

**SAVE THE CHILDREN VIETNAM**

**An Evaluation report**

**On Micro Finance component of the Integrated Child  
Development Program (ICDP) in Luc Yen district, Yen Bai,  
Vietnam**

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## Abbreviation

PC	Commune People Committee
DOLISA	Department of Labour Invalid and Social Affairs
CPFC	Committee for Population, Family and Children
ECD	Early Childhood Development
ICDP	Integrated Child Development Program
MF	Micro finance
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PMB	Project Management Board
SC	Save the Children
S-C	Saving – Credit
VBARD	Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
VBSP	Vietnam Bank for Social Policy
WU	Vietnam Women’s Union

## **Introduction**

### **1. Background**

The Micro Finance (MF) component of SC program has started in Luc Yen district since late 2008 with the general objective is to link this component with other ICDP components in order to help targeted families to raise income, then to improve nutrition situation of children in 0-36 months and of women in childbearing ages.

The MF component started in four communes selected as results of the baseline survey in 2008 on the situation and demand for micro credit and related issues. After one year of implementation, there is necessity to evaluate performance, effectiveness and impact MF activities before handing over the last component to the local project management boards.

### **2. Evaluation objectives**

- To review the situation and implementation results of the project in order to withdraw experiences and lessons learnt.
- To address possible impacts of the project on households in project sites on every livelihood aspect with focus on nutrition improvement for children and pregnancy women.
- To identify the linkage and effect of the Micro Finance component on the ICDP component, especially the impact on improvement of children nutrition.
- To give essential recommendations for sustainable and effective management of the MF project in the next years.

### **3. Methodology**

- Review of existing project documents, including baseline survey report, data and regular project reports
- Quantitative survey: A set of questionnaires will be designed for interviewing project beneficiaries. This is the most important tool designed for two main purposes, one is comparing the primary data with and secondary data collected from the baseline survey and another is to gather information on the implementation and participation of the beneficiaries in the project.
- Qualitative survey will be applied with different sets of semi structural questionnaires for different groups, like representatives from women union, commune people committee, health center and project stakeholders at district and commune levels.

### **4. Sample size:**

This evaluation will survey all four project communes: Minh Tien, Khanh Thien, Vinh Lac and Minh Chuan. The number of interviewees at each commune will depend on the number of project beneficiaries and the number of applicants carried out from baseline survey.

**Total number of quantitative interviewees** in four communes is calculated by the standard statistic formula:

$$n = \frac{t^2 \sigma^2 N}{t^2 \sigma^2 + c^2 N}$$

Where: N is the number of project beneficiaries; t is coefficient of significance, taking the conventional value  $t=2$  ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ),  $\sigma$  is standard deviation, taking the value  $\sigma=0.5$ .

We estimate to interview about 220 project beneficiaries in all four communes.

**The qualitative survey** will be carried out through interview following targets:

- Focus-group interviews: each commune conducts one group of women (5-7 persons) who participate in the MF program.
- Commune workshops: a workshop will be conducted for each commune in order to collect information from representatives of local authority and mass organizations
- Interview commune and district project steering committee and project stakeholders (1 person for each commune and all members of district steering committee)
- In-depth interview: each commune will interview 2 cases on borrowing loans and using income for improving nutrition of children and pregnancy women.

**Table 1: The number of interviewees**

	Khanh Thien	Vinh Lac	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Total
Individual interview by questionnaires	73	58	54	51	<b>236</b>
Commune workshop with representatives of local government and mass organizations	1	1	1	1	<b>4</b>
Focus group interview	1	1	1	1	<b>4</b>
Semi- structure interview with local project officer	1	1	1	1	<b>4</b>
Case study	2	2	2	2	<b>8</b>
Group interview with district PSC members					<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>257</b>

Structure interview was undertaken with a set of questionnaires developed for every households selected. Survey team members were divided to visit every household to do face-to-face interview with target women. For filling some questions, the survey-team member could make observation of the house or ask the collaborator or the interviewee's husband. This method helps improve the reliability of information collected.

At each commune, a group interview was conducted with people from PC, WU, Statistics office, Agriculture extension and CPFC. The interview concentrates on the performance and impacts of the project in the past five years. A list of open questions was designed for doing this task. At district level, we did interview representatives WU, DOLISA. These interviews focus on results of MF project implementation; impacts of MF

component; the cooperative mechanism and linkage among stakeholders and their views on possibility of sustaining the integrated project.

## **5. Preparing and organizing the survey**

A survey team was established with a consultant and 4 team members. One-day training was held for all team members in order to revise the questionnaires and to guide how to fill these questionnaires correctly.

The survey team spent one day for a commune to interview all women selected in the sample list. These women are living in different villages and it was difficult and time-consuming to visit them at their home. At the end of the day, all filled forms of questionnaires were initially checked by the team members and then by the consultant. A short review meeting was organized in the evening of every day to share experiences and difficulties in the interview as well as in filling questionnaires.

## **6. Data analysis**

All filled questionnaires were cleaned and coded consistently for each commune. Next, a SPSS file was created for entering and analysing data. A short training on the contents of questionnaires, typing codes was held for people who were responsible for entering and analysing data. The analysing results, consequently, were transformed to the Excel program to adjust table formats.

## Main Findings from the evaluation

### I. Performance of the SC Micro Finance (MF) component

#### Who are project beneficiaries?

Few months before the disbursement of loans, staffs of project steering committee at commune and district levels were invited to participate in a short training on management of saving- credit (S-C) scheme. At this training, regulations for the S-C component were developed with orientation from SC experiences in conducting S-C scheme in previous communes of Yen Bai province. In particular, objectives of the S-C component in the four communes are well defined:

- To increase family income, then contributing to improvement of nutrition of children and pregnancy women.
- To raise knowledge, experiences in business, management, family accounting and to build constant saving practice in the family.
- To build management capacity of women union's staff at project management levels.

The document also regulates targets of the project include women in child bearing ages, having the permanent household book at the locality, having demand on credit and voluntary participate into the S-C group, and willing to accept all regulations of the project and group. This project gives priority to women who have malnutrition children in the age of 0-36 months and pregnancy women.

In practice, results of the random survey show over 80% of the project members are accurately selected. On the date of the first disbursement of loans (October 2008), 35.7% are selected women having children in the age of 0-36 months; 23% are in reproductive age but living in the poor condition; 12.3% have children in the ages of 37-60 months and 5.1% are pregnancy women (Table 2). Comparing among four communes, Khanh Thien is more likely concentrating on the prioritised targets with the composition of this group is over 80%.

General information of the surveyed households also reflects project members were carefully selected. This evaluation interviewed 236 project members. Nearly 90% of them are Tay ethnic people; the rest are Nung and Kinh ethnicity. The education level is quite low with about one third having primary and the majority having secondary education levels. 94% of them are married and having children. We also found a common feature of the ethnic women, i.e., although they are very young with two third of them being 35 years old or younger; 45% of them have two children and 27% have three or more children.

**Table 2: Project members at the beginning of the project implementation**

Target groups		Project Communes				Total
		Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	
Pregnancy women	Count	2	3	0	7	12
	Percentage	2.7%	5.3%	0.0%	13.7%	5.1%
Women having children in 0-36 months old	Count	24	14	28	18	84
	Percentage	32.9%	24.6%	51.9%	35.3%	35.7%
Women having 37-60 months children	Count	11	7	5	6	29
	Percentage	15.1%	12.3%	9.3%	11.8%	12.3%
Poor women in reproductive age	Count	24	12	10	8	54
	Percentage	32.9%	21.1%	18.5%	15.7%	23.0%
Not be in above targets	Count	12	21	11	12	56
	Percentage	16.4%	36.8%	20.4%	23.5%	23.8%
Total	Count	73	57	54	51	235
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

## Project management Structure at local levels

### *Structure and Duty*

All communes follow the same structure of project formulation and management. ICDP is managed by a Project Steering Committee (PSC) having at least four members and this committee is led by the President or Vice President of the PC. Other members could be selected from commune health centre, CPFC, agriculture extension, kindergarten and WU. Within PSC, a coordinator is often selected from CPFC collaborator and playing as a focal point for all project components except for the C-S. This component is managed by a separate team, so called PMB with the manager being the president of commune women's union and other two members including an accountant and a cashier. Three persons of the PMB are divided by geographical space in order to monitor performance of all project groups.

