

GENDER ISSUES IN THE COASTAL SANDY ZONE OF THUA THIEN HUE PROVINCE

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SUMMARY

Based on both participatory approach and household survey data, the gender issues in Coastal Sandy Zone of Thua Thien Hue are overviewed and analyzed. The findings indicate that in the last few years, gender disparities are significantly improved, both men and women have better access to education, health services and economic opportunities. However, in comparison with other regions, the existing gender gap between men and women in Coastal Sandy Zone remains wide. Generally, many disadvantages are still specific to women, particularly the poor ones due to their great responsibility for birth giving, as well as their overload of housework and economic activities. Mean while, voice is limited in the process of decision making in the family and societies due to traditional beliefs and stereotypes in which women status is either subordinate or unrespected by men. In comparison with men, women have fewer opportunities to engage in cash earning activities because they work mainly in agriculture and some other economic activities at home land. Consequently, their cash income is lower. In the field of social capital, although women's union has considerably improved women's position in social and economic life, they have less access to other sources of social capital, particularly informal ones. In order to improve gender issues in the Coastal Sandy Zone, some recommendations are 1) having more innovative solutions for better access to family planning, education, health care and social services; 2) gender equality should be specialized into rural development policies such as access to resources, income generation, development planning and decision making process; 3) having more support policies for women in such economic activities as credit, trainings on starting new business, business skills and transferring technology and 4) raising gender awareness for local authorities.

TÓM TẮT

Dựa trên cả phương pháp tiếp cận có sự tham gia và phỏng vấn hộ, các vấn đề về giới ở khu vực vùng Cát ven biển đã được phân tích và đánh giá. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy rằng bất bình đẳng giới đã được cải thiện đáng kể, cả phụ nữ và nam giới có cơ hội tiếp cận tốt hơn với giáo dục, dịch vụ y tế và cơ hội kinh tế. Tuy vậy, so với các vùng khác khoảng cách hiện còn giữa nam và nữ về giới còn khá lớn ở vùng Cát ven biển. Nhìn chung nhiều bất lợi đối với phụ nữ, đặc biệt là phụ nữ nghèo bởi vì trách nhiệm và gánh nặng công việc đối với việc sinh đẻ, công việc nội trợ cũng như các hoạt động kinh tế quá lớn. Nhưng tiếng nói của họ lại rất hạn chế trong quá trình ra quyết định trong gia đình cũng như trong xã hội do các quan niệm và thái độ không đánh giá đúng vai trò và tạo cơ hội cho phụ nữ, địa vị phụ nữ thường thấp hơn và không được tôn trọng bởi nam giới. So với nam giới phụ nữ có ít cơ hội hơn trong việc tham gia các hoạt động kiếm tiền trực tiếp bởi vì phần lớn phụ nữ phải tham gia sản xuất nông nghiệp, và các hoạt động kinh tế khác tại quê nhà. Kết quả là thu nhập bằng tiền của phụ nữ thường thấp hơn. Trong lĩnh vực vốn xã hội, mặc dầu hội Phụ nữ đã có đóng góp quan trọng trong việc cải thiện đời sống kinh tế - xã hội của phụ nữ, họ vẫn có ít cơ hội hơn để tiếp cận các vốn xã hội khác, đặc biệt là nguồn vốn xã hội phi chính thống. Để cải thiện các vấn đề về giới ở vùng Cát ven biển, một số đề xuất là 1) có nhiều hơn các giải pháp có tính đổi mới trong việc tạo ra cơ hội tiếp cận tốt hơn với kế hoạch hóa gia đình, giáo dục, dịch vụ y tế và dịch vụ xã hội; 2) vấn đề bình đẳng giới cần được cụ thể hóa và cần nhắc trong các chính sách phát triển nông thôn, như cơ hội tiếp cận tài nguyên, tạo thu nhập, lập kế hoạch phát triển, tập huấn và quá trình ra quyết định; 3) cần có nhiều chính sách hỗ trợ cho phụ nữ trong các hoạt động kinh tế như tín dụng, tập huấn về khởi sự kinh doanh, đào tạo nghề, chuyển giao kỹ thuật; 4) nâng cao nhận thức về vấn đề giới cho cán bộ địa phương.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, Vietnam has impressively gained great achievement in socio-economic development. With such impressive performance of economy, there is opportunity to improve people's standard of living and reduce gender inequality. In order to ensure women's rights and gender equality, Vietnamese government introduced many policies such as its Constitution, the National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (2006–2010), and Law for Gender Equality in 2006. These efforts have

resulted in significant improvement in Vietnamese gender equality indicators. In comparison with other developing countries in the Asia and Pacific region, Vietnam has better access to education and health care services as well as a higher participation rate of women in economic activities and government bodies¹³

In spite of the above significant achievement, gender gaps exist in rural areas. Apart from the Confucian tradition, there are many impacts on gender issues associated with the shift of shifting economy forward market oriented one which has created new social hierarchies with new intra-household relations, mobility and social differentiation in the market economy, and new forms of political participation and knowledge¹⁴.

