



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>ANCP</b>	Australian NGO Cooperation Program
<b>CCWC</b>	Commune Committee for Women and Children
<b>DFAT</b>	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
<b>DoA</b>	District Office of Agriculture
<b>DoWA</b>	District Office of Women's Affairs
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FIG</b>	Farmer Interest Group
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>FPIC</b>	Free and Prior Informed Consent
<b>GEF</b>	Gender Equality Framework
<b>HEAD</b>	Health and Development Alliance
<b>INGO</b>	International Non-Government Organisation
<b>ISAF</b>	Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interview
<b>LEL</b>	Local Economic Leadership for Marginalised Rural Women project
<b>MAFF</b>	Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
<b>MFI</b>	Micro-Finance Institution
<b>MoWA</b>	Ministry of Women's Affairs
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organisation
<b>PACE</b>	Personal Advancement Career Enhancement
<b>PDoA</b>	Provincial Department of Agriculture
<b>PDoWA</b>	Provincial Department of Women's Affairs
<b>PIN</b>	People in Need
<b>PSL</b>	Partnering to Save Lives project
<b>SDK</b>	Women Demonstration Farmer (Khmer: <i>Satrei Dekneam Kaksethan</i> )
<b>SoC</b>	Stories of Change
<b>ToT</b>	Training of Trainers
<b>VAHW</b>	Village Animal Health Worker
<b>VSLA</b>	Village Saving and Loans Associations
<b>YWIB</b>	Young Women in Business project

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched on 1 July 2013, the *Local Economic Leadership for Marginalised Women Project* (LEL) in Cambodia is a four year project funded under the Australian Government's *Australian NGO Cooperation Agreement* (ANCP) initiative. The project is mainly implemented in Botum Sakor and Sre Ambel districts, Koh Kong province, in south-west Cambodia. National level dialogue also takes place in Phnom Penh.

LEL focusses on supporting marginalised rural women to not only benefit from improved livelihood options, but through their strengthened participation and representation in markets and value chains, there will also be fundamental shifts in broader attitudes on the economic position and roles of rural women.

LEL is in Year 3 of its proposed four year design. CARE International in Cambodia and CARE Australia have decided to undertake a joint internal Mid Term Review (MTR) of LEL. The mid-term review aimed to assess LEL progress to date and provide formative recommendations for the final year of the project to assist LEL in achieving its strategic objectives and overall goal. The review considered LEL activities' relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency in relation to progress towards the intermediate outcomes and strategic objectives.

LEL has 21 target villages in Sre Ambel and 7 target villages in Botum Sakor. Due to time constraints, the MTR team visited four villages – one village in Botum Sakor and three villages in Sre Ambel. These villages were selected based on a criteria to ensure a diverse subset of participants. Between March 13 and March 17 2016, the team carried out multiple focus group discussions and key informant interviews in each of the four villages, consulting with project participants and a diverse range of stakeholders ranging from women demonstration farmers and their husbands, local leaders to Government ministry representatives.

### Key findings

#### Outcome 1: Marginalised rural women have increased benefits from elevated livelihood options

##### Achievements

- Existing collectives have been nurtured with women demonstration farmers (**SDKs**) and **farmer interest group (FIG) members benefiting from sustained engagement** from CARE Cambodia over the last five years. This can be seen in the different confidence in and application of agricultural techniques and levels of production between new and established groups.
- LEL has **supported the capacity development of SDKs and FIG members through training** on a wide variety of topics, including technical skills in livestock rearing and vegetable and fruit tree production. These skills are learnt through a cascading model training model (SDK to FIG member) and through Farmer Field Days led by SDKs and supported by CARE.
- The project has **enhanced the efforts of the Provincial Department of Agriculture (PDaA) to better and more equitably serve female farmers** in Koh Kong province.
- There are **high adoption rates of project-promoted livestock and agricultural practices by women farmers**. Recent project monitoring data reveals that 87% of SDKs and 58% of FIGs



have adopted new practices and techniques. In terms of livestock husbandry, this included: pig nutrition, housing and routing vaccination as well as chicken vaccination and hatchery. In relation to vegetable growing, the most frequently adapted techniques included: seed selection, land preparation, fertiliser and pest management. Adoption rates for intercropping, crop rotation, irrigation techniques and post-harvest management appeared to be low.

- **Project-promoted techniques have led to improved quality and quantity of crop and livestock production.** Whilst this cannot be verified using qualitative means, vegetable production has reportedly increased between two- and three-fold. PDoA representatives also noted that there was significant difference in agricultural activity and production between LEL target districts and non-target districts.
- **Women farmers have increased household income** across both districts. The greatest gains have been through the sale of livestock to traders and middlemen. The second largest gain has been in surplus crop sales either locally or to traders. However, it should be noted that increases in household income may not have directly benefitted women farmers in male-headed households.
- There is an **emerging culture of saving within women farmer households**. As a first priority, women are meeting immediate household needs and subsequently any remaining income generated from the sale of livestock or crops is used to either invest in agricultural inputs or assets, and pay their contribution to the village savings and loans association (VSLA) group.
- **Women have access to credit for agricultural investment through VSLAs.** Group members are borrowing money for agricultural inputs and expansion. However, women farmers also report that given the current drought situation, loans are increasingly being used to meet immediate household needs including the purchase of food.
- **Women farmers are being recognised in non-traditional productive roles through the village animal health worker (VAHW) program.** Traditionally this government-supported program only targets men, but the LEL project has successfully promoted the inclusion of women. The majority VAHWs have established successful small businesses that support their para-vet activities.
- **Women farmers have basic marketing knowledge and are actively seeking to access market information** informally through networks of neighbours and family.

### *Challenges*

- **El Niño drought conditions are impacting project participants with evidence of tensions between productive and domestic water consumption.** LEL-promoted livelihood options are highly dependent on water availability and there is already evidence of difficult water allocation and management decisions being made by women farmers, including abandoning their home gardens. At the time of the MTR, the project planned to construct 16 community water ponds. The review suggests that a number of issues must be considered including remaining timeframe, appropriate construction, ongoing maintenance, ownership and potential tension over land use.

- **Variable provision of extension services by women demonstration farmers.** Whilst SDKs have increased their capacity and practical skills in livestock husbandry and vegetable production – their role in actively promoting these techniques and sharing knowledge to FIG members and the broader community appears to be limited to the field days organised by CARE.
- **Multiple roles held by individual women farmers.** The review found that the majority of SDKs hold a combination of two or more roles promoted under the LEL project. Women farmers are usually an SDK plus one or more of the following: VAHW; Village Agent; VSLA leader; Box keeper; Cashier. Whilst this is understandable given that these roles require a certain level of capacity – there is a risk that the SDKs will naturally prioritise those activities that provide a financial return over those that do not.
- **Limited market engagement by women.** Whilst SDKs and FIG members appear to have a better understanding of how markets function and how to access pricing information, there has been less progress in terms of positioning them to take advantage of existing and emerging market opportunities for their products.
- **Low literacy of women farmers.** Many women, including those who were VSLA members, had poor financial literacy and limited cash management experience.

## Outcome 2: Better valuing of elevated economic opportunities for rural women by men and communities

### *Achievements*

- **Increase in the valuing of women farmer's roles and contributions to household wellbeing.** The aspirations of women farmers themselves are changing through exposure to progressive female roles, including SDKs and VAHWs. Men's attitudes towards women farmers is changing with increased valuing of women's agricultural work and women as income-earners.
- **Increased influence and joint household decision-making by women farmers.** Women farmers report that they are now able to make sole or joint decisions about the household's income and assets, compared to two years ago. Women farmers report increasing influence on decisions regarding what agricultural inputs, which crops to plan and when, and how to allocate household income – the three decisions that women consider to be the most important decisions a household makes.
- **Shared productive and domestic workloads within women farmer households.** For the women farmers whose husbands have attended Provincial Department of Women Affairs (PDOWA) and CARE gender training or men's dialogues, there is evidence of gradual changes in household attitudes. This is enabling women to better balance their productive and domestic workloads and benefit from the family farm. Main changes in gender relations at the household level centre around changes in household labour with a more equitable distribution of labour in the home.
- Anecdotal evidence suggests that **VSLA groups have led to a reduction in social issues** at the village-level **including gambling and domestic violence.**

### Challenges

- **Lack of targeted extension services by local authorities for women farmers.** While the PDoA recognises that women play a significant role in farming, in general, women farmers are still perceived as not being the ‘real’ farmer or head-of household. The MTR team also found that PDoA representatives lacked awareness of the barriers women face in accessing extension services.
- **Participation of women farmers in commune councils and local planning.** Whilst there has been significant progress in terms of women farmers becoming FIG members and then SDK/VAHWs, promoting women in community-level leadership has been slower to progress. Women farmers are not yet translating their technical confidence as an SDK/VAHW into public confidence on broader community issues.
- **An opportunity is being missed to maximise women farmers’ potential for economic leadership within agricultural markets.** By focussing on the commune council as the next step in leadership progression, the LEL project logic misses this opportunity. Project investments could increase women’s power in market systems by ‘upgrading’ them to roles that are more profitable and less risky – beyond production to processing or inputs.

### Outcome 3: Stronger learning, evidence and national influence

#### Achievements

- There is **good coordination and collaboration with all levels of government.** The LEL project aligns well with government policies and has good working relationships with the district and provincial departments responsible for agriculture and women’s affairs. CARE has also continued to maintain a good relationship with H.E. Hor Malin, Secretary of State at the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF), including facilitating a project site visit.
- CARE has **documented approaches and developed a range of training resources** in Khmer. Practical guidance books with visuals have been developed on technical agricultural topics as well as gender roles. These resources are an increase to knowledge for low-literate women and have been acknowledged by Government officials as high quality and useful. CARE has also documentation on the four pilots implemented as part of the project, safe migration approach, gendered market analysis, results monitoring, and community accountability through the community scorecard.

#### Challenges

- There is a need to **distill outcomes and learnings from documentation to inform policy and programming.** The project has generated a number of documents from the pilots and most of them have already been shared with Government stakeholders. However, to increase their impact and up-take, there is a need to distill these long documents into short, attractive briefs.
- **Utility of community scorecard pilot may be limited.** The standard CARE model, which has been tested many times around the world, was not implemented. Instead, it was an adapted



by a local partner. The review recommended that the second round use the standard CARE approach but the local partner was already in the process of implementing it. It will be useful to reflect on CARE's model and what was learnt from the pilot to inform future social accountability work in Cambodia.

- **Further work is needed for Government officials to internalise the importance of gender training.** At the moment, it seems that some Government staff are implementing gender trainings or attending workshops because it is Government policy rather than understanding the importance and benefits of this work.

The project remains **relevant** to the needs of women farmers in terms of increasing their skills and capacities to participate in the market economy and contribute to their household's income. However, further work is needed to ensure resilience and climate variability are considered in the planning of project activities so development gains are not lost (e.g. through the current drought). The project is well aligned to Government policies in Cambodia and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) Aid Investment Plan for Cambodia (2015 – 2018).

In terms of **gender**, women's **agency** is improving – in FGDs, women farmers report their skills, knowledge, and confidence is increasing through their participation in agricultural trainings and through ongoing mentoring and support in applying new techniques and practices. In terms of **relations**, the review indicates that relations are slowly changing in terms of influence on financial decision-making. In the case of the SDK and VAHW models, as men begin to see women as skilled and capable farmers and income earners, so they tend to respect and value women's views and contributions more. In terms of changing workloads, both men and women's FGDs report that there is a more equal distribution of both productive and domestic workloads. The review found that the project's work on **structures** is mixed. The project partners with the provincial and district level government and has gained visibility at the national level through providing inputs to the National Department of Animal Health and Production's Gender Mainstreaming Policy. However, the review did not find evidence of women being encouraged to move beyond production and take leadership roles within co-operatives or producer groups, processing, marketing or sale of products being generated through Objective 1.

