

## Advancing the Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women: The Key to the Sustainable Development in Vietnam

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis and evaluation of the situation of gender equality, initially indicates a qualitative relationship between gender equality and economic growth in Vietnam. The Global gender gap index, the secondary data in the reports of WEF (World Economic Forum) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) and the qualitative method were used and analyzed to show that the gender gaps in Vietnam has been improved significantly over the last 10 years. However, the gender gaps in the economic and political fields have been still relatively low and very low. Based on the results of the analysis of the state of gender equality in Vietnam, particularly in terms of employment opportunities, income and the opportunities in the politic field for women, the study proposes some solutions to reduce the gender gaps as well as promote the gender equality in Vietnam.

**Keywords:** Gender; Gender equality; Development; Gender gap; Women

### Introduction

Gender equality is to create conditions and opportunities for both men and women to maximize their capacity and potential for mutual development and to ensure that both women and men benefit equally in the development process [1]. This is a very important issue for the development of each country. For this reason, the United Nations (2000) has put the Gender Equality issue in the third objective of the Millennium Development Goals.

Vietnam has enacted and implemented Gender Equality Law since 2006, integrating the implementation of gender equality issues into many policies, programs and projects in many fields. Although up to the present, the quantitative relationship between gender equality or inequality to economic growth have not found but lots of studies indicated the role and the importance of the gender equality issue to the development of each country, such as: The higher the level of gender equality, the greater economic efficiency and achievement of more important development goals; The gender equality and the empowerment of women are the important issues for the accomplish the other Millennium Development Goals, such as: reducing the poverty caused of low income and no income, contributing to promote the universal primary education, reducing mortality rates of children under 5 years old, improving the maternal health and reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS. Beside, lots of researchs also just indicated the negative impacts of the gender inequality to the economic growth and development, such as: Dorllar and Gatti [2] specified that the gender inequality reduce the average quality of the labor force in the social and has the negative impacts to the economic growth. Increasing gender gaps in education diminishes the social benefits of highly qualified women used Solow's growth model to demonstrate that gender gaps have a significant negative impact on gross national product [3-5]; Inequalities in income and employment affect the negotiation capacity of women in the family [4]. The negotiation

capacity of women has a positive effect on economic growth and accumulation growth. In Vietnam, some studies have also shown that the gender inequalities have a negative relationship with economic growth and social issues [6]. At the Senior Policy Dialogue on Women and the Economy in APEC 2017, Vietnam's Minister Dao Ngoc Dung also emphasized that "APEC affirms that gender equality is the important issue of the developmen of economic and human resources". This shows the important role of the gender equality in the socio-economic development of each nation and in the world.

Vietnam in the last 10 years has been gained lots of achievements in the gender equality or reduction of gender gap in lots of fields of social political economic. In 2017, the global Gender Gap Index (GGI) of Vietnam ranked 69/144 countries and ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the Asia Pacific region, ranked 5<sup>th</sup> in Southeast Asia. The data on the subindex shows that gender equality in the fields of education and health in Vietnam were improved well, respectively achieving the score of 0.972 and 0.957. Meanwhile, the gender equality in the economic field has been had lots of shortcomings (this subindex score was 0.738) and there were lots of limitations in the political field (the GGI score in this field was only 0.124). Therefore, in order to promote gender equality or to narrow the gender gap in Vietnam, this study will focus on analysis of the issues of gender equality in four areas: economics, politics, education and health. In particular, the issues of gender equality, women's opportunities for participation and development in the economic sectors (employment, income) and the political field will be further analyzed in order to find solutions to overcome the barriers that have been restricting the participation and development of women in these areas.

### Literature Review

#### Gender

Gender refers to the characteristics, positions and roles of men and women in all social relationships (Law on Gender Equality in Vietnam, 2006); Only features, expectations, social norms, behaviors, cultures

associated with women or men [7]. Gender is defined as the social and cultural structure, relating to the positional correlation between men and women [8].

## Gender equality

Gender equality is the fact that men and women have equal positions and roles, have the conditions and opportunities to develop their capacity for the development of the community and their families and equally benefit from the achievement of that development [9].

Gender equality creates conditions for women have opportunities and achievements equally to men, including the ability to participate in the work environment and community [10].

