

# LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT FOR TRAFFICKING WOMEN RETURNED IN THE PERIOD OF 2019-2023 (Case study in Ha Giang province)

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Ha Giang is a mountainous border province in the North of Vietnam, with a strategic location in terms of politics, economy, national defense and security of our country, to be home to many ethnic minorities. In recent years, with the attention and investment of the Party and State, along with the drastic efforts of the Border Guard, police, functional forces and local authorities, the illegal human trafficking across the border has been prevented and achieved many results. However, besides that, this buying and selling situation in the border area of the province is still quite complicated. Among the victims of buying and selling, the majority are ethnic minority women. When trafficked back, victims face many difficulties in reintegrating into the community such as: psychological crisis, discrimination, lack of jobs, lack of production capital... Therefore, supporting victims of human trafficking to reintegrate into the community so that they have jobs, income, livelihood support, economic development and stable lives is extremely necessary.

**Keywords:** *Human trafficking; Livelihood; Women; Victims; Economic development; Ha Giang province.*

## 1. Introduction

According to a report by the Ministry of Public Security, in the 5 years (2012-2017), there were approximately more than 3,000 victims of human trafficking and suspected human trafficking, of which 90% of victims were trafficked to China. The number of victims of human trafficking and suspected human trafficking is 3,090 people, of which, mainly women and children (accounting for over 90%), the majority are ethnic minorities (accounting for over 80%), often concentrating in rural and mountainous areas, especially remote areas, most of whom have difficult economic circumstances... Upon returning to the community, the victims face many difficulties, notably lack of employment and unstable income. Some victims, because they do not have jobs, after being trafficked, returning to the other side of the border illegally to find work. This brings many risks, including the risk of re-trafficking. Faced with these realities, the Women's Union of Ha Giang province has made efforts to coordinate with organizations and sectors to support the livelihoods of trafficked women who have returned. The victims are supported with loans to develop their economy, raise buffalo, cows, goats and grow fruit trees... Thereby, helping them overcome their inferiority complex and stabilize their lives.

Victims of trafficking are supported with funds to buy livestock breeds and are equipped with knowledge and skills to generate income, which is livelihood support. The concept of livelihood

is understood in many ways. In the scope of this article, the author uses the concept of livelihood as: *"Activities to support access to resources, improve capacity and vocational skills to create jobs, increase income and improve material and spiritual life"*.

## 2. Research overview

There are many researches related to the livelihoods of trafficked women, some typical researches include: The research *Trafficking of Women and Children Abroad: An Evil That Needs to Be Prevented by the Community* (Xuan, 2005) states that: for victims when they return, we must create maximum conditions for them to integrate into the community such as: handling paperwork, legal procedures, encouraging and helping them to rise up, creating livelihoods and jobs to stabilize their lives,... In the research *Results and experiences in implementing programs to prevent trafficking in women and children in the period 2002-2007* (The Asia Foundation, 2008) summarized and provided lessons learned about the Program to support victims of trafficking to return and reintegrate into the community. Accordingly, the intervention activities include: Vocational training support (tailoring, hairdressing, business accounting) and job introduction/business start-up support for 65 women, including returned victims of trafficking and women at high risk of being trafficked; capital support and technical training for victims' families to develop the family economy; support for localities in market research and identifying economic development opportunities for poor women,...

The research *Results of the implementation of the project to prevent and combat trafficking of women and children in the Mekong sub-region, phase II in Vietnam* (Ha, 2008) mentioned: “For factories and enterprises that use migrant workers, it is also necessary to support housing and favorable conditions for workers. In the long term, implement poverty reduction, narrow the gap between rich and poor in urban and rural areas and raise people’s awareness to prevent human trafficking; In the research *Supporting the repatriation of trafficked victims (research of some facilities supporting victims of trafficking in Hanoi)* (Huong, 2023), the author pointed out: Hagar International Organization has activities to support the livelihoods of returned trafficked women, which are community-based economic development, supporting livelihoods in agriculture, livestock and aquaculture. At Blue Dragon Children’s Organization, support the livelihoods of victims of trafficking through job search, provide capital for business start-up through guidance programs, develop agricultural skills (cultivation, animal husbandry)...