The C-S group is established by gathering women who are living at the same village/hamlet. Under project rule, each group has 5 to 7 members, so one village could have several groups and a village volunteer supervises these groups. Most volunteers also have permanent jobs as heads of village women union. The dual role of this volunteer has been very helpful in integrating C-S activities with other project activities for nutrition, food security and early childhood development.

Structure of district PSC seems to be complicated and cumbersome. The vice president of PC plays as the head of PSC, the head of DOLISA plays as vice director of PSC and other members include representatives of women's union, center for health and population and center for agriculture extension. However, only women's union and health center show real and active participation in the integrated project at the local level. These organizations have network at both commune and village levels; and the local staffs have been working as official collaborators for SC project.

In brief, the structure of C-S PMB is quite effective with three staffs working in three corners of finance management and all staffs coming from WU. This helps to make decision more quickly and consensually.



### ***Change in project staffs***

The personnel organization is quite stable during the first year of implementation. Only one commune (Minh Chuan) changed the head of C-S PMB as she passed away as a result of serious disease. Besides, there are some new village collaborators and group leaders (in Vinh Lac, Minh Tien communes) as consequences of expanding geographical scope of the project. In Minh Chuan commune, there are 9 volunteers and 30 group leaders but only one volunteer was replaced.

### ***Monitoring and supervision activity***

Monitoring and supervision activities from SC office and district PSC are very often, especially during the first months. These are integrated with other technical activities like Monitoring and supervision of the commune PSC staff to groups is for every two months on the date for community's preparation of "nutrition meal" for malnourished children and weight examination. Group meetings are often organised in the same day and each PSC member can supervise up to five groups. In four communes, only one village have not conducted regularly the activities because of not having the health collaborator. Monitoring and supervision is an important determinant for the remarkable results on finance management at all levels.

### ***Work load and compensation for local project staffs***

Normally, the commune accountant spends about 7 days per month for doing the project activities, including collection of capital, saving and interest; recording and reporting and supervising the group meetings. Besides, she has to join the monthly review meeting at the district, commune levels and the nutrition education demonstration. Regular meetings of PSC members are on 25<sup>th</sup> of the month with discussion on important issues of all project components. However, as reported by local project staffs, only the Heads of commune PSC and the head of the commune health center have joined actively in the regular nutrition education demonstration.

Compensation for local project staffs are mainly decided by the commune PSC reflecting deep decentralization applied. In general, this wage is small and not very significant. For instant, in Minh Chuan commune, a group leader was paid 5000 dongs/month while remuneration for a volunteer depends on the number of borrowers she supervised. In Vinh Lac commune, total SC capital is small because the number of borrowers at the beginning was below the SC schedule distributed for each new project commune. This leads to small amount of interest collected from lending and hence, the project staff receives a tiny payment. In particular, a group leader in Vinh Lac also receives 5,000 dongs/month; remuneration for village collaborator depends on the number of borrowers, ranging from 25,000 to 35,000 dongs.

### ***Provisions of credit and saving services***

The project regulates a range of specific and strict principles for credit and saving activities. In practice, these regulations have been applied in a more flexible and simple way. For examples, the loan size is regulated at the maximum of 1 million dongs for the first cycle and 1.5 million dongs for the second cycle. The survey found all communes are using the fixed loan size for the two cycles: 1 million and 2 million dongs in accordance with the durations of repayment are 12 months and 24 months, respectively. This adjustment was done by mutual consensus between SC and local stakeholders based on the up-to-date demand of the borrowers. The regulations also ensure every borrower reimburses

a constant amount of capital less than 100,000 dong per month. It reflects a strict rule for developing a MF scheme for the poor: small loan size, gradual repayment aiming to encourage economic capacity and to give a good lesson learnt for the poor. Fixed loan size applied at the beginning helps local project staffs especially the group leader and collaborator achieve a suitable and successful practice in accounting. It creates and nourishes a positive motivation for them to maintain the work in the long terms with small or no compensation.

The S-C component has performed successfully and followed strictly the rules developed and committed among different project stakeholders at commune and district levels. All four communes started the S-C component at the same time but actual disbursement of loans was slightly different from commune to commune. In Minh Tien, loans of the first cycle disbursed at two points of time: in September and in December of 2009 adding up the total number of balance is 193 million dong (Table 3). Currently, this commune has 62 groups supervised by 13 collaborators and the total number of project members is 349. With the total number of 972 women in childbearing ages at this commune, it is obviously that the project can collate more members. Khanh Thien is the second largest commune in terms of SC capital. This commune lent 319 households in the first cycle. Three out of four communes has started the second cycle with capital collected from gradual repayment of borrowers in the first cycle. Outstanding loans are different from one commune to another as results of difference in mobilising saving and distribution for the fund for growth of capital. Minh Chuan is having a significant deposit of capital to the bank in order to wait for the second cycle.

*“The SC program is very strict, grounded from the people and satisfies objectives of the people. The way of doing this project is different from other projects. Although local staffs of the government and other organizations take more loads of work, the project has brought a lot of benefits to the people and improved capacity of our staff”* - Vice President of CPC of Minh Tien

**Table 3: Project performance in credit activity**

Indicators/communes	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	Khanh Thien	Minh chuan	Total
Date of the first disbursement	9/08	10/08	9/08	9/08	-
Total loans provided by SC (million dong)	193	130	189	108	620
Number of project members	349	184	319	173	1025
Number of outstanding borrowers (by 10/2009)	278	179	300	173	930
Number of borrower's groups	62	39	58	30	189
Number of borrowers in the first cycle	367	130	339	139	975
Number of borrowers in the second cycle	40	0	59	34	133
Outstanding loans by 10/09 (million dong)	201.7	162.3	232.8	83.4	680.2
Overdue capital (million dong)	0	0	0	0	0
Number of risk cases	0	0	0	0	0

### Purpose of borrowing

The purposes of using loans are not very diversified. Over 80% of all borrowers spent money for buying small pigs, followed by production of chicken. Only few households used money as variable capital for small trading, cultivation. There is an amazing similarity between the figures from official reports and those of this evaluation on the purpose of using loans (Table 4). Profit obtained from raising pigs was severely suffered by the increase in the price of inputs and the reduction in the output price.

*“Trading of processed teas is not highly profitable as many households in this village have bought in debit for up to six months”.*

Some small traders in Vinh Lac commune just know they would gain profit from using the loans for trading but they cannot count the exact number of profit.



**Table 4: Purpose of using SC loans**

Indicator	Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	Total
<b><i>Data from official reports</i></b>	233	127	235	143	738
Raising pigs	84.1%	88.2%	90.6%	75.5%	85.2%
Raising chicken	8.6%	11.8%	9.4%	24.5%	12.5%
Others (fish, service, craft, cultivation)	7.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%
<b><i>Data from this evaluation</i></b>	73	58	54	51	236
Raising pigs	84.9%	82.8%	94.4%	70.6%	83.5%
Raising chicken	30.1%	20.7%	13.0%	35.3%	25.0%
Others (small trading, cultivation)	1.4%	1.7%	0.0%	5.9%	2.1%

### Repayment of loans and interest

Monthly repayment of loans and interest is undertaken by different sources of family income. Many borrowers sell their agricultural products, like eggs, poultries, fruits, vegetables and other products for reimbursement of loan, interest and saving. Other project members in Minh Chuan commune have worked as tea-leaf pickers, crop harvesting, grass clearance for other families (hired workers)... The type of jobs is various with the lunar year seasons. Sometimes, they feel difficult to repay but at last, they have overcome the situation. Successful experience of loan collection from these four communes resulted from clear deregulation of commune PMB to village volunteers and group leaders. Overdue could be accepted but just for a few days and all members in the group have responsibility of repayment in time.