## Gender and development

The approach method of Gender and Development (GAD) which has been used since the 1980s, has replaced the concept of 'women' to 'gender' - one of the most important elements of GAD. This method focuses on the 'basic social structure of the difference between men and women' [10]; and promote the liberty of women [11]. Gender is considered in social relationships, relationships between men and women, rather than just women [8]. In addition, it clarifies the need of men's participant in improving the women's role in the socio-economic activities. In this approach, women should participate in the decision-making process as an active, positive factor. At the same time, the government plays an important role in promoting feminist freedom through the adoption of preferential policies for women [11]. An important strategy of GAD is integrating gender in all levels of development and the public sector [10].

## Research Methodology

**Data collection method:** The study collected the secondary data through reports such as WEF's Global gender Report; UNDP's Human Development Report, the GSO's report of Labor-employment survey aims to study gender gap data, indicators reflecting the level of gender equality in Vietnam and other countries in the world [12].

**Method of analysis, statistics and comparison:** Including string comparisons and cross-comparisons. This method was used to evaluate the process in reducing the gender gap in Vietnam in the period of 2007-2017 and comparison analysis on gender gap between Vietnam and other countries in the world.

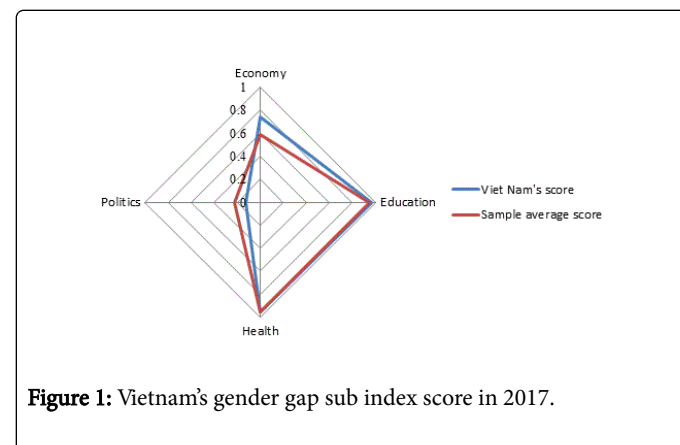
**Research Indicators:** This study uses the Global Gap Index (GGI) which was introduced by the World Economic Forum in 2006, evaluating gender gaps in the areas of economics, education, health and politics, and providing national rankings that allow for effective comparisons between regions and income groups. The Global Gap Index examines the gap between men and women in four basic areas: (1) economic participation and opportunity, (2) educational attainment, (3) Health and survival, (4) political empowerment. If the value of the global gender gap is closer to 1, the greater the gender equality is.

## Research Results

### The current status of gender equality in Vietnam

According to data from the World Human Development Report, the Global gender Gap report showed that Vietnam is one of the countries

that had eliminated the gender gap the fastest in 20 years [13]. In 2017, the GGI of Vietnam reached 0.698 points, ranking 69/144 countries. In particular, the subindex scores on Vietnam's economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival are all higher than the sample average score (score in the fields of economic, education, health of Vietnam respectively were 0.738, 0.972, 0.957, while the sample average score respectively were 0.585, 0.953, 0.956 ). Only the scores in the political field was lower than the sample average score (score in the political field of Vietnam and the sample average score were respectively 0.124 and 0.227) (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Vietnam's gender gap sub index score in 2017.

In 2017, GGI of Vietnam dropped 0.002 points compared to 2016 let Vietnam from position of 65<sup>th</sup> to 69<sup>th</sup> among 144 countries [14]. However, Vietnam is still ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the Asia-Pacific region and 4<sup>th</sup> in Southeast Asia, lower than Philippines, Lao PDR and Singapore (Table 1).

