

GENDER EQUALITY IN THE FAMILY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS - EVIDENCE FROM VIET NAM

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Abstract

Sustainable development is a requirement throughout the country's development process. People are at the heart of sustainable development. Maximizing the human factor as the main subject, resource and goal of sustainable development are Vietnam's commitments so that no one is left behind. To achieve this goal, human resources must be liberated, in which it is necessary to create conditions for everyone and all communities in society to have equal opportunities for development, access to common resources and to participate, contribute and benefit, creating material foundations, good knowledge and culture for generations to come. This article approaches from the perspective of gender equality in the previous family and the implementation of sustainable development goals in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Family, Gender, Equality, Sustainable Development Goals, Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Viet Nam is recognized by the world as one of the 10 countries that best implement goal 5 on promoting gender equality and empowering all women and girls in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. In the last two years, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused inequality to increase and women and children to suffer more disadvantages. In this context, the Government of Viet Nam has always made efforts in implementing measures to ensure social security, promote gender equality and prevent and respond to gender-based violence, especially violence against women and children. (Huu et al., n.d.)

Gender equality is one of the goals of countries around the world towards a progressive, equal and sustainable society. In fact, both men and women are affected by gender inequality, but women and girls are still the more disadvantaged groups.

In Vietnam, gender equality goals have always received close attention from the Party, Government, agencies as well as organizations both at home and abroad. The state's policy and legal system is constantly being improved, the organization is implemented synchronously and drastically along with the strengthening of cooperation with development partners and UN organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women... to address issues revolving around gender equality. The goal is to solve the problem in the following aspects: ensuring substantive equality between men and women in terms of opportunities, participation and enjoyment in the political, economic, cultural and social fields, contributing to the rapid and sustainable development of the country. (Dineen et al., n.d.; Santill et al., n.d.)

According to the Law on Gender Equality, the goal of gender equality is to eliminate gender discrimination, create equal opportunities for men and women in socio-economic development

and human resource development, move towards substantive gender equality between men and women and establish and strengthen cooperation, support between men and women in all areas of social and family life.

Article 18 of the Law on Gender Equality and Gender Equality in the Family is prescribed as follows:

1. Spouses are equal in civil relations and other relations related to marriage and family.
2. Spouses have equal rights and obligations in owning common property, equality in using common income sources of spouses and deciding on resources in the family.
3. Spouses are equal in discussing, deciding on the selection and use of appropriate family planning measures; use sick child care leave in accordance with the law.
4. Sons and daughters are cared for, educated by their families and create the same conditions for learning, working, playing, entertaining and developing.
5. Male and female members of the family have the responsibility to share household chores."

According to the Law on Gender Equality, husband and wife, men and women have the same rights and obligations in household chores. However, there are now many opinions that "equal rights and obligations" mean that whatever the wife has to do, the husband must also do those things and vice versa. If the husband does not do it, there is no equality in the family, which is very unfair to the woman. In fact, gender equality should not be understood in half by all jobs. According to the author, gender equality in the family is that each individual should do things that are appropriate to his level, expertise, abilities and according to the characteristics of his family. If in the family, the husband is the main source of economy, then the wife can stay at home to do household chores and vice versa. If the couple goes to work together, the household chores can be shared with each other, not imposed on which the wife can do, the husband must also do and vice versa. The implementation of gender equality in the family should not only emphasize the claim of rights for the woman and the wife but should aim at the sharing of work, responsibility and understanding between the wife and the husband. Goal 5 of the group of 17 that Viet Nam is committed to implementing in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals emphasizes: "Achieving gender equality, empowering and creating opportunities for women and girls". (Bank, 2011)

2. GENDER EQUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

In a gender-equal society, men and women have access to education, health care services, vocational training, and job creation, and income increase, participation in economic, cultural, social and political activities... Gender equality means that there is no longer discrimination based on gender, women and men have equal status and opportunities for development in society. Equality here does not mean that men and women are exactly the same but that the similarities and differences between them are still acknowledged and respected.(Biology & 2021, 2021)

In Decision No. 622/QĐ-TTg dated May 10, 2017, the Prime Minister promulgated the National Action Plan to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The objectives of the plan are to maintain sustainable economic growth in tandem with the implementation of progress, social justice and ecological environmental protection, efficient management and use of resources, proactive response to climate change; ensure that all people can reach their full potentials, participate in and enjoy the fruits of development equally; building a peaceful, prosperous, inclusive, democratic, fair, civilized and sustainable Vietnamese society. Of the 17 development goals, "Achieving gender equality; empowering and creating opportunities for women and girls" falls under goal 5.