Table 5 shows the results of the quantitative interview on the sources of income for loan repayment. It is closely similar to the group interview as selling products of animal raising (chicken, eggs, pig, and duck), planting products and wages from temporarily hired jobs. There is no significant difference between four communes as they have the same socio-economic conditions.

**Table 5: How do you repay for capital and interest?**

Sources of money for repayment		Project Communes				Total
		Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	
From income of trading and other services	Count	3	4	3	5	15
	Percentage	4.1%	6.9%	5.6%	9.8%	6.4%
From selling planting products	Count	16	18	8	8	50
	Percentage	21.9%	31.0%	14.8%	15.7%	21.2%
From income of hired jobs and/or complementary jobs	Count	22	18	27	20	87
	Percentage	30.1%	31.0%	50.0%	39.2%	36.9%
From selling forestry products	Count	5	13	3	0	21
	Percentage	6.8%	22.4%	5.6%	0.0%	8.9%
From selling products of animal raising	Count	66	38	40	36	180
	Percentage	90.4%	65.5%	74.1%	70.6%	76.3%
From selling products of gardens	Count	15	9	3	1	28
	Percentage	20.5%	15.5%	5.6%	2.0%	11.9%
From salary, pensions	Count	3	4	1	2	10
	Percentage	4.1%	6.9%	1.9%	3.9%	4.2%
Total	Count	73	58	54	51	236
	Percentage	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

### **Saving mobilisation**

Saving is compulsory to all project borrowers; it started 2 months before the date of SC loan disbursement in the first cycle. The amount of regular saving is constant for every loan cycle, standing at 10,000 dongs per month. Voluntary saving is not applied because under Decree 28/2005/ND-CP, this type of MF organisation is not allowed to mobilise voluntary savings. Since saving is aiming to be an additional source for the project capital, withdrawal of this fund is prohibited unless the borrower terminates her participation into the project.

In fact, regular saving was encouraged successfully as the result of careful training and regular communication activities. Attitude of the beneficiaries has been changed in a positive way and monthly saving is done constantly by all project members with no further encouragement from group leaders. However, the total saving balance is quite different among four communes because the number of project members is not the same. It is surprising as Minh Tien has the largest number of borrower and SC capital but has the smallest amount of saving balance. This could be explained by the withdrawal of saving of borrowers at the end of the first cycle. All women who stopped being SC project members also withdrew all savings they have.

**Table 6: Saving mobilisation**

Communes	Accumulation saving (mill dongs)	Ratio of saving over SC capital (%)	Withdrawal saving	Number of borrower terminated
Vinh Lac	33.880	26.1	4.066	-
Minh Chuan	21.430	19.8	1.620	16
Khanh Thien	35.540	18.8	3.740	32
Minh Tien	17.350	9.0	-	-
Total	108.200	17.5	9.426	48

After one year of implementation, the saving becomes an important source of credit for project members. On average, the ratio of saving over SC initial capital is 17.5%. Vinh lac is a commune having the highest ratio (26.1%) and the local project staff expected that after four years, they would have the amount of saving equivalent to the SC capital.

### Capacity building:

In terms of capacity building relating to C-S project, all project staffs and borrowers were also invited to join appropriate trainings (Table 7). The content, time and method of these trainings are designed to help them in implementing their functions in the project. In addition, the borrowers were trained with two main aspects: knowledge about credit and saving and technical skills on agriculture production. Topics of technical trainings are depending on the needs of households and in accordance with the immature plants/animals provided. All trainings are practical with application of participatory methods and various kinds of teaching materials and equipments. Training topics for production are grounded on the local demand and in line with planting seeds provided. Consequently, effectiveness and impacts of these trainings are proved by the changes in their knowledge, production and living practices that will be discussed in the next section.

**Table 7: List of trainings provided by SC MF project**

No.	Target group	Content of training	No. day
1	Project Management Board (district and commune level)	- Management of MF activities for the poor - Mechanism of Credit and Saving project	4 days
		- Accountancy	4 day
2	Village volunteer and group leader	- MF activities for the poor. - Mechanism of Credit and Saving project	2 day
		- Bookkeeping recording	1 day
3	Borrower	- Credit and saving activities for the poor. - Mechanism of Credit and Saving project	1 day

### Borrowing other sources of credit

The reasons for being project beneficiaries are mainly from the demand on small loans for business. Before entering SC project, most borrowers felt very difficult to access bank loans as well as loans from private lenders

The overlapping of borrowing two sources of credit is found to be significant even though this finding is not noteworthy from group interviews. **Figure 2** shows apart from borrowing SC loans, in comparison with the first year of project implementation (2008),

there is an increase of over 10% of total surveyed households in borrowing other sources of credit. This trend occurs in three of four communes with high increase in Minh Chuan and Minh Tien communes. This finding partly shows targeted households are more active than before.

## **II. Impacts of the MF component**

### **Change in the household production**

At the beginning, it was very difficult to conduct S-C component because the borrowers were new to the monthly repayment and they faced difficult to follow strict rules on credit (small loan size with high interest rate). However, through various trainings and participation of the borrowers in the formulation of project regulations, positive impact of the repayment method was found in the short term. The project provided a significant number of loans for women and this money is managed by an experienced organization – women's union. After one year of implementation, apart from changing in the borrower attitude, linkage between this project and other development programs has applied. For examples, the project of IDE organization on fertiliser provision for poor households has concentrated on the same targets as SC project. Small loans from this project are demanding as many communes request for additional capital. In contrast, the VBSP loans are larger and having longer duration of repayment but more difficult to return

*“I always want to borrow the project loan because the gradual repayment of this loan is suitable to the pocket money of women”* – Group interview in Minh Tien commune.

We found 23% of total surveyed households have more jobs and/or new production activities since they have accessed SC loans. In fact, not many families undertake new jobs with small loans from SC. They focus using the money to expand the scope of production, mostly in raising pigs, poultries and buying fertilisers for cultivation. Some households used SC loans for expanding available & small trading services or complementary jobs.

*“This is the first project that money is in the hand of women. Previously, most men signed on the loan contract and held money. We strongly believe women can use money for right purposes and effectively”* –Vice President of Vinh Lac CPC.

Apart from provision of capital, other supports from the SC project in all communes are quite similar. Families having small children are provided with vegetable seeds, potato, papaya, mango, lemon and others. These supports were in line with technical introduction help them use the loans more effectively.

### **Changes in income and the use of income**

After one year of participating into SC project, more than 80% of the target households have increase in income and this change is more substantial in Vinh Lac commune compared with other three communes (Figure 1). Moreover, 50% of these families purchased new assets with high concentration on colour TV (13%), electronic fan (19%), telephone (17%) and motorbikes (12%). Contribution of income from using SC project loans is quite significant as over 20% of households use this source of income for buying new assets.