This study focuses on the coastal sandy zone of Thua Thien Hue Province where many disadvantages are still specific to women, particularly to poor women. Due to the intangible barriers created by cultural beliefs, traditional stereotypes¹⁵ and rural institutions, in the existing gender relations, women have disadvantages and are almost subordinate to men in both the private and public domains. For example, women often work longer hours than men with lower salary. In addition, access to education and job trainings, health care, social services and credits is still more limited for women than for men. Women's voice is poorly represented in the process of decision-making, especially at the local level. The objectives of the study are:

Assess the existing gender relations related to economic position such as the division of labour between men and women, income, access to resources and benefits.

Identify the factors that influence or determine the women's access to resources and benefits, their participation in the social network and rural organizations.

Identify the possible policy to improve the gender issues in the coastal sandy zone of Thua Thien Hue Province.

METHODOLOGY

Study sites

Thua Thien Hue's Coastal Sandy Zone includes five districts, namely Phong Dien, Quang Dien, Huong Tra, Phu Vang and Phu Loc which are located along two sides of Tam Giang and Cau Hai lagoon. The Coastal Sandy Zone is characterized by the high population density since this region represents only 18.2 % of the total provincial area, but it is the homeland of about 45 % of the total provincial population. In the region most of inhabitants mainly depend on agriculture, fishery and aquaculture for their livelihood.

In this study, in order to select the study sites many issues relating to farming system, natural condition, infrastructure, rural institutions and organizations were carefully considered during group

¹³ World Bank (2006), ADB (2005), ADB (2007).

¹⁴ World Bank (2000).

¹⁵ Gender stereotype is considered as the society's attitude of giving preference to male over female, especially in the family, are reflected in the preference of boys to girls, giving more favor to boys than girls; seeing household works as purely a woman's duties, etc (ADB, 2007).

discussions. As a result, seven villages of the Coastal Sandy Zone are chosen, namely (1) Duc Phu village in Phong Hoa commune, Phong Dien District; (2) Dong Cao village in Quang Thai commune, (3) Thuy Lap village in Quang Loi commune, Quang Dien District; (4) Xuan Thien Thuong village in Vinh Xuan commune, (5) Vinh Luu village in Phu Luong commune, (6) Nghia Lap village in Vinh Phu commune, Phu Vang District; (7) Phung Chanh village in Vinh Hung commune, Phu Loc District. Geographically, these villages are equally distributed and they are representatives for socio-economic conditions of the Coastal Sandy Zone of Thua Thien Hue Province.

Data source and approach method

In this study both participatory method and household surveys are applied. Participatory method is a set of diagnostic tools used to assess the gender related issues. Based on bottom-up, pragmatic approach, participatory method is an innovative combination of several tools of Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). This method would involve, mobilize and motivate the relevant stakeholders to conduct mappings and analyses of gender related issues. In the context of participatory learning and action, workshops in general and group discussions in particular are normally conducted using the Mesocard visualization method along with economic structuring tools. Other tools such as trend analysis, day-time use analysis, social mapping, Venn diagram, life-line, and ranking matrices are used to structure discussions.

Primary data were from two rounds of household survey conducted by PIC project in 2004 and 2007-2008. By random sampling method, 146 households from 7 villages were chosen in 2004 and 138 of them were re-interviewed in 2007-2008. These households are divided into three categories, namely poor, average and better-off households. This household classification is based on such criteria created by participatory method as land size, family size, productive assets, housing, livestock, education level, income.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Household Gender profile

The gender profiles in Coastal Sandy Zone of Thua Thien Hue Province are characterized by demographical structure, role of men and women, their responsibilities,

Family structure and gender relations

According to household survey in 2007-2008, population in the Coastal Sandy Zone in Thua Thien Hue is relatively young and lightly skewed distributed to the men (Table 1 in appendix). On average, household size is 6.07 persons per household. Although family size is lightly reduced in the last five years thanks to the lower birth rate and higher rate of migration, in comparison with other regions, the household size in the Coastal Sandy Zone is significantly larger (Table 2 in appendix)¹⁶. Traditionally cultural beliefs give overestimated value to the necessity to have a boy child in the family. These beliefs sometimes generate major difficulties, particularly to women since their husbands want to have a boy. Although family planning and birth control policies have been introduced for many years, the number of families having more than three children represented high frequency in the sample.

