



Brief for Policymakers:

The State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Viet Nam

Photo: UN Environment Programme/Hai Tran

Introduction

Gender integration in climate change policies and actions leads to more efficient and just implementation, as it takes into account the needs, challenges, and capacities of both men and women. The State of Gender Equality and Climate Change is a series of reports covering countries across the Asia-Pacific region and serves an important function in identifying the areas where gender-responsive climate action is needed to realize the ambition of key global commitments such as the Paris Agreement.

The report for Viet Nam prepared by the Institute of Strategy and Policy on Natural Resources and Environment (ISPONRE), the UN Environment Programme, and UN Women, describes the necessary linkages that need to be created between gender and climate change so that these can be used by policy makers to address the gaps that prevent climate adaptation and mitigation interventions from addressing gendered vulnerabilities and barriers to the agency of women, which are critical to ensuring a sustainable future. The report takes a deep-dive into agriculture, water management, waste management and renewable energy to assess sector specific gendered climate change impacts that call for immediate response.

This policy brief is based on the assessment report for Viet Nam and aims to guide government action towards the achievement of climate goals at the country level, in particular as it relates to the Paris Agreement on climate change. The policy brief presents the summary of gender equality and climate change issues in Viet Nam while providing recommendations on how to step up the work on gender equality within climate action, by building institutional capacity on gender equality and developing effective interventions that pave the way for building an inclusive climate resilient society.

To access the full report, visit the resources section of www.empowerforclimate.org



Photo: UN Environment Programme/Jack Young

Summary of Gender Equality and Climate Change Issues in Viet Nam

Integration of gender into policy at the sectoral level is inconsistent

While the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) submitted in September 2020 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) makes specific reference to the gendered impacts of climate change, a comprehensive integration of gender in the policy frameworks underpinning the implementation of the updated NDC is lacking. This applies to the four sectors analyzed by this report that were also identified as a priority in the NDC – agriculture, water management, waste management and renewable energy.

In the agriculture and waste management sectors, policy documents responding to climate change explicitly mention gender; however, there are no specific gender equality targets or measures identified to address women's vulnerabilities or lack of agency in climate change. Meanwhile, in climate-related policies for the water management and renewable energy sectors, gender is not mentioned, so guidelines on gender mainstreaming and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of gender integration are absent and need to be developed.

Women's participation in sectoral policy-setting and management practices is limited

Sectoral policy-setting is assigned to state agencies, in which women's participation is typically limited, particularly in the waste management and renewable energy sectors. Across all sectors, structural barriers that restrict women's access to natural

resources, information, technologies, markets and training prevent them from developing their adaptive capacities to climate change. Because women carry the double burden of having to fulfil both a productive and reproductive responsibility, they are also left with few opportunities to participate in decision-making processes at all levels, particularly when it comes to issues related to climate change. As a result, their rights are overlooked in relevant labor laws that should offer them full protection. This is especially pronounced in the waste management sector where activities women are engaged in are considered part of the informal sector.

Limited data and technical capacity of government officials and practitioners hinder the implementation of sectoral gender strategies

There is a lack of understanding around the inter-linkages between climate change impacts and gender equality so practitioners are often guided by assumptions and generalizations, unable to assess climate vulnerabilities in a sex-disaggregated manner. The absence of data, evidence, and analysis on gender-related aspects limit their ability to include and consider gender equality in the institutional and policy frameworks of climate change, as well as in climate action design and implementation.

Implementation of gender strategies and action plans is weak due to unclear policies, guidelines, and limited capacity of officials in translating policy direction into specific actions. Reporting on gender integration is absent in some sectors such as water management. At the same time, existing differentiated capacities and skills among men and women as resource users and contributors to implementation of climate policies are not presented as potential solutions in addressing climate risks.



Key Findings by Sector

Agriculture

- Agriculture is the sector that will be hardest hit by climate change in Viet Nam and women are disproportionately impacted because they make up a majority of the workforce
- There is a lack of gender integration across national policies to address the unequal access of women to agricultural land, information, resources, and training
- The gendered division of labour within the sector and additional responsibilities taken on by women as a consequence of gender norms prohibit their active participation in decision-making inside and outside of their households
- Women from rural areas are provided by the government with preferential access to credit but there is no information that highlights the linkage of this program to women's climate change vulnerability or climate risk exposure
- There is a need for new technologies and livelihood diversification for rural women-farmers to actively respond to climate change

Water Management

- Water security issues caused by climate change impact poor women more severely – their traditional domestic role as the primary water collectors restricts their social, educational, and economic opportunities; women's health is more sensitive to a lack of clean water due to their need for clean water during menstruation, pregnancy, and caregiving activities; women who live with insecure water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions are also at greater risk for violence and sexual abuse
- Despite the crucial role of women in securing water, in many national policies related to water and gender, women are seen as one of many vulnerable groups and mainly treated as beneficiaries so policies rarely focus on women as potential change agents to preserve water resources
- Almost all existing policies on water management are gender-blind, thus they cannot effectively respond to the gendered impacts of water scarcity on women and men, and instead have the potential to exacerbate existing inequalities
- There are no reviewed policies recognizing the need to address gender, climate change, and water issues coherently since gender equality is treated mainly as an add-on component; because of this there is also a lack of explicit guidelines to support local officials on implementation of water management programs
- Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for gender mainstreaming in water management policies are non-existent

