

The Role of WAP in reducing vulnerability of women in Xuan Thuy National Park

Background

For most women living close to Nam Dinh's Red River Delta, collecting aquatic resources around Xuan Thuy National Park's (XTNP) mangrove forests has become their primary livelihood. Hundreds of them flock to the mangrove area daily and a lot more work seasonally to catch fish, crab, shrimp and shellfish, among others in the mangroves, mudflat, sandy areas and riverbeds. Most of these women are unskilled and had to use their hands in digging the mud or use rudimentary tools such as hoe and rake to capture aquatic animals. They could be seen any time of the day and night walking in the mud or battling through the weather in the hope of getting anything that could be sold or used for their household consumption.

WAP intervention

Survey done by XTNP in 2008 with WAP support showed that out of the 500 aquatic resource collectors, about 70% of them are women aged 20 to over 60 years old from nine communes of Nam Dinh. They form different groups based on where they work, working tools used and type of animals captured. Each person can only use a specific tool to catch one or several types of fish or crustacean.



Fish and mollusks collected are mostly for sale and women only keep the ones rejected by middlemen for household consumption. In a particular day, these women could earn an average of 50,000 VND each (about 3 USD), after working 7 hours in the mud.

While they contribute economically to the household, these women often face hardships and constraints in their work. They usually have to contend with the cold weather during winter time and the sweltering heat in summer. There are times that women have to travel alone at night time and start working from midnight until dawn. Women also face competition with other collectors and as such would lead to unsustainable collecting practices in the mangrove area, consequently, to the eventual decline of resources.

Wetlands Alliance Local Partners around Xuan Thuy National Park have identified these women collectors as vulnerable groups and were given support in terms of alternative livelihood, increasing their awareness on sustainable aquatic resources collection, and ensuring security and safety within their working area. Those who chose to undertake alternative livelihood work were trained on handicraft making and were given support on cattle breeding and farming or other trainings that they collectively see as needed. Elderly

people, particularly the women, were encouraged to join existing livelihood activities such as mushroom culture.

Capacity-building mechanism

A co-management guideline for aquatic resource collection and mangrove conservation was drafted in a participatory way through the facilitation of XTNP, in cooperation with other institutions and communes. Women collectors need support to improve their work conditions as well as given rights to utilize resources around the mangrove areas. They are being educated to ensure sustainable practices in aquatic resource collection. Organizing a mangrove protection team was also suggested by XTNP and local authorities to monitor and survey activities around the area. A future plan of the park is to develop eco-tourism activities that will support the products of these women aquatic collectors and their communes around the buffer zone.



What has been done so far

During the first year of WAP support in XTNP, the vulnerable women group was not yet recognized as such. However, on the second year of WAP Phase 1 implementation, local partners with facilitation of CORIN were able to identify this stakeholders' group as highly dependent on aquatic resources, marginalized, vulnerable and needs external assistance. Thus, initial activities to incorporate this group into the stakeholders of XTNP was facilitated with WAP support.

Next Steps

Further support is needed by this vulnerable women's group to strengthen their capacity and empower them. Their role in wetlands resources management is essential because they are highly affected by any changes within the Ramsar Site and National Park. Thus, more activities will be initiated during the implementation of the second phase of WAP.

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