

# Overview of gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development in Vietnam

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## **Abstract:**

Gender issues and gender inequality still exist in many countries, especially in remote and poor rural areas. Rural women often suffer from economic disadvantages, low self-confidence in the family and community, and limited access to health, social services, and extension services, which leads to lesser decision-making roles in the production and business of households and in leadership at work. In the context of digital transformation, women were found to be more disadvantaged in comparison with men. Gender mainstreaming activities have only recently become apparent in development efforts but are still limited in development projects. Promoting gender mainstreaming in rural development activities will be necessary to improve the capacity of women towards achieving rural development. Future interventions should pay more attention to building the capacity for women to access more educational and extension services in enabling environments. Institutional monitoring system to track progress in gender mainstreaming in agriculture and rural development will be very important to deliver wider impacts of development programs and projects.

**Keywords:** agriculture, gender mainstreaming, rural development, Vietnam.

**Classification numbers:** 4.1, 7

## **1. Introduction**

Vietnam is an agricultural country with large export markets around the world. Agriculture transformation has contributed to poverty reduction in rural areas, which is reflected by increased income from non-crop cultivation, especially among ethnic minorities. In recent years there has been a great shift in the workforce from agricultural to non-agricultural sectors, specifically from about 65% in 2000 to 47.4% in 2012, 39.4% in 2019 [1] and 29.06% in 2021 [2]. The total population in 2021 of the country is approximately 98.5 million people of which about 61.9% live in rural areas. The percentage of female population in 2021 was nearly 50.2%. The growth rate of gross domestic product (GDP) in the period 2016-2021 was quite high, at an average of about 8.5%. The agriculture, forestry, and fishing sectors contributed about 12.6% to Vietnam's GDP in 2021 [2].

In 2017, the ASEAN Ministers on Agriculture and Forestry (AMAF) agreed to develop the ASEAN Guidelines on Promoting Responsible Investment (RAI) in Food, Agriculture, and Forestry. Within these ASEAN guidelines, gender mainstreaming has been included. In 2020, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Asia Partnership for the Development of Human Resources in Rural Areas (AsiaDHRRA) advocated for the adoption of frameworks such as the globally recognised principles of the FAO's Committee on World Food Security (CFS) for Responsible Investment in Agriculture and Food Systems (CFS RAI) and supported the rollout of the ASEAN Guidelines to Promote RAI [3]. Responsible investment entails respect for gender equality, age, and non-discrimination and requires reliable, coherent, and transparent laws and regulations. It is therefore important to understand how far gender

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mainstreaming practices have reached in the context of smallholder farmers and rural communities in Vietnam.

Achieving gender equality has been one of the prime concerns of Vietnam. Resolution No.26-NQ/TW of the Communist Party of Vietnam on agriculture, rural areas, and farmers is the foundation for the new rural development, which sets the targets for agriculture and rural development by 2020 and details eight main solutions. Resolution 26-NQ/TW also sets targets for women's representation by 2030 for Party Committees at all levels (25%), and for National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels (35%). The country's gender equality strategy 2021-2030 targets that 60% of state agencies and local governments must have women in key leadership positions by 2025, which should rise to 75% by 2030 [4]. Thanks to great efforts over the past few decades, Vietnam has made great achievements in gender equality. The country has been recognised as one of the top 10 best performers worldwide in implementing the United Nations' goal No.5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. Vietnam scores 0.705 on a scale from 0 to 1 in terms of the gender gap index, ranking 83 out of 146 countries, improving its position from 87 in 2021 [5].

Despite these successes, gender inequality is still persistent in rural areas, especially in poor districts and communes. There are still gender gaps in terms of labour, employment, property ownership, and access to essential services in rural and poor districts, communes, and regions. Gender-based violence remains a widespread and worrisome issue. There have been several gender issues found in Vietnam in general [6, 7]. Those issues have been more serious in minority ethnic groups compared to the majority group - the Kinh ethnic group. Gaps in education, training, employment, income, healthcare, and reproduction have also been found among ethnic minority groups in both rural and urban regions.

