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# NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS

## Viet Nam



**COUNTRY  
GENDER  
ASSESSMENT  
SERIES**

**ASIA AND  
THE PACIFIC**



# **NATIONAL GENDER PROFILE OF AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOODS**

**COUNTRY GENDER ASSESSMENT SERIES**

**Viet Nam**

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# Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
CGA	Country Gender Assessment
CPF	Country Programming Framework
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FAOVN	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Viet Nam
FHH	female-headed households
GGs	Green Growth Strategy
GSO	General Statistics Office
IFGS	Institute for Family and Gender Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPSARD	Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development
LFS	labour force survey
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MHH	male-headed household
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MOET	Ministry of Education and Training
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHA	Ministry of Home Affairs
MOIC	Ministry of Information and Communications
MOLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
MONRE	Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment
NDC	Nationally Determined Contributions
NTFP	non-timber forest product
NTP-NRD	National Target Programme on New Rural Development
NTP-SPR	National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction
OCOP	one commune one product
PFES	payment for forest environment services
PWD	persons with disabilities
SRB	sex ratio at birth
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
VNA	Viet Nam News Agency
WHO	World Health Organization
VWU	Viet Nam Women's Union
WB	World Bank

# Executive summary

The National Gender Profile of Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Viet Nam was undertaken by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) in coordination with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), as part of the Country Gender Assessment (CGA) series. Conducted from July to November 2023, the assessment reviewed gender equality and women's empowerment within the context of agriculture and rural development in Viet Nam, focusing on the period from 2018 to the present. Beyond informing FAO's work, this report serves as a valuable source for stakeholders involved in national planning and programming with reference to national development priorities. It also supports the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) implementation and contributes to broader discussions on rural women in Viet Nam as part of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

Key findings from the CGA highlight Viet Nam's continuous efforts to implement international commitments on gender equality at different levels. The country has strengthened and updated its legal frameworks on gender equality. Additionally, Viet Nam has initiated numerous extensive programmes to build and develop the agriculture sector and rural areas. These efforts include vocational training and agricultural job creation programmes aimed at diversifying livelihoods and supporting poverty reduction and economic development among rural populations. The development of the banking system and digital banking technologies throughout rural areas has increased women's access to financial and credit resources. These efforts have partly contributed to reducing the unemployment rate in rural areas from 2018 to 2021, with positive outcomes for rural female workers. However, challenges remain, as many programmes and policies often fall short in effectively integrating gender concerns.

In Viet Nam, women represent about 52 percent of agricultural workers. Still, they continue to face numerous challenges in sustaining and improving their livelihoods, particularly in rural areas (GSO, 2021e). Due to a lack of an enabling environment, women often have fewer technical and professional qualifications and are more likely to engage in unstable and vulnerable jobs (GSO and UN Women, 2021). Additionally, the average income of female wage workers in rural areas consistently lags behind that of men. Despite their significant contribution to agriculture, women's employment rate as wage workers in rural areas remains lower than men's (13.7 percent compared to 19.5 percent) (LFS 2018-2021). The limited access to skills development, knowledge and innovative tools further hinders women's capacity to manage their farms as a business. Moreover, women face distinct challenges in accessing agricultural extension services due to the insufficient integration of gender considerations in these initiatives, preventing the full realization of their potential.

Although rural women have more access to finance and credit than before, significant gender gaps continue to exist. Handling and making loan decisions are often perceived as men's role. These gender disparities are compounded by traditional gender roles that restrict women's access to resources like land. Progress on the implementation of the issuance of Land Use Rights Certificates, which seek to facilitate men's and women's joint registration of land ownership and use, has been slow since its release in 2013.

## Recommendations for the Government of Viet Nam

### At the macro level

The Government of Viet Nam is recommended to:

- Review and deliberately incorporate gender considerations into national policies and programmes related to agriculture and rural development. This includes initiatives such as the National Target Programmes for sustainable poverty reduction, new rural areas and ethnic minorities, which are significant in terms of their scope and impact across different aspects of life.
- Ensure that the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these policies and programmes are informed by gender analyses at all levels<sup>1</sup> to better respond to the distinct needs of women and men, promote positive masculinity and challenge discriminatory gender norms.
- Synchronize and adopt guidance documents (e.g. circulars or official dispatches issued by agencies responsible for implementing state policies)<sup>2</sup> to support gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes. These documents need to include specific indicators, accountability mechanisms and provisions for collecting sex-disaggregated data to enhance the monitoring and reporting these programmes. Additionally, it is necessary to allocate budgets specifically for gender equality activities within these programmes and strategies.
- Continue to develop and deploy communication strategies on policies related to the issuance of land use rights certificates with both men's and women's names. Additionally, there needs to be more effective and enforced gender-responsive guidance to local authorities to support the implementation of joint registration of land use rights certificate among spouses.
- Strengthen the involvement of socio-political organizations, especially the Women's Union, in the development, implementation and monitoring of gender mainstreaming within national programmes and strategies, particularly those focused on agriculture and rural development.

### At the meso level

The Government of Viet Nam is recommended to:

- Increase awareness about the importance of gender equality for leaders and staff in agriculture and rural development to improve the effectiveness in decision-making and implementation of gender equality activities.
- Integrate gender mainstreaming approaches into agricultural extension activities to address the specific needs and interests of rural women. This includes setting specific targets and gender-related indicators for monitoring progress and informing reporting processes. It also involves implementing extensive training for local agricultural extension officers on integrating gender considerations into their work. To facilitate this, guidelines have been developed by the National Agriculture Extension Centre with support from UN Women.<sup>3</sup>
- Strengthen the capacities to systematically integrate gender considerations and responsive measures in rural infrastructure development plans, particularly in National Target Programmes, and give priorities for economically disadvantaged areas, mountainous areas and ethnic minority areas to enhance access to services, markets, education and health to meet women's needs.

<sup>1</sup> Policy, institutional and grassroots levels.

<sup>2</sup> Examples of guidance documents include Circular No.17/2014/TT-BTP of the Ministry of Justice regulating the integration of gender equality issues in the development of legal documents, or Official Dispatch No.1303/BLDTBXH-VBĐG on guidance Implement gender equality work by 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The guideline was developed as training materials for trainers (ToT). The content includes: Agricultural extension system and activities in Viet Nam; Basic concepts of gender; The necessity and principles of gender integration in agricultural extension; Analyse and evaluate gender needs in agricultural extension; Planning and implementing gender integration in agricultural extension; Monitor and evaluate gender integration in agricultural extension. The National Agriculture Extension Centre in collaboration with UN Women organized an online ToT training class on "The guideline for gender integration in agricultural extension" in October 2021 with participation of provincial and district agriculture extension centres.



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- Continue to increase the proportion of women participating in leadership and management positions in agriculture and rural development sectors by strengthening training and supporting the career planning and promotion for female officials at all levels.
- Develop more programmes in agriculture and rural development for women in extremely difficult areas, ethnic minorities, and mountainous areas. Activities can include capacity building as well as productive and financial services and resources.
- Recognize the diversity among rural women to better address their needs and foster more inclusive and effective rural development, thereby reducing the risks of pockets of poverty and vulnerability.

#### At the micro level

The Government of Viet Nam is recommended to:

- Increase the engagement of staff in charge of ensuring gender equality at the grassroots level through full-time positions. This approach provides dedicated focus and continuity necessary for effective gender mainstreaming, ensuring that initiatives are not only started but also maintained and evolved over time.
- Develop communication programmes in various forms that take into account different messages and channels tailored to the target audience. Activities may include grassroots awareness events, sensitization campaigns, training on gender analysis, group activities, competitions, theatre, banners, handouts, radio broadcasting, cultural or artistic initiatives to engage women, as well as men and youth in promoting gender equality.
- Continue to develop and implement strategies to increase women's participation and voice in the formulation of agricultural and rural development policies, while encouraging their participation in leadership and management positions.

## Recommendations for FAO

### At the macro level

FAO is recommended to:

- Strengthen partnerships and conduct national-level dialogues with relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of FAO's policy on gender equality and its activities in Viet Nam.
- Enhance collaboration with UN organizations like UN Women and ILO, as well as government agencies, such as the Department of Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), to promote gender-responsive policies and programmes.
- Continue to strengthen gender policy research and analysis in the field of agriculture, rural development and rural livelihoods diversification, advocating for evidence-based gender equality measures in these fields.

### At the meso level

FAO is recommended to:

- Develop capacity-building activities for FAO staff<sup>4</sup> in Viet Nam on gender equality, as well as tools and methodologies for gender mainstreaming into FAO programmes, plans and projects to ensure proper implementation of its gender policy.
- Ensure that FAO's collaborative efforts with partners include gender-responsive activities, accompanied by appropriate monitoring measures. Programmes and projects should consistently collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data, and where possible, integrate specific gender-related data. While it is essential to mainstream gender aspects across different thematic areas of knowledge products,<sup>5</sup> it is also cardinal to have a dedicated section for gender considerations.
- Continue to support partners (MARD and MOLISA, among others) in developing gender-responsive plans and programmes for rural development and rural livelihoods by providing capacity-building activities for operating staff, consultation and guidance.
- Ensure appropriate gender-responsive budgets in projects and programmes.

### At the micro level

FAO is recommended to:

- Develop implementation guidelines for agriculture and rural livelihood initiatives that include specific requirements for gender mainstreaming, provide reference materials and offer training for field-level staff to enhance their effectiveness.
- Ensure that grassroots partners meet their gender mainstreaming commitments, especially in technical capacity-building activities in agriculture and emergency relief activities, among others, during implementation of projects and programmes. Additionally, conscious efforts should be exerted to include women from disadvantaged groups (e.g. women from poor households, with disabilities, and ethnic minorities).
- Develop and implement field programme activities targeting both women and men to promote behavioural change towards gender equality. These should encourage men's participation in family care and housework activities, while enhancing women's voice in agricultural production.

<sup>4</sup> Including project, administrative and human resource staff.

<sup>5</sup> Including project and programme reports.

# 1

## INTRODUCTION



## 1.1 Background and rationale

The Government of Viet Nam has made significant efforts to address gender inequality through international commitments, being one of the first countries in the world to sign the CEDAW convention in July 1980. Following the promulgation of the Gender Equality Law in 2006, gender mainstreaming became a mandatory legal process in the development of legal documents. Gender equality is also one of the Sustainable Development Goals, and Viet Nam has reviewed its policies and legal frameworks to enhance gender integration. This includes the development of 78 indicators, issued by the Ministry of Planning and Investment in July 2019,<sup>6</sup> 40 of which are disaggregated by categories such as rural and urban areas.

Despite this progress, persistent gender inequalities and stereotypes continue to affect the rights, welfare and livelihoods of women and men across agrifood systems and beyond. UN Women's 2021 Overview Report on Gender Equality in Viet Nam highlights these disparities across various domains. These include, but are not limited to, unpaid work, the tendency of favouring sons, discrimination against women in leadership roles, and gender-based violence. In addition, shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic have further exacerbated challenges for women, limiting their participation in the labour force, access to skills, and qualifications in the digital economy. These are just some of the negative impacts women have faced during the pandemic. The restructuring of the agricultural sector needs to focus on creating conditions and opportunities for women to transition into other employment sectors if they choose to (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). Evidence also shows that gender inequalities contribute to low agricultural productivity and worsen food security and nutrition. Tackling these disparities requires active engagement of both women and men to accelerate progress towards sustainable development (FAO, 2023).

To effectively tackle these challenges, a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in agriculture and rural development is essential. This Country Gender

Assessment (CGA) in agriculture and rural sector is a requirement in FAO's Country Programming Framework (CPF) (FAO, 2023) and is stipulated in FAO Policy on Gender Equality (2020–2030). The CGA aims to highlight gender disparities in access to important agricultural and rural resources, knowledge, opportunities and markets.

## 1.2 FAO's presence in Viet Nam

FAO is working closely with multiple stakeholders in the country, and in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), to develop a new CPF for 2022-2026.<sup>7</sup> This framework reflects FAO's commitment to the Leave No One Behind (LNOB) principles and complies with the United Nations system's obligations to international standards and treaties. It outlines four priority areas as described below.

- 1. One Health (OH):** The CPF seeks to strengthen Viet Nam's systems for pandemic preparedness, nutrition, water and sanitation, hygiene, health, and environmental sustainability. Special attention will be given to ensuring that vulnerable populations have equitable access to comprehensive, affordable, gender-responsive, climate-resilient and environmentally sensitive services.
- 2. Climate change response, environment and natural resources management:** The CPF supports Viet Nam in revising and implementing Green Growth Strategy (GGS) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) in the agriculture sector. To enhance community preparedness, mitigation, resilience and recovery against catastrophe risks, the CPF outlines the need for building capacities, promoting inter-disciplinary coordination and strengthening institutions.
- 3. Food safety (FS), sustainable production and consumption, and equitable livelihoods for all:** Along the six priorities to food systems transformation outlined pathways, the CPF aims to support the development and implementation of the forthcoming National Action Plan on FS Transformation.

<sup>6</sup> Circular 10/2019/TT-BKHDT of the Ministry of Planning and Investment regulating the set of national gender development statistical indicators.

<sup>7</sup> The CPF is set as the basis for FAO's country-level strategic priority and medium-term country-level programming. It defines the development priorities of Viet Nam and FAO and contributes to national priorities, regional priorities, and corporate results. For additional information, see FAO. 2021.



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#### 4. Governance, Gender and Persons with Disabilities

**(PWD):** FAO continues to mainstream intersecting concerns into its projects and support, including gender, youth, ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. In addition, by incorporating these concerns into its technical interventions, the CPF highlights the need to address data management challenges to improve planning, budgeting and policy decisions that address the diverse needs of disadvantaged people engaging in agrifood systems.

Corresponding to these four development priorities, the CPF outlines four outcomes for FAO to contribute to at the country programme level.

**Outcome 1:** “By 2026, people in Viet Nam, especially the poor and those at risk of being left behind, will benefit from inclusive, gender-responsive, disability-sensitive, equitable, affordable and quality social services and social protection systems, will have moved further out of poverty in all its dimensions and will be empowered to reach their full potential”. Thus, FAO will support Viet Nam in (1) reducing incidence of endemic zoonoses in poor farming communities; (2) reducing threats of new epidemics and pandemics; and (3) halting the spread of AMR and pesticide use.

**Outcome 2:** “By 2026, people in Viet Nam, especially those at risk of being left behind, will benefit from and contribute to a safer and cleaner environment resulting from Viet Nam’s effective mitigation and adaptation to climate change, disaster-risk reduction and resilience building, the promotion of the circular economy, the provision of clean and renewable energy and the sustainable management of natural resources”. With this aim, FAO will support Viet Nam in enhancing or strengthening individual and institutional capacities in (sustainable and inclusive) practices, governance, and law enforcement in the areas of environment and natural resources management (including land, water and biodiversity). FAO will also contribute to the development of more efficient, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable blue food systems (FS), promoted through improved policies and programmes for integrated science-based management, technological innovation, and private sector engagement.

**Outcome 3:** “By 2026, people in Viet Nam, especially those at risk of being left behind, will contribute to and benefit equitably from sustainable, inclusive and gender-responsive economic transformation

based on innovation, entrepreneurship, enhanced productivity, competitiveness and decent work”. Thus, FAO will support Viet Nam in increasing or enhancing safe, healthy, and sustainable food production and consumption systems; and promote healthy and nature-positive patterns for food production practices, equitable livelihoods, and value distribution systems in the agri-food sector.

**Outcome 4:** “By 2026, people in Viet Nam, especially those at risk of being left behind, will benefit from and contribute to a more just, safe and inclusive society based on improved governance, more responsive institutions, strengthened rule of law and the protection of and respect for human rights, gender equality and freedom from all forms of violence and discrimination, in line with Viet Nam’s international commitments”. To this end, FAO will support Viet Nam in (1) enabling environments to foster innovative, responsive, accountable and transparent national systems with mainstreaming cross-cutting issues such as gender, PWDs, youth, ethnic minorities, etc.; (2) increasing the availability, access and disaggregated nature of data and statistics for improved monitoring and agricultural-related policy design into its technical interventions; and (3) working for an inclusive rural transformation that ensures equal participation of, and benefits to poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups accelerated through implementation of targeted policies, strategies and programmes.

### 1.3 Objectives of the Country Gender Assessment (CGA)

To promote gender equality, FAO updated its Policy on Gender Equality in 2020, which includes 17 minimum standards for gender mainstreaming. These standards are designed to ensure that gender considerations are adequately integrated into all institutional processes and functions, with specific accountability measures for relevant offices and divisions (FAO, 2020). In 2021, FAO issued the Regional Gender Strategy and Action Plan 2022-2025 for Asia and the Pacific to address regional trends and challenges affecting women’s participation in agriculture, forestry, livestock and fisheries. This plan seeks to mainstream gender perspectives into regional priorities and initiatives determined by the FAO Regional Conference for Asia and the Pacific, in line with the FAO Policy on Gender Equality 2020–2030 and the FAO Strategic Framework. It establishes regional focus areas to promote gender equality and

women's empowerment across key sectors while addressing new and emerging challenges, such as those brought by the COVID-19 pandemic, to rebuild resilient lives and livelihoods (FAO, 2022, p. 3).

In line with these commitments, the objectives of CGA include:

1. Inform FAO country-level planning and programming in line with national development priorities and FAO's mandate and strategic framework.
2. Facilitate FAO's contribution to the UN Country Team CEDAW Report with up-to-date and objective information on the situation of rural women in the country.
3. Facilitate SDG monitoring and reporting and the preparation of the Common Country Assessment for UNSDCF preparation.

## 1.4 Methodology

Conducted between July and November 2023, this CGA primarily relied on a review and analysis of available documents and data. However, limitations of this assessment include potential gaps in up-to-date information, difficulty accessing sources, or lack of specialized data on the agricultural sector. The assessment covers the period from 2018 to present, utilizing the most current data and figures where possible.

Key documents covered by the desk review included:

- a) Laws, policies, development strategies or plans in agriculture and rural livelihoods.
- b) Laws, policies and development strategies or plans on gender equality in Viet Nam, including updates since the 2019 CGA and initiatives<sup>8</sup> related to the National Strategy on Gender Equality (from 2018 to June 2023).
- c) Reports and publications on gender equality and women's empowerment in agriculture and rural livelihoods.
- d) The 2019 Country Gender Assessment of Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Viet Nam (FAO, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> Including projects implemented by MARD and its affiliated units.

Key data used for the analysis include:

- Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey 2020 (VHLSS 2020)
- Labour Force Survey 2020 (LFS 2020)
- Agriculture and Rural Survey 2020
- Survey on Development Goals for Women and Children 2021 (MICS6)
- Viet Nam's SDG 5.a.2 report 2020, but an update is due as of March 2025, as part of the four-year reporting cycle. However, as evidenced by recent Land Act reforms and highlighted in the ESCAP Progress report, insufficient data remains a major barrier to achieving the 2030 Agenda. In Asia-Pacific, only 52 percent of indicators have two or more data points, and over a third of the indicators lack data entirely (UN, 2024), with Viet Nam only having one data point for 5.a.2 and no data point for SDG 5.a.1. Regionally, gender equality (Goal 5) continues to have the least available data, further impeding progress.

It should be noted that most national statistical datasets, used in this assessment, lack a specific focus on gender equality, except for the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), limiting the quantitative analysis of gender equality in agrifood systems.

To complement this data, five in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with leaders and staff from key institutions, including MARD, Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) and UN Women. Interviewees were selected based on their expertise in topics where quantitative data was lacking. The list of interviewees is provided in the Annexes.

