

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT - A KEY TO SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

“Forest work is men’s work”

“Jobs that need technical knowledge, physical strength and skillfulness are better suited for men.”

“Women’s key duties are being mothers and caregivers”

These gender norm statements have been characteristic of a traditional line of thinking present in the forestry sector of Viet Nam and other countries worldwide. However, these types of gender biases should not continue to be perpetuated in our modern world – where the importance of equality of both sexes is acknowledged.

With their essential contributions in many facets of the forestry sector, women have been key participators. In forest plantations, they often take over nursery and seedling production. At the household production level, it is primarily women who are responsible for household consumption needs (e.g. medicinal herbs, fuelwood, wild foods, and fodder) and selling NTFPs in local markets. They, too, share in the responsibilities of thinning and pruning, forest rehabilitation, and enrichment planting^{3,4}. Female leadership is also visible on the national level, with nearly 25% of the upper-level leadership positions in the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry occupied by women.



... SIGNIFICANT GAPS ARE STILL VISIBLE

The existing gender disparities, however, act as a barrier, preventing female foresters from achieving their full capabilities and ensuring a fair and equal industry. Various studies (as cited in the Sources section of this article) show that women’s tasks are especially focused on low-return activities while men tend to have more control over high-value production, thereby generating more income^{3 4}. It is also measured that women are primarily involved in financial accounting and administrative tasks, as well as in marketing and selling of products. Men are often involved in managing the plantation and related timber production process, along with the interaction with public authorities and associations³.



"Paying attention to gender equality helps increase work efficiency in enterprises. This is achieved through individuals having their capacity fully and fairly promoted, facilitated according to needs and capacities and regardless of their gender" – shared by Mr. Tran Quoc Hung from Ben Hai Forestry Company, Quang Tri

On the other hand, women have fewer opportunities to join in forestry planning and capacity development programmes, which results in their hindrance of knowledge of agroforestry specialties⁵.

Inequality – reinforced by the aforementioned factors combined with the local power structure and social norms – is also reflected in their difficulties in accessing legal and financial services as well as technology.

Regarding the decision-making processes, women still occupy a small portion of leadership positions (*see table 1*). It can therefore be deduced that women’s needs and interests are potentially less likely to be heard².



	1994 - 2004	2004 - 2011	2011 - 2016	2016 - 2021
Provincial level	22.33	23.80	25.70	26.42
District level	20.12	22.94	24.62	27.51
Commune level	16.10	19.53	17.71	26.70

Table 1. Women in provincial, district and commune People’s Councils (percent) ¹





© GIZ/Binh Dang

FOREST POLICIES TO TACKLE GENDER INEQUALITY

The Vietnamese government has taken numerous actions to tackle gender inequality in the forestry sector. The Law on Forestry [2017, Article 9(8) and Article 14(7)] prohibits discrimination based on gender in forest allocation and forest lease and requires transparency and the involvement of local people. Meanwhile, translating from the National Strategy on Gender Equality in the 2021-2030 period and other national Gender laws and policies, in 2022, the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) adopted its Action Plan on Gender Equality (2021-2025). The overall objective of this Action Plan is to continuously close the gender gap, facilitate and create opportunities for both men and women to participate and enjoy equal benefits in the agriculture and rural development sector. They also further involve gender aspects in all new legal documents submitted to the National Assembly, including the Law on Crop Production and the Law on Livestock Production (MARD 2020). Along with other ministries, MARD has established the Committees for the Advancement of Women (CAW). These same institutions and plans developed at the ministerial level have been subsequently implemented downstream at the local levels.

These efforts – together with a Viet Nam Forestry Development Strategy that includes gender-specific clauses – have shaped a legal framework for cultivating gender equality in the sector. However, there are still opinions stating that the law lacks specific guidance on how to guarantee that these clauses are implemented systematically^{1 3}.





© GIZ/Nguyen Duy Cong



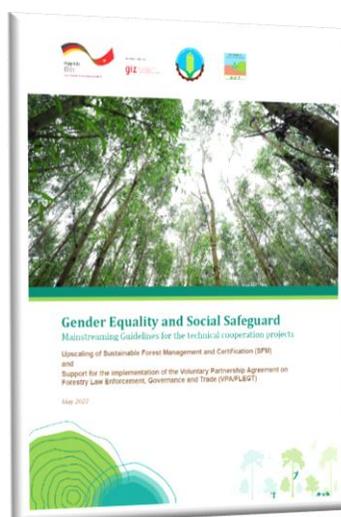
© GIZ/Binh Dong



© GIZ/Binh Dong

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

In the German-Vietnamese development cooperation, gender equality is considered a cross-cutting issue and one of the key expected outcomes for all projects, including the Project “**Upscaling of Sustainable Forest Management and Certification – SFM.**” In this project – which is commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and jointly implemented by the Management Board of Forestry Projects and and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, gender mainstreaming will be achieved through improving the sector’s awareness of gender equality, empowering women’s leadership, and promoting policymaking that is gender-responsive at corporate and policy levels.



The project has developed a **Gender Equality and Social Safeguard Guideline** to steer the project team and stakeholders in the planning and implementation of the project’s activities. The guideline provides concepts, principles, implementation, and monitoring methods for mainstreaming gender in all project activities.

The Gender Equality and Social Safeguard Guideline can be accessed here:

https://snrd-asia.org/.../Gender-Guidelines_SFMEFLEGT_EN.pdf

A prime example from the guideline of promoting proactive, flexible, and innovative gender mainstreaming in project activities are three training courses on Gender and Gender mainstreaming in sustainable forest management, which were organised for the project's partners and supporting agencies in Binh Dinh, Phu Yen and Quang Tri provinces. Joining the training courses were around 110 representatives from the provincial Department of Agricultural and Rural Development, Forest Management Boards, forestry companies, and the Women's Union.

Ms. Le Thi Bich Hau - President of Son Hoa District Woman's Union, Phu Yen shared - ***“After two days of the training, I have gained a lot of practical knowledge that would help me to perform my duties and meet the requirements at my department”.***

These sessions have fostered participants' knowledge and understanding of gender concepts, women's empowerment, and the linkage between gender equality and sustainable forest management. They can now identify the prioritised gender issues and develop solutions to ensure gender equality in their work.

“When it comes to promoting gender equality in the forestry sector, it does not mean we fight for women to do the same tasks as men. It is about the efforts to enable all genders to work with their full capacities and strengths. They are respected, ensured of safety while doing their job, and entitled to experience new roles and responsibilities without any difficulty”

- remark of Dr. Le Van Son – Gender trainer; Director of Community Development and Family, Gender Research Centre.



Sources

¹ FAO (2019) Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Viet Nam. Hanoi. Available online: <http://www.fao.org/3/ca6503en/ca6503en.pdf>

² FERN (2020) FLEGT VPA Update January 2020: How to ensure FLEGT is a success. Available online: <https://www.fern.org/publications-insight/how-to-ensure-flegt-is-a-success-make-sure-we-stay-the-course-2070/>

³ Shanks, Edwin (2020) Analysis of the State of Gender and FLEGT in Vietnam.

⁴ RECOFTC (2015) Understanding women's participation in forestry. Available online: <https://www.recoftc.org/publications/0000071>

⁵ UNDP (2019) Opportunities to Empower Women with Enhanced Access to Climate Change Information Services for Transformative Adaptation Actions in Viet Nam's Agricultural Sectors. Technical Brief. Available online: https://www.vn.undp.org/content/vietnam/en/home/library/environment_climate/opportunities-to-empower-women-with-enhanced-access-to-climate-i.html