This article aims to generate an understanding of gender policies, programs, and services, as well as their successes and shortcomings, and how to interact with or promote inclusive rural development. Identifying national platforms that effectively

work around gender and women empowerment in the agricultural sector and rural areas is also an important part of this article. These ideas help the formulation of development strategies and provide concrete recommendations on national and regional gender mainstreaming works towards sustainable development.

## 2. Methodology and data

This analysis employed a documentary research method for collecting and reviewing available secondary documents. A systematic review of published literature was conducted to collect data on gender mainstream for rural development in Vietnam. Scientific databases like the Web of Science and the Agricultural Science and Technology Information (AGRIS) were searched using the following keywords: gender, agriculture, rural development, and Vietnam. Vietnamese databases including the Vietnamese Science and Technology database (STD), the Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development, and the National Library of Vietnam were also searched for relevant publications using the same keywords in Vietnamese (gender - *giới*, agriculture - *nông nghiệp*, rural development - *phát triển nông thôn*). The review included studies published in both Vietnamese and English language. More than 50 documents were downloaded and reviewed in the first stage. Upon compilation of search results from different databases, duplicate records were removed. Thereafter, the titles and abstracts of the articles were screened for relevance. Finally, 19 full-text records related to gender and women empowerment in agriculture and rural development in Vietnam were evaluated and synthesised for the review.

In addition, primary data was gathered through key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) with leaders and researchers from the Vietnam Women's Union (VNFU), Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and several research institutions. Participants were selected on the advice of senior experts in gender mainstreaming and representatives from the Vietnam Women's Union (Table 1). This aimed to generate an understanding of gender issues and gender mainstreaming policies in agriculture and rural areas of Vietnam to recommend development policies.

**Table 1. The number of FGDs and KIIs.**

Participants	FGD		KIIs		Total
	Men	Women	Men	Women	
1 At the central level (Vietnam Women's Union, Vietnam National University of Agriculture, Vietnam Women's Academy, National Research institutes in Agricultural fields)	2	4	4	2	12
2 At the district level (staffs of Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARDs), Women Unions, and Farmer's Union) in Ly Nhan district (Ha Nam province); Nho Quan district (Ninh Binh province), Ba Vi District (Hanoi)	2	5	-	-	7
3 International development agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs)	1		1	5	7
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>26</b>

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Gender issues in agriculture and rural development

##### 3.1.1. Gender issues in obtaining job opportunities and income between males and females and among different ethnic groups

Inequalities of job opportunities and income between men and women in the same position exist today [8]. The opportunity for women to access high-income jobs is still lower than that of men. Consequently, the average income of female workers is often lower than the average income of male workers [9]. M. Wells (2005) [10] pointed out that female-headed households (divorced, separated, or widowed women) in Vietnam, particularly in rural areas, are more vulnerable to poverty. A report by International Labour Organization (ILO) in 2021 [11] also indicated that COVID-19 created new inequalities for women as they left the labour market in larger shares than men. Indeed, a gender-based gap appeared in the unemployment rate. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (GSO) (2021) [12], in 2019, women's access to jobs and job security were lower than their male counterparts. Statistics show that only 43% of employed women are wage workers compared with 51.4% of employed men. Meanwhile, unpaid family labour for women is 19.4% which doubles the figure (9.2%) for men's labour.

In comparison to other demographic groups, ethnic minority groups had the lowest proportion of their workforce in professional, skilled employment and the largest share in unskilled employment. There were around 6.53 and 5.69% of skilled workers aged 15 and older for males and females, respectively. Female ethnic minority workers aged 35 and older could not participate in vocational training courses because of high illiteracy and returning to illiteracy rates in the Vietnamese language. Ethnic minority women engage in the labour force much earlier than women in the Kinh ethnic group. By the age of 15, many ethnic girls have joined full-time work. Most of their workers are self-employed in agriculture. They have limited opportunities to access paid jobs [11].

