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POLICY BRIEF

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT IN VIETNAM: CURENT STATE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Source: baolaocai.vn

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I. PROBLEM

Source: baolaocai.vn

Nowadays both men and women are equally involved in production activities and social life. However, the level of contribution and participation between men and women has not been recognized equitably. This leads to the discrimination and affects the division of labour, as well as the right to access and control resources of men and women. In addition, the awareness of gender in the community is limited for it is largely influenced by stereotypes and social norms.

In the forestry industry, the role of women has not been significantly recognized, especially to women in remote areas due to gender stereotypes that have been establisded for a long time. Accordingly, women are mainly in charge of domestic chores such as taking care of children and working in the mountain fields. They have few opportunities to participate in decisive meetings as well as improve their knowledge on forest protection and management. However, in fact, many women actively take part in forestry activities such as planting, tending and restoring forests, and harvesting non-timber forest products-NTFPs (for example: bamboo shoots, mushrooms, rattan, honey and so on). Women also participate in patrolling the forests contracted for protection, where payment for forest environment services (PFES) scheme is available. Additionally, women are the primary workforce in the production stages of wood products at production facilities. In particular, according to the 2019 statistics from the Vietnam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST), Vietnam had about 5,400 wood processing enterprises, of which small and micro enterprises accounted for 93%. Of the 500,000 female workers working in this industry, 55 - 60% are long-term skilled workers and 40-45% are short-term and low-skilled workers. Wood processing enterprises often employ both long-term and short-term workers based on specific jobs and related skills (based on the statistics of VNFOREST in 2019). However, there is no specific assessment on the contribution of female workers in the wood products' value chain. In addition, there is no evident indicated that academic research studies roles of women in forest management . Therefore, it shall be clarified the role of women in order to review and propose new policies to promote and recognize their contribution to forest management including exploitation, utilization, development and protection of the forests. As a result, new policies will enhance the sustainable forest management and development in Vietnam.

By reviewing, synthesizing and analyzing data from different research reports and experiences from implementing projects of the Center for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD), this report expects to provide some evidences of women's participation in forest protection and development in general and sustainable forest management particularly. The report also proposes policy recommendations on promoting the role of women in forest protection and sustainable development, in line with the development strategy of forestry in Vietnam.

The report is one of the policy briefs developed under the project "Strengthening human rights and gender equality in reducing natural disaster and climate change's risks" (EmPower) by the Center for Environment and Community Research (CECR) and The Network of Vietnamese NGOs and Climate Change, with the support from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women).

II. GOOD FOREST MANAGEMENT: CONCEPTS AND IMPLICATIONS

THE CONCEPT OF FOREST MANAGEMENT

Forest management is currently considered as an important factor to the success of the forestry industry. Accordingly, in order to achieve good forest management, we need to answer three questions as followed: (i) Who makes the decisions? (ii) Who has the benefits? and (iii) How are decisions formulated?

Forest management is defined as a highly social process that requires responsibility and participation of both the government and many other public organs. This indicates the fact that not only the technical issues but also the participation of related parties, especially those who live on forests, helps the forestry industry to develop sustainably.

Therefore, forest management is a system of legal documents, programs, plans and actions to achieve the goals of sustainable forest development set by the parties.

Research shows that good forest management contributes to solving the following problems:

- Ensuring the decision-policy process has participation; identify and tackle the gaps/weaknesses of the present/future policy;
- Minimizing conflicts/risks, harmonizing interests in planning: promoting the right to access, manage and utilize resources of the parties (use rights);
- Increasing full participation: socialize resources from enterprises and communities; improve the efficiency of forestry cooperation/co-management; gender equality;
- Sharing benefits; coordinate-integrate resources (more effectively) in forestry, poverty alleviation, investment-forestry trade;
- Improving the capacity for management agencies, forest owners and other related parties.
- Enhancing the efficiency of social resources through transparent processes at all stages from the development of legal documents, planning options to the implement and compliance in the process.

