Gender Analysis of Women’s Economic Empowerment

Summary of Findings

Vietnam
The results and lessons presented in this learning document would not have been possible without the diligent work and participation of the SNV programme team in Vietnam (Tran Tu Anh, Tran Quang Truong, Nguyen Cong Nhue, Resy Vermeltfoort) in addition to those in a global role (Sabdiyo Dido, Leonie Hoijtink, Sanne van Laar, Raymond Brandes).

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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.

This report is based on research for the ‘Enhancing Opportunities for Women’s Enterprises’ programme funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands (DGIS) under the ‘Funding Leadership and Opportunities for Women’ (FLOW) framework. Any part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form and by any means with proper referencing © 2017, SNV, Enhancing Opportunities for Women’s Enterprises Programme.
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Abbreviations

CEDAW  Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CWA  Committees for Women’s Advancement
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
IDI  In-depth Interviews
NGO  Non-governmental Organisation
SNV  SNV Netherlands Development Organisation
VWU  Vietnam Women’s Union
Vietnam’s economic liberalisation and deeper international integration over the past decades resulted in applaudable achievements in poverty reduction and social advancement. When looking 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 60 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. Throughout history, women are labelled to stay at home and take care of household tasks, including small livelihood activities/businesses like cultivating cash crops and raising animals for consumption and selling at the local market, while the men were considered as the bread-winner of the family. Nowadays, more 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. In addition, rural women in agriculture have less access than men to productive resources and opportunities.

**Enhancing Opportunities for Women’s Enterprises (EOWE)** is a 5-year women’s economic empowerment programme funded by the Department of Social Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands under the ‘Funding Leadership Opportunities for Women’ (FLOW) framework. The FLOW/EOWE programme aims to increase women’s economic participation and self-reliance in Vietnam and Kenya by catalysing a conducive national and local environment for female entrepreneurship.

**A Gender Analysis** was carried out in the four provinces where the FLOW/EOWE programme is being implemented, Quang Binh, Binh Dinh, Ninh Thuan and Binh Thuan. The gender analysis aimed to establish:

- The socio-economic, cultural, religious and legal factors that underlie differential gender positions on economic development among the target groups;
- The consequences of the differential gender positions on women’s access to economic opportunities (economic equality);
- The activity profiles of the different gender groups and the socio-cultural norms that underpin these;
- Inter-personal and intra-household power relations that are at play and how these shape access to economic resources in a household;
- The power and privileges of gender groups in relation to access, control, sale or transfer of inputs and productive resources or assets, including income sharing at household level;
- The opportunities and constraints that affect women’s effective participation in businesses, producer organisations, cooperatives, markets, leadership, etc.;
- The extent to which women have access to knowledge, information and other means of self-development.

**Programme Geographic Areas**
2 **Methodology**

A thorough desk study and consultation meetings with diverse stakeholders, including NGOs and local partners, provided the direction of the content of the focus group discussions and interviews in the field. For this gender analysis, data was collected from interactions with male and female members of enterprises and cooperatives and key stakeholders in the four target provinces of the EOYE programme. Focus group discussion (FGD) is one of the key qualitative research methods used in this gender analysis. A total of 12 FGDs were held in four provinces. In each province, three FGDs were held: (i) FGDs with the participation of women only, (ii) FGDs with the participation of men only, and (iii) FGDs with a mixed group of men and women. Gender analysis tools were used to facilitate the participatory discussions, including the activity profile tool, access and control profile tool, institutional analysis tool and the gender needs assessment tool.

In-depth interviews (IDIs) were used to obtain information from women who take a key role in income generation for their family (2 in each province) and from randomly selected farmers (two female farmers and two male farmers per province). A total of 24 IDIs were held in the four provinces.

In total, 171 people participated in the focus group discussions and in-depth interviews for this gender analysis, of which 92 are women.

3 **Key findings**

**Laws and policies on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment**

Vietnam was the 6th country in the world joining the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1982. Since then more than 40 national laws, regulations and programmes have been developed or revised taking women’s right and women’s participation in relevant sectors into consideration. The most important laws developed under CEDAW are the Law on Gender Equality issued in 2006, the Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control issued in 2007, the revised Land Law 2013, which highlights the equal land entitlement of husbands and wives and the revised Law on Marriage and Family 2014, which significantly increased opportunities for women to be equally treated within the family in terms of property ownership, marriage age and protection from violence.