##### 3.1.2. Gender issues in education and training between males and females and among different ethnic groups

According to the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (2019) [13], women and girls often participate in short-term and traditional vocational training. The ratio of women attaining postgraduate education is also much lower than that of men. This will lead to occupations that offer low incomes or sectors where jobs are more difficult to find. H.T. Hoa, et al. (2020) [8] also point out that education level is one of the driving factors affecting the income gap between men and women in Vietnam.

About differences among ethnic groups, there has been a gap in access to quality education between children in ethnic minority groups and those of the Kinh ethnic group. This gap is wider in higher-level education. For example, the percentage of children going to school at the primary level of the Kinh group was 89.21%, while this number for ethnic minority groups was 88.83%. However, those numbers at the upper secondary school level were 65.2 and 32.33%, respectively. According to P.L. Nguyen, et al. (2020) [14], unequal access to education services and variations in the quality of education not only exist between majority and minority ethnic communities, but also between disadvantaged areas (i.e., remote, mountainous, and rural areas) and urban areas.

The infrastructure of schools at the lower secondary level is inadequate and insecure for ethnic minorities. This indicates a potential danger for ethnic minority children, especially girls. M. Wells (2005) [10] also indicated that better education provisions are necessary for female ethnic minorities of certain groups such as Nung, Muong and Tay.

### 3.1.3. Gender issues in healthcare among different ethnic groups

There is a disproportionate quality of health care services among different ethnic groups in Vietnam as discussed by the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (2019) [13]. In 2002, infant and child mortality rates in the ethnic minorities located around the northern mountain region were twice the rates of those of the majority Kinh near the Red river delta [10]. The maternal mortality rate in some ethnic minorities such as Hmong, Thai, Ba Na, Tay, Dao, and Nung remains even higher. Indeed, the maternal mortality rate was estimated to be four times higher compared to that of the Kinh ethnic group [13].

Ethnic minority women often give birth for the first time at a much younger age than Kinh women. Their health during pregnancy is also inferior to that of Kinh women. The percentage of pregnant ethnic minority women aged 12-29 receiving prenatal check-ups at medical clinics/stations was 70.9%, while this number for Kinh women aged 15-49 was 99%. In 2015, there were still about 36.3% of ethnic minority women giving birth at home compared to just 0.5% of Kinh women. For some ethnic groups such as La Hu, Si La, La Ha, Mang, Ha Nhi, and Cong, the percentage of women giving birth in medical clinics was less than 20% due to the limitation of road access, poverty, and traditional customs and practices as well. Similarly, the percentage of ethnic minority women receiving postnatal care for two days was also low (at around 64%) [13].

Generally, ethnic minority children do not receive sufficient health care and priority for nutritional content. There are some reasons leading to poor health care for ethnic minorities including: (i) the limitations and constraints of the health care system in geographically and economically isolated areas; (ii) language and cultural barriers; (iii) poverty; and (iv) preference to be examined by a female health worker.

### 3.1.4. Early marriage

In Vietnam, the prohibition of early marriage was presented in the *Law on Marriage and Family* (2014) [15]. However, the results from the 2015 survey indicated that the average rate of early marriage was 26.6% (26% for males and 27.1% for females). The O Du ethnic group had the highest rate with 73%. In comparison to urban areas, early marriages in rural regions are far more common. About gender, in some ethnic minority groups, girls are up to 3.4 times more likely to be married as children than boys. A child is defined as a person under 16 years of age [16].

A central factor leading to early marriage is that it is considered a means of securing livelihoods. In some cases, girls decide to marry early due to concerns about remaining single and the decreasing likelihood of getting married later on. Improvement in accessing information technology, smartphones, and social networks has also been reported to have an impact on early marriage. Established traditions are another reason in the context of Vietnam. In addition, insufficient effectiveness of legislative prohibition is also considered a cause of child marriage.

### 3.1.5. Domestic violence

Domestic violence is regarded as a critical issue in Vietnam. M. Wells (2005) [10] reported an enduring gender challenge in Vietnam, namely, violence against women. Domestic violence occurs in both rural and urban areas, with most victims being women and children. However, similar to other gender issues, domestic violence is also more widespread in ethnic minority households than that in Kinh ethnic households. About 35% of ethnic minority women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence [17]. According to a study funded by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in 2019, about 63% of married Vietnamese women experienced one or more forms of physical, sexual, emotional, or economic violence and controlling behaviour by their husbands in their lifetime [18].