## 1.5 Organization of the report

The CGA is divided into five parts:

- Part 1 introduces the CGA, providing a general description of the context, the basis for conducting the assessment, its objectives, scope and methods.
- Part 2 describes the current socio-economic context of Viet Nam, both in general and in the field of agriculture and rural development. This section also describes the status of human development and gender equality in Viet Nam's current context. Furthermore, it covers changes in policies and laws related to agricultural and rural development and gender equality since the release of the last CGA report in 2019 and the submission of the SDG 5.a.2 report in 2020.
- Part 3 presents an analysis of gender equality in agriculture and rural livelihoods, based on the available secondary data. The assessment covers topics such as labour and employment in agriculture, women-led entrepreneurship and cooperatives, gender and forestry, resilience to climate change and natural disasters, access to resources, and transfer of science and technology in agricultural production.
- Part 4 provides additional information on stakeholders and potential partners whose work relates to promoting gender equality in Viet Nam.
- Part 5 summarizes key assessment results, based on the research findings, and proposes recommendations for the Government of Viet Nam and FAO to promote gender equality in agriculture and rural livelihoods.



# 2

## VIET NAM COUNTRY CONTEXT



## 2.1 Overview of the agriculture and rural sectors

Agriculture continues to be Viet Nam's key economic sector and is considered a cornerstone of overall economic development. Since 2018, Viet Nam has implemented a series of strategies, policies, programmes and plans for agricultural and rural development. Key initiatives include the Strategy for Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development (2021–2030) with a vision to 2050, the Development Strategy of Rural Occupations until 2030 with a vision to 2045, the National Target Programme on New Rural Development (2016–2020), and the National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction (2021–2025). These initiatives have resulted in several achievements in the field of agriculture and rural development.

The implementation of the National Target Programme on New Rural Development (2016–2020) has brought transformative changes to the socio-economic landscape of rural areas in Viet Nam (MARD, 2020). According to the Mid-term Agricultural and Rural Survey 2020 report, rural areas have seen substantial improvements<sup>9</sup> in economic, social and environmental infrastructure. For example, as of 1 July 2020, all communes and nearly 99 percent of villages in rural areas had electricity, a significant improvement from the 1 766 villages without electricity in 2016, reduced to 681 by 2020. The transportation system has also been upgraded, with 99.67 percent of communes now connected by motorable roads to district offices,<sup>10</sup> an increase of 0.24 percentage points since 2016. Additionally, 75.77 percent of all communes<sup>11</sup> in rural areas had street lighting systems in 2020, with investments also strengthening the irrigation system.

In the education sector, rural areas have seen a notable increase in the number of schools meeting national standards. Between 2016 and 2020, the share of preschools meeting the national standard increased from 33.4 percent to 58.4 percent; primary schools from 46.9 percent to 65.9 percent; and secondary schools from 37.7 percent to 62.9 percent (GSO, 2021b).

These developments have created better conditions for people to access essential and productive services, infrastructures, cultural initiatives, agricultural solutions and education. Upgraded transportation systems have improved mobility for rural populations and facilitated the transport of commodities, particularly agricultural, forestry, and fishery products across specialized farming regions, large production centres, and remote areas to markets. Nonetheless, significant challenges remain in integrating gender considerations into national target programmes for new rural areas and sustainable poverty reduction covering the 2010–2020 period. Consequently, while there has been considerable progress in enhancing rural infrastructures, gender-sensitive and gender-responsive actions have often been overlooked (UN Women, 2021c).

Another key programme for rural economic development is Viet Nam's One Commune One Product (OCOP) initiative, which promotes local resources and the development of agricultural and non-agricultural products within value chains. This initiative has been essential for the implementation of the National Target Programme (NTP) on New Rural Development (NRD) and continues to be deployed in the period 2021–2025. Products in the programme, which are divided into six groups,<sup>12</sup> have become diverse sources of livelihoods. By 2021, the OCOP was operational in all 63 provinces/cities and has made positive contributions to rural economic development. It has facilitated the transition from small-scale production to cooperative production within value chains, enabling production with specific standards, regulations and market needs. By 2022, there were nearly 4 400 OCOP entities, including 38.3 percent cooperatives, 25.8 percent enterprises, and 33 percent production groups. Many areas have specialized in raw material production and rural industries. Traditional craft villages in particular have flourished. This development is reflected in the average annual revenue of OCOP entities, which has increased by 17.6 percent (B.T, 2022b).

<sup>9</sup> In terms of increase in the quantity and quality.

<sup>10</sup> From the commune People's Committee Office to the district People's Committee Office.

<sup>11</sup> Out of 8 297 communes nationwide.

<sup>12</sup> 1) Foods; 2) beverages; 3) medicinal herbs and products from medicinal herbs; 4) handicraft products; 5) ornamental biological products; and 6) community tourism services, ecotourism and tourist attractions.

In February 2021, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 255/QĐ-TTg, a plan to restructure the agricultural sector for the period 2021–2025 to modernize agriculture, support sustainability, increase income for rural people, ensure food security, strengthen national defence and security, adapt to climate change and integrate into global agricultural value chains.

In 2022, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam also approved the “Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development Strategy (2021–2030), with a vision to 2050”.<sup>13</sup> This strategy sets the nation’s target for annual average growth of the gross domestic product (GDP) from agriculture, forestry and fisheries sector at 2.5–3 percent until 2030. According to the General Statistics Office (GSO), agriculture’s GDP contribution grew from 3.04 percent in 2020 to 3.36 percent in 2022, demonstrating progress towards the sector’s GDP growth target outlined in the national strategy (GSO, 2021c; Do, 2023).

Most recently, on 14 September 2023, the Prime Minister approved Decision No. 1058/QĐ-TTg, the Development Strategy of Rural Occupations until 2030. This strategy aims to maximize rural potential, improve production and business efficiency, increase income, create jobs, enhance quality of life, protect the environment, and promote cultural heritage. Rural economic development is associated with the goal of “ecological agriculture, modern rural areas and civilized farmers”.

These strategic initiatives have shown positive effects. Although labour productivity in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors remained lower than in industry and services, it has steadily increased. In 2022, labour productivity in these sectors rose by 8.5 percent annually and was estimated to reach 81.07 million Vietnamese dong (VND)<sup>14</sup> per worker (Table 1).

## 2.2 Socio-economic context in Viet Nam

Despite its initially lagged status in social and economic development, Viet Nam climbed two places in the Human Development Index (HDI) global, raising from 117<sup>th</sup> in 2019<sup>15</sup> to 115<sup>th</sup> in 2022.<sup>16</sup>

This improvement was based on data concerning gross national income per capita, life expectancy at birth, and average years of schooling, positioning Viet Nam among the countries with high human development (UNDP, 2022). Among the three component indexes of the HDI, the health index, which includes life expectancy at birth, showed the most significant improvement,<sup>17</sup> followed by income (GNI per capita) and education<sup>18</sup> (UNDP, 2022).

The Gender Development Index (GDI) in Viet Nam has remained stable over recent years (see Table 2). This index measures the gender gap in three dimensions: health,<sup>19</sup> knowledge<sup>20</sup> and living standard.<sup>21</sup> In 2021, Viet Nam’s GDI reached 1.002, a marginal increase of 0.001 points from 2020, and remained above the global average GDI value of 0.958.

When analysing sex-disaggregated data, figures show that women in Viet Nam have a higher average life expectancy than men. However, they also typically experience approximately 11 years of unhealthy life, compared to 8 years for men (Le *et al.*, 2019). Despite some progress in women’s income, persistent gender gaps remain in both income and education. On average, from 2018 to 2021, women had fewer years of schooling and less income than men.

According to the Report on the Global Gender Gap Index, Viet Nam was ranked 72<sup>nd</sup> out of 146 countries in 2023 (World Economic Forum, 2023).

This represents an improvement of 11 places compared to 2022 and an increase of 5 places since 2018. This ranking is based on four sub-indices: economic participation and opportunities, educational attainments, health and survival,

<sup>13</sup> Decision No.150/QĐ-TTg dated 28/01/2022 on approval of Strategy for Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development 2021–2030, vision to 2050.

<sup>14</sup> The Vietnamese dong (VND) has been the official currency of Viet Nam since 1978. As of 1 May 2024, the UN exchange rate for VND is 1 VND=0.00004002081 USD.

<sup>15</sup> Out of 189 countries.

<sup>16</sup> Out of 191 countries.

<sup>17</sup> 78.2 for female and 69.1 for male individuals.

<sup>18</sup> In terms of expected year of schooling and mean years of schooling.

<sup>19</sup> In terms of average life expectancy.

<sup>20</sup> Expected years of schooling for children and years of schooling for adults aged 25 and over.

<sup>21</sup> Measured by GNI per capita.

**Table 1. Social labour productivity by sector and year (million VND/worker)**

Sector	2018	2019	2020	Preliminary 2021	Estimated 2022
Agriculture, forestry and fisheries	42.24	48.23	57.44	74.68	81.07
Accommodation and food services	75.05	82.68	66.31	59.00	80.51
Manufacturing and processing industry	163.78	162.42	170.44	186.23	200.16
Mining	1 239.23	1 167.44	1 108.26	1 179.45	1 367.80
Production and distribution of electricity, gas, hot water, steam and air conditioning	1 450.91	1 462.04	1 827.08	2 215.11	2 722.02
Education and training	117.14	141.69	153.96	174.85	188.17
Health and social support	267.55	282.13	321.65	461.00	427.95
Hired labour for household works, and household production of products, materials and services	44.27	43.14	48.90	62.10	58.91
Other sectors <sup>22</sup>	4 243.19	4 120.14	4 163.63	4 540.00	4 631.22

Source: GSO website.

**Table 2. Viet Nam's Gender Development Index (GDI) 2018–2021**

Year	GDI	Expected life expectancy at birth		Expected schooling years		Mean years of schooling		GNI per capita (2017 PPP\$)	
		Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man	Woman	Man
2018	1.003	78.8	69.2	13.1	12.7	7.934	8.666	6 224	7 995
2019	1.004	78.9	69.4	13.2	12.7	8.031	8.727	6 613	8 470
2020	1.001	79.9	70.8	13.2	12.7	8.138	8.790	6 795	8 713
2021	1.002	78.2	69.1	13.2	12.7	8.138	8.790	6 932	8 826

Source: UNDP website. Update on 08/9/2022.

<sup>22</sup> This includes the consolidation of the following sectors: i) construction; ii) wholesale and retail; Repair cars, motorbikes, motorbikes and other motor vehicles; iii) transportation, warehousing; iv) Information and communication; v) finance, banking and insurance; vi) real estate business; vii) professionals, science and technology; viii) Administration and support services; ix) activities of the Communist Party and socio-political organizations; State management, national security and defence; mandatory social insurance; x) arts, entertainment; xi) other services.

Table 3. Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) and Viet Nam's rank 2018–2023

Year	GGI score (0-1)	Rank	Sub-indices			
			Economic participation and opportunities	Education attainment	Health and survival	Political empowerment
2018	0.698	77	0.740 (33)	0.972 (101)	0.957 (143)	0.124 (99)
2020	0.700	87	0.751 (31)	0.982 (93)	0.942 (151)	0.123 (110)
2021	0.701	87	0.751 (31)	0.985 (88)	0.950 (141)	0.135 (106)
2022	0.705	83	0.751 (31)	0.985 (88)	0.950 (141)	0.135 (106)
2023	0.711	72	0.749 (31)	0.985 (89)	0.946 (144)	0.166 (89)

Note: Data in 2019 is not available.

Source: World Economic Forum. Global gender gap reports 2018–2023.

and political empowerment.<sup>23</sup> Progress was especially observed in the economic participation and opportunities sub-index, where the country ranked 31<sup>st</sup><sup>24</sup> in 2023. Educational attainment and political empowerment both held the 89<sup>th</sup> position, while the health and survival sub-index lagged behind at 144<sup>th</sup> (see Table 3).

### 2.2.1 Demography and population dynamics

As of 1 April 2021, Viet Nam's population was 98.2 million people, with women comprising 50.4 percent. The population grew by 1.11 percent from 2020, an increase of about one million people. The majority (62.7 percent) of the population lived in rural areas (GSO, 2022a). By 2022, Viet Nam's population had reached 99.46 million people and was projected to surpass 100 million in 2023.

In 2021, Viet Nam's sex ratio at birth (SRB) remained significantly unbalanced at 112 boys per 100 girls. Although improved from 2018,<sup>25</sup> this ratio remains higher than the normal range of 104–106 boys per 100 girls and similar to the 2020 level. Significant differences in SRB among provinces and cities are

reported in 2020, with Son La (118.2), Hung Yen (118.1) and Bac Ninh (117.1)<sup>26</sup> experiencing highly imbalanced ratios, much higher than the average ratio of the country. Data from the Population and Housing Census 2019 shows that SRB was slightly higher in rural areas (111.8) compared to urban areas (110.8). The Red River Delta region has the highest SRB, while the Southeast region has the lowest. The difference in SRB between rural and urban areas in the Red River Delta is also the most pronounced in the country, mainly due to son preference. As the imbalance of SRB continues, its consequences may be observed in future changes in family and marriage structures.

Regarding the total fertility rate, Viet Nam has successfully achieved replacement fertility<sup>27</sup> through decades of family planning. The total fertility rate (TFR) was 2.05 in 2018, rose to 2.11 in 2021, and declined to 2.01 in 2022.<sup>28</sup> Fertility rates are consistently higher in rural areas than urban areas. For example, in 2018, the fertility rate in urban areas was 1.75, while in rural areas it was at 2.22, rising to 2.40 in rural areas by 2021. Some urban areas,

<sup>23</sup> The GII shows the loss in potential human development due to inequality between female and male achievements in three dimensions. These encompass i) health, ii) empowerment and iii) labour market (UNDP, 2020).

<sup>24</sup> Among the 146 countries.

<sup>25</sup> 114.8 boys per 100 girls.

<sup>26</sup> Decision No.3671/QĐ-BYT dated 02/8/2021.

<sup>27</sup> Replacement fertility is the level of fertility at which a population exactly replaces itself from one generation to the next. In developed countries, replacement level fertility can be taken as requiring an average of 2.1 children per woman (Craig J. Replacement level fertility and future population growth. Population Trends. 1994 Winter;(78): 20–2. PMID: 7834459). A fertility rate that is lower to the replacement rate reflects into an overall reduction in the population.

<sup>28</sup> This indicates that Viet Nam is still maintaining replacement fertility.

such as Ho Chi Minh, reported very low fertility rates, reaching 1.39 in 2019 and increasing slightly to 1.48 in 2021<sup>29</sup> (GSO, 2021f; GSO, 2022a). Overall, the number of provinces and cities experiencing low fertility rates is on the rise, increasing from 11 in 2014 to 21 in 2020<sup>30</sup> (FAO, 2019). In response, the government has introduced policies in these provinces and cities with low fertility rates to encourage marriages and family planning. Measures include providing childcare services, daycare centres, and kindergartens to support mothers,<sup>31</sup> along with services to support pregnant women and those giving birth to at least two children. Examples are the provision of social housing, rental assistance, prioritizing enrolment in public schools, and scholarships. The government is also exploring initiatives to address delays in marriage or decisions to remain unmarried, including promoting social and community responsibility for individuals, women and men, in such circumstances (GSO, 2022a).

One emerging concern in recent years regarding Viet Nam's population is the rapid ageing of its demographic, marked by improvements in the average life expectancy of the population, a reduction in the mortality rate, and the maintenance of replacement-level fertility. Viet Nam began transitioning into an ageing population in 2019, with 11.9 percent of its total population being 60 years old or older. The economy is among the world's fastest ageing countries. By 2036, it is expected to become an aged population country. A noteworthy aspect of this ageing process in Viet Nam is the feminization of the elderly population (GSO, 2021d). This phenomenon indicates that the number of elderly women will surpass that of elderly men due to women's longer average life expectancy. Consequently, elderly women are at risk of living

alone and suffering from more chronic diseases than men. Additionally, women tend to retire earlier than men, contributing less to social insurance, which results in them receiving lower pensions (lower income)<sup>32</sup> than men upon retirement and facing a higher likelihood of widowhood (ILO, 2021a). Furthermore, an increase in the elderly population is likely to escalate the burden of unpaid care work for women (UN Women *et al.*, 2021).

## 2.2.2 Poverty

Between 2010 and 2020, Viet Nam made significant achievements in poverty reduction. According to a World Bank (WB) report, Viet Nam's monetary poverty rate<sup>33</sup> dropped to 5 percent by 2020, down from 2018 (World Bank, 2022). In 2016, Viet Nam adopted a multidimensional poverty standard,<sup>34</sup> encompassing six dimensions: employment, health, education, housing, water and sanitation and information. The results of poverty reduction efforts from 2016-2020 are reflected in the continuously decreasing multidimensional poverty rate. By 2022, Viet Nam's multidimensional poverty rate stood at 4.3 percent, slightly lower than the estimated rate of 4.4 in 2021. Over the five-year period from 2016 to 2020, the average reduction in multidimensional poverty was 0.81 percentage points (GSO, 2023a). At the same time, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the GDP per capita (PPP) of Viet Nam also increased during the period 2010-2020, climbing from USD 9.89 thousand in 2018 to USD 13.28 thousand in 2022, with projections for 2023 of 14.39 thousand (IMF, n.d.). However, poverty remained more pronounced in rural areas, as shown in the Viet Nam Household Living Standard Survey 2022 (VHLSS 2022), which indicates that the poverty rate in rural areas, based on multidimensional poverty standards,<sup>35</sup> was much higher than in urban areas<sup>36</sup> (see Figure 1).

<sup>29</sup> Still lower than the replacement fertility.

<sup>30</sup> According to the Decision No.588/QĐ-TTg, dated 28/4/2020 on approval of "Programme for adjusting fertility to suit regions and subjects 2030".

<sup>31</sup> The term "mother" was originally used in the policy document (Decision 588/QĐ-TTg, dated 28/4/2020).

<sup>32</sup> While Viet Nam does not have a universal pension system, Resolution 28-NQ/TW outlines a vision for a multi-tier system. This system aims to provide earnings-related benefits to contributors and ensure basic income security for all through solidarity and redistribution (ILO, 2023).

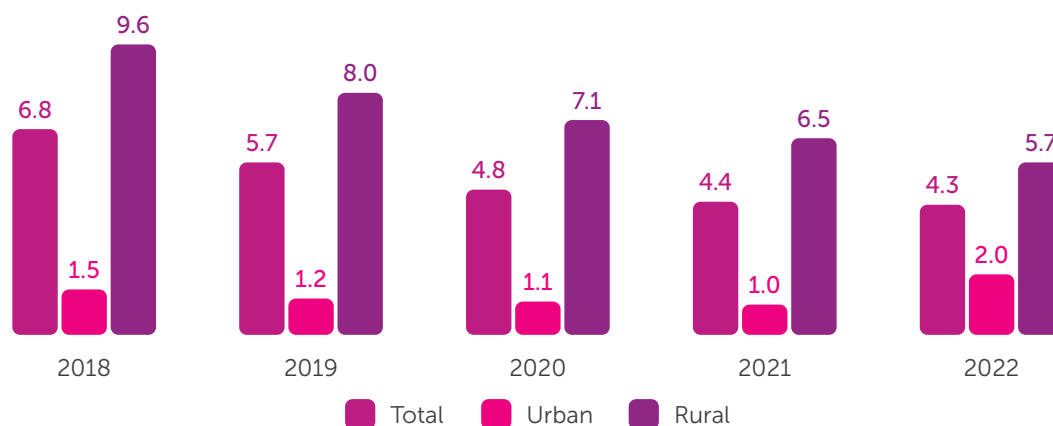
<sup>33</sup> Calculated according to the WB poverty standard for low middle income countries in 2011.

<sup>34</sup> Decision No.59/2015/QĐ-TTg dated 19/11/2015 on the promulgation of the multi-dimensional poverty standards applicable to the period 2016-2020; Decree No. 07/2021/NĐ-CP dated 27/01/2021 on the regulation of multi-dimensional poverty standards for the period 2021-2025.

<sup>35</sup> From 2016 to 2021: multidimensional poverty standard 2016-2021; From 2022: Multidimensional Poverty Standard 2022-2025.

