

A STORY OF A DAO WOMAN IN BAC KAN PROVINCE

Mrs. Tran Thi Kim Phuong (55 years old) and her family, as well as other families in Khuoi Dac village, Mai Lap commune, Cho Moi district, Bac Kan province, are Dao people who emigrated from other provinces (Lang Son and Cao Bang province) and immigrated to the place twenty years ago. Being born and bred in Cao Bang province, until Mrs. Phuong at her twenties, she married a man from Gia Lai who was a soldier garrisoned in her living area at the time. The couple later moved to his hometown in Gia Lai. Unfortunately, Mrs. Phuong's husband passed away in a traffic accident. She was forced to marry her husband's younger brother according to the customs in Gia Lai. On rejecting to follow such customs, she ran away from her husband's family in a stormy night to move to Khuoi Dac village, Mai Lap commune in 2000, accompanied by her two little children and one more to be born (her husband's family members have not yet known where she has moved to so far).

At initial time, Mrs. Phuong's family encountered lots of difficulties in the settlement and economic activities since they had no residential land and also farmland. She built a temporary shack on the cattle grazing area as it was a public and unused land and farthest from the residential area. She then took her mother from Cao Bang to live with her so that they could take care of each other. At the beginning, the villagers did not allow her to do any cultivation and farming activities in that land for the reason that the land belonged to their ancestors. Gradually, the villagers felt pity and sympathy for Mrs. Phuong's situation. She and her family have changed 3,000m² of wasted land into maize cultivated area. This maize cultivation area brought her family the major income for a long time because they did not have any land suitable for wet rice cultivation. With a limited income source for a household of five members, and her three children were at schooling age, her mother was over 80 years old and could no longer work, she had to run about to other communes, districts or even to other provinces. Yet her family got stuck in the poverty trap.

According to the Sedentarization program in 2006–2007 period, her family was granted with land to build house and with the land use right certificate (Red Book) by the communal People's Committee. The land used to be the public grazing area surrounding her house was planned and allocated to local people and her family was also allocated with more than 10 ha forest land. From 2010 to 2011, thanks to the support of project conducted by ADC, her family was granted the Red Book for the 10 ha forest land area.

Since the official issuance of land use right certificate, her family has concentrated on cultivation and production activities. She joined technical trainings for nursery garden, afforestation and she has planted more than 2 ha of *Manglietia conifera* Dandy. Until now the *Manglietia conifera* Dandy area is in preparation for harvest, promising to bring the significant income of around 100 to 200 million VND. Besides, she also joined some research and training courses on the role of indigenous knowledge (IK) and the impact of climate change on her life and the community. She understands the difficulties and challenges caused by climate change that she and her community are facing and will face in the area, especially to households having no flatty- field land like her household. She is a pioneer in agro-ecological transition in her community. Instead of using fertilizers and pesticide as previous period, she applied the minimum tillage methods that she and her community have been using to her own maize and banana fields, and in addition to that, she used the bodies of maize trees to cover the soil to prevent erosion and keep the humidity. As a result, in 2011 fall crop her maize productivity increased by nearly 100 kg in the area of 3000m².

Being aware of her strength on sloping land cultivation, apart from the corn model, Mrs. Phuong and 4 households in the village voluntarily registered to implement the banana planting on sloping land model under the support of ADC on the Climate Change Adaptation project in 2011. She applied the model on 1 ha land area. Since early 2012 until now, she intercropped ginger and also medicinal plants into such banana area. Being supported with the seedlings, provided with technical trainings using the farmer field school method, together with previous experiences in the field, Mrs. Phuong and other households in Khuoi Dac village took good cares of the models in their own fields.

Mrs. Phuong shared: "I and the villagers are very excited with the support of ADC. At present, bananas are growing well with some are blooming and some are being harvested. Furthermore, the soil is protected from erosion thanks to ginger and medicinal plant layers. The bananas intercropping ginger and medicinal plant models brought my family steady income around 40 million VND/year. Hence, my family has escaped from the poor household list since 2014. I was able to build a new house and my children also got better studying conditions".

In 2016 and 2017, with the income resource from the banana model, Mrs. Phuong continued to build fruit models (persimmon, tangerine) in the 2 ha land area. She continues to apply indigenous knowledge in planting and maintaining these plants. These are two strong plants of Bac Kan province, promising lots of potentials in the future and they will be harvested in the next 2 years.

Now Mrs. Phuong does not have to work for others, she focuses on taking care of her banana-ginger model instead. And there is a new inter-commune road which is not too far from her model, so beside members of the village or commune, many other people travelling across and noticing the model also come to ask for her experience sharing. Mrs. Phuong has shared all of her experience enthusiastically, without hesitation and with a hope that everybody, especially women and poor families can have higher income. She also wants to scale up the agro-ecological transition model on her rest land, and advocates other households in the village and commune to follow her in order to develop a specific product for the locality and help all villagers escaping from poverty.

With efforts and as the typical woman in the economic development, mutual love heart and always help others, in recent years Mrs. Phuong received many certificates of merit from the authorities. She had a very big change from a woman living in poor, aloof and now she has become a successful woman in the community. She was elected as Farmer Council president of the village. She always represents members to share, consult and have lots of contributes to the socioeconomic development plans of village and commune. She represented the ethnic minority woman, who is an enterprising and responsible citizen in the community. She has represented the women of the Dao community who confidently shared about her own experiences in the "Round table conference on the role of EM women in Climate change Adaptation" organized by the UN and participating in the "Poverty reduction initiatives" program at national level.

As a companion for the journey of development who observes every single change in her life, ADC wishes that her dream will come true. ADC believes in her fortitude, and in a near future, she will not only get rid of the poverty and hunger but also be an example to represent Dao people's enrichment model. And hopefully, this will put an end to the misery phase that

she has experienced for more than half of her life to enter a new page of happiness and wealthy.



Mr Phuong in her banana and ginger farm