### 3.1.6. Gender issues in unpaid housework

The burden of unpaid work facing women is an issue in Vietnam in general. However, this is more severe in ethnic minority areas due to a lack of electricity and clean water, poor road conditions, and isolation from markets, schools, medical clinics, etc. On average, about 74% of ethnic minority women and 5% of ethnic minority girls are regularly in charge of collecting clean water for households. In some areas, they have to travel for more than 30 minutes to collect clean water. Moreover, several ethnic minority communities are matrilineal. In those communities, the women are the heads of households and are responsible for earning income.

The division of domestic labour within a family is strongly influenced by gender norms, stereotypes, and prejudices. In Vietnam, domestic work and taking care of children, older family members, and the ill are assumed to be the responsibility and duties of women. In addition, the lack of a social care system for the elderly increases the burden of care for female family members. A report by the ILO (2021) [11] also mentioned that while being highly economically active, women are also in charge

of a disproportionate amount of family responsibilities. Women spend twice as many hours as men producing services for their households. The work includes cleaning, cooking, and taking care of family members and children.

Besides, gender issues have been reported in social protection, leadership, management, and women's invisibility in fishery sectors [13, 19]. According to the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (2019) [13], the rate of women participating in leadership and management is low in every agency within the political system on both national and provincial levels. Women have rarely been the head of an agency that can take up strategy and make decisions. Moreover, ethnic minority women participating in politics remains low, not only in comparison to that of men, but also to women from the Kinh ethnic group.

C. Pross, et al. (2020) [19] indicated that in Asia in general and Vietnam in particular, inequalities related to gendered fishery practices have been under-valued economically and side lined within policymaking. The reason is that women are often responsible for activities such as shellfish gleaning, cleaning, fish processing, and trading and those activities are commonly considered extensions of domestic work rather than productive labour.

### **3.2. Gender mainstreaming actions in agriculture and rural development**

#### *3.2.1. At a national level*

At a national level, there have been several pieces of evidence showing that the Vietnamese government has implemented gender mainstreaming actions. The results of this study show that a relatively progressive legal framework at the national level on gender equality and the empowerment of women has been developed including policies to promote gender equality in ethnic minority areas. In the *Law on Gender Equality* (2006) [20], specific provisions aimed at promoting gender equality in ethnic minority areas are incorporated. Besides, the Vietnamese government also established a national strategy for gender equality and this strategy was detailed in two programs over the two periods 2011-2015 and 2016-2020.

Moreover, since 2015, there have been two national projects to end child and inter-family marriage in ethnic minority regions and support gender equality activities. In addition, Vietnam has increased its efforts to implement surveys and studies to generate data and practical evidence for policymaking and to inform the policies of statutory bodies responsible for gender equality in ethnic minority areas. For instance, the first survey in 2015 conducted by the GSO reported that gender issues in Vietnamese minority regions are more severe in ethnic minority groups than in the Kinh ethnic group and those issues must be addressed and overcome. Women and girls are more disadvantaged in

terms of access to opportunities and resources due to social norms. The position of women tends to be as inferior to men. Social norms also restrict women's livelihood options and often limit them to domestic and reproductive activities.

#### *3.2.2. At a sectoral level*

At a sectoral level, we also found evidence of gender mainstreaming actions in some fields. Agriculture is the sector most affected by climate change in Vietnam and women are often more impacted because they make up the majority of the labour force. The gender division of labour in each sector and the additional responsibilities that women have to assume due to gender norms often limit their active participation in decision-making within and outside the household. Women in rural areas have government-facilitated access to preferential credit, but there is currently no information highlighting the link of this program to women's climate change vulnerability or exposure to climate risk. In rural areas, women need access to new technologies to diversify their livelihoods and proactively respond to the impacts of climate change.