In relation to **disability inclusion**, the project has worked to identify and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities as much as possible, including through incorporation into the beneficiary selection. However, the project works with people who already have some level of assets and capital to increase income and production, which may unintentionally exclude some people with disabilities. That said, the project is promoting improved agricultural techniques and animal husbandry practices through picture books and practicals. This is one way to make activities accessible not only to low-literate people but also people with disabilities. Going forward, CARE Cambodia may want to think about how they address the components of CARE Australia's Disability Framework.

In relation to **sustainability**, CARE has long-term relationships with the communities in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor districts and ongoing strong relationships with key government actors and local authorities. Being well-regarded, having strong commitment from all levels of Government will help to ensure that project learning influences Government policy. The project's work around promoting women in the VAHW program and getting that recognised at the highest levels of the Cambodian

Government is a highlight. CARE's participatory training methodology is easy to understand so has the potential for good up-take by government staff. VSLAs are promoting a savings culture and are increasing access to credit for people who many otherwise be able to get a line of credit. They are also promoting community solidarity as they meet regularly and the interest is kept within the community instead of paying the banks or micro finance institutions. Some barriers to sustainability remain. Further work is needed for SDKs, SDK Assistants and VAHWs to internalise project knowledge so training activities need to be consolidated in the remaining project period. Lack of government budget to implement their own trainings, despite the willingness, is an ongoing challenge. Finally, the drought and resulting shortage of water is already affecting production in some locations. Climate-proofing our project activities is essential going forward.

### **Recommendations**

These recommendations are intended to contribute to improved project planning and implementation for the LEL project, with the hope that others may find useful lessons as well. Whilst all of the recommendations below are considered to ensure project impact and sustainability, in recognition of the remaining timeframes, project implementation schedule, and subsequent design phase, recommendations have been ordered according to the current and potential future phase of LEL. Further details about each recommendation can be found in Section 4.0.

### **CURRENT PHASE**

*Promote and strengthen the role of SDKs and SDK assistants:*through strengthening and formalising the SDK assistant role it is likely that the provision of agricultural advice relating to crops, specifically vegetable growing will continue to receive equal priority to that currently received by advice on livestock husbandry that attracts a fee.

*Promote conservation agriculture techniques:*many of the social and economic gains made by project participants are natural-systems based and are therefore vulnerable to climatic factors. This has been highlighted by the current El Nino drought conditions being experienced in Koh Kong.

*Enhance the quality of marketing initiatives:*the project is scheduled to continue rolling out marketing training over the remaining implementation period, therefore three steps are proposed to build on the existing basic training package: 1) establish FIG-based informal marketing committees with a view to formalising these under a future phase; 2) deliver business training and 3) emphasise diversification.

*Structure VSLA group savings, lending criteria and repayment schedules to take into account seasonality:* currently a VSLA group cycle depends on when the group was established – essentially nine months from the date the group was established. Livelihood strategies in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor are highly seasonal which can affect the economic status and food security of women farmers and their households.

*Target financial education to VSLA members to increase financial literacy and reduce vulnerability:*at this stage, the project plans to establish up to 32 new VSLA groups over the next year. One year is a short period of time within which to establish a functioning VSLA – it would mean there is only the opportunity to have single supported share-out. An alternative would be to build on a training component to existing VSLAs on financial literacy.

*Revise project language to better reflect the vision of the project:* Currently, the project uses a range of terminology including elevated livelihood options, elevated economic opportunities, and better valuing of women's livelihoods. Whilst these broad terms are well-described further down at the outcome level – at the objective level the change being sought is not captured.

## **FUTURE PHASE**

*Agriculture as a family enterprise:* adopt family business management training approach that values the contribution of women to the economic well-being of the household and identifies opportunities for collaboration on farm management between both heads of household.

*Women's collective action in agricultural markets:* Currently, the review found that women are almost exclusively positioned at the bottom of the agricultural value chain, providing labour for production without realising the benefits from their labour through processing, direct marketing and sale. Cooperatives represent a mechanism through which to ensure women's economic empowerment whereby they are able to put the skills and knowledge they have gained into action and choice.

*Integrate complimentary training programs into the group-based training methodology:* given the project focus on increasing production and diversity (through intercropping) there is potential to also introduce a curriculum of nutritional and health training through the groups to improve health behaviours of group members and lead to improvements in food security through better utilisation of food.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Background

Cambodia has made rapid progress in its economic development, with poverty rates decreasing in recent years. However, while Cambodia's economy has been growing, income inequality has increased and a significant proportion of the population remains in poverty, particularly in rural areas, where up to 90% of Cambodia's poor live. Marginalised rural women (MRW) are amongst those at risk of being left behind. Economic exclusion and vulnerability are linked to deeply rooted gendered attitudes. Women in Cambodia are subject to different expectations and opportunities than men; for example many believe that men and women have different rights, with men having more rights in business, decision-making, social and sexual freedom and mobility. Where rural women have entered the cash economy, they largely take on work that is of lower value than that of men, and in roles often seen as an extension of 'women's work'. Government programmatic responses have been limited, reflecting resource and capacity constraints and gendered institutional behaviours.

Launched on 1 July 2013, the *Local Economic Leadership for Marginalised Women Project* (LEL) in Cambodia is a four year project funded under the Australian Government's *Australian NGO Cooperation Agreement* (ANCP) initiative.

LEL focusses on supporting marginalized rural women to not only benefit from improved livelihood options, but through their strengthened participation and representation in markets and value chains, there will also be fundamental shifts in broader attitudes on the economic position and roles of rural women. This requires targeted support for rural women to engage in locally appropriate, higher level livelihood options relevant to the changing economic environment in rural Cambodia, and changes in deeply held attitudes and practices of key duty bearers at local and national levels.

LEL has three strategic objectives:

Objective 1: Marginalised rural women have increased benefits from elevated livelihood options

Objective 2: Better valuing of elevated economic opportunities for rural women by men and communities

Objective 3: Stronger learning, evidence and national influence

Leveraging established local relationships and foundations laid through the recently completed European Commission-funded *Young Women in Business* (YWIB) project, the project introduces a number of programming innovations in economic roles for marginalised rural women, in local governance, and in specific interventions such as safe migration. Underpinning the approach is a strong emphasis on learning and building credible evidence, with a view to deepening impacts, capturing learning from innovative approaches, and influencing dialogue and broader programming at local and national levels.

LEL is currently implemented in:

- *Botum Sakor and Sre Ambel Districts, Koh Kong Province:* for community level interventions, and provincial level capacity building and dialogue
- *Phnom Penh:* for engagement in national level dialogue

Koh Kong Province, located on the border with Thailand, is transitioning from a largely agricultural, subsistence based economy, to a more diverse economic base. Road access has improved markedly in recent years, providing new opportunities and risks and opening up the province to foreign and national investment, fueling industries such as sugar plantations and logging, and seeing growth in the services sector. A new Special Economic Zone to attract industry has been established in Mondul Seima District while Botum Sakor and Sre Ambel Districts have been identified as areas for economic land concessions. To date through economic land concessions one large Chinese hydro power station has been built and a British owned sugar company runs a large sugar plantation. These new industries bring new opportunities in labour for surrounding communities; however, the work is often seasonal and there is little oversight from government regarding adherence to fair working conditions and labour laws. Furthermore hundreds of families have been displaced by these economic land concessions with little compensation or access to new livelihoods.

Phnom Penh is the seat of economic and political decision-making. LEL aims to bring evidence and recommendations from target communities to national level dialogue amongst key government, United Nations, International NGOs and Civil Society Organisation stakeholders.

LEL is in Year 3 of its proposed four year design. CARE International in Cambodia and CARE Australia (CAUS) have decided to undertake a joint internal Mid Term Review (MTR) of LEL.

### **Mid-term Review Objectives**

The primary purpose of the MTR is to assess LEL progress to date and provide formative recommendations for the final year of the four year project period to assist LEL in achieving its strategic objectives and overall goal. For this MTR, particular focus was given to LEL activities and progress towards the outcome areas under each strategic objective, as outlined in the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework. The review considered LEL activities' relevance, effectiveness, impact, sustainability and efficiency in relation to progress towards the intermediate outcomes and strategic objectives.

Information contained in the baseline study and various project documentation informed the review. The review also gave specific consideration of project activities and achievements to date in relation to CARE's Gender Equality Framework (GEF), and in particular, a focus on activities that aim to address barriers within the relations and structures domains of the GEF as key to achieving sustainable improvements to in the social and economic wellbeing of marginalised rural women in Cambodia.

Recommendations aim to inform 1) quality implementation of activities over the remainder of the project period and 2) the potential for innovation and scale-up should a second phase of the project be feasible. Recommendations consider what is working well, and what could be improved in order to achieve the project's strategic objectives and overall goal.

## **2.0 METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Mid-term Review Process**

The MTR team used a mixed method approach for the review - whilst quantitative data came primarily from the project baseline and routine monitoring, the collection of qualitative data in-country gave richness and context to quantitative outcomes and provided an assessment of overall

engagement by project partners and beneficiaries. Qualitative methods included focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII), and Stories of Change Interviews (SoCs). These tools gathered data for gauging project quality and drawing out key elements of performance assessment (e.g., relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability). The review was participatory, incorporating a cross section of key stakeholders at community, district and provincial levels, including: project participants, commune council representatives, commune committees, district and provincial government agencies, and CARE Cambodia LEL project staff.

The MTR is aligned with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's (DFAT) monitoring and evaluation requirements, and includes a core set of key evaluation questions developed by CARE regarding various elements of performance:

#### *Key Research Questions*

KEY QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	METHOD
<b>RELEVANCE</b>		
How does LEL adapt in response to changes in local context (social, political and economic)?	What steps have been taken to ensure that project strategies are appropriate/flexible for a changing national context? Are changes needed? How could this be improved? How does the program relate/complement Government policy at National; Provincial and District levels?	KII, FGDs, project documents
Is the project design based on/responsive to sound research?	How does project design and implementation reflect the findings of the different analyses undertaken? E.g. market analysis; gender and power analysis?	Project documents
How does the project fit into the long-term program strategy?	How does the project connect to the country long-term program strategy? Which program? Where are the opportunities to complement other components of the LTP?	KIIs, project documents
<b>EFFECTIVENESS</b>		
To what extent is LEL on track to achieve its strategic objectives and outcome areas?	Are some LEL initiatives proving to be more/ less effective than others? What is working best and why? What is not working and why?  How effectively are various project outcome areas integrated?  Do SDKs and VSLA members perceive their economic and social well-being to be improved as a result of activities?  What have been economic impacts of participation in LEL activities for women at the different levels – demonstration farmer; para-vet; village extension/animal health worker?  What are the necessary pre-conditions that enable women to progress through the levels (demonstration farmer; para-vet; village extension/animal health worker) and to have resilience in the face of external shocks?  Have women's income earning and economic opportunities improved as a result of their participation in LEL activities?  What social, economic and environmental barriers to women's economic empowerment remain under LEL?  What other empowerment impacts have been experienced by women involved in activities of the SDK or VSLA groups?  How has the project impacted on women's power and	KIIs, FGDs, project documents



KEY QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	METHOD
	<p>agency? (Covering agency, structure and relations)</p> <p>What have been the impacts of participation/involvement in LEL for partner organisations (i.e. CCWs; PDOWA; POAFF)?</p> <p>Have these organisations changed to become more supportive of women's inclusion and participation in income earning activities? How do they support women?</p>	
Are partnerships progressing in line with expectations and good partnership practice?	<p>Capacity of implementing partners, both in terms of technical capacity and systems, and ability to sustain project activities beyond CARE inputs and support?</p> <p>What steps could be taken to improve partner staff capacity?</p> <p>Extent of engagement with partners?</p>	KIIs and project documents
How do the results contribute to the goal and strategic objectives of LEL?	<p>The extent to which participants believe participation in LEL activities have improved their wellbeing (livelihood security, income; control over productive assets; increased knowledge; increased decision-making; improved intra-household relationships)?</p> <p>Any shifts in cultural and social norms and attitudes within the household and/or community-level since project inception?</p> <p>What, if any, unanticipated negative consequences of the project activities were observed? How were they addressed?</p> <p>Unanticipated positive consequences?</p>	FGDs, KIIs
To what extent is LEL reaching the poorest and most vulnerable groups?	<p>What criteria were used to select target communities and participants?</p> <p>To what extent has the project improved the lives of the most vulnerable (e.g. rural women and people with disabilities)?</p>	KIIs, FGDs, project documents
<b>EFFICIENCY</b>		
Structural efficiency?	<p>To what extent are the management systems and flows efficient?</p> <p>To what extent is the project management structure adequate to deliver the project objectives?</p>	KIIs, project documents
Cost efficiency?	<p>To what extent were budget allocations adequate to achieve the stated objectives?</p> <p>Was the timeframe for the project realistic?</p> <p>Were resources applied efficiently? Burn rates? How to improve?</p>	KII, project documents
<b>SUSTAINABILITY</b>		
Is the LEL exit strategy appropriate and adequate?	<p>Is the project exit strategy appropriate to the timeline?</p> <p>To what extent are activities in line with or complementary to other actors (e.g. government agencies, NGOs)?</p> <p>How has the project leveraged financial and non-financial resources (e.g. knowledge) from others including government, donors, peer agencies, institutions?</p>	KII, FGDs, project documents

