



Evaluation

WAVES: Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality in Viet Nam 2019–2022



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Foreword

RECOFTC believes in a future in which people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. One of its four strategic goals centres on social inclusion and gender equality, in which women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and other vulnerable groups are active and empowered contributors to forest management.

To achieve this goal, RECOFTC recognizes that gender equality and equity are matters of fundamental human rights and social justice and a precondition for sustainable forest governance. It uses an equity-oriented intersectional approach to help expand the representation and leadership of women and other excluded groups. This approach helps increase their access to income and other economic assets, promote gender-inclusive policy and extension mechanisms and tackle root barriers, including harmful gender norms, practices and knowledge gaps.

Tackling these long-standing inequalities is a complex process that requires dedicated attention and resourcing. RECOFTC established Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion. RECOFTC has positioned and engaged with WAVES as a regional network that leads, inspires and sustains long-lasting changes. WAVES operates in partnership with “gender leaders” who are change intermediaries creating context-relevant inclusive solutions that work for women, Indigenous Peoples and youth across the forest landscapes.

The WAVES results from the first nearly three years of the program, which are captured in this report, demonstrate innovative approaches, such as how engaging gender leaders and supporting them in determining national and organization-based gender issues and priorities can lead to locally acceptable and sustainable solutions. The results showcase the absolute value in power-sharing and inclusive engagement for co-creating long-term solutions on topics of gender and social inequalities.

The type and spectrum of changes brought about by the gender leaders that were evaluated for this report differed among them but were contextually relevant and significant.

We invite you to learn about WAVES and its gender leaders who have spearheaded different initiatives to make the forestry landscapes more equal and inclusive. We hope that WAVES will inspire you to become a gender leader, with each one of you taking actions to realize a more inclusive and equal world, especially in the forest landscapes.

David Ganz

Executive Director, RECOFTC

Kalpana Giri

WAVES Program Manager, RECOFTC

Acknowledgements

The research report was designed and implemented under the technical oversight of Kalpana Giri, now the former Senior Program Officer for Social Inclusion and Gender Equality, RECOFTC, who also managed the WAVES program. Independent consultant Dibya Devi Gurung, who is the Coordinator of Women Organizing for Change in Agriculture and Natural Resource Management in Nepal, collected and analysed the data and wrote the initial draft of the report.

Ly Thi Minh Hai, the WAVES country focal point, reviewed and provided technical inputs. Vanessa Hongsathiviz and Julian Atkinson from RECOFTC provided technical inputs to finalize the report.

RECOFTC recognizes the partnership from and engagement with the gender leaders and their respective organizations in the WAVES network in Viet Nam: Nguyen Tuong Van, from the Forest Protection and Development Division, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; Nguyen Khac Lam, from the Nghe An Forest Protection and Development Fund, from the Forest Protection and Development Fund, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development; Mai Quang Huy, from the Phong Dien Forest Company in Thua Thien Hue Province; and Ho Thi Phuong, from Vinh University in Nghe An Province.

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Executive summary

Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, or WAVES, is a RECOFTC initiative that promotes gender equality in the governance of forest landscapes in the Asia-Pacific region.

WAVES built a network of 36 gender leaders from the seven countries where RECOFTC works. In Viet Nam, four gender leaders—from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), Vinh University and the Phong Dien Forestry Company Ltd—were supported in advocating for social and gender-equitable programs in their communities and institutions.

In early 2021, more than two years into the program, WAVES conducted an evaluation at country and regional scale to document the results and learnings. Gender leaders, partners and stakeholders provided inputs.

The evaluation found that the program triggered a range of results and changes among the WAVES gender leaders and partners at the individual and institutional levels. The gender leaders reported personal and professional growth in their ability to articulate gender and inclusion concepts, formulate effective plans and strategies and influence high-level policymakers and community leaders through negotiation and advocacy.

In Viet Nam, the gender leaders conducted trainings and assessments to promote gender equality. The gender leaders and faculty trainers from Vinh University developed a Guideline on Mainstreaming Gender into environmental courses, in Vietnamese and English, and trained faculty members and students. At the Phong Dien Forestry Company, gender training was conducted, gender-responsive mechanisms were introduced and working conditions and benefits for women were improved.

The gender leaders from the MARD conducted a gender assessment and integrated gender equality into the in-service training and conducted regular training for forestry staff. They proposed gender inputs to organizational policies, strategies and annual workplans. They also engaged with like-minded organizations to advocate for gender equality integration and encouraged women's organizations and the Women's Union of Nghe An Province to participate in women's leadership training.

Lessons documented through the evaluation process included:

- An accurate understanding of the capacity of stakeholders that allow for reasonable timelines for complex activities and the ability of stakeholders to commit to longer-term work plans are all important determinants of project success.
- Gender action plans can be most effective when they are demand-driven, results-oriented and context-specific.