In general, researchs related to supporting victims of trafficking in general and returning trafficked women in particular have mentioned activities of job creation and economic development. This is an important source of documents with high scientific and practical value, helping the author inherit and develop the content of the article. However, up to now, there have not been many researchs on the livelihoods of trafficked women returning to remote areas, ethnic minorities bordering the border, of which very few researchs have focused on livelihood creation activities for ethnic minority women in Ha Giang province.

### 3. Research method

The author used some basic methods in the article such as: Secondary data collection method; synthesis and evaluation method, at the same time clarifying livelihood support activities for trafficked women returning home in Ha Giang province, thereby proposing solutions to improve efficiency in the coming time.

### 4. Research result

#### 4.1. The context of policy development

Regarding victim support activities in general and livelihood support for returned trafficked women in particular, our State has issued a number of policy documents regulating the issue of repatriation and community reintegration such as:

Decision No. 312/2005/QĐ-TTg dated November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2005 of the Prime Minister approving projects under the Action Program on prevention and combat of crimes of trafficking in women and children from 2005 to 2010 (The project focuses on receiving, repatriating and supporting community reintegration for women and children who have been trafficked from abroad, with the

Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs as the lead agency).

Decision No. 17/2007/QĐ-TTg dated January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 of the Prime Minister promulgating the Regulations on receiving and supporting community reintegration for women and children who have been trafficked from abroad (regulations on procedures, policies and responsibilities of agencies and organizations in receiving and supporting community reintegration for victims of trafficking such as: psychological support; legal procedures; culture, vocational training; initial hardship allowance and loan support).

Joint Circular No. 03/2008/TTLT-BCA-BQP-BNG-BLDTBXH dated May 8<sup>th</sup>, 2008 on guidance on procedures for verifying and receiving women and children who have been trafficked from abroad.

Circular No. 05/2009/TT-BLDTBXH dated February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2009 of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs on guiding the organization and operation of victim support facilities under Decision No. 17/2007/QĐ-TTg dated January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2007 of the Prime Minister (stipulating: The center to support victims of human trafficking returns to provide health recovery services, psychological and legal counseling, career guidance, job referrals and preparation for reintegration into the community for victims).

Circular No. 84/2019/TT-BTC dated November 27<sup>th</sup>, 2019 of the Ministry of Finance on the content and level of expenditure for victim support affair and the content and level of expenditure for victim support regime prescribed in Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP dated January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 of the Government detailing the implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking.

Joint Circular No. 113/2010/TTLT-BTC-BLDTBXH dated August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 of the Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs on amending and supplementing Joint Circular No. 116/2007/TTLT-BTC-BLDTBXH dated September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2007 guiding the content and level of expenditure for the affair of verifying, receiving and supporting women and children who have been trafficked from abroad to reintegrate into the community according to Decision No. 17/2007/QĐ-TTg dated January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2007 of the Prime Minister (Article 3 stipulates: If a victim is a poor household (according to the poverty standards issued by the Prime Minister from time to time) or has a particularly difficult family situation (confirmed by the Chairman of the People’s Committee at the commune level) considered for an initial hardship allowance with a minimum level of VND 1,000,000/person; If a victim has a need to study, he/she will be considered for an initial hardship allowance with a minimum level of VND 1,000,000/person; If a victim has a need to study, he/she will be considered for an initial hardship allowance with a minimum level of VND 1,000,000/

person; Victims who want to learn a trade will be considered and provided with a one-time vocational training fee of VND 1,000,000/person/course.

In Clause d, e, Article 32 of the Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking (Law No. 66/2011/QH12), it is stipulated that victims of human trafficking who return will be supported with vocational training and loans.