¹⁶ According to a statistical survey data from 12 provinces in 2006, including Ha Tay, Lao Cai, Phu Tho, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Nghe An, Quang Nam, Khanh Hoa, Dak Lak, Dak Nong, Lam Dong and Long An, the average household size was about 4.75 persons (Characteristics of the Vietnamese rural economy: evidence from a 2006 rural household survey in 12 provinces of Vietnam, Statistical Publisher, 2007).

It implicates that many disadvantages are still specific to women, particularly to poor ones. In order to fulfil the natural reproduction function, women have to spend a lot of time for pregnancy, giving birth and children care. In addition, women in the coastal sandy zone are mainly responsible for housework which is traditionally considered to be women's duty. Information from group discussion indicates that women often spend about seven hours per day for their housework, while men spend only 1.5 hours. In the morning women often wake up very early and go to bed very late to do such housework as cooking, animal feeding, cleaning, washing, and taking care of children. Besides, women in the Coastal Sandy Zone have increasingly participated into the economic activities such as agriculture, aquaculture, non-farm and off-farm.

Consequently, in the coastal sandy zone women's working day is longer. It is estimated that women work from 12 to 14 hours per day while men work from 9 to 10 hours. However, due to feudal thoughts which have persisted for a thousand years women are considered to be weak or inferior compared to men. In the families men often make final decisions despite of discussions. Besides, women's voice is limited or inadequately taken into consideration.

Access to education

Vietnam has made significant progress in expanding the coverage of education, even among the poor¹⁷. The enrolment rates of all grade level increased steadily between early the 1990s and the beginning of 21st century. In the coastal sandy zone of Thua Thien Hue Province, the access to education has significantly been improved in recent years. For example, in Phu Vang District, enrolment rate in primary level increased from 97 % in academic year of 2001-2002 to more than 99 % in 2006-2007. At the same period, the enrolment rate increased even faster from 51 % to 55 % for the lower secondary and from 20 % to 22 % for upper secondary levels. In the last few years, gender equality in access to education improved remarkably. However, there is relative disparity between boy and girls. In comparison with the richer regions, the gap between girls and boys enrolling at all levels of education is wider in the coastal sandy zone. Due to high expenditure for education, households tend to give priority to boys in terms of education in case they cannot afford for all children. Many girls of the poor households have fewer opportunities to go to school. They are very vulnerable due to traditional beliefs in which girls are not encouraged to get high education. The dropout rate of girls is higher than that of boys, because they are not encouraged by their parents. After graduation from secondary most of students particularly the girls stop studying to earn a living. Consequently, in comparison with other regions, education of the interviewed households in the coastal sandy zone of Thua Thien Hue is relatively limited. A majority of population is under secondary level. For example, about 45 % of the interviewed persons have completed primary school and the same percentage have completed secondary school. The grade level attained by the workforce in the study sites is just beyond grade nine. Especially, in 2007-2008, about 3 % of labourers are illiterate (Table 3 in appendix). Besides, professional level of the population in the study sites is relatively limited. However, there are significant differences among the household wealth categories (Table 4 in appendix).

Access to resources

Access to land and finance has been central to rural development. The ways in which these resources are used and ownership defined and transferred have profound effects on the economic, social and political outcomes, particularly the position of men and women in rural society. Traditionally, rural women often lack of security of land tenure (Komjathy & Nichols, 2001).

