A woman with dark hair, wearing a black floral dress and orange sandals, is kneeling on a concrete floor in a rural kitchen. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a wooden table with several coconuts on it, a large metal stove, and various household items. The setting is outdoors with lush greenery and palm trees visible through the open doorway.

Learning Note

OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN VIETNAM'S RURAL WASH: A CASE STUDY OF HA TINH PROVINCE

Nguyen Thi Khanh Hoa, Hoang Hoa,
Dr Lien Pham

1. POLICY CONTEXT OF GENDER EQUALITY IN VIET NAM

Vietnam has made significant progress in promulgating the legal basis related to gender equality for last more than two decades. This demonstrates the strong political determination of the Communist Party and the State as well as Viet Nam's efforts to realize its commitments to international conventions and laws on equality such as CEDAW, Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

With the opinion that gender equality is an indispensable element of the country's socio-economic development, over the past decades the activities to promote gender equality have been robustly and effectively implemented.

Since 1997, a series of law and guidelines have been implemented starting with the 1997 National Action Plan for the Advancement of Women in Viet Nam 1997-2000. In 2006, the Gender Equality Law was promulgated:

“Gender equality is the fact that men and women have equal status, roles, are given conditions and opportunities to enhance their capacity for development of the community, the family and to equally enjoy the fruits of that development” (Article 5, Clause 3, Gender Equality Law, 2006).

This concept of gender equality has since been the foundation for the formulation, revision and improvement of legal documents, policies, strategies and programs on gender equality or pertaining to gender equality in Viet Nam. By supporting the empowerment of women and affirming that women are equal to men in all spheres of life, and this continues to be the primary goal of gender equality work at this stage; moreover, several emerging initiatives to engage men in gender equality activities are in evidence.

In 2008, Ministry of Labor, Invalid and Social Affairs (MoLISA) established the Gender Equality Department with an advisory function for the performance of state management tasks on gender equality. On December 24, 2010, the Prime Minister stipulated Decision No. 2351/QĐ-TTg approving the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2011-2020 (NSGE 2011-2020). After a period of implementation, in 2018, the Prime Minister issued Decision No. 800/QĐTTg adjusting and supplementing some contents of the NSGE. MoLISA was assigned to lead and coordinate with the Ministry of Planning and Investment, the Ministry of Finance, concerned ministries and sectors, the Vietnam Women's Union, other socio-political organizations as well as People's Committees of provinces and cities directly under the Central Government to organize the implementation of the NSGE 2011-2020 nationwide.

The NSGE 2011-2020 set out 7 objectives and 22 specific targets. The objectives include: 1) increase women's

participation in leadership and managerial positions in political sphere; 2) reduce gender gaps in the economy, labour, and employment, and increase access of poor rural women and ethnic minority women to the economy; 3) equal participation between men and women in education and training; 4) increase gender equality in access to and benefits from healthcare services; 5) ensure gender equality in culture and information; 6) ensure gender equality in family life, gradually eliminating gender-based violence; 7) enhance state management capacity of gender equality

According to the government's report on the implementation of the national objectives on gender equality in 2019 and for the period 2011-2020, 7 out of 22 targets on gender equality are under-achieved and one lacked ground for the evaluation of achievability. Especially, all three targets of the first objective “To increase women's participation in leadership and managerial positions to gradually narrow the gender gap in the political sphere” are under-achieved. The percentage of female leaders/ heads of a sector or locality is very low. Comparisons with international statistics reveal that, in 2019, the rate of women's political participation in Viet Nam fell in the global rankings with the ranking of 110 out of the 153 countries.

2. THE STUDY

Against this policy landscape, we conducted a study on the opportunities and constraints for women's empowerment in a donor funded WASH project implemented in 5 rural provinces of Vietnam (Hoa Binh, Thanh Hoa, Nghe An, Ha Tinh and Ben Tre). The 4.5 years (2018-2022) project was funded by DFAT through the Water for Women Fund and implemented by Thrive/EMW. Its key objective was increasing WASH access to poor and socially disadvantaged households through a results-based subsidy scheme, and improving gender equality and women's empowerment in the WASH sector. The Women's Union (WU) was the key delivery partner of Thrive/EMW, who was responsible for mobilizing households to take up WASH services and implementing the subsidy scheme.

