

Summary of Baseline Survey Findings

Informed to Influence': Increasing ethnic minority women's access to information for improved governance and development in Dien Bien, Cao Bang, Bac Kan (I2I project)

Objectives

- i) To examine information access context in ethnic minority (EM) community including available information sources, information channels, communication and information accessibility among EM population, EM women particularly.
- ii) To access impacts of information shortage on EM communities, as well as identify associated factors with information accessibility of EM population, EM women particularly.

Methods

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approach was applied for this baseline survey. A designed structure questionnaire was employed to collect information from 350 EM women randomly selected from 5 communes at 3 districts in 3 provinces. In-depth interview (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD) techniques were used to get information from husbands of EM women selected for the study and stakeholders at different levels from local and national level in order to better understanding insights of information accessibility among EM population and EM women particularly.

CARE in collaboration with three local Northnet Civil Society Organizations including ADC (Thái Nguyên), CCD (Điện Biên) and DECEN (Cao Bằng) conducted data collection in project sites during May and June 2017.



Socio-economic characteristics of EM women and information access in EM community

One out five surveyed EM women has never been to school. Majority are able to speak Vietnamese (95%), but still around 25% not be able to read or write Vietnamese. In EM families, husband is more likely to obtain higher education than his wife (7% husband never been to school vs 20% wives).

According to local authorities, four out of ten EM households are certified to be the poor. Cao Bang is with the highest poverty rate among 3 studied provinces, in which the poverty rate among H'mong and Dao is higher than it among Tay and Thai (58% vs 27%). Crops and livestock are main income sources for 92% EM households while 90.7% of those agricultural products are for self-sufficiency. Nevertheless, one out of five EM household has experiences yearly food shortage during Jan, Feb and Mar.

In EM community, average distance from home to communal center is around 5km and motorbike is the main vehicle used for transportation (63%). In Cao Bang, it takes Em women approximately 45-60 minutes to travel from home to the central.

Community meetings, cell phones and tivi are popularly information sources in EM community (89%, 82% and 76%, respectively), followed by village speakers (37%), fliers and printed documents (22%), government officers are also an information channel in EM community (12%).

Every ten EM women, at least four people own a smart phone and use on daily basis; they reported that *"using smartphone to update information regarding agricultural production, weather, news, etc."*



Available Information Topics and Information Demands in EM community

Community score-card technique was used to collect available information topics in community reported by EM women. This participatory tool creates opportunities to facilitate study participants self-scoring their satisfaction level on existing information in their community.



Information on education, health and social affairs was reported being available and meeting demands of community. These information is communicated by village health workers, teachers and/or in village meetings.

"Everyone has health insurance for health check-up and medicines at community health station. Even when the cards are expired, village health workers still provide medicines and distribute the insurance card at home". However, when being asked about how to use the cards, referral to higher level for better care, claim refund, most of participants stated "I do not know, it is subsidized by government, I simply received and benefited".



Information on law, code, policy, socio-economic development program, and other social security issues was reported being limited, not updated, non-comprehensive and irregular in EM community.

"There are little updates on deceit affairs (e.g. usury, multi-level sales..) taking place in the village which are supposed to be inform to all villagers so that they could better detect and respond to deceits", FGD Thai men in Dien Bien.

"Law and policies are informed by officers in charge once or twice per year and little information is noted and only in need when disputes take place (i.e. land disputes)", FGD Dao women in Cao Bang.



Information on economic development and agricultural extension programs to eradicate hunger and alleviate poverty was reported being poor, missed and not updated that influence seriously on lives in EM community.

"Market information is missing despite support from development programs that's why we are often passive in approaching markets to sell our products and depend on collectors to buy out agricultural products under price pressure", FGD Tay women in Cao Bang.

"Farmers are allowed to borrow fertilizers but only whom are informed in advance by the village head could borrow. Limited information on loans and not always being informed transparently in community" – IDI Dao man in Bac Kan.

"There is little information on pestilence and pesticide; if any, it is too late to do anything to save the harvest. Actually, government officers in charge should go to the field, early detect and inform farmers so that we could spray pesticides to prevent loss", FGD Thai Men in Dien Bien



Information Channels and Effectiveness of Communication

Decision No 52/2016/QĐ-TTg issued on 6/12/2016 regulated community-based information forms, contents, and channels as well as stakeholder's involvements into community-based communication activities.

- **Village/community meeting** is the most popular information channels in EM community (89%). Information topics include *“mostly notices from village leader on policies, programs and community activities in the village. Should villagers have concerns, they can raise questions and be quickly responded”*, said a village head. However, *“people rarely ask and be passively informed as I did not know anything”*. Moreover, *“Husbands are the ones to attend meetings and women are sometime in case of their spouse’s absence. Even at the meetings, women keep silent as they have little knowledge of what are being discussed or have no power in making decisions”*, FGD H’Mong women in Dien Bien.
- **Village speakers** are common channels in most of project sites in Dien Bien and Bac Kan, (not yet in Cao Bang), however, *“of total 14 villages in the commune, only 3 work properly”* or, *“speakers are already in bad conditions, functioning poorly”*, or *“there are no specific information for each village, most of which is general information”*, or *“wireless speakers village heads use could be replaced by a more convenient device such as bells”*. Consequently, every ten EM women, only three reported to be used to listen information from village speakers.
- **Mini libraries, flyers and bulletin boards** are found at offices of communal People’s Committee or post offices but *“are not preferred by local people as not up-to-date”*. Also *“only available at communal office so that only those who pass by communal center would be able to read”*, *“women with transport limitation are unlikely to have chances to know information”*. There are no specialized **communication officers** who solely take responsibility for communications at local level. *“Officers in charge of communications are burdened by other tasks; hence, they only conducted once or twice communications activities and their capacity is not considered”*.

