



Knowledge, Attitude and Practice Study of Women's Economic Empowerment

Summary of Findings

Vietnam

SNV



Vietnamese woman collecting asparagus in Ninh Thuan province, Vietnam.

Acknowledgements

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Founded in The Netherlands in 1965, SNV has built a long-term, local presence in many of the poorest countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Our global team of local and international advisors work with local partners to equip communities, businesses and organisations with the tools, knowledge and connections they need to increase their incomes and gain access to basic services – empowering them to break the cycle of poverty and guide their own development.

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Abbreviations

| | |
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| CSO | Civil Society Organisation |
| DGIS | Directoraat-Generaal Internationale Samenwerking (Directorate-General for International Cooperation under the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs) |
| EOWE | Enhancing Opportunities for Women's Enterprises |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| FLOW | Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women |
| KAP | Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices |
| WEE | Women's Economic Empowerment |

I Introduction

Vietnam's economic liberalisation and deeper international integration over the past decades resulted in applaudable achievements in poverty reduction and social advancement. When we look back at the development of Vietnamese society, particularly economic development, women hold a key position, as they directly participate in the national labour force and in paid labour. For instance, in agriculture, one of the country's key sectors, women make up around 70 per cent of the labour force. In the past 10 years, there has been a change of thinking and practice related to women's entrepreneurship. Before, women only stayed at home to do household work and the men were the bread-winner of the family. Nowadays, women are participating in business with their husbands. However, they also remain responsible for most of the household tasks, which results in a heavy workload.

The household is the basic unit of society where individuals confront and actualise societal norms, form relations, values, power and privileges. It is the central place where children first learn their gender roles through socialisation, and where power relations built around gender are founded. The gender norms learnt in the households are reinforced in the community and institutions within society. While gender norms and relations are not confined to households alone, the household constitutes an important institutional site in which relations are played out. A deeper understanding of gender relations in households is critical to inform interventions for women's empowerment, improvement in bargaining power and poverty reduction and food security at household and national level.

The purpose of this Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) study is to establish attitudes and practices of women and men on women's economic empowerment and gender equality within the household in Vietnam. The study was conducted under the Enhancing Opportunities for Women's Enterprises (EOWE) programme funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands (DGIS) under the 'Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women' (FLOW) framework. The programme aims to boost the start-up and development of women's businesses in rural areas in Kenya and Vietnam through a combination of enterprise development, social transformation and policy advocacy interventions.

*The **Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP)** study was carried out in four provinces of Vietnam, Quang Binh, Binh Dinh, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. The objectives of the KAP study were to:*

- ❖ *Understand the extent to which attitudes and social norms practiced in every-day life affect women's empowerment;*
- ❖ *Identify where there is potential for changing social norms;*
- ❖ *Reveal the underlying gender norms in decision-making, control over income and leadership.*



Programme Geographic Areas



2 Methodology

The main methods used in this research are Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), in-depth key informant interviews, field surveys and observation. The FGDs offered good opportunities to share, reconceive and reimagine different local ideas and ways of thinking.

The FGDs were utilised to get information from women and men. In total, 16 FGDs (4 per province; 2 for women and 2 for men) were conducted with 117 participants (61 women/56 men) in 4 districts: Quang Ninh (Quang Binh), Tuy Phuoc (Binh Dinh), Ninh Phuoc (Ninh Thuan) and Tuy Phong (Binh Thuan). In addition, a total of 38 in-depth key informant interviews were conducted. The FGDs and interviews conducted in Phuoc Dan (Ninh Phuoc) and Phu Lac (Tuy Phong) are with Cham ethnic groups, which provided cases of patriarchy for this analysis.

The research team, consisting of gender experts, SNV programme team and local informants, adopted a range of participatory techniques to maximise community involvement, particularly of the targeted beneficiaries, and to generate different layers of participant's meaning and understanding on abstract issues like gender and equity.

3 Key Findings

Women doing business: Continuation and change

There has been a change of thinking and practice related to women's entrepreneurship over the past 10 years. Before, women only stayed at home to do household work and did not take part in their husband's business. The husband was the bread-winner of the family and the pressure they suffered was very big, 'the more they work, the more miserable they feel.' Now, women are participating in business with their husbands. The wife and husband work together, 'each person gives a hand'. Women share the work and become the 'best wingman' for the men. Men feel 'very happy' with the change. When both women and men work together, excitement is generated for the men and it makes them want to work even more.