At all levels, from the national to the local level of state-owned ministries and organisations, Committees for Women’s Advancement (CWA) have been established. The main function of the CWA is to enforce the advancement of women through inter-sector programmes and promoting women’s role in relevant sectors. Despite the efforts, not many practical changes have been made by the CWA Committees, because there is not enough communication, training and campaigning to facilitate capturing and sharing of knowledge and attitudes. As a result, a lot of gender issues are still prominent throughout the country.

**Actors relating to women’s economic empowerment in the four study areas**

In all four study areas, there is no clear gender equality strategy or policy at provincial, district or commune level. Besides the Committees for Women’s Advancement (CWA) and the Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Welfare, which is assigned to promote the role and position of women as part of social development, the Vietnam Women’s Union (VWU) is the most important organisation taking care of women’s empowerment and gender equality. However, the implemented activities by the VWU are politically obeyed and embraced with gender prejudices. Increased practical focus of VWU’s work could improve the facilitation of women’s empowerment and gender equality.

Field data from focus group discussions among women in Binh Dinh province shows that women spent an average of 5 hours per day on household tasks, including shopping for food, cooking meals, cleaning the house and clothes and taking care of children. Men explained they pick up their children from school and clean the house when their wife is busy, which costs them 2 hours per day on average.
Women’s responsibility for household tasks
In all four study areas, women are responsible for the majority of reproductive work, which involves care and maintenance of the household and its members, including bearing and caring for children, food preparation, water and fuel collection, shopping, housekeeping and family health care. A popular traditional saying is “men build a house, women build a home”. Ironically, social prejudice compels women in the Confucianism framework of four words: “Công, Dung, Ngôn, Hanh” (“Công”: Perform domestic tasks with good quality; “Dung”: Neat and humble physical appearance; “Ngôn”: Speech gently with refrain from violence and anger; “Hanh”: Inner beauty), which have tied both business women and female farmers to a domestic responsibility. Women’s workload and subordination is deeply rooted in the patriarchal society and both men and women perceive the task division as fixed and culturally decided.

Task division in production activities and economic development
Women take on active roles in farming activities in most provinces. In the seasonal time (sowing time and harvesting time), women spend more than 8 hours a day in the field. Women are mainly responsible for the selection of crop varieties, cleaning the field, making soil and sowing. This kind of work is marked as women's work, as people believe that only women are good and efficient in this kind of skillful, manual and time-consuming work. Nowadays, women are also in charge of irrigation, fertilisation and even pesticide spraying during the cultivation process in the absence of their husband, because their husbands want to spend time working for others to gain an extra income. A lot of traditional work undertaken by tractors and harvesting machines are associated with men. Many women are overloaded, because they have to work many hours a day and have very little time to rest and for self-development.

Overall, women who are running a successful business are making good contributions to the family and society and gaining respect from their husband, family members and the community. Most of the successful business families led by women are able to afford to have their children (at least two children) study in the big cities or abroad. In addition, successful businesswomen are more likely to have strong communication skills and show good behaviour to their beloved one so that they can gain a good reputation from society, family and the community. At provincial and national level, a few successful businesswomen are selected for political positions. Economic empowerment appears to be one of the keys to challenge unequal gender relations and enhance gender equality.

Role of women in agricultural production is underestimated
Agriculture cooperatives are providing significant services to their member farmers. The cooperatives are managed by men and provide services on water irrigation, fertilisers, electricity, sanitation, technology, weather forecast and market access. Even though women benefit from technical trainings of the cooperatives, women’s roles are still underestimated by the cooperatives as agricultural activities and cooperative development are traditionally considered a male-dominated operation.
Lack of women’s leadership in cooperatives and the consequences

Although justice and fairness are the most important characteristics within agricultural cooperatives, women are barely represented in important positions within cooperatives. Most of the members of the board and the directors running the cooperatives are male, who tend to focus on technology transfer and technical services. Observation in the field shows that many operational services of current local cooperatives are likely to be technique-oriented, not market-oriented. This is a gap that needs to be filled in the future development of the cooperatives to bring better and fairer benefits to both male and female members.

Opportunities and constraints for women taking the lead in production and business

Women are bound to household work, which limits their opportunities to access information, education and training. Most rural women are not confident to start a business and to communicate in public. On the other hand, more and more men believe that women should be involved in business and stress that women are hardworking and open to learn and have good financial management skills. This viewpoint of husbands provides an opportunity to increase women’s role in business. Women leading businesses perceive their husbands to be the most influential actor to make their business work. Therefore, when husbands are supportive, women might feel more comfortable to try to start and develop a business.