- Understanding and being responsive to intersectionality is important to achieving inclusion and equity.
- Financial support for WAVES-like interventions must be scaled up to achieve more widespread and sustainable impacts. Enabling follow-up action and partnerships are crucial to sustaining the momentum created through the activities made possible by WAVES.

The evaluation

About WAVES

Weaving Leadership for Gender Equality, known as WAVES, is a RECOFTC initiative that promotes gender equality in the governance, management and use of forest landscapes and their resources in the Asia-Pacific region. RECOFTC implemented the three-year WAVES program from March 2019 to September 2022. It was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

RECOFTC established WAVES based on the idea that having stronger leadership and expertise will improve policymaking and investments in ways that promote gender equality and social inclusion more broadly. It also recognizes that creating transformative change requires identifying and supporting individuals working in natural resource management who can advocate for and negotiate such change at the institutional level.

The WAVES initiative so far has created a network of 36 gender leaders in the seven countries where RECOFTC works: Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam. Although the WAVES program has ended, RECOFTC continues supporting the gender leaders as they advocate for equality and lead gender-equitable programs in their communities and institutions.

The gender leaders across the region encompass technical experts, senior government officials, politicians, academics, directors and officers of civil society organizations, local community leaders, business managers and a journalist. To date, WAVES has equipped them with the knowledge and capacity to understand, design and implement gender equality measures in forest landscapes. It has built up women's leadership skills to promote gender equality across public agencies, the private sector and local communities and has worked with men as allies to support gender equality. And it has supported the gender leaders to integrate gender equality into policies, investments and actions.

WAVES has helped the gender leaders maximize their potential by cultivating leadership skills and by providing technical and financial support as they implement their individual action plan. Through regular mentoring and ad hoc psychosocial support, WAVES has helped the gender leaders create new narratives and visions in leading gender equality efforts and has helped amplify their work by linking them with wider networks and collaborators.

With support from the WAVES program, the gender leaders challenge conventional ways of thinking and promote gender equality in policies and processes related to climate change, REDD+, forestry, forest law enforcement, governance and trade. They have revived and are driving the gender agenda and reminding their societies that the goal is inclusion and social justice for all.

The WAVES program is part of RECOFTC's dedicated effort to achieve its strategic goal 4 on social inclusion, gender equality and public action. In its work RECOFTC tackles systemic inequities and marginalization prevalent in the natural resource landscapes by using a participatory approach of critical framing and co-engagement and co-creation of knowledge.

Four pillars of the WAVES program

WAVES was designed using participatory action research principles to activate self-discovery, analysis and actions (or co-creation) through a regional network of gender leaders. Participatory learning and action were activated by using engagement approaches that took into account the gender leaders' demand-driven needs and priorities. Multiple strategies were employed to address the intersecting barriers and drivers of gender inequality. The four pillars outlined here are part of the co-creation structure that was put in place to cultivate discovery and actions.

Demand-driven

- The gender leaders were selected for their commitment to gender issues and their ability to work on context-specific issues and achieve results. They were involved in the program's conception and remain involved in its implementation.
- Before launching the program, the WAVES manager and focal points from the seven countries where RECOFTC works conducted informal outreach and national discussions with the gender leaders. Together, they identified gender issues relevant to the national context and priorities and assessed potential positive outcomes as well as challenges, conflicts and barriers, and they planned risk-mitigation strategies.

The gender leaders were selected based on the following criteria:

- **Demonstrated commitment:** They had experience taking initiatives on gender and social inclusion work in forestry but were limited by the institutional set-up or facing resistance.
- **Understanding of gender issues and activities:** They had some level of understanding of gender issues, activities and changes that result from such interventions and barriers.
- **Scope of manoeuvrability:** They had a mandate to create institutional influence over people working in gender, policy or planning who provide opportunities to influence institutional changes and were willing to lead work in these areas.
- **Diversity of partners to deliver different types of changes:** They had collaborated with a wide group of organizations and people who can bring about diverse levels of change, from the policy level to practice, with a good representation of state and non-state actors and the private sector.
- **Period of engagement:** They were willing to commit to working with the WAVES program for three years (2019–2022).
- **English proficiency:** They had a working level of English sufficient to participate fully in the program.

Participatory engagement approach

- **Meaningful engagement:** WAVES created spaces for deliberation and dialogue. It enabled ownership, power-sharing, knowledge co-creation and multifaceted engagement strategies. The gender leaders were involved in every step, from program scoping and implementation to unpacking tensions and nuanced resistance that they encountered. Problems and solutions, including unintended changes and resistance, were analysed as a group. The program's methods were defined by the participatory approach and power-sharing between the WAVES team and the gender leaders.
- **Tailored capacities:** WAVES provided the gender leaders with targeted and timely support at the regional and national levels. They were provided with trainings and workshops on various gender concepts and skill sets, based on each leader's specific skills, needs and interests to implement their action plans.
- **Learning space:** WAVES created learning channels to connect the gender leaders in a safe and trusting environment at the national and regional levels to share their accomplishments, challenges and pitfalls. The WAVES focal points in each country moderated the learning channel at the national level.
- **Results-oriented:** WAVES provided support to each gender leader to implement their action plan and to link with other RECOFTC programs to expand their outreach and garner more support.