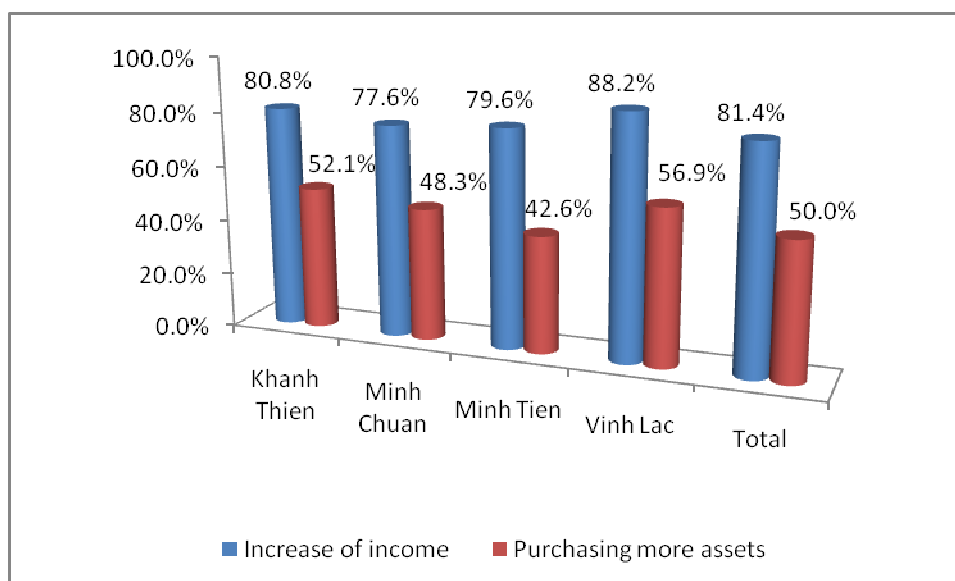
**Figure 1: Changes in household income and assets**

Table eight presents over 75% of the households use the interest obtained from investment of SC loans for production in the next period. Astonishingly, over 30% of targeted households use the interest for buying foods for children and the same number of households used for buying foods for whole family. This confirms project target have acknowledged the importance of nutrition for children. Women in Khanh Thien and Vinh Lac communes seem to have better understanding with over 60% of them use the interest for buying foods. Besides, 28.4% of households used income to cover education cost for their children.

**Table 8: Purposes of using interest acquired from using SC loans (%)**

Options	Project Communes				Total
	Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	
Buying more foods for children	33.3	24.5	37.0	28.0	31.1
Buying more foods for whole family	41.7	26.5	16.7	38.0	31.6
Invest in children education	22.2	34.7	31.5	28.0	28.4
Buying more assets	25.0	12.2	22.2	20.0	20.4
Invest in family production	70.8	79.6	81.5	76.0	76.4
Paying for debt	13.9	12.2	9.3	30.0	16.0
Others	5.6	2.0	16.7	4.0	7.1
Total (quantity)	72	49	54	50	225

### Changes in saving and spending practices

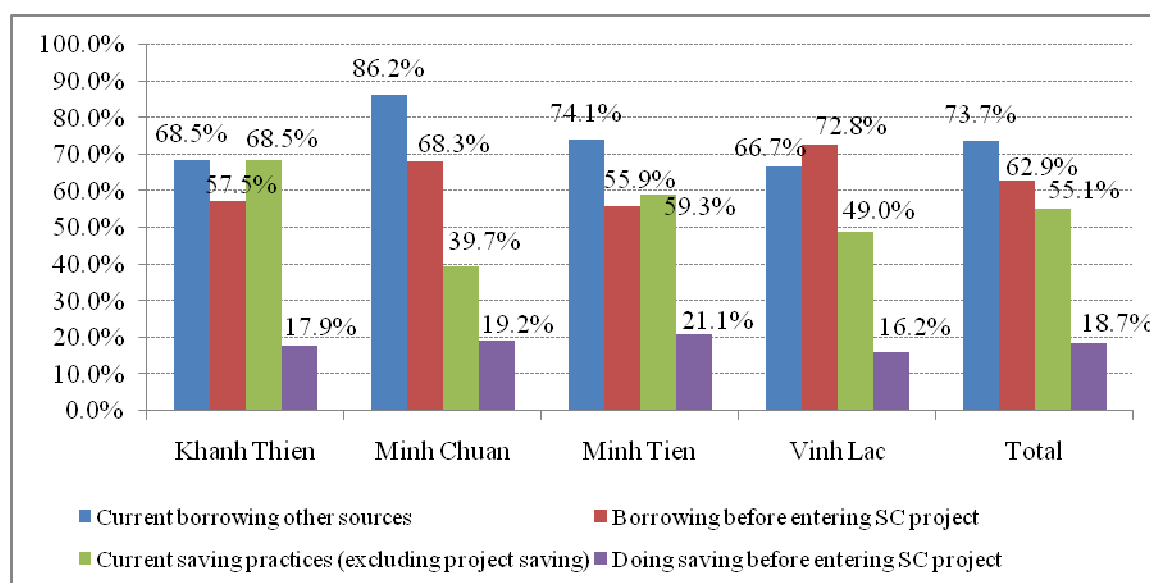
Before entering the project, only 18.7% of the borrowers have saving practice and most of them keep the savings at home either in cash or in kind. One year after the date of



loan disbursement, 55% of them have saving practice with the exclusion of their deposit to the project. Among four project communes, people in Khanh Thien obtain the highest rate of family saving (68.5%). As well, monthly gradual repayment encourages households to perform saving practice in order to pay for capital and interest and they will have a significant amount of saving at the end of the cycle.

*“At the beginning, many people thought that one million dong is too small for doing a useful thing. Through training and communication, small loans in line with gradual repayment helped them deposit their owned money in a good and safety box”.* Commune workshop in Vinh Lac

**Figure 2: Rates of doing borrowing and saving before and after being a SC project member (excluding loans and savings in the SC project)**



### Changes in nutrition practice

Benefits from joining SC project are clear in the attitude and knowledge of women on nutrition for children. Table nine shows change in knowledge on child nutrition and pregnancy caring is one of three fundamental changes in knowledge of women. The other significant changes are “knowledge on saving and credit” and “experience and technique in agriculture production”. Knowledge on pregnancy caring is likely to be difficult to absorb to women as the rate of interviewees answering this option is very low.

*“In the past the baby was feed with rice powder and fat only. Now, we know how to mix different kinds of foods for making the disk more colourful and delicious”* (Group discussion in Khanh Thien commune).



The mothers also know the necessity and how to buy various kinds of foods for their children and other family members. There are many foods available around their living location but before the project entering, women have not known how to make the meal from these foods or use them effectively.



*“New ideas were come to our mind, like conversation with neighbours and friends; one year ago we were ashamed of your presence but not now”* (Group of women in Minh Chuan commune)

*“The most important benefits are knowledge and skills on the scientific method of child care and raising as well as caring pregnancy women. As for women’s union, SC project is a favourable condition for membership development”.* (Commune discussion in Vinh Lac)

**Table 9: What are changes in knowledge of the beneficiaries (%)?**

Indicators	Project Communes				Total
	Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	
Increase in knowledge on S-C activity	65.8	63.8	75.9	45.1	63.1
Experience and technique in using loans and production/ business.	71.2	69.0	83.3	70.6	73.3
Knowledge on nutrition for children and pregnancy caring	64.4	43.8	66.7	90.2	65.5
Total (quantity)	73	58	54	51	236

Positive change in attitude and knowledge of women has caused change in practice of the family members. This survey found nearly 80% of households have improvement in the quality and quantity of meals. In particular, about 60% of families have prepared more kinds of foods and over 30% increased the quantity of each kind of meal. Pork meat and egg are very common in the rural area and these kinds of foods have the most increase in quantity. Among four communes, more changes in nutrition practices are found in Khanh Thien and Minh Tien.

Nutrition practice for children of 0-36 months has also improved very fast as all major foods necessary for the children increased between two years (Table 11). **Figure 3** shows vegetable, meat (all kinds) and fruits are the most common foods for the baby. In contrast, milk, crabs, mussels even fish and shrimp are not popular in this mountainous region. This explains the fact that many mountainous women now have known to exploit available foods for their children.