For good forestry management, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the World (FAO) has identified three main pillars including: (1) Policy framework, legislation/regulations and institutions; (2) Planning and decision-making processes; (3) Implementation and compliance. All the 3 pillars are divided into 6 principles including (i) Accountability, (ii) Efficiency; (iii) Calculating efficiency; (iv) Equity; (v) Participation and (vi) Transparency as indicated in Figure 1.

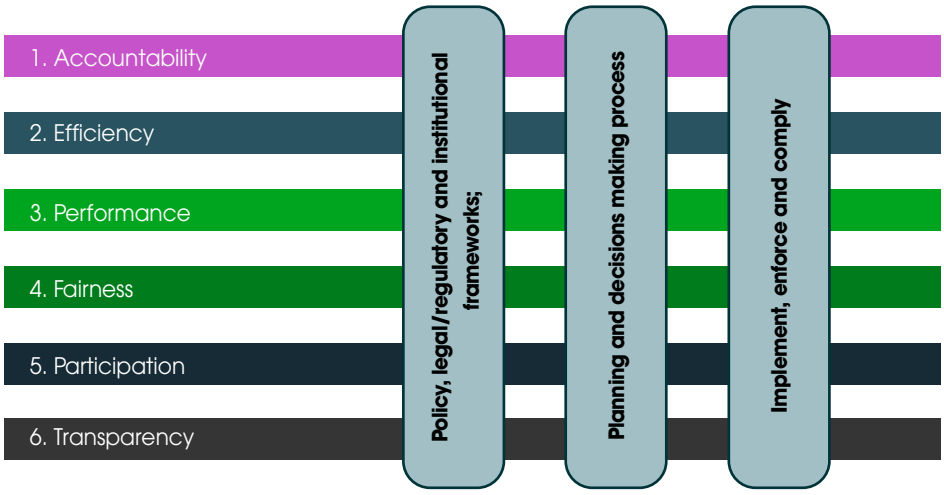

Figure 1. Three pillars and six principles of good forest management

Around the world, good forest management is a topic that attracts many related parties, not only the government or specialized agencies of the state. In our country, forest management has been received a lot of attention through two initiatives (i) Voluntary Partnership Agreement on Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (VPA/FLEGT) and (ii) Professional Governance Act (PGA) is supported by the Programme on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (UN-REDD).

Source: hoilhpn.org.vn

III. THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FOREST MANAGEMENT IN VIETNAM

3.1. OVERVIEW OF THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FORESTRY INDUSTRY

Vietnam has issued legal provisions such as ordinances, laws and decrees, strategies and national programs to give equal rights and opportunities to women such as the 2006 Gender Equality Law, the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2021 – 2030[1], and the National Action Program on Gender Equality 2016 - 2020. In 2021 to enhance the role of women, the Government of Vietnam has issued Resolution No. 28/GQ-CP dated March 3, 2021 National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period with the goal of continuing to narrowing the gender gap, creating conditions and opportunities for women and men to participate and enjoy equal benefits in all fields of social life, contributing to the country's sustainable development. Government agencies have been established with the aim of formulating and implementing policies related to gender equality, gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment. The Gender Equality Department under the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) is the state management agency responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Law. The National Committee for the Advancement of Women is an interdisciplinary mechanism with committees for the advancement of women in all ministries, branches and localities. The Women's Union is the body representing the rights and voices of women, with presence at all levels from central to local.

In the forestry sector, the 2017 Forestry Law provides for equal access to forest land, forest-based livelihoods and land ownership. Clause 7, Article 14 of the Law governing forest allocation, lease, reuse and ownership, highlights the principles of equal participation and without gender discrimination. The law also provides for equal rights of women in accessing information on forest development plans, employment opportunities, management positions and professional training. The Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020 advocates for capacity building for forestry staff on gender mainstreaming and gender integration in forestry monitoring.

The Action Plan on Gender Equality of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development for the period 2011-2020 has set out specific goals to ensure the legitimate rights and interests of women. The plan also makes the goal of ensuring women's equal rights to participate in and enjoy agricultural and rural development activities. In addition, gender equality is also reflected in other legal documents such as the Civil Code 2015, the Land Law 2013, the Law on Real Estate Registration 2006, the Law on Forestry in 2017.