KEY QUESTIONS	SUB-QUESTIONS	METHOD
To what extent are LEL outcomes/impact sustainable?	<p>How does the project define sustainability? What would make the project sustainable?</p> <p>Are we using the best available climate projections to plan our activities? Are we ensuring our activities are sustainable under changing climate?</p> <p>To what extent was long-term sustainability considered during planning? What could have been done better?</p> <p>How has the project leveraged financial and non-financial resources (e.g. knowledge) from others including government, donors, peer agencies, institutions?</p>	KIIs; project documents
<b>GENDER/DISABILITY</b>		
To what extent has LEL developed the capacity of community leaders and civil society in understanding and promoting gender equality?	<p>How has the project promoted gender-sensitive/transformational thinking/approaches of local government partners? What is working best and why? What is not working and why?</p> <p>Does the project have potential to influence the broader work of local government/peers agencies and partners?</p>	KIIs, project documents
To what extent has LEL supported equal access by women, men and people with disability to the benefits of activities, and more broadly to resources, services and skills (e.g., by increased access directly, or by removing barriers to access)?	<p>Do project strategies enable effective and equitable participation of women at each stage?</p> <p>Do women who participate in project promoted activities/groups experience improved gender relations and increased voice and power within households and communities? Why/why not?</p> <p>How has the project ensured that vulnerable people such as people with disabilities/elderly/youth are represented and their specific concerns addressed at all stages of design, implementation and M&amp;E?</p> <p>To what extent are men involved in promoting women empowerment? Is any conflict being generated as a result? How is conflict managed?</p>	KII, FGDs, project documents
<b>MONITORING AND EVALUATION</b>		
Are M&E systems being used for reporting and learning?	<p>Who are the primary users of project monitoring information? How could the collection, analysis and dissemination of project-level information be improved?</p> <p>How has M&amp;E data been integrated into ongoing project design and implementation?</p> <p>Are systems in place to promote participant feedback on inputs and services?</p> <p>Is the project taking time to reflect on progress and share learning within the teams and across teams?</p>	KII, project documents
Are M&E systems fit for purpose?	<p>Does the M&amp;E system monitor key indicators of change? Where can improvements be made?</p> <p>Adequate M&amp;E staffing to implement systems?</p> <p>Are systems in place to promote data collection and analysis with accuracy?</p>	KII, project documents

## 2.2 Tools

A standardised set of qualitative participatory tools was developed in collaboration with the LEL project team. These tools included: detailed field guides for community FGDs; SOC interview guides; and KII guides/outlines for government agencies; commune council leaders; commune committee for Women and Children representatives; female village para-vets; Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) leaders/Village Agents; Women Demonstration Farmers (SDK) group leaders and other stakeholders whose opinions were relevant to the key questions in the MTR.

## 2.3 Site Selection

LEL has 21 target villages in Sre Ambel and 7 target villages in Botum Sakor. The MTR conducted FGDs in a total of four villages – one village in Botum Sakor and three villages in Sre Ambel.

The selection of villages was based on the following criteria:

1. **Distance from town centre/road accessibility:** in each district the team aimed to cover at least one village close to town and/or with good road accessibility and one that is more distant and/or less accessible by road
2. **Type of groups (SDK/VSLA) present in the village:** the team aimed to cover both SDK and VSLA female group members. Male group members were husbands of SDK/VSLA members and had participated in either gender training or men's dialogue's.
3. **Type of economic activity/ livelihood model practiced by groups:** the team aimed to cover both types of SDK activities – integrated farming and nurseries and Village Animal Health Worker (VAHW) enterprises. By conducting FGDs with groups practicing a range of different livelihood models/ economic activities the team aimed to explore which activities or combination of activities lead to the greatest impact and are mutually reinforcing.

Table 1: Villages selected for the review

DISTRICT	COMMUNE	VILLAGE	DISTANCE (KM)	TYPE OF FGD GROUP	ECONOMIC ACTIVITY	# OF HHS
Botum Sakor	Kandol	Tamkon	36	Women SDKs =6 FIGs =6 Husband Husband SDK/FIG =12	Rice, corn, vegetable and livestock raising	164
Sre Ambel	Sre Ambel	Klong	6	Women SDKs =5 FIGs =7 Husband Husband SDK/FIG=12	Vegetable, rice and livestock raising	160
	Chroy Svay	Chroy Svay Lech	23	Women SDKs =8 FIGs =4 Husband Husband SDK/FIG=12	Pig raising, rice, and main income fishing crab, crimps.	182
	Chi Khor Leu	Chi Khor	18	Women SDKs =8 FIGs =4 Husband Husband SDK/FIG=12	Rice, vegetable and livestock raising	243

## 2.4 Data Collection

The MTR team carried out data collection in Koh Kong Province between March 13 and March 17, 2016.

The team carried out female-only FGDs and male-only FGDs comprised of:

FGD	PARTICIPANTS
<b>WOMEN'S FGD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10-12 participants</li><li>• participants made up of SDKs who are either engaged in integrated farming or nurseries.</li><li>• 50% of participants both SDKs and VSLA members.</li></ul>
<b>MEN'S FGD</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10-12 participants</li><li>• participants made up of husbands of SDKs/VSLA members</li><li>• where possible participants had also participated in gender training/men's dialogues.</li></ul>

Additionally, the MTR team conducted key informant interviews with a diversity of stakeholders each offering a unique perspective of the LEL project – these included VSLA leaders; SDK leaders; Para-vet or participant in the VAHW program; Commune Council Leaders; Committee for Women and Children representatives; Koh Kong Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (PDOWA); Provincial Department of Agriculture (PDofA); District Agriculture Office (DoA); District of Women Affairs (DoWA) and CARE LEL project staff. The MTR team also carried out SOC interviews with SDKs and VAHWs and the husbands of SDK/VAHW.

## 2.5 Data Analysis

Ideally, qualitative data are reviewed each day to crosscheck information and interpretation, and to sharpen discussion guides as necessary. Following each day of interviews and field work the MTR team came together to review and cross-check data as well as identify common themes. Summaries were reviewed and reorganised by the team following fieldwork to identify trends related to male/female perceptions, similarities and differences, and project indicators.

A systematic review of project documents complemented primary data. A reflection workshop attended by the project team and implementing staff was held on March 18, 2016. Preliminary findings and recommendations were shared, and several points were discussed. The results of that discussion are incorporated into this report.

## 2.6 Limitations

The CARE Cambodia Country Office was very responsive and supportive throughout the MTR process. Although there were challenges during the course of the review, the extent to which they limit the ability to comprehensively address key review questions is minimal.

### *Timeframe*

A total of 10 days was allocated for the in-country field work – given the rural location only four communities could be visited in this timeframe. It must therefore be noted that although this review uses qualitative data from hopefully a sufficiently diverse subset of project participants and partner organisations, for logistical reasons the team could not visit all project sites where LEL activities are

being implemented through partners. Thus, it is difficult to estimate the level to which specific field observations can be generalised to the entire LEL project. Review findings should be used to cross-check throughout the rest of the area of implementation those activities that may need more/less focus in terms of improving outcomes by the end of the project.

### *Attribution*

Attribution of findings to LEL alone is difficult as a number of similar CARE Cambodia projects have been implemented successively in Koh Kong Province since 2007, including LEAD; WEBLOOM; Young Women in Business (YWIB) and Partnering to Save Lives (PSL). LEL builds on the learning from these projects and therefore the review aims to evaluate CARE Cambodia's approach to women's economic empowerment and leadership as well as the project itself.

CARE Cambodia was the first INGO to work in Koh Kong Province at the time when implementation of the LEAD project began in 2007. However, since 2006 the district has experienced rapid and wide-reaching process of development and socio-economic change. It was clear from FGDs that wider processes of socio-economic change within the province such as migration, economic land concessions and construction of new roads have had a considerable impact in the lives of LEL project participants both currently and during the time as participants in previous CARE projects. The analysis presented in Section 3 therefore seeks evidence of the LEL's *contribution* to changes in women's economic empowerment and leadership while recognising that those changes cannot be attributed as being *solely* the result of their participation in project activities.

## **2.7 Organisation of findings**

The purpose of a MTR is to serve as a management tool, where input from independent reviewers provides an opportunity for project staff to reflect upon implementation of activities, expected impacts, and ways of enhancing the effectiveness of project activities and management strategies. In the following sections, achievements are highlighted. At the same time, the report attempts to point out areas where project effectiveness might be improved, where activities and implementation strategies may need to be reassessed, and where other innovations might be explored.

Section Three presents the qualitative findings using the over-arching elements of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, gender and partnerships. In Section Four, recommendations are presented for CARE Cambodia's consideration relative to the final 18 months of the LEL project in Koh Kong Province and possible programming directions for a future phase.

## **3.0 FINDINGS**

### **3.1 Relevance**

#### *Working with Smallholder Farming Communities*

Building on the previous YWIB project, the LEL project has worked to achieve deeper and high level impacts through a focus on genuine economic empowerment and a stronger voice for marginalised rural women. The project aims for women to equitably benefit from growth and to have greater control over decisions that affect them. To support these activities, LEL has worked with men and local authorities to raise awareness of the rights of women to participate in social, economic and political activities and to develop evidence on what works. This work is still relevant in Sre Ambel and Botum Sokor districts in Koh Kong Province.

The majority of the population in the project area are reliant upon rain-fed agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihoods with some fishery activity. Some people also have small grocery stalls (including village animal health worker stalls), work as day labourers such as carpenters or on the nearby sugar cane plantation. A number of people migrate to Koh Kong town, Thailand or Phnom Penh for work, so for some people, remittances also provide a source of income. While there is some off-farm livelihood diversification, most of the population rely on agriculture. Small-scale farmers are among the most vulnerable to climate variability and the drought and resulting water shortages are posing a real challenge. This project was not framed as a “resilience project” but this is something that the project should consider further, particularly since a multi-agency rapid assessment of the drought situation noted “*the water shortage crisis requires urgent and immediate action.*”<sup>1</sup>

Given the marked gender division of labour in the project area and constraints on women’s mobility and decision-making, it is very relevant that the project is implementing activities that develop women’s skills, knowledge and capacities and encourage women in leadership roles within the Farmer Interest Groups (FIGs), and through SDKs, VAHWs and VSLAs. Before the project started, women did not engage significantly in productive income-generating activities, and had limited access to knowledge and resources.

Economic land concessions in the area are encroaching on community land and present a risk to the gains made by communities participating in CARE projects, including LEL. Should there be a future phase, CARE should consider activities which develop participant’s understanding of free and prior informed consent (FPIC).

#### *Alignment with Government and Donor Priorities*

There are a range of Government policies which govern agricultural and rural development in Cambodia. The *MAFF Agricultural Extension Policy in Cambodia (2015)* and the *MAFF Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategic Framework (2015-2018)* are particularly relevant to the work that LEL does.<sup>2</sup> The LEL project is working to improve women’s access to information, knowledge and technical skills through the FIGs, SDKs and VAHWs. LEL is starting to work to strengthen linkages to markets but further work is needed. LEL is also working to develop women’s leadership capacity, confidence and influence in decision-making. Furthermore, LEL is implementing a range of pilots to inform policy and future programming, for example the community scorecard which brings service users (female farmers) and service providers (government officials) together to identify barriers to agricultural livelihood inputs.