¹⁷ Trends in the Education Sector, Nga Nguyet Nguyen

In Vietnam, following the economic reforms in agriculture in 1988, although land is still controlled by the state, the farmers obtain land use rights. In 1993 a Land Law was enacted to state the long-term and stable use of the land use right for household. The period of land allocation is 20 years for annual crops and 50 years for other perennial crops and forestry. Land use rights include the rights of transfer, exchange, lease, inheritance and mortgage. To ensure the legislation of land-users, a land-use right certificate (a Red Book) is given. Unfortunately, the land use right certificate according to Land Law in 1993 bears only the name of the husband who was often considered as household head. As a result, there was unequal access to the land use right between men and women. Women often met many difficulties in case they want to use land-use right certificates as collateral for loans. With the improvement of land registration system and clearer administrative procedures, land law of 2003 states that both husband and wife have equal access to land. A novelty is the requirement that the land use certificate certifies the names of both husband and wife if the land belongs to both. However, the implementation of this land law take place slowly because it takes a long time for reissuing the land use certificate.

Like all Vietnamese households, women in the coastal sandy zone are usually responsible for financial management. In most households women often make financial decision for small expenditures. For important financial decision they have to discuss with their husband. Many women said that they consider keeping cash as a burden since they could not spend the money without their husband's agreement. The situation is even worse for the poor women since their family income is not enough to cover their expenditure. Consequently, the poor women often fall into debts.

Gender division in economic activities

In rural regions, women are over-represented in some sectors, such as in agriculture and occupations while men are in others (WB, 2006). In the coastal sandy zone, gender divisions were well acknowledged in households according to the type of tasks. Although both men and women are engaged in farming activities, men are often responsible for heavy tasks such as ploughing, pest control (herbicide and insecticide spraying) and irrigation. While women are in charge of seeding, transplanting, caring (weeding) and post-harvesting (processing and marketing). For some tasks such as fertilizer application, harvesting, fertilizer application and planting the gender division is less clear since they are shared by both men and women in the household.

For livestock activities women do most of the work such as collecting and preparing animal feed, feeding and cleaning. Men's involvement in these activities is often less, but they have equal power to women in terms of the marketing or decision making in livestock production. In aquaculture, except pond cleaning which is equally shared, men are responsible for most of heavy activities such as pond building and harvesting. They also take more power for marketing decision. For non-farm and off-farm activities men's involvement is higher. Women are mainly engaged in a regular cash income activities such as processing, production and sale of food, trade, and handicrafts. Men derive income from wage labor, especially as non-agricultural and migrant laborers, transportation and construction workers. Men benefit more from these jobs, because they have stronger power in decision-making and status. They are easier to shift from agriculture to wage labour and non-farm business activities since they are relatively free from household works. Information from group discussions indicates that in the Coastal Sandy Zone on average female wages account for only 70 per cent of those of male workers. This seems to be similar to the findings of Vietnam Living Standard Survey in 2002.

Table 1. Division of labour between men and women in activities (% done by men and women)

Activities	Men	Women
Crop production		
Clearing field, ploughing	80	20
Sowing seed and transplanting	30	70
Applying fertilizer	55	45
Pest control	70	30
Caring	30	70
Irrigation	60	40
Harvesting	50	50
Post harvesting	40	60
Livestock production		
Preparing feed	20	80
Feeding	30	70
Cleaning	20	80
Marketing	50	50
Aquaculture		
Pond building	80	20
Pond cleaning	50	50
Feeding	60	40
Caring	60	40
Harvesting	70	30
Marketing	70	30
4. Non-farm works	60	40
5. Hired works	70	30

Source: PRA reports in the study sites, 2007

Migration

As reflected above, the coastal sandy zone is densely populated and characterised with limited farming land area and a general lack of non-farm job opportunities. In this context, the migration of some workforce and its associated remittances are becoming very popular. In recent years, migration is likely to be motivated by better employment and income opportunities in the urban centres, especially in Ho Chi Minh City.

The information collected during the household survey shows that migration is extremely popular in the study sites. The rate of households having migrants is relatively high. Individuals from the poor households are more likely to migrate than those from the average and the better-off households categories. About 62 % of the poor and of the average as well as 58 % of the better-off reported that one of their household's member is working in other locations such as Ho Chi Minh City, Binh Duong and Dong Nai Provinces. Most migrants move towards the South. They often go to Ho Chi Minh City and other surrounding southern provinces where employment opportunities are better. Some migrants who are known as seasonal migrants move within the province. Only few migrants opt for the international migration, mainly focused on Taiwan and Malaysia. Most of migrants are young people and equally distributed between men and women. Over half of them (55 %) are under 25 years old, and only 10 % of

them age 45 years or more. Although migrants are mostly concentrated on the young age group 20–25, their education and professional skill are limited and differ considerably among the three wealth categories of households. For the poor households, most of their migrants have under secondary level of education; no one is educated in vocational school or university. Migrants from the better-off households category have higher level of education. Migrants' occupation is mainly to be unskilled nature. Occupation of female migrants mainly includes tailors, shoe makers, trading and housekeeping, (10 %), housekeeping (10 %). Meanwhile, male migrants are likely to be more involved into construction worker or mechanic.