<sup>36</sup> During the 2016-2022 period.

Figure 1. Multidimensional poverty rate by urban and rural areas 2018–2022 (%)



Source: GSO, 2023. Results of Viet Nam household living standard survey 2022.

Additionally, women are often at greater risk of experiencing monetary and multidimensional poverty as they face greater social and economic inequalities. This is especially true for ethnic minority women and those living in difficult areas. For instance, nearly a quarter of women from ethnic minority groups are illiterate, compared to 13.3 percent of men, highlighting a significant gender gap in literacy rates in 2019 (World Bank, 2022). Statistics from 2019 also indicate significant disparities in employment conditions between Kinh or Hoa individuals and those from ethnic minority groups. Among employed non-Kinh or Hoa women, only 17 percent have a wage-paying job, compared to 22 percent of Kinh or Hoa women, and 32 percent among men from ethnic minorities (World Bank, 2019; World Bank, 2022).

Women's lower educational attainment, along with restricted opportunities for decent employment and the persistence of discriminatory gender norms, frequently prevent them from improving their livelihoods, participating in community activities and influencing decision-making processes. Gender stereotypes often carry expectations for women to uptake traditional housewife duties, limiting their access to productive resources, their mobility and opportunities for higher-paying jobs. This also affects the division of labour and agency in the agrifood systems. As a result, women are more likely to work in informal sectors with lower productivity and income (UNDP, 2023).

The issue of food insecurity and poverty in Viet Nam is closely related to the gender of the household head and the presence of a spouse in female-headed households (FHHs). Research indicates that FHHs, on average, are more vulnerable to food insecurity and poverty than male-headed households (MHHs). Among all groups, FHHs without a spouse are the most vulnerable, underscoring the need for gender equality policies. Additionally, higher levels of education, increased non-farm incomes, and greater land-use rights can significantly enhance Viet Nam's food security and poverty levels. These findings emphasize the importance of targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by FHHs, particularly those without a spouse, and the need for policies that promote education, non-farm income and land-use rights (Mishra and Tran, 2021).

### 2.2.3 Health

The health care sector in Viet Nam has recently seen significant development, achieving the targets set in the National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2011–2020.

The 2019 Population and Housing Census recorded that the maternal mortality ratio in 2019 was 46 per 100 000 live births. This represents a substantial decline from 69 per 100 000 live births in 2009. This achievement exceeded the target<sup>37</sup> of 52 per 100 000 set for 2020. These results indicate that Viet Nam is on track to meet its goal of reducing the maternal mortality ratio, as outlined in the National Action Plan for implementing the 2030 Agenda<sup>38</sup> and the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2021–2030<sup>39</sup> (GSO and UN Women, 2021).

<sup>37</sup> Target 2 of Objective 4.

<sup>38</sup> Targeting 45 per 100 000 live births in 2030.

<sup>39</sup> Aiming for less than 42 per 100 000 live births by 2030.

In terms of nutrition, the 2019–2020 nutrition census conducted by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF shows significant improvements in the nutritional status of Vietnamese children. The rate of malnutrition and stunting children under 5 years old decreased from 29.3 percent in 2010 to 19.6 percent in 2020, meeting the average level according to the standards of the World Health Organization. However, stunting, underweight and malnutrition-related disorders disproportionately affect infants and young children, especially those from ethnic minorities, and those residing in rural and mountainous regions, or from lower-income households. In contrast, childhood obesity and overweight rates for children aged 5–19 have increased,<sup>40</sup> rising from 8.5 percent in 2010 to 19 percent in 2020. In urban areas, rates reached 26.8 percent compared to 18.3 percent in rural areas (MOH, 2021). Obesity and overweight is more prevalent among school-aged males from wealthier families living in urban areas (P.Y. Tan *et al.*, 2024).

Deficiencies in essential micronutrients such as vitamin A, anaemia, iron, and zinc remain a public health concern. Despite some improvements, the aimed rates for reducing vitamin A deficiency and anaemia in women of childbearing age and children under five years old have not been met. As of 2020, the prevalence of anaemia was 19.6 percent in children under five, 25.6 percent in pregnant women and 16.2 percent in non-pregnant women. The rate of preclinical vitamin A deficiency in children under five was 9.5 percent, and the rate of low vitamin A in breast milk was 18.3 percent. In the same year, zinc deficiency was reported at 58 percent in children under five and 63.5 percent pregnant women. These rates fall short of the targets<sup>41</sup> set by the National Strategy on Nutrition (2011–2020) and the National Action Plan on Nutrition (2017–2020) (MOH, 2020).

The adolescent birth rate also poses a challenge. According to the Ministry of Health, the adolescent birth rate in Viet Nam was 29.2 per 1 000 women

aged 15–19 in 2018. However, survey data from MICS5 (2015) estimated it higher at 45 per 1 000 women, and in MICS6 (2021) reported it at 42 per 1 000 women<sup>42</sup> (GSO and UNICEF, 2021; UN Women *et al.*, 2021). The adolescent birth rate correlates with women’s education levels, ethnicity and living standards and is associated with risks such as maternal mortality, stillbirth, infant mortality, child marriage and adolescent abortion (GSO and UNICEF, 2021).

#### 2.2.4 Education and literacy

The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Index indicates that Viet Nam performs well in gender equality in the education sub-index, particularly in literacy rates, and enrolment at primary, secondary and tertiary education. Its Educational Attainment Index has seen gradual improvement, ranking 93<sup>rd</sup> in 2016<sup>43</sup> and 2020,<sup>44</sup> and rising to 89<sup>th</sup> in 2023<sup>45</sup> (World Economic Forum, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2023).

The mean years of schooling increased from 7.934 in 2018 to 8.138 in 2021 for women and from 8.666 in 2018 to 8.79 in 2021 for men (see Table 2), accompanied by overall improvements in high school graduation rates for both male and female students (GSO, 2020). Household investment in education has also grown, as reflected in increased education expenditure (see Figure 2).

Furthermore, Viet Nam’s National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2011–2020 achieved its targets<sup>46</sup> of improving female human resources quality and ensuring equal participation in education and training (Government of Viet Nam, 2020). In 2019, the literacy rate of women aged 15–60 was nearly equal to that of men (see Table 4). In 14 provinces with disadvantaged social and economic conditions, the literacy rate reached 93.6 percent surpassing the 2020 target of 90.0 percent. According to 2022 statistics, the literacy rate for people aged 15–60 reached 98.9 percent at level 1 and 97.3 percent at level 2<sup>47</sup> (Viet H., 2023).

<sup>40</sup> In both urban and rural areas.

<sup>41</sup> For improving the micronutrient status of mothers and children.

<sup>42</sup> Age-specific fertility rate for women aged 15–19 years.

<sup>43</sup> Out of 144 countries.

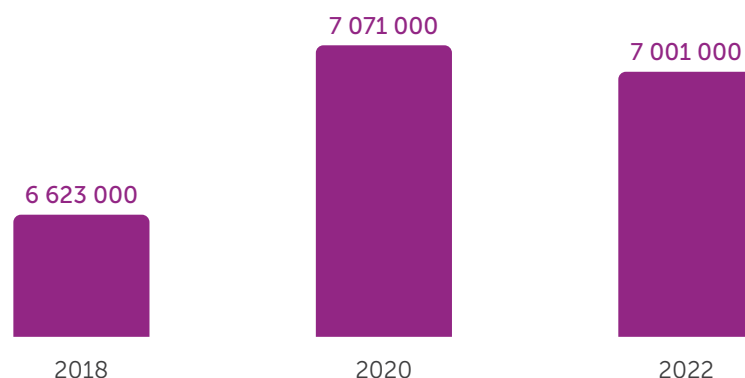
<sup>44</sup> Out of 153 countries.

<sup>45</sup> Out of 146 countries.

<sup>46</sup> Under Objective 3.

<sup>47</sup> Level 1: Completion of stage 1 of the literacy programme and continuing education after literacy or completion of grade 3 of the primary education programme; Level 2: Completion of stage 2 of the literacy programme and continuing education after literacy or completion of the primary education programme.

Figure 2. Expenditure for education and training per person/year (in VND)



Source: Press release on the results of the VHLSS 2022.

Table 4. Literacy rate achieved in 2019 (%)

	Achieved percentage in 2019	Target in 2020
Women aged 15-60	97.33	98.0
Men aged 15-60	97.98	98.0
Ethnic population aged 15-60	93.60	90.0
Ethnic women aged 15-60	92.58	–

Source: Report No.362/BC-CP on the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality in 2019 and the period of 2011–2020.

In 2020, net school attendance rates were high at the primary and secondary levels 98.1 percent and 93.4 percent respectively (GSO, 2022d). Viet Nam aims to achieve a 97.5 percent primary school completion rate by 2025, and increase secondary school completion to 87 percent by 2025, and 90 percent by 2030.<sup>48</sup> The rate of women holding master's degree reached 44.2 percent in 2019, while 28 percent held a doctoral degree (GSO, 2020). While the national target for women with a master's degree was met, the target for doctoral degree was not attained, according to Objective 2 of the Strategy.

However, a 2022 UNICEF analysis highlighted persisting gender disparities in school attendance. At the primary level, more out-of-school children were girls, while at secondary and high school levels, boys had higher out-of-school rates. Rural areas had significantly more out-of-school children across all education levels (UNICEF, 2022). Ethnic minority girls

faced particularly low attendance and education levels, compared to boys and national averages. According to the General Statistics Office (GSO), 90.6 percent of ethnic minority girls were enrolled at the correct age for secondary level, compared to 95.1 percent of boys (GSO, 2022d). This rate is even lower at the high school level, with 41.3 percent of girls attending school at the correct age, compared to 52.4 percent of boys in the 2020–2021 school year (see Table 5). These figures highlight the need to further support and promote school attendance in rural areas and in particular among ethnic minority girls.

Similarly, the proportion of the population aged 15 and over receiving vocational training by disability status shows a significant gap, with disabled individuals — both male and female — having considerably lower participation rates compared to their non-disabled counterparts (see Table 6).

<sup>48</sup> According to Decision No.841/QĐ-TTg dated 14 July 2023, of the Prime Minister promulgating a roadmap for implementing Viet Nam's sustainable development goals by 2023.

**Table 5. School net attendance rate by educational level and sex, ethnicity (%)**

		Total	Male	Female
Primary (2020)	Country	98.1	98.0	98.1
	Ethnic minority	96.5	96.4	96.5
Lower secondary (School year 2020-2021)	Country	95.7	95.2	96.2
	Ethnic minority	92.8	95.1	90.6
High school (School year 2020-2021)	Country	61.8	55.9	68.5
	Ethnic minority	46.6	52.4	41.3

Source: GSO, 2022.

**Table 6. Proportion of population aged 15 and over receiving vocational training by disability status**

	Disabled	Non-disabled
Female	4.40	19.23
Male	11.64	24.74

Source: NSPD, 2016.

Only 2.9 percent of primary and secondary schools are designed to accommodate students with disabilities. Additionally, a mere 8.1 percent of schools have walkways or ramps in place. Sanitation facilities suitable for disabled students are also scarce, with only 9.9 percent of schools possessing appropriate facilities.

The national criteria for new rural development include two educational benchmarks: Criterion No.5, which focuses on school facilities, and Criterion No.14, which addresses education. To meet Criterion No.5, a commune must ensure that at least 70 percent of schools comply with national standards for facilities and teaching equipment. At the district level, new rural development standards are achieved when at least 60 percent of high schools meet national standards (Viet Nam Journal of Education, 2022). According to MARD, as of November 2022, 71.4 percent of the 8 225 communes across the

country had met these standards. Additionally, 18 provinces achieved full compliance, with all their communes meeting the new rural development standards (B.T, 2022a).

Overall, supportive measures are currently insufficient to address the educational inequalities faced by girls residing in extremely disadvantaged<sup>49</sup> rural areas, mountainous areas, or remote areas, as well as those from ethnic minorities, where many poor households cannot afford or choose not to invest in girls' further education. Article 85 of the Law on Education 2019, which offers special support for various segments of the population, does not specifically refer to girls, especially those in difficult areas. Similarly, the Law on Higher Education also fails to address supportive measures to promote gender equality in higher education. Gender equality concerns have not been prioritized in the development of general education programmes and teacher training, indicating the need for more robust policies in ensuring inclusivity across all levels of education.

Although there are more female students at the university and college level, male and female students continue to be segregated in different majors due to gender stereotypes. Men are disproportionately engaged in engineering, machine manufacturing, construction, and service fields, while female students are more inclined toward social sciences, education, arts and humanities.

<sup>49</sup> According to Decision No.33/2020/QĐ-TTg issued by the Prime Minister, which outlines criteria for delineating ethnic minority and mountainous areas based on their development level for the period 2021–2025, these areas are characterized by high poverty rates, underdeveloped socio-economic conditions, low human resources, and inadequate infrastructure. Challenges persist, particularly in transportation, health care, and education, significantly impacting the well-being of the population.

The MARD currently oversees 34 institutions dedicated to agricultural education, including one academy, three universities, two management schools, 28 colleges, and eight scientific research institutes that offer postgraduate training. In 2020, these institutions offered programmes in 373 majors, with 88 at the university level and 112 at the collegiate level. Of these, 35.2 percent of the university-level majors and 42.8 percent of the collegiate-level majors were in the agricultural discipline (MOET, 2021). Despite the variety of programmes available, the agricultural and forestry training sector has struggled to attract students. Many students lack a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities within this sector and perceived it as a field with limited job prospects and unstable incomes, which discourages enrolment.

Women participating in vocational training are often directed into traditionally female-dominated industries, generally associated with lower-wage occupations, such as garments and hairdressing (MOLISA and UNFPA, 2020). Enrolment data for the 2019–2020 school year shows that female students often enrol in pedagogy and education (80 percent), business administration (69 percent) and health (62 percent). Differently, male students make up 80 percent of those in mathematics and statistics, computer and information technology, engineering, manufacturing and processing technology, architecture and construction, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and veterinary sciences (UN Women *et al.*, 2021).

### 2.2.5 Employment and access to decent work

In 2018, the proportion of women participating in the labour force in Viet Nam was relatively high at 71.6 percent, rising slightly to 71.8 percent in 2019 (GSO, 2019b). However, this upward trend later reversed, with participation dropping to 69.0 percent in 2020 and further to 61.5 percent in 2021, before a modest recovery to 62.7 percent in 2022 (GSO, 2021a; GSO, 2021e; GSO, 2022c; GSO, 2023b). The significant decrease during these years is likely due to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak in Viet Nam, which disproportionately affected women's employment opportunities.

Still, even before the pandemic, labour force participation among women was lower than men across all working-age groups and levels of urbanization, as highlighted by data from 2019 (GSO and UN Women, 2021). This disparity can be explained by the deeply rooted gender norms, which often assign women the majority of unpaid housework and caregiving responsibilities (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). As shown in Figure 3, a higher proportion of women were classified as family workers compared to men in both 2019 and 2020, reflecting their overrepresentation in unpaid or informal labour. Meanwhile, men are more likely to hold positions as employers or co-operative members. Consequently, women's occupations tend to be considered more vulnerable and less stable.

### 2.2.6 Women's political rights and empowerment

To monitor progress toward gender equality, the World Economic Forum launched the Gender Gap Index in 2006, offering annual benchmarks on gender parity across countries. The Global Gender Gap Index scores countries<sup>50</sup> evaluates progress in closing the gender gap in areas like education, health, economic participation, and political empowerment. However, as shown in Figure 4, Viet Nam's index value for political empowerment stands at about 0.17, indicating a significant gender gap in this dimension.

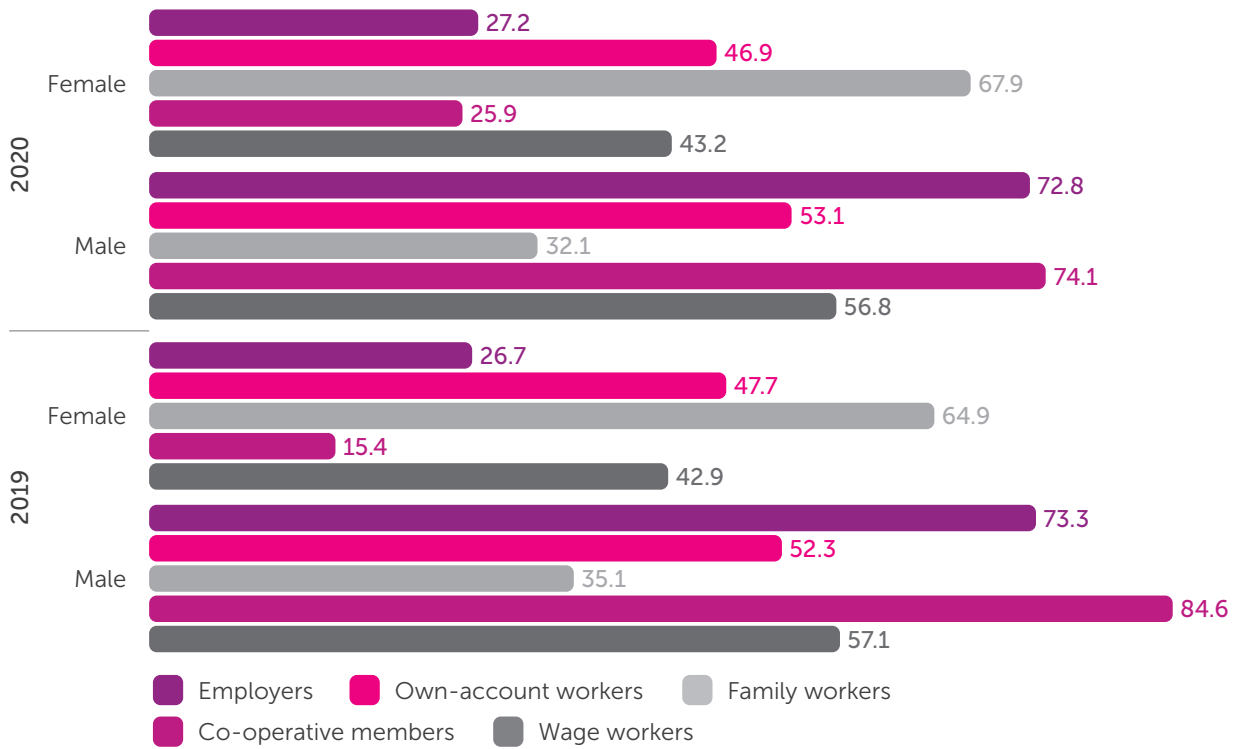
The National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2011–2020 aimed to advance women's decision-making rights, voice, and political representation. While progress has been made, significant gaps remain in achieving these goals.

For the 2021–2026 term, women made up 30.26 percent of National Assembly deputies, the highest in the last 45 years. This milestone improved Viet Nam's global ranking in female parliamentary representation, climbing from 71<sup>st</sup> to 51<sup>st</sup> place worldwide and from 9<sup>th</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> place in Asia (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). Despite this progress, the figure remains below the target of over 35 percent<sup>51</sup> set for the 2016–2020 term. Besides, the proportion of women who are concurrent National Assembly deputies is higher than men (73.8 percent and 66.4 percent, respectively).

<sup>50</sup> Using a 0–100 scale, where 100 reflects full gender parity, while 0 means no progress. This index allows comparisons of progress toward gender equality across countries and dimensions.