Our study aimed to better understand the conditions for which women's empowerment opportunities can arise and barriers that constrain these empowerment choice and agency. In addressing this objective, we captured the gender experiences of the WU women in WOBA from different perspectives: political, WASH work and entrepreneurship, community, households. The study is guided by three research questions:

1. What opportunities are available to women in their WOBA participation, leadership and decision making, and which factors contribute to these opportunities?

2. What constraints do women encounter in their WOBA participation, leadership and decision making, and what are factors that contribute to these constraints?

3. What implications of these findings for policy and practices of women's empowerment in similar contexts of WOBA Vietnam?

In answering these research questions, we considered all relevant objectives of the NSGE 2011-2020: Objective 1 on women's participation in leadership and managerial positions in political sphere; Objective 2 on women's participation in the economy, labour, particularly for poor rural women and ethnic minority women; Objective 3 on participation of women in education and training; Objective 5 on access to information and participation in public community activities; Objective 6 on gender equality in family life; Objective 7 on gender equality capacity within the WU organizations.

3. METHOD OF INQUIRY

The study uses the mixed methods case study approach, involving quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis across and within five cases of communes. Phase 1 of the study involved a survey with the WU staff at provincial, district, commune and village levels and the women in the WOBA's partners who participated in WOBA. The survey focuses on the women's perception of women's empowerment and experiences through WOBA in the seven domains of the NSGE 2010-2020.

From the results of the survey, 5 communes in 5 provinces were selected for Phase 2, which involved focus group discussion with men (who are the heads of villages) and women (who are the WU staff at village level); interviews with the WU staff and their husbands; and key informant interview with male leaders of CPC and WU staff at district level. The intention is to gain deeper insights in both men's and women's sides about what women's empowerment mean, and to what effects (positive and negative) have their participation in WOBA shaped their view of gender equality and women empowerment.

In addition, secondary data on statistic gender-related information was collected at the commune level. These gender-disaggregated information include demographic characteristics, poverty and employment, domestic violence and the female proportion in leadership positions.

This learning note presents the case study of Tan Hung commune, Ba Tri district, Ben Tre province. The next

section provides an overview of the context of the ward to foreground the discussion of the case. The following sections present and discuss the key findings relating to the seven domains of the NSGE 2011-2020. The final section offers some implications for policy and practice for improving gender equality and women empowerment in rural Vietnam.

4. CASE STUDY OF HA TINH

4.1 Overview of the context of Son Linh commune

Demographic characteristics and population

Son Linh is a mountainous commune in Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province. The total natural area of the commune is 1880.13 ha (18,8013 km²), of which: (i) Agricultural land 1598.24 ha accounting for 85.01% (ii) Non-agricultural land 191.28 ha accounting for 10.17% (iii) Unused land 90.61 ha, accounting for 4.82% of the total natural land area. The commune has 10 villages with 52 residential clusters. The main source of income of the people is mainly from agricultural activities.

The population of the commune in 2021 is about 2,837 people. Most of population in the commune is Kinh people. The number of households in the commune is about 899 households, the household size is about 3.16 people/household, lower than the whole country (3.6 people/household in 2019).¹ The commune's population growth rate is low in 2020 at 0.32%, and the growth rate is lower than in 2021 at 0.53%. Compared to the population growth rate of the whole country (0.8% in 2021)², the commune has a lower population growth rate.

Sex ratio at birth (SRB) is calculated as the number of live birth boys per 100 live birth girls in the same period. According to the list published by the Ministry of Health on August 2, 2021, Ha Tinh is one of the 21 provinces and cities with the highest sex ratio at birth in the country with the rate of 115.54 boys per 100 girls. This ratio is higher than in 2020 and 2019. However, Son Linh commune is not in the high SRB category. The commune's SRB is 107 boys per 100 girls.

The common education level of people in the area is secondary and high school. There is no case in the commune that don't know to read and write the Vietnamese.

¹ <https://www.gso.gov.vn/su-kien/2019/12/thong-cao-bao-chi-ket-qua-tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-va-nha-o-nam-2019/>

² <https://danso.org/viet-nam/>

Income and poverty

In 2020 and 2021, the COVID19 pandemic had a significant impact on people's lives in Son Linh commune. In general, the rates of poor households (68 households – 7.6%) and near-poor households (84 households – 9.3%) of the commune is still quite higher than that of Huong Son district (5.4% and 7.1%),³ Ha Tinh province (4.68% và 5.09%)⁴ and whole country (2.23% and 3.11%).⁵

Among the poor and near-poor households in the whole commune, the poor and near-poor female headed households account for 50%. This rate is higher than the percentage of female-headed households (24.7%) out of 899 households in the commune. Among 62 GESI households (accounting for 6.9%), female-headed GESI households account for 35.5% (22 households). This rate is higher than the percentage of female-headed households in the whole commune (24.7%).