It is a great concern for the local people to migrate freely to other regions. Firstly, most of migrants are young people. This rapid increase in migration has caused additional difficulties for their home as there are not sufficient good labours for farming. Secondly, due to low education, most of migrants are unskilled labours, their employment is unstable and their wage is generally low and not enough to cover their expenditure. Thirdly, migrants have met many difficulties such as poor housing condition, long working hours, social safe net shortage. Information from group discussions reveals that most of migrants have neither labour contract with their owners nor social and medical insurances. Consequently, they face many difficulties once they are ill, have accidents and are lost. Finally, there is a serious concern about the spread of HIV/AIDS for women since their husbands migrate to other regions. Living far away from their home makes some men have unprotected commercial sex, get HIV infection and pass it on to their wives.

Gender and social capital

The social network, institutions and organizations play an important role in rural areas. Access to and use of social network related to typical capital that strongly influences the household livelihood. In rural area of Vietnam, a complex and wide social network links the governmental institutions, the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and social organizations at different levels with farm household. Besides, there are informal social networks based on the characteristics of the local culture. The official social networks include the Women's Union (WU), the Farmers' Association (FA), the Youth Union (YU), the Veteran Union (VU), the Fatherland Front (FF), various Professional Groups (PGs) such as extension, shrimp, gardening and livestock raising, IPM groups and so on. However, WU and FA are the most popular social networks that have attracted most of the farmers in the study sites. Figure 1 shows that over 90 % of the surveyed households reported their membership to WU and FA at local level. Besides, some of them have participated in other social organizations such as YU, PGs, FF as well as voluntary organizations such as voluntary health group, charity and religious groups.

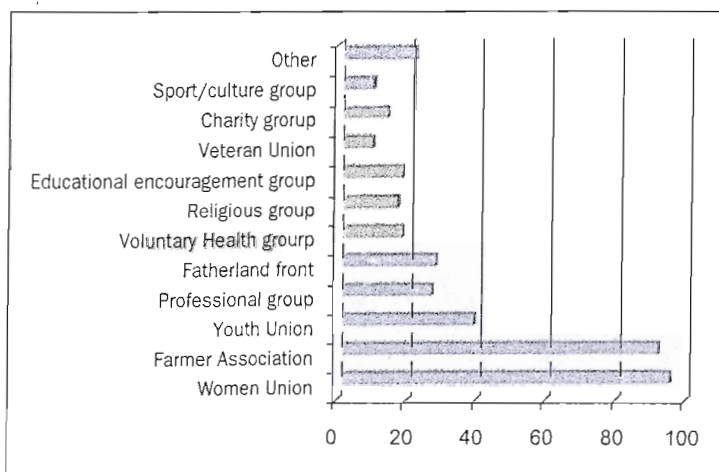


Figure 1. Rate of households' participation in social networks, 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households)

Women's Union is a social organization that has a full network from the central to the grass root level. It always has contact and coordination with government institutions at different levels to implement campaigns initiated by local governments. Most of WU activities focus on protecting women rights, guaranting the partaking of women in social life, training and giving consultations on reproductive health and family planning. In recent years, WU has increased its participation in many projects to help farmers. WU also mobilizes women to join many campaigns such as credit, saving, animal raising and vegetable production. It carries out activities related to the Provincial Food Security Programme. More specifically, WU supports production activities focussed on livestock raising and on crop production with the organisation of training courses on the caring and feeding livestock and cultivation techniques Rural credit programmes funded by government institutions and NGOs are mostly channelled through the WU. Many poor women in the study sites have benefited from such activities. WU managed credits and conducted 1,340 training courses to more than 67,000 women¹⁸.

Table 2 presents that most of women in the study sites are members of WU and there is no significant difference in the rate of participation in WU activities among household wealth categories. However, the level of participation varies considerably. Women of the better-off category are likely to have more regular participation in activities organized by WU (Figure 2).