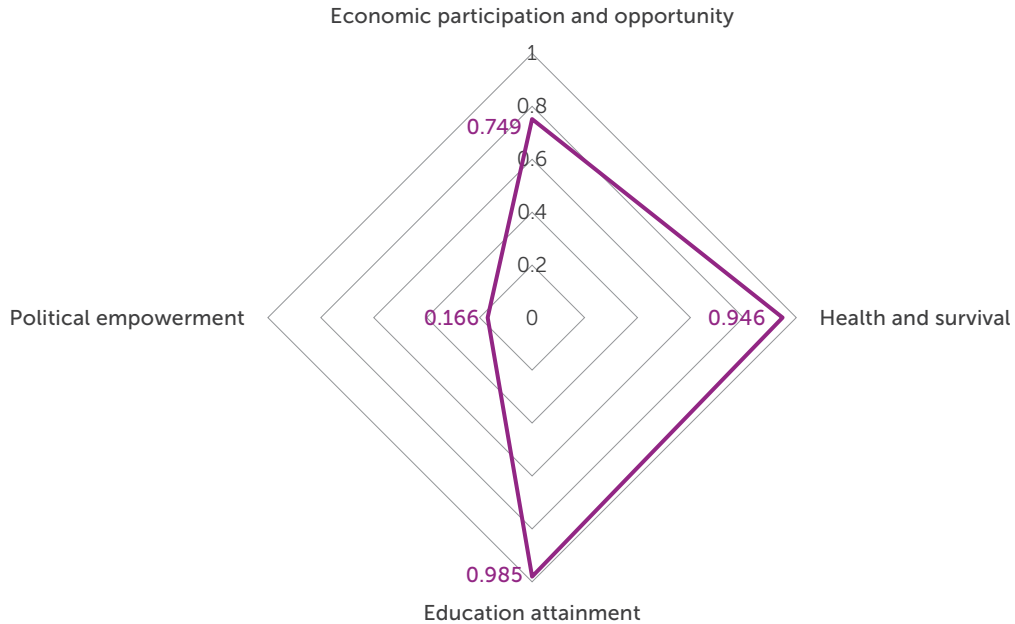
<sup>51</sup> Female deputies in the National Assembly.

Figure 3. Distribution of the employed population in the economy divided by sex and employment status 2019–2020 (%)



Source: LFS 2019, 2020.

Figure 4. Viet Nam’s GGI component index’s values in 2023



Source: World Economic Forum, 2023.

**Table 7. The proportion of female deputies in the people's council at all levels (%)**

Term	Provincial level	District level	Commune level
2016-2021	26.60	27.50	26.60
2021-2026	29.00	29.08	28.98

Source: Adapted from UN Women *et al.*, 2021.

**Table 8. Percentage of women in party committees at different levels**

Executive committee member	2015–2020 term	2020–2025 term
Central government level	9.4	8.5
Provincial level	12.6	16.0
District level	15.5	20.1
Commune level	20.8	25.6

Source: GSO, 2019a. VWU, 2020. Report on the results of selecting female officials for the term of 2020-2025 at the grassroots party committees.

In the 14<sup>th</sup> National Assembly (2016-2021), women's participation varied across committees. They had significant representation in the National Council (51.4 percent), the Committee for Culture and Education for Youth and Children (48.6 percent), and the Committee for Social Affairs (43.9 percent). In contrast, women's participation was lower in defence and economic committees, such as the National Defence and Security Committee (6.25 percent), the Economic Committee (8.8 percent), and the Finance and Budget Committee (15.2 percent). Leadership in these committees was predominantly held by men, with 8 out of 10 committees chaired by male members.<sup>52</sup> Vice President positions were also exclusively held by men (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). However, in 2019, the Assembly's National Defense and Security Committee appointed its first female permanent member.

At the local level,<sup>53</sup> female representation in People's Councils increased during the 2021–2026 term compared to the previous term (see Table 7).

Despite this improvement, the numbers still fall short of the target<sup>54</sup> set out in the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2016–2020.

Overall, the percentage of women in Party Committees has shown progress, particularly at the grassroots level where it reached 25.6 percent in the 2020-2025 term – 4.8 percentage points higher than the previous term (see Table 8). All 63 provinces and cities achieved the target of over 15 percent of commissioners being female. At district level, women's representation reached 20.1 percent (4.6 percentage points higher than the previous term), with 60 out of 63 provinces and cities achieving the 15 percent target<sup>55</sup> (Government of Viet Nam, 2020). Notably, in the 2020-2025 term, nine women were elected Provincial Party Secretary (14.3 percent), the highest rate ever achieved in the country. Data show that the number of women in Party committees at all levels has increased over the last three terms, but still falls short of the 25 percent the target set in the NSGE for the 2011-2020 period.

<sup>52</sup> Except for the Judiciary Committee and the Committee for Social Affairs.

<sup>53</sup> The provincial, district, and commune levels.

<sup>54</sup> I.e. 35 percent of female deputies in the People's Council at all levels.

<sup>55</sup> Of commissioners being female.



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Regarding women in leadership and management positions,<sup>56, 57</sup> the NSGE 2011–2020 set a target of having 95 percent of ministries, ministerial-level agencies, and government-affiliated agencies, government and People’s Committees at all levels to have female leaders. However, by 2021, only 44.8 percent of these institutions met this goal. Specifically, 44 percent of ministries, 75 percent of ministerial-level agencies, and 28.5 percent of government agencies had women in leadership roles. During the 2016–2021 term, less than one-third of People’s Committees at all levels had female leaders, with representation at 32.1 percent at the provincial level, 32.6 percent at the district level, and only 22.0 percent at the commune level (UN Women *et al.*, 2021).

By December 2022, 15 out of 30 ministries, ministerial-level agencies, and government agencies had key female leaders, accounting for 50 percent, a 5.2 percentage points increase compared to 2021 (Government of Viet Nam, 2023). Although data is still limited, especially at the grassroots level, data from departments and agencies of the MOET shows that women represented 14.8 percent of the Party Committee of the Ministry, 13 percent of the Director level, 34.8 percent of Deputy Director level and 19.8 percent of leaders and managers in affiliated units. Currently, there are no specific measures, targets, or strategies to increase women’s leadership and management participation within the education sector (UN Women *et al.*, 2021).

Regarding women-led businesses, the NSGE 2011–2020 aimed for 35 percent or more of by 2020. However, the actual figure fell short at 28.2 percent (including cooperatives) in 2020 (GSO, 2022b). Women-led businesses were predominantly in the trade and service sectors, with limited presence in other sectors such as construction, agriculture, and industry. These businesses often operate as small or micro enterprises, with 61.3 percent<sup>58</sup> scaling up from household businesses. The business environment remains challenging for women-led businesses, with barriers related to access to land, transparency, and

business support services. Difficulties in securing credits, particularly due to collateral requirements, also hinder the growth of many women-led businesses in production and other business activities (VCCI and AusAID, 2021).

## 2.3 Policy and legislative context, and institutional and financial arrangements related to gender equality and women’s empowerment in Viet Nam

### 2.3.1 Policy and legal framework

Viet Nam has made significant strides in updating its policy and legal framework to promote gender equality and empower women. Building on the coordination mechanisms described in the previous CGA report (FAO, 2019), this section focuses on updates to policies, legal instruments and national programmes relevant to gender issues.

Since 2018, Viet Nam has introduced several policy and legal updates to promote gender equality and empower women. Specifically, the Labour Code 2019 was amended in some articles to strengthen the prevention and prohibition of gender discrimination. The law also has new regulations to shorten the retirement age gap between men and women to ensure greater employment equality and create more opportunities for women to continue working. The Labour Code 2019 adds new policies to protect women related to maternity issues<sup>59</sup> and protect the rights of female workers.<sup>60</sup> Some provisions previously applicable to female workers have been extended to all workers.

Viet Nam is a signatory to several international conventions recognizing land as a fundamental human right, including the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) with General Comment No.26 (2022), and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which addresses women’s land and

<sup>55</sup> Of commissioners being female.

<sup>56</sup> Including chairperson/vice chairperson.

<sup>57</sup> Definition of leadership is specified in the following two documents: Conclusion No.35/KL-TW dated 05 May 2022 of the Politburo on the list of titles, leadership positions and equivalents of the political system from central to grassroots level; Circular No.9/2022/TT-BNV dated December 16, 2022 of the Ministry of Home Affairs promulgating the system of statistical indicators for the home affairs sector.

<sup>58</sup> Of women-led businesses.

<sup>59</sup> Clause 3, Article 137.

<sup>60</sup> Articles 137 and 142.

property rights. The country has also endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on the Responsible Governance of Tenure of Land, Fisheries and Forests, as well as those on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in Food Security and Nutrition. Additionally, Viet Nam is committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Article 26 of Viet Nam's Constitution guarantees equal property rights for women, and land use rights are protected by law. However, challenges remain due to cultural practices and gaps in implementation. The Land Law 2024,<sup>61</sup> effective from 1 January 2025, establishes a prohibition of gender discrimination in land management and use.<sup>62</sup> However, the law's provisions on women's land rights appear limited. While it expands land use rights for overseas Vietnamese, granting them the same rights as domestic citizens, it does not comprehensively the full spectrum of women's land rights, including their rights to own, have secure tenure, inherit, and control or make decisions regarding land. Furthermore, the law lacks clear legal remedies for violations and is currently without the necessary implementing regulations, creating uncertainty about how these provisions will be enforced.

The amended Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control 2022, effective from 1 July 2023, introduces several key changes compared to the 2007 Law. These include broadening the definition of domestic violence by adding new categories of violence, identifying additional subjects affected, and introducing new measures for prevention, protection and support.

Another important update is the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030), issued on 3 March 2021 (Resolution No. 28/NQ-CP). Its overarching goal is to narrow the gender gap, creating conditions and

opportunities for women and men to participate and enjoy equally in all areas of social life, contributing to the sustainable development. The implementation of this strategy is led by MOLISA in cooperation with other ministries.

On 28 July 2021, the National Assembly approved the investment policy for the National Target Programme on New Rural Development (NTP-NRD) for the period 2021–2025.<sup>63</sup> Compared to the previous period,<sup>64</sup> the National Target Programme for the period 2021–2025<sup>65</sup> has integrated gender equality presented in Content 06 of Component 08,<sup>66</sup> with MOLISA to preside and coordinate with the Viet Nam Women's Union to prepare the implementation guidelines. This new iteration also incorporates gender considerations into various indicators, including labour (12.1 and 12.2), education and training (14.2), health (15.1), political system and legal access (18.5). Indicator 18.5 specifically refers to gender equality and the prevention of domestic violence, gender-based violence, as well as the protection of children and vulnerable people.<sup>67, 68</sup> In May 2022, the MARD issued instructions for implementing the criteria and targets on new rural areas for the period 2021–2025.<sup>69</sup> Later, in September 2022, MOLISA provided instructions on the implementation of Content 06, focusing on ensuring gender equality, preventing gender-based violence; childcare and protection, and supporting vulnerable people.<sup>70</sup> Despite these advancements, concerns on the delayed issuance of these guidance documents to implement the programme were expressed by MARD as these may hinder local implementation and progress toward programme targets (MARD, 2020).

The National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction (NTP-SPR) for the period 2021–2025 aims to reduce the rate of poor households experiencing multidimensional poverty

<sup>61</sup> This Law was approved by the 15th National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam on 18 January 2024.

<sup>62</sup> Clause 11, Article 11 of the Land Law 2024 (Law No.31/2024/QH15).

<sup>63</sup> Resolution No.25/2021/QH15 dated 28/7/2021 of the National Assembly.

<sup>64</sup> Decision No.800/QĐ-TTg dated 04/6/2020.

<sup>65</sup> Decision No.263/QĐ-TTg dated 22/02/2022.

<sup>66</sup> Content 06 of Component 08: "Strengthen solutions to ensure gender equality and prevent violence on the basis of gender; Strengthen the care, protection of children and support vulnerable people in the fields of family and social life" (page 15).

<sup>67</sup> Decision No.318/QĐ-TTg dated 08/3/2022 on the issuance of the national criteria for new rural communes and set of national criteria for enhanced new rural communes for the period 2021–2025. This indicator (18.5) is one of the requirements that a commune need to achieve to be approved as a new rural commune. It is a component of the criteria no. 18 on Political system and Legal access in the NTP-NRD.

<sup>68</sup> Indicators and targets with of gender considerations include the participation of female officials in the Commune-level Party, a quota of 30 percent on female participation in cooperatives and projects, the elimination of child or forced marriage, the provision of reliable shelters for victims of gender-based violence and the support of child protection workers at the commune level, among others.

<sup>69</sup> Decision No.1680/QĐ-BNN-VPDP dated 11/5/2022.

<sup>70</sup> Decree No.3860/LĐTBXH-BĐG 2022 dated 29/9/2022.

annually by 1.0–1.5 percent, and the poverty rate among ethnic minority households by over 3.0 percent per year. At the same time, it also targets a 4–5 percent annual poverty reduction among disadvantaged communes and districts, including coastal and island areas.<sup>71</sup> While this programme identifies women from poor households, as well as pregnant and lactating women as priority beneficiaries,<sup>72</sup> implementation largely rests with government agencies. Moreover, the programme lacks specific indicators to measure progress on gender equality and a report by UN Women (2021c) highlights recommendations to further strengthen gender mainstreaming in these initiatives and programmes' criteria system (UN Women, 2021c).

On 28 March 2023, the Prime Minister issued the "National Action Plan to transform a transparent, responsible and sustainable food system in Viet Nam until 2030" (Decision No.300/QD-TTgw). The plan prioritizes increasing producer revenue, guaranteeing consumer food safety, and ensuring that all subjects, particularly those living in disadvantaged areas and vulnerable groups, and enhancing access to healthy food in all circumstances. Its overarching goal is to change the food system to one that is transparent, accountable, and sustainable based on local advantages; to firmly ensure national food security and nutrition; to raise people's standard of living and income; to prevent and control epidemics and natural disasters; to protect the environment and respond to climate change; and contribute to the attainment of the 2030 sustainable development goals. Nevertheless, gender issues are not explicitly addressed in the plan.

In line with the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2021–2030, various provinces, cities, ministries and branches have developed plans to implement this national strategy. For example, the Ministry of Health issued Decision No.5658/QD-BYT,<sup>73</sup> outlining a plan to advance gender equality in the health sector for the period 2021–2030. While this plan represents a step forward in addressing gender equality, its focus on staffing risks to overlook broader gender-related issues in the health sector.

<sup>71</sup> Decision No.90/QD-TTg dated 18/10/2022.

<sup>72</sup> Key projects that address these groups include Project 2 (diversifying livelihoods, developing poverty reduction models), Project 3 (supporting production development, improving nutrition), and Project 7 (capacity building and monitoring and evaluating the Programme – focusing on improving capacity building for female officials).

<sup>73</sup> Dated 11 December 2021.

### 2.3.2 Institutional and financial arrangements

The Country Gender Assessment in Agriculture and the Rural Sector in Viet Nam 2019 already outlines the government mechanism for gender equality in section 3.1 of the report (FAO, 2019). Consequently, this section does not delve into institutional arrangements for gender equality activities, but instead focuses on public financial arrangements in the country.

The 2015 amendments to the National Budget Law introduced the principle of promoting gender equality in national budget expenditures, bringing about important incremental changes. However, implementing these changes has proven to be challenging to date, attributing to various factors such as a lack of planning and budgeting processes, tools and guidelines, limited understanding of gender budgeting approaches, and a scarcity of sex-disaggregated data. Notably, gender equality expenditures have not been adequately tracked and labelled in financial reports (United Nations Viet Nam, 2021; UN Women, 2021b).

As Viet Nam's status shifts away from being a low-income country, its access to preferential financial resources from developed countries, international organizations and resource partners is gradually narrowing. Therefore, funding for gender equality and women's advancement primarily relies on state budget sources and other domestic financial resources. Circular No.191/2009/TT-BTC dated 1 October 2009, issued by the Ministry of Finance, provides guidance on the management and use of budget for gender equality and activities for the advancement of women. In general, currently available budget sources for gender equality include:

1. State budget
2. Developed governments and international organizations/foundations
3. Social organizations – local non-governmental organizations

However, funding from developed governments, international organizations, and social organizations typically support small, model-based development programmes or projects.

In practice, funding for gender equality, both in general and within specific programmes and strategies, is integrated into the regular budget of ministries, industries and provinces, following the decentralized state budget management system. As previously mentioned, limitations exist in statistics and reporting on public funding due to the absence of a detailed expenditure content for gender equality activities within the state budget index system and the local reporting forms.

All of the National Target Programmes include gender mainstreaming initiatives, with funding starting from 2022. Examples include:

- Project 8<sup>74</sup> on gender equality is part of the National Target Programme for Socio-Economic Development of Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas for the period 2021–2030. It mobilizes central and local budgets to implementing gender equality and solving critical concerns for women and children during the 2021–2025-time frame.
- The National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction for 2021–2025 includes gender-focused initiatives, such as Sub-projects 2<sup>75</sup> and Project 6<sup>76</sup> alongside other topics.
- The National Target Program on New Rural Development Budgets which allocated budget for supporting gender equality through the implementation of content 06 of component 08.<sup>77</sup> However, specific funding allocation for these components have not yet been clearly defined.

Financial resources for gender equality are primarily integrated into national target programmes, with no independent funding has been allocated specifically for this purpose. Consequently, budget allocations for gender-related activities have fallen short, with disbursements lagging behind approved plans. For example, in the period 2016–2020, the government approved a total budget of 180 billion VND for gender equality plans and programmes, but only 103 billion VND (equal to 57 percent of the total) were disbursed over five years.

In addition, gender equality issues are primarily integrated into plans rather than specified explicitly or separately in the financial and budget planning framework. In the context of the 5-year Financial Plan 2021–2025, gender equality is not explicitly stated as a priority area for resource allocation but is considered indirectly addressed through expenditures in sectors like health care and education. The 2015 Budget Law specifies regular budget plans for ministries, ministerial-level organizations, and other government agencies across 13 sectors.<sup>78</sup> However, gender equality is not included as one of these sectors (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam. 2023).

<sup>74</sup> Project on “Implementing gender equality and solving urgent problems for women and children”.

<sup>75</sup> Sub-project 2: Communication on multidimensional poverty reduction.

<sup>76</sup> Project 6: Communication and information poverty reduction.

<sup>77</sup> Approved by the Prime Minister on 22 February 2022, with Decision No.263/QĐ-TTg on 22 February 2022.

<sup>78</sup> National Defense; Security, order, and social safety; Education, training and vocational education; Science and technology; Health, population and family; Culture and information; Sports; Environmental protection; Economic activities; Activities of state management agencies, public service units, political organizations and socio-political organizations; Other tasks, programmes and projects as prescribed by law.

# 3

## GENDER ANALYSIS OF THE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIVELIHOOD



### 3.1 Gender mainstreaming in food security and nutrition, agriculture and rural development policies, strategies and investment plans

Resolution No.19-NQ/TW<sup>79</sup> by the 13<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee focuses on enhancing the living standards of farming households. It also includes measures to put into practice “gender equality policies, improving the capacity and position of women in rural areas, preventing and combating abuse of women and children”.<sup>80</sup> To implement this resolution, the Government issued Resolution No.26/NQ-CP;<sup>81</sup> one of the tasks to implement this Resolution is to develop and implement a project supporting women’s startups for the period 2026–2035. This responsibility is assigned to the Viet Nam Women’s Union. Additionally, several other programmes, projects documents integrating gender considerations, such as the National Target Programme on New Rural Development for the period 2026–2030, are being implemented by various ministries, including MARD, the Ministry of Information and Communications (MOIC), the MOLISA, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA), and the MOET, depending on the sector.

Aiming to improve the nutritional status of individuals across demographic and geographical regions, the Prime Minister issued Decision No.02/QD-TTg dated 5 January 2022, endorsing the National Strategy on Nutrition for the period 2021–2030, and with a vision to 2045. This strategy aims to alleviate the burden of diseases, while improving the health and well-being of the population. Priority is given to disadvantage groups, ethnic minorities, mothers and young children.

Building upon this national strategy, the Ministry of Health issued Decision No.1294/QD-BYT on 19 May 2022, which lays out the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Strategy on Nutrition until 2025. This decision was based on the assessment results of the National Strategy on Nutrition’s performance from 2011 to 2020. While Viet Nam has made significant strides in reducing maternal and child malnutrition; it has not yet fully met its objectives for addressing micronutrient deficiencies, reducing adult overweight and obesity, or improving various indicators linked to strengthening the country’s capacity to implement the Strategy.