Labor and employment

Labor is mainly in the field of agriculture, accounting for about 90% of the commune. There is a trend that households with members at working age mainly migrate to work far away to provinces/cities such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh, Binh Duong, etc. Despite the complicated developments of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment does not occur in the commune in 2020 and 2021, possibly because the income source of the people in the commune is still mainly agricultural, so unemployment is not available in the commune.

Women in leadership and managerial positions

According to reports from CPC, the percentage of women in the Executive Committee of the Commune's Party Committee accounts for about 15.4%, and in the Standing Committee of the Commune Party Committee is quite high at 33.3%, 18.2% of secretaries of Communist Party Cell at village are female. Although the percentage of women in the commune's Committees already exists, this rate is still lower than the national target by 2020, the percentage of female staff participating in Party Committees at all levels is over 25%.⁶ There are no women in the leadership of the Commune People's Committee. The whole province, for the term 2020 - 2025, with 15 members in the Standing Committee of the

³ <https://baohatinh.vn/xa-hoi/ket-qua-ra-soat-ho-ngheo-ho-can-ngheo-cua-ha-tinh/224925.htm>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <https://www.vietnamplus.vn/ca-nuoc-co-4-tinh-thanh-trang-ho-ngheo-va-can-ngheo-trong-nam-2021/774974.vnp>

City Party Committee, has 2 female one (13.3%).⁷ In the commune, there are 31.6% female deputies of the commune People's Council, this rate is also lower than the target of 35-40% female deputies to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels by 2020.⁸ And the percentage of female heads of villages in the commune is not much, 14.3%.

4.2 Access to training and resources

In general, the female interviewees remember the training programs of WOBA, especially the content related to menstrual hygiene and gender equality has just been implemented as well as the impression of the training on latrines for People with Disability (PwD), latrine construction techniques.

“My awareness on the latrines for the PwD is from the training sessions, the awareness of WU staff increased, such as the reason for doing that, for doing for the PwD. In the past, it was very simple, the latrines for PwD are similar to others, there wasn't any equipments for PwD. Secondly, when women are trained to grasp the technique of latrine construction, they will have a voice in the family and in the community. You can speak out when you know, right?” (DWU staff)

Besides improving understanding for WU staff under the WOBA, the WU staff said that training on gender and menstrual hygiene should be trained earlier to increase the effectiveness of building latrines.

“The training on gender and menstrual hygiene could be done as soon as possible because it went hand in hand with the project. I think it would have been better if it had been done earlier. For example, it is better and more efficient if it could be conducted about the first one third of the project. The gender training was very good, the DWU have already done as well. Because the WU staff could integrate these contents to explain for household during mobilizing household to build latrine.” (DWU staff)

In addition, the DWU staff also commented that some contents of the training were not suitable for grassroots level, and training target group should be expanded to include more men.

⁶ Resolution 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị dated on 27/4/2007

⁷ <https://baohatinh.vn/xay-dung-dang/cong-bo-ket-qua-bau-ban-thuong-vu-bi-thu-tinh-uy-va-cac-pho-bi-thu-tinh-uy-ha-tinh/200191.htm>

⁸ Resolution 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị dated on 27/4/2007

“When I have training materials to study, I choose the content that is suitable for the locality. Some games in the provincial training couldn’t be applied for DWU and CWU level. It had to be changed accordingly... There should be another training course for male staff from communist party, heads of village and male local residents.” (DWU)

4.3 Income and employment opportunities

The WU staff believe that the work in WOBA they are doing is their responsibility of the tasks assigned by their superiors and their passion for the community activities. The project provides a small allowance only to encourage WU staff in mobilizing HHs. However, this allowance isn’t enough for the cost of petrol and phone to contact with HHs and among WU staff. In their hearts, the activities in the project don’t aim to have job opportunities, increase income or receive financial allowances for WU staff.

“Q: So, do you see that when your wife participate in the Woba project, does she share with you that she has any benefits to join WOBA?”