LEL is well-aligned to Government policies and this was acknowledged by government officials all three levels, district, provincial and national levels during the mid-term review. For example, H.E. Ms. Hor Malin, Secretary of State, Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries commented, ‘*I am*

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<sup>1</sup> Save the Children, People in Need and CARE International in Cambodia, 2016., *Rapid Assessment of the Drought in Koh Kong Province*, April 2016

<sup>2</sup> The goal of the Agricultural Extension Policy is: “*All Cambodian farmers and farming communities will access and adopt better agricultural knowledge, information, and technologies to enhance agricultural productivity, diversification, commercialization, and sustainable natural resources management.*”

The *Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategic Framework in Agriculture (2016-2020)* has three strategic objectives: (1) to promote women’s economic empowerment through women’s access to goods and services for agricultural development and markets; (2) to strengthen capacities, resources and commitment within MAFF to ensure effective mainstreaming of gender perspectives into the agriculture sector; and (3) to increase women’s and men’s equal representation and participation in agriculture sector. The Royal Government of Cambodia is also gradually implementing decentralisation initiatives.



very proud of the LEL project as it has promoted women as Village Animal Health Workers. Promoting women as VAHWs is one way to achieve the government policy but it also helps to increase the income of the household, especially women.’ Officials engaged as part of the review also noted how CARE helps to develop their capacity to implement Government policy.

MAFF is implementing the Village Animal Health Worker program throughout Cambodia and so far most participants are men. Through LEL, CARE is promoting women as VAHWs in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor districts, which is providing interesting learning for government officials as they implement the program, ‘women are working as village animal health worker. This is the first time in our province and the first time in Cambodia,’ noted the Provincial Department of Agriculture in Koh Kong. H.E. Ms Hor Malin and the Vice-Director of National Department of Animal Health and Production, Ms. Ok Savin visited the project in 2015 and were particularly impressed with CARE’s efforts in promoting women as VAHWs and how it was contributing to increasing their income and that of their families.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has a strong focus on women’s economic empowerment. The *Aid Investment Plan for Cambodia (2015-2018)* has three objectives, one of which is “increasing agricultural productivity and farmer incomes” with the cross cutting issues of governance, empowering women and disability. The project therefore remains highly aligned to donor priorities.

#### *Drawing on Research and Analysis*

CARE International in Cambodia has two long term programs focusing on: (1) socially marginalised women, and (2) ethnic minority women. The LEL project is part of the socially marginalised women program. There was a range of analyses that were conducted to inform the development of the long-term program. The LEL design particularly drew on *Women in Cambodia: Policy, Institutional and Stakeholder Analysis (2012)*, and *Women at Risk Analysis (2012)*. The theory of change for this program is below:



LEL addresses each domain of the theory of change through: targeting elevated livelihood options for women, including a focus on safe migration (economic opportunities), targeting stronger valuing and stronger voice of women, particularly in financial decision making (social opportunity and voice), and supporting effective implementation of enabling livelihood policies, and greater institutional accountability to women through for example the community scorecard (enabling governance).

LEL also works to address the underlying causes of poverty as identified in the long-term program analysis, including:

- *Gender inequality*: through promoting positive changes in duty bearer /male attitudes and actions; and supporting duty bearers to realise their responsibilities.

- *Governance*:targeting stronger responsiveness amongst duty bearers to their obligations, and includes a focus on community accountability around livelihood services through the community scorecard for example.
- *Policy environment*:promoting implementation of enabling policy directions, such as support for Village Extension Workers, and policies such as the decentralisation policy initiative.

The LEL project has also generated a range of documentation including on the community scorecard and a gendered market analysis in Koh Kong. The former was a pilot and at the time of the MTR, a second round was being implemented by local partner, Health and Development Alliance (HEAD). The gendered market analysis has informed project activities, for example, around equipping women with the technical skills to increase agricultural production, strengthening the capacity of village animal health workers, and promoting the use of savings and loans for productive purposes. There has been less activity around promoting market linkages.

## 3.2 Effectiveness

### 3.2.1 Objective One: Marginalised rural women have increased benefits from elevated livelihood options

#### OBJECTIVE ONE ACHIEVEMENTS

##### *Nurturing existing collectives of women farmers*

The project design outlines SDKs and FIGs as the primary means to build capacity and leadership skills as well as increase agricultural productivity and generate income for project participants. In total there are 52 SDKs and 863 FIGs under the LEL project however the majority of these (around 50%) were established under previous projects such as YWIB. Only 25 groups have been newly established under the LEL project.

The SDKs and FIG members appear to be benefiting from sustained engagement with CARE Cambodia over a period of 3-5 years through previous projects such as YWIB, PS and now LEL. The majority of SDKs and the associated FIGs appear to be functioning with high levels of membership and active participation. Newer groups, however, were yet to develop the same level of confidence in agricultural techniques or achieve the same levels of production as the more established groups. Differences between the capacity and sustainability of new and established groups should be explored further in the final evaluation. All SDK/FIG members interviewed highlighted the benefits that the interest group-model provides in terms of solidarity and knowledge sharing. It is likely that if the LEL project had established a majority of new FIGs – the groups would not be functioning as cohesively or achieving as high levels of production at this stage of project implementation. Therefore commencing with already established groups appears to have been an effective strategy given the timeframe of the project.

##### *Expanded agricultural knowledge and skill base for women farmers*

Mid-term findings indicate that LEL has substantially supported the capacity development of SDKs and FIG members as well as enhanced the efforts of the PDoA to better and more equitably serve female farmers in the province. At the time of the review, LEL had already developed the capacity of 156 SDKs (including SDK-Assistants) and 759 FIG members. FGDs with SDKs/FIGs relate that CARE has provided them with training on a wide variety of topics including technical skills in livestock rearing (housing standards; nutrition requirements; breeding; vaccination/treatments of routine diseases; castration; hatchery) and vegetable and fruit tree production (seed selection; land

preparation; crop rotation; pruning and grafting; fertiliser and pest management; irrigation; post-harvest management). These skills are learnt through a cascading training model (SDK to FIG member) and through Farmer Field Days led by SDKs and supported by CARE. All SDK/FIG members interviewed in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor report that their skills and knowledge base has increased in relation to livestock husbandry and vegetable growing with one participant stating, *'what was it like before? We only knew how to look after the pigs and chickens – I can say we only knew how to care for them but now...we know how to raise them – how to fatten them; how to vaccinate them; how to feed them and how to breed them – we have the knowledge and practical skills to do this'*.

Representatives of PDoA express great appreciation for SDKs and women VAHWs whom they claim facilitate greater saturation of assistance to women and men farmers alike. PDoA representatives interviewed, reported that SDKs play an important role in informally assisting District Extension Officers to carry out their workplan in a context where both capacity and budget for the delivery of extension services is limited. Although there has been no formal assessment and district certification has not yet occurred, PDoA estimates that three quarters of the SDKs are of 'high quality'.

#### *High adoption rate of project-promoted livestock and agricultural practices by women farmers*

SDKs and FIGs are the main models through which LEL has been supporting women farmers to adopt improved livestock and agricultural practices. Demonstration or model farms and farmer field days using the SDK approach are key strategies in the training delivered. Mid-term findings indicate that an increasing number of women farmers have adopted and applied improved livestock and agricultural practices and techniques promoted by the project. Recent project monitoring data reveals that 87% of SDKs and 58% of FIGs have adopted new practices and techniques – if sustained, this will likely result in continued improvements to production among a majority of project participants (plus non-participants who adopt practices based on observing their neighbours), however it also indicates that LEL must continue to reinforce and refresh earlier trainings if the project is to convince a majority of FIG members to change their behaviour.

According to FGDs the most popular improved techniques adopted relating to livestock husbandry include: pig nutrition, housing and routine vaccination as well as chicken vaccination and hatchery. As one participant described it, *'before the pig was free to go where she pleased! She ate anything! It took me more than a year to be able to sell the pig and even then the price was not good. But now my pigs have a house, they eat feed from the market mixed with bran, they have vaccinations. I can sell a pig after just 4-5 months – now we sell pigs twice a year for a good price'*.

In terms of vegetable growing the most frequently adopted techniques included: seed selection; land preparation; fertiliser and pest management. In terms of vegetable production, *'before the project the land you see here was empty, we just used to dig a hole and put the seed in the ground! But now the land is full and green with many different types of vegetables - we prepare the seed bed, we test the seed, we make organic fertiliser and pesticide – there are enough vegetables for the family and to sell at market'*. Per qualitative interviews with participants, key informants, and PDoA officials, farmer field days and SDK training have been critical to promoting and uptake of these practices.

FGDs and site visits indicate that adoption rates appear to be low for: intercropping; crop rotation; irrigation techniques and post-harvest management.

#### *Improved quality and quantity of crop and livestock production by women farmers*

The principal change noted by all FGDs is that application of LEL-promoted techniques has led to both improved quality and quantity of crop and livestock production.

In terms of vegetable production SDK/FIGs often cited that production is either ‘twice as much’ or ‘three times as much’ across both districts compared to the start of the project. FGDs also indicate that there has also been an increase in crop diversity (sweet potato; pumpkin, morning glory; gourd; long bean; eggplant; cabbage; green pepper; squash). Whilst this cannot be verified using qualitative means, there is consensus that vegetable yields have increased. Project participants’ state they have more food for more months and that they are able to sell the surplus locally.

In terms of pig/chicken husbandry women farmers interviewed reported that prior to the project, they would sell an adult pig once a year and frequently faced challenges in terms of disease. However since applying skills acquired through SDK training, women farmers report being able to sell between two to four adult pigs twice a year as well as piglets 2-3 times a year. Again, whilst this cannot be verified using qualitative means, there is consensus that pig production has increased compared to previous years.

PDoA representatives noted that there is a significant difference in agricultural activity and production between LEL target districts and non-target districts with one officer stating, *‘Is there a difference? Of course! I have seen a difference as I move between CARE and non-CARE districts within the province. In CARE villages the women farmers are very active and committed – they are growing many different crops and rearing animals at scale – their attitudes are different – they have confidence and ask a lot of questions. In non-CARE areas I can say women are farming but only in very small amounts and only a few types of vegetables...they mostly buy their food in the market and do not grow it...and their pigs and chickens are not good quality and have illnesses often. CARE should expand the project I think!’*

Despite the increased production FGDs noted that constraints to women farmers reaching their full production potential remain, particularly in relation to accessing productive resources such as land and water and agricultural inputs such as quality seed, fertilisers and pesticides.

Women farmer FGDs also raised concerns about the current drought in Koh Kong province and associated water shortages. At the time of the review, SDKs/FIGs report that there is not enough water to sustain the current level of their livelihood activities. Qualitative data and site visits confirm that currently, there is not enough water for communities to plant crops and vegetables; adequately raise their livestock; and there are emerging tensions between productive and domestic water consumption with insufficient amounts to meet household water consumption needs.

### *Women farmers increased household income from agriculture*

Per the LEL theory of change, increased income from livestock and vegetable primarily relies on women farmers adopting improved agricultural and post-harvest practices—skills they can learn through being part of a FIG from the SDKs and Farmer Field Days. Once women farmers adopt improved agricultural skills, LEL hypothesises that, coupled with new marketing knowledge and adoption of improved post-harvest practices, women farmers will have a greater marketable surplus, which they will be able to sell through improved market linkages.

Mid-term findings indicate that there have been significant increases in household income for both SDKs and FIG members across both districts. Qualitative data from FGDs report that the greatest gains have been through the sale of livestock to traders and middlemen. However, this increase may not have directly benefitted women farmers in male-headed households; qualitative information

from women FGDs indicates that most large livestock such as pigs and buffalo are owned by men (though women are responsible for taking care of them) and women own mostly chickens. The second largest gain has been in surplus crop sales either locally or to traders. However, from the analysis of data from FGDs it appears that no women farmers are directly accessing output markets (those beyond the local market) to sell their production, and that with the current drought conditions the vegetable surplus available for sale is minimal.