Waste Management

- Women are responsible for domestic work as well as collecting, classifying and disposing household waste but their participation in community decision-making about waste disposal is limited as men are more likely to take part in the community consultation processes
- Female workers account for the majority of the informal labour force; however, their jobs are not recognized in the existing laws
- 90% of street waste collectors and scavengers are women who often live and work under dangerous and unhealthy conditions and suffer from extreme poverty and discrimination
- In the plastic waste value chain, women often bear the brunt of the work and suffer from marginalization while making a fraction of what male workers earn
- There is no particular reference to gender issues with regard to waste collection and recycling in the Labor Law, especially since waste collection in some stages of the value chain is still considered as an informal sector activity

Renewable Energy

- When clean energy solutions are not readily available to all people, women are more vulnerable because of the traditional domestic roles they play including cooking and collecting fuels – they are placed at higher risk for violence and sexual abuse; their health is more adversely affected by indoor pollution; their opportunities to participate in other economic activities, education, community decision-making, and self-development are limited
- Women's labor participation in the sector is heavily influenced by gender norms. Most jobs in the manufacturing, construction, and engineering are traditionally seen as suitable only for men, thus women are significantly underrepresented
- Shifting towards the carbon-friendly mix in the energy sector can lead to economic opportunities and strengthened livelihoods for women and men which contributes to improvements in health, safety, and overall quality of life
- There remains a scarcity of sex-disaggregated data that can be used to identify the gendered differences in access to and control of renewable energy
- Most renewable energy policies have been found to be gender-blind and the lack of gender integration in energy sector policies implies that there is no clear guidance on gender mainstreaming at the central, provincial and community levels, particularly when it comes to power generation projects



Photo: UN Environment Programme/ Daniel Bernard

Recommendations to Ensure Gender Equality Integration in Climate Policies

1. Awareness-raising and capacity building among policy makers

Awareness-raising and capacity building on gender equality and women's empowerment aspects of climate change adaptation should be an urgent priority in all sectors, using both bottom-up and top-down approaches. This awareness will enable and encourage policy advocacy across all levels of all Ministries, thus supporting the achievement of political commitments, as well as possible financing for measures ensuring gender sensitivity in the response to climate change. This can be achieved specifically through:

- **Promotion of women's leadership.** This should be done at the highest levels of ministries with a mandate to tackle climate change, such as the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE), the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and the Ministry of Planning and Investment (MPI). The role of the Viet Nam Women's Union (VWU) should also be strengthened and made more apparent in consultation and decision-making processes, instead of in implementation only.
- **Dialogues and stakeholder consultations.** Dialogues and exchanges between the women machineries, including VWU, and line Ministries or Departments responsible for sectoral mandates (for example, MARD and MONRE and its provincial offices) on technical capacities should be paid more attention, given VWU's significant ability to reach women members, at all levels, for awareness raising and capacity building. The Ministry of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (MOLISA) should engage other stakeholders and consult the VWU, as well as organizations working on gender issues, in order to develop an explicit gender mainstreaming workplan to support MONRE, MARD, Ministry of Industry and Trade (MOIT) and other governmental agencies in implementing sectoral strategies with gender sensitivity.
- **Provision of training.** The lack of resources to train new staff and members affects VWU's ability to integrate gender equality into strategies and policies for climate change adaptation and mitigation across all sectors. This also affects VWU's ability to contribute to MARD and MONRE's efforts. VWU could be a channel to feed back to climate change-policy makers regarding the implementation of climate change adaptation interventions on the ground. In return, officers with a climate change background would have opportunities to improve their understanding of gender equality in the sector. Technical knowledge related to climate change must be transferred to the staff of departments responsible for social issues, such as MOLISA at the national level and the Department of Labour, Invalids, and Social Affairs (DOLISA) at the provincial level, in order to strengthen their roles in the climate change policymaking process.

- **Collaboration between government agencies and cooperation with CSOs.** MONRE, MARD, MOIT and MOLISA should cooperate on gender analyses and co-develop plans for gender mainstreaming, where possible. These agencies should involve gender specialists and other organizations working on gender issues, such as UN Women and VWU, in developing gender mainstreaming plans. The Climate Change Working Group, including national NGOs and CSOs, should be able to participate in the policy-making process and implementation of climate change interventions given the nature of its work at the grass-roots level, particularly in the agriculture and water management sectors.

Additionally, line ministries such as MONRE, MARD, MOIT, MOLISA, and other relevant agencies at the provincial levels, should cooperate in revisiting all legal documents related to agriculture, water resources, water management, and renewable energy in order to identify entry points to integrate gender where necessary. For example, in the Steering Principles for Program Implementation, the potential of women as community consultants should be emphasized to avoid the dominant discourse that "they are vulnerable people" only.