A: No, absolutely not. Frankly, we do it for the mutual benefits of the community. It is impossible to do it when putting the individual benefit first. Like I said at first, it was difficult, because there was no salary, right.” (Husband of CWU)

4.4 Activities in family

In the group discussion for the village head and the village women’s union, it was found that there were many activities in the household listed by the participants such as: child care, child rearing, financial management, doing housework, attending funerals, farming, building/repairing houses, building/repairing water/sanitary facilities, earning money. The overall average score of men versus women in all activities shows that women still holds the main task of performing activities, especially the housework (54.5% for women and 45.6% for men).

There were mixed opinions through group discussions and in-depth interviews. The results of the group discussion showed that women play the main role such as housework (70%), take care of children (80%) and the rest are men who perform these two tasks. Meanwhile, in the in-depth interviews, there is a difference, the husband thinks that the care and upbringing of the children is the wife’s responsibility, but on the wife’s side, the job of taking care of and educating the children is the responsibility of the wife need to be shared by the husband.

Q: What does husband do after eating?

A: The husband takes a rest while the wife washes the dishes.

(HT- FGD)

Q: So, who do the activities in your family such as housework or taking care of children, who is the main person responsible for?

A: The wife is in charge.

Q: What about raising children?

A: The wife as well.

Q: For example, guide the children to study?

A: The wife, too. I am in bad temper, but the children don't know how to do, I will beat them. Taking care of the children is the task of the wife.

(Husband of CWU staff)

“Now there are fewer and fewer husbands who don’t help their wives with housework. Most of the time, the husband and wife do housework, the wife does one thing and the husband does another, so it is different from the past. (CWU staff)

There was consistence among members in focus group discussion and in-depth interviews on financial management and earning money. The wife still holds the role of financial management in the family and the man is still the breadwinner. The opinion from members of FGD is that 90% of men have to go out to earn money and do heavy work, but 90% of the wives are the financial managers. Men often don't know how much money they have in their family at the present.

“Men are ATMs for women to withdraw money.” (FGD)

“Here men do the mainly responsible for earning money. Women who are the village staff get a few money, it's not enough for living.” (Husband of CWU)

Besides, the participants of FGD, interviews also said that men still had the right to decide on the big jobs such as building houses (70%), auxiliary works (60%).

“It seems there are more women, but in fact, men take care of everything more like design, construction, finance and have to discuss and unify both husband and wife to make decision together.” (FGD)

In addition, it is said that men still have the right to decide the main jobs that are considered to be the “big” ones such as building houses (70%) or auxiliary (kitchen, water tank, latrine, bathroom) works (60%).

“It looks the women participate more than men, but the fact that men take care of all such as design, construction, finance and must discuss with the wife then give the final decision.” (FGD)

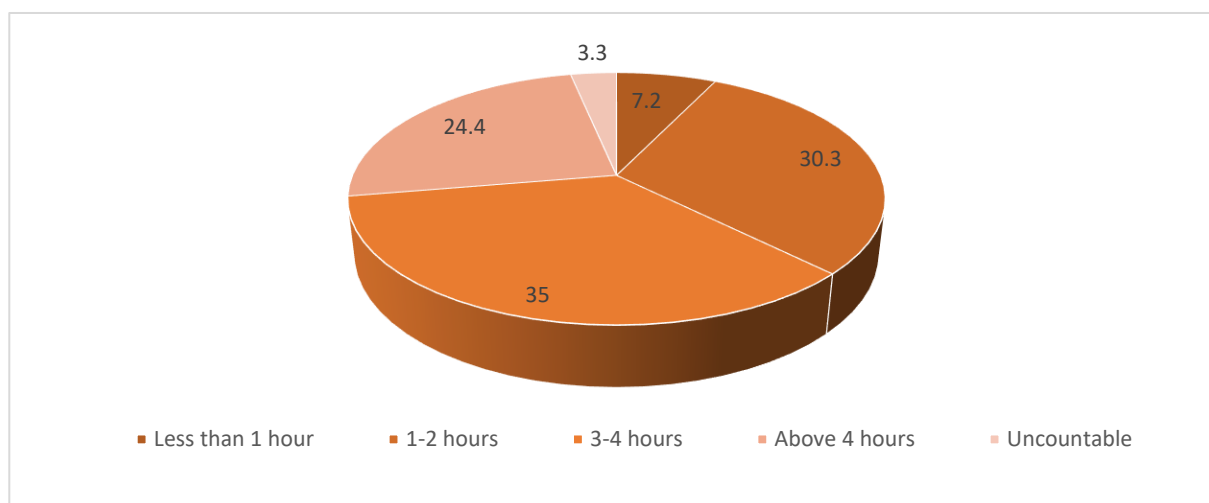


Fig 1. Time spending for doing housework (Survey with WU staff in Ha Tinh province)