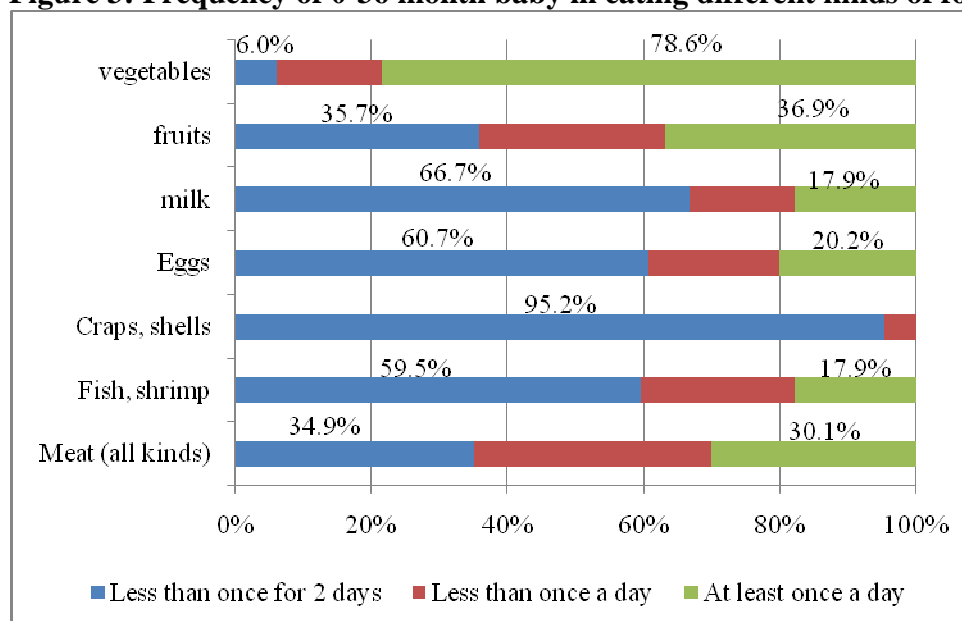
**Table 10: What improvement in the family food practice after one year of implementing MF project?**

Major Options	Project Communes				Total
	Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	
Have significant improvement (in general)	80.8	69.0	77.8	80.0	77.0
Eating more foods (quantity)	43.8	24.1	33.3	21.6	31.8
Eating more kinds of foods	58.9	58.6	64.8	52.9	58.9
Eating more meat, fish and eggs (more protein)	57.5	37.9	44.4	37.3	45.3
Eating more fruits	39.7	31.0	27.8	31.4	33.1
The practice is more hygienic	17.8	12.1	24.1	39.2	22.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>236</b>

As reported by both group and individual interviews, a few years ago, most mothers in the locality did not know how to cook healthy soup. Now, many of them knew the way to mix different kinds of materials to make healthy foods for their children and for themselves. People also know how to manage the capital and take care of children. Pregnancy mothers often go to health center for examination and receiving consultation from the collaborator and enjoy the “*nutrition meal*” every two month. However, because of the budget constraint, the nutrition meal is very poor

*“The manual on Feeding and Teaching kids of 0-5 years old is very useful. I read this book very often and now I can remember all contents of the book. I have applied this book for varying daily foods for my children. In particular, process of meals for children is very important and following the book makes the food more delicious to children. I also rely on the book to examine the growth of my children, for examples, what the child can do after three months, four months or five months from the birthday and how weight the child is?”* (Ms Hoang Thi Diep, Project member in Minh Chuan commune)

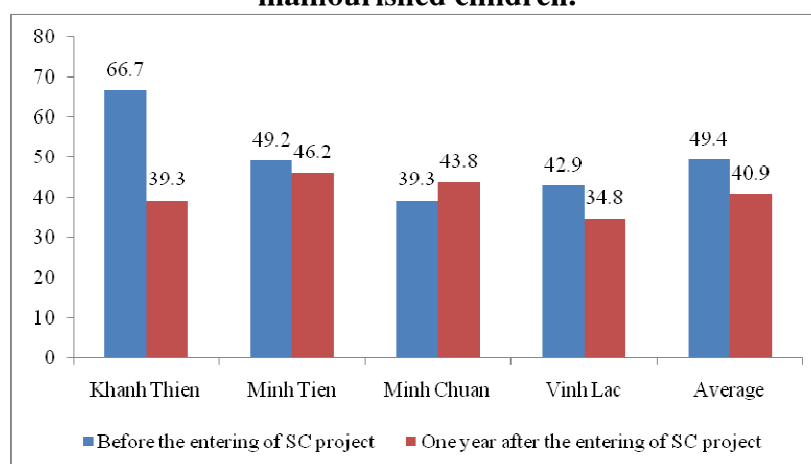
Access and using project loans with close monitoring from different project management committees proved a true direction that the SC MF program would help generate more income for targeted families and this income would be used for improving the nutrition for children and pregnancy women. Response from group interviews and local project officers presents after conducting the S-C component, more vegetable gardens were built with provision of seeds from the SC project. In addition, we found almost all households have fruit trees, including mango, lemon and papaya. The development of vegetable and fruit gardens are contributed by the Household Food Security project as it provides various kinds of seeds and trees that satisfies production demand of households.

**Figure 3: Frequency of 0-36 month baby in eating different kinds of foods****Table 11: Frequencies of eating foods per week of 0-3 children**

Commune/year		Meat	Fish, shrimp	Crap, mussel	Eggs	Milk	Fruits	Vegetables
Khanh Thien	2008	3.1	2.5	1.6	2.8	1.5	4.4	7.5
	2009	6.2	3.9	1.4	5.5	3.3	3.9	10.9
Minh Tien	2008	3.2	2.9	1.4	2.7	2.9	4.2	7.3
	2009	4.0	4.0	1.0	4.0	2.3	5.1	9.6
Minh Chuan	2008	2.9	2.7	0.6	2.6	2.2	4.3	8.5
	2009	6.4	6.1	0.7	2.6	4.1	7.9	15.3
Vinh Lac	2008	3.0	2.9	1.6	2.9	2.2	4.6	7.8
	2009	5.9	5.0	1.2	4.6	3.0	8.1	14.6
Total	2008	3.1	2.8	1.4	2.8	2.3	4.4	7.6
	2009	5.5	4.6	1.1	4.3	3.1	6.0	12.2

The rate of malnourished children has reduced significantly in recent years. We compared two random samples of the baseline survey and this evaluation and found that on average, this ratio reduced nearly 9%. The trend of reduction happens in three of four communes with rapid decrease in Khanh Thien commune. The data is over biased about the malnutrition rate of children because both the baseline and this survey selected randomly interviewees from the list of prioritised targets and survey results are affected by the low accurate responses of the mother. However, the situation in all communes recommends for the necessity of continuing the nutrition and other integrated programs.

**Figure 4: Percentage of surveyed families having malnourished children.**



**Notes:** These figures are from surveyed families selected randomly

### Change in gender roles

The investigation on gender roles is applied for the families having both husband and wife. Therefore, families having only the mother will be excluded from the sample. Three major corners of gender roles are examined: doing family work, participating in community activities and making final decision on 5 important aspects (Borrowing and using loans, Family business plan and strategy, Purchasing valuable assets, Daily consumption and Education of children. Although the husband and wife could discuss with each other before making any decision, this study wants to investigate who has more powerful voice in the family or whose idea would be followed if the husband and the wife cannot agree with each other.

Tables 12 and 13 show momentous changes between two years on the rates of women making final decisions on the five important aspects, especially in business plan. Following the data, women have important roles in all five aspects and have predominant role in daily consumption. Answering about participation of women in community activities may be biased by the activities organised and funded by SC for project targets. This explains why participation of women in community activities is more frequent than men's participation.