Nevertheless, increased income is considered to be a result of 1) improved agricultural productivity (with food being available for consumption and sale – *'buying less and selling more'*; 2) livestock production and productivity (pigs and chickens are reported to have increased in both number and size/health and can be sold at multiple times over the course of a year); and 3) access to credit. Access to credit through the VSLA groups appeared to be a key factor behind the adoption and application of techniques, increased productivity and therefore increased income – women reported that loans were used to purchase inputs such as animal feed; vaccinations; materials for pig/chicken pens; and fertiliser and pesticide. Although CARE provided some initial inputs under previous projects such as YWIB, having access to a line of credit was seen as the critical factor in unlocking their potential as successful farmers – enabling them to apply their knowledge (*'how can I practice the knowledge without the money to buy the inputs?'*) and expand their production.

FGDs also found that an increasing number of women farmers are also engaging in agriculture wage labour – agriculture wage labour both provides needed income and takes women farmers away from their own fields when their labour is most needed; the change may be a coping strategy to deal with the reported increase in constraints such as water access and availability.

In addition to supporting improvements to agricultural income, LEL also supports improvements to non-agricultural income via small business activities. The review found that a number of women VAHW have established successful small businesses that support their para-vet activities – typically these involve village-level roadside markets stalls selling livestock vaccinations and medication and fodder and fertiliser normally only available through output markets.

In most of the FGDs, participants state that women have the same access to income-generating activities as men but not to higher-paying casual labour through construction due to distance, the strength requirements, and other factors that favour men. Men's overall greater mobility is an advantage in the number and types of income-earning opportunities open to them, while women are largely confined to their communities. In addition, a women's mobility and available time to pursue income activities is still limited by her domestic obligations.

#### *Emerging culture of saving within women farmer households*

Mid-term findings indicate that VSLAs have led to an emerging culture of saving within women farmer households with one participant describing it as, *'before money was always moving and you could never hold it but now it keeps still longer as part of the savings group'*. FGDs revealed that the majority of households are keeping their savings either at home or in a VSLA, with little or no use of other institutions.

However, before further discussion on saving strategies it is worth noting that across all FGDs, women farmers raised issues around the proportion of money kept at home and in a VSLA during times of need. Currently there is a drought and associated water crisis in Koh Kong Province – women farmers report that households are retaining a larger proportion of savings at home than in the VSLAs. Since savings kept in a VSLA are generally held for future investment, and savings kept at home are often for immediate use, this shift is in line with the increased stresses in sustaining

agricultural livelihoods reported by many women farmers during FGDs. In times of stress, investment declines, and savings kept at home can be more readily accessed than those in a VSLA, especially when savings are needed to meet immediate household needs.

Women farmers report their main reasons for saving is long-term investments but increasingly it is also being used to cope with emergencies and to meet household expenses including purchase of food and health care and medicine. One of the reasons that VSLAs established under LEL was the expectation that this would create a strong link between income generation and agricultural investment. Qualitative data from across the four FGDs indicate that as a first priority women are meeting immediate household needs and subsequently any remaining income generated from the sale of livestock will then be used to either invest in agricultural inputs or assets and pay their contribution to the VSLA group. Allowing for a change in short-term savings behaviour due to the drought and increased shocks, the extent to which people continue to reinvest VSLA profits in agriculture is an area of future investigation for the final evaluation of LEL.

Finally, there is anecdotal evidence through FGDs and interviews with CCWC representatives that the VSLA groups have led to a reduction in social issues at the village-level including gambling and domestic violence. One CCWC member stated, *'before the VSLAs many of the women and men were gambling with the small amount of money they had – you would see it every day and every week – but now you hardly see it anymore! All the women want to put their money into the savings group because they know it's a guaranteed win! They don't lose like in gambling – they always win, you see how it is!'*

#### *Access to credit for agricultural investment by women farmers*

FGDs indicated that the majority of women farmers (SDKs and FIG members) are also VSLA group members. At the time of the review around 49% of SDK/FIG members were also VSLA members.

All women farmers who are VSLA members report accessing credit through the groups. Women farmers report that given the current drought situation, loans are increasingly being used to meet immediate household needs including the purchase of food. Where loans are not used to meet immediate needs, loan use has been for agricultural inputs and infrastructure such as pig/chicken pens and water tanks; followed by long-term investments such as school fees, drip irrigation and house improvements. The majority of group members are satisfied with the current loan size and the repayment cycle of three months. Those groups that have been established longer tend to have either higher interest rates than those that are still building capital, or they aim to increase profits through increasing the utilisation of loans through lowering the interest rate from 5% to 3%. Some group members have also borrowed money from microfinance institutions (MFIs) such as Amritor AMK which have a variety of credit products – however accessing these loans requires some form of collateral – usually land titles and very few group members have land documentation. Therefore the VSLA loans are seen as preferable because 1) no collateral is needed and 2) the interest paid goes back to the group itself.

Whilst loan size is seen as sufficient by women who are primarily acting as individual producers, it is likely that if there were to be a future phase of LEL that saw the establishment of formalised collectives/cooperatives then the loan size would no longer be sufficient and the project would need to consider linkages to MFIs and the formal banking system.

#### *Women farmers in non-traditional productive roles*



In three of the four villages reviewed SDKs had developed their expertise further through participating in and graduating from the Village Animal Health Worker (VAHW) program delivered jointly by CARE and PDoA. The majority of VAHWs have developed successful small enterprises around their increased skill-sets – for example, one VAHW interviewed had used her income from charging a small fee for vaccinations and treatments of small livestock to purchase additional shares in the VSLA. By doing so she was able to secure a loan to make an initial upfront investment in a small shop selling animal vaccinations and medicines and bags of pig feed normally bought at the market – she was able to repay the loan within the three month cycle based on sales and now she makes a growing profit from the shop.

The quality of service provision and successful entrepreneurship of female VAHWs has been recognised by both women and men within three of the four villages reviewed. VAHW are seen as knowledgeable, capable and trustworthy and receive requests equally from men and women. This finding was reinforced by interviews with PDoA who are now focussed on promoting female candidates as part of the VAHW program, *‘yes we are very much focussed on having women as part of the program now – we can see that women can not only do this work – they can do it with more skill and care than men! Also men are going out of the village to find construction work but the women are there– when the community needs them – they are there!’* VAHW report an evolution of trust among community members for their ability to provide agricultural services. After initial struggles with acceptance, women VAHW report they are now in high demand, by both men and women farmers. These women are challenging the dominant viewpoint that men are holders of agricultural knowledge whilst women are the agricultural labourers.

#### *Basic marketing knowledge for women farmers*

Recent marketing training at the end of 2015 and in early 2016 has led to SDKs and FIG members actively seeking to access market information informally through networks of neighbours and family. For example, women farmers describe strategies such as, *‘I call up my relatives who have a shop near the market and I ask them the price – then when I talk to the trader I try to get close to that price here in the village’*; *‘I now have the numbers of several traders – sometimes I will check the price with each of them and then with the market and choose which one I will sell with’*. Whilst this is progress, such access to market information is reliant on an individual woman’s networks. There is an official daily sms alert with market pricing information provided by MoAFF, but very few of women farmers interviewed were aware of this system.

#### **OBJECTIVE ONE CHALLENGES**

##### *Slow onset disaster – El Nino drought conditions impacting women farmers*

A key challenge going forward, with implications across project activities is the recent slow onset drought in Koh Kong Province. The lack of rain and dry, hot weather has had a negative impact on the ability of women farmers to sustain their agricultural livelihoods in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor districts. The ability of women farmers to sustain the gains in productivity for the LEL-promoted livelihood options of both livestock and vegetables is highly dependent on water availability. As a general rule one adult pig requires 10L/day through to a lactating sow which requires 22L/day; and based on soil type and average climate observed during site visits, a minimum 10L/sqm per day during the dry is needed for a vegetable garden, with site visits indicating the majority of gardens are 30-40sqm or more.

Qualitative data indicates that drought-related water shortages have resulted in tension between productive and domestic water consumption with difficult choices being made by women farmers to

meet their water needs within the household and those of livestock, and unfortunately abandon their home gardens. Women farmers report having to frequently purchase water, and increased migration to Thailand of male family members seeking income as construction labourers.

To address this, CARE Cambodia has developed a plan to construct community water ponds in 16 target villages across Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor. However whilst such an initiative may provide initial relief – it is likely to be temporary. The review cautions that the considerable investment in constructing these ponds should be weighed against the remaining timeframe for implementation and concerns such as appropriate construction (if ponds are to service community needs then they will need to be built with sufficient capacity and therefore significant depth to reduce surface evaporation rates); ongoing maintenance, ownership and potential tension and conflict regarding current and future household allocations particularly as the LEL project encourages expansion of agricultural holdings.

#### *Variable provision of extension services by demonstration women farmers (SDKs)*

Whilst SDKs have increased their capacity and practical skills in livestock husbandry and vegetable production – their role in actively promoting these techniques and sharing knowledge to FIG members and the broader community appears to be limited to the field days organised by CARE. SDKs do not yet see themselves as an ongoing ‘source’ of advice on vegetable growing or livestock-raising. This may be due to the fact that field days are delivered to varying extents in partnership with CARE staff – both SDK/FIG members refer to field days as ‘CARE training’ and therefore follow-up post field-day seems to be limited.

Those SDKs, not holding another role such as a VAHW, indicated that outside of field days, they are not approached by FIG members for advice and that they do not actively visit households to provide advice. This is in contrast to those SDKs who are also VAHW’s – these women are active in offering their services and are seen to be knowledgeable, capable and trusted by group members. VAHWs are often in high demand, particularly for the vaccination of pigs and chickens, and community members refer to them as ‘*Neak Kru Neak Kru – teacher, teacher*’. Nevertheless their advice is reported to be limited to livestock husbandry and is provided usually only as part of a visit for another reason – vaccination or treatment. In the context of the current limited capacity and resources available through provincial and district-level extension services this presents a concern for sustainability when SDKs/VAHWs retire and/or are no longer active due to pregnancies or migrating elsewhere.

#### *Multiple roles held by individual woman farmers*

The review found that the majority of SDKs hold a combination of two or more roles promoted under the LEL project. Women farmers are usually an SDK plus one or more of the following: VAHW; Village Agent; VSLA leader; Box keeper; Cashier. Whilst this is understandable given that these roles require a certain level of capacity – there is a risk that the SDKs will naturally prioritise those activities that provide a financial return over those that do not. For example, providing para-vet or VA services which have a small fee attached to them over agricultural extension services/model farm visits which do not. This was found to be the case for all SDKs interviewed. For example, one SDK who was also a VAHW stated, ‘*I have been to each household and explained to them the importance of vaccinating their livestock – it took some time but now I have many requests – sometime 10 in one day – sometimes only 2 or 3...but in answer to your question about offering advice on vegetable growing or members visiting my farm– no I have not done that because I think I have the same knowledge as everyone in the group on that and I do not have time*’.

#### *Limited market engagement by women farmers*

Whilst SDKs and FIG members appear to have a better understanding of how markets function and how to access pricing information, there has been less progress in terms of positioning them to take advantage of existing and emerging market opportunities for their products. However, marketing as a concept is fairly new in many of the villages that formed part of the review – according to the project implementation schedule some only received marketing training as recently as November 2015. There is opportunity to take this strategy forward over the remaining project period. To date marketing training has been basic focussing mainly on pricing information. In terms of developing market-orientated products or produce women do not yet have the skills to assess market-demand and supply in relation to their own production – whilst some women have adapted their products (e.g. changing from pumpkin fruits to selling pumpkin leaves) – this is reactive based on seeing price and product in the market but not assessing the true costs/benefits of switching products.

Going forward, the review suggests the project should take a value chain conscious approach. This approach would provide women farmers with an opportunity to understand the different actors within value chains relevant to them such as pig or chicken raising, and opportunities for growth and better revenues within that value chain. This would include training and interactions with input suppliers, service providers and output market actors. Some of the training topics could include business plan development, cost benefit analysis, and negotiation skills.