In terms of food security, the Politburo published Conclusion No.81-KL/TW on 29 July 2020, outlining three main objectives for the year 2030. These objectives pertain agricultural land use, rice production, food supply, improving farmers’ livelihoods and income, and the fulfilment of nutritional requirements by increasing food consumption and lowering the incidence of malnutrition and obesity among children under five.

Furthermore, to implement Conclusion No.81-KL/TW of the Politburo, the Prime Minister issued Decision No.1975/QD-TTg dated 2 December 2020 on promulgating the action plan. The Government also issued Resolution No.34/NQ-CP on ensuring national food security until 2030, concretizing the contents of Conclusion No.81-KL/TW and identifying 10 main solutions and tasks, including:

1. Promote development and restructuring of food production, linked to the market
2. Invest in developing infrastructure to serve food production
3. Strengthen research, application, and transfer of science and technology in food production, preservation, and processing
4. Training to improve the quality of human resources
5. Innovate forms of food production organization
6. Innovate policy mechanisms to ensure national food security
7. Develop the circulation system, increase food access for people anytime, anywhere
8. Develop information and communication systems on national food security
9. Improve the efficiency of resource use, protect the environment, improve the ability to adapt to climate change, and prevent natural disasters
10. Promote international cooperation in the field of food security

The above documents are generally gender-neutral in their language, except for the National Strategy on Nutrition, which prioritizes children and women of reproductive age, especially mothers. The Ministry of Health’s action plan also integrates nutrition programmes and projects into the National Target Programmes on Sustainable Poverty Reduction,

<sup>79</sup> Dated 16 June 2022.

<sup>80</sup> Resolution No.19-NQ/TU’ dated 26/6/2022 of the Central Party Committee XIII.

<sup>81</sup> Dated 27 February 2023.

New Rural Development, and Socio-economic Development in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas. In addition, the Ministry of Health has also developed and is implementing programmes related to nutrition for mothers and children such as “Nutrition care for the first 1 000 days of life to prevent maternal and child malnutrition, improve Vietnamese people’s stature” by 2025, the overall project to “develop Vietnamese people’s physical strength and stature 2011–2030”.

Moreover, the National Action Programme “Zero Hunger Programme” in Viet Nam by 2025 was issued by the Prime Minister of Viet Nam with Decision 712/QĐ-TTg dated 12 June 2018. Aligned with SDGs of eradicating hunger, ensuring food security, improving nutrition and developing sustainable agriculture, this programme has been implemented under the National Target Programme on Sustainable Poverty Reduction. It seeks to ensure enough food and nutrition to improve the physical condition, intelligence, and stature of Vietnamese people, a commitment to the objectives under sustainable development goal number 2 (SDG2).<sup>82</sup> Some activities in this Programme specifically target pregnant women and women of childbearing age, raising children under 2 years old.

The Agricultural Vocational Training Plan for Rural Workers for the period 2022–2025 approved by the MARD in September 2022<sup>83</sup> aims to build a qualified and skilled rural workforce to meet the new socio-economic development requirements. Specifically, the programme’s objectives are to provide vocational training for 910 400 rural agricultural workers to increase the rate of trained workers with degrees and certificates. Training subjects focus on agricultural cooperative managers and rural workers in difficult areas and ethnic minority areas. Publicly available information does not specify enrolment criteria or address challenges for women to benefit from this programme. However, the content of this document does not mention gender equality, nor does it contain gender indicators or targets.

## 3.2 Gender inequalities in the context of agriculture and rural development and food security and nutrition

### 3.2.1 Division of labour in agricultural production and gender roles

The gender division of labour in agricultural production in Viet Nam differs between regions and depends on family circumstances. Generally, men remain responsible for and control activities that bring economic benefits to the family. In large-scale rice production areas, where mechanization is prevalent, income from rice cultivation plays an important role in the total household income. For example, in Bac Lieu, men participate mainly in rice production activities, focusing on decision-making on input materials and investment while women participate more in livestock activities. On the contrary, in areas where agricultural production accounts for a small proportion of total family income and has a high rate of male migration such as in the North and Central regions, women participate more in agricultural production (Tran *et al.*, 2021).

Even so, the tasks performed by women and men in agricultural production are generally different. Men often undertake work that is considered heavy, and hazardous such as pumping water, hoeing soil, spraying pesticides or transporting products. These are also jobs that take less time, and they require more technical skills. Even in cases where men work far away, women still consult their husbands about tasks related to farming techniques. Differently, women are responsible for tasks that are considered light and require a level of meticulousness and dexterity. These also tend to be more routine tasks such as transplanting, weeding and cutting branches (IFGS and UN Women, 2016; UN Women, 2021a).

In the production process, men make most of the decisions in key stages such as investment and household livelihood transformation. Results from a survey in the Mekong Delta in 2019 show that 53.5 percent of respondents feel that the husband is the one who makes investment decisions to buy land, agricultural materials, and do business. This rate is much higher than those of respondents who think that the wife has a decisive role (8.1 percent) and it is a joint decision by both husband and wife (26.7 percent).

<sup>82</sup> Decision No.712/QĐ-TTg dated 12/6/2018.

<sup>83</sup> Decision No.3685/QĐ-BNN-KTHT dated 29/9/2022.

**Table 9. Decision maker on the household production in the Mekong Delta (%)**

	Both	Husband	Wife
Investing in land, agricultural material	26.7	53.5	8.1
Livelihood transform	31.0	47.6	9.5
Land management	51.1	36.9	3.6
Loans for production management	26.0	40.3	20.8
Seed, fertilizer and capital management	9.3	70.7	9.3

Source: IPSARD, 2020.

Regarding livelihood diversification, business and generating income transformation, the husbands were perceived to be the main decision-makers (47.6 percent) while 31 percent of respondents believed it is a joint decision, compared to 9.5 percent who consider that these are tasks for the wives (see Table 9). The husbands also control over household's property resources, making decisions on loans, seed and fertilizer management while half of respondents answered that their lands are managed jointly by husband and wife (IPSARD, 2020).

The gender division of labour in household agricultural production has undergone certain changes due to the influence of agricultural mechanization and industrialization. The application of machinery in agricultural production has helped save women's time and effort in some stages of the value chains. For example, in rice production, women are the main workforce in rice transplanting and harvesting but are gradually being replaced by the widespread application of machinery such as seeders or harvesters (Tran *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, women also have better control over the production process and observe a reduction of their dependence on the male members of the family for heavy work. However, men still dominate jobs that involve the use machinery and technology (UN Women, 2021a).

Women also spend more time doing housework than men. On average, women spend twice as much time performing unpaid care activities for their families compared to men. Data from 2019 revealed that women devote 20.2 hours per week on unpaid care work while men only devote 10.7 hours per week (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). Increasing women's engagement in agricultural activities may therefore lead to a heavier burden if not done with gender

considerations, as stereotypes and prejudices still persist, viewing household chores as women's duties (Ngo Quoc Dung and Nguyen Van Dai, 2019). Nonetheless, variations in the engagement in care activities may exist across different income segments and level of urbanization (UN Women, 2016).

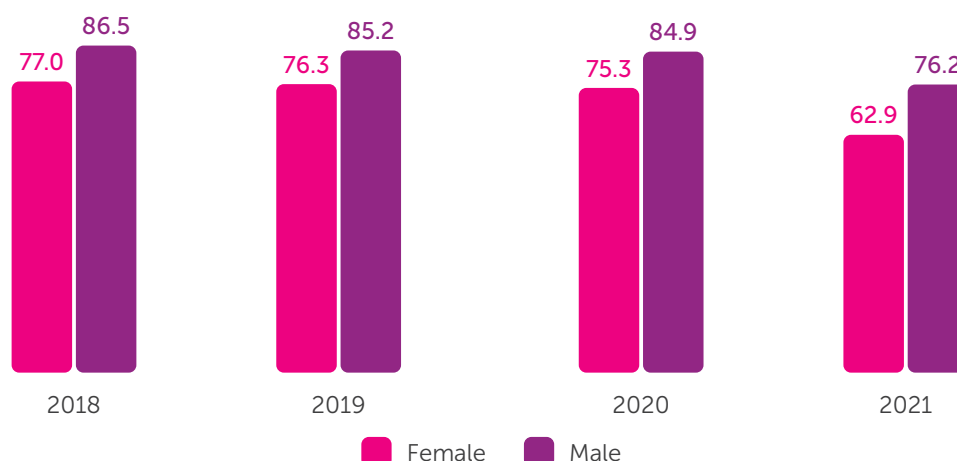
### 3.2.2 Agricultural and rural employment, labour force participation and rural incomes

Viet Nam's economic structure has undergone rapid changes during its development process, leading to shifts in the labour force. While the majority of Viet Nam's labour force was historically concentrated in the agricultural sector, the proportion of employment in agriculture has gradually decreased as workers increasingly transition to the industry and service sectors (ILO, 2021b; UN Women *et al.*, 2021; GSO, 2021a).

In 2020, the agricultural sector accounted approximately for 14 percent of the national GDP and employed 33.1 percent of the workers operating in agriculture, forestry and fishery. This rate dropped to 29.1 percent in 2021 after GSO adjusted the concept of employment and excluded self-production and self-consumption from employment statistics (GSO, 2022c).

According to the Labour Force Survey 2019, 52 percent of agricultural workers were women, compared to 48 percent men (GSO, 2021e). Thus, a significant proportion of female workers still work in the agricultural sector and face many challenges transitioning to non-agricultural sectors (UN Women, 2021c). The proportion of women in agriculture has consistently been higher than that of men, but has steadily decreased for both women and men over

Figure 5. Labour force participation rate of persons aged 15 and older in rural areas by sex 2018–2021



Source: GSO, LFS 2018–2021.

recent years (GSO, 2022d). This clearly shows a broader decline in labour participation within the agricultural sector, particularly among women.<sup>84</sup>

In rural areas, 62.9 percent of women aged 15 and older participated in the labour force in 2021, compared to 77.8 percent of men — a gap of nearly 15 percentage points. This rate is lowest in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas (57.7 percent), and highest in the Central Highlands (80.6 percent). Figure 5 shows the labour force participation of people aged 15 and older in rural areas disaggregated by sex between 2018 and 2021. Both female and male employment rates declined gradually over this period, with a drop in 2021. The decline was more pronounced for women compared to men.

Over this period,<sup>85</sup> the labour participation rate of women has always been lower compared to that of men. The difference was widest in 2021 with 13.3 percentage points. This raises an issue of job security for rural workers, especially women when the proportion of women engaging as family workers is much higher than that of men. If “self-employed workers” and “family workers” were taken into account, the proportion of employed female workers in rural areas would account for 58 percent compared to 48.3 percent for men (LFS, 2021). This type of employment, however, is often unstable and does not benefit from social insurance.

Figure 6 shows that the employment rate of female workers aged 15 years and older in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, which remained consistently lower than that of men from 2018 to 2021, across both rural areas and overall. Between 2018 and 2019, employment rates for both female and male workers in these sectors gradually declined. However, in 2020, rates began to increase again, likely influenced by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused widespread job losses in non-agricultural sectors, prompting a shift back to the primary sector. This trend was especially observed in rural areas.

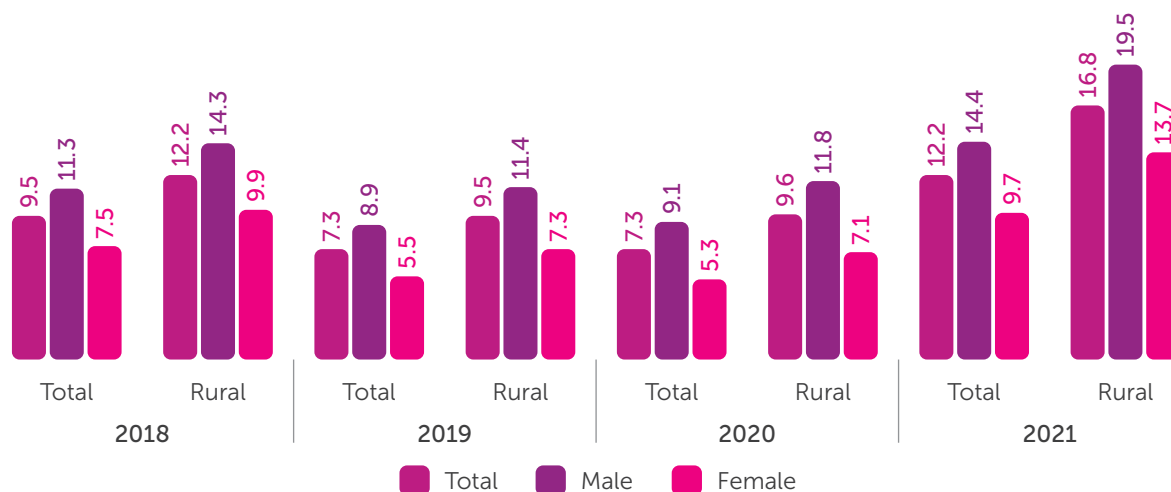
Specifically, rural women saw a decrease in 2.6 percentage points between 2018 and 2019, slightly less than the 2.9 percentage point decline for rural men. In 2019 to 2020, women’s employment in rural areas decreased by an additional 0.2 percentage points, while men experienced a slight increase of 0.4 percentage points. Between 2020 and 2021, agricultural employment rebounded, with women’s employment in rural areas rising by 6.6 percentage points and 7.7 percentage points for men, partly due to the pandemic-induced shifts.

It is crucial to consider that these trends, while suggesting a direct pandemic impact, might also be influenced by other factors such as agricultural policy changes, market demand and technological advances. Still, the gender-specific differences in rebound rates suggest potential disparities in access to agricultural employment, meriting further investigation into the economic roles and opportunities available to men and women in rural settings.

<sup>84</sup> See Target 2, Objective 2 of the NSGE.

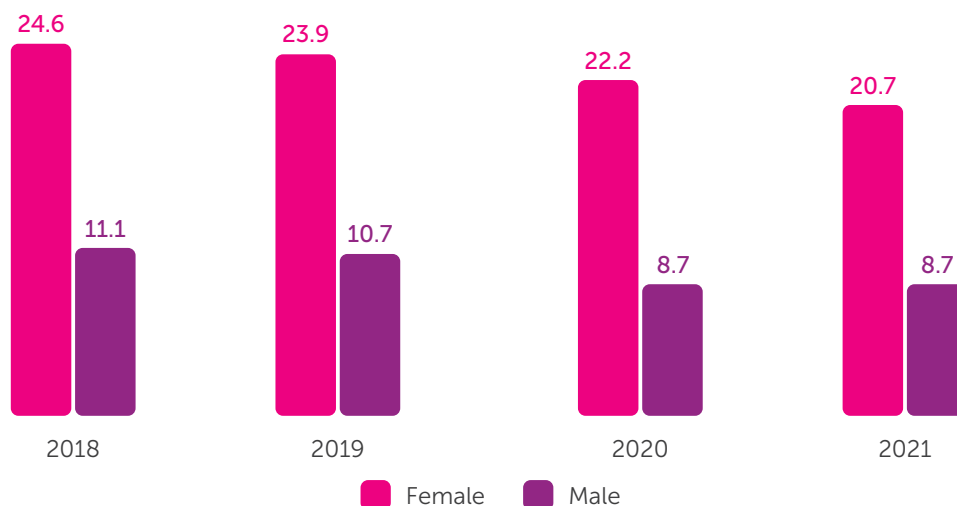
<sup>85</sup> 2018–2021.

Figure 6. Employed population rate of persons aged 15 and older as skilled agricultural, forestry and fisheries workers 2018–2021 (%)



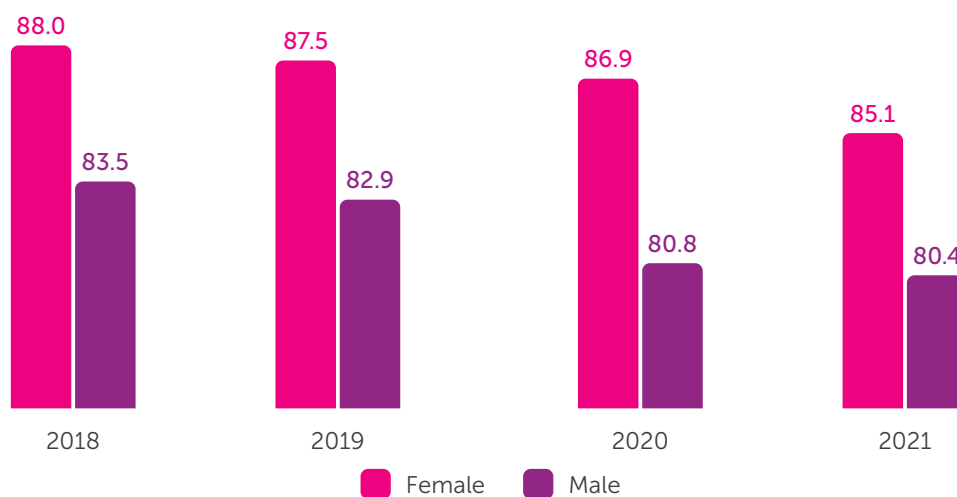
Source: GSO, LFS 2018–2021.

Figure 7. Rate of labour aged 15 and older in rural areas working as unpaid family workers by sex 2018–2021 (%)



Source: GSO, LFS 2018–2021.

Figure 8. Rate of population aged 15 and older without technical and professional qualifications in rural areas by sex 2018–2021 (%)



Source: GSO, LFS 2018–2021.

Figure 7 shows that over the four years, the proportion of unpaid family workers in rural areas displayed a steady decline for women and men, although women consistently have higher participation as unpaid family workers. This suggests enduring gender disparities in the distribution of unpaid family labour.

In addition, the proportion of workers aged 15 and older in rural areas without technical and professional qualifications<sup>86</sup> is higher among female workers than that of men (85.1 percent versus 80.4 percent, respectively, in 2021). Figure 8 shows that these rates have decreased each year, indicating some improvements in technical and professional training activities for workers, but the gender gap has remained nearly the same, except for 2020.

In 2021, out of a total of 49 072 000 employed people, 5 993 700 individuals were classified as skilled workers in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. Among these, 37 percent were female skilled workers. Furthermore, of all employed female skilled workers, 9.4 percent engage in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, compared to 14.4 percent of men (GSO, 2022c).

One of the barriers to workforce participation for rural women is the burden of unpaid housework and family care. According to data from the LFS in 2021 (GSO, 2022c), on average, women in rural areas spend 17 hours per week on these jobs, which is twice as much as men who spend 8.4 hours per week. In particular, women aged 25-39 years old spend between 21.2 and 23.2 hours per week on unpaid housework and family care, while men in this same age group spend significantly less, ranging from 8.6 to 11.5 hours per week.

Table 10 reveals the difference in average monthly earnings between male and female wage workers in the agricultural sector. From 2018 to 2021, men consistently earned more than women. This gap<sup>87</sup> remained relatively steady at around 28 percent between 2018 and 2020, but widened to 31.1 percent in 2021.

### 3.2.3 Women-led entrepreneurs and cooperatives

Women-owned enterprises have made great contributions to economic growth and poverty reduction. Enhancing women's economic empowerment, boosting women's leadership position and promoting women's active participation in the economy are some of the driving forces for sustainable and inclusive development. As of September 2022, the number of women-owned businesses in Viet Nam accounts for about 29.8 percent of the number of operating businesses.<sup>88</sup> Figure 9 shows that between 2018 and 2021, women represented less than a quarter of business owners, decreasing to 22.2 percent in 2021. These figures show that the share of women-led enterprises in the economy is still relatively small and has not yet reached the targets outlined in the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period between 2011 and 2020.