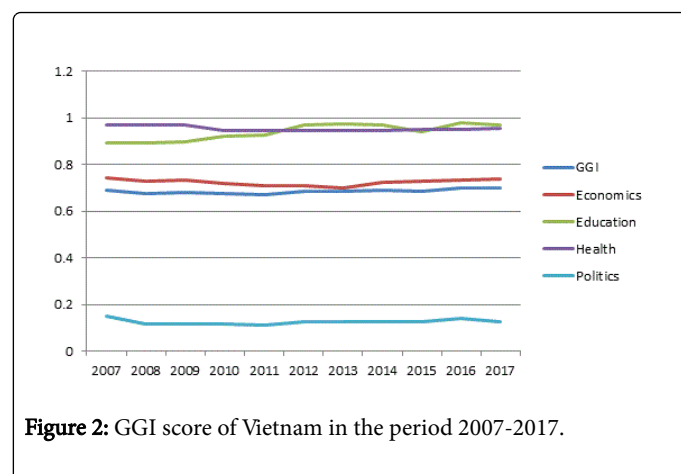
	Rank in 144 countries	GGI	Rank in the Asia-Pacific
New Zealand	9	0.791	1
Philippines	10	0.79	2
Australia	35	0.731	3
Wongolia	53	0.713	4
Lao PDR	64	0.703	5
Singapore	65	0.702	6
Vietnam	69	0.698	7
Thailand	75	0.694	8
Myamar	83	0.691	9
Indonesia	84	0.691	10
Cambodia	99	0.676	11
China	100	0.674	12
Brunei	102	0.671	13
Malaysia	104	0.67	14
Japan	114	0.657	15
Korea	118	0.65	16

Fiji	125	0.638	17
East Timor	128	0.628	18
Source: The World Economic Forum, 2017			

**Table 1:** GGI of the Asia-Pacific countries in 2017.

This data shows that although Vietnam's economic was less developed than some countries such as Japan, Korea and China but achieved the higher gender gap index. This shows that Vietnam always attaches great importance to narrowing the gender gap in the process of national development.

Among the four sectors of economics, politics, education and health, Vietnam has the best gender equality in the field of education and health, particularly in the field of education [15]. According to the global gender gap report from 2007 to 2017, Vietnam's GGI score in the field of education has continuously increased and reach a high level (0.09 points). In terms of gender equality in education, Vietnam ranked 97<sup>th</sup> out of 144 countries, higher than some of the more developed countries such as Germany (98/144), China (102 /144) and Korea (105/144). Regarding the gender gaps in the field of health, although the sub-index score of Vietnam was quite high in 2017 (0.957 points), but the gender inequality in the field of health and survival from 2007 and 2017 had tended to increase (the GGI score in the field of health and survival decreased by 0.013). This is mainly due to the enhancement of the inequality in the gender ratio of newborns (the gender ratio at birth for girls/boys in 2017 and 2007 is 0.91 and 0.93 respectively). The cause of this phenomenon is mainly due to the Vietnamese's longstanding thought of respecting men more than women lead to the trend of fetus's gender selection. As science and technology are developed, the higher the possibility of gender selection is, the higher the level of gender inequality in Vietnam is (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** GGI score of Vietnam in the period 2007-2017.

Regarding the gender equality in Vietnam's economic field, the gender gap in terms of economic participation and opportunities in Vietnam is significantly higher than the sample average (in 2017, Vietnam's GGI score in the field of economics was 0.738, while the sample average score was 0.585). However, since 2007 to 2017, the Vietnam's GGI score in the field of economics had decreased by 0.007 points. Since 2007, the gender gap in terms of the economic participation and opportunity has tended to decrease, the lowest point was 0.702 in 2013, later it had tended to rise but has not recovered the initial point. This was due to the fact that during the economic crisis

(2008), the number of female laborers losing jobs was more than male laborers and the income of female laborers was lower than that of male laborers.

Since 2013, the GGI score in the field of economic in Vietnam have tended to increase (i.e. the gender gap has been narrowed). Although female laborers account for a high proportion of total employment, the quality of employment as well as average incomes are low compared to male laborers. Therefore, the further assessments of the causes of this problem and suggesting the effective solutions to narrow the gender gap in the economic sector in Vietnam are necessary.

The gender inequality in Vietnam is best demonstrated in the field of politics. Although Vietnam has 26.7% of women in parliament, only 4.2% of women are heads of ministries and ministerial-level agencies. The gender gap in the field of politics over the past 10 years has not only improved but also tended to increase (the GGI score in the field of politics decreased by 0.024). Therefore, finding the causes and solutions to narrowing the gender gap in this field is the great significant thing for narrowing the gender gap in Vietnam.