[1] https://luatvietnam.vn/chinh-sach/nghi-quyet-28-nq-cp-chien-luoc-quoc-gia-ve-binh-dang-gioi-giai-doan-2021-2030-199301-d1.html

Table 1: The legal framework and policy on gender equality in Vietnam

Scope	Legal documents	Effective from	Summary
International	The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women	1979	The guide reviews existing policies and programs from a gender perspective and develops new policies to promote and protect women's rights.
International	Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action	1995	General outline and planning for women's empowerment in 12 key areas, including good works and women's rights to land and property, and women's participation in policies labour.
International /National	Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals 2030	2015	Goal 5: Commit to gender equality and the empowerment of all women, among other goals, ensuring women have equal rights to economic resources, as well as ownership and control land and property, financial services, inheritance, natural resources, etc.
National/ Forestry industry	Law on Gender Equality	2006	Ensure equal rights for both women and men in all areas and require all ministries to institutionalize gender in their strategies. Article 4: Eliminate all forms of discrimination based on sex, create equal opportunities for both sexes in the socio-economic development and human development of the country. Clause 1, Article 7: Ensuring gender equality in all fields of politics, economy, culture, society and family; support and create conditions for men and women to promote their abilities, have equal opportunities to participate in the development process and enjoy the fruits of development. Clause 1, Article 13: Gender equality in labor, recruitment, salary payment and working conditions.
National	National Strategy on Gender Equality for the period 2021 – 2020	2012	Ensuring gender equality in political, economic, cultural and social fields, contributing to sustainable development.
National	National Strategy for Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period (Resolution No. 28/NQ-CP 3/3/2021)	2021	Continue to narrow the gender gap, create conditions and opportunities for women and men to participate and enjoy equal benefits in all areas of social life, contributing to the country's sustainable development.
National	Plan No. 1136/KH of the Presidium of the Vietnam Women's Union	25/10/2021	Implement the national strategy on gender equality with concretizing activities to ensure that the gender equality objectives in the strategy are fully implemented, which is the legal basis for localities to develop implementation plans. implementing the gender equality strategy for the period 2021-2030.
National	National Action Program on Gender Equality 2016 - 2020	2015	Narrowing the gender gap and raising the status of women in a number of fields, sectors, regions and locals.
National	Forestry Law 2017	2019	Clause 7, Article 14: Equal participation and non-discrimination on the basis of gender in forest allocation, leasing, reusing and owning. Equal career opportunities including good work and professional training from Government support for women.
National	The Forestry Development Strategy 2006-2020	2007	Capacity building on gender issues for forestry staff. Invest in local government agencies for gender integration and gender-sensitive monitoring in forestry.

Source: Report on Challenges and Opportunities of the Voluntary Partnership Agreement between Vietnam and the European Union (VPA) for women and civil society organizations (SRD)

The implementation of forest management is based on three main pillars including (i) Legal documents such as laws, decrees, circulars; (ii) Plans and pillars' plans and (iii) Effectiveness and implementation. In the process of issuing legal documents according to the Law on Promulgation of Legal Documents, the formulation of laws, decrees, circulars, standards, regulations, and planning options must have time to be consulted, and posted on the websites of public organs for at least 15 days. This is an opportunity for people to comment on these draft legal documents, especially for women to give their opinions on issues related to their rights and responsibilities. It illustrates the gender integration in issuing legal documents. Therefore, gender integration in the promulgation of legal documents is a solution to achieve the goal of gender equality, eliminate gender discrimination, ensure legal rights and interests that is suitable to the characteristics of each gender. Furthermore, it creates equal development opportunities for both men and women in social and family life, ensure substantive gender equality between men and women.

* Challenges in improving the role and position of women in sustainable forest management

Despite the policies mentioned above, gender discrimination and discrimination related to gender issues still exist in daily life. Women are often considered as collectors of forest products to serve daily needs and take care of family's nutrition and health. Meanwhile men are involved in logging and trading other forestry products. Therefore, the opportunities for women to participate in giving opinions and making decisions on activities that brings economic benefits are often limited. Due to physical and psychological characteristics that women get pregnant and are responsible for raising children, it is a huge challenge for them to work frequently and constantly in severe weather conditions. Besides that, in fact, women rarely participate in commenting on draft legal documents, hence the voice of them is not loud enough. Although many legal documents have been consulted by social organizations, the opinions of the Women's Unions for these documents are still very limited..