In terms of economic sectors, data from the Department of Business Registration Management in 2022 indicates that there are only 3 146 businesses that are owned by women in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries industry, accounting for 1.19 percent of the total. This figure reflects broader challenges in the sector. Corporations tend to show limited interest in investing in agriculture due to the numerous risks associated with it, including poor rates of return, challenging land acquisition, limited financial resources, and complex legislative processes. Furthermore, the dominance of small-scale agricultural production in Viet Nam results in fragmented and scattered landholdings. This fragmentation not only makes it difficult to consolidate land for larger, more efficient operations but also challenges the access of essential infrastructure, as dispersed plots increase the costs and logistical challenges for building roads, irrigation systems and storage facilities (Dau, A.T. *et al.*, 2022).

The challenges faced by women business owners extend beyond agriculture to broader economic activities. Most women-owned businesses are small or micro-scale enterprises, often originating from household businesses that serve primarily domestic markets. Data, in Figure 10, further reveals that as the

<sup>86</sup> As defined by GSO, technical and professional qualifications include primary, secondary, college, university, and higher level.

<sup>87</sup> Gender pay gap is defined as  $(E_m - E_w)/E_m$ , where  $E_m$  is the average monthly earnings for men and  $E_w$  is the average monthly earnings for women.

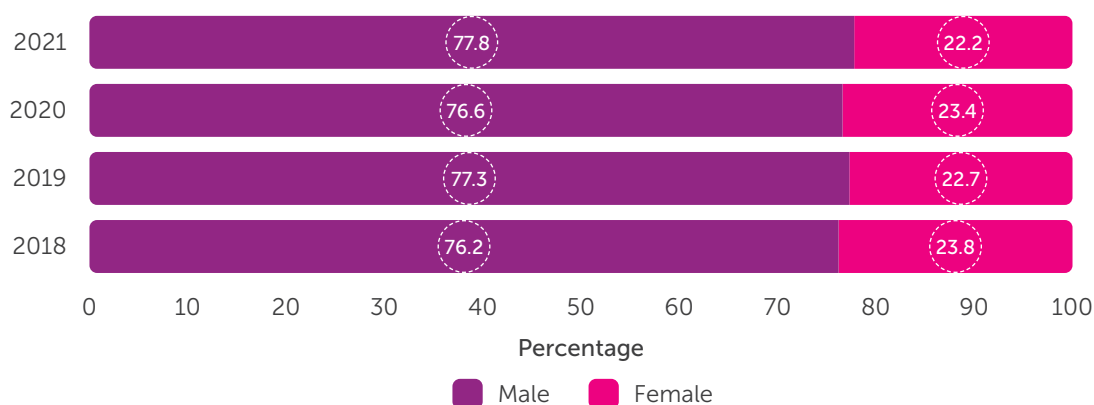
<sup>88</sup> Data from Department of Business Registration – Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2022.

Table 10. Average monthly earnings of wage workers in the agriculture sector (in VND thousands)

	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	3 870	4 514	4 291	4 701
Men	4 288	5 002	4 737	5 288
Women	3 107	3 593	3 431	3 643
Gap (%)	27,5	28,2	27,6	31,1

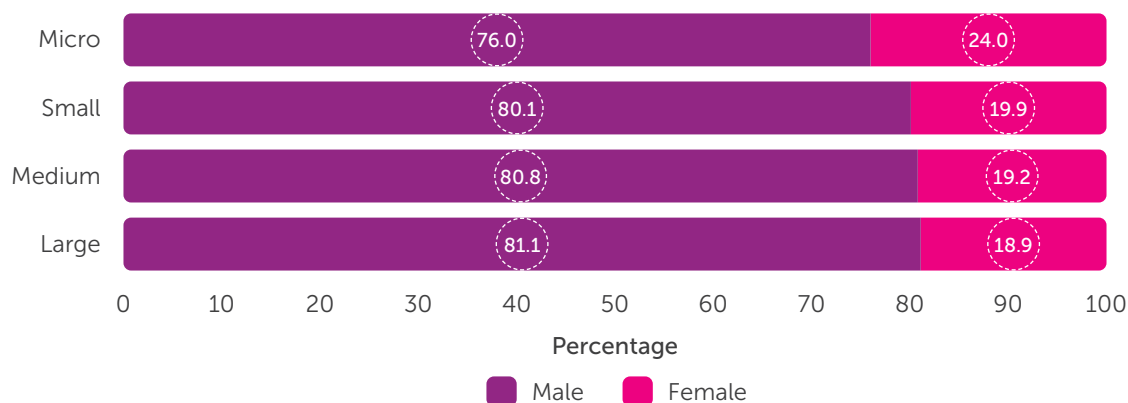
Source: Calculating from LFS 2018–2021 data.

Figure 9. Percentage of businesses by sex of business owners in the PCI survey 2018–2021



Source: VCCI-USAID, PCI Survey 2011–2021.

Figure 10. Labour size by sex of business owners in Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) 2021



Source: VCCI-USAID, PCI Survey 2011–2021.

scale of businesses increases, the share of women as business owners steadily declines — from 24 percent in micro-enterprises to 18.9 percent in large businesses. This pattern underscores the systemic barriers women face in scaling their businesses, including difficulties in accessing financial capital, finding customers, navigating market

volatility, and hiring qualified staff. The lack of access to finance and credit is particularly pronounced, as many women-owned firms fail to meet loan requirements due to a lack of collateral, weak financial potential, and limited proven profitability, leaving banks cautious in lending capital to avoid debt (Dau A.T. *et al.*, 2022).

Discriminatory social norms, expectations and unequal power relations continue to exert pressure on women entrepreneurs in Viet Nam, with traditional and patriarchal values reinforcing women's dependence on men. Women often find obstacles pertaining to morals, social norms, and biases, which impede their ability to concentrate on their businesses and grow their enterprises. Because they are often expected to spend more time than men on children, family responsibilities and household tasks, women-led businesses are at a disadvantage.

In response, the Vietnamese Government has developed policies to support women-owned businesses, including the Law on Support for Small and Medium Enterprises 2017 and Decree 80/2021/ND-CP, which details and guides the implementation of several articles of the Law on Support for Small and Medium Enterprises 2017. These supports include priority assistance, consulting, direct training on business start-up and corporate governance, and direct training support for small and medium-sized enterprises in the fields of production and processing. Additionally, there are initiatives such as the project on supporting women's startup during the period 2017–2025, implemented by the Viet Nam Women's Union, and Project 3 in the National Target Programme on socio-economic development for ethnic minority and mountainous areas.

The collective economy and cooperatives are important economic components of Viet Nam, serving as a driving force for growth, innovation and creativity. However, their agricultural production and business activities often have poor profitability and are fraught with risk, particularly in the context of climate change. In Viet Nam there are over 29 000 cooperatives, with agricultural cooperatives accounting for almost 67 percent of the total. Approximately 3.4 million people work in agricultural cooperatives; with households making up 84 percent of the membership, the remaining members are individuals, organizations and corporations. Most cooperatives members are family farmers with limited size and production capacities.

Cooperatives operate in many fields, making them well-suited to the abilities and needs of women looking to start a business and increase their income.

Women's participation in cooperatives is one of the indicators<sup>89</sup> in the National Target Programme on New Rural Development, which sets a target that at least 30 percent of women participate in cooperatives, poverty reduction projects, and production models linked to key products or rural economic development initiatives<sup>90</sup> that combine economic, cultural and environmental values.<sup>91</sup> Currently, about 50 percent of workers in cooperatives are women, making up 80 percent of the workforce in agricultural cooperatives (Viet Nam Communist Party Online News, 2023).

Moreover, about 10 percent of cooperatives across sectors are run by women, and many of these have demonstrated numerous advantages and strengths, by significantly enhancing the production of local goods and representing 39 percent of OCOP product owners. In early 2023, the Prime Minister of Viet Nam issued Decision No.01/QĐ-TTg dated 3 January 2023, approving the project for "supporting cooperatives with women participating in management, creating jobs for female workers until 2030". This initiative aims to: 1) develop, consolidate and improve the effectiveness of cooperatives managed and operated by women, creating more jobs for female workers; 2) support and improve the material and spiritual life of members and workers in cooperatives; 3) raise awareness of members and women about the Party's guidelines and policies and the State's laws on the development of the market economy and cooperatives; 4) promote the internal strength, spirit of cooperation and creative entrepreneurship of members and women; and 5) contribute to achieving the goals of socio-economic development, international integration and gender equality.

### 3.2.4 Gender and forestry

In forestry, women play an important role as a labour force across three sub-sectors: forestry production, forest product processing and furniture manufacturing related to forest products. Jobs created from these three sub-sectors account for 3.5 percent of Viet Nam's workforce. Non-timber forest products (NTFPs) represent an important source of income and food security for forest-dependent communities. NTFPs indeed have the potential to be used as "daily net" to meet

<sup>89</sup> Indicator 18.5.

<sup>90</sup> Integrating "multi-values".

<sup>91</sup> Decision No.757/QĐ-LĐTBXH dated 18 Aug 2022.

immediate household needs as well as a “safety net” during unforeseen crises (Shackleton and Shackleton, 2004). Still, attaining a balance between forest conservation efforts and livelihoods opportunities for local communities is a complex challenge, where gender dynamics play a crucial but often overlooked role (Nguyen T.H.V., 2018).

Data for the year 2022 reveal varying proportions of female participation in this sector, with the lowest share of female workers in furniture production at 30 percent, followed by 37 percent in the forestry production sector, and the highest representation in the forest product processing sub-sector with 53 percent of workers being women (Shanks and Hoang T.H., 2023). Despite the relatively high proportion of female workers in the forest product processing sub-sector, a significant majority of them work in small household businesses or are self-employed, accounting for 79 percent compared to 68 percent of men.

Female wage workers in forestry sub-sectors tend to be fewer than their male counterparts (except in furniture production). Conversely, in all three sub-sectors, women dominate in unpaid family work, especially in forestry production, where 28.6 percent of women engage in such work, as opposed to 9.3 percent of men (Shanks and Hoang T.H., 2023). This imbalance raises concerns about the repercussions and sustainability of these employment arrangements. Women tend to occupy roles involving tasks that do not typically require advanced skills, while men are more prevalent in machinery operating roles, aligning with the broader patterns observed in agricultural production.

When it comes to income disparities, female wage workers in forestry sub-sectors generally get lower average wages than men, especially in forest product processing. Additionally, the percentage of women who have received vocational training remains significantly lower than men (Shanks and Hoang T.H., 2023). Moreover, in the context of land ownership, men are often the sole owners of land, and the share

of men as sole owner of cropland (including forestry land) is three times higher than that of women (Nguyen T.L.G., 2023).

In exploitation of natural forest products, women are often responsible for activities that do not require technical skills or physical strength. They often assume the responsibility of collecting firewood, wild vegetables and fruits, cutting and gathering animal feed and grazing while men are mainly responsible for activities that use technology and require physical strength such as hunting large mammals and birds, collecting honey, timber and bamboo. This results in women being affected by the Payment for Forest Environment Services (PFES)<sup>92</sup> operational regulations such as restrictions on forest use, especially the collection of firewood and non-timber forest products, which in turn, affects women who are most dependent on these products (Nguyen T.L.G., 2023).

### 3.2.5 Gender and resilience to climate change and natural disasters

In terms of policy, the National Target Program to Respond to Climate Change 2008<sup>93</sup> and the National Strategy on Climate Change 2011<sup>94</sup> only mentioned gender equality in the guiding principle and specific objectives section, respectively. In the National Plan to Respond to Climate Change for the period 2021–2030, with a vision to 2050,<sup>95</sup> gender equality is included in the second group of solutions and tasks<sup>96</sup> and is outlined in the specific tasks for implementation. The most recent policy, the National Strategy on Climate Change for the period up to 2050,<sup>97</sup> references gender equality more explicitly in the tasks and solutions section. Viet Nam also reaffirms its commitment to gender mainstreaming and women’s empowerment in climate change response through the 2022 update of the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), where gender equality is integrated throughout (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2022). However, these policies lack detailed instructions for implementing gender equality measures, and there is no system of measurement and monitoring indicators.

<sup>92</sup> PFES is an innovation policy in forest resource management in Viet Nam applied since 2011 nationwide.

<sup>93</sup> Decision No.158/2008/QĐ-TTg dated 02 Dec 2008.

<sup>94</sup> Decision No.2139/QĐ-TTg dated 05 Dec 2011.

<sup>95</sup> Decision No.1055/QĐ-TTg dated 20 July 2020.

<sup>96</sup> “Improve awareness and knowledge about climate change and natural disasters at all levels of government, social organizations and communities; Strengthen capacity, develop female human resources, promote gender equality in responding to climate change” (page 6).

<sup>97</sup> Decision No.896/QĐ-TTg dated 26 July 2022.

Climate change and natural disasters have negative impacts on agricultural production and food security, two areas with a large participation of women. Both women and men are affected by climate change and natural disasters. However, women are often subject to greater impacts due to their limited access to information, poor health, and limited participation in decision-making in the community. With the trend of feminization of agriculture due to the migration of men to urban areas in search of job opportunities, any impact of climate change on the agricultural sector will further affect women's lives (Nguyen S.L., 2021). It is therefore important to recognize that gender-based inequalities in agrifood systems, as analysed through this assessment, may be exacerbated in the context of negative impacts of climate change and that, at the same time, these inequalities can also pose a challenge in the adoption of effective mitigation and adaptive measures by rural women.

One of the negative impacts of climate change and natural disasters that can affect women, especially in rural areas, is water insecurity. While climate change has far-reaching effects on a diverse range of individuals, the impact is particularly pronounced for women, especially ethnic minority, and impoverished women, when it comes to clean water scarcity. Women are often responsible for collecting clean water to serve their family needs. Water fetching is traditionally considered a household chore and often requires traveling long distances. MICS 2021 survey results show that, in households without a water source, female members aged 15 years and older tend to go to fetch water for the family more than male members (34.2 percent versus 23.6 percent) and this is similar in the cases of rural areas (34 percent versus 25.4 percent). In the context of climate change and natural disasters, clean water sources may become scarcer, making this job more laborious for them, especially for those who work in small scale farming (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). In addition, lack of clean water can lead to health risks for both women and men. However, women, in particular rural women, are often disproportionately impacted by the inability to access sanitary water sources since they frequently come into contact with it through household chores and productive activities. Gender integration in water management in Viet Nam still has many limitations, and the National Strategy for Clean

Water Supply and Rural Sanitation to 2030, vision to 2045<sup>98</sup> does not mention gender considerations in the general objectives or specific objectives of the strategy (Nguyen S.L., 2021).

### 3.2.6 Gender-based violence

At present, there are two national surveys on domestic violence against women in Viet Nam. The first national survey was carried out in 2010 with financial and technical support from WHO and UNFPA implemented by the GSO. The results show that 58 percent of ever-married women have experienced physical, sexual or mental violence by a husband or partner in their lifetime and 27 percent have experienced at least one of the above three types of violence (physical, sexual or mental) in the past 12 months. The proportion of women in rural areas who have experienced violence is higher than that of women in urban areas<sup>99</sup> (GSO, 2010).

According to the results of the National Survey Report on Violence Against Women in Viet Nam 2019, 62.9 percent of women who have ever had a husband or partner experienced at least one type of violence<sup>100</sup> in their lifetime and nearly 32 percent of women have experienced at least one type of violence in the past 12 months. 34.1 percent of women in rural areas were victims of physical and/or sexual violence by a husband or partner in their lifetime compared to 27.8 percent of women in urban areas. Additionally, the proportion of rural women who have been victims of this form of violence in the past 12 months is also higher than that of urban women, accounting for 10 percent and 6.8 percent respectively (MOLISA *et al.*, 2020). Violence against women leads to negative effects on women's health, but it also affects children, women's economic status, employment and labour productivity.

In this context, the Government of Viet Nam issued Decision No.235/QD-TTg on 14 February 2015 approving the project on "Reducing domestic violence in rural areas of Viet Nam in the period 2015–2020". Farmer's Union was assigned to implement this project. The Project's activities for the period 2015–2021 have been implemented in 70 percent of the communes and wards nationwide, which have led to changes in the awareness of domestic violence prevention and control, particularly among male farmers. At the same time,

<sup>98</sup> Decision No.1978/QD-TTg of the Prime Minister dated 24/11/2021.

<sup>99</sup> In both lifetime and within the past 12 months.

<sup>100</sup> Including all five types of violence: physical violence, sexual violence, emotional violence, controlling behaviours, and economic violence.

it also helped women in rural areas of Viet Nam to be more aware of their rights and denounce acts of domestic violence (Department of Family, 2021).

### 3.2.7 Access to land

In 2020, Viet Nam presented its SDG 5.a.2 data, highlighting the protection of women's rights to common matrimonial property through joint registration and certificates in both the husband's and wife's names. Following the 2003 Land Law and the 2013 Land Law,<sup>101</sup> joint registration of property remains mandatory in the 2024 reform. Specifically, if land use rights (LURs) or ownership of property affixed to land are jointly owned, both spouses' full names must appear in the certificate of title. Additionally, the laws also protect the family home and other common (immovable) property through the requirement of spousal consent for possession, use, and disposal, alongside equal inheritance rights (FAO, 2023, p.72, Slavchevska *et al.*, 2025).

However, despite these legal protections, gaps in laws and policies were identified in 2020. For example, while Viet Nam recognizes customary land rights for ethnic minorities, families, and religious communities through frameworks like Communal Land Rights (CLRs), relevant legal provisions, such as those in the Civil Code and the Law on Forestry, do not explicitly address gender equality in land rights. There was also no evidence of quotas ensuring women's participation in land management and administration bodies, nor financial allocations aimed at increasing women's actual land ownership, whether individually or jointly.

Challenges in implementation also persist. For instance, Vietnamese law theoretically ensures gender equality in inheritance by granting all individuals, regardless of gender, equal rights to transfer and inherit property. This principle generally applies in cases of intestate succession, where no will or testament is present. However, evidence from court cases, surveys, and interviews suggests that, in most cases (with the exception of bilateral or matrilineal communities), families who divide property before death often do so without regard to gender equity. Property division is influenced by various factors, including male preference, customary practice and traditional gender stereotypes. Additional influences are inadequate awareness of land use rights and inheritance rights, as well as

individual circumstances (Hoang Cam *et al.*, 2013; ICRW and ISDS, 2016). This occurs despite significant evidence that land rights improve women's control over income and empower them within the family. Secure land rights give women a greater voice in decision-making and an increased capacity to invest in climate resilient agriculture, thereby also boosting food security.

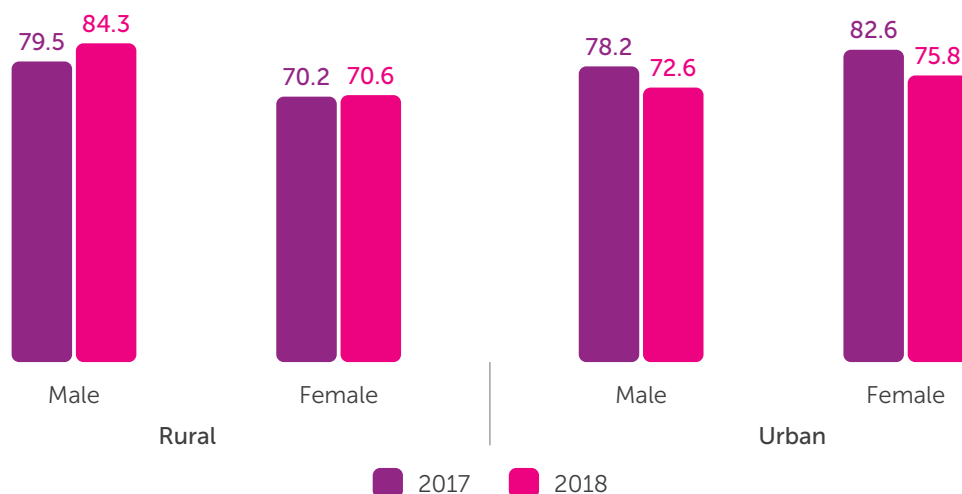
Critically, the lack of SDG 5.a.2 updates and SDG 5.a.1 data on women's and men's ownership or secure rights to agricultural land presents a major challenge. This gap hinders effective policy development, monitoring, and progress towards gender equality in land rights, as data indicates that when women lack secure land rights, men also face similar challenges. Without this data, it becomes difficult to assess disparities, allocate resources effectively, or implement targeted interventions to address inequalities in land ownership and security.