This overall goal has 8 specific objectives, including:

- Reduce and move towards ending forms of discrimination against women and girls in all sectors and everywhere;
- Significantly reduce all forms of violence against women and girls in public or in private, including sexual exploitation and other forms of exploitation;
- Restrictions on the abolition of practices such as child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage;
- Ensuring equality in homemaking and family care; recognition of homemaking and unpaid care; strengthening public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, family support services, and child care;
- Ensure the full, effective and equal opportunity participation of women in leadership at all levels of policy-making in political, economic and social life;
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed upon in the agenda of the international conference on population and development, the Beijing Platform for Action, and documents on the results of conferences evaluating the implementation of this Program and platform;
- Ensure that all women, especially poor women in rural areas and ethnic minority women, have equal rights to economic resources, access to land use rights, ownership of other assets, financial services, inheritance rights and natural resources in accordance with national laws;
- Improve the efficiency of use of technologies and facilitation, especially information and communication technologies, to promote the empowerment of women. Create conditions for women to access and use information and communication technologies.(Mathematics & 2021, 2021)

Index	2016	2018	2020	2021	Progress
Global Gender Gap Index, World Economic Forum (156 countries)	65	77	87	87	↓
Economic Opportunity and Participation	33	33	31	26	↑
Educational Attainment	93	101	93	94	=
Health and Survival	138	143	151	152	↓
Political Empowerment	84	99	110	121	↓

Figure 1: Vietnam's gender index ranking

Source: Human Development Reports and Global Gender Gap Index reports (2016 – 2021)

Vietnam's national strategy on gender equality for the period 2011-2020 has obtained many encouraging results, contributing to narrowing the gender gap in various fields, contributing positively to the country's socio-economic development. The Government's Report No. 362/BC-CP dated August 18, 2020 on the implementation of the national target on gender equality in 2019 and the period 2011-2020 shows that the proportion of women participating in the following Party committees has increased more than the previous one. Specifically: The proportion of women participating in the XI Party Central Committee is 8.62%, party ministries directly under the Central Committee are 11.4%, district level is 14% and grassroots level is 18.1%; by the XII course, the respective ratios were 10%, 13.3%, 14.3% and 19.07%, respectively. Vietnam is in the top 1/3 group of countries in terms of the proportion of women members of the National Assembly, class XIII reached 24.2%, course XIV reached 27.31%. (J. & 2000, n.d.) Gender equality results are also reflected in the aspect of reducing the gender gap in the field of economy, labor and employment; enhancing the economic empowerment of women, increasing the access of poor women in rural areas and ethnic minority women to economic resources and labor markets; focus on developing high-quality female human resources. According to the results of the 2019 Population and Housing Census of the General Statistics Office, women make up 47.3% of the country's main labor force. As of October 2019, there are over 285.6 thousand enterprises headed by women entrepreneurs, accounting for 24% of the total number of enterprises in the country. The female literacy rate between the ages of 15-60 reached 97.33%, the rate of female masters reached 54.25%, the doctoral rate reached 30.8%. (Tran et al., n.d.)

	2016	2018	2019	2020	
Gender Inequality Index, UNDP (189 countries)					
Composite index: Health (maternal mortality and adolescent birth rate); Empowerment (% seats in parliament, secondary education); and labour force participation rate.	115	116	118	117	No significant change
Life-course gender gap	115	116	118	117	
Women's empowerment	-	116	118	117	

Figure 2: Gender inequality index, UNDP (189 countries)

Source: Human Development Reports and Global Gender Gap Index reports (2016 – 2021)