3.2. FOREST MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION

Although the role of women has been mentioned in other laws and by-laws as well as in programs to promote equity and gender equality in various fields, including the forestry industry, women are still not fully equal as men. In the forestry industry, patrolling and protecting forests is a job that requires physical strength and those who do this job are often in danger, especially when dealing with violations that take place in the forest. In fact, most of the cases of dealing with violations of the Law on forest usually take place outside the forest, mainly on the way of transportation, trading, etc., hence the participation of women is very little. Because most of the patrolling and protection of forests as well as handling of violations are done by men, whereas women only assist in providing information and undertaking office work. Therefore, viewing on the angle of gender integration in the forestry industry should have a broad vision not only in the forest but also in the whole forest value chains.

Source: lamdinh.tuyenquang.gov.vn

3.3. LAND USE RIGHT

In forestry, most of the land use right certificates (red books) of households so far are under the name of husband, only a small number of red books are names of the wife included, especially often seen in ethnic minorities. A number of surveys and studies have examined and evaluated gender aspects in the land allocation process, including the percentage of household's red books of s under the name of both husband and wife or only under the name of husband according to the Land Law 2003 (MARD 2006; Hoang et al 2013; Wells-Dang 2013; ICRW 2015; SRD & FERN 2020). For example, the results of the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey in 2014 (VHLSS 2014) show that for non-residential land in rural areas, about half of the land use right certificates or red books (48.2%) have the wife's name, of which only 35.5% under the name of both husband and wife, and 12.9% under the name of only the wife, and about 41.6% under the name of only the husband (Table 2).

Table 2: Summary of some gender-related indicators in the process of granting land use right certificates in Vietnam

No.	Land use right certificates (red books)	Total (%)	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Kinh (%)	Ethic minorities (%)	Poor house -holds (%)	Normal households (%)
1.	Residential land							
1.1	Red books under the name of both husband and wife	41.3	45.8	39.4	41.5	40.0	37.3	41.7
1.2	Red books under the name of only the husband	32.2	24.6	35.3	31.4	31.4	32.7	32.1
1.3	Red books under the name of only the wife	17.2	20.8	15.6	18.0	10.8	17.2	17.2
2.	Other land							
2.1	Red books under the name of both husband and wife	35.7	39.3	35.3	35.0	37.7	37.1	35.4
2.2	Red books under the name of only the husband	41.1	36.3	41.6	40.8	41.8	40.1	41.2
2.3	Red books under the name of only the wife	13.0	14.3	12.9	14.9	7.4	11.5	13.3

Source: GSO, Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS 2014)

According to a study conducted by Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SRD) on forest land tenure in 4 provinces (Nghe An, Binh Dinh, Quang Nam and Phu Tho) indicates that 64% of households interviewed have forest land use right certificates under the name of the husband, 25% under the name of both husband and wife and 11% under the name of the wife or other family members (Figure 3). In 2013, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) carried out a survey on women's right to access land resources (including residential, agricultural and forestry land) in 10 provinces. The results indicate that out of 1,250 interviewed households, only 22% of households registered for forestland use right certificates under the name of both husband and wife and 18% of households registered under the name of the wife.

In the land management context, discriminatory behavior against women are common, especially in rural forest-dependent communities. The land allocation process is managed by provincial governments, who can be influenced by casual customs that are heavy gender stereotypes. Furthermore, women are often not allowed to inherit land for their parents or grandparents because after marriage they moved to their husband's house.