Some reports provide insights into the situation on the ground, particularly regarding joint land registration. A World Bank study found that, between 2004 and 2014, the percentage of certificates with the names of both spouses increased from 11.6 percent to 38.3 percent for cropland and from 15.7 percent to 55.6 percent for residential land (Buchhave *et al.*, 2020). Another study conducted in the Mekong Delta suggests that nearly half of the surveyed households had land use rights certificate with both spouses' names (IPSARD, 2020). Including both the wife's and husband's names on the certificate can positively affect women's lives, improving their access to other productive resources such as credit, enhancing their status in the family and boosting household income (Buchhave *et al.*, 2020; Nguyen and Le, 2020; Tran *et al.*, 2018). However, the actual impact depends on the broader context and effective implementation of those provisions.

Stakeholders highlight that the transition to joint registration is slow because many people do not fully understand the benefits of this change (World Bank, 2022). The Viet Nam Household Living Standard Survey 2014 showed that 46 percent of cropland was registered under men's names, twice as much as the cropland registered under women's names (15.7 percent) (VHLSS 2014). Women who have their names as sole owner of a cropland on the certificate

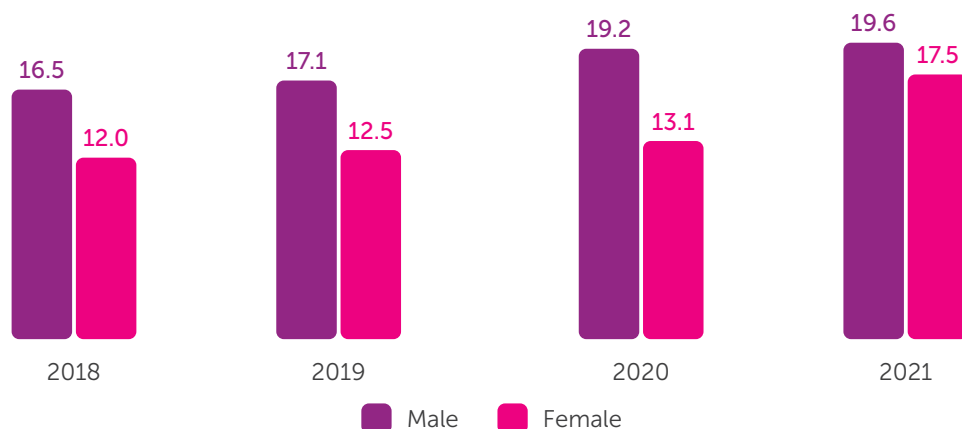
| <sup>101</sup> Amendments in 2024.

Figure 11. The person whose name is on the certificate in rural and urban areas 2017–2018 (%)



Source: PAPI, 2018.

Figure 12. The rate of trained workers in rural areas in 2018–2021 (%)



Source: LFS 2018–2021.

are often single (unmarried, widowed or divorced) (Buchhave *et al.*, 2020). Among married couples, only 4.3 percent of women had their names alone on agricultural land use rights certificates, compared to 51.1 percent of men (UN Women *et al.*, 2021). Although the proportion of men holding their names alone on land use rights certificates has decreased, women still face challenges in land management and men are still more likely than women to bear the name on the certificate alone or as the household head.

Since the VHLSS 2014, there has been no national survey with sex-disaggregated data on land use rights certificates, making it difficult to track changes in the gender gap considering also the SDG 5.a.1 data gap. However, studies such as the 2019 Mekong Delta research and the 2020 Rural and Agricultural Mid-term Survey continue to show significant gender disparities in land ownership. For example, research

in the Mekong Delta in 2019 reported about 36.9 percent of the respondents having the husband's name on the certificates, compared to 3.6 percent of the respondents having registered the land in the wife's name alone (IPSARD, 2020).

Additionally, a 2022 MONRE report reveals that 63.5 percent of 24.69 million land certificates issued since 2013 included women's names, with 4.6 million featuring both spouses' names (MONRE, 2022). Similar findings were also reported by the 2018 PAPI Survey (see Figure 11).

These fragmented data highlight the ongoing challenge of measuring progress on gender equality in land rights. Without consistent, sex-disaggregated data, it remains difficult to track the gender gap and design targeted interventions to address these disparities.

Delays in converting land use certificates to joint registration may further hinder women's access to resources. With agricultural land decreasing due to urbanization and industrialization, these delays pose additional challenges for women who tend to be more dependent on land-tied agricultural activities. Women without land certificates in their names are often ineligible for compensation and less likely to participate in training programmes that help them transition to new employment opportunities in other sectors (UN Women *et al.*, 2021).

Gender disparities in land ownership, inheritance, and access to land continue to impede women's socio-economic progress, underscoring the necessity for targeted interventions. While legal equality is theoretically present, traditional practices and inconsistent policy enforcement still restrict women's full exercise of these rights. To overcome these barriers, it is crucial to strengthen enforcement mechanisms, increase legal literacy, ensure equal representation in land management bodies, and implement policies that actively promote women's land rights in both formal and customary contexts.

### 3.2.8 Rural advisory services (agricultural extension services)

Various policies on vocational training in Viet Nam have recently<sup>102</sup> contributed to creating more favourable conditions and opportunities for women to access vocational education, especially those residing in rural areas and ethnic minority areas. Under the MARD Project "Vocational Training for Rural Workers until 2020"<sup>103</sup> many women have benefitted from support, including short-term vocational training subsidies and loans to help them create their own employment opportunities. However, data show that the proportion of trained female workers in rural areas was constantly lower than that of men between 2018 and 2021 (see Figure 12).

From 2009 to 2020, during the implementation of the Vocational Training Plan for Rural Workers, an average of 1 million workers received vocational training every year, totalling nearly 10 million people – reaching 89 percent of the targeted 11.2 million people. Out of these, about 4.6 million people received financial support for training, achieving 65 percent

of the target.<sup>104</sup> Additionally, 4.57 million workers participated in the three-month induction training, with 53.4 percent being female and 40.2 percent of all students being trained in agricultural occupations. Between 2016 and 2020, about 89.3 percent of all vocationally trained workers reported holding a job.

Vocational training for rural workers has the potential to contribute to local socio-economic development, reduce poverty, ensure social security, shortens the gap between the rich and poor, between rural and urban areas, and improves living standards for rural residents. At the same time, vocational training for rural workers also contributes to maintaining stability, by reducing pressure on employment needs in big cities and promoting industrialization and modernization of agriculture, associated with rural urbanization.

In addition to vocational training and job creation in rural areas, the National Employment Fund targeting vulnerable groups including small and medium-sized enterprises, cooperatives, and household businesses and employees also contributed to creating more job opportunities. The National Fund for Employment and the mobilized resources from the Viet Nam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP) contributed to the job creation for 54 920 workers, of which there are 24 309 female workers (accounting for 44.3 percent) (Vietnam Economic News, 2021).

In May 2022, MOLISA issued Circular No.09/2022/TT-BLDTBXH. The focus on this circular is on diversifying livelihoods, developing poverty reduction models, and supporting workers to work abroad with the support of the National Target Programme for Sustainable Poverty Reduction for the period 2021–2025. Implementation principles refer to ensuring gender equality and giving priority to women in poor households. However, no specific criteria and targets related to ensuring gender equality are mentioned in this circular.

In September 2022, the MARD issued Decision No.3685/QD-BNN-KTHT, approving the vocational training plan for 910 400 rural workers in the period 2022–2025. The plan aims to increase the proportion of trained workers; pilot training programmes for agricultural workers for exports under contracts;

<sup>102</sup> Law on Vocational Education 2014, Decision No.46/2015/QĐ-TTg, Circular No.31/2017/TT-BLDTBXH dated 28/12/2017.

<sup>103</sup> Decision No.1956/QĐ-TTg dated 27/11/2009.

<sup>104</sup> About 7.05 million people over 11 years.

and provide capacity development opportunities to people involved in agricultural management and education. However, it does include specific gender-related targets. Migrant workers in the agriculture sector, including female migrant workers, often face challenges in accessing vocational training services due to policies that primarily target those with local permanent residency.<sup>105</sup>

Agricultural Extension Centres' activities have improved in terms of service delivery through the adoption of demonstration models and farmer field school methods, which combine theory with practice to meet the actual needs and conditions of farmers. Women generally experience limited access and biased focuses of agricultural extension services compared to men. Records indicate that about 74.4 percent of men were able to participate in training classes, compared to only 5.1 percent of women. About 7.5 percent of participants (woman and men) were part of the same household (IPSARD, 2020).

Vocational training for rural women mainly focuses on basic technical training, often excluding topics such as advancements in agricultural science and technology in agriculture, and their practical application. Additionally, these programmes lack emphasis on sustainable organic product markets and soft skills related to market access and trade promotion. These skills are critical for women to engage effectively in value chains and capitalize on market opportunities. This shortfall is compounded by agricultural extension policies that frequently lack gender-sensitive and responsive measures, further marginalizing women in agricultural development initiatives.

However, in agricultural training courses organized by the New Rural Area Programme, women, especially those who are married and belonging to middle-aged groups, make up the majority of participants. This is partially due to the shift in family roles, with women increasingly engaging in small-scale household agricultural activities while men focus more on non-agricultural paid jobs. Nevertheless, the high proportion of women attending these trainings does not guarantee that they would gain the necessary skills in agricultural production, as the programmes are often neither gender-sensitive nor gender-responsive. Conversely, men tend to benefit

more from these courses, as agricultural extension officers frequently favour male participants (UN Women, 2021a).

Furthermore, statistics on beneficiaries of these activities have not been sex-disaggregated, which made it impossible to evaluate the participation of women and men in agricultural extension activities on a national scale (UN Women and MOLISA, 2021). In addition, there are no official guiding documents on gender mainstreaming in agricultural extension.

The stereotype on gender roles also limits women's and men's access to vocational training courses. Women are often given priority in courses that require dexterity and hard work, as well as those that allow home-based work (such as knitting, brocade weaving, sewing and cooking). Technical courses such as use of machinery or water-saving irrigation techniques are often considered more suitable for men (Oxfam, 2017; Tran *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, men tend to participate more in farmers' association activities. Men are also more informed about new trends in farming and animal husbandry and often receive more technical assistance and extension services, even when the production or crops are managed and carried out mainly by women (UN Women, 2021a).

### 3.2.9 Technology

Mechanization continues to be promoted in agricultural, forestry and fishery production. In recent years, the use of machinery and equipment at all stages of the production process has increased significantly. In the period 2016–2020, the number of cars used for production purposes grew by 3.89 times, averaging 0.74 cars per 100 households working in agriculture, forestry and fisheries. The use of generators also increased by 5.36 times, reaching an average of 1.93 generators per 100 households, compared to figures in 2016 (GSO, 2021b). Additionally, among 100 rice-growing households, the use of combine harvesters rose by 1.61 times, averaging 0.44 units, and motorized rice threshing machines, accounting increased by 1.25 times, to 4.02 units per 100 households (GSO, 2021b).

Transfer of technology and the application of machinery in agriculture have saved labour and time for both women and men. It has particularly

<sup>105</sup> Circular No.152/2016/TT-BTC dated 17/10/2016.

reduced men's involvement in strenuous tasks, like building automatic irrigation systems, while enabling women to better control their production and reduce dependence on men, particularly in households where men migrate for work (UN Women, 2021a). However, men often remain responsible for the application of agricultural machinery and technology. Tasks such as operating ploughs, tractors and combine harvesters are typically considered physically demanding and technically challenging, and are usually performed by men. Even in situations where men are absent due to work commitments elsewhere, women frequently consult their husbands on farming techniques. Furthermore, when women need to rent machinery services, the providers and operators of these services are predominantly men (UN Women, 2021a).

Women's limited access to science and technology can be attributed to several reasons. One major barrier is the scarcity of vocational training opportunities compared to men. According to the Labor Force Survey (LFS) 2020, there is a significant gender gap in the proportion of trained workers: 19.2 percent for men and only 13.1 percent for women in rural areas (GSO, 2021a). Although the proportion of trained female workers has improved over the years, it remains lower than that of men. According to statistics from the Department of Economic Cooperation and Rural Development for the period 2010–2020, a total of 8 712 879 rural female workers have attended vocational and technical training courses, accounting for 45.1 percent of the total number of trained workers during this time (Vu T.P.L., 2023). Additionally, entrenched gender biases in agricultural production continue to restrict women's access to science and technology.

### 3.2.10 Rural finance

Access to the credit system in rural areas has seen improvements, particularly with the expansion of banking services and branches. As of 1 July 2020, there were 1 836 communes equipped with banks, bank branches, and people's credit funds, accounting for 22.13 percent of all rural communes. This marks

an increase of 2.01 percentage points since 1 July 2016 (GSO, 2021b). Additionally, the advent of electronic and mobile banking has further enhanced credit access for rural populations, especially for women with limited access to transportation (NpM Platform for Inclusive Finance, 2018).

Statistics also indicate that farmers' ability to access loans has improved. The proportion of rural households receiving loans from the banking system for agricultural, forestry and fishery activities increased from 53.9 percent in 2016 to 76.2 percent in 2020 (GSO, 2021b). At the same time, rural women's access to formal loans has also seen improvement. According to a report by the Viet Nam Bank for Social Policies, by June 2020, the total number of female customers borrowing money from social policy credit programmes in poor rural areas and ethnic minorities was 1.47 million, accounting for 47 percent of the total number of customers with 52.336 billion VND outstanding debt. This figure indicates an increase of 29 075 billion VND compared to the beginning of 2011, reflecting strides in women's financial accessibility (UN Women and MOLISA, 2021).

Although women's access to loans has improved, the balance of loan management still favours men. Only 26 percent of loans were jointly managed by both spouses, whereas 40.3 percent were managed solely by husbands—significantly higher than the 20.8 percent managed by wives (20.8 percent) (IPSARD, 2020). Men generally find it easier to meet the requirements for accessing formal loans and the amounts they can borrow are often higher than those available to women (NpM Platform for Inclusive Finance, 2018; Tran *et al.*, 2018). While Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) provides women access to small sources of credit, their access to loan services from banks such as Agribank or Viet Nam Bank for Social Policies remains very limited. These financial institutions often require more elaborate application procedures and lack specific strategies to facilitate women's access to their financial services (NpM Platform for Inclusive Finance, 2018).

# 4

## STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS



This section provides insights into various stakeholders for FAO and other development partners to consider for collaboration in promoting gender equality within the agriculture and rural development sectors.

Name of stakeholders	Description of stakeholders	Relevant initiatives and recommendations to promote gender equality
International development partners		
Asian Development Bank (ADB)	Regional financial institutions, with headquarters based in the Philippines and field offices across the region.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is recommended to collaborate with ADB on supporting women, particularly those who own enterprises/business in rural areas.</li> </ul> <p>Relevant ongoing initiatives to be further explored for cooperation include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promoting Climate-Resilient Rural Development and Food Security in Southeast Asia: Technical Assistance Report (ADB, regional project);</li> <li>• Unleashing Asian Female Entrepreneurship with Digital Technology (ADB, regional project);</li> <li>• LPB Expanding Access to Finance for Women-Owned Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (ADB, Viet Nam).</li> </ul>
UN Country Agencies (ILO, UNDP, UNFPA and UN Women)	UN organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is suggested to strengthen collaboration with other organizations within the UN system by engaging in ongoing projects and exploring various working areas through a gender lens.</li> <li>• UN organizations have conducted researches, projects and programmes related to the fields of labour and employment, workers' rights, gender equality, population, development and various other areas that are related to agriculture, rural women and rural livelihoods. Such initiatives include, but are not limited to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Decent Work Country Programme for Viet Nam, 2022–2026 (ILO);</li> <li>• Strengthening the resilience of smallholder agriculture to climate change-induced water insecurity in the Central Highlands and South-Central Coast regions of Viet Nam" also known as "GCF 2 Water security and farmers" (UNDP, duration 2020–2026);</li> <li>• Preventing gender-based violence and other harmful practices (UNFPA and Farmers' Union, duration 2022–2026);</li> <li>• Empower: Women for climate-resilient societies in Viet Nam (UN Women, duration 2023–2027);</li> <li>• Development of gender mainstreaming guidelines in agricultural extension services, with support of UN Women.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Name of stakeholders	Description of stakeholders	Relevant initiatives and recommendations to promote gender equality
Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA)	Japanese agency for official development assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is recommended to collaborate with JICA on agricultural production models for economic development and rural infrastructure.</li> </ul> <p>Relevant initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical support/investment, sponsorship;</li> <li>• ODA loans to implement projects in different fields including agricultural-rural development, climate change and natural disasters, and enhancement of women's financial access; and</li> <li>• Technical cooperation project for promoting gender-responsive financial inclusion through VWU since 2019.</li> </ul>
Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA)	Korean agency for official development assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is advised to explore possible collaboration with KOICA in supporting extension services with a focus on climate change and agricultural development, building a model to respond to violence against women and girls in Viet Nam.</li> <li>• Other areas for collaboration could include governance, education, water management and health care and transportation.</li> </ul>
<b>Government agencies</b>		
Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD)	Government agency working on agriculture and rural development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is recommended to partner with MARD in multiple areas including rural development, food security, disaster prevention and climate change and gender equality in rural development.</li> <li>• A relevant initiative for partnership is the National Target Programme on New Rural Development.</li> </ul>
Ministry of Health (MOH)	Government agency working on health including nutrition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is suggested to explore opportunities to join forces with MOH on programmes and projects that aim to improve nutrition status for women and children in rural areas.</li> <li>• MOH is already implementing programmes on nutrition and could therefore represent a key counterpart in this domain.</li> </ul>
Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), especially its Department of Gender Equality	Government agency working on promoting gender equality in national level	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All programmes and initiatives implemented by MOLISA are gender and women centric. Thus, this government institution could represent a potential partner for gender equality and gender policy advocacy.</li> <li>• A relevant initiative for collaboration includes the implementation of the National Strategy on Gender Equality period 2021–2030.</li> </ul>
General Statistics Office	Government agency working on national surveys and statistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National surveys related to nutrition, agriculture and rural development, labours and employment, and gender equality.</li> <li>• Engaging for collection of sex-disaggregated data in the agricultural sector.</li> </ul>