Information forms: Mainly in official written format

“Mainly in the form of documents through various channels such as village meetings, bulletin boards, leaflets, or speakers” – a village head in Dien Bien.

“Information disclosed by sponsored programs is in the form of flyers and illustrated by images, which makes it easier to understand. Information without visual illustrations is more complicated to comprehend. For example, when brown plant- hopper outburst took place, people were aware of this based on farming experience while official announcement did little help” – a female participant in FGD in Cao Bang

“Information is not straight-forward and tedious.. Information related to law need to be provided with case studies. For instance, young people nowadays are creative to present law-related information in form of live performance, such as role-playing for anti-drug and family planning issues” – a former village head in Bac Kan

Communication mechanism: One way without feedback

“Information is top-down conveyed, meaning that official permission from top authorities is required to pass information to lower levels”.

“There has been lack of monitoring mechanism that assesses feasibility of current information channels”.

“Information flow relies much on local authorities who make decisions whether or not to circulate information”.

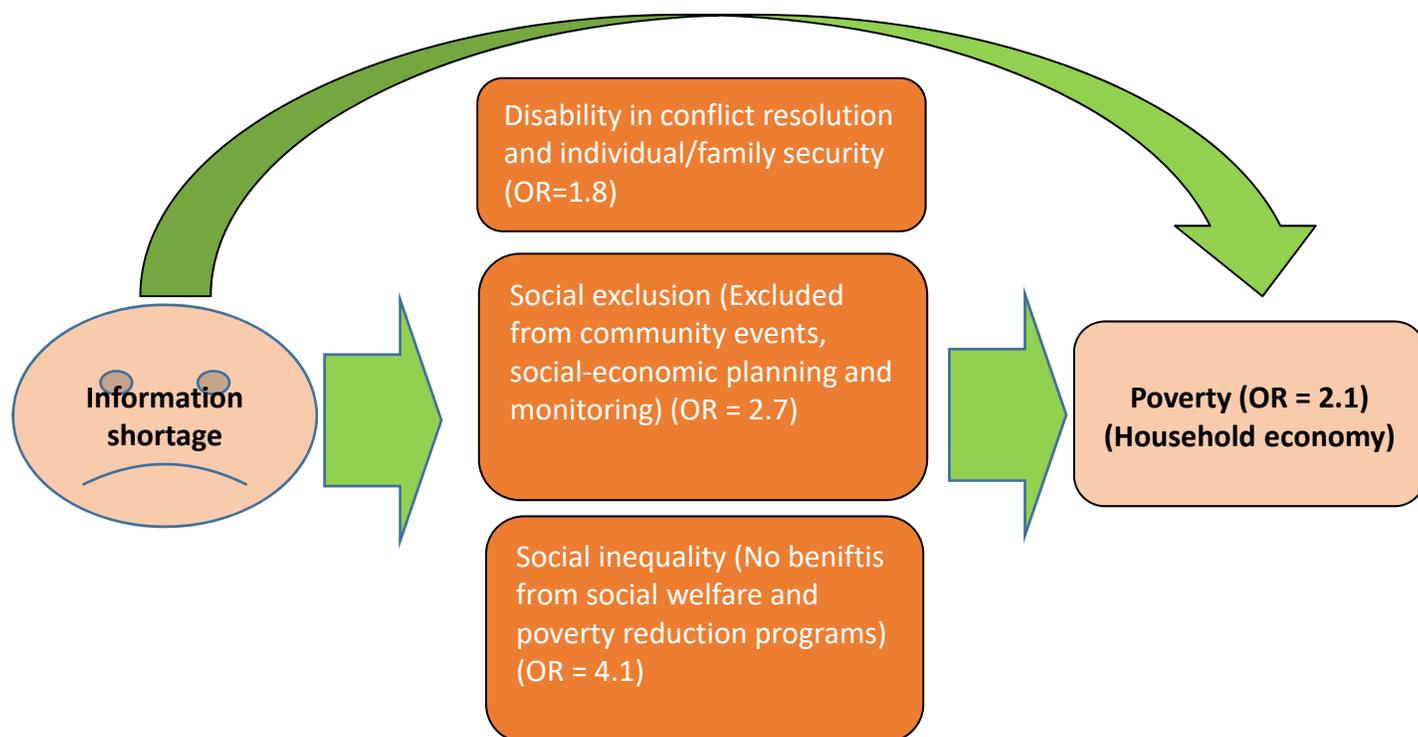
“Vote of confidence that takes place once a year is merely a formality”.

“The feedback mechanism is mainly through the People's Councils and dispute claims. Even though there are complaint mailboxes, no one uses those”.

“There is little participation of local people in forming, circulating information, etc.”



Impacts of Information Shortage in EM community



Associated Factors with Information Accessibility

Multivariate logistic regression was applied to project and identify factors associated with information accessibility in EM community and EM women particularly. Associated factors identified include individual factors such as gender (EM men are 2.3 times more likely to access information than their partners - EM women); education (higher education increases information accessibility to 1.6 times in comparison with those with lower education); household economy (those in better household economic condition are 5.1 times more likely to access information than those at poorer households). Importantly, the distance from home to communal center plays a key role in information access of an individual, those who are able to go to communal center will be 9 times more likely to access information than those not able. On the other hand, availability of information sources and channels also influences on information accessibility of an individual in EM community.

Those who are members of social unions, associations and/or government agencies at different levels are more likely to access information than those not (OR = 3.5).

Availability of communication channel (numerous of information channels in community) is one of the important factors increasing information accessibility of EM population (OR=5.5).

Availability of information services provided by authorities (broadcasting services such as radio, tivi; mobile signal) increases information accessibility of individuals in community (OR=7.6).