Phụ nữ không sở hữu đất đai và tên của họ thường không được đăng ký trên giấy chứng nhận sử dụng đất, nên họ phải đối mặt với những rủi ro lớn trong các trường hợp tranh chấp đất đai, ly hôn và phân chia tài sản. Cũng do định kiến về phụ nữ nên nhiều gia đình, nhất là các gia đình vùng nông thôn vai trò của phụ nữ cũng không được quan tâm bình đẳng theo đúng nghĩa (Phần lớn bố mẹ phân chia tài sản đất đai cho con thì con gái bao giờ cũng được phần ít hơn). Cũng do định kiến về giới phụ nữ cũng ít khi đấu tranh cho quyền lợi của bản thân trong gia đình

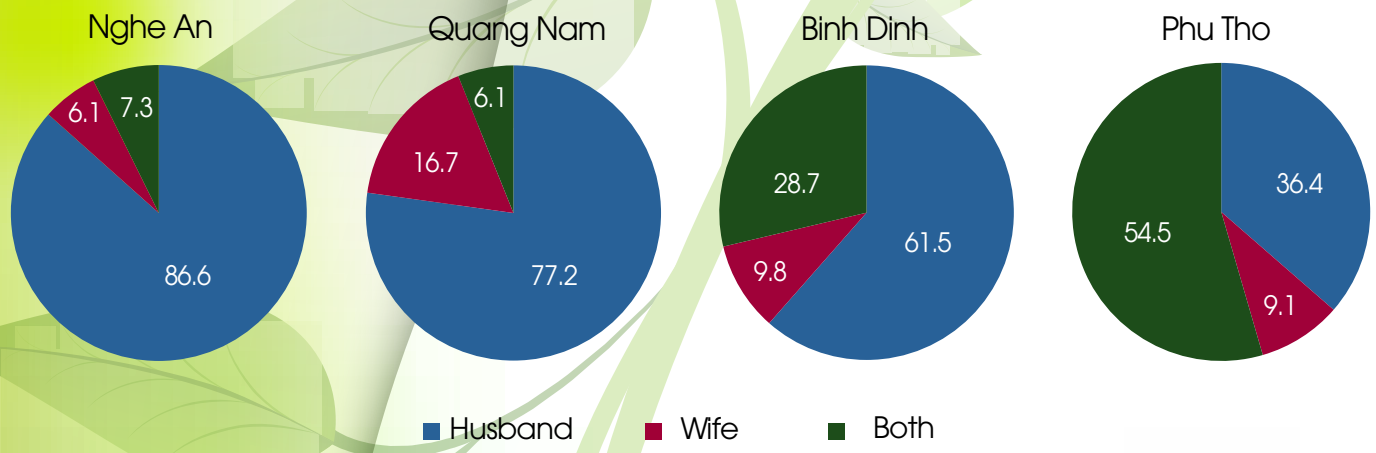

Figure 2. Owners according to forest land use right certificates

Source: SRD 2019

3.4. PARTICIPATING IN AFFORESTATION

In afforestation, women are mainly responsible for taking care of the nursery and producing seeding, the harvesting and clearing vegetation is done by men. Meanwhile, other tasks such as planting, thinning and pruning are performed by both men and women (MARD 2006; FAO & RECOFTC 2015). For the collection and using forest products from natural forests, the economic role of women is often linked to meeting household consumption needs (e.g. fuel and wild food) and selling non-timber forest products from the forest at local markets, while men's role is more linked to the harvesting of timber and more valuable non-timber products for commercial purposes (Chapter 5). UN REDD+ Programme 2013; FAO & RECOFTC 2015). Several studies equate types of division of labor and economic differences with cultural standards in order to reinforce the belief that forestry is mainly a men's field and women's work is only of minor importance (FAO & RECOFTC 2015).

3.5. WOOD PRODUCTION AND PROCESSING

Source: vnanet.vn

Currently, Viet Nam is in the process of preparing for the implementation of the VPA/FLEGT Agreement. When the Agreement is fully implemented, all wood and wood-based products of Viet Nam, whether sold in the domestic market or the international market, will be followed the principle of VPA/FLEGT. The Agreement is expected to contribute to bringing practical economic, environmental and social benefits to Vietnam. However, the regulations and the strict law enforcement required by the VPA/FLEGT will have a negative impact on vulnerable groups, in which men and women may be affected differently. As a result, there is a need to integrate gender consideration in the implementation of the Agreement in Viet Nam.