Along with that, ensuring gender equality in access to and enjoyment of health care services and family life has also achieved many achievements. According to the results of the Census, Viet Nam's sex ratio at birth (SRB) has been controlled at a much stable level thanks to efforts to bring the SRB to the natural balance with 111.5 boys per 100 girls born alive. Thanks to the effectiveness of the health system in providing maternal health care before, during and after birth, the maternal mortality rate has decreased from 69 cases per 100 thousand live births in 2009 to 46 cases per 100 thousand live births in 2019. Efforts to address gender equality are also integrated in the field of culture and information through the promotion of communication activities, gender awareness raising and gender equality. (“Vietnam Country Gender Assessment,” 2011) In addition, in order to improve the state management capacity on gender equality, from 2011 to mid-2020, Vietnam continuously added and perfected the legal framework as a basis for solving gender equality issues. Specifically: The National Assembly promulgated the Constitution in 2013, 7 laws, 161 laws; The Standing Committee of the National Assembly promulgates 15 ordinances, including about 45 laws and laws related to gender equality; The Government promulgated 1,413 decrees and all were considered to integrate gender equality issues in accordance with the Law on Gender Equality and the Law on Promulgation of Legal Documents.(TRS) & 2022, n.d.)

In particular, in the past two years, in support policies for people and businesses facing difficulties due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, women and children have always been identified as priority subjects and have higher support, especially pregnant women, women infected with COVID-19, orphaned children whose parents died from COVID-19... This has contributed to helping disadvantaged women and children stabilize their lives, reduce pressure and risk of violence and abuse. And the selection of the theme "Ensuring social security, empowering and creating opportunities for women and girls to realize gender equality and eliminate violence against women and girls" for this year's Action Month once again affirms Viet Nam's priorities and commitments in promoting substantive gender equality. (del & 2022, n.d.)



Figure 3: Structure of Vietnam's national gender equality system

In addition to their achievements, women and girls remain vulnerable to risks and need more equal opportunities. There is still a problem of mistreatment of women, especially in low-income areas, gender stereotypes still exist and cause a lot of damage not only to the vulnerable but also to the whole society. Gender inequality is also considered one of the major causes of domestic violence. The 2019 National Survey on Violence Against Women in Viet Nam by the General Statistics Office in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs shows that nearly 2 out of every 3 women (nearly 63%) experience one or more forms of physical violence, sexual, mental and economic violence as well as controlling behaviour perpetrated by their husbands in their lives and nearly 32% of women experience current violence. This can have serious consequences for economic development and women's physical and mental health, even negatively affecting the behavior and spirit of children in families where women have been abused. The report also estimates that violence against women is causing economic losses to Viet Nam estimated at 1.8% of GDP in 2018.(1735-188X) & 2022, n.d.) In terms of economy, in the labor market, the proportion of female workers in vulnerable jobs amounted to 59.6%, much higher than the 31.8% of male workers. According to the General Department of Vocational Training (Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs), the average monthly salary when doing the same job of female employees is about 4.58 million VND, lower than the average of 5.19 million VND of male employees.(Onaran et al., n.d.)

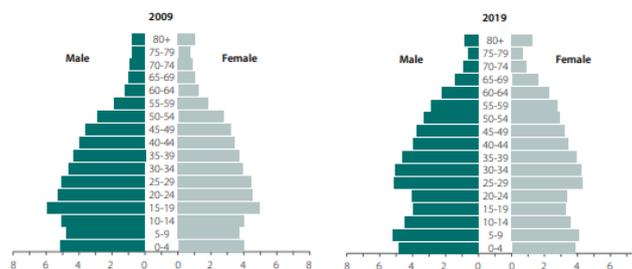


Figure 4: Population pyramid of Vietnam 2009-2019

Source: Population and Housing Census, 2019

Worryingly, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused gender inequality to increase. According to the report "Overview of Gender Equality in Viet Nam 2021", the COVID-19 pandemic has hit women in Viet Nam harder, exacerbating the gender gap that already exists in the labour market. For example, women's labor force participation rates fell more deeply than men's, causing the gender gap to rise slightly to 10.8%. Before the pandemic, there was no difference in the unemployment rates of men and women, but this gap has been around since the third quarter of 2020.(Santill et al., n.d.)