Water security issues due to climate change often have a more severe impact on women, especially poor women. Because of the traditional role in the family, women are often the main source of water. That has limited their opportunities to contact and participate in social, educational, and economic activities. Although women play an important role in ensuring a domestic water supply for their families, in many national policies related to water resources and gender, women are considered one of many vulnerable groups.

A report by N. Menon, et al. (2016) [21] reported that, on balance, land-use rights held exclusively by women or jointly by couples result in several beneficial effects including increased household expenditures and women's self-employment, as well as lower household vulnerability to poverty.

A study conducted by T.T.K. Van, et al. (2018) [7] explored gender differences in formal credit approaches to rural households in Vietnam. The results showed that women in Vietnam have less access to formal credit than men. In addition, many rural women in mountainous and remote areas are illiterate, leading to immense difficulty in obtaining credit for production and business. Men tend to have more advantages in accessing credit for investments and training on using the loan for household economic development.

D.N. Quoc, et al. (2019) [6] argued that in the context of the transition economy in Vietnam, empowerment for Vietnamese women has been far from achieving gender equality. They provided evidence to convince that empowerment for women has created more burden

for them and they had to shoulder two roles of both paid labour and unpaid caregiver. Hence, there should be a continuation of a holistic gender strategy. This is very true to work in agricultural and rural areas in Vietnam, and other developing countries as well, if limited efforts are made to create more equal work and home responsibilities between men and women.

### 3.2.3. *At development projects and private sector*

Gender equality and equity has been integrated into most development projects and programs implemented by international development agencies and NGOs in partnership with local authorities and communities throughout Vietnam, especially in rural areas [22, 23]. Almost all NGOs and development projects funded by international development agencies have activities to mainstream gender and empower youth and women. All NGOs are concerned with gender differences (but with different priorities) in the process of project implementation (data collection, design of interventions...) [24]. This enhances the participation of women as well as contributes to the sustainability of the project's achievements.

The gender lens has been applied in many internationally funded development projects, especially agricultural product value chain projects. When applying the gender lens to those projects, insights into time trade-offs for the production process between males and females are expected. Based on those insights, interventions can be designed accordingly in an appropriate way. For instance, a gender lens has been applied to the project "Market-based approaches to improving the safety of pork in Vietnam" (2017-2022) funded by ACIAR to understand the role of males and females in the pork value chain in Vietnam, especially in slaughtering and retailing activities. For slaughterhouses, women were often responsible for preparing boiled water and cleaning after slaughtering and men were often responsible for slaughtering and cutting the carcass. Most of the retailers were female. Consequently, when organizing training to improve awareness and practices of those stakeholders to improve food safety, gender issues were considered carefully (FGDs and KIIs). Similarly, a paper by R.H. Bosma, et al. (2018) [25] also gave evidence of applying a gender lens in the aquaculture value chain in Vietnam.

Action Aids Vietnam has also implemented various programs, projects, and activities on agriculture and rural development focusing on livelihood support and capacity-building training for the community in agricultural techniques to support animals, plants, and climate change adaptation livelihood plans. Much attention has been paid to gender mainstreaming in almost all projects and programs of Action Aids Vietnam. In addition, projects on building community capacity in community development

management, nutritional health, child protection, and supporting communities to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic and disaster prevention have been also accomplished by many NGOs in Vietnam.

### 3.3. *National platforms for gender*

The Vietnamese Government is strongly committed to gender equality, as reflected in several national laws, its ratification of key international conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1982, and various policies supporting socio-economic development plans.

Thanks to many efforts by the Vietnamese Government, international development agencies, and NGOs, there has been a drastic change in awareness and promotion of societal changes in behaviour to implement gender equality, gradually narrowing the gender gap and partly raising the status of women in rural and agricultural areas. Communication on gender equality and domestic violence has also been integrated into development projects and programs leading to the initiations of positive changes in gender equality and equity, especially in remote and mountainous regions.