Like other communes in the survey, participants in FGD and interviews all said that in households, there was a change in roles and responsibilities in the family compared to before, the husband had known how to sympathize and share work with his wife. And the women participated in the earning income jobs more and more. Although, in the community this sharing of unnamed and unpaid housework was sometimes limited.

“Previously men went out to earn money and women were housewives, but now they are different, the women are more struggling, they do not only agricultural activities but they also do other jobs. In the past, women take care the “small” things and men do “bigger” jobs, but now both discuss, even men will take care of the family so that the women can go out to earn money.” (Male leader of CPC)

“This is actually changing slowly, taking a lot of time time, but now it is difficult to change the concept from the past until now. For example, very few men can take care of their wives when she gives birth.” (CWU staff)

Similar to the statements in the interviews and FGD, with the WU staff, the housework takes a lot of time for the WU staff. More than a half of respondents in the survey with WU staff in Ha Tinh (N=180) said that they spend at least 3 hours per day for housework.

In which, 58.9% said there is no change in their time spending for doing housework in the last 4 year. 22.8%

said it decreased and 11.1% said it increased. While 53.3% of respondents spent below 10 hours per week (it meant about 2 hours per day) for paid work. There are only 21.1% of WU staff in Ha Tinh spend from 40 hours and above per week for paid work.

4.5 Participation in social activities

According to the recognition of the participants in FGDs and interviews, women now have many advantages to participate in social activities. Firstly, it is the consensus of the husband's family, the women receive the help from the parents and parents-in-law in doing housework, taking care of children.

“For example, in 2019, I had a lot of work, I didn’t have time to stay at home, so I also wanted to resign. But my husband and my husband's family encouraged me to keep doing. The husband's family also supported a lot. My parents supported as well.” (CWU staff)

From another side, the women even think that everything they can do due to the support and sympathy from the husband rather than their own efforts.

“The CWU staff have to go all day, now just conduct propaganda on new rural development program. If the husband does not know how to sacrifice, I can never do it. Sunday or Saturday I am never at home.” (CWU staff).

And secondly, the better economic and living conditions impact on the movements of dancing and sport activities in the commune. Especially, the new rural development program encourages the rural area to develop in many

areas, not only in economic area but also in entertainment activities. Those attract the local residents to join.

“Right, now it has changed, under the new rural development program, a commune folk song team is established. In the evening, the people dance and sing, at the beginning, there were only some women participating, then now there are more and more women.” (Village WU staff)

Customs and beliefs are still deeply rooted in the perception of the people, the support from the husband is considered as a "grace" and "help", but not the responsibility of both. Not only that, women themselves have not yet overcome the barriers of thought that hinder themselves, they have to take care of their families and be grateful whenever their husbands do the housework.

“We (the women) are undertaking all the housework, but we don't know how to share it. For example, when we can't do housework, we ask the husband to do, we don't think that it's the responsibility of the husband as well. So, we also thanks, then feel grateful. We feel graceful when we have to go home late and the husband cooks for meals. I think it is the deepest ingrained. And even the women themselves also lost their own gender equality. I myself are the same.” (DWU staff)

According to the male village heads and village WU staff in the FGD (Fig. 1), there is no significant change in labor division between men and women on the housework and agricultural production activities. These activities take much more time from women than men in the family. And the time for leisure and entertainment activities of women is much less than men.

The biggest change is the participation in the community meetings. In the past, only men went to the community meetings, but now most of participants in the community meetings are female. The reason is the men working away from home. This is both an opportunity and a constraint for women while the women can increase their awareness on gender equality but their husbands can't access these knowledges and the activities promoting the gender equality in the community.

The family's economy decides whether a woman can participate in social work or not, if their economy is not stable, it is difficult for women to participate. And there have been husbands who orient their wives to participate in social activities and they are the main breadwinners in the family.