Intersectional interventions

- Different types of interventions were needed for the gender leaders to implement their respective action plan.
- The WAVES program employed diverse strategies and actions to address gender gaps and structural barriers, mitigate emerging risks and reduce opportunity costs.
- Technical and financial support were provided at the regional and national levels to roll out interventions.
- Interventions promoted inclusive changes at the individual and institutional levels.

Institutionalization and enabling systems

- The WAVES program design emphasized deliberative feedback loops to formal and informal spaces and governance procedures so that efforts to achieve gender equality extended to the institutional system to address systemic inequalities.
- A system of direct communication channels, such as the WAVES focal points working directly with the RECOFTC regional WAVES project team, leveraged influence and encouraged adaptive planning and strategizing.
- The gender leaders in each country supported one another and created communication loops between their informal network and the formal systems.
- Individual leadership approaches were used to influence institutional shifts within each gender leader's organization through policy changes, mandates, budgets and other means.

- The gender leaders were connected to a larger audience and network outside of their institutions and forestry circle for collective advocacy and amplification.

Of the 36 gender leaders from the seven countries where RECOFTC works, 31 are women and five are men.

About the evaluation: Purpose and framework

The regional evaluation was conducted in 2021, more than two years after the program had begun, by independent consultant Dibya Devi Gurung, in close collaboration with the then-WAVES program manager Kalpana Giri, the WAVES country focal points and the gender leaders.

The overarching objective of the evaluation was to review and identify the results and learnings of the WAVES program to date. The consultant interviewed the gender leaders, partners and stakeholders from all seven countries where RECOFTC works.

The approach of the evaluation was based on the principles and practices of participatory learning.¹ The gender leaders were guided through a process of self-reflection and assessment through several facilitated workshops and individual discussions.

Framework for evaluating individual and institutional change

The framework for individual and institutional change,² which was also used to design the WAVES program, was adapted for the assessment. The framework focused on changes that took place at two distinct but interrelated levels:

Individual change: The performance and behavioural change of the gender leaders were assessed based on their understanding of gender and leadership concepts and how they were able to apply these concepts to their personal and professional lives. The evaluation also considered informal changes, such as increased confidence and capacities of leaders on gender integration into the efforts they have led towards influencing internal policies and programs.

Institutional change: The evaluation examined how WAVES effected changes in organizations' programs, policies, structures and work culture. It considered both informal changes, such as each institution's networks, peers, norms and values, and the formal changes, such as introduction of policies and programs to support gender equality.

Evaluation process

The evaluation process was guided by a framework designed by the RECOFTC WAVES team with the consultant and the gender leaders. The framework was used as a guide to examine the WAVES results at the country and regional levels.

Design and framework for evaluation

The design and framework were developed by RECOFTC in consultation with the consultant and gender leaders.

- A first workshop was organized to create a common understanding of the evaluation framework among the consultant, the gender leaders and the WAVES RECOFTC team.
- The evaluation framework was then used to facilitate the country and regional evaluations.
- The evaluation was designed at two levels. First, workshops and meetings drew out evidence and learnings that occurred within each country. Then the learnings from the national evaluations were condensed into a regional perspective and shared at a regional evaluation workshop in March 2021.

Project documentation

The evaluation drew on all project documentation:

- WAVES concept report
- WAVES framework
- Country reports
- Meeting minutes
- Case studies
- Documents related to participatory action research, gender and leadership

Meetings and workshops conducted for the evaluation

- Country evaluation workshops: Country-level evaluations were made within a span of two months, from February through March. Each evaluation was conducted with a mixed approach of face-to-face meetings, virtual workshops and interviews and group discussions. One in-person workshop was conducted each in Lao PDR, Nepal and Viet Nam. One virtual workshop was conducted in Indonesia. Interviews and discussions were conducted in Cambodia, Myanmar and Thailand. The gender leaders shared their progress, learnings and achievements, including examples and evidence. The country-level workshops and meetings were used to assess the achievements, results, gaps and possibilities that the gender leaders had observed through their engagement with WAVES. Information derived through each country's evaluation process was then synthesized and consolidated to collate results and learnings at the regional level.
- Regional workshop: A three-day regional workshop in March gave the gender leaders the opportunity to present and discuss their results, learnings, challenges, opportunities and recommendations with all stakeholders, including partner and donor agencies.
- Meetings: Two meetings were organized between the consultant and the RECOFTC WAVES team to discuss and provide feedback on the draft reports. In addition, several rounds of in-depth discussions with the RECOFTC WAVES manager, the WAVES country teams and communication and learning experts were organized to gain a better understanding of the context and validate the findings.

Limitations of the evaluation

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the evaluation had to be conducted virtually.