This is clarified in Decree No. 09/2013/ND-CP dated January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2013 of the Government detailing the implementation of a number of articles of the Law on Prevention and Combat of Human Trafficking (stipulating: Victims who need to learn a trade will be supported one time for the cost of learning a trade. The level of support is based on the corresponding cost of vocational training at local vocational training facilities).

In general, the legal documents of the State in general and the regulations of Ha Giang province in particular all mention livelihood support for victims of trafficking returning, which emphasizing financial support for short-term vocational training and primary education. In addition, if the trafficked women returning belong to other social groups (poor households, ethnic minorities, women’s union members...), they will still enjoy preferential policies on unsecured loans, vocational training support... according to current regulations.

**4.2. Current situation of livelihood support for trafficked women returning home in Ha Giang province**

In the 5 years (2019-2023), Ha Giang has focused on supporting the livelihoods of trafficked women returning from districts (Meo Vac, Dong Van, Yen Minh, Hoang Su Phi...) with complicated human trafficking situations. The level of different support depending on the number of trafficked victims returning to reintegrate into the community.

**4.2.1. Livelihood support for households at high risk of trafficking**

In order to prevent human trafficking, livelihood support for families in difficult circumstances and at high risk has been given special attention by Party committees at all levels, local authorities and mass organizations in Ha Giang province.

Implementation method: Support costs for purchasing breeding animals for breeding, creating jobs, limiting migration to China for work, reducing the risk of being trafficked. In particular, the focal point of this livelihood support activity is the Women’s Union of Ha Giang province, directing the Women’s Unions of districts and communes to provide livelihood support for high-risk families with the mobilization of social resources, including support from the Blue Dragon Children’s Organization.

**Table 1.** Livelihood support for families at high risk of human trafficking in Ha Giang province (2019-2023)

District area	Supported communes	Support level	Livelihood model	Result (*)
Meo Vac (46 households)	Niem Tong (15 households), Khu Vai (15 households), Giang Chu Phin (16 households)	- Total: 552 million VND. - Average: 12 million VND/household	Support for buying breeding animals: raising pigs, raising goats	Revenue from selling breeding animals: 642,983 million VND
Dong Van (17 households)	Ho Quang Phin (04 households) Pho La (03 households) Sinh Lung (06 households) Ta Phin (04 households)	- Total: 272 million VND - Average: 16 million VND/household	Support for purchasing breeding animals: pig and goat farming.	Proceeds from selling breeding pigs: 70.7 million VND.
Hoang Su Phi (6 households)	Then Chu Phin (06 households)	- Total: 72 million VND - Average: 12 million VND/household	Pig farming	Money from selling pigs for meat and breeding pigs: 68.2 million VND
Yen Minh (13 households)	Huu Vinh (1 household) Yen Minh Town (1 household) Thang Mo (10 households) Sung Thai (1 household)	- Total: 128 million VND - Average: 9.8 million VND/household	Pig and cow farming	The sale of breeding pigs brought in 38.2 million VND.

Source. Summary from the Report of the Women’s Union of Ha Giang province in 2019-2023

(\*)Depending on the number of high-risk households in the districts is different, so the level of financial support for purchasing breeding animals in each district is also different. The support time in the districts depends on the capital mobilized by the Provincial Women’s Union, so some areas are supported first, some are supported later (For

example: in Dong Van district, funding will support purchasing breeding stock for high-risk households from 2022; Hoang Su Phi district will support 4 households in 2021 and 2 households in 2022...). Therefore, the above “Results” amount in each locality depends on the time of statistics. This amount is compiled from the number of livestock that have

been sold, not including the number of livestock that are still being raised to develop the local economy.

Among the supported areas, Meo Vac district is the area with the most difficulties, the largest number of households at high risk, so it is supported up to 46 households. Next are the districts including: Dong Van (17 households), Yen Minh (13 households), Hoang Su Phi (6 households). Most households were supported to buy breeding pigs, some households bought cows and goats. The support level ranged from 9 to 12 million VND/household. Funding source: socialized, most of which was sponsored by the Blue Dragon Children’s Organization.