Table 2. Rate of participation at Women's Union related activities among the three wealth categories of households, 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households)

	Better-off	Average	Poor
Rate of participation	94.2	92.8	92.6
<i>of which :</i>			
Very regular	65.2	58.6	51.2
Often	16.2	14.4	18.5
Rare	11.5	14.5	12.1
Very rare	7.1	12.5	18.2

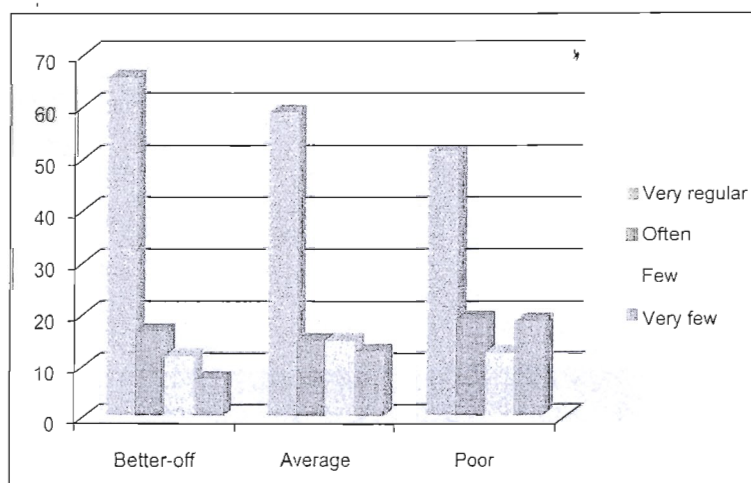


Figure 2. Graphic representation of the rate of participation at Women's Union related activities among the three wealth categories of households, 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households)

¹⁸ From : Annual Report, Thua Thien Hue Women Union, 2007

Information from household survey reports that WU plays an important role in the social network in the study sites. It is the main way for informing, exchanging and sharing information or knowledge among members. By participating in WU's activities, women get much benefit. About 85 % of them said that they had encouragement and sympathy from other members, especially when they were facing difficulties such as sickness, animal death or even conflicts in their family. About 78 % said that they could learn from each other about the technique for crop and livestock production and 48 % reported about experience sharing. Especially, 24 % of them obtained credit through WU since it acts as an intermediary to help women access credit from VSPB. It also helps their members to participate in national and international projects (32 % of WU members had the opportunity to take part in the training sessions and 18 % of them attended study tours) (Figure 3).

The participation in WU's activities is more important for the poor women because they have relatively more benefit than others from WU activities. Many poor women said that they are in close contact with WU by group meetings or Women's Union head's visits. They received some credits introduced and guaranteed by WU to raise pig. But they are passive and less self-confident to have a full participation.

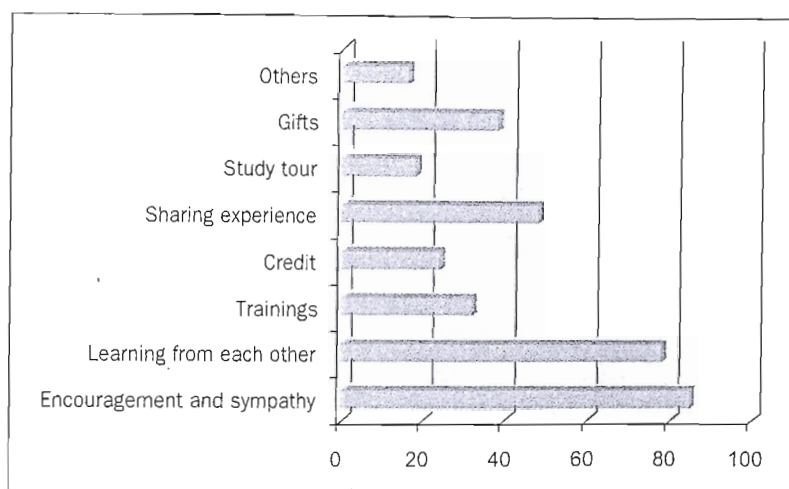


Figure 3. Major benefits gained from participation at Women's Union related activities (% of surveyed households)

Farmers' Association (FA)

FA and WU have similar structures of organisation, although most FA's members are men. FA are initiated and directed by the State with the main functions of passing on government agriculture policies to farmers and assisting farmers in agricultural production. FA also serves as a guarantee for its members in general and the poor in particular to access loan from the banks¹⁹. FA participates into the activities of rural development projects as a providing partner service and mobilizes its members in the project implementation.