An interesting finding presented in Figure 5 show the increase in participation of women in business activity is not in line with the decrease in doing other gender roles. In fact, although they take more loads of business work they still have to do more housework, care and education for children. However, they still keep optimistic view about their role.

*“Childcare and housework are mainly carried out by the wife. However, these jobs are well prepared, so it causes no effect to our participation in group meetings”.* (Interview Group 3 of Khanh Thien)

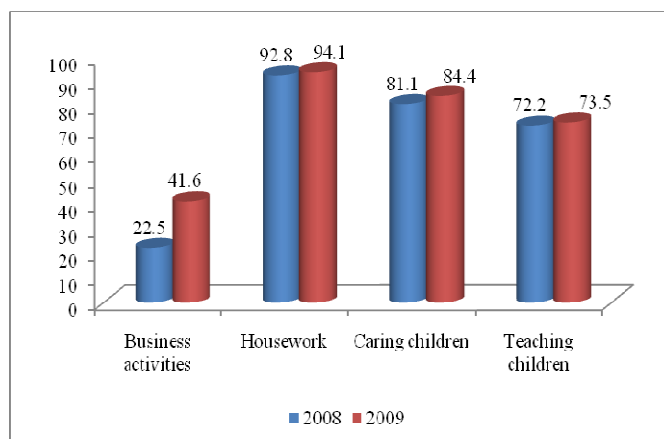
**Table 12: Who in the family make final decisions on the following aspects?  
(Percentage of the total interviewees)**

Aspect for decision making	2008		2009	
	Wife	Both husband and wife	Wife	Both husband and wife
Borrowing and using loans	21.5	19.6	33.9	34.8
Family business plan and strategy	18.2	25.1	33.9	34.4
Purchasing valuable assets	8.1	24.4	17.2	42.5
Daily consumption	67.4	14.3	71.9	15.8
Education of children	33.5	53.7	38.7	52.0

**Table 13: Who participate more in the community activities? (% of the total interviewees)**

Activities	Who participate more?	2008	2009
All kinds of trainings	Husband	17.6	15.9
	Wife	69.4	74.5
	Both	13.0	9.1
All kinds of local meetings	Husband	36.8	26.2
	Wife	43.6	60.6
	Both	19.5	11.8
Traditional culture and music festivals	Husband	7.2	9.9
	Wife	32.2	77.7
	Both	59.3	11.9
Visiting and attending events of the relatives	Husband	40.7	28.1
	Wife	22.5	46.6
	Both	36.8	24.0
Number of interviewees		307	221

**Figure 5: Percentage of interviewees responding that women participate more in business activities.**



### III. Project Sustainability: simple analysis

#### Finance sustainability

- *Structure of equity*

Ratio of outstanding loan over total equity in project commune is very high: 92%. This is a common feature of community-based credit and savings programmes because most of these programmes do not have fixed asset, their deposit in banks is small and their major activities is lending to borrowers. An equity structure with high outstanding loan is a project's strength because it helps generating revenue from interest to recover project costs.

- *Quality of outstanding loans*

Data in project's accounting books and financial reports show a repayment rate of 100% maintaining in every month. There is no case of overdue loan and the project has not written off any loans. This remarkable result is rooted by fundamental reasons including the appropriateness of the repayment scheme for the poor (small amount, instalment payment...), lending through group entrust, strict credit disciplines, committed and responsible project staffs. Maintaining a good quality of loans creates a good financial environment and spirit for project to maintain its capital fund and then to make high and stable revenues. The quality of loans is a fundamental factor of project sustainability.

- *Cost recovery*

Financial sustainability orientation can be seen in the use of interests for necessary cost in MF activities, including: Cost of Capital, Financial Cost, Cost for Capital Loss Provision, Operational cost, Cost for Capital Growth. In practice, the SC project has followed the rule of running a MF scheme as the interest was distributed to the same cost funds as above. Besides, it is allocated for none finance costs aiming to support other project components in CNP, ANC and HFS.

Although the interest of SC loans is small it is distributed for covering five kinds of costs. Inflation fund is established to ensure the real value of capital (0.4 percentage point). Risk prevention fund is allocated at 0.1percentage point to pay for Cost for Capital Loss Provision even though the repayment rate achieves 100%. Operation costs allocated for PSCs of district and commune levels, collaborators and group leaders (0.9 percentage point). Operation costs also include costs for printing accounting books, buying stationeries and organising regular meetings. These costs are in proportion with the amount of interest collected. In particular, the compensation for local project staffs is very small; it has just played as an incentive for the hard working of project staffs. However, this source is very important in maintaining project activities as the direct funding from SC ended. In addition with setting up the inflation fund, a fund for Capital growth has been established with 0.1 percentage point. Interest from lending the saving fund is distributed simpler with 0.8 percentage point paying for the deposit, 0.1 percentage point for the Risk Prevention Fund and 0.6 percentage point for management fees at local levels.

Non finance costs of ICDP project include costs for buying fresh foods for organising child nutrition education demonstrations in every two months at villages and for mother's nutrition meal at the health center; cost for buying vegetable seeds for poor

households in the project (having malnutrition children, pregnancy mothers) aiming to develop family nutrition cells. Total expenditure for non finance activities up to 10/2009 is 7,525,000 dongs. This money allocated from the interest is very significant in maintaining activities on improving nutrition situation of children and mothers.

In brief, income from the C-S component has covered necessary and minimum costs for its operation and supported non finance activities on nutrition. This is an important determinant of the project sustainability.

**Table 14: Accumulative distribution of interest by 10/2009 (%)**

Indicator/commune	Project Rules	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	Khanh Thien	Minh chuan	Total
Amount of interests collected (million dongs)	-	34.56	22.51	31.35	14.82	103.2
Interest from lending SC loan	-	97.40	95.44	86.89	88.38	92.49
Interest from lending saving fund		2.60	4.56	13.11	11.63	7.51
<b>Actual distribution (%)</b>						
Inflation fund/SC interest	26.67	26.53	22.46	26.87	26.98	25.77
Risk prevention fund/total interest	6.67	6.86	6.71	6.93	7.00	6.87
Fund for capital growth/SC interest	6.67	2.66	3.04	3.05	7.43	3.51
Management fees for district level/SC interest	10.00	9.82	8.73	9.87	10.01	9.61
Management fees for commune and village levels	50.00	52.10	32.14	52.66	44.28	46.80
Payment for deposit interest/interest from lending saving	53.33	166.89	100.0	44.55	53.63	68.05
Spending for nutrition program	-	7.87	3.17	5.90	3.09	5.56
Spending for pregnancy caring	-	0.58	0.09	0.51	0.13	0.39
Spending for food security in the family	-	1.45	0.93	1.99	0.00	1.29

### **Demand for micro finance and saving practice**

90 % of total surveyed women say “yes” with the question on whether or not they want to join the MF project in the future or after they complete the current lending cycle. This is consistent among 4 communes with a little difference in the lower rate of Minh Chuan and the higher rate of Khanh Thien communes. This is explained by the fact that only a few families have accessed bank’s loans. Moreover, because of this situation, only few women can compare the strength and weakness of these loans in comparison with SC project loans. However, results from several group interviews on the advantages of the SC project capital in comparison with VBSP loans has come up with the following:

- + Procedures are simpler, with no collaterals and the borrowers do not have to go to the district bank for getting loans.

- + Loans are disbursed immediately and hence it meets the seasonal demand of agriculture production.

- + Gradual repayment regulations make easier for the poor to return capital and interest.

- + Maintenance of small, compulsory and regular saving creates good attitude and behaviour for the poor women and other borrowers.

Most beneficiaries want to maintain this project with purpose of helping poor and nearly-poor women have more opportunities for development.