Năm 2019, theo số liệu thống kê của Tổng cục Lâm nghiệp (VNFOREST), Việt Nam có khoảng 5.400 doanh nghiệp chế biến gỗ, trong đó các doanh nghiệp nhỏ và siêu nhỏ chiếm 93,8%. Trong số 500.000 công nhân làm việc trong lĩnh vực này, 55 - 60% là lao động dài hạn có tay nghề cao và 40-45% là lao động ngắn hạn có tay nghề thấp. Nhóm lao động ngắn hạn thường làm việc ít hơn bảy tháng mỗi năm theo quy định của Luật Lao động. Các doanh nghiệp chế biến gỗ thường sử dụng cả lao động dài hạn và lao động ngắn hạn dựa trên các công việc cụ thể và các kỹ năng liên quan.

Năm 2018, theo kết quả khảo sát của Trung tâm Phát triển Nông thôn bền vững thực hiện tại 36 doanh nghiệp chế biến gỗ tại 4 tỉnh (Nghệ An, Quảng Nam, Bình Định và Phú Thọ) đối với những doanh nghiệp chế biến gỗ có quy mô vừa và nhỏ cho thấy lao động dài hạn là nam giới chiếm 65%, nhiều hơn so với tỷ lệ nữ giới trong lĩnh vực này.

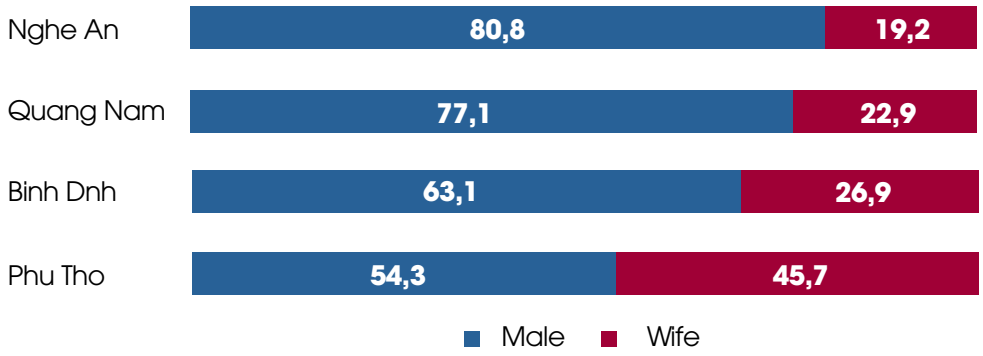

Figure 3. Structure of long-term workers in small and micro wood processing enterprises by gender (in %)

Source: SRD, 2019

For short-term jobs in wood processing, the data shows that there are more female workers than male in Quang Nam and Binh Dinh provinces. Meanwhile, in Nghe An and Phu Tho provinces, number of male workers are slightly greater than female workers (Figure 5).

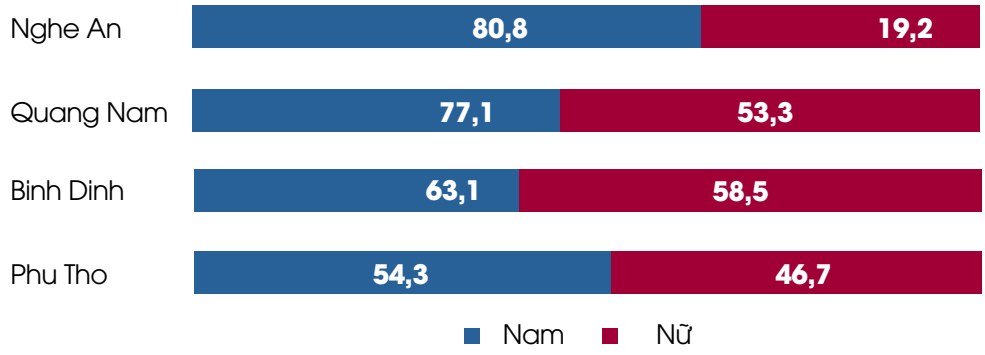

Figure 4. Structure of short-term workers in small and micro enterprises by gender (as indicated in percentage)

Source: SRD, 2019

Regarding the opinion of enterprises, they are concerned about long-term recruitment for female workers because women often have to take maternity leave, unable to do jobs that require physical strength, and in rural areas, women often have to take the housework, so the working time needs to be more flexible. As a result, women are often recruited for short-term and low-skilled jobs. These jobs carry the highest risk when implementing the VPA. Besides, women are also less participated in professional training courses, which makes them rarely play an important and proactive role in their work, as well as are taken more risks when there is any change in the wood production and processing industry.