Women have equal access to, but less control over resources

Both men and women have equal access to land, water and other resources, but women have less control over these resources and benefit less from them. Women groups believe that whatever starts the discussion between husband and wife, men are more likely to be the final decision makers. The men groups are confident that every decision they make is based on discussion with and agreement of their life partners. The fact that there is a co-decision-making process and that partners are discussing issues together is a popular argument to justify for the gender justice. When sitting in a mixed group, both men and women agree that husbands and wives earn their income and that women keep the family income and can make decisions on how to use the money up to a certain point. The decision-making power on how/what/where/when and with whom to use the resources and benefits lies in men’s hands and this is acceptable for women in farming and low-income families. On the other hand, the businesswomen, who have more power and skills, can negotiate in different ways to get their decision made with satisfaction of their husbands.

Vietnam Women’s Union as a change agent for women’s economic empowerment

There lies an opportunity in strengthening the VWU as a change agent for women’s economic empowerment, as they are mentioned by most participants as the key to gender equality. Due to their political mandate, the current activities of the VWU at all levels are so broad that they lack focus on practical responses to women’s needs and women’s economic empowerment. Therefore, it is important to work on organisational strengthening and institutional development of the VWU. Through strategy and planning workshops the VWU, especially the members in the economic section, can be trained and guided to find out what the strategic priority areas are to promote gender equality and empower women in enterprises. It is important to empower the VWU to promote women’s economic empowerment professionally (not politically), to protect women’s rights and to lobby for government policies and policy frameworks to enhance the enabling environment for women entrepreneurship.
Value chain development
In each province, key commodities must be identified and the cooperatives of each commodity must be supported in the development and strengthening of the value chain. A sustainable production process that is climate-smart and gender-responsive is an important element of each value chain. The cooperatives should take gendered barriers and needs into account and promote women in leadership positions where possible. Many agricultural products are currently sold fresh to the middlemen who transport and sell the products in- and outside the province. The programme can for example study the processing path of apple and grape products and explore the potential role of women as contributors in these processes.

Capacity development of women farmers and entrepreneurs
Capacity building for both existing and potential women entrepreneurs is important. Business management knowledge, marketing skills and communication skills are the key training needs of women in business. These needs can be addressed through trainings and exchange workshops with participation of women who already run an enterprise or women who want to become entrepreneurs.

Increase the role of women in marketing in the rice value chain
Rice cooperatives perform well in providing technical services, but perform less in providing good access to markets. The programme can focus on strengthening rice cooperatives, particularly in delivering services that address the needs of women members and by establishing a professional women’s group taking on the marketing role of the cooperatives. The professional arrangement of the cooperatives should be reviewed and restructured to put more effort and capital on a rice buying and selling service, which is a strong point of female members. The female rice agents (buying raw rice and selling husked rice) should be connected and there should be a mechanism where farmers, rice agents and cooperatives can negotiate on a fair market for all.

Resilient, environment-friendly and sustainable farming practices for women
The role of women in farming activities is changing. Besides the traditional tasks, women tend to be involved in more intensive and chemical activities (ploughing and spraying pesticides) in the absence of their husbands. A more environmentally friendly cultivation method and practice should be introduced to women, reducing the risks to their health and the environment.

Further study on partners to promote business start-up among women
Starting a business seems to be a big challenge for rural women as most women are overloaded with triple tasks (reproductive, productive and community tasks), especially in the absence of their husbands. Further study is needed to get a better understanding on how and with whom the programme should work to support women with business start-up. The existing businesswomen can be asked to share their experiences on how they started their business in their own context to provide lessons for others and to build their confidence.

Supporting women to develop SMART business plans
The programme can support women interested to start or grow a business in the development of a "SMART business plan" by helping them to decide what job is most relevant to them and by selecting competitive products. The SMART business plan should empower women to negotiate with their husbands and gain their support in the business. The smart business plan should take into account the workload of women and the potential involvement of men. In addition, there should be platforms to share experiences with others and build confidence among the women with an interest in starting and running a business.

Encourage male engagement in programme activities
The success of changing gender roles and improving gender equality is dependent on the engagement of men. In order to achieve sustainable behaviour change towards gender equality and women’s economic empowerment it is important to involve men and boys. Men and boys should be included in the training and workshops on gender equality. It can also be considered to include men in farming and business exchange visits to good practice cases.

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