This made it difficult to discern behaviour changes and expansion of informal spaces, especially through the remote interviews. The pandemic made it unrealistic to visit the gender leaders' workspaces and conduct face-to-face interviews with them and their colleagues, subordinates, supervisors and partners, which could have provided further insights on the gender leaders' leadership practices and their influences on their colleagues' behaviour and institutional norms for gender integration. This also limited the face-to-face interaction with the WAVES leaders, except for Nepal, where the consultant is based.

WAVES in Viet Nam

Gender leaders

RECOFTC supported four gender leaders in the evaluation period, one each from the Forest Protection and Development Division, MARD; Nghe An Forest Protection and Development Fund, MARD; Vinh University; and Phong Dien Forestry Company Limited, Thua Thien Hue Province.

	Name	Organization	Position
1.	Nguyen Tuong Van	Forest Protection and Development Division (MARD) (government)	Senior Official
2.	Mai Quang Huy	Phong Dien, Forest Company, Thua Thien Hue Province. (private sector)	Director
3.	Ho Thi Phuong	Vinh University, Nghe An Province (academia)	Lecturer
4.	Nguyen Khac Lam	Nghe An Forest Protection and Development Fund, Nghe An province (civil society)	Director

Implementation of the WAVES approach

As this section elaborates, RECOFTC provided step-by-step, demand-based inputs and some financial support to each WAVES leader to implement their specific action plan to meet the program's objectives. Within Viet Nam, the WAVES approach evolved with the following primary inputs.

Country-level scoping meetings and orientation workshops

The RECOFTC WAVES focal point in each country was oriented on the overall WAVES approach and provided them with guiding criteria to help identify prospective partner organizations and gender leaders. One country-level scoping meeting and one-on-one in-depth discussions were conducted with prospective participants to determine their vision for gender equality in forestry work, map out major barriers they faced to integrate gender in their work and to understand their interest to engage with a program like WAVES. After a few months of careful preparation by the RECOFTC country team and through the scoping meeting, the gender leaders were selected.

Regional launch, training workshops, coaching, mentoring and technical support

A regional leadership workshop was organized in Bangkok to launch the WAVES program. The workshop examined training on gender concepts, including negotiation, communication and networking. Participants were encouraged to critically analyse their situation and explore solutions and opportunities for developing their individual action plan based on their needs, priorities and context.

After six months of implementing their action plan, the WAVES gender leaders attended another regional training in Bangkok on relational leadership and gender analysis. This Leadership Pathways and Change workshop focused on developing frameworks on domains of change and gender assessments, managing resistance and self-care, training of trainers with facilitation skills, designing training courses and developing delivery skills.

Demonstrated actions

After returning to their respective organizations, the gender leaders started implementing their individual action plan, facilitated by the RECOFTC WAVES focal point from the country office. They were also provided some financial support to execute their plan.

A Zalo group for gender leaders was created to enable regular meetings and exchanges among them. The RECOFTC WAVES focal point provided regular support to the gender leaders through technical backstopping and guidance, monitoring and addressing their queries and challenges at the personal and institutional levels. These exchanges helped the gender leaders and RECOFTC staff analyse and identify their needs and challenges and develop demand-based, tailor-made capacity-building programs for them.

Some examples of the WAVES activities implemented in Viet Nam included:

Regular meetings and discussions

Monthly Zoom meetings were conducted to track and update the progress of the gender leaders' action plans. Periodic WAVES group discussions were conducted to provide technical and emotional or psychosocial support; identify and address emerging issues, needs and opportunities; and plan appropriate responses. Two platforms were established to provide this support: one at the national level among the gender leaders and the country WAVES focal point and one at the regional level among the gender focal points from the seven focal countries and the RECOFTC Main Office.

Needs-based training and workshops for gender leaders and their partners or community

Based on the needs and issues identified in the monthly and periodic meetings, specific training, coaching and mentoring sessions were conducted. For example, a training of trainers on the design and delivery of gender topics in forestry, a two-day training on gender integration in training curriculum and a one-day network meeting were conducted for the faculty members of Vinh University. A two-day capacity-building workshop to develop gender-sensitive forestry businesses for ethnic women in Quy Chau and Que Phong districts, Nghe An Province was conducted as well as a workshop on participatory learning and assessment.

Drafting of training modules

A Guideline on Mainstreaming Gender into natural resources management was developed and piloted through two subjects—climate change and environmental ecology—in Vinh University. The guideline was produced in Vietnamese and English. In addition, stories of the gender leaders' experiences were documented.

Gender analysis and technical inputs in the planning cycle

The gender leaders raised gender-related questions and provided inputs at the different stages of the planning cycle discussions in their respective organizations.

Regional trainings and workshops

The gender leaders were provided with a series of regional trainings. The Leadership Pathways and Change provided frameworks on domains of change, gender assessments, managing resistance and self-care and a training of trainers.