3.6. TRAINING

Because forestry is a specific industry which forest is distributed spread nationwide and is difficult to access, it is some difficulties in attracting female students enrolled in forestry trainings and education. According to statistics from Vietnam National University of Forestry, the annual number of female students entering the school accounts for about 25- 30% of the total number of students. Some majors have almost no female students, such as wood technology, silviculture, forest resources management. The percentage of high school graduates who wish to study in forestry universities and colleges is also very low. That's why the role of women in this industry is not appreciated and less properly appreciated. The percentage of female leaders in the forestry sector is also very low. The Vietnam Administration of Forestry (VNFOREST) has 14 subordinate units equivalent to the department level, but only one director is female (accounting for 7% or 1/14).

Source: gialai.gov.vn

IV. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FOREST MANAGEMENT

Gender equality means creating equal opportunities for both men and women related to role, participation and responsibility in accessing resources and benefiting from forest resources. In order to gradually achieve gender equality in the forestry sector, the following issues need to be considered in designing and implementing related policies:

- Gender mainstreaming has been included in the legal documents of the national assembly in general and the forestry sector in particular, but it is necessary to clarify the role of women in specific issues such as participation in land-use planning, participation in production, and decision-making…. Thus, policies can achieve the goals of gender equality, eliminating gender discrimination, ensuring rights and legitimate benefits, suitable to the peculiarity of each gender; create equal opportunities for development in all areas of social and family life; To achieve this target, in the process of developing legal documents and action plans, opinions and voices of women should be collected.

- Provide clear and easy-to-use tutorial on how to mainstream gender issues forest management, particularly in relation to climate change, to policy makers and other related-parties;

- There should be policies to encourage women to participate in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) studies, which contributes to improving women's capacity in applying advance technologies to respond to forest management and sustainable timber trading. This is becoming increasingly essential in the 4th Industrial Revolution, which requires women to access and master technologies;

• Dialogues and exchanges between agencies at all levels (central and local) on the participation of women in activities from policy formulation and implementation should be held regularly;

• Raising awareness on gender equality is one of the main targets that the National Strategy on Gender Equality for the 2021-2030 period aim to and strengthening the transmission of linkages between forest management and gender, as well as the role of forests in responding to climate change;

• Raising the gender awareness of the community to improve the knowledge of women in rural areas about their rights and build a positive attitude towards land use rights to local leaders. Related-parties can collaborate through local organizations such as the Women's Union in Training of Trainers (TOT) and raise awareness campaigns to effectively reach out to local people, especially women who live dependently on forests.

Source: baothainguyen.vn

Source: baogiaoduc.com.vn

Source: SRD

• Support for women needs to be done specifically to avoid general mobilizations, so it is suggested that the State and the Ministry of Education and Training to have policies to encourage students to enter agro-forestry schools/universities by granting specific scholarship programs for female students so that after graduation they will be the core contributors to the process of bringing fair and equality to women in the future.

• Nowadays, when it comes to gender equality, people only stop at fighting for women, while the concept of gender equality is much broader. In fact, there are many different concepts and understandings about gender equality, so to ensure gender equality, it is necessary to have specific criteria, through which it is possible to regularly monitor and evaluate the level of gender equality not only in the region but also globally, particularly in sustainable forest management strategies.

V. CONCLUSION

Source: www.mard.gov.vn

Women's roles in the forestry sector are often limited to low-value activities and they are often unskilled short-term workers in forest management activities. Women often do not enjoy worker benefits, suffer from inequalities in policies, have little opportunity to have a voice in decision-making, and enhance capacity and specialize in forestry in particular and other industries in general.

To handle and reduce inequalities against women, policies for forestry sector need to make significant changes to help women benefited from increased awareness and equitable uses of forest resources and have a stronger voice in the decision-making process for sustainable forest management.

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