POLICY BRIEF
AND RECOMMENDATIONS
ON RURAL WOMEN IN VIET NAM

PREPARED FOR WORLD FOOD DAY IN 2014 “FAMILY FARMING: FEEDING THE WORLD, CARING FOR THE EARTH”
AND INTERNATIONAL DAY OF RURAL WOMEN – 15 OCTOBER
ural women across the world play vital roles in farm and nonfarm-based food production activities. Despite being active contributors to economic development, they face serious challenges as a result of gender-based stereotypes and discrimination that deny them equal opportunities, resources, assets and services.

In Viet Nam, women work in agriculture as unpaid labourers on family farms and as paid or unpaid workers at other farms and agricultural enterprises. Globally, women work in the agriculture sector than men, 37% of all employed women work in agriculture compared with 33% of all employed men. In Viet Nam agriculture is an important means of livelihood and therefore the percentages are even higher with: 48.8% of the employed women and 45.0% of the employed men working in agriculture. In rural areas the gender difference was larger as 63.4% of working women were engaged in agriculture compared to 57.5% of working men. The country is currently developing its new Social Economic Development Plan 2016-2020, which will prioritize rural development in the national agenda as evidenced in the continuation of the National Target Programme (NTP) on New Rural Development.

Regionally, the ASEAN Economic Community’s creation of a single regional common market and production base from 2015, comprising 600 million people from 10 member states, will create significant opportunities for Viet Nam as well as challenges to ensure growth is inclusive and prosperity is shared. As agriculture is still the largest employer for many ASEAN members including Viet Nam, more practical strategies and policy actions will be needed to promote inclusive and sustainable growth.

The theme for 2014 World Food Day is “Family Farming: feeding the world, caring the earth” to raise the profile of family farming and smallholder farmers. Rural women play important roles for the future of global food security, particularly in the context of family farming. Giving women equal access to agricultural resources could increase production on women’s farms in developing countries by 20-30%. This could raise total agricultural production in developing countries by 2.5-4%, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17%, or 100 to 150 million people.

This policy brief highlights the concerns and challenges faced by rural women in Viet Nam and provides important policy recommendations to policy-makers and practitioners to promote gender responsive agricultural and rural development policies in Viet Nam.

1. Education, Training and Information

Rural women’s improved access to education and training in Viet Nam could dramatically improve their income-generating opportunities and overall well-being. However, few rural women can access vocational training, extension services, finance, technology, markets and trader networks, as reflected by 70.9% of rural women labourers being unable to access vocational training, in comparison with 59.9% of rural men. The type of vocational training available to women is often short-term and concentrates on ‘traditional’ women’s skills.

References:
1. UN Women Watch, 2013
This limited access to technical agricultural training leads to gender inequalities in access to and adoption of new technology. These factors, coupled with the heavy burden of unpaid household/community duties, have a negative impact on women's labour productivity in agriculture and off-farm sectors.

62% of women versus 52% of men are engaged in agricultural production. However, women are more likely to own/operate smaller farms and cultivate subsistence crops. Though the 2003 Land Law requires jointly held land to be recorded on land use rights certificates as marital property, by 2008 only 10.9% of agricultural land and 18.2% of residential rural land use certificates were in husband and wife names\(^9\). Female-headed households have significantly less access to land\(^{11}\). In addition, women's land holdings are typically smaller than among men\(^{12}\). Women also have less irrigated land and cultivate smaller areas, with female-headed households cultivating rice areas almost six times smaller than male-headed ones and women owning less than a tenth of commercial farms\(^{13}\). In addition, urbanization and industrialization has led to conversion of fertile land into industrial zones and agricultural workers moving to other sectors. This has increased the relative number of women in agriculture as household heads and led to the feminization of agriculture\(^{14}\).

Unequal access to land rights has major ramifications for women's access to credit, as land use rights certificates are generally required by banks as collateral. This is compounded by limited access to formal credit sources, while preferential credit policies have little impact on the income levels and poverty reduction of women and girls. As more than 45% of women farm workers are self-employed they do not receive social security benefits and lack access to insurance, which leaves them vulnerable and insecure\(^{15}\).

