

PACE in the Community

Gap Inc.'s *Personal Advancement and Career Enhancement (P.A.C.E.)* project in garment factories had positive impacts on women's personal lives and their performance at work. CARE has been piloting this in the province of Koh Kong to learn the impacts this training can have on women in rural communities.

PACE in the Community works with community members to enhance their skills so they can use their money in the most effective ways. Working alongside CARE's *Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs)*, members of these community-based savings groups receive additional support to enhance their personal agency and economic empowerment.

When groups meet each week to add to their savings, they stay for training sessions on skills which will help them make the most of their money. These include life skills such as communication, problem-solving and decision-making, as well as Khmer literacy, health and hygiene, and basic financial skills. Women were also provided opportunities to learn from groups in other villages and to present their views to local authorities so their needs are heard.

The pilot showed that bringing these two models together was very effective. Linking *PACE in the Community* training with existing groups ensured people continued to participate, while providing relevant training to support savings activities helped maximise the impacts of participation in VSLA groups.



Key impacts: personal agency

The *PACE* model has helped to increase women's voice and agency both in their homes and communities.

- Increased self-esteem and confidence**
 Women's increased confidence in their abilities has changed how they perceive themselves and how they feel they are valued within the community. Many report an improved sense of self worth and happiness.
- More influence within their families**
 Improved communication and negotiation skills have positively impacted family relationships. Some women report husbands reduced drinking alcohol as a result of using reasoned discussion.
- Changed attitudes: women's traditional roles**
 More men are now more engaged with activities such as cooking, cleaning and looking after their children.
- Increased participation within communities**
 Over 50% of women involved with *PACE in the Community* can confidently speak up and discuss concerns with local authorities in community meetings. Women now proactively ask questions, challenge statements and ask for clarification then needed.
- Increased value within communities**
 Improved ability to communicate and negotiate with local leaders has helped women gain respect from those in authority. As a result their voices are more likely to be heard.
- Reduction in domestic violence**
 Commune council members reported a decrease in domestic violence within their communities and attributed this to the improved communication and negotiation skills participants gained from the project.

"I used to ask my husband or members of village committee first before doing things. Now I make decisions without their assistance and I am no longer afraid that people will be angry with me when I ask for advice."

"Before training I was unable to voice my own views to my husband. Now I feel more daring in what I will say and I am also able to talk with the village chief, commune council and other local leaders to tell them about the needs of our savings group."

Key impacts: economic empowerment

Many women who joined the *PACE in the Community* training saw significant financial benefits from this.

- **Increased and regular saving**
90% of VLSA members interviewed said their savings had increased since joining the P.A.C.E. project through the VSLAs. Non-PACE VLSA groups had not increased the amount they save, regardless of whether incomes had risen.
- **Increased investment in livelihood activities**
Women are consciously investing their money in creating small businesses and extending their livelihood activities. Loans of up to \$200 have allowed for investments such as purchasing additional livestock, more fishing nets or fertiliser to improve agricultural returns.
- **Improved results from livelihood activities**
Better time management and budget planning have led women's income generation activities to be more successful than before.
- **Changed attitudes: women's economic contributions**
Women's economic contributions are valued more within their communities as a result of the increased confidence they are demonstrating and the increased income they are generating for their families.
- **Increased financial independence**
Savings, investing in livelihoods and the diversification of income generating activities mean women are less dependent on their husbands for money.
- **Reduction in debt**
Participants have reported that financial management skills are having a huge impact on their family finances, including helping families to escape from debt.

"Before I joined the classes I had only 1 sow. Now, I have 3 sows for breeding and 9 pigs for selling. Both my savings and number of pigs have increased."

"I used 200,000 riels (USD\$50) from my savings to buy piglets and then sold them for 1 million riels (USD\$250) net profit."



KEY FACTS & STATS: 2014

- 13 VLSA groups in 11 villages
- 200 participants (94% women)
- Each group received 28 x 1.5 hour training sessions
- 93% graduated
- Knowledge levels doubled by end of project

"I now share housework with my wife, we can finish the chores quickly and this has reduced conflict within our family."



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"My self esteem is enhanced because when my husband is not able to work and earn an income, I can still maintain my share in the VSLA as I have livestock and can earn money myself."



PACE VSLA VS NON-PACE VSLA

Differences between VSLA groups receiving PACE training and those which did not were so marked that some members requested to switch groups. Reasons include:

- Better communication within the groups
- Improved sense of ownership among members
- Strong group spirit support other members
- Improved ability to work together to solve problems
- Greater savings successes