4.2.2. Livelihood support for victims of human trafficking to reintegrate into the community

According to the report of the Department of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs, from June 2013 to June 2019, the facilities received and supported 2,961 victims, including 2,891 women and 528 people under 18 years old. This shows that the majority of victims in trafficking cases are women. When rescued and returned to their homeland, the victims face many difficulties, including obstacles such as lack of jobs and income, especially those in remote areas and ethnic minority areas. Faced with these difficulties, the Women’s Union of Ha Giang province has connected and supported the livelihoods of returning victims of human trafficking by providing funds to buy livestock breeds suitable to the production experience of its members.

**Table 2.** Livelihood support for returning victims of trafficking in Ha Giang province (2019-2023)

District area	Supported Communes	Support level	Livelihood model	Result (**)
Meo Vac (02 victims)	<b>Support for breeding stock:</b> - Khau Vai (1 victim) - Nam Ban (1 victim)	- Total: 18 million VND. - Average: 9 million VND/household	Pig breeding	- In 2020: five breeding pigs were purchased. - In 2023: the herd increased by 63 pigs. - Earned 156 million VND
	<b>Production Technical Support</b> - Niem Tong (1 victim)	- Provide free biological products and NPK fertilizers, guide families to apply techniques to growing corn	Growing corn	Corn plants grow better, are less susceptible to pests and diseases and have higher yields
Dong Van (5 victims)	Sinh Lung (01 victim), Lung Tao (01 victim), Sa Phin (01 victim), Pho La (01 victim), Sang Tung (01 victim)	- Total: 79 million VND - Specifically: + Support 01 household (Pho La commune) to buy materials for building barns and buying cow breeds worth 26 million VND, 03 households (Sinh Lung commune, Lung Tao commune, Sang Tung commune) to buy cows worth 48 million VND (16 million VND/household), 01 household (Sa Phin commune) to buy black-bone chicken breeds worth 05 million VND (buying 15 chicken breeds)	Raising black boned cow and chickens	The initial support of buying 04 cows and 15 chickens has now increased to 21 native black-bone chickens, selling for 1.5 million VND in eggs
Yen Minh (11 victims)	<b>- Support for breeding animals:</b> Lao Va Chai Commune (03 victims), Mau Due (01 victim), Ngoc Long (01 victim), Lung Ho (01 victim), Du Tien (01 victim), Phu Lung (01 victim)	- Total: 126 million VND - Specific level: + 15 million/cow + 9 million/2 goats + 12 million/3 pigs.	Raising pigs, cows, goats	- Initially bought 11 animals (07 cows, 02 goats, 03 pigs). - By 2023, it had increased to 46 animals (increased by 35 animals compared to the original: 04 cows, 06 goats, 25 pigs). - The amount of money earned from selling pigs, cows, and goats was 33,278 VND.
	<b>- Fertilizer support:</b> Lao Va Chai Commune (02 victims), Lung Ho Commune (01 victim)	- Total: value 6,750,000 VND	Livelihood support in farming: Free provision of fertilizers and technical guidance on farming	Plants yield better and to be less susceptible to pests and diseases

Source. Summery from the Report of the Women’s Union of Ha Giang province in 2019-2023

(\*\*)The above “results” in each locality depend on the time of statistics. This amount is aggregated from the number of livestock sold, not including the number of livestock purchased from support sources but still being raised for economic development in the locality. In addition, the amount of livelihood support through agricultural production techniques (livestock barns, cultivation) has not been aggregated into a specific amount.