The Vietnam Women's Union has a broad nationwide network composed of four levels: the central level; the provincial/municipal and equivalent level (called provincial level); the district/precinct/provincial capital and equivalent level (called district level); and the commune/ward and equivalent level (called grassroots level). The highest body of the Vietnam Women's Union is the National Women's Congress. The Vietnam Women's Union has implemented many programs and projects to support rural women to develop their economy through production and agribusiness and has contributed to many activities in rural development. These organizations for Vietnamese women show strong systems from the central to local level by implementing development activities including agricultural and rural development programs.

Although there are many programs related to rural planning development or gender issues with attention to the participation of women and young people, there are limited large-scale projects or specific programs on RAI for youth or young women. Despite empowering women more, in reality, Vietnam still has a low rate of women in leadership and management roles.

There have been some incentive works for women such as women who are good at domestic chores, women's unions, emulation programs for women on special occasions, and dedicated rewards for good women but there have been no large scale and comprehensive incentive policies and programs. To some extent, women are sometimes given more jobs rather than being empowered.

**Box 1. Women participation in leadership**

“Although Vietnam is very interested and gives priority to issues of gender equality, especially women’s empowerment. Moreover, women face more difficulties because they do not have enough knowledge and experience and are not capable enough to shoulder many important responsibilities such as taking care of the family and participating in social activities, politics or decision-making rights in family farming. For example, the Vietnam Women’s Union at the Central Office has 16 departments, but only 2 units have women playing a key role in the head of a department.”

*Source: Interview with a leader from the Vietnam Farmer Union, Oct 2021*

Many women are not willing to participate in development or project activities, especially in rural and remote areas.

The importance of gender mainstreaming has not been properly made aware to the public as an important responsibility and factor to increase the effectiveness of programs and projects. In practice, gender mainstreaming has not yet become a mandatory condition when approving domestic programs and projects. Hence, for many programs and projects, gender mainstreaming is only assessed through the number of women participating in activities without other measures to promote gender equality such as the design of activities with gender sensitivity. In addition, the necessary budget for gender mainstreaming has not been ensured to promote gender equality activities in programs and projects.

**3.4. Challenges to implementing gender mainstreaming**

There are several challenges to implementing gender mainstreaming in Vietnam. Along with the existence of gender inequality, rural women suffer from economic disadvantage, lack of power and confidence in the family and community, and face many difficulties in accessing health, social services, and resources. In addition, women have a lesser role in making decisions on the type of crops, and female household heads in the particular face more challenges than men in accessing technical knowledge and better working conditions.

NGO projects have very specific gender equality assessment criteria; while state projects normally do not have specific criteria, the implementation depends on many factors such as qualifications, the approach of implementing staff and local culture, and women’s capacity.

Along with the process of international integration, digital transformation helps women expand their opportunities to access information, improve their capacity and professional qualifications, seek career development opportunities, cultivate training knowledge to develop themselves and increase opportunities to participate in management leadership positions. However, digital transformation also poses many challenges, especially for women in rural or remote areas. Women are still disadvantaged, especially in issues related to digital transformation. The results from FGD in this study reveals that when a project is invested, it creates a gap between men and women in digital transformation activities because smartphone users are mainly men while women are the main workers, creating some communication difficulties. Training activities that require the application of technological advances are often more difficult for women than men.

**Box 2. Gender mainstreaming in implementation of projects and programs**

“NGOs’ projects recently often have a specific gender component and gender equality assessment criteria, whereas state’s projects have neither a gender component nor gender equality assessment criteria. Therefore, the integration of gender mainstreaming when implementing state projects depends on many factors such as qualifications and approach of implementing staff and local culture.”

*Source: FGD, Oct 2021*

While women can be more empowered and do well in assigned tasks, they face more disadvantages than men because, in addition to social work, they also have to pay more attention to other jobs such as taking care of the family.

At the district level, finding from FGDs with district staff and leaders in agriculture and mass organizations such as women’s and farmer’s unions show that the awareness of local stakeholders on responsible agricultural investment (RAI) with a focus on gender mainstreaming is still limited. It has been also shared by the district staff of the Ba Vi district (Hanoi), Ly Nhan district (Ha Nam province), and Nho Quan district (Ninh Binh province) that many agricultural extension training activities have been organised for farmers by local government extension stations, but little attention has been made to gender issues.