### **Institution sustainability and stakeholder's commitment**

The S-C scheme of SC is the community MF model integrated with other objectives on nutrition and carried out by WU. Selection of WU as a key project stakeholder is very suitable in order to exploit advantages and strength of this organisation in implementing the community C-S model.

- The WU is well structured at all levels: central, provincial, district, commune and village
- Credit and savings is one of six major WU's programmes, which is "supporting capital and creating employment for women's income generation activities". Therefore, it is strongly supported by the WU and the project can take advantage of WU's experience in this field.
- Target groups of credit-savings project: 100% are women and most of them are WU members
- WU's staffs are committed, responsible and careful in their works. When managing credit and savings fund, they usually use the loan properly for right target groups with high repayment rate.
- Credit and savings are integrated into other WU's activities; therefore, they can take advantages of working conditions of WU such as working office, staffs.... This helps reducing operational costs.

In addition to mentioned advantages, the WU when implementing C&S activities also face with some difficulties and challenges. One of problems is personnel change due to the work shift or termination of tenure. However, this is not a major barrier to project sustainability because C&S activities of the project is quite simple in nature and is not complicated and requiring professional management as banking activities. Staffs in project communes can be trained for replacement with on-going coaching through practicing. In reality there are staff changes in project communes, they have trained and replaced gradually, and the new staffs are now working well in their positions.

In the future, regarding institutional aspect the project can still be sustainable if maintaining the current scheme of having WU as a focal point. Furthermore, this type of MF model is legitimate and regulated by Decree 28/2005/ND-CP.

The SC project received strong support from local government staffs. Village leaders have joined many communication meetings and visits to target households. This project also changes their point views and responsibilities in solving local issues. Their family members and relatives are also the project targets. The government representatives in all communes perceive that project helped them resolve an important and official task, so



sustainability is possible. All district project staffs believe that the project will be maintained in 4 communes as it has been continued in five prior communes

*“Sustainable possibility of the project requests for concern and spiritual support of the local party and government leaders as well as the enthusiastic participation of the collaborators”* - Interview the Vice President of District Women’s Union

### **Appropriateness of the MF regulations**

In general, over 80% of interviewees satisfy with the project regulations. This satisfaction index is highest in Minh Tien and lowest in Vinh Lac. Looking at every principle, the satisfaction level is also very high, especially on borrowing procedures, saving regulations and group meeting. Loan size and the interest rate are complaint by about one fourth of surveyed women. Loan size is now in appropriate because of the high inflation and increasing demand from the poor. The interest rate are relatively high compared to the bank rate and it is stable over time. However, when we explained about the purpose of using the interest, most people accept the current level.

*“Since the lending interest is used for paying saving interest (0.8%/month), so if we cut off the lending interest, we will not have money for support other non finance activities.”* (Correspondent from a commune PSC representative)

**Table 15: Percentage of borrowers responds the appropriateness of project regulations**

Main provisions	Khanh Thien	Minh Chuan	Minh Tien	Vinh Lac	Total
Overall	83.3%	80.7%	92.6%	76.5%	83.3%
Borrowing procedures	100.0%	100.0%	98.1%	100.0%	99.6%
Entrust through group	100.0%	96.6%	98.1%	100.0%	98.7%
Loan size	82.2%	72.4%	68.5%	78.4%	75.8%
Duration of loans	87.7%	89.7%	92.6%	98.0%	91.5%
Interest rate	54.8%	51.7%	66.7%	70.6%	60.2%
Saving interest	87.7%	79.3%	87.0%	78.4%	83.5%
repayment method	83.6%	89.7%	85.2%	90.2%	86.9%
Regular saving	95.9%	98.3%	98.1%	98.0%	97.5%
Saving withdrawing	97.3%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	99.2%
Monthly group meeting	100.0%	93.1%	100.0%	100.0%	98.3%
Total (persons)	73	58	54	51	236

### **Linkage among 5 project components**

As discussed in the previous sections, MF component creates a good opportunity for poor women, especially pregnancy mothers and those having small children in accessing loans for income generation. Income from economic activities of the family will be used for improving the quality and quantity of meals for the child and mother. In other words, CNP and ANC help raise knowledge and skills for women and other family members whereas, MF creates economic conditions for application of these knowledge and skills. Combination of these project components aims to solve the roots of malnutrition. Moreover, MF also generates a finance resource for covering necessary costs of running other ICDP components, including CNP and ANC.

All project cadres from commune and district levels said, the S-C component plays as a skeleton for continuance of other components because the local budget is very limited.

*“The S-C component plays as a central part for SC integrated project. Without this component, it is hardly to maintain other components. Even though the loan’s interest allocated for other components is still small, it is an essential substance for encouraging contribution of the people in doing project activities.”* – District PSC interview

A part of loan interest is distributed to demonstrate nutrition practice at every village. Besides, about 50% of total expenditure has been contributed by households, which have malnutrition children. All project communes maintain nutrition practice for every two months. It was undertaken for every month during the period of receiving financial support from SC. There has not much support for the Early Childhood Development (ECD) component because the demand on finance overcomes the supply. This activity was mainly integrated with school opening day, teacher’s day and other holidays.

*“The S-C component is the most effective part of the nutrition integrated project as its activities happen more often than any other components”* – Project staff in Minh Tien commune. She added her point as *“all five components have the same targets, i.e., the mother in child bearing ages and her children, so these components need to have close relationship with each other in order to increase the effectiveness and impact of the whole project”*.

#### **IV. Main conclusions and recommendations**

This evaluation has carefully examined the implementing results and impacts of the MF component of SC integrated project in 4 communes of Luc Yen district, Yen Bai, Vietnam. Although the MF project has been implemented for one year, many significant successes have been achieved. The project regulations were initially approved with careful examination and high commitment among representatives of all project communes. Therefore, they are highly reliable and appropriate to the beneficiaries and local circumstances. The appropriateness of project regulations helped PSC at all levels to manage and implement the project successfully. Evidence from this evaluation shows the MF component has been conducted in the appropriate order with participation of all stakeholders and beneficiaries. Even though the project has been carried out for one year, impacts on the livelihood of the projects targets (small children and pregnancy women) are found to be significant and substantial. Family income of all target households increased with significant contribution of SC in terms of small loans and other technical and material supports. The initial supports were in line with regular trainings and monitoring activities of different-level PSCs. As results, knowledge, attitude and practices of households in nutrition, pregnancy caring are much improved, contributing to the reduction in malnourished children, increase in women’s participation in pregnant examination or consultation. The roles of women in the family also increased with higher participation in family business, community activities and making decision.

The evaluation also found close linkage between MF and other components in the ICDP projects of SC. Of these, MF has played as a focal point for maintaining other components and for the effective application of the knowledge and skills of the mothers and other family members. Success in running MF component by an experienced mass organisation (WU) in the past year is the key condition for sustainability of the whole project in the future.

In terms of recommendations, maintaining the existing model with MF and other 4 components is strongly requested in order to help more women and children improve their livelihood conditions and development . However, it is necessary to review some provisions in the scheme of MF project.

As for the organisation of project management, the fundamental role of commune and district women's unions in conducting and supervising the MF project. Other stakeholders, like health, DOLISA, agriculture should take the collaborative and supporting roles. The provincial level needs to keep their coordinating role and contributing more effort than before. Regulations on the role, function of project stakeholders at different levels should be more specific and transparent.

Some rules for savings and revolving loans, especially the loan size should be increased in accordance with changes in periodical repayment rate and duration. Income distribution (from repayment of loan's interest) for different funds should be adjusted towards enhancement of project sustainability and improvement of child nutrition.

SC and project partners are recommended to have open discussion and consensus on mechanism of handing over the MF project to full management of local partners. This transfer needs to be resulted in written paper with the approval from all partners. The document should take into account of ownership, purpose of using loans, role and responsibility of every stakeholder.