Findings and results

The gender leaders were situated in institutions that had limited exposure, skills or programs to address gender and social issues. They recognized these gaps and used their newly gained knowledge and skills on gender integration and relational leadership to make small but critical interventions. In the process, they also enriched and expanded their respective knowledge and skills.

Some achievements and results demonstrated during the WAVES program include:

Identifying formal and informal spaces or platforms

The gender leaders used both formal and informal platforms to orient and train colleagues and network members on gender concepts and tools. For example, Nguyen Tuong Van from the MARD integrated gender into the in-service training course and conducted regular trainings on gender for forestry staff (formal spaces). Mai Quang Huy mobilized his team in his company (informal space) to develop and implement a plan to increase opportunities for female workers through the organization's structuring, establishing more nursery teams and investing in tissue culture technology, for which women would have major roles. Nguyen Khac Lam integrated gender issues into his coordination activities with partners in Nghe An Province, encouraging women's organizations, such as the Women's Union of Nghe An Province, to organize themselves and participate in women's leadership training. Ho Thi Phuong from Vinh University in Nghe An Province integrated gender topics into the environmental training curriculum.

Showcasing incentives of integrating gender into the technical programs

Nguyen Tuong Van from the MARD demonstrated that by specifically incorporating gender-responsiveness and equity into their technical proposals, the chances of winning a bid improve considerably. Among the 11 proposals that were submitted to donors, for example, only three of them were selected and one among the three had strong gender and ethnic minority components.

Guiding and suggesting specific ways to integrate gender equality

The gender leader in the MARD proposed to include women into the firefighter's training, which had never been done before. They expanded the payment for forest environmental services guidelines to ensure access of the funds to women through inclusive budget allocation and making it mandatory to open joint accounts in both the wife's and husband's names. All the gender leaders took proactive steps to integrate gender-oriented tasks and responsibilities into their existing terms of references. The Vinh University gender leader

helped develop guidelines to integrate gender topics into two environmental subjects and has plans to make the education system more inclusive in the future.

Conducted studies to reveal gender inequality within their organizations

The gender leaders mobilized their organizations to conduct gender assessments and used the data to advocate for a better gender balance in the hierarchy of positions, decision-making and advancement opportunities. The MARD's data revealed few women in senior positions, and their participation in technical trainings, workshops and decision-making forums was minimal. The data also revealed that men were promoted sooner than women, even if they were working in the same positions and were equally competent. Nguyen Tuong Van said that she worked for more than 16 years in the same position and received few capacity-building opportunities. She used this data to mobilize other women staff and asked the union leader to lobby for gender justice within the MARD.

Developing the capacity of staff to increase women's participation

The gender leaders contributed to strengthening the capacities of their staff to plan and for increasing women's participation, particularly in forest companies, where there is resistance against women taking technical and meaningful positions. As a result of the gender awareness and training programs, the Phong Dien Forestry Company developed and introduced several gender-responsive mechanisms and structures. They revised the recruitment plan and included gender-responsive performance indicators into the monitoring and evaluation system, improved the working condition of female workers and revised payment regulations. They also made it mandatory to have both the husband's and wife's signature in the contract paper to ensure that women also received cash directly for their contributions.

Assigning equal roles to women in remote jobs was not a fair solution without addressing the risks of harassment. He needed to find ways that would allow redistributing recognition and resources more fairly between the women and men workers. To do this, Huy mobilized his organization to conduct a study to identify and analyse the gender issues.

As a result of the study's findings, several changes were made to his organization's policies and strategies, including identifying diverse and important roles for women in forest work; integrating specific and separate gender-related actions in annual workplans; expanding or revising job descriptions to ensure women's participation in more valued technical work; and involving senior management in gender awareness activities and events, including the chairperson who later had a significant role in approving the revised human resource policies and plans.

"These initiatives helped increase the roles and visibility of women in technical areas," Huy said. "Women have started to perform technical tasks, such as managing forest fire plans. However, despite these small but important changes, resistances and barriers for women to participate are still there and must be addressed."

Networks for promoting women's leadership and gender equality

Three types of networks were initiated by the gender leaders. A group among the gender leaders and the RECOFTC country and regional staff conducted Zoom meetings regularly to keep track of their action plans, receive technical and ad hoc psychosocial support, discuss technical and personal issues, share ideas and learn from each other. A network of the gender leaders and other organizations' staff, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, met to discuss gender issues in their sectors, share ideas and lessons learned, create synergies to advocate for addressing gender issues, mobilize funds and provide or seek technical expertise on gender. A small team of trained gender focal points who are passionate and have the skills and knowledge to promote gender equality and the idea of relational leadership within the institution was formed within each institution.

The gender leaders found these networks very effective in conducting discussions and dialogue, to aggregate their individual efforts to create synergies and to help them grow professionally and personally as relational leaders. The networks helped them amplify their initiatives and gain recognition within their organization and networks. For example, the gender group formed within their respective departments used their platform to discuss a range of issues, including flexible working hours for new mothers, developing proposals and training that address deep social issues and talking about disparities between male and female staff.