During the period from 2019 to 2023, the Women’s Union of Ha Giang province directed the Women’s Unions of Dong Van, Meo Vac and Yen Minh districts to support the livelihoods of 18 female victims who returned from human trafficking. Most of this support was to provide funds to buy livestock breeds, the remaining support was to build livestock barns, provide biological products and NPK fertilizers for cultivation. Supporting the livelihoods of returning victims of human trafficking is linked to job creation and increased income for the whole family. Although the districts in Ha Giang province have only been implementing the above livelihood support activities for a short time, but they have brought about positive results.

Meo Vac district (supported 2 victims): In 2020, 5 breeding pigs were purchased. In 2023, the herd increased by 63 pigs and earned 156 million VND.

Dong Van district (supported 5 victims): The initial support included the purchase of 04 cows and 15 breeding chickens, which by 2023 had increased to 21 native black-bone chickens, selling for 1.5 million VND in eggs. The number of cows continues to be raised for breeding.

Yen Minh District (supported 11 victims): Initially, 11 animals were purchased (07 cows, 02 goats, 03 pigs), by 2023 it had increased to 46 animals (an increase of 35 animals compared to the original: 04 cows, 06 goats, 25 pigs) and the amount of money collected from selling pigs, cows and goats was 33,278,000 VND.

### **4.3. Assessing the strengths, limitations and causes of existing livelihood support for trafficked women and high-risk families in Ha Giang province**

#### **4.3.1. Advantage**

Livelihood support activities for returned trafficked women and high-risk families have achieved relatively positive initial results due to the following advantages:

*Firstly*, the drastic participation of Party organizations, unions and local authorities, in which the Ha Giang Provincial Women’s Union plays an important role in directing and coordinating.

*Secondly*, livelihood models are easily implemented by taking advantage of existing livestock farming experience and the mountainous environment with abundant food sources for cows, goats, chickens and pigs.

*Thirdly*, mobilized a large amount of funding: Total funding is approximately 1,250,000,000

VND, of which 1,024,000,000 VND is provided to 82 high-risk families and about 225,000,000 VND is provided to families of 18 victims.

*Fourthly*, support livelihoods associated with job creation for the whole family, thereby developing the household economy; all family members benefit.

#### **4.3.2. Limitation**

Besides the above advantages and benefits, livelihood support activities for victims and families at high risk of human trafficking in the past time still have some of the following limitations:

(1) Livelihood activities only focus on livestock and crop farming without diversity in other models such as industry, services, trade...

(2) The key activities of livelihood creation are providing funds to buy livestock, fertilizers and support the construction of barns to create jobs on the spot, but have not focused on introducing jobs with high economic efficiency; have not provided, trained to improve vocational skills and increase the value of labor.

(3) Livelihood models of farming and livestock farming require a lot of time for crops and livestock to grow. During that time, victims of human trafficking will continue to face difficulties. Some victims have gone to other countries to work as hired laborers through unofficial channels, leading to potential risks.

#### **4.3.3. Cause of existence**

*Firstly*, the educational level of the people is uneven, many ethnic minority women in the border areas (Mong, Dao, Ha Nhi...) in the project area are illiterate and cannot speak the common language, therefore, their ability to grasp information and acquire knowledge about livelihoods is limited, especially career guidance and vocational training that require high professional qualifications.

*Secondly*, difficult terrain, harsh weather, lack of water for daily use (epidemics in livestock; lack of feed for livestock...), some households have had their livestock die, affecting the effectiveness of livelihood support for trafficked women and high-risk families.

*Thirdly*, some guides (collaborators or cadres assigned by the Women’s Union) still lack knowledge and propaganda skills, so the effectiveness may not be high.

*Fourthly*, due to the short time of model implementation, activities in different areas were carried out at different times, so it is not possible to compare and contrast the effectiveness of livelihood support in different areas.

### **5. Discussion**

From the above reality, we need to study to propose some solutions as well as supplement timely policies to improve the effectiveness of livelihood support for ethnic minority women, especially returning victims of trafficking. We need

to consider the following solutions:

*Firstly*, continue to strengthen the leadership of the Party, the participation of authorities at all levels and mass organizations to join hands to push back the problem of human trafficking.