### 3.5. Proposed actions for gender mainstreaming

Based on the above findings, some actions should be carried out to promote gender mainstreaming in agriculture: i) focusing on improving women’s access to education and legal services; ii) building extension capacity to provide gender-sensitive supports and market-driven productions; iii) facilitating partnerships and networks amongst civil

society organizations (CSOs), farmers’ groups, indigenous peoples’ groups, and women’s cooperatives to support women’s economic empowerment; iv) enhancing roles of mass organizations and civil society in promoting gender mainstreaming; and v) setting up institutional monitoring systems to track progress in gender mainstreaming in agriculture. These are expanded on in Table 2.

**Table 2. Summary of the proposed actions for gender mainstreaming.**

Focus	Action for development
Improve women’s access to education and legal redress mechanisms and women’s ability to collectively mobilise and claim political rights.	<p>Conducting regular gender analyses to provide information to support the process of establishing or adjusting programs/policies;</p> <p>Mobilising women’s participation in community activities, including agricultural production;</p> <p>Raising awareness about gender equality: The status of “respecting men, disregarding women” is still a major ideological consequence. This will not only affect the rights of women but also limit the development of society. Both men and women need to update their awareness and eliminate gender discrimination stereotypes. Training and talks on gender equality on television and radio... should be organised regularly.</p> <p>Integrating gender equality work into socio-economic development programs at different levels. Violations and gender discrimination should be strictly handled;</p> <p>Strengthening opportunities for disadvantaged ethnic minority women to access and benefit from policies and services for vocational training;</p> <p>Strengthening support policies for ethnic minority areas and market connectivity, climate-adaptive production, and safe agricultural production. Changing awareness, habits, and behaviour of a person or a community requires a process or approach starting from the smallest and simplest things, especially in culturally diverse and remote regions;</p> <p>Strengthening and propagating the roles of women in the family through books, newspapers, television and radio... to mobilise women’s potential for agricultural, forestry, and fishery development;</p> <p>Gradually removing the view of women as a vulnerable group when establishing or adjusting policies and programs;</p> <p>In the context of digital transformation, women need to be supported to improve their capacity, and create opportunities to participate and contribute effectively in this changing context.</p>
Building extension capacity to provide gender-sensitive support and market-driven productions for smallholders and small enterprises by	<p>Building capacity for agricultural policy makers with gender mainstreaming knowledge and skills and methods of designing gender-sensitive agricultural projects;</p> <p>Responsible investment in agriculture should pay particular attention to maintaining investment sustainability through capacity building and local empowerment. In fact, at present, investment projects in agriculture seem to have achieved a lot of results in the process of implementation. However, after the project ended, these achievements were not maintained when the project’s staff and investments were withdrawn;</p> <p>At the central and provincial levels, the staff of research institutes, government, NGOs, and agencies should be trained to understand up-to-date policies of the state; budget coordination for related activities at grassroots levels; integrating training in secondary and high schools, vocational schools, and universities;</p> <p>Having a clear orientation on livelihood development for households, developing local agriculture in the direction of One Commune One Product (OCOP) with safe agricultural production or other good agricultural practice (GAP)-oriented production procedures that help not only to protect the environment but also to meet market demand and to improve incomes for agricultural smallholders. This also contributes to empowering women to engage more in agricultural business and off-farm activities to improve not only their income but their capacity for sustainable livelihood development;</p> <p>Increasing the participation of women in leadership and improving knowledge and skills of gender mainstreaming of staff managing and implementing policies and projects;</p> <p>There should be more appropriate policies to encourage young people of working age to return to their hometown to start up (to establish a career and do agriculture) clearly and on a large scale;</p> <p>Integrating training programs on entrepreneurship, analysis, and market development into training programs for schools, professional schools, universities, and training courses for business owners, cooperatives, and cooperative groups.</p>
Facilitating partnerships and networks among CSOs, farmers’ groups, indigenous peoples’ groups and women’s cooperatives to support women’s economic empowerment.	<p>Collecting opinions of women to contribute to the construction of local agricultural works and the agricultural production process such as crops, plant and animal varieties, and division of labour;</p> <p>Strengthening methods of research and implementation of participatory projects in which women can voice their needs and desires and contribute to sharing their productive labour experience;</p> <p>Promoting the role and participation of women in training activities on agricultural production knowledge, encouraging women to boldly participate in the process of high-tech production and applying science and technology. Using agricultural digital transformation in the production and market search and participation in e-commerce platforms to consume agricultural products.</p>
Enhancing the roles of mass organizations and civil society in promoting gender mainstreaming is also a good action.	<p>At the local level (districts, communes, and communities): training for key officials in mass organizations (women’s unions, farmer’s unions, youth unions...) on basic concepts of RAI and roles of gender in agriculture and rural development;</p> <p>Coordinating with agencies working on gender equality at the same level such as the Labour Department and the Women’s Union to consult and implement activities considering necessary gender factors;</p> <p>Connect with CSOs that are mobilising resources and sharing information among stakeholders.</p>
Setting up an institutional monitoring system or scheme to track progress in gender mainstreaming in agriculture.	<p>At central level: issuing implementation guidelines and policy documents that show the importance of gender mainstreaming and encourage projects to integrate gender activities in their components;</p> <p>Making gender indicators one of the compulsory indicators in agricultural programs and projects, which are monitored and evaluated like other development indicators;</p> <p>Improving the quality and availability of reproductive, maternal, and child health care services in ethnic minority areas;</p> <p>Monitoring and supporting the community to carry out activities for RAI with gender mainstreaming that needs to be more realistic and adaptive to villages, communities, and regions.</p>