Amplification of the WAVES approach to increase male allies

The gender leaders mobilized their organizations and partners to reach out to unions, youths, women and labour. They advocated on gender issues through daily communications, training and gender-related activities. They also used the unions to encourage young male leaders to advocate, plan and take on small actions on gender issues. For example, Nguyen Tuong Van from the MARD used gender-disaggregated data to show specific gender issues to the young male leaders and give them ideas to develop issue-based plans and programs.

Developing strategic confidence among the gender leaders

Working on gender equality entails persistence and continued persuasion by people who work on this subject. Although people in general believe in the principles of gender equality, a majority of them do not understand the challenges of integrating it into their programs and institutions. The gender leaders have to spend a substantial amount of their time and energy to convince their staff and decision-makers to show them the value of integrating gender equality. Most of the time, it is a lone battle for the gender focal point or the gender officer. Exposure to daily and continued resistance creates emotional setbacks for staff working on gender equality. For example, Mai Quang Huy, the Director of the Phong Dien Forestry Company, said that he was criticized for his efforts to integrate gender-sensitivity with such comments as, "You are a fool to be pushing so much for it." However, he said that he is confident of his intentions and knowledge and has understood the value of working on social and gender issues and can deal with these criticisms and not get affected. Similarly, the female gender leaders said that before this program, they reacted emotionally when challenged by their colleagues, but now they are confident to deal with it calmly and know when to react or not to react.

Overcoming gender bias in a forest company in Viet Nam

Mai Quang Huy worked at the Forest Protection and Development Fund within the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development when he was selected as one of the six WAVES gender leaders.

At the regional workshop, he explained that the majority of Viet Nam's technical sectors are beset with biases and prejudices against professional and community women. In Huy's workplace, only 50 of the 400 workers were women.

"Women are often not considered capable and suitable for technical work, such as planning and managing forest activities like forest fire prevention, forest patrolling or even driving," he said. "Due to these

reasons, women are not considered valuable to the organization. During restructuring and budget cuts, women staff are the first ones to be sacked. They are given more administrative jobs and cannot exercise their technical skills and improve their careers."

Women who work and travel with men are often questioned for their capabilities and characters, he said. There is also risk of harassment from external loggers in the field.

"There are comments like, 'Who will marry her? She is always with men and travels with them in remote areas,'" Huy said.

Increased awareness and changes made in personal lives

Nguyen Tuong Van from the MARD said that in addition to using the gender analysis knowledge and skills in her work, she also made several changes in her personal life, such as teaching her son to take up household responsibilities and encouraging her daughter to explore and make career choices beyond the traditional women-centric careers. The gender leaders said that one of the most useful concepts learned from the training was the importance of being mindful and to practise it in their daily life. They said that being mindful helped them to remain focused and self-reflect. It taught them to be self-aware about the way they think, behave and act.

Careful attention to the quality of the training program is critical

All the gender leaders expressed that the quality of the training and the inputs provided by the WAVES program was very useful in giving them the clarity and skills to promote and address gender issues in their work and personal life.

The WAVES training package was carefully designed to engage and empower the gender leaders. It was based on the deep analysis and demand of the participants, supported with a series of training and tied up with coaching and mentoring support. The gender leaders were also provided with technical and some financial support to practise and apply their knowledge and skills. They were organized to support and learn from each other through networks and organized groups. They were fully engaged to learn, apply, network and continue to practise their knowledge and

skills, which motivated them to take leadership in addressing gender issues in their organization and personal life.

For example, in the environment-related subjects in the Vinh University in Nghe An Province, gender is considered a social subject and a non-requirement and not a priority. Ho Thi Phuong, a lecturer in the university and a WAVES gender leader, explained that there are no policies and guidelines to integrate gender equality into her unit. Among all the faculty members, only two staff had some exposure to gender as a subject. For her to understand the relational leadership and gender concepts and mobilize her faculty members and be confident to apply her training skills within two years was something she had never imagined she could do.

Ho Thi Phuong said that the design and quality of the WAVES inputs provided her with concepts and skills to view gender situations from different and multiple lenses. She says it has become her passion to seek opportunities to promote and work for gender equality issues. She was able to implement several gender-related activities, such as designing gender training modules and training students and faculty members and incorporating gender into different subjects. She has plans to expand it with different faculties, such as law and economics. She also formed a gender group with a few women faculty members who were interested and had participated in her training program. She said all this could happen due to the quality of the trainings and support provided and the whole participatory approach used by the WAVES program.