3. DISCUSSION

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the key solutions for gender equality that need to be implemented in Viet Nam today are:

Reducing and ending forms of discrimination against women and girls in all sectors and everywhere

Continue to effectively implement the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2011-2020; The Project on Prevention and Response to Gender-Based Violence 2016-2020 with a vision to 2030. Develop and organize the implementation of projects to support the implementation of national goals on gender equality (Target program on development of social assistance systems in the period of 2016-2020). Develop strategies, programs and communication on the role of women and gender equality in the period of 2017 - 2030. Include content on domestic violence prevention and gender equality in the curriculum of all levels of education. Review, amend and supplement laws and policies that discriminate against women and girls. Develop and implement policies and laws to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls at all levels.

Promulgate policies to improve the capacity of female workers, female cadres, female civil servants and female employees. Strengthen supervision of the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and the Gender Equality Strategy, especially the integration of gender equality in legal documents. Evaluate the implementation of the Law on Gender Equality and propose additional amendments in accordance with the new situation. Periodically review international commitments on women, including the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Promote the implementation of the contents recommended by the CEDAW Committee over the years such as retirement age difference, sex difference at birth.

Restrictions on the elimination of procedures such as child marriage, early marriage and forced marriage

Develop educational schemes/programs to propagate the abolition of customs such as child marriage, early marriage, forced marriage, forced divorce for the period 2016 - 2025. Strengthen propaganda, dissemination, education and raise awareness about the harms, consequences and consequences caused by child marriage and inbreeding in areas with high rates of early marriage, forced marriage and forced divorce. Evaluate effective interventions on child marriage prevention to develop a national program tailored to each region and ethnic

minority group. Building and operating an "exemplary mother" model for girls to eliminate child marriage, early marriage when it is not enough to be a safe mother and ensure the future of children; the "family I love" model for adult men and women to abolish forced marriages carries a high risk of violence. Establishment of centers, counseling institutions, premarital education.

Ensuring equality in homemaking and family care; recognition of homemaking and unpaid care; strengthening public services, infrastructure and social protection policies, family support services, child care

Raising society's awareness of the role and importance of unpaid care work and housework; raise awareness of shared responsibility equality in each household. Strengthen propaganda and education on equal rights in unpaid care work and housework among family members. Develop and replicate the model concretizing the principle "Male and female members of the family are responsible for sharing household chores" specified in Clause 2, Article 18 of the Law on Gender Equality to increase opportunities to bond, support each other, ensure health and time for family members to coexist and develop harmoniously. Building and operating the model "Father's loving hand" (enhancing men's participation in sharing housework, motivating and encouraging men to participate in prenatal classes, caring for and nurturing children...)

Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed upon in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and documents on the results of conferences evaluating the implementation of this Programme and Platform

Continue to effectively implement the contents related to universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights in the Action Plan of the International Conference on Population and Development, the Beijing Platform for Action and related documents. Strengthen education and communication on sexual and reproductive health and family planning. Raise awareness and educate women, especially women aged 15-49 years old, about self-determination in sexual intercourse, use of contraceptive methods and reproductive health care. Expand and improve the quality of population education, reproductive health, sexual health and family planning programs; counseling, sex education inside and outside the school for adolescent boys/girls and young people. Improve the quality of counseling and reproductive health care services.

Ensure that all women, especially poor rural and ethnic minority women, have equal access to economic resources, access to land use rights, ownership of other property, financial services, inheritance rights and natural resources, in accordance with national laws

Review and propose adjustments to current legal documents and policies in the direction of ensuring equal access to economic resources. Strengthen policy enforcement, monitor policy implementation in practice. Uphold the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, socio-political organizations, socio-professional organizations in the process of monitoring law enforcement

and policies. Coordinate with ministries and sectors in formulating and implementing policies and laws to promote gender equality and empower all women and girls at all levels

4. CONCLUSIONS

Over the past 20 years, the national gender assessment has been carried out every 5 years in Viet Nam. These multidisciplinary efforts aim to provide an overall picture of the progress made in the field of gender equality based on key socio-economic indicators, while providing analyses and recommendations to address barriers to progress and narrow the gender gap. Each report identified gender issues or inequalities across every sector considered – from governance, labour, agriculture, business, transport and connectivity, urban development and especially family life. This clearly shows that gender equality is not a fringe issue, but crucial to the quality, permanence and progress gained from Vietnam's socio-economic development. With a commitment to the responsible implementation of the sustainable development goals, indicators on gender equality in the family are important to assess the advantages and challenges of achieving this goal in Viet Nam today.

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