Name of stakeholders	Description of stakeholders	Relevant initiatives and recommendations to promote gender equality
Viet Nam Women's Union	Mass organization representing Vietnamese women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO could partner with VWU in different areas including women in rural areas, agricultural value chains, improving rural women's capacities, climate change and disaster prevention in gender perspectives.</li> <li>• The Union is implementing many programmes and projects on gender equality, enhancing women's empowerment and women's rights and voice.</li> <li>• Project 8 "Implementing gender equality and solving urgent problems for women and children" in the National Target Programme for socio-economic development of ethnic minority and mountainous areas in the period 2021–2030, Phase I: From 2021–2025 (National Target Programme).</li> </ul>
Viet Nam Farmers' Union	Mass organization representing farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is suggested to explore collaboration with the Viet Nam Farmers' Association. The association has the mandate to disseminate and promote policies and laws related to agriculture, farmers, rural areas, including gender equality, contributing to raising political and legal awareness among its members.</li> <li>• A relevant project to further explore involves the participation of the Viet Nam Farmers' Union in collective economic development in agriculture until 2030.</li> </ul>
Viet Nam Academy of Social Sciences (VASS)	Governmental research institute	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is recommended to explore partnership with VASS or its affiliated organizations (such as Institute of Sociology and Institute for Family and Gender Studies) to conduct research, assessment, or evaluations on gender issues in agriculture and rural development.</li> <li>• The institute also engages in research related to agriculture, rural areas, farmers, and issues related to gender equality and development. Collaboration with VASS could offer new insights on gender equality and the status of rural women in agriculture and rural development.</li> </ul>
Viet Nam Bank for Social Policy, Agribank	State financial institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The institution provides loan schemes for rural women's economic development (collaboration with VWU, Farmers Association), offering entry points for collaboration on financial inclusion.</li> </ul>
<b>International NGO and local NGOs</b>		
CARE International in Viet Nam	An international NGO supporting remote ethnic minority women in rural areas and socially marginalized women in urban settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FAO is suggested to collaborate with CARE in promoting women's economic empowerment in rural areas and gender mainstreaming in agriculture.</li> <li>• A relevant initiative is CARE's engagement on Advancing Women's Economic Empowerment in Viet Nam (AWEEV) (2022–2026). This programme directly supports over 2 600 ethnic minority women and men and reaches approximately 9 000 household members, aiming to improve the economic lives of poor rural women, especially those from ethnic minorities.</li> </ul>

Name of stakeholders	Description of stakeholders	Relevant initiatives and recommendations to promote gender equality
Oxfam in Viet Nam	An international NGO supporting to reduce poverty, injustice and inequality in Viet Nam	<p>Oxfam could represent a potential partner to collaborate on models for agricultural economic development in rural areas.</p> <p>Relevant initiatives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women’s empowerment mainstreaming and networking for gender justice in economic development (WEMAN)</li> <li>• Inclusion Project – Phase 2 (IP2): Mekong Regional Water Governance Programme (MRWGP) (2020–2024)</li> </ul>
Action on Poverty (AOP)	An Australian NGO supporting community-led development projects that address the root causes of poverty	<p>Thematic areas for potential collaboration include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Water and food security and response to climate change</li> <li>• Sustainable livelihoods and economic empowerment</li> <li>• Governance and social accountability</li> <li>• Health, including public health</li> </ul>
Centre for Social Initiatives Promotion (CSIP)	A scientific and technological organization under the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations, seeks and directly supports social entrepreneurs and enterprises implementing sustainable business solutions to address social and environmental challenges.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CSIP is supporting enterprises in agricultural value chains (EDF2), backstopping 8 businesses and creating 327 jobs, of which 77 percent are for local female workers.</li> <li>• A relevant initiative is ISEA-GRAISE, which promoted women's economic empowerment in the agricultural sector and created a positive impact on the operations of small-scale farmers.</li> </ul>
Institute for Social Development Studies (ISDS)	An institute working on research, policy advocacy, information sharing, and organizational capacity building related to social development including gender issues, reproductive health and social inclusion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ISDS engages in gender studies, capacity building and communication services related to gender, reproductive health and social inclusion.</li> <li>• FAO is suggested to explore collaboration in activities related to capacity building on gender equality for project staff and community.</li> </ul>



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# 5

## MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## 5.1 Main findings

Results from the analyses in this report indicate that despite great achievements in rural development in recent times, gender inequality still exists in the agricultural and rural livelihood sectors in Viet Nam at different levels and aspects.

### At the macro level

The integration of gender concerns into policies and laws related to agriculture and rural development, sustainable poverty reduction, rural vocational training, and agricultural support activities has been inconsistent and limited. Gender equality is not prominent in the goals and principles of programmes on agriculture and rural development. Moreover, these programmes are frequently missing gender impact assessments, gender equality measurement indicators and accountability mechanisms.

For example, agricultural extension activities often lack specific gender-related indicators and targets, so during the implementation of programmes and activities, gender concerns are often overlooked. Consequently, annual reports on agricultural extension activities do not mention gender equality issues. Additionally, the absence of a dedicated budget for gender mainstreaming and the lack of sex-disaggregated data hinders progress towards this area.

### At the meso level

Gender mainstreaming activities are increasingly being integrated into policies, programmes and strategies,<sup>106</sup> but awareness of the importance of gender equality in the field of agriculture and rural livelihoods is still limited. This lack of awareness is reflected in an overall slow rollout of gender-related activities. The lack of implementation guidelines, as well as their slow issuance compared to the policies and programmes, have posed challenges during the implementation process.

Numerous measures to improve gender sensitivity and gender responsiveness have been incorporated into the execution of state programmes and projects. However, the adoption of transformative initiatives that engage both women and men in challenging

discriminatory gender norms and promoting positive masculinity remains limited. It is crucial to engage both men and women to effectively combat gender discrimination and promote inclusivity. Hence, there is a pressing need to focus on initiatives that go beyond traditional gender sensitivity and responsiveness programmes and embrace a more transformative approach to gender equality.

The role of mass organizations, such as the Viet Nam Farmers' Union, Viet Nam Women's Union, Youth Union, and Viet Nam Veteran's among others, in implementing gender mainstreaming activities and monitoring gender aspects in policies, programmes and strategies has been enhanced, particularly Viet Nam Women's Union. However, there needs to be a more effective coordination mechanism between relevant units.

### At the micro level

Evidence confirms the important role of rural women in economic development and rural livelihoods. While the labour force participation of rural women is substantial, it remains lower than that of men. From 2018 to 2021, the employment rate of women aged 15 and older in agriculture, forestry and fisheries was consistently lower than that of men. Additionally, a higher proportion of women aged 15 and older in rural areas work in unstable, vulnerable positions such as contributing family workers or own account workers, compared to men.

The proportion of female workers with professional training or qualifications in rural areas trails that of men. Rural women earn a lower average income than men and spend twice as much time on unpaid housework and family care. Moreover, rural women face distinct challenges in accessing resources such as finance, land, agricultural development support services, agricultural extension activities and production technology transfer. Important decision-making in agricultural activities is predominantly undertaken by men, while women are often involved in less critical stages, being associated with "lighter" work, facing persistent stereotypes that emphasize a subordinate role.

| <sup>106</sup> In the current period than in the previous period (2010–2020).

## 5.2 Recommendations

### 5.2.1 Recommendations to the Government of Viet Nam

#### At the macro level

The Government of Viet Nam is recommended to:

- Review and deliberately incorporate gender considerations into national policies and programmes related to agriculture and rural development. This includes initiatives such as the National Target Programmes for sustainable poverty reduction, new rural areas and ethnic minorities, which are significant in terms of their scope and impact across different aspects of life.
- Ensure that the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of these policies and programmes are informed by gender analyses at all levels<sup>107</sup> to better respond to the distinct needs of women and men, promote positive masculinity and challenge discriminatory gender norms.
- Synchronize and adopt guidance documents (e.g. circulars or official dispatches issued by agencies responsible for implementing state policies)<sup>108</sup> to support gender mainstreaming in policies and programmes. These documents need to include specific indicators, accountability mechanisms and provisions for collecting sex-disaggregated data to enhance the monitoring and reporting these programmes. Additionally, it is necessary to allocate budgets specifically for gender equality activities within these programmes and strategies.
- Continue to develop and deploy communication strategies on policies related to the issuance of land use rights certificates with both men's and women's names. Additionally, there needs to be more effective and enforced gender-responsive guidance to local authorities to support the implementation of joint registration of land use rights certificate among spouses.

- Strengthen the involvement of socio-political organizations, especially the Women's Union, in the development, implementation and monitoring of gender mainstreaming within national programmes and strategies, particularly those focused on agriculture and rural development.

#### At the meso level

The Government of Viet Nam is recommended to:

- Increase awareness about the importance of gender equality for leaders and staff in agriculture and rural development to improve the effectiveness in decision-making and implementation of gender equality activities.
- Integrate gender mainstreaming approaches into agricultural extension activities to address the specific needs and interests of rural women. This includes setting specific targets and gender-related indicators for monitoring progress and informing reporting processes. It also involves implementing extensive training for local agricultural extension officers on integrating gender considerations into their work. To facilitate this, guidelines have been developed by the National Agriculture Extension Centre with support from UN Women.<sup>109</sup>
- Strengthen the capacities to systematically integrate gender considerations and responsive measures in rural infrastructure development plans, particularly in National Target Programmes, and give priorities for economically disadvantaged areas, mountainous areas and ethnic minority areas to enhance access to services, markets, education and health to meet women's needs.
- Continue to increase the proportion of women participating in leadership and management positions in agriculture and rural development sectors by strengthening training and supporting the career planning and promotion for female officials at all levels.

<sup>107</sup> Policy, institutional and grassroots levels.

<sup>108</sup> Examples of guidance documents include Circular No.17/2014/TT-BTP of the Ministry of Justice regulating the integration of gender equality issues in the development of legal documents, or Official Dispatch No.1303/BLDTBXH-VBĐG on guidance Implement gender equality work by 2024.

<sup>109</sup> The guideline was developed as training materials for trainers (ToT). The content includes: Agricultural extension system and activities in Viet Nam; Basic concepts of gender; The necessity and principles of gender integration in agricultural extension; Analyse and evaluate gender needs in agricultural extension; Planning and implementing gender integration in agricultural extension; Monitor and evaluate gender integration in agricultural extension. The National Agriculture Extension Centre in collaboration with UN Women organized an online ToT training class on "The guideline for gender integration in agricultural extension" in October 2021 with participation of provincial and district agriculture extension centres.

- Develop more programmes in agriculture and rural development for women in extremely difficult areas, ethnic minorities, and mountainous areas. Activities can include capacity building as well as productive and financial services and resources.
- Recognize the diversity among rural women to better address their needs and foster more inclusive and effective rural development, thereby reducing the risks of pockets of poverty and vulnerability.
- Enhance collaboration with UN organizations like UN Women and ILO, as well as government agencies, such as the Department of Gender Equality of the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA), to promote gender-responsive policies and programmes.
- Continue to strengthen gender policy research and analysis in the field of agriculture, rural development and rural livelihoods diversification, advocating for evidence-based gender equality measures in these fields.

#### At the micro level

The Government of Viet Nam is recommended to:

- Increase the engagement of staff in charge of ensuring gender equality at the grassroots level through full-time positions. This approach provides dedicated focus and continuity necessary for effective gender mainstreaming, ensuring that initiatives are not only started but also maintained and evolved over time.
- Develop communication programmes in various forms that take into account different messages and channels tailored to the target audience. Activities may include grassroot awareness events, sensitization campaigns, training on gender analysis, group activities, competitions, theatre, banners, handouts, radio broadcasting, cultural or artistic initiatives to engage women, as well as men and youth in promoting gender equality.
- Continue to develop and implement strategies to increase women's participation and voice in the formulation of agricultural and rural development policies, while encouraging their participation in leadership and management positions.

#### 5.2.2 Recommendations for FAO

##### At the macro level

FAO is recommended to:

- Strengthen partnerships and conduct national-level dialogues with relevant stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of FAO's policy on gender equality and its activities in Viet Nam.

#### At the meso level

FAO is recommended to:

- Develop capacity-building activities for FAO staff<sup>110</sup> in Viet Nam on gender equality, as well as tools and methodologies for gender mainstreaming into FAO programmes, plans and projects to ensure proper implementation of its gender policy.
- Ensure that FAO's collaborative efforts with partners include gender-responsive activities, accompanied by appropriate monitoring measures. Programmes and projects should consistently collect and analyse sex-disaggregated data, and where possible, integrate specific gender-related data. While it is essential to mainstream gender aspects across different thematic areas of knowledge products,<sup>111</sup> it is also cardinal to have a dedicated section for gender considerations.
- Continue to support partners (MARD and MOLISA, among others) in developing gender-responsive plans and programmes for rural development and rural livelihoods by providing capacity-building activities for operating staff, consultation and guidance.
- Ensure appropriate gender-responsive budgets in projects and programmes.

<sup>110</sup> Including project, administrative and human resource staff.

<sup>111</sup> Including project and programme reports.

**At the micro level**

FAO is recommended to:

- Develop implementation guidelines for agriculture and rural livelihood initiatives that include specific requirements for gender mainstreaming, provide reference materials and offer training for field-level staff to enhance their effectiveness.
- Ensure that grassroots partners meet their gender mainstreaming commitments, especially in technical capacity-building activities in agriculture and emergency relief activities, among others, during implementation of projects and programmes. Additionally, conscious efforts should be exerted to include women from disadvantaged groups (e.g. women from poor households, with disabilities, and ethnic minorities).
- Develop and implement field programme activities targeting both women and men to promote behavioural change towards gender equality. These should encourage men's participation in family care and housework activities, while enhancing women's voice in agricultural production.



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# ANNEXES

## Annex 1. List of interviewees

Number	Name of interviewees	Organization
1	Female representatives	Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development – MARD
2	Female representative	Department of Policy and Law – Viet Nam Women’s Union
3	Female representative	UN Women
4	Female representative	National Agricultural Extension Centre – MARD
5	Female representative	Department of Cooperatives and Rural Development – MARD

## Annex 2. List of consulting workshop participants

Number	Name of participants	Organization
1	Female representative	Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development – MARD
2	Male representative	Directorate of Fisheries – MARD
3	Female representative	National Agricultural Extension Centre – MARD
4	Female representative	Department of Science Technology and Environment – MARD
5	Female representative	International Cooperation Department – MARD
6	Male representative	Digital Transformation Centre – MARD
7	Female representative	MARD Trade Union
8	Female representative	Viet Nam Academy of Agricultural Science
9	Female representative	Department of Personnel and Organization – MARD
10	Male representative	Department of Livestock Production – MARD
11	Female representative	Viet Nam Disaster and Dyke Management Authority
12	Female representative	International Support Group – MARD
13	Male representative	Deputy Director General, International Cooperation Department – MARD

### Annex 3. List of validation workshop participants

Number	Name of participants	Organization
1	Male representative	Deputy Director General, International Cooperation Department – MARD
2	Nguyen Song Ha	Assistant FAOR in Viet Nam
3	Ha Thi Lan Anh	Operations Specialist, FAO in Viet Nam
4	Trinh Thai Quang	FAO consultant
5	Female representative	MARD Trade Union
6	Female representative	Department of Cooperatives and Rural Development – MARD
7	Female representative	The Australian Embassy
9	Female Freelancer	National consultant for Oxfam International, among others
10	Female representative	GIZ
11	Female representative	Viet Nam Academy of Agricultural Science
12	Female representative	Scientific Association of Rural Development
13	Female representative	Agricultural project management Board
14	Female representative	Viet Nam Disaster and Dyke Management Authority
15	Female representative	National Agricultural Extension Centre – MARD
16	Female representative	Department of Personnel and Organization – MARD
18	Representatives (male, female)	International Cooperation Department – MARD
20	Female representative	International Support Group – MARD
21	Female representative	MARD Trade Union
22	Female representative	Vietnamese Academy of Forest Sciences
23	Female representative	National Institute of Animal Science
24	Female representative	Institute of Policy and Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development – MARD
25	Female representative	Department of Forest – MARD
26	Female representative	CPO
27	Female representative	GIZ MCRP
28	Female representative	International Cooperation Department – MARD
29	Male representative	Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development
30	Male representative	Sociological Review
31	Representatives (male, female)	Office of MARD
32	Representatives (male, female)	Centre for Digital Transformation and Agricultural Statistics

## **Annex 4. List of online participants/organizations in the validation workshop**

1. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Dien Bien province
2. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Thai Nguyen province
3. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Ha Giang province
4. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Lang Son province
5. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Bac Ninh province
6. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Yen Bai province
7. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Lao Cai province
8. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Tra Vinh province
9. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Binh Dinh province
10. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Dong Thap province
11. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Binh Duong province
12. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Ho Chi Minh city
13. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – An Giang province
14. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Ninh Binh province
15. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Quang Tri province
16. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Dak Nong province
17. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Phu Yen province
18. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Kien Giang province
19. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Ha Nam province
20. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Tuyen Quang province
21. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Hai Duong province
22. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Gia Lai province
23. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Thanh Hoa province
24. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Vinh Phuc province
25. Department of Agriculture and Rural Development – Hung Yen province
26. Farmer's Union – Thanh Hoa province
27. Agro-Forestry-Fisheries Quality Assurance Sub-department – Vinh Phuc province
28. Protection Forest Management Board – Binh Duong province
29. Sub – department of Crop Production and Plant Protection – Nghe An province
30. Sub – department of Rural Development – Hung Yen province
31. Special-use and Coastal Protection Forest Management Board – Bac Lieu province
32. Sub – department of Crop Production and Plant Protection – Tuyen Quang province
33. Farmer's Union – Bac Lieu province
34. Farmer's Union – Hoa Binh province
35. Women's Union – Binh Duong province
36. Forest Ranger Department – Binh Duong province

37. Hoang Mai Van Anh – UNIDO
38. Annie Wallace – USAID
39. Vu Van Anh – World Vision Viet Nam
40. Women’s Union – Binh Duong province
41. Sub – department of Rural Development – Hung Yen province
42. Farmer’s Union – Bac Ninh province
43. ISG Office
44. Sub – department of Crop Production and Plant Protection – Binh Duong province

## Annex 5. Interview guidelines

### 1. The situation of agricultural development, rural development and rural livelihoods in the last three years.

- General assessment of the current agricultural sector and outstanding issues in agricultural, rural development and rural livelihoods.
- Updates on policies related to agriculture, rural development and agricultural livelihoods over the past three years.
- Factors affecting agricultural development and explanations for why these factors are impactful.
- Mechanisms, policies, and challenges for diversifying occupations in rural areas in the past three years along with possible solutions.
- Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture and rural development over the past three years, including observed difficulties and challenges.
- Issues that require attention and suggestions for the near future.
- Suggestions on appropriate and sustainable ways to address the needs of women and men in agriculture.

### 2. Update new policies on gender equality, especially in the field of agriculture, rural development and rural livelihoods; gender mainstreaming in agricultural development and rural livelihood policies.

- Updates related to the amendments of laws and policies related content in agriculture, including the law on gender equality in Viet Nam.
- Effects of newly updated policies on gender relations and the expected achievements from these updates.
- Details of ongoing programmes aimed at improving agricultural livelihoods and their impact on the livelihoods of women at household and community levels.

### 3. Implementation of activities to promote gender equality

- Challenges and difficulties in implementing gender equality policies within the field of agriculture and rural development.
- Gender issues observed over the past three years in agriculture, rural development, and rural livelihoods, along with contributing factors to ongoing gender inequality.
- Strategies to enhance gender equality within the agricultural sector.
- Differences in access to productive agricultural resources between women and men, including causes and potential improvements.
- Availability of agricultural extension services to women farmers for knowledge sharing and learning.
- Accessibility of financial services for women and men to support agricultural production, including the types of services accessed and any existing barriers.
- Constraints faced by women and men in agricultural related activities.
- Impact of gender inequalities on household food security, poverty reduction, agricultural production, and rural employment.
- Reasons for the persistence of gender inequalities and necessary actions to ensure household roles and responsibilities are equally shared.
- Practical barriers that hinder women's engagement in agricultural activities and rural development, with suggestions for eliminating such barriers.
- Approaches to gender mainstreaming in socio-economic development activities.
- Current state of women's empowerment activities, focus areas related to women's empowerment, their effectiveness, and challenges encountered.

#### 4. Data on gender equality

- Methods used for the development and measurement of the current set of national indicators on gender equality.
- Conformity between national indicators on gender equality and international commitments to ensuring gender equality.
- Approaches to measuring gender equality indicators in general and specifically within the field of agriculture and rural development.
- Availability of national data and the extent of sex-disaggregated data in current national datasets, particularly in statistics related to agriculture and rural development.

#### 5. Recommendations

- Recommendations to improve the quality of the programme for women and men in the agricultural sector.
- Recommendations to FAO with regards to promoting and advancing gender equality in agriculture in country.





**COUNTRY  
GENDER  
ASSESSMENT  
SERIES**

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**ASIA AND  
THE PACIFIC**

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