“My orientation is that my wife participates in social work, I earn money. Without the stable economy, the wife can't join the social activities.” (Village WU staff)

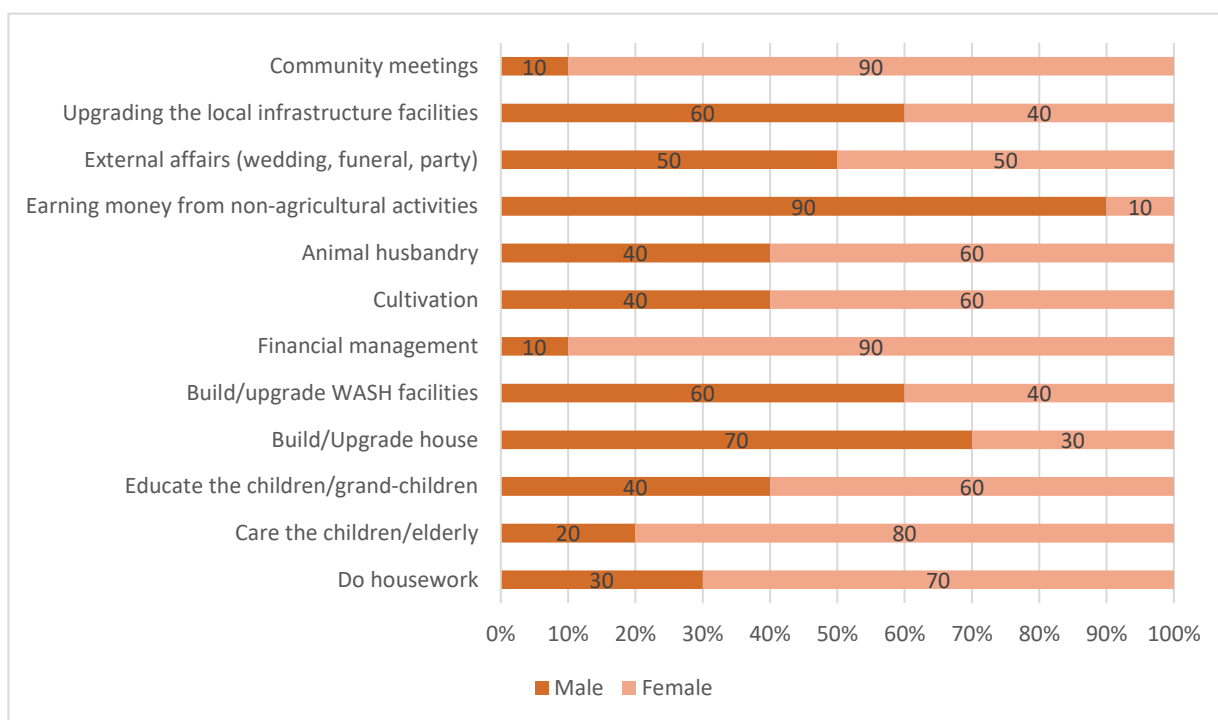


Fig 2. Labor division by gender – in Son Linh, Ha Tinh (estimated by the participants in FGD with male village heads and village WU staff)

“Frankly, the allowances to participate in the community activities are very limited. The husband must sacrifice so that the wife joins the social activities with very limited money. If he has no stable income, the women have to stay at home.” (Husband of CWU staff)

The women still face barriers from the family, if the husband does not want his wife to participate in social activities, they think that the wife will interact with many other men, neglecting the housework.

“Men who have an unstable stance are jealous when they hear others say nonsense about his wife, then the men don't let their wives participate in social work.” (Husband of CWU staff)

“In the past, when the husband was busy but the husband wore a nice suit, then it's not okay, the husband didn't accept. Even now, the wives whose husbands don't sympathize dress well and go out (for the community meeting) after breakfast, it can't be unaccepted by the husband.” (Village WU staff)

4.6 Leadership and decision making

Women with passion in their work, they have self-esteem, sympathize with the disadvantaged and their improved skills from Woba which has increased their value in the community and have a voice to advise the party committee and authorities.