Gender networks activate male and female gender leaders to work together to turn their knowledge and skills into action

The gender leaders found gender networks and organized groups very effective in helping them roll out their gender action plans and to practice their relational leadership skills. They appreciated the WAVE's regional gender leader's network that helped bring both women and men together to work for a common goal. Being connected through regional and country networks helped them feel supported, recognized and united. Regular dialogues, sharing and backstopping through these networks provided spaces for the male gender leaders to work for gender equality that were not there before. The male leaders said that they felt included and appreciated for their work, and with this support, they could take some concrete and effective actions. For example, one male gender leader took a bold step and made it mandatory for 50 percent of workshop participants to be women, which is not common in Viet Nam.

Leadership happens in context

All the gender leaders had some experience practising leadership in their respective organizations but had limited experience of directly integrating gender equality into their work. Through the WAVES training, they gained good conceptual clarity and skills to integrate gender and were clear on the differences between traditional positional and relational leadership. But the rolling out of their gender action plan varied among the gender leaders and was dependent upon their gender, seniority and position within their organization and the type of organization they were situated in.

Nguyen Khac Lam, the Director of Nghe An Forest Protection and Development Fund and a gender leader, was able to make some critical changes in his organization's

working policies and translate them into action. He introduced rules and activities to increase women's participation in technical areas in the forestry sector, such as rules to include women in the payment for environment services and to make both a husband and wife the signatories in the resin contracts. He also coordinated and engaged with like-minded organizations, such as the World Wide Fund for Nature, to advocate for gender integration, etc. For him, the gender integration tools and approaches and the idea of practising relational leadership were helpful to identify spaces to promote gender equality within his existing responsibilities.

Ho Thi Phuong, the lecturer at Vinh University who is a new mother, said the training helped her to balance her work and childcare responsibilities. She helped her unit conduct training for students and lecturers and to integrate gender equality into different subjects as well.

For the female gender leaders in senior positions, the training helped them to reflect and refine the ways they were working. The training provided them an opportunity to reflect, refine and implement their ideas and practices. It provided them conceptual clarity and skills to understand, design and implement a gender-related program. They were also able to more systematically reflect both in their personal and professional lives. They said that they had become more mindful, thoughtful, analytical and reflective in their work.

For Nguyen Tuong Van, a senior official from the Forest Protection and Development Division in the MARD, the training helped her identify opportunities and be innovative to influence her institution's leadership to change their perceptions on gender as a subject and to invest in it.

Opportunities for WAVES in Viet Nam

- The stereotypical narratives that women are weak and vulnerable to perform technical tasks within the forestry sector still remain a huge barrier for professional and community women, and their contributions are not fully recognized or understood. Gender as a subject is also framed as “women's business” and not considered part of an organization's overall program. This makes it difficult to engage institutions and prioritize gender as an important component of their work. It is challenging to integrate gender equality into a whole planning cycle and allocate financial and technical resources.
- The WAVES gender leaders have been active and successful in integrating gender within their individual responsibilities and to influence their unit's workplans. However, they have not been able to do so at the wider institutional levels. Some of the reasons they cited were their small number and the individual nature of their gender action plans and limited financial resources restricted them from making sustained changes.
- Although the WAVES training program was carefully designed with intensive and step-by-step inputs, the gender leaders still require more in-depth knowledge, skills and experience in gender advocacy and integration to make wider and sustained impacts. The gender leaders also said that even if they are recognized for their gender-related

knowledge and contributions, they still feel unsure about their capabilities. They were still not able to call themselves gender leaders and experts. Despite a clear understanding of the differences between positional and relational leaders, they still seem to be influenced by the traditional definition of a leader who has power, position and authority.

- The gender action plans were not embedded within their respective organizations' plans or workplans. They were considered an add-on activity and the gender leaders had to negotiate for time and space to implement it. Limited or lack of specific guidelines and regulations on gender integration made it difficult for them to find logical entry points to integrate gender equality. They need more systemic support to link gender and integrate it within their institutions.
- Having male gender leaders with gender skills and knowledge is unusual in Viet Nam. The male gender leaders said that most people would consider that gender leaders should be female, but male gender leaders are now accepted, respected and understood. They are admired by their colleagues. But the men said they felt the need for more training, guidance and mentoring to manage these barriers effectively. And both the male and female gender leaders said their past two years of experiences showed that it is possible to engage men to work on gender issues.
- When compared with the civil society organizations, the gender leaders within the government system said that they found less space to practise relational leadership and integrate gender equality. They said that the civil society organizations have more flexibility and support systems and hence can be more innovative in their actions.
- The country and regional networks have proved to be very effective in knowledge management, mobilizing technical resources and creating spaces for psychosocial and intellectual growth and bonding. This network can be further strengthened and expanded to promote gender equality and relational leadership in the forestry sector and beyond, at the regional and country levels.
- The program should expand the experiences of integrating gender and systematically within the forestry sector's overall planning and management systems, such as human resources management, capacity-building plans, monitoring and evaluation systems and new project designs. It should cooperate with other like-minded civil society organizations and development agencies.