The study found that the origin of women's businesses can be divided in three main categories: (i) self-development, (ii) succession and development, and (iii) dependence. Businesses that fall under self-development usually start from agricultural production with accumulated savings and mainly aim at household-level economy improvement within one or two generations. Businesses under succession and development are developed by women who can receive support from relatives or continue their parent's business. These businesses often have a 'big' development strategy, aiming at international markets. In businesses that fall in the third category, dependence, men have the talent and good relationships to expand the business, while women support the men with selling the goods and with customer relationships.

In all three categories of women's businesses, the study identified three important stages of enterprise development: (i) after marriage, start-up, (ii) 10-20 years of doing business and (iii) older. In different stages of their enterprise development, women face different hardships. The first stage, after marriage, start-up, is the most challenging stage for women doing business, as young husbands tend to be bossy and the family's financial situation is often unstable. In the second stage, the study found many stories of failures and successes. Yet, women who are already in business for 10-20 years try hard to stabilise the business and pay the debts. When women are in business for over 20 years, they have more time to rest and spend time for themselves. These businesses often hire more employees and the business is transferred to the children.

Before:

Women mainly took care of household work in the family, without participating in income generation activities.

Now:

There is an increasing number of women doing business; many of them are very successful. Women participate more in social activities and movements.

Gender roles, social norms and attitudes around division of labour

Both women groups and men groups contend that the nature of women is painstaking and diligent. Women must love their husband and children and should take good care of their homes. Going to the market and cooking food are their responsibilities. They cover all the household work and put the family before the society. Women generally agree that men should not go to the market. The ideal type of woman, from the perspective of men, is a woman that is resourceful, takes good and comprehensive care of the family, pampers their husband, and cooks good meals for the family.

"Women have to undertake much more work, but 'lighter' work than their men. Women should take care of household work. Men do hard work already, so it is facultative that husbands can help with anything related to household work. Women love their husbands and try to manage all the household work well so that their men have more time to relax."

- Interview with a female farmer -

In short, it is apparent that the four Confucian essential characteristics of 'industriousness, appropriate self-presentation, communication skills, and virtue' are still relevant in defining today's Vietnamese feminine ideal (see also Knodel et al. 2004). A Vietnamese symbolic expression focuses on a house, in which men are the framework while women are connectors to strengthen the framework of the house.

From both men's and women's perspectives, the wife has to take care of all the household work in the family, 'from A to Z'. Women have to take care of more 'no-name jobs'

(household work) than men in the family from washing, cooking and cleaning to taking care of the children. Those are women's tasks, but it requires good care and is time consuming, so the wives need to arrange things smartly, work quickly and be resourceful to do a good job.

Men perform less household work than women. However, they bear more heavy work such as transportation of goods, delivery, carrying and loading, husking and machinery work. The husband only performs household work when the wife is sick; or sometimes he would do it if it would make him feel happy. Men can also help 'a little bit' when they see that the women are struggling. Women will not feel comfortable when their husbands would do the household work. Women maintain their thinking that they are 'born to do household work', 'that it is a farmer's life' or their 'conscience' will not allow them to ignore this duty. When the children are already grown up, parents adapt to the new situation, in which they help each other with household work and thereby provide a good example to their children.

In several women's group discussions, when asked to think again and again, the women in the groups reached an agreement that women take care of 'heavy' jobs in the family, requiring them to sacrifice a lot, and that the allocation of family work nowadays is still based on differing gender roles.

The discussions and interviews pointed out two main sources/drivers that change the men's mentality and practice related to doing household work. First, social and economic development into a more modern world and the wide and continued propaganda on gender equality. The second driver is livelihood improvement. When the life is getting better, people can open their mind more. A stable household economy is an important foundation for a firm family.

Women doing business are women without free time

"Women doing business are surely resourceful women, as they have to manage a huge load of work, including household work and work in their business."

- Female FGD participants -

Unlike the common thinking of matriarchy that women are the decision makers in household and community issues, the Cham matrilineal society with its long co-existence and interactions with the Kinh's male dominance culture, has distinctive features. Cham women take the responsibility of taking care of the family and clan, which hinders women from going far away from their home and clan. Cham men have wider social and professional mobility. As such, Cham men have more opportunities for and accessibility to education and a social life.

Gender roles, social norms and attitudes around control over income

Both interviewed men and women strongly believe that managing the family's fund is generally the 'right of the women'. It is 'more secure'. There are 2 common types of fund keeping within families: (i) women manage the whole family fund or (ii) women and men share the family fund. In practice, both women and men believe that women manage the fund better and save more. Women are usually responsible for expenses and investments



 A rice farmer couple during harvesting season in Quang Binh province, Vietnam.

within the family and they usually repay the debts of their husbands. Women therefore bear the constant but invisible pressure of allocating and adjusting the family fund, which is frequently very limited.

