**

Regarding the **women**, they have a very little knowledge of the several topics that have an impact on their daily lives. Their educational level is low and they often know little about their social rights (insurance), labour law or access to public services.

They also lack confidence in themselves, in their opinions or in their ideas. As they feel so belittled, they may think that their visions and suggestions are not interesting or not good enough to be considered.

Moreover, they do not know how to carry on a discussion on those topics, even when they have the

requisite technical knowledge. They are not experienced with how to argue, how to refer to facts and how to react to other ideas.

Regarding the **other actors**, if they know about the situations of those women, they may not know all of the aspects of their situations, as the labour migration trends in those areas are quite new to Vietnam. They need to be informed about the specificities of female migrant workers, by the project team at first and by the women themselves after a certain point.

Finally, a framework that will allow constructive debate and ensure that everyone's arguments are listened to and that consensus solutions are found, but that will also serve as a tool for implementing these solutions, is mostly nonexistent as far as the participation of outside parties in the proceedings of the women's clubs goes. If some meetings and working groups do exist, there is no permanent structure formally created that would assume this role of mediator.

**Results:** After three years of training sessions and regular meetings, female migrant workers have a much better understanding of the several topics that have an impact on their daily lives. Even if this technical knowledge has to be renewed regularly as laws and practices evolve quickly in Vietnam, they now have an understanding of how the body of laws works and how it can be updated to meet their needs.

They still need the support of the project team to clearly identify problems, to propose solutions and to introduce their claims, but they are now able to contribute to all those steps. They also feel more confident on topics such as living conditions, but less so on problems relating to working conditions. This can be explained mostly by the good relationship the women maintain with their **landlords**. Indeed, as the landlords directly benefit from the project's activities with the improvement of their housing, they are easier to mobilize in favour of the women. In addition, they spend more time with the female workers than do the companies' representatives. The landlords even became real activists for

the women's cause, thanks to their involvement in the Phu Nu project. They are ready to support women when they face any problem.

The **local partners** have also got a better understanding of the specificities of female migrant workers and are aware of the importance of taking those into account in their policies. Due to several meetings organized by the project team, women leaders and the other actors in the area know each other (it is common that members of the local authorities or public services take part in club's meetings to exchange with the members).

Finally, the systematic or occasional working groups have been widely implemented by the project, with three groups meeting every quarter to share about specific issues with the migrants and to try to find solutions collectively. However, even if this system has yielded results, it has its limits, especially in terms of the implications of each actor and the follow-up on the implementation of the solutions adopted.

A more permanent framework that could assume those roles still need to be developed and would be the object of an advocacy campaign led by the Phu Nu project team.

### TOOLS AND STEPS OF IMPLEMENTATION

The project has started to conduct **trainings**, as explained in the other sections of the present "lessons learnt" document. These trainings, which focused on women leaders, introduced topics in social law, health and labour law. On this basis, the women leaders were then able to hand on their knowledge to the members of the clubs, with the help of the project team.

The tools developed by the project are mainly documents supporting the development of women's capacities in carrying on with their propositions. First, there are booklets on the different topics that are impacting their daily lives, as well as flashcards that sum up a topic, which help in giving them handy access to resources with the objective of providing them with a good knowledge of those matters. Those documents have been printed and distributed to the women leaders, and more extensively to club

members, according to the topics they are interested in. The team project also provides women with public service flyers so they can get a clearer idea of what they can expect from those structures.

For the identification of the problems and the development of **proposals** to resolve them, the project team supports migrants based on the minutes of the club's meetings. Consequently, a framework adapted to the club meetings must be developed in collaboration with the women workers and a process to fill them has to be established.

Finally, questions, arguments and propositions should be defined in a form that would suit the women leaders of the meeting and the other actors. Of course, it is the migrants' role to define and write them, but the project team must provide close support for that. A specific document could be developed to help with this task.

### MEANS

The project team has also gathered a **panel of resource persons**. Those persons, who are employees of the different actors in the area (the local authorities, public services, companies, etc.), have taken part in the clubs' meetings (in exchange for the reimbursement of their travel expenses). It is difficult to make all of them come to the same meeting, because they often come when their time schedules are not too busy and when they have interest in the topics being discussed. At least three dialogue sessions are organized with all the stakeholders, because there are several advantages to their participation.

First, those resource persons can share their expertise with the migrants, giving them a better understanding of the several subjects that impact them. Moreover, through those meetings, female migrant workers and members of partners' structures get to know each other and create links. The women feel more confident, as they know the persons they will exchange with to find solutions to their problems in advance. This also helps the resource persons to get to know those targeted populations, their issues and their opinions, which could be relevant and taken into account when discussing solutions.

To develop those bonds, and to set up the basis of a real framework for dialogue, the project team has brought **working groups** together. There were three groups in each of the project's areas of intervention, each focused on a type of actor: a local authorities' group, a companies' group and a landlords' group. Meeting quarterly with the representatives of the women's workers, those groups discussed problems raised by the clubs and tried to find solutions.

Those discussion meetings were organized by GRET and the Women's Union in Vinh Phuc, on the premises of the latter. GRET prepared agendas for the meetings, which were then approved by the Women's Union, based on women leaders' claims.