Although all forms of the accounting system are suitable and now most of group leaders and collaborators can record by themselves; they still propose more repetitions of trainings in order to ensure they can make the accounting system more clean and transparent.

## Appendices

### Case study 1:

After several years of savings, Mrs. Tran Thi Lap and her husband could eventually rebuild their house. Definitely, they had to borrow some money from their relatives and friends to have their house rebuilt. Despite they would have to work hard after that to earn more money to pay back these debts, they could have their own house to live more comfortably with their two small children.

Unfortunately, only two months after that, Mrs. Lap's husband died in a traffic accident. Former debts had not paid, Mrs. Lap had to borrow more for her husband funeral. Becoming a poor family, Mrs. Lap told that at that time, she and her children "had nothing in the house: no cows, no pigs, and no chickens. Nothing left to be sold to pay for the debts". The two small children's main dishes were just vegetables or peanuts, which were planted in their garden. Sometimes their meals were "enriched" with some pig fat or tofu their mother bought. Meat appeared in their meals only once every month. Mrs. Lap must rely on some part-time jobs to earn little money.

Late 2008, Mrs. Lap was told about SCK's project. She could borrow 1 million VND for 1 year, and pay back capital and interest every month.

"Former debts are still there, now I wonder whether I can pay back for this new debt.". Mrs. Lap said. However, she decided to borrow 1 million to buy 1 pig, 7 chickens and 3 ducks. Ten months after that, in October 2009, she had 1 pig and some chicken sold (at the total price of 1.050.000). Other 3 pigs and 40 chickens and ducks were still in pigsty and hen house.

How does this affect Mrs. Lap and her children's living conditions? "The children still don't have children food like milk and fruits, even they are ill". However, they can have meat three or four times a month. They can even have eggs when chicken lays eggs.

However, what changed the most is Mrs. Lap's attitude: "I am proud that despite the fact that I am poor, I still have 10.000VND savings each month. For the first 2-3 months, I was nervous about paying back the debt every month. Until this moment, I do not feel worried about it so much. In the past, I spent all what I earned. Now, despite how much I earn, I always try to save.



It becomes a habit of savings to pay back the project and to save". She believes that by saving, she could have a small sum to invest more in her production.



Now she has pigs in pigsty, chickens in the garden although the recent disease has made half of her chickens die. She smiles and tells us she and her children's lives are getting less and less hard than they were 1- 2 years ago.

## Case study 2:

Mrs. Hoang Thi Lung's family is a poor household in Lang Mac, Vinh Lac commune. All income of the family comes from cassava plucking in the forest, rice fields, chickens & pigs raising. She has a son who will be three years old in the end of 2009. Following the traditional habits, she never let her son have fruits, beef or hens as it is said that these food may cause gastralgia for a child. She usually bought instant rice soup, boiled it and fed her son without adding any other food like meat or vegetables. She said it should save her time, and as it is chicken rice soup (actually it's chicken-flavoured rice soup) she didn't have to worry about its nutrition.

Joining SC's project, she borrowed 1 million VND. With this amount, she bought 2 small pigs at the total price of 900,000 VND. Several months later, she sold these two pigs. After deducting cost for their food, the two pigs brought her 2 million VND. She now intends to build a cage for pigs and if there is some money left, she will buy another pig.



Joining SCJ's project, she also attended some classes about children care. She said that now she knows it was not right way to avoid feeding her son with fruits or beef. Now "what my son has not tried before, I always try to buy and make it for him". Although she still cannot afford to buy him enough food (the little boy only has 1 meal with meat, 2 with fish, 2 with egg per week), she "still tries to make different dishes for him". "As I was told in these classes, I know that I should change dishes for my son so that he would not get bored with the same dish everyday". She also said that she knows a child needs to have rice, meat and vegetables in a meal, however, due to her condition, she cannot not feed her son more. She hopes to have more support and borrow the second time from the project to buy pigs after a pig cage is built.

### Case study 3:

Mrs. Hoang Thi Voi (Minh Chuan commune, Luc Yen district, Yen Bai province) has been participating in SC project since September 2008. She is one of people who has successfully and effectively spent the loan from the project.

In our dialogues, she was willing to disclose her family conditions before she joined the project. She is living with her husband and three children. Her oldest child, who was born with Down syndrome, is 14 years old, the second child is in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and the last is 4 years old. A small house and several chickens are all what they have. Their earnings mostly come from agricultural products, which are limited due to small area of agricultural land.



In September 2008, SC project was first launched in Minh Chuan commune. Mobilized by the women union and be aware of the benefits the project may bring, Mrs. Voi decided to participate in the project.

After discussion with her husband, Mrs. Voi borrowed 1million VND from the project in September 2008. With this amount, they bought two small pigs. In February 2009, they sold the pigs at the total price of 2.1million VND. Deducting cost for feeding, the profit was 800,000VND. Again, they decided to buy more pigs. 1.6million was used to buy 4 pigs, and the rest was for pigs' food. In July 2009, they took another loan of 10million VND from Vietnam Bank for Social Policies. Together with this amount, Mrs. Voi sold 2 pigs to have 2million more to invest in purchasing a wood splitter machine. Since then, they keep going on with their new occupation: wood splitting and furniture making. She was eager to tell that they can earn 500,000VND per month. Showing a new cupboard and television, she said "you see, we have just spent 3million last month to buy this cupboard and TV, it's the project that brings us success". I understand she refers the success in effectively spending the project's loan. The success is not just profit, the way it motivated Mrs. Voi and her husband to actively think and work should be counted.

For the coming future, they are planning to sell the last 2 pigs to rebuild pig cage. The monthly savings will be used to buy more pigs and 10more chickens so that to have more food for her family's meals and more earnings.

While taking me to the gate, she pointed at 4 chickens in the garden, saying "they bring me enough money to pay the project monthly". Saying goodbye to Mrs.Voi, I didn't forget to wish her plans to success.



#### Case study 4:

*This is the story about Mrs. Hoang Thi Vuon (Bo Ma, Vinh Lac commune, Luc Yen district, Yen Bai province), who has applied knowledge in children care and nutrition delivered by SCK project in feeding and looking after her two children. The small amount borrowed from the project has also been invested effectively.*

Mrs. Vuon was born in 1985, got married in 2005. She has 1 son and daughter, at the age of 4 and ½ year. Since getting married, she and her husband had always had difficult and ‘struggling’ life. The only source of income came from agricultural products such as: rice, corn, cassava... In 2006, she had the first child, who was usually sick and malnutrition.

In December 2008, while pregnancy, she was told by the women union about the SC project and was mobilized to join. Aware of the benefits that she may receive, she discussed with husband and decided to join the project with expect to have more knowledge in children nutrition as well as to have a little capital.



1million borrowed from the project was spent to buy 2 pigs and 5 ducks. At the time we have the interview, she is going to sell the pigs while ducks have given eggs several times. Each month, the ducks give her 80 eggs, income from selling these eggs are to pay back to project, and to buy more food for the whole family.

Asking Mrs. Vuon about how her children are taken care, she said eagerly “my two children are healthy, the older child is not malnutrition any longer”. Noticing that I am looking her cute 6-month child, she continues “she is 6.5 kg, and not malnutrition”. The knowledge in children care she was trained in class held by the project was applied with her children. She taught her older child to wash his hands before and after meals, to brush before bed. The child makes it a habit and does it by himself now. She also changed dishes for her children; meat, fish, eggs, snails... are cooked. Vegetables are minced and put in the small daughter’s everyday congee bowls.

Mrs. Vuon’s expect is that the project can last long to help poor women, especially women who have small children, to have more knowledge in children care and education. Moreover, she wants to keeps going with the project to borrow more so that her family may expand production and have more income.