Undertaking an approach like this also builds the foundation for future phases of LEL which could develop market subcommittees to identify and track market opportunities and negotiate on behalf of an informal producer group or established cooperatives – this would also give women an opportunity to move up the value chain from just being producers into the processing and direct marketing parts of the value chain. Currently women do not have the confidence to move beyond production even in terms of direct sales for a variety of reasons. For example, one participant stated, *‘no, it is not possible for me to sell my pigs directly at market– firstly how can I take my pigs there? The road is good but transportation is difficult – we can only go on the neighbours motorbike and when I got there – I would be worried about who to sell to and what if they did not offer me the good price? I cannot bring the pig back home like a chicken – once a pig has travelled the health is not good enough to come back – so I will be forced to sell for whatever price they give me. Also going to the market takes one whole day – who will do all the work at home if I am at the market? So yes the price can be better at market but the price here in the village is the best that I can get’*. Moving up in the value chain can buffer women farmers against the market volatility which many of them are vulnerable to currently. For example, pig-raising is a high input activity and pricing can be volatile in Koh Kong with many imported pigs/large-scale farmed pigs saturating the market. Traders are offering lower and lower prices at the village level but remaining competitive at market.

#### *Low financial literacy of women farmers*

The review found that many women farmers including those who were VSLA members, had poor financial literacy and limited cash management experience. Qualitative data indicated that, although during shareout group members receive relatively large sums of cash, they often do not know how best to utilise these funds over the long-term i.e. the 9 month VSLA cycle.

### **3.2.2 Objective 2: Better valuing of elevated economic opportunities for rural women by men and communities**

#### **OBJECTIVE 2 ACHIEVEMENTS**

##### *Valuing of women farmer’s roles and contributions to household wellbeing*

The review found that there has been an increase in the value associated with women farmer's roles and capabilities by both men and women in the communities visited.

Firstly, the aspirations of women farmers themselves are changing through exposure to progressive female roles including SDKs and VAHWs. During FGDs, women farmers shared that before the LEL project women farmers were not 'seen by others' and were not considered 'holders of knowledge', and there were no women farmers with the confidence to provide demonstrations and trainings to other women. FGDs reveal that prior to the project, all district VAHWs were male and women farmers were hesitant to approach them directly for guidance. As one women farmer put it, *'before the project women and girls did not aspire to become farmers or para-vets – we did not imagine that we can do those things! There were no stories of a woman doing such a thing! Now there are two women VAHWs in our village...we see with our own eyes what women can do– our VAHW vaccinate not only chickens and pigs, when they go together they can vaccinate a buffalo like any man! My daughter wants also to be a farmer and a para-vet...she can see that women can make a business of this and make money... I think it's a good idea for her. I hope she can do it'.* Sharing stories about strong women who are approaching 'farming as a family business' in the home, school, and community is one of the best ways to inspire girls and women to build livelihoods that can give them more control over their future.

Secondly, men's attitudes towards women farmers is changing with increased valuing of women's agricultural work and women as income-earners. The review found that women farmers have developed their confidence and ability to raise their voice as a result of their access to new knowledge and skills, and the opportunity to discuss and share experiences within FIG/VSLA groups. Qualitative data highlights the importance of community-based groups such as the FIGs/VSLAs in providing safe spaces for women to identify their needs and priorities, to build greater solidarity, and to develop and practice leadership and communication skills. The fact that women are the primary focus of trainings offered by the LEL project is considered to be a transformative approach in that it gives women farmers opportunities to not only improve the effectiveness of their income-generating agricultural activities, but also to take on the role of transmitting their new knowledge of improved production techniques to their husbands, resulting in increased status and authority within their families and communities.

Men's realisation of the household-level economic benefits resulting from women's participation in the groups has been a positive motivating factor for changes in men's attitudes and behaviours. Men consistently commented on their wives' new knowledge, skills and confidence and the fact that women are managing and making a greater contribution to household income and budgeting, which in turn seems to have opened spaces for women to wield greater influence in processes of household decision-making. As one woman farmer stated, *'attitudes among men have changed, women also attend training just like men, before it was only men. The attitudes have changed because in the past men did not believe that women can give good advice for a better household. Now men appreciate that women provide good advice, for example building a proper roofed house for the pigs and vaccinations at the right time, he sees the pigs are fatter and healthier. This builds trust about women's skills.'*

#### *Increased influence and joint household decision-making by women farmers*

Mid-term findings indicate that women farmers are increasingly able to influence household decision-making particularly in relation to household income and agricultural production.

Women farmers report that they are now able to make sole or joint decisions about the household's income and assets, compared to two years ago. Analysis of qualitative data across the two districts however suggests that the difference in control of income, expenditures, and assets is greater than women themselves recognise. In terms of income, FGDs reveal that in most households women farmers are able to make decisions independently regarding small household expenditures ranging from the purchase of necessities such as salt, soap and cooking oil to staple foods such as rice. Women farmers are also able to make productive decisions regarding the purchase of animal feed or vaccinations as well as the sale of chickens. However, women's FGDs indicate that men within the household continue to retain decision-making power regarding larger household expenditure such as the purchase of a motorbike, farm equipment, building materials and the purchase and/or sale of larger livestock including pigs and buffalo. Even with the recent trend in migration, women farmers report waiting for their husband to return before making these decisions. Nevertheless the mid-term finds that the gap is steadily narrowing, with women farmers emphasising that there has been gradual change over the past two years. FGDs revealed that as women take on a more active role in income-earning agricultural activities and begin to contribute to household finances, so too they are able to influence the decision-making processes of their households.

Women farmers report increasing influence on decisions regarding what agricultural inputs to purchase such as fertiliser and pesticide; which crops to plant and when; and how to allocate household income (agriculture; health; education; VSLAs) - the three decisions that women consider to be the most important decisions a household makes. Focus group participants credit LEL and PDoWA-supported community trainings on gender relations as one contributor to this change.

#### *Shared productive and domestic workloads within women farmer households*

For the women farmers whose husbands have attended PDoWA and CARE gender training or men's dialogues, there is evidence of gradual changes in household attitudes. This is enabling women to better balance their productive and domestic workloads and benefit from the family farm.

Main changes in gender relations at the household level centre around changes in household labour with a more equitable distribution of labour in the home. Men are reportedly assisting with domestic tasks such as caring for children; preparing meals and washing clothes. Men are also supporting women farmers in their productive work by assisting in the construction of housing for livestock and tilling soil in preparation for planting. As one women farmer described it, *'before men were always going outside the home and not thinking about what needs to be done – the women did it all – but now men do not look down on us anymore – now they are ready to support us – they can do the cooking and the washing and care for animals if we have to go to a meeting.'*

FGDs with participant men confirmed women's experiences regarding changes in household labour, *'before the training, women did their duties in the house alone.... now men are helping women at home... men are washing their wives clothes! Before the training men never cooked, now they do the cooking'*. FGDs with men revealed they considered the training to be useful to them and their family because of improved communication between the husband and wife. Their motivation for changing their behaviours seems to be the tangible economic returns that result from working as a unit and enabling women to reach their potential through learning new skills and applying them to the household's benefit. The review notes however that men's engagement in productive tasks tends to be targeted – such as construction of livestock enclosures and land preparation, whereas women's tasks are daily and continuous.

#### *Reduction in domestic violence*

In two of the four villages reviewed there is qualitative evidence that there has been a reduction in gender-based violence— key informant interviews with the PDoWA and CCWC members suggest that this trend can be observed consistently and at scale across the two districts. FGD participants specifically links the reduction to the shifts in household workloads and improved relationships, much of which participants credit to domestic violence prevention training messaging delivered by the PDoWA and LEL agricultural and savings initiatives. CCWC and PDoWA interviews indicate that both men and women who have taken part in LEL gender-dialogues are much more likely to reject household violence than men and women who did not participate in the sessions.

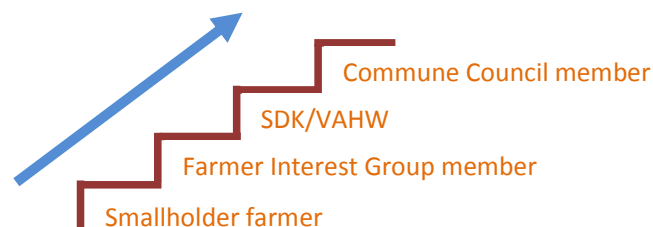
## OBJECTIVE 2 CHALLENGES

### *Lack of targeted extension services by local authorities for women farmers*

Interviews with PDoA staff revealed that although the department increasingly recognises that women play a significant role in farming, in general women farmers are still perceived as not being the ‘real’ farmer or head-of household. However, the context in Koh Kong is such that women are often either household-heads themselves or by default because their husbands are working as labourers elsewhere. Overall, although PDoA recognises the need to reach out to women farmers, there is a low awareness of *how* to provide inclusive agricultural services. For example, interviews with PDoA representatives found a marked lack of awareness on the barriers women face in accessing extension services –no PDoA officials could identify barriers such as: time availability; mobility; accessing credit and inputs; access to technology; low numbers of female extension officers; low literacy; and inequality in land rights and tenure. The review found that the project is slowly changing this, particularly through the Village Animal Health Worker training program. CARE worked together with PDoA to revise materials for a low literacy audience to ensure women farmers could participate – 27 female VAHWs have graduated. Nevertheless, although PDoA has participated in LEL-led trainings and assists in the delivery of farmer field days – there is no plan to adopt/adapt current training modules developed with CARE as part of its broader training program.

### *Participation of women farmers in commune councils and local planning*

The LEL project vision for progression in women’s economic leadership can be summarised in the diagram below:



Whilst, there has been significant progress in terms of women farmers becoming FIG members and then SDK/VAHWs, promoting women in community-level leadership has been slower to



progress. Whilst the project's intention to promote women's voice and leadership at the community-level through commune council membership is important. However such an outcome relies heavily on the assumption that women farmers will translate their technical confidence as an SDK/VAHWS into public confidence on much broader issues within different community structures traditionally dominated by men. Qualitative data from the review indicates that this assumption is not yet holding true with women farmers reporting that they a) do not feel confident to raise issues beyond their immediate group whether it be a FIG or VSLA and b) even if they did feel confident to do so, they do not know how to raise issues or with whom. In 3 out of the 4 villages visited, women farmers did not know who their commune council for women and children representative was or what the role of that representative was.

By focussing on the commune council as the next step in leadership progression, the LEL project logic misses an opportunity to maximise women farmers' potential for economic leadership within agricultural markets. In this sense women's economic leadership is about identifying market sub-sectors that are commercially viable and which most women can benefit from. Likewise, project investments could increase women's power in market systems by 'upgrading' them to roles that are more profitable and less risky – beyond production to processing or inputs. The review notes that the LEL project has already undertaken a gendered market analysis as part of the inception stage, but that this has not yet informed choices about investments and the design and emphasis of activities. Crucially, women's economic leadership requires linkages between market analysis with gendered analysis of household work, women-specific risks, gender-based violence and norms about women and men in communities to increase women's agency. Women's economic leadership also promotes gender equality in economic decision-making and policy advocacy. Therefore the review finds that although the opportunity to promote women's economic leadership has not been realised in this phase of LEL, much of the foundation work has been done paving the way for the future.

### 3.2.3 Strategic Objective 3: Stronger learning, evidence and national influence

#### OBJECTIVE 3 ACHIEVEMENTS

##### *Good coordination and collaboration with all levels of government*

The LEL project aligns well with government policies and works closely with the Provincial Department of Agriculture (PDoA), Provincial Department of Women's Affairs (PDoWA), District Office of Agriculture (DoA) and District Office of Women's Affairs (DoWA). It is acknowledged across all three levels of government, including the national level, that CARE is helping to achieve the Government's vision in mainstreaming gender in agricultural policy and practice. PDoA officials stated, *'For a long time, we have had a policy that 50% of training participants must be women. However, this is the first time we have been able to meet those targets [due to working with CARE].'*

CARE's focus on empowering women is also acknowledged including by the highest levels of Government, *"I really like CARE's projects as CARE focuses on empowering women. Other organisations have a big focus on working with men, but CARE always focuses on women,"* noted H.E. Ms. Hor Malin, Secretary of State, MAFF.