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2. Participation of Rural Women in Decision-making

Efforts to achieve inclusive and sustainable development goals in the post 2015 context will not be credible without the full and equal participation of rural women in Government decision-making. Enhancing rural women’s leadership and meaningful participation in all forms of decision-making and at different levels will ensure more attention is paid to meeting the needs of women and girls\(^7\).

Very few women hold decision-making positions, within agricultural sector producer and mass organizations as well as Government institutions\(^8\), as evidenced by women holding 5.7% of senior positions at national, 4.5% at provincial, 4.9% at district and 6.4% at commune levels\(^9\).

According to the 2013 German Watch Global Climate Risk, Viet Nam is the sixth most at-risk country from climate extremes. As rural women are disproportionately impacted by climate change, their active participation and leadership is needed in environmental planning, finance, budgeting and policy-making processes.

3. Access and Control of Productive Resources and Services

Access to productive resources such as land, modern inputs, technology and financial services is a critical determinant of agricultural productivity. In Viet Nam, 70.9% of rural women labourers being unable to access vocational training compared to 59.9% of rural men labourers.

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4. Health

Rural women encounter numerous constraints in accessing affordable and adequate health services in rural areas, with insufficient health insurance and inadequate implementation of social insurance policies. As the primary handlers of raw animal products, with poor sanitation, lack of knowledge of diseases, women are often exposed to higher risks to food-borne and zoonotic diseases. Out of 100,000 people, 1,710 are poisoned by direct contact with pesticide. The advent of large rural transport infrastructure projects in rural areas has resulted in increased risks of sex trafficking which heightens HIV/AIDS risks.

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7 UN Women Watch, 2013
8 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, 2012
9 Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Gender in agricultural and rural development, 2012
10 Viet Nam Household Living Standards Survey, 2008
11 Rural, Agriculture, and Fishery Census, 2006
12 World Bank, 2011
13 FAO/General Statistics Office, 2010
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FAO AND UN WOMEN PROPOSE THE FOLLOWING
GENDER RESPONSIVE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS IN AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN VIET NAM.

1. Education, Training and Information

- Support a gender sensitive education system to eliminate gender stereotypes and discrimination affecting rural women and men.
- Improve access to education and provision of better quality education for rural girls and women. Vocational training should include livelihoods promotion on agriculture and land-based activities.

2. National Programmes/Frameworks

Ensure rural women's perspectives are taken into account and they participate in the design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation of rural development policies and activities. NTPs focused on rural development, livelihoods creation and poverty alleviation should incorporate gender assessments as part of mid-term and annual reviews to ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of impacts on rural women and girls.

3. Access and Control of Productive Resources and Services

- Develop specific assistance and advisory services to promote rural women's economic skills. The formal banking and financial sector needs to be engaged to develop specialized need-based financial products and services for rural women.
- Invest in strengthening women's capacity with skills to undertake climate smart agriculture, with knowledge of climate change resilient seeds and crops as well as enhanced food security and nutrition.
- Implement information, education and communication and behavior change programmes so women understand their land rights and obtain land title registration in their names.

4. Participation of Rural Women in Decision-making

- Eliminate socio-cultural constraints to rural women's participation in decision-making through gender equality awareness campaigns.
- Promote and strengthen rural women's participation, as members and leaders, of project-related decision-making bodies and producer organizations.
- Support regular dialogues and consultations between key partners, such as Ministry of Rural Agriculture Development and Farmer's Union, to discuss challenges faced by rural women and how policy-makers can progress rural women's agendas.

5. Health

- Improve rural women's health and overall well-being through advocating for social protection, decent work and elimination of child labour.
- Improve development health systems 'effectiveness and increase gender responsive training and service delivery with national and civil society partners to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for women and girls.
- Engage men and boys as partners in promoting gender equality, not only in addressing gender-based violence and human trafficking – both critical areas related to rural women's health and well-being, but also to equally share household and child care responsibilities with women.

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