*Secondly*, continue to disseminate and propagate information on preventing human trafficking so that people understand and raise their awareness. The forms of propaganda need to be diverse (dramatization, banners, slogans, knowledge contests, radio and television programs, organizing discussions in community meetings and in regular activities of mass organizations,...).

*Thirdly*, continue to mobilize social resources to create livelihoods for victims and families at high risk of human trafficking. Localities need to have policies to create favorable conditions for organizations and individuals to invest in livelihoods for the poor, ethnic minorities in general and victims of human trafficking in particular.

*Fourthly*, promote literacy education and vocational training for ethnic minorities. This is an important foundation for people to access science and technology and information related to sustainable livelihoods.

*Fifthly*, it is necessary to train and develop cadres working on preventing human trafficking and supporting the livelihoods of victims. In particular, it is necessary to have policies and mobilize victims of human trafficking to join the team of propagandists and collaborators because they are insiders, they understand the difficulties that victims

have gone through; they are ethnic minorities and will understand the language, culture, customs and livelihoods of ethnic minorities.

*Sixthly*, localities need to boldly research livelihood models with high economic efficiency based on available resources in the community such as: developing community tourism, zoning for planting high-value crops, developing traditional craft villages,...

## 6. Conclusion

The current situation of livelihood support for victims and people at high risk of being trafficked in Ha Giang province has achieved positive results. This is due to the drastic participation of Party committees, authorities and organizations at all levels, including the key role of the Women's Union at the provincial, district, commune levels and the financial support of the Blue Dragon Children's Organization. However, supporting the livelihoods of ethnic minorities in general and victims, families at high risk of being trafficked in particular still faces a number of difficulties and shortcomings. We need to step up propaganda work on legal policies, especially the Law on Prevention of Human Trafficking; regularly disseminate information on the causes and consequences of human trafficking; forms of luring victims; hotlines to report incidents; forms of livelihood support suitable to the locality... Through this, we will control the problem of human trafficking and help improve the lives of ethnic minorities in general and victims, families at high risk of human trafficking in particular.

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## HỖ TRỢ SINH KẾ CHO PHỤ NỮ BỊ MUA BÁN TRỞ VỀ GIAI ĐOẠN 2019-2023 (Nghiên cứu trường hợp tại tỉnh Hà Giang)

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Hà Giang là tỉnh miền núi biên giới phía Bắc Việt Nam, có địa bàn chiến lược về chính trị, kinh tế, quốc phòng, an ninh của nước ta, là nơi sinh sống của đông đồng bào dân tộc thiểu số. Trong những năm qua, với sự quan tâm đầu tư của Đảng, Nhà nước, cùng với vào cuộc quyết liệt của Bộ đội Biên phòng, công an, lực lượng công chức năng và chính quyền địa phương, tình trạng mua bán người trái phép qua biên giới đã được ngăn chặn, đạt được nhiều kết quả. Tuy nhiên, bên cạnh đó, thì tình trạng mua bán này trên địa bàn khu vực giáp biên giới của tỉnh vẫn còn diễn ra khá phức tạp. Trong số các nạn nhân bị mua bán thì phần lớn là phụ nữ người dân tộc thiểu số. Khi bị mua bán trở về, nạn nhân gặp rất nhiều khó khăn để tái hòa nhập cộng đồng như: khủng hoảng tâm lý, bị kỳ thị, thiếu việc làm, thiếu vốn sản xuất... Chính vì vậy, việc hỗ trợ nạn nhân bị mua bán trở về tái hòa nhập cộng đồng để họ có việc làm, có thu nhập, phát triển kinh tế, ổn định cuộc sống là điều vô cùng cần thiết.

**Từ khóa:** Mua bán người; Sinh kế; Phụ nữ; Nạn nhân; Phát triển kinh tế; Tỉnh Hà Giang.