

Gender and forests in a changing landscape

Understanding women's participation in forestry in Viet Nam

Policy brief



Photo by Viet Nam country program

Key messages

- Many women work in the forestry sector but their participation in decision-making at both national and subnational levels and their representation in leadership roles are limited.
- Securing women's tenure and leadership for forest use and management cannot be guaranteed until the contradictions in various laws, policies and practices are addressed.
- Enhanced technical capacity, as well as adequate financial and suitable human resources, should be ensured for effective gender mainstreaming in forestry.

Background

Gender equality is a government priority as Viet Nam is signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020) and the National Action Programme on Gender Equality (2011-2015) provide the framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (UN-REDD 2013; Thoa 2013). Also, the Law on Gender Equality of 2006 guarantees equal rights to women and men and requires each ministry to adopt gender-responsive strategies. Women account for 58 percent of the workforce in agriculture, forestry and fisheries, and deliver more than 60 percent of agricultural products. They play important roles in all rural agriculture and forestry activities, including management and utilization of natural resources as well as the practice of traditional knowledge on management and protection of forests and forest resources (ICARD 2012).

Gender disparities in various forestry activities are evident. Women are heavily involved in activities like nursery tending, seedling preparation and non-wood forest product (NWFP) collection, whereas activities such as thinning and pruning, forest rehabilitation and enrichment planting are undertaken by both men and women (Table 1). Overall, women's roles in forestry are linked to fulfilling subsistence needs for medicinal herbs, fuelwood, wild foods and fodder, while men are more involved in timber and NWFP extraction for commercial purposes (UN-REDD 2013).

Despite the many women who work in the forestry sector, gender disparities in Vietnamese forestry are largely attributable to cultural norms that re-inforce that forestry is a male profession and women's work is of secondary importance.

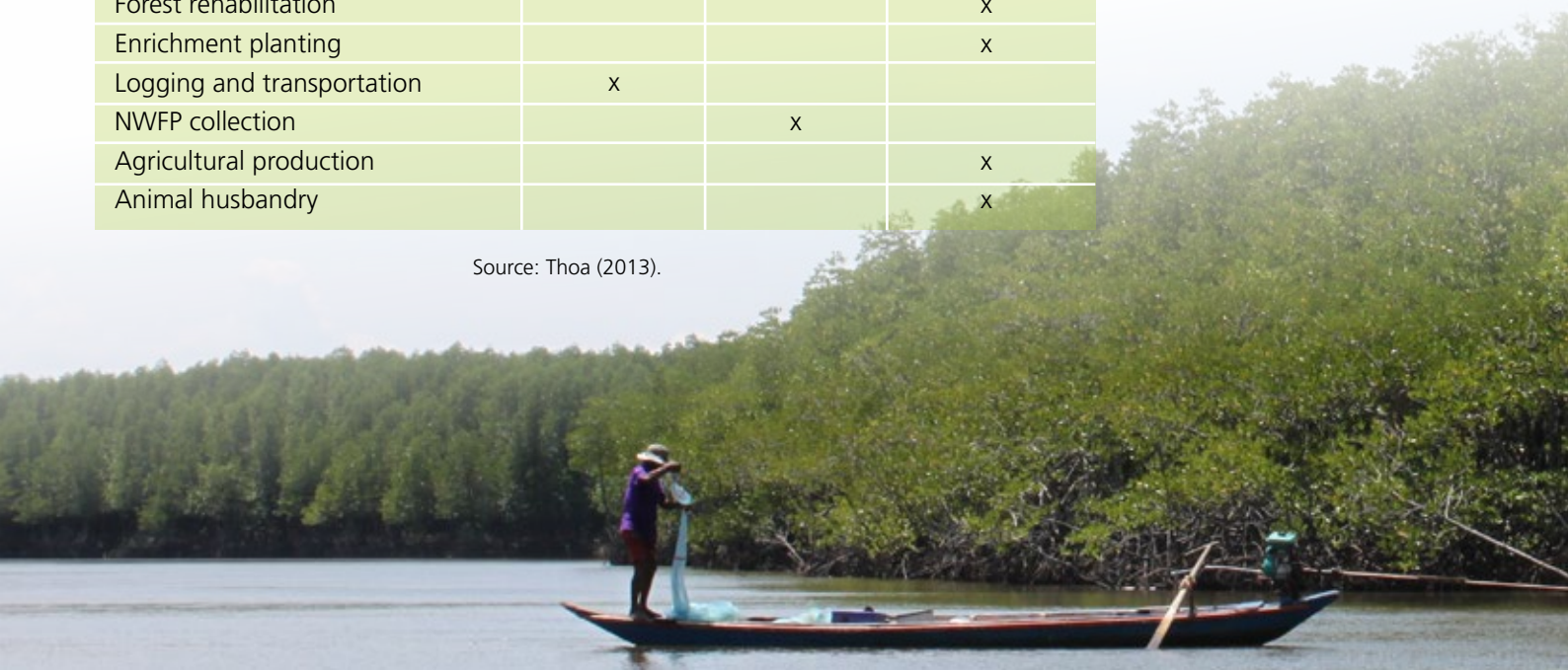
Because of these norms, fewer opportunities in forestry planning and capacity development programmes for managerial, technical and business skills are offered to women. Hence, women's participation in decision-making and their representation in leadership positions at both national and subnational levels are low. For example, at the national level, only 5.7 percent of women have leadership roles in forestry departments, research institutes, corporations and training agencies, while at the local level they occupy less than 5 percent of such positions. Similarly, untrained women workers account for about 90 percent of the workforce in rural areas (Thoa 2013; ICARD 2012). The lack of gender-disaggregated data in the forestry sector limits knowledge and availability of evidence on women's considerable involvement in and contributions to sustainable forest management in Viet Nam.

