

Seeds of hope: Women's groups lead the shift to sustainable farming

CASE STUDY Dong Tam group, Vietnam

Women Respond data from 2025 shows that women in Vietnam face floods, destruction of crops by pests, and an overall lack of access to clean water. 94% say these factors are affecting their ability to earn income. Nearly 3 in 5 report this has an impact on how much food they have. But the women of Dong Tam village in Vietnam's Central Highlands aren't losing hope. They're tackling these challenges head on by leading action to protect their environment and spearheading a shift toward more environmentally-friendly farming for the future.



The Dong Tam Village Savings And Loan Association (VSLA) group brings together 17 women who save and support each other.

Like other local farmers, for years they relied heavily on chemical fertilizers and pesticides for crops like coffee, durian, and maize. While this approach boosted yields in the short term, it gradually degraded the soil—depleting natural resources and threatening the ecosystem they depend on for their livelihoods.

Soil degradation, combined with the ongoing threat of floods and crop-destroying pests, made the women concerned about their ability to grow enough food in the future.

"We've always grown vegetables, but we used so much chemical fertilizer and pesticides," shares Ms. Đàm Thị Phương. "The soil kept getting worse, so yields were low, and the cost of supplies just kept going up. We couldn't make a living."

"Plus, every time my husband finished spraying, he felt sick for a few days, so I knew how badly it was affecting us."



Credit: Bui Hoang Quan/CARE Vietnam

AN ALTERNATIVE WAY TO FARM

Recognizing the need for change, women like Phương began exploring sustainable practices. In early 2024, she joined training in ecological agriculture. Along with other group members, Phương learned how to produce Indigenous Microorganism (IMO) solutions — an organic alternative to chemical inputs — and make organic fertilizers using locally available ingredients like banana, papaya, molasses, chili, garlic and ginger.

These natural products offer clear benefits: they are healthier for the environment, healthier for people, and farming costs are reduced.



Using IMO helps plants grow faster and healthier while cutting costs by half compared to chemical fertilizers. The vegetables are greener, the soil is healthier, and we no longer worry about harmful chemicals."

Phương used small loans from her savings group to invest in water-saving sprinklers and experiment with these natural alternatives. She soon became a model in her community, inspiring others to adopt organic fertilizers on their own farms.

"Yields were low, and the cost of supplies just kept going up. We couldn't make a living... That's why we had to change."

Credit: Bui Hoang Quan/CARE Vietnam

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

Efforts to protect their natural environment quickly expanded beyond individual farms, and soon the women of the Dong Tam VSLA decided to do more.

They began producing IMO collectively, enough for their own farms and for others in the community. They now sell IMO to local farmers, strengthening community resilience in the face of environmental shifts. The group doesn't just offer products; they share knowledge and support, building a network of farmers committed to nurturing the land for future generations.

What began with small household gardens has grown into a movement toward environmental protection, sustainable farming, and community well-being.

In this collaborative model, women lead efforts to track production, share resources, and exchange techniques and learnings.

Today, women like Phương are teaching their community through action: that adaptation begins at home, in the gardens they care for every day.



Credit: Bui Hoang Quan/CARE Vietnam



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A STRONGER ECONOMY FOR A STRONGER FUTURE

With stable income from vegetables sales and growing demand for eco-friendly produce, the group is optimistic about their ability to earn money and feed their families in the future.

Phương says they plan to expand production and commercialize their IMO products to reach more markets. She hopes their collaboration will not only reduce environmental harm but also build resilience among other communities facing changing weather patterns and environmental degradation.

The VSLA group has shown that sustainable farming is not just about crops; it is about community, care, and connection.

Together, they are restoring livelihoods while safeguarding the future of their land and their people.

The Dong Tam VSLA group was formed in 2023 by CARE's partner Community Development Center Daklak as part of a [project working with women small-scale producers](#) to improve access to food and nutrition.

For more on Women Respond, visit care.org/womenrespond

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