CARE has continued to maintain a good relationship with H.E. Hor Malin, who was previously the Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and is now the Secretary of State at MAFF. CARE does not have a formal MoU with MAFF so their main engagement at the national level is with H.E. Hor Malin. Through this engagement, CARE has provided advice on the development of the Gender Mainstreaming Policy of the Department of Animal Health and Livestock

Production. Despite not having a formal institutional arrangement with MAFF, CARE also facilitated a field visit to Botum Sakor district in 2015 for Her Excellency and the Director of National Department of Animal Health and Production, Ms. Ok Savin,, which helped them to get a better understanding of activities in the field. There is also evidence that this may help influence policy. *'The field visit was very useful. I don't get much time to see farming activities. I was able to see CARE beneficiaries learning about grafting, vaccination and I was able to join a discussion,'* noted Her Excellency.

CARE has also shared learning from the LEL project to integrate into the draft gender mainstreaming policy of the National Department of Animal Health and Production. This has included promoting: VSLAs as a model among smallholder farmers to mobilise capital for livelihood investment; demonstration farm model to impact more famers; women to become VAHWs, and raising awareness among men and duty bearers on women's empowerment including their right to actively participate in social, economic and political activities.

### *Documented approaches*

CARE has promoted participatory and engaging methodologies which is helping to increase access to knowledge for low-literate women. Through LEL, CARE has developed a range of training resources in Khmer. The books are mostly visual with some text. They are simple and practical in the way they have been developed. The books address a range of topics including: livestock production i.e. chicken/pig castration, chicken hatchery, boar/piglet rearing as well as horticulture techniques such as fruit tree pruning, grafting, and nursery.

Similarly, practical guide books on gender roles have also been developed and shared with project participants and government officials. The Koh Kong Provincial Department of Agriculture was particularly impressed, *'I like the curriculum that CARE has. To reduce barriers we need to ensure illiterate women can join and apply the training. We can do this with posters, slides, speaking using simple words, encouraging them to join practicals and form discussion groups.'*

Through LEL, CARE is implementing four pilots: safe migration approach, gendered market analysis, results monitoring, and community accountability through the community scorecard which brings together service users and service providers to understand and address the barriers to agricultural inputs, particularly for women. The results monitoring is primarily an internal CARE exercise but the other three pilots have the potential to inform policy and programming at multiple levels. Learning from the community scorecard will be particularly relevant as the Government seeks to implement the Social Accountability Framework and progress the decentralisation agenda.

## **OBJECTIVE 3 CHALLENGES**

### *Distilling outcomes and learnings to inform policy and programming*

The project has generated a number of documents from the pilots. Most of them have already been shared with Government stakeholders, however, they are currently long documents and key learnings and outcomes need to be distilled in short briefs to inform policy and programming. CARE staff noted that they did not just share the documents and expect them to be read but provided verbal presentations on the documents. Nonetheless, it would still be useful for those Government officials and others who did not attend these presentations to be able to access the main learnings and outcomes from short, attractive briefs.

### *Utility of Community Scorecard Pilot*

The first round of the Community Scorecard was implemented by a local implementing partner, HEAD. The standard CARE model was not implemented so its utility in informing policy and

programming is limited. CARE's model has been trialled and tested in many countries around the world. While it has been adapted for different sectors, there is great value in implementing the model in full to inform learning. The MTR found that a second round should be implemented with CARE leading but HEAD were already in the process of implementing the second round. CARE was recently awarded a European Union (EU)-funded grant *"Implementation of the Social Accountability Framework (ISAF),"* which will be implementing the community scorecard in four provinces including Koh Kong. When reviewing the report for the second round, it will be useful to reflect on the CARE model and what was learnt from the pilot to inform this EU-funded project.

### *Government officials internalising government policy*

Further work is needed for Government officials to internalise the importance of gender training. For example, when asked why it was important for women to be involved in the Village Animal Health Worker program one government official noted that it was the policy of the Government. CARE staff have also noted that they want to continue to encourage Commune Council leaders to join the training so they know what the project is doing and can share learnings with others.

## **3.3 Gender Equality and Disability**

### *3.3.1 Gender Equality*

Women's economic participation and empowerment is central to the LEL theory of change and project programming reflects all three aspects of CARE's Gender Equality Empowerment Framework. The project is contributing to change in all three of the single realms of empowerment.

Women's **agency** is improving – in FGDs women farmers report their skills, knowledge, and confidence is increasing through their participation in agricultural trainings and through ongoing mentoring and support in applying new techniques and practices. Women's access to productive resources assets and financial services has also improved. In terms of financial resources - women report they have increased their household income and access to savings and credit through the VSLAs. In terms of productive resources – women report they have increased their small livestock holdings and agricultural infrastructure (drip irrigation, water tanks etc).

In terms of **relations**, the project focuses on increasing the influence of women on financial decision-making within the home and on challenging attitudes through raising awareness of inequality and its relationship to the productive and domestic workloads of women and men; and of the positive impact on household well-being of involving both women and men equally in decision-making. The findings of the review indicate that relations are slowly changing in terms of influence on financial decision-making, and the FGDs revealed that as women take on a more active role in economic activities and begin to earn an income and contribute to household finances, so they are also able to influence the decision-making processes of their households.

In the case of the SDK and VAHW models, as men begin to see women as skilled and capable farmers and income earners, so they tend to respect and value women's views and contributions more *'before there were a lot of arguments in the house – we had to ask for money for the smallest things and my husband used to say I am the one to make money...so I am the one to spend the money – you need to ask permission but I do not. Now things are better because I also make money as a VAHW so I also have the right to spend! We now discuss how to spend the money on things like buying piglets and paying school fees'*. It seems women farmers are able to make decisions about smaller household or farm purchases independently (soap; salt; oil; pig feed; chicken feed; vaccinations) but

for the larger decisions regarding sale/purchase of productive assets such as pigs or materials for housing there needs to be discussion with the husband with the husband retaining final decision-making power.

In terms of changing workloads, both men and women's FGDs report that there is a more equal distribution of both productive and domestic workloads with men supporting in activities such as seed bed preparation and the building of pig pens and caring for children and cooking so that women can attend VSLA meetings. The project is changing attitudes and beliefs to enable equal relations with men, recognising the value of unpaid productive and care work and promoting women's role in economic decision-making. The project is making visible the significant economic contribution of women smallholders to agricultural development, including unpaid productive and care work.

In terms of **structures**, through working in partnership with provincial and district level governments the project has gained visibility at the national level and recently provided input to the National Department of Animal Health and Production's Gender Mainstreaming Policy. It is clear that government partners such as PDoA and PDoWA have the willingness to continue or scale up project activities, but lack the capacity and resources required. However, that aside, the review did not find further evidence of the project working at the structures level. For example, the review did not find evidence of women being encouraged to move beyond production and take leadership roles within co-operatives or producer groups, processing, marketing or sale of products being generated through Objective 1. To be fair, the context in Cambodia is such that due to the lower representation of women in formal structures and institutions, any programming on women's leadership would a long-term investment. Nevertheless it does imply that it is harder shift women's participation to more rewarding positions in markets and value chains than to improve gender relations around production at the household level.

Finally, it is worth noting that qualitative data cross both districts revealed that many of these changes in power dynamics and social norms have taken place in a context where men are absent because they have migrated to other areas of the province or Thailand seeking work – so to some extent the project is seeing women exert their agency in the absence of those social norms that would otherwise limit and constrain them. It should be noted therefore that such changes risk being temporary and in the absence of further gender sensitisation, socio-cultural norms are likely to revert any gains made.

### *3.3.2 Disability*

In August 2015, the CARE Australia Disability Framework was approved. This included the ENABLED approach which includes: Engaging people with disabilities; Networking with Disabled People's Organisations; Assessing activities to ensure they are accessible; Building in actions; Learning from our work; Empowering people with disabilities to know their rights; and Developing capacity of staff and project participants. As this was approved more than two years after the start of the LEL project, the LEL MTR did not seek to assess the project against the framework.

Nonetheless, the project has worked to identify and promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in activities. For example, people with disabilities or people who had family members with a disability were prioritised during beneficiary selection to ensure that they were able to access the same opportunities as their peers. Project monitoring data has found that there are ten 10 direct beneficiaries and 24 indirect beneficiaries who have a disability. This is out of a direct beneficiary population of 915 and indirect beneficiary population of 5,807 people.

The project is working with the poor, but not necessarily the poorest of the poor (as project participants need some level of assets and capital to increase their income and production). This approach may unintentionally be excluding people with disabilities. That said, it is not suggested that the project change its approach, as it is common for this sort of project to work with people who already have some assets.

The project is already promoting improved agricultural techniques and animal husbandry practices through picture books and practicals. This is one way to make activities accessible not only to low-literate people but also people with disabilities (e.g. with sight or hearing impairments). If the project has a future phase, CARE Cambodia may want to think about how they address the components of CARE Australia's Disability Framework.

### 3.4 Efficiency

The project is largely managed out of the Sre Ambel field office in Koh Kong province with the Senior Program Manager overseeing the project on a day-to-day basis. The Socially Marginalised Women Program Director is based in Phnom Penh, but is in regular contact with the Senior Program Manager and makes periodic site visits, typically every 3 months. Likewise with the DRR and Resilience Advisor who is based in Phnom Penh.

Currently, the Phnom Penh advocacy work is largely left to the staff who are based in Phnom Penh. However, with the resignation of the DRR and Resilience Advisor who had good connections into Government, and as the project goes into its final year, there is likely going to be a need to engage further with Government stakeholders to share learning and evidence of what works. This will be important work in achieving Objective 3 of the project on stronger learning, evidence and national influence.

The project has built on the achievements of the EU-funded Young Women in Business project in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor districts. For example, YWIB started working with women in 2011 to develop capacity in rearing animals and starting small gardens. Having a good basis to work from has enabled CARE to look at deeper and more strategic work including on women's leadership and economic empowerment. LEL has also been able to leverage off the GAP-funded Personal Advancement Career Enhancement (PACE) project operating in the same districts. The Australian-Aid funded Partnering to Save Lives project established VSLAs in Koh Kong in Sep. 2012 but was unable to continue funding them so LEL and the GAP project took over in Aug 2015. Through sharing an office in Sre Ambel and cost-sharing technical staff, the LEL project is able to get advice from the VSLA Project Manager while the GAP project is also able to access LEL staff expertise. This appears to be working well on the whole but the project needs to continue to ensure there is transparency in how Technical Advisors are budgeted and charged.

The project, which has a budget of \$1,711,146 over four years, has focused on a relatively small geographic area and has benefited from CARE's sustained engagement working with smallholder farming communities in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor districts. CARE also has strong relations with Government and local authorities which has facilitated smooth implementation of project activities. There were some challenges related to the Government official per diem rate but this appears to have been managed. There have also been challenges with managing the turnover of SDKs. To address this each SDK is accompanied by two SDK Assistants to ensure the knowledge and skills are maintained should someone have to withdraw from the program due to pregnancy, illness or moving away.

In 2016, the drought is affecting agricultural production and water availability. LEL has responded to local authorities' requests by being flexible and funding the construction of sixteen community ponds. CARE's experience elsewhere in Cambodia shows that local construction providers can collude and mark up prices, so CARE will continue to advertise procurements widely, including outside of the province, to ensure the project is achieving value for money. In FY16, the LEL project was projecting to spend 100% of the budget. However, due to the drought response, it has been acknowledged that there may be some activities that will go into FY17.

The project has had a strong focus on working with Government officials. This has included providing Gender ToT and providing technical support to officials as they conduct the training themselves in the field. There is limited budget at the local level for gender training but by developing the capacity of government officials, the project is working within government systems which is a more sustainable approach than CARE staff conducting training directly. As the project goes into its final year, it will be important to continue to advocate for budget at the local level to support the implementation of gender and agricultural extension training at the local level.