“I can visit HHs and know them clearly, the poor or near-poor families, especially the disadvantaged groups, has been supported a lot from WU. Propaganda and advocacy skills of WU staff are improved, and especially the people they trust, the position and role of the WU organization are also increased. Decisions, advice, support policies are recorded as participating in the project.” (CWU staff)

“Now, when she works as an official, she goes out a lot to propagate, and expand her knowledge, she can stand in front of the meeting and the crowd with much more confidence.” (Husband of CWU)

4.0 technology, communication, information, and the internet are also one of the reasons that help women learn from each other and improve their knowledge, qualifications and opportunities are the factors to push their rights of decision making and leadership.

“I think the information is very important. Especially in the 4.0 era, the women can access the

images and activities of other communes/districts. Of course, the WU have also changed a lot, propagandizing, campaigning more, doing more. The 4.0 it is very beneficial. Of course, we don't talk about the disadvantages, but the benefits are like that.” (DWU staff)

The male leader of CPC recognized that the Woba project had contribution to the impact on promoting gender equality and decision-making of women in society.

“I think in this project the women have the right to decide, they can access, it is easier for women to persuade the local people to participate.” (Male leader of CPC)

Besides, the chances on being educated help the women increase the opportunities for the leadership positions.

“In the previous time, the opportunity for holding the leadership position was not given to women due to their limited education degree. Now, the superiors make plan to give the young women the chances of learning to get higher degree, therefore, the women will have more opportunities to hold the leadership positions.” (FGD)

Age is one of the factors that prevent women from promoting, as the older they are, their health does not allow them to have much ambition to be leaders, not only that, but they find themselves keep a position for a long time, sometimes there are complaints about "why do they take so long, should spend room for the next generation!"

“I don't do it anymore because I feel exhausted, I'm too old to keep doing this position.” (WU at village)

A barrier from the women themselves, "peaceful" content with what they have, many women have "opportunities" in their hands but they refuse, they also think that their degree is not relevant so they don't dare to challenge.

“It's not enough because the woman herself doesn't accept, it's true. Women also do not want to strive. They think that's okay. It's fine to work and get salary. The internal cause is because of the tradition of the East Asians. So it is difficult, not one day, two days, one project, one session can change their mindset. The first reason is that women themselves lose the gender equality.” (DWU staff)

The family is a barrier, the husband does not sympathize, share, or be jealous of his wife when the wife participates

in social activities whole day. Women themselves still have a heavy burden on housework, taking care of

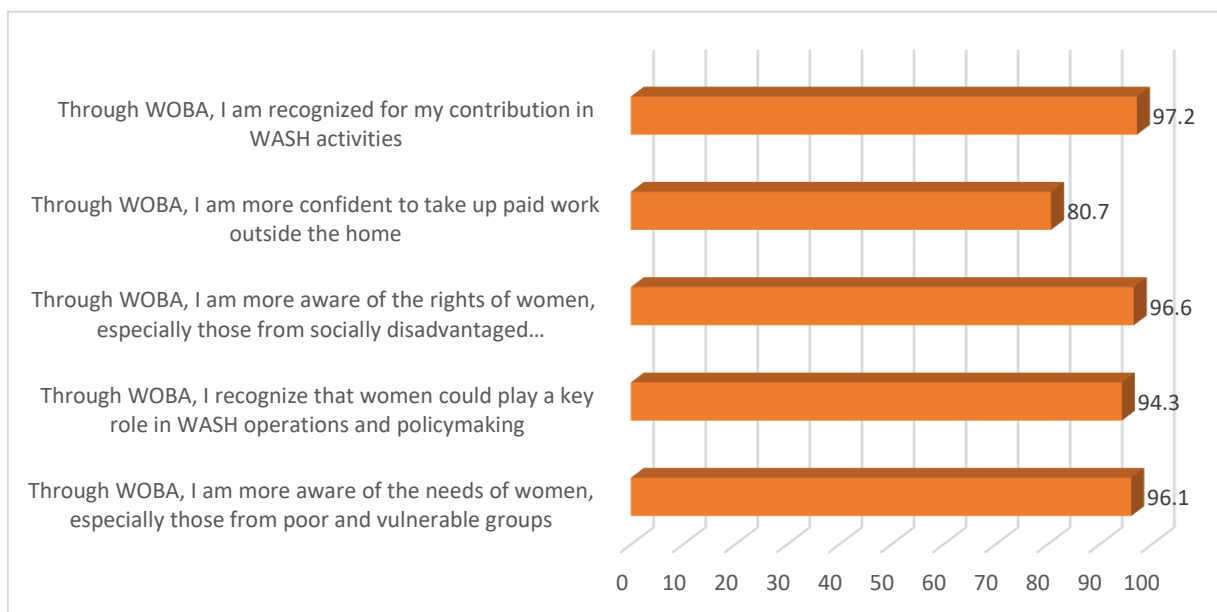


Fig 3. Personal changes under the WOBA (survey with WU staff in Ha Tinh province)

children, etc., that makes women miss many opportunities to participate in decision-making or leadership positions.