Sometimes, FA coordinates with extension agents and projects to organize training courses of production techniques for crops and livestock, transferring new technology, performing demonstration models. Every two months, FA organises a meeting session inform farmers on agriculture related news and to offer an opportunity for successful farmers to share experiences with others. Some study tours to witness and learn new technology and experience from other villages and communes also take place.

¹⁹ FA has mobilized different sources of capital to give loans to 3,200 poor farmers; the total loans increased to 16 billions VND (Report on Poverty Reduction Program of Thua Thien Hue PPC, 2006)

At present, most households are member of FA. However, the surveyed households reported that they consider the FA to be too administrative. Generally, the activities organized by FA are not really attractive to its members. Information from household survey presents that the participation level of the farmers in FA's activities is lower than that of WU. Table 3 indicates that although most of farmers report their involvement in FA's activities, the level of participation is relatively low. By contrast, many farmers said that they participate rarely or very rarely to FA activities; some poor people even said that they are very passive to participate.

Table 3. Rate of participation at Farmers' Association related activities among the three wealth categories of households, 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households)

Rate of participation	Better-off	Average	Poor
of which	93.2	91.2	88.4
Very regular	52.6	42.6	41.8
Often	15.4	18.9	19.3
Rare	14.8	18.9	16.7
Very Rare	17.2	19.6	22.2

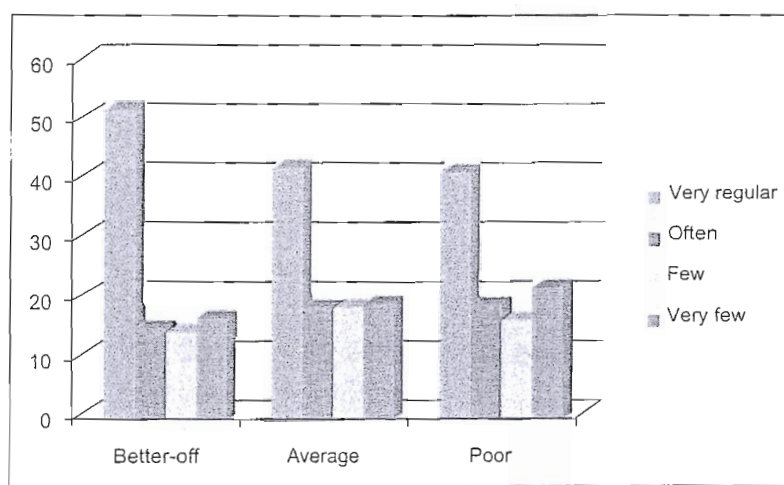


Figure 4. Graphic representation of the rate of participation at Farmers' Association related activities among the three wealth categories of households, 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households)

Other organizations

Other organizations such as Youth Union (YU), Professional Groups (PGs) and Veteran Union (VU) have attracted some farmers in the study sites. Except professional group, these organizations are likely to be politically orientated, yet they also have some activities to assist their members in agricultural production through information sharing and credit assistance. Young people get vocational training through the YU. The YU also helps members to access loans for income generation through either production or working abroad. Similarly, some people get credit through VU. Except YU which divides equal access to both, women are likely to be less participated in the activities organized by professional groups such as extension club, cow raising group, garden production group.

Informal social networks

The informal social network offers the opportunity to attend community and social events such as weddings, funerals and commune and village feast days, which, in all sites, carries a high economic cost. These community activities and social events provide a network of contacts, which facilitates access to

services and providing an informal safety-net against some shocks and crises. Social connections appear to be important in accessing formal sector loans in rural areas.

In the Coastal Sandy Zone, women generally have less opportunities to participate in these activities. The reason normally given by the local people is that it is not the right position for women to take part in such activities. The poor also has fewer opportunities to join these events.

Meeting and training participation

Information from group discussion and household survey indicates that there is significant difference in the level of participation in the meetings and trainings between men and women. In general, men's participation is higher than that of women. Except the meetings and trainings in which gender balance of participation is taken into account by organizers, women have fewer opportunity to take part in. In most of the study sites, men are dominant in the extension trainings since they are traditionally considered to be in the right position standing for new things such as new innovations, technology, "men know everything and they are better at understanding than women". Men often take more power in decision making with respects to the use of technology although they are less responsible for some economic activities at home such as livestock production. Similarly, it is widely seen in Coastal Sandy Zone that men are the ones who attend the meetings (village and commune meetings) much more than women. The main reasons are that there is no place for women in traditional beliefs, women are considered as "slow to understand", women's voice is less respected by the men. Moreover, the time of meeting is often at night (from 8 to 10pm) when most of women are busy with house work and women should not go out at night according to the traditional thinking.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In spite of significant improvement in terms of gender equality in the recent years, there are many disadvantages to women in the Coastal Sandy Zone. Although discrimination is often intangible, women have less access to and control over resources such as education, healthcare, information, technology, land and social capital. Traditional gender stereotypes, cultural beliefs give overestimated value to the men in the family, while women are considered as weak or inferior.