Recommendations

- RECOFTC could coordinate with the Government and development agencies to create programs to continue the momentum created by WAVES. The WAVES approach could be further reviewed, expanded and used as a best practice.
- The WAVES gender leaders have made some strategic and effective entry points within their organizations to promote gender equality. They still require both technical and financial support to establish the processes that have been created. To ensure a smooth continuation of the momentum, WAVES should support them until they and their organizations develop their own programs. The WAVES gender

leaders proposed two solutions: increase the focus on awareness raising, capacity development and gender-transformative policies and regulations; and strengthen the country-level networks for wider impact and to sustain the momentum created by the WAVES gender leaders. Having a critical mass with knowledge and skills to promote relational leadership and gender equality can help to continue the process even if there is no dedicated program.

- The gender leaders found the mentoring and coaching to be very helpful and suggested it must form an integral part of any future gender integration work within institutions. The idea of mentorship should be further strengthened and packaged as a component of the WAVES program. It is also important to include a separate component to discuss psychosocial issues by providing dedicated safe spaces with proper support services.
- The learning and knowledge generated from the WAVES program should be systematically documented and used to influence and educate the development of gender equality programs and to make adequate investments.

Endnotes

1. Pretty, J.N., Guijt, I., Thompson, J. and Scoones, I., *Participatory Learning and Action: A trainer's guide*, IIED Participatory Methodology Series. London: Sustainable Agriculture Programme, IIED, 1995; WOCAN, *Training Manual-Gender Integration in Planning*, 2011.
2. Gurung, B., and Menter, H., *Mainstreaming Gender-sensitive Participatory Approaches: The CIAT case study*. In *Scaling Up and Out: Achieving Widespread Impact Through Agricultural Research*, D. Pachico, ed. Cali, Colombia: Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical, 2004; WOCAN, *Framework for Assessing Participatory Action Research Program Activities*, 2010.

Annex: Actions undertaken by the gender leaders

	Activities	With whom
1.	Established a network of WAVES gender leaders in Viet Nam	4 gender leaders
2.	Participated in the Training of Trainers on Training Design and Delivery on Gender Topics in Forestry, online, (16 June –17 July 2020)	3 participants from Vinh University
3.	Organized a one-day WAVES network meeting in Vinh City, Nghe An Province (29 July 2020)	4 gender leaders
4.	Organized a one-day workshop on Sharing Results and Lessons Learned from the Training of Trainers on Training Design and Delivery on Gender Topics in Forestry, in Vinh City, Nghe An Province (30 July 2020)	28 participants who are lecturers in Vinh University and NAFF staff
5.	Organized a two-day training on Gender Integration into Training Curriculums of Environmental and Related Subjects for Lecturers in Vinh University, in Dien Chau District, Nghe An Province (31 August–1 September 2020) Developed a story on gender mainstreaming in teaching in Vinh University	25 participants who are lecturers in Vinh University
6.	Organized a two-day training on Capacity-Building on Proposal Development of Forestry Business Start-ups by Ethnic Women in Quy Chau and Que Phong districts, in Vinh City, Nghe An Province (22–23 September 2020) A story on “Gender and the Nexus Between Food, Energy, Water and Forests” appeared in MyRECOFTC (November 2020)	20 participants who are Thai ethnic women from Chau Thang and Chau Hanh communes (Quy Chau District) and Thong Thu and Dong Van communes (Que Phong District)
7.	Implemented a consultancy to develop the Guideline on Mainstreaming Gender Equality in the courses of Natural Resources Management and Environment; and piloted it in two subjects—climate change and environmental ecology—at Vinh University. The Guideline is available in Vietnamese and English.	Consultants
8.	In academic year 2020–2021, Vinh University used the Guideline on Mainstreaming Gender Equality into the courses of Natural Resources Management and Environment and piloted it in two subjects—climate change and environmental ecology—at Vinh University	Vinh University

9.	Organized a two-day National Workshop on Participatory Learning, Assessment and Planning Workshop in Hue (4–5 March 2021)	20 participants (4 gender leaders, expanded gender leaders from Vinh University, communities, partners)
10.	Participated in the WAVES fourth regional workshop (29–31 March 2021)	4 gender leaders, expanded gender leaders, partners
11.	Documented story of four gender leaders	4 gender leaders



At RECOFTC, we believe in a future where people live equitably and sustainably in and beside healthy, resilient forests. We take a long-term, landscape-based and inclusive approach to supporting local communities to secure their land and resource rights, stop deforestation, find alternative livelihoods and foster gender equity. We are the only non-profit organization of our kind in Asia and the Pacific. We have more than 30 years of experience working with people and forests, and have built trusting relationships with partners at all levels. Our influence and partnerships extend from multilateral institutions to governments, private sector and local communities. Our innovations, knowledge and initiatives enable countries to foster good forest governance, mitigate and adapt to climate change, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda.



RECOFTC

P.O. Box 1111
Kasetsart Post Office
Bangkok 10903, Thailand
T +66 (0)2 940 5700
F +66 (0)2 561 4880
info@recoftc.org



recoftc.org

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