This brief discusses how gender perspectives are being integrated in Viet Nam's forest policies in terms of women's representation, participation, access to and decision-making in forest use and management. It also highlights key challenges and outlines recommendations to promote gender mainstreaming further in the Vietnamese forestry sector.

Table 1. Gender division of labour in forestry-related activities

Activity	Mainly done by men	Mainly done by women	Done by both
Forest protection	x		
Seedling preparation		x	
Nursery tending		x	
Afforestation			x
Thinning and pruning			x
Forest rehabilitation			x
Enrichment planting			x
Logging and transportation	x		
NWFP collection		x	
Agricultural production			x
Animal husbandry			x

Source: Thoa (2013).



Gender concerns in forest policies

The Law on Gender Equality (2006), the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2011-2020) and the National Action Programme on Gender Equality (2011-2015), among other policy and strategy instruments, form a legal framework to support gender equality in forestry. However gaps remain that need to be considered during policy development or revision to strengthen gender equality in forestry activities.

The Law on Forest Protection and Development (2004) has provided equal land rights to men and women, but forest lands are often not clearly demarcated; in this context it is important to note that secure titles and access rights are crucial for women to actively use and manage forest resources. Although the land-use right certificate (LURC) contains both spouses' names, women still face obstacles in accessing their land rights. For example, if the male co-LURC holder has migrated, women cannot use the LURC as collateral for access to credit because the co-holder's endorsement is needed.

The National Forest Strategy (2006-2020) provides a promising platform to mainstream gender as it acknowledges the capacity development needs of forestry officials on gender issues; it also recognizes the need to invest more in promoting a full-time gender focal unit to institutionalize gender mainstreaming, including gender-sensitive research and monitoring. However, lack of institutional capacity, including human and financial resources, as well as contradictory institutional procedures and practices have impeded these approaches. For instance, capacity for gender-related activities within the functional and management units of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD) is limited to a few members of the Committee for Advancement of Women (CAFW) who are trained on gender analysis.

Agencies like the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension Center, in coordination with MARD and the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs are identifying and promoting women candidates in the forestry sector, guided by the government's female leadership quota policy. These agencies could be instrumental in strengthening the skills and capabilities of women at different levels to enable them to take up leadership roles and become directly involved in forest-related planning and decision-making. Nevertheless, more efforts are required to address the following key challenges to mainstream gender further in Viet Nam's forest policies and practices.

- Women's land rights should not be tied to the male family member's rights because tree and land tenure issues are interconnected and it is crucial to safeguard women's rights as individuals.
- Women have limited involvement in and access to decision-making and leadership positions, job development, education and training, science and technologies, health care and other opportunities. There is no full-time focal unit on gender in the Viet Nam Administration of Forestry (VNFORD).
- Inadequate gender-disaggregated statistics compounded by limited technical capacity on gender analysis and gender mainstreaming among forestry officials inhibit informed policy-making.



Moving forward

Viet Nam has made progress in promoting gender equality across all sectors, including forestry, in addition to demonstrating commitments towards international gender agreements. Despite progress towards mainstreaming gender in forest policies and practices, some challenges remain for which the following recommendations are suggested.

- Dialogue and consultation meetings at national and subnational levels to review the provisions of LURCs and related laws as well as lineage and inheritance legislation should be conducted concurrently to ensure that they do not contradict the women's empowerment agenda.
- Provision of capacity development for gender mainstreaming, such as sensitization and training workshops for forestry planners, is critical to sustain interest and discussion on gender analysis and women's specific needs and priorities.
- There is a need to constitute and strengthen a full-time gender working group in VNFOREST to oversee capacity development activities and work towards removing barriers that women encounter in the forestry sector.
- Provision of skills' development training on income generation, accountancy and literacy alongside technical forestry training for women is called for to enable them to meaningfully participate in forestry programmes and projects.
- A national system for collection of gender-disaggregated data in the forestry sector should be established at the national level for better understanding of the rights and responsibilities of men and women and their contributions to forestry.
- Strong coordination among relevant sectors is vital. In this context establishing a coordination unit on gender equality in MARD with a focal point responsible for coordination with other relevant partners at different levels for gender mainstreaming in forestry is required.
- There is a need for more knowledge and information on gender issues in forestry, as well as guidelines for mainstreaming gender aspects into national forest policy development.

References

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This brief is part of a project entitled 'Mainstreaming Gender Issues into Forest Policies of Developing Asia-Pacific Forestry Commission (APFC) Member Countries' funded by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and implemented by RECOFTC – The Center for People and Forests. The objective is to promote gender equality in national forest policies, including strengthening the capacities of policy-makers and relevant stakeholders in mainstreaming gender issues in national forest policies. For more information, see: <http://www.recoftc.org/site/Gender/>.

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Bangkok, Thailand

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