

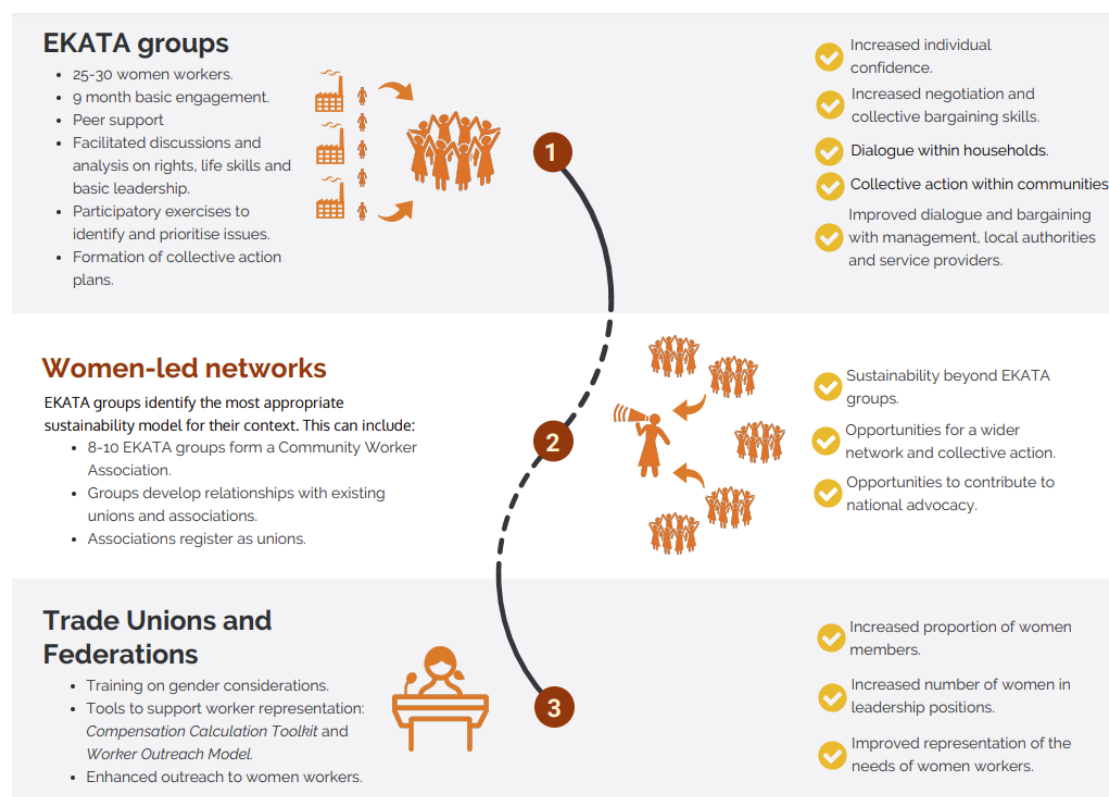
The Voices of Women Who Make Your Clothes: Spotlight on Vietnam

The clothes in your wardrobe have many stories to tell. Stories of 35¹ million women who work for long hours in the garment industry. Stories of their struggles to make ends meet and their fight for change.

Women make up around 80%² of the workforce in the garment industry and are the most important voices in the fashion industry today. However, their voices often go unheard. They are a part of our everyday life, but their lives are undervalued.

To ensure these voices are heard and represented, CARE worked with these incredibly resilient women as a part of The Worker Wellbeing project in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Indonesia between 2018 and 2021. The aim of the project was to improve wellbeing and dignified working conditions for female factory workers in their workplaces and communities.

The project's specific outputs were to form Empowerment, Knowledge and Transformation Action (EKATA) groups of women garment workers; train and build the capacity of said groups' leaders and members; support collective action of the EKATA groups; merge and facilitate networking between EKATA groups; engage with men to support women garment workers in accessing their rights; organize factory-based activities, and conduct advocacy and training with duty-bearers to support the sustainability of the project. [The EKATA model](#) (shown below) has been used to bring women together and confidently discuss common grievances collective action to redress power imbalances in the workplace and improve their conditions.



¹ Source: ILO, Better Work & Cornell University, 2020

² Source: Better Work, 2019

What did we achieve?



Photo Credit: Giang Vu / CARE

Among many highlights of the program in Vietnam, **garment workers having an organized voice** to promote their rights and wellbeing is the most notable one.

“I know what I have, what I need, what I haven’t been given, such as resting time, maternity policy. We suggest these and we are given paid maternity leave like the law requires, the company used to avoid those,” a program participant and garment worker in Vietnam said.

The outcome of this advocacy is enormous. For example, if fully implemented, it is estimated that 28.25 million Vietnamese garment workers will benefit from the sexual harassment prevention provisions spelled out in the Labor Code and the Decree, equivalent to 51.1% of Vietnamese workforce³.

The project has also shown that EKATA groups are **safe spaces for women to build confidence, leadership skills and a support network**, and realize what change they want to see. A total of 794 female workers have participated in 26 established EKATA groups across four provinces with six participating factories between 2018 to 2021 in Vietnam. All members have participated in a capacity-building program to boost their

³ In detail, CARE Vietnam’s advocacy has resulted in the following: 1) Sexual harassment prevention was concretized with the definition of “sexual harassment” at the workplace; 2) requirements for workplace regulation to protect employees from sexual harassment; and responsibilities of employers, employees and related stakeholders in sexual harassment prevention; 3) Decree 145 expands the definition of “workplace” (including the locations or work-related spaces such as work-related social activities, seminars, training, official business trips, work-related meals, work-related phone conversations and communicational activities via electronic devices and other locations regulated by employers); 4) this updated version also emphasizes the victim-centered approach, requiring workplace regulations for compensation for survivals and damage control activities; and 5) employers and relevant stakeholders are responsible for creating a work environment free of sexual harassment

awareness, skills, and confidence. All participating workers have reported increased confidence not only at work, but also in their community and at home.

“I am much more confident now. I am strong enough to organize dialogues with the factory’s management board to discuss the facilities. I know it is our right to discuss issues frankly and openly, but it was only when I participated in the project with CARE that I felt empowered to do so,” says Mrs. Ho Thi Thuong, a garment factory worker in Vietnam.

Thirdly, **employers have a positive attitude towards worker empowerment and gender equality and take actions to promote them**, enable and engage in social dialogue and respond appropriately to workers demands. The program has shown that when factory leaders are provided with gender training and awareness, and when dialogues are well facilitated, they have positive attitudes toward worker empowerment and gender equality – and they respond to workers’ demands.

“I can reduce my overtime working to maintain my health, my family can share more time, I have more time to take care for my children,” says a program participant and garment worker in Vietnam.

And lastly, **men and boys adopt positive norms that enable the economic empowerment and well-being of women workers**. The engagement of men and boys – and the resulting shifts in their attitudes and mindset – on topics of gender equality and women’s empowerment has been a positive outcome of this project.

What did we learn?

One of the most important lessons learnt through this project is that **one-off experiences of effective dialogues are not enough to maintain constant results**. Women workers need continued coaching and support in holding these dialogues with their management to create sustainable and appropriate channels of communication.

Another important lesson was that at the community level, **empowering women takes time and effort**, requiring more than a few to create exceptional leaders. The process involves building trust with people and communities and should be a part of the long-term intervention.

Finally, **evidence-based research is essential when it comes to advocacy** – both on a national level, and at the factory level. It was only through photos, videos and research that workers could get their points acknowledged by the factory.

To know more:

- 1) [Worker Wellbeing Final Report](#)