### 3.5 Sustainability

According to the LEL design, it was envisaged that CARE would start to scale back the level of support in Year 3 and transition to a coaching role to consolidate progress. It was also intended that local authorities and women peers would be adopting a more active, sustained support role in the final years of the project. Some of this transition work is taking place, however, there is still a need to consolidate the technical training by continuing to facilitate refresher trainings and coaching to ensure the gains are sustained.

#### Enablers

CARE has long-term relationships with the communities in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor districts and ongoing strong relationships with key government actors and local authorities. Being well-regarded, having strong commitment from all levels of Government, and having good linkages into MAFF through H.E. Hor Malin and through other contacts in other departments, will help to ensure that project learning influences Government policy. The project's work around promoting women in the VAHW program and getting that recognised at the highest levels of the Cambodian Government is testament to that work. This sort of work takes a significant investment of time and human resources to nurture those relationships and to identify entry points. Nonetheless, it is important work that needs to be sustained for the remainder of the project to ensure the project continues to generate learning to influence national policy.

The LEL project remains committed to developing the capacity of Government officials and those engaged during the MTR appear open to receiving CARE's support. Government officials are ultimately the ones implementing trainings once CARE leaves, so developing their skills and capacities to deliver participatory and engaging training is crucial. The LEL project has been placed a significant focus on practical ToT and methodologies that can easily be implemented in their day-to-day work, whether budget is available or not. Chief of District Office of Women's Affairs, Botum Sakor District stated, *'I enjoyed the Gender ToT training as it is related to my current job. CARE has very good methodology and I can apply it in the community.'* CARE is gradually stepping back from direct training and providing more of a technical support role on gender, agriculture, and animal husbandry to the Government officials. However, ongoing mentoring support is still required.

VSLAs are promoting a savings culture and are increasing access to credit for people who may not otherwise be able to get a line of credit. They are also promoting community solidarity as they meet



regularly and the interest is kept within the community instead of paying the banks or micro finance institutions. The social fund component of the VSLA has been used to respond to medical emergencies and has been valued for quickly releasing funds. In this way, it is also acting as social safety net and basic form of insurance. There is evidence that some people are already paying Village Agents to support their VSLAs which is also a sign of sustainability.

### Gaps

The project has made significant progress in developing the skills of SDKs, SDK Assistants and VAHWs but further work is needed to ensure their knowledge is internalised and they have the capacity to continue the work beyond the project. The project initially planned to phase out of technical training in Year 4. However, it is suggested that this work is sustained along with coaching and mentoring to help ensure learning is internalised. It is also suggested that staff look at ways to ensure lessons and evidence are shared to influence national policy. There is a finite budget in FY17 but it would be premature to phase out of technical trainings altogether.

Some activities have only been implemented quite recently, for example, on market information and the men's engagement dialogue. Further work including refresher sessions will need be conducted to ensure that knowledge is retained and knowledge is internalised and converts to improved practice. During the MTR, many men "said the right thing" but whether they are reflecting back what they have recently learnt or what they have internalised and are practising is unknown.

Due to lack of budget, CARE continues to subsidise Government-led trainings which poses sustainability challenges. The District Office of Agriculture, District Office of Women's Affairs, Provincial Department of Agriculture and Provincial Department of Women's Affairs have the desire to follow up on CARE, and now their own trainings. However, limited budget means that if there is any follow-up training it will likely not be as comprehensive. There is therefore a need for CARE to continue to advocate at the national level to try and influence budget decisions on trainings at the local level.

The drought and resulting shortage of water has already affected production in some locations. There are farmers who are irrigating year round but many are not able to due to the lack of water. At the time of the MTR, CARE was going to respond to the request of local authorities and start constructing sixteen community ponds. The selection of these sites had already taken place and construction was to commence after Khmer New Year.

### 3.6 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

All members of the project team are involved in some way with MEL processes (e.g. data collection, data analysis, information management, reflection). This is a real strength of the team – everyone from the project manager to field officers understands and is engaged with the project theory of change and how the activities relate to the strategic objectives and goal of the project.

From reviewing the project documentation, it is clear that the project has been committed to tracking activity/output indicators for reporting purposes, and that this type of information and analysis is readily available as part of the information management system. The team has also invested in monitoring at the outcome level through undertaking internal assessments including a '*Field Assessment of Project Implementation*' in Year 2 to assess against logical framework indicators. Whilst the review notes that these assessments have limitations in terms of producing statistically significant results, the process did provide the team with an indication of progress and an opportunity for internal analysis. However the review found that it is less clear how learning and reflection is gleaned from these efforts. As currently used the monitoring system is challenged to



provide managers and stakeholders with regular indications of progress towards higher level outcomes and goals (outside of the logical framework), or to capture knowledge on which strategies and approaches are working and which are not, such that the project can modify and adapt strategies.

In terms of the MEL system, at mid-term, the logical framework had not been revised from the original design despite activities being further refined. Therefore the logframe indicators do not capture the full extent of activities and the changes intended under the three specific objectives. A number of indicators are not yet well-defined raising the question of how they will be measured and whether they are in fact, meaningful. For example, how is LEL currently measuring (or intending to measure) 'increased valuing of women' or 'increased voice of women' and whether or not progress has been made (i.e. what are baseline and/or target values for these indicators and what constitutes 'valuing' or 'voice')? Perceptions of self-improvement by project participants can lend great insight into interpretation of project results, however the MEL system must ensure there is clear understanding on what constitutes improvement, so that the definitions are uniformly applied. Finally, the project has produced a number of case studies but these have been used to communicate project successes, and their use appears more media-focused than analytical insight for project management and improvement.

## 4.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are intended to contribute to improved project planning and implementation for the LEL project, with the hope that others may find useful lessons as well. Whilst all of the recommendations below are considered to ensure project impact and sustainability, in recognition of the remaining timeframes, project implementation schedule, and subsequent design phase, recommendations have been ordered according to the current and potential future phase of LEL.

### CURRENT PHASE

*Promote and strengthen the role of SDKs and SDK assistants:* through strengthening and formalising the SDK assistant role it is likely that the provision of agricultural advice relating to crops, specifically vegetable growing will continue to receive equal priority to that currently received by advice on livestock husbandry that attracts a fee. SDKs and SDK assistants must be both sustainable and legitimate in order for LEL to succeed as a gender-transformative development project. This may require closer supervision and mentoring of volunteer-driven initiatives and strengthening linkages to structures that encourage continuation of their work such as DOAF. The sustainability of the SDKs ultimately depends on their being recognised a formal resource in the community which DOAF can draw on – the review team acknowledges that this is no easy task, however the project should consider formally setting the stage for handover of mentoring of SDKs and VAHWs by these departments under future phases – this is an important consideration for the provision of inclusive agricultural extension services for not just the current project beneficiaries but for the next generation of women farmers.

*Promote conservation agriculture techniques:* many of the social and economic gains made by project participants are natural-systems based and are therefore vulnerable to climatic factors. This has been highlighted by the current El Nino drought conditions being experienced in Koh Kong. To build resilience into the system, the team should consider introducing conservation agriculture techniques through SDKs – such techniques would complement water provision through sustainable water management practices. Techniques would include stronger promotion of intercropping and rotation

(site visits revealed this was not being applied routinely during the review) and the introduction of mulching; minimal tillage; water retention pits and so on. Such measures may prove to be more feasible and sustainable than the construction of water ponds currently being proposed.

*Enhance the quality of marketing initiatives:*the project is scheduled to continue rolling out marketing training over the remaining implementation period, therefore we propose three steps to build on the existing basic training package:

1. establish FIG-based informal marketing committees with a view to formalising these under a future phase.
2. deliver business training. Sample topics for business training related to marketing include: basic record keeping, farm business plans and their relationship to marketing, accessing and interpreting market information, one market or multiple market strategies, and in the case of Koh Kong awareness of the benefits and risks of contract farming.
3. emphasise diversification - specialization is important to increase competitiveness, but project participants are not yet at a level where they can bear this risk and it makes them susceptible to market volatility.

*Structure VSLA group savings, lending criteria and repayment schedules to take into account seasonality:* currently a VSLA group cycle depends on when the group was established – essentially nine months from the date the group was established. Livelihood strategies in Sre Ambel and Botum Sakor are highly seasonal which can affect the economic status and food security of women farmers and their households. Factors such as varying labour demands, high agricultural input costs and food insecure periods between planting and harvest can significantly affect the financial capabilities of VSLA members. Going forward the project should work with VSLA groups to discuss their financial needs during different seasons and vary interest rates and/or regular saving contributions during vulnerable periods. This can help reduce the financial burden of SDKs/FIGs during these times.

*Target financial education to VSLA members to increase financial literacy and reduce vulnerability:*at this stage the project plans to establish up to 32 new VSLA groups over the next year. One year is a short period of time within which to establish a functioning VSLA – it would mean there is only the opportunity to have single supported share-out. An alternative would be to build on a training component to existing VSLAs on financial literacy - training in financial literacy such as cash management, budgeting, saving and growing familiarity of products available with MFI/bank services should be combined with other training delivered through the VSLAs. This could help to improve household financial management and reduce the seasonal economic vulnerability experienced by group members.

*Revise project language to better reflect the vision of the project:*the vision being that women farmers are empowered and recognised and valued for their contributions to achieving secure livelihoods and sustainable futures for their households and communities. Basically the vision is being achieved by promoting women's leadership and women's productive and profitable engagement in sustainable agriculture. Currently the project uses a range of terminology to describe this – terms include elevated livelihood options; elevated economic opportunities; better valuing of women's livelihoods. Whilst these broad terms are well-described further down at the outcome level – at the objective level the change being sought is not captured. In terms of Objective 1 the team may want to consider describing it in terms of resilient livelihood options and access and participation in inclusive markets. In terms of Objective 2 the team may wish to describe it in terms of cultural and social norms and attitudes better support the individual and collective aspirations and economic opportunities of marginalised rural women.

## FUTURE CONSIDERATIONS

*Agriculture as a family enterprise:* adopt family business management training approach that values the contribution of women to the economic well-being of the household and identifies opportunities for collaboration on farm management between both heads of household.

*Women's collective action in agricultural markets:* women farmers in cooperatives or formal producer groups have been found to earn approximately 70-80% more income than women trading independently. The co-operative model offers multiple possibilities for women to move up the value chain, through increasing their income, putting their skills and choices into action, and to assume leadership roles. Currently, the review found that women are almost exclusively positioned at the bottom of the agricultural value chain, providing labour for production without realising the benefits from their labour through processing, direct marketing and sale. As individuals women will find it difficult to participate in the value-chain beyond production – they are more likely to experience the benefits of processing, marketing and sale as part of a cooperative or producer group. Cooperatives represent a mechanism through which to ensure women's economic empowerment whereby they are able to put the skills and knowledge they have gained into action and choice.

*Integrate complimentary training programs into the group-based training methodology:* given the project focus on increasing production and diversity (through intercropping) there is potential to also introduce a curriculum of nutritional and health training through the groups to improve health behaviours of group members and lead to improvements in food security through better utilisation of food.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

Overall the findings of the MTR suggest that the LEL project has achieved positive intermediate results with progress observed across all three outcome areas. Objectives are well-suited to the Cambodian context and positive change is occurring within the project communes and villages, as a result of the efforts of CARE and others.

Findings demonstrate that LEL is improving household income and agricultural productivity and food security for project participants, and that being an SDK or member of a FIG/VSLA is widely considered by smallholder farmers to provide important agricultural and economic benefits leading to improved household well-being. There has been gradual change in terms of women's economic empowerment and leadership, with women exerting increased influence on financial decision-making. As men begin to see women as skilled and capable farmers and income earners, so they tend to respect and value women's views and contributions more. However the needs of women remain underrepresented in formal and informal institutions, and cultural and social norms still favour men.

Key recommendations from the review will help CARE Cambodia and the project team to chart the next stages of the project, in order to improve specific components, to achieve better overall quality of work, and most importantly to provide greater opportunities for sustainable outcomes and impact.