Thanks to high growth of economy and support policies introduced by government, the economic opportunities are significantly improved for both men and women. However, there remains considerable differences in accessing to these economic activities. Due to the burden of housework, women are mainly engaged in agriculture and some other economic activities at home while men are more engaged in cash earning activities. As a results, men could contribute more cash income, compared to women. This invisible barrier makes women strongly dependent on their husbands.

Women have got much benefit from various activities organized women's union such as trainings, credit provision, and social services. But in comparison with men, women in the Coastal Sandy Zone have limited access to social capital such as fewer opportunities for social activities and meeting. Their voice in the process of planning and policy making is limited because their participation is not regularly or their opinions are not respected by men.

In order to improve gender issues in the Coastal Sandy Zone, some recommendations are 1) having more innovative solutions for better access to family planning, education, health care and social services; 2) gender sensitivity should be taken into account in rural development policies relating to access to resources, income generation, development planning and trainings and decision making process; 3) having more support policies for women in economic activities such as credit, trainings on starting new business, business skills and transferring technology and 4) raising gender awareness for local authorities.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Distribution of the surveyed population in the Coastal Sandy Zone of Thua Thien Hue Province by age classes and gender, over 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households' members)

Age groups	2003-2004			2007-2008		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
<12 years	10.6	11.0	21.6	6.2	8.3	14.6
12 – 18 years	12.6	11.7	24.3	9.7	9.3	18.9
18 – 55 years	25.8	20.3	46.1	30.2	24.7	54.9
> 55 years	3.3	4.7	8.0	5.6	6.0	11.6
Total	52.3	47.7	100	51.7	48.3	100

Source: PIC household survey 2004, household survey 2007-2008

Table 2. Demographic characteristics (age classes) of the three wealth categories of households , over 2003-2008 period (number of persons, % of surveyed households' members)

Household size	2003-2004			2007-2008		
	Poor	Average	Better-off	Poor	Average	Better-off
(persons)	6.3	6.7	6.4	6.0	6.1	5.9
< 12 years	32.5	19.3	14.8	20.0	13.6	11.1
12 to 18 years	23.3	24.9	24.7	24.6	17.6	15.7
18 to 55 years	36.0	48.8	51.9	43.6	57.6	60.8
> 55 years	8.1	7.0	8.6	11.8	11.2	12.4

Source: PIC project survey data in 2004, household survey in 2007-2008

Table 3. Professional education and training levels among the three wealth categories of households*, over 2003-2008 period (% of surveyed households' members)

	2003-2004			2007-2008		
	Better-off	Average	Poor	Better-off	Average	Poor
No skill training	54.6	70.4	83.7	34.3	55.6	73.0
Skill training	6.2	6.6	3.7	7.1	8.9	5.4
Professional training	6.2	3.4	1.8	9.1	5.1	3.6
College, University	6.7	2.9	0.0	13.1	4.8	0.0
Short trainings	26.3	16.7	10.8	36.4	25.6	18.0

Source: PIC project data 2004 and household survey 2007-2008

* This figure is only statistical for people who are at working ages (from 18 to 60 years old)

Table 4. Structure of occupation among the three wealth categories of households, over 2003-2008 period (% of occupation)

	2003-2004			2007-2008		
	Better-off	Average	Poor	Better-off	Average	Poor
Farm	55.71	60.39	68.52	41.98	49.65	55.75
Wage work	7.21	7.48	14.20	8.64	9.15	23.01
Non-farm	21.06	19.04	4.36	29.63	25.00	7.08
Officer	1.47	1.02	0.42	1.23	1.76	0.00
Worker	8.86	8.64	10.02	11.11	10.92	12.39
Retired	3.46	2.23	1.21	4.94	2.82	0.88
Housework	2.22	1.20	1.32	2.47	0.70	0.88

Source: PIC project data 2004 and household survey 2007-2008