- **Development of STEM education policies.** There must be efforts to encourage women to enter STEM by providing scholarships and awards for women through the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). This will contribute to increasing the capacity of women to adopt new climate-related technologies and provide them with more opportunities to be engaged in work related to STEM including those in the field of renewable energy.
- **International support and cooperation.** Support from international organizations must be mobilized for advocacy work on gender integration into climate change policies.

2. Development, promotion, and application of technical guidelines for gender mainstreaming into climate change policies

Clear technical guidance on how to integrate gender aspects into climate policy should be provided to policy makers and be made easy to use, and leverage and build upon any existing ones. Specifically these should cover:

- **National policies and action plans to highlight gender integration.** Key policies such as the National Strategy for Natural Disaster Prevention, Response and Mitigation by 2020 and the Action Plan on Response to Climate Change for each sector should acknowledge the importance of gender equality in the context of climate change. These documents are considered an important basis for mainstreaming gender. They should be translated into action via the development of the national gender strategy for the sector; and provinces should be mandated to address gender equality in climate change adaptation.

- **Decrees/circulars to guide local authorities in practice.** This applies particularly to the agriculture, water resources, waste management, and renewable energy sectors. MOLISA and MPI should develop clear guidelines on how to mainstream gender into the national socio-economic development planning process and send it to all line agencies, from the national to provincial and communal levels. The guidelines should include gender indicators and must be attached to a legal decision and circulars to ensure gender equity in sectoral policies, particularly those related to climate change.

3. Conduct studies on the gendered impacts of climate change by sector and region

Further research on the gendered impact of climate change by sector and region should be conducted in order to provide policy makers with a firm basis upon which to design and implement gender-responsive climate policies. Identification of suitable entry points to mainstream gender into climate policies is also critically important. The studies should cover the following areas:

- **Best practices in gender mainstreaming.** Studies on the nexus of gender, agriculture, water, waste and climate change, and best practices in gender mainstreaming in climate change should be promoted to provide policy/decision-makers responsible for mainstreaming gender equality into related climate actions with evidence-based information.
- **Diversification of livelihoods involving new technologies.** Studies on the diversification of livelihoods for the most vulnerable groups, including women and elderly people, involving new technologies developed for agriculture can be of further support. Access to new technologies should be gender-inclusive and sensitive such that both men and women can benefit from technological development and innovation. Both should also be equally provided with digital skills development and opportunities.
- **Policy gaps.** Studies that identify policy gaps and suggest recommendations for improving gender responsiveness at the sectoral policy level while addressing inter-related issues of gender equality, development in agriculture and climate change, rather than looking at them in isolation would be informative.
- **Entry points for gender integration.** Studies to identify entry points for integration of gender aspects into existing and new policies would also be helpful. For example, MONRE's plan to update the national strategy for climate change in 2021 could greatly benefit from inputs related to the gendered impacts of climate change. The National Adaptation Plan of Viet Nam to address climate change has also identified priority activities to promote gender equality in developing adaptation plans that should be followed up.

- **Gender-sensitive taxation.** Studies on taxation on natural resources, as well as that related to environmental protection under the Law on Environmental Protection approved in November 2020, along with its implementation guidance, should be undertaken to ensure that women-owned businesses, in particular, benefit from such taxation.

4. Development of a monitoring and evaluation framework for gender integration into climate policies and generation of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data

This would help to systematically track the integration of gender into climate policies, and help in understanding the gendered impact of climate change by sector and region. This would involve the following components:

- **Monitoring and evaluation of gender integration.** Line agencies should establish an explicit and comprehensive mechanism for the monitoring and evaluation of gender integration in their sectors, and ensure that the mechanism is applied to all processes. The reports of the assessment should be published and made available to all stakeholders.
- **Coordination across national and provincial levels.** MONRE, MOIT, and MOLISA should cooperate to establish a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation mechanism on gender mainstreaming to apply in the implementation process from the national down to provincial and communal levels. Sex and gender indicators should be designed as a required output in programs/projects. Sex disaggregated data and gender-sensitive data should be collected and reported publicly to relevant stakeholders.
- **Budget allocation.** Ministries responsible for state management of agriculture, water resources and waste management such as MARD and MONRE should secure and/or must allocate budgets to ensure gender considerations and integration are applied to their policy and program implementation. At the same time MOLISA, charged with state administration of gender equality, as well as the Ministry of Finance (MOF) and MPI, which are responsible for mobilizing and effectively using funds for renewable projects, should allocate resources for gender mainstreaming. These budgets should cover the conduct of gender audit, gender analysis, capacity building, response to gender-based needs, and monitoring and evaluation activities.
- **Incorporation of gender considerations in the 2020 NDC.** Gender considerations should be incorporated into models of ecological city, waste separation and others, as mentioned in the 2020 NDC given that men and women may have different concerns, priorities, interests, and preferences. These important points need to be effectively communicated to all stakeholders concerned, especially people in the communities, through dialogue platforms, guiding materials, and awareness-raising programs, as part of the NDC implementation process.