



THE “TURN-WASTE-INTO-MONEY” REVOLUTION: The Indispensable Role of Women in Creating Change and Innovation

As Quang Ninh Provincial People’s Committee would like to improve environmental management and protection, GreenHub launched the Plastic Action Network in August 2018, which is the network to take action and focus on 3R concept “Reuse - Reduce - Recycle Plastic waste”. This project was created to support the researching topic called “Raising awareness of solid waste management in Quang Ninh province”. The project’s goals are to create an environmentally friendly lifestyle based on the foundations of science, social benefits and sustainability. The project is initially being piloted in Ha Long City and Ha Long Bay with the aim of scaling it up and applying it at a national level.

Within the process of the PAN, we determine that Women’s Union is the target audience who we should aim at to help those women raise their income just by collecting, recycling plastic bottles and then turning them into a marketable product. After the first stage, the project received positive feedback from Women’s Unions in five different wards within the province. Of these five, Ha Trung deserves a special mention for their efforts over the past year, exceeding initial expectations of the project.

“We don’t think that we’ve taken part in a 3-year project, instead, we consider it to be a permanent project because environment protection is the lifelong responsibility of every citizen.”

- said by the representative of Women’s Union of Hai Phong city about the activities of minimizing waste, recycling and turning discarded waste into items that can be sold, which can generate an income.

In fact, there are so many on-going constructive projects in the area of Ha Trung Ward, locals there must currently face up with serious environmental pollution directly related to smoke as well as flooding problem. As a result, the local community is heavily affected by ongoing dust pollution and flooding. Consequently, it is at the forefront of the concerns of women in Ha Trung ward to live in a green, clean, urban environment – an environment that does not adversely affect people’s health. Especially, although the upgraded Road No. 336 could help to make this residential areas look much more better, this still can’t help to improve the citizens’ attitude to save the environment. Waste disposal still exists. More seriously, the particular concern is when garbage enters the sewage system, obstructing its flows. The improper disposal and treating method of plastic waste not only undermines our urban beauty but also harms the people’s health.

In this circumstance, in the first stage of the Plastic Action Network project, on 29 - 30 December, 2018, GreenHub coordinated with the Women's Union of Ha Long City to organize a training course focusing on "How to improve the capacity of the Women's Union of Ha Long City in the work of building a strategic plan to reduce domestic waste and single-use plastic products", which helps WU's member to improve their knowledge and techniques to perform initiatives.



Women Union of Ha Trung Ward implemented a project in which they collected, sorted waste and make Ecobrick from these plastic disposables. And this ward became one of the leading wards whose Women Union’s been pioneering at minimizing as well as actively and positively improving plastic waste epidemic in Vietnam.



These activities’ scale are still small but together, the impact is immense.



From small-scale collecting activities in which these women have found each single plastic bottle, every month, they also could collect & sell more than 200 kg of plastic waste. The money, though not much, but also is a source of encouragement and support for disadvantaged women located in the ward. Then GreenHub Officer gave a training course as well as technical guidance for these women to make eco-bricks in order to build public works in the local area, to make good use of available resources and together aim at sustainable development.

**However, to be honest,
the implementation
process can be
considered to be a
revolution of change.**

There are many people who are willing to pay 10,000 VND per month for environmental staff instead of collecting, sorting and recycling waste by themselves, because they think it is just a time-consuming and labor-intensive job. But regardless of difficulties, the efforts in the reform of thinking and the way of life of the women don't undermine. For example, the Women's Union persisted to involve as many participants as they could.

The Women's Union is determined to implement these activities in a sampled association. Each week, Women's Union in person came to each household to spread the project's message and collect each beer container, each paper cover and small plastic bottles, etc. In the first 3 month, all the 7 women team in the association No.2 and 30 participant households put all of their effort to spread out this project's key message and collect waste. As a result, the first waste sale took place at the gate of the cultural house of the Association No. 2, right next to the main road 336, which involved 30 women members to participate and called attraction from hundreds of people who pass by with curiosity. Besides, the event-holders also receive the financial support from 5 road riders, each of whom donates 500,000 VND to support the poor women. This small effort every single day helps to spread the meaningful message of this event to the people around.

“I do not consider garbage collection and sorting as an ominous and boring job. So, we organize cleanup campaigns, which include collecting and sorting activities, right in public areas so that many people can have the chance to know about it, initially they are curious, then see the meaning. After that, they join and contribute recycle waste to the program to spread these positive actions to the community. ”, shared by the chairman of Women's Union of Ha Trung Ward as a strong statement about the proud and persistent jobs that they are carrying out every day

All the efforts do just not include all above-mentioned activities!

This model is scaled up into 4 remaining associations in Ha Trung ward. The most typical activity is that the Association No.1 immediately opened a meeting to discuss about the implementing plan within 10/10 women groups. Each household received 01 bag to store waste. Each month, they spend 1-2 days to sell recycled products. In the process of classification, the women separately sort out plastic bottles and large plastic containers to grow flowers in them, **and utilize the invaluable resources from garbage.** Besides, they also involved the members of the women's group in collecting plastic bags to stuff these waste into the bottles which is use to make eco-bricks.

Every day, there are 20- 30 women participating in making bottles of eco-bricks in a fixed schedule, which is 3 weekly gathering evenings on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. On average, each week they make 15 bottles of eco-bricks. From the beginning of 2019 until now, they have made 450 bottles of eco-bricks, contributing to the construction of local public works.

Determining the large amount of waste stemming from Business Households, the Women's Union also came to each household and persuaded them to participate in collecting activities, and also asked for the local government to provide garbage truck in order to make this model much more effective.



They not only actively and actively collect rubbish at home, at the market, but also on each road, every street, **involving from the old to the young**, not to mention female over-70-year-old senior citizens, children at the first grade and university students. Especially, we must mention the solid support from these women's family to help them actively participate in these activities.

So far, all the 5 branches in Ha Trung ward have participated in the revolution.

Each branch has a different way of making various products from waste, but still very effective. This association collects waste materials to make beautiful street with flower pots recycled from bottles which is hung on the wall. Another one collected them to make recycled products. And especially, all the associations are involved in collecting plastic bags for making eco-brick bottles.





In addition to making eco-bricks, collecting discarded materials, women also collect plastic banners and posters to recycle and turn them into useful products in daily life such as eco-friendly shopping bags to replace plastic ones, recycled flower vases used in the conferences, sunlight-proof hat; knitting shopping lanes from brick and tile ties in construction works. This is also a large amount of plastic waste discharged into the environment, all ideas are built up from the reality, from updated information provided by Plastic Action Network project.

After 1 year of active participation in the project, Ha Trung women are confident, knowledgeable and well-experienced in waste-treating at source, turning garbage into resources, supporting each other in daily life, raising awareness of every woman in the Women's Union to become pioneering forces in reducing plastic waste in Vietnam!