When it comes to decision making, all important decisions relevant to family and business development are discussed in many forms between wives and husbands. It is this agreement that plays an important role in urging the two of them to reach a consensus in their discussions and to avoid unnecessary “quarrels” or “blaming”. Women are strong in making decisions on business development in many aspects of the agriculture sector, such as opening a general store and acting as an agriculture general agent; however, they also need the agreement of the husband before starting the work.

Gender roles, social norms and attitudes around leadership

Good women leaders are supposed to combine and harmonise family and social affairs. It is not acceptable for them to be successful in society but ignore family responsibilities. Women themselves do not feel comfortable and are afraid of being judged when they have to go out early and come back home late frequently.

| | Ideal women leaders |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Women’s points of view | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Living in harmony with people in society ❖ Earning trust of the people, people listen to them ❖ Hard-working, willing to share knowledge with the others |
| Men’s points of view | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Taking over family stuff, taking care of husbands and children, putting family work first ❖ Determined, keeping promises and committed |

In terms of qualifications and qualities, when a woman wants to become a leader she needs to have a good educational background, vision, ability to convince people and willingness to listen to people. The key informant interviews point out that men feel fine with having women leaders in their community. Women can be the chairperson of the people’s committee of a commune, district or province, however women cannot be village leaders as this will lead to mid-night work, which will be judged by the public.

Women managing business establishments of many employees share that a woman who is resourceful at household work is not necessarily good at being a leader; they need to have a good mind, make accurate decisions, (not biased, unilateral and sentimental), have a good sense of judgment related to people and have good relationships. Women leaders need support of their husbands in household work, otherwise they cannot be fully devoted to their work. When the wife is a leader, the husband can also support her in doing her work reports, or by being her secretary.

The better-off business households are often contributing positively to social work in the community. They can help their neighbours and disadvantaged groups in different forms like selling products without benefits, contributing financially to build up communities and by sharing and teaching others to develop together.

Women are playing an important role in economic development of the transforming peasant economy of the researched regions. The findings from this KAP analysis suggest that the promotion of gender-responsive business and leadership can challenge the current social norms, which hinder women from participating in business and leadership like men, and enhance women's (economic) empowerment.

Women's success in business communities and social life cannot and should not threaten their emotional life and the family with all of its values. Interventions to create gender-responsive businesses and leadership need to be comprehensive and need to integrate institutional interventions, awareness and economic and social aspects at different levels.

Institutional level

- ❖ Development of policies bringing favourable conditions for gender-responsive businesses and leadership;
- ❖ Promoting the effective and gender-responsive operation of business institutions, such as the Vietnam Women Entrepreneurs Council (see ILO 2007).

Awareness raising

- ❖ Continuing to implement awareness raising activities on gender, especially on economic development. Some activities may be designed only for men;
- ❖ Promote the awareness on doing business for women, with a focus on aspects that women can take over such as: calculation, market access, customer hunting;
- ❖ Integrating cultural and art activities into gender equality awareness raising and education.

Economic aspects

- ❖ Women willing to raise their voice need to have a good financial status; to have a good financial status, they must have capital to do business, generating income together with their husband for the family;
- ❖ Providing low-interest loans to women to develop the economy; initiatives in small and medium sized production businesses in agriculture and handicraft. Providing incentive loan programmes to female farmers to develop their business and production;
- ❖ Providing technical support and capital to women for the development of agriculture models, start-ups and enterprises. Providing trainings on knowledge and specialist skills on business, marketing, market research etc. at the locality;
- ❖ Continuing to provide trainings on new technology transfer in agriculture. Supporting female farmers in fertilisers, production, planting and husbandry facilities and equipment;
- ❖ Finding output markets for agricultural products.

Social aspects

- ❖ Creating forums or clubs for women to meet and do activities such as exchanging business knowledge and experiences or stress relieving activities. It is important to ensure that these activities are arranged to take place when women have time to participate in them. Sharing and exchanging among women could enhance their confidence and self-esteem;
- ❖ Forming women groups and networks in which members can support each other in production and business;
- ❖ Promoting the role of the association of women's small and medium sized enterprises;
- ❖ Organising study tours and exchange trips to successful production and business models for women's enterprises in and outside of the province;
- ❖ Creating women's business hubs and creating accessible knowledge products.