## 4. Conclusions

Gender issues and gender inequality still exist in Vietnam, not only among ethnic groups, but also within each ethnic group and between rural and urban areas. Rural women tend to suffer more from economic disadvantage, lack of confidence in family and communities, face more difficulties in accessing health, social services, and resources, and have less accessibility to technical training and market compared to men. These issues place women in fewer decision-making roles both in business and at home. Women were found to be more disadvantaged in digital agricultural transformation. Gender mainstreaming activities have only recently become apparent in NGOs, while they are still vague in projects and programs led by the state.

In order to address gender inequality issues, it is necessary to continue promoting gender mainstreaming in state-led rural development activities. At the same time, it is also necessary to improve the capacity of women to make them eligible for and actively participate in development activities. In the context of digital transformation, it is also necessary to assess the opportunities, challenges, and major problems facing women and girls in the digital transformation process. Creating opportunities for women to promote their strengths and address issues that digital transformation exclusive to women is especially important to those in local, rural, and remote areas.

Following is a list of proposed actions to promote gender equity: i) Improving women's access to education and legal redress mechanisms, and women's ability to collectively mobilise and claim political rights; ii) Building extension capacity to provide gender-sensitive supports and market-driven productions for smallholders and small enterprises; iii) Creating favourable environments for women to promote their creativity, research and apply new technologies in start-ups, look for job opportunities and do business in line with the requirements of the digital economy and make policies to improve women's capacity and skills for digital integration and transformation, ensuring women's access to the digital transformation process so that no woman is left behind; iv) Facilitating partnerships and networks amongst civil society organizations, farmers' groups, indigenous peoples' groups, and women's cooperatives to support women's economic empowerment; v) Enhancing roles of mass organizations and civil society in promoting

gender mainstreaming; vi) Setting up institutional monitoring system or scheme to track progress in gender mainstreaming in agriculture, especially gender mainstreaming in government's programs and projects.

## CRediT author statement

Nguyen Huu Nhuan: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Data curation, Data analysis, Writing, Editing and Finalising; Nguyen Thi Thu Huyen: Methodology, Data collection, Data analysis, Writing, Editing and Formatting; Ngo Thi Khanh Ly: Data collection and processing, providing some inputs for writing.

## COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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