- One or two stakeholders' representatives were generally invited to attend the meetings, but the number of participants depended on the topic being discussed. The Vice President of the Women's Union was in charge of hosting the meetings. After one or two hours of debate, all the decisions adopted were written in a specific report, although they were not all implemented.

In Hai Duong, those dialogue sessions are prepared by the Labour Union, in the company or the community house (a kind of cultural centre located at the entrance of each village, where leisure activities like sports are organized; there is no need for authorization, as the mayor gives the key when someone asks for it).

- The Labour Union set the agenda, with the assistance of CDI, and hosted the sessions. Around 45 people regularly attended the meetings, but once 150 persons participated. The strong presence of participants on that occasion can be explained by the fact that that meeting was organized in the company offices within working hours. It was also an opportunity for employees to ask questions to their managers.
- After 2-3 hours of discussions, the Labour Union listed all points raised and useful recommendations to apply measures in time.

Those groups talked about very material but important problems, such as public lighting or access to information. Those meetings were thus very useful, as they helped to find solutions to improve the living conditions of the groups target-

ed by the project, but also created a relationship of understanding and cooperation between those actors.

## ANALYSIS



The main element is a **good knowledge** of the topics. Knowledge leads to understanding, understanding leads to a good analysis of a situation and a good analysis leads to a relevant solution. If migrants' representatives appear to understand a problem deeply, they will not only be taken more seriously by their partners, but will also feel more confident of the relevance of their proposals to the problem.

A very careful focus should then be placed on the transmission of knowledge as it has been mentioned in the other sections of this document, by not only adapted trainings, but a close follow-up and support by the project team. Also, **motivation** is a key element of the process, and it has to be maintained by way of dialogue with the leaders and the organization of informal meetings.

The other main element linked to the first is **self-confidence**. As noted above, for several reasons, women may often feel like that they are not fit to talk about certain topics. In order to counteract this feeling, the project team needs to pay specific attention to women leaders. Explaining to them why their opinions are relevant is important, and why if they do not get involved and share their ideas, then the potential solutions will never be properly adapted to their problems. Their knowledge, opinions and visions are important elements that have to be taken into consideration in any discussion related to those topics.



The main risk is that the actors will not wish to exchange with the female migrant workers, feeling that their opinions and claims are not interesting or that discussing with them is not part of their jobs. That kind of reaction can occur, as female migrant



workers are not locals and consequently are not legally under the responsibility of the local authorities.

However, this situation is unusual, albeit not unheard of. The best solution to it consists in mobilizing the project team as a facilitator between women leaders and those actors to try to understand the reasons for such refusals. From there, it is possible to raise the partners' awareness of the fact that this problem is going to increase in the coming years and that they can have an impact on those problems.

Moreover, the time schedules of the different actors involved in those meetings also represent an obstacle. As they all work during the day, it is difficult to set up a timeframe for meetings. This must be anticipated and included in the preparation of the meeting.

### IMPROVEMENT AND PERSPECTIVES

Two improvements can be made to what has been tried.

First would be to focus more on **collective leadership**. At the moment, the women leaders are the group who carry most of the burden in the advocacy process. Even if they are among the best ones to talk about their situation, this adds a lot of responsibility that can discourage them. That is why, initiating collective leadership is important.

This could be resolved by developing the capacities of the community as a whole and by integrating mechanisms for collective leadership. This means that the female migrant workers will identify collectively the problems, propose solutions and carry out the solution decided upon, with ad hoc representatives present for the discussions. This would also

help the female workers with the ownership of the project topics and objectives.

The second improvement will be to create this **framework** for coordination, as a dialogue space where every actor could share his analysis and his opinions on the problem. But this framework would not only be for discussion, but would also be a way of implementing solutions. It could become responsible for making the decisions adopted really concrete.

### LOCAL CONTEXT

Because gender equality is a sensitive issue in Vietnam, as in many countries, women often feel less confident presenting their opinions in front of men. That would be a responsibility of the project team to follow up with this problem and provide support to the women to express themselves.

It is also important to bear in mind that there are differences in attitude between the north and south of Vietnam. Workers in the south tend to more actively assert their rights, whereas workers in the north tend to change job when they are not satisfied with their current situation. Those different behaviors can be explained by the presence of the Vietnamese government, which seems to be more significant in the north of the country. Indeed, the northern population has been subjected to communism for longer than the southern population. Furthermore, the south is also more economically developed and attracts more foreigners, who bring with them other ways of thinking, which may have spread a spirit of protest among the southern population.

These are, however, not strict rules or established facts, but just general points to bear in mind.

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# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Started in 2014, the Phu Nu project aims to improve the living conditions and social inclusion of migrant women living in industrial zones. It targets two provinces - Vinh Phuc and Hai Duong - where the vulnerability of female migrant workers in industrial areas is partly related to inadequate management and a deficiency in the public services available. The project aims specifically to strengthen and empower female migrant workers who are less likely to have their social rights guaranteed. By supporting **self-managed women's** clubs where migrant workers live, the project helps migrant workers participate in educational sessions to raise their legal awareness. This report presents the main lessons learned from this first-step experience.

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