“Women’s constrain is family, this is different from the men’s one. For example, when I go to work, I can come home and have a difficult family job to take care of children, if my husband shares it, it will be convenient. Unless it is an obstacle. Then participation in the late meetings at nights, it is difficult for women if their husbands are jealous.” (CWU staff)

“Like participating in a party, men get drunk and go home without doing anything, while women get drunk, they still have to do housework and take care the children.” (FGD)

As the statements from the participants in FGD and interviews, the purpose of the WU staff participated in the WOBA is not for earning money, getting the employment opportunities or taking up the leadership positions. However, they can get the indirect benefits such as self-esteem, confidence, prestige, trust... which are potential to get the direct benefits in the future. The results from the survey with the WU staff also prove that.

More than 97% of respondents said that they are recognized for their contribution in WASH through activities. Similarly, 96.6% said that they got more awareness of the rights of women or disadvantaged households. There is no significant difference in the personal changes among the WU at different levels.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

There are inherent limitations with the methods employed particularly the survey. First, the use of online survey was unfamiliar to many women and restrict many WU’s staff (especially at village level) who did not have smart phones with internet connection. Second, the respondents in the survey are mostly the WU’s staff and WOBA’s partners who all belong to the government organizations. Many of them were afraid of giving frank assessment and straight opinions and tend to agree with the statements in the questionnaire although it may not be the reality of their community. Although this is an inherent problem with online survey where Likert scale is used to elicit opinions on latent indicators, it is a more critical issue for this group of respondents due to the context of the WU and Vietnam political context. Other logistical problems relating to the qualitative data collection include interrupted focus group discussion and interviews at the start and during the interviews. We have attempted to improve the rigour of the data by using multiple sources and levels of analysis including comparison of the information gathered across and within the cases.

Despite these limitations, the case study provides some insights, which we can draw on to offer some implications for improving gender equality and women’s empowerment at the policy and practical level.

It can be seen from the case study in Son Linh commune, beside the opportunities for participating in social activities, making decision and taking leadership positions, the women have been facing many constraints. The economic empowerment for women is essential to empower women in general. Increasing the allowances for social activities and the community leadership positions make the women feel more secure to participate in the social activities. Even in the projects which are similar to WOBA, the allowance for WU staff should be more to motivate them to join WOBA more actively.

In addition, general empowerment is inevitably based on the women's economic empowerment. When women are economically independent, they have a better voice and better participation in social activities. This is an important factor to promote gender equality. Therefore, empowering women requires a parallel combination of other resources. As WOBA directly focuses on interventions to empower women in WASH. To increase the effectiveness of these interventions, additional interventions are needed, especially livelihood and employment development, income improvements for women.

To ensure that all have access to latrines, it is necessary to increase the number and subjects who have access to latrines. There should be different levels of subsidy to apply for each marginalized HHs that helps them have a chance to use WASH service. So that women in these households have the opportunity to use hygienic latrines and clean water.

The communication on gender equality should be applied for both men and women instead of more women. There should be more clubs for households to share and learn from each other as well as for husbands and wives to have the opportunity to share and understand each other better.

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Decision No. 800/QD-TTg dated July 2, 2018 of the Prime Minister adjusting and supplementing a number of contents in the National Strategy on Gender Equality in the period 2011-2020.

Decision No. 1241/QD-TTg dated July 22, 2011 of the Prime Minister approving the National Program on Gender Equality for the period 2011-2015.

Decision No. 1696/QD-TTg dated October 2, 2015 of the Prime Minister approving the National Action Programme on Gender Equality for the 2016- 2020 period.

Directive No. 21-CT/TW dated January 20, 2018 of the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Viet Nam on continually promoting the women's work in the new situation.

Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW dated April 27, 2007 of the Politburo on women's work in the period of accelerated industrialization and modernization of the country.

Government Report No. 474/BC-CP dated October 6, 2020. Report on the implementation of the national objectives on gender equality in 2019 and the period 2011-2020.

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