## The gender equality in employment and income in Vietnam

### The gender gap in access to employment

The report "World Employment and Social Outlook: Trends for Women 2018-Global snapshot" of the ILO [16] showed that Vietnam is one of countries where the proportion of women in the labor force highest in the world (72%, while the world's average rate is 49%). Female labor force in Vietnam accounts for 48.4% of the total labor force of nation, but the percentage of the employed women is 9 percentage points lower than that of men.

The report on the Vietnam Labor Force Survey (2016) showed that the unemployment rate among female laborers and male laborers in Vietnam is not much different. However, unemployment in the group of uneducated women workers accounted for 57.3%, the group of vocational training accounted for 50.2%, the group of university graduates accounted for 55.4% [17-19].

Thus, the female laborers in the group of untrained have more risk of unemployment the most, followed by the female laborers who have been trained from university or higher. This indicates that the level of inequality in employment among the unskilled laborers is highest, followed by groups of laborers graduated from universities or higher education. The reason is that society Vietnam still exists viewpoints of the division of labor by gender (male laborers will take to do the hard work requiring technical and qualifications, while female laborers undertake light works requiring ingenious skills). Therefore, unskilled female laborers will have less opportunity than male workers when applying for unskilled jobs (mainly hard works) [20]. Whereas, female laborers who have the university degrees or more also tend to choose gentle majors leading to the redundant of trained labors in this field and causing the phenomenon of unemployment of female laborers who have the qualification more than male laborers [21]. On the other hand, due to the social barriers on views of women's roles, the employment opportunities for female laborers are often lower than for male laborers.

### The gender gap in the employment quality

Up to 2017, Vietnam has 7.8 million female laborers working in the informal sector with unsured conditions. 59.6% of female laborers in

the informal sector work in vulnerable occupations (unstable jobs, less to be insured by insurance) (this rate at 31.8% for male labors).

The report on the Labor Force Survey (2016) also shows that the proportion of female employees in leadership positions is only 26.1%, in the simple labor position accounts for 52.1% and in the family workforce accounts for 66.6%. This indicates that although the employment rate of women in Vietnam is relatively high, the unemployment rate for female laborers is not much different from that of male laborers but the quality gap of female and male employment remains quite large. Thus, the barriers in the access to the opportunities to development career of women still exist.

### The gender gap in income

The report on the Labor Force Survey (2016) shows that although women work in the same qualification as men, their income is always lower than that of male workers. The income of female laborers is lower than the wage of male laborers about 10.7% (the average salary of women: 4.7 million VND per month while the average salary of men is 5.3 million VND per month).

In particular, the gender gap in income of high qualified labors is increasing. The percentage of the income difference between men and women in the group of untrained labor is 8.1%, meanwhile, 19.7% in the group of qualified labors from university or higher level. Therefore, although Vietnam is one of the countries with the highest proportion of female labor force participation in the world and the unemployment rate among female laborers is not significantly different from the rate Unemployment in male laborers (female unemployment: 2.2%, male unemployment: 2.4%), but there are still big barriers to employment and career development for female laborers (they often have to work in the informal sector, with vulnerable jobs, easily fired, and low incomes). The causes of gender inequality in the area of labor, employment and income are from social barriers, the prejudice thought on the position of women and the role of women in society.

### The gender gap in politics in Vietnam

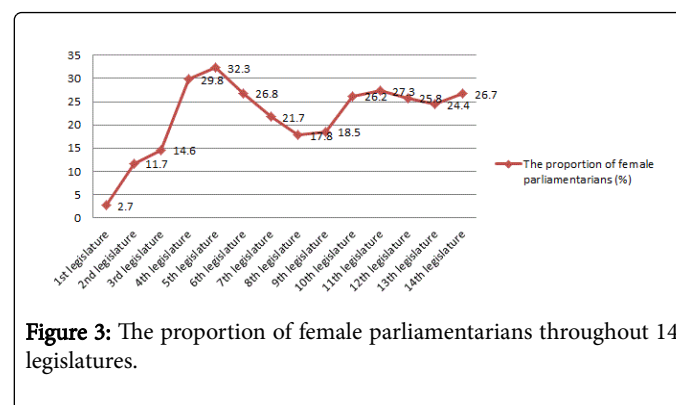
#### The general assessment on the gender gap in politics in Vietnam

In WEF's Report on the Global Gender Gap, the Political Empowerment index is a sub-index of the overall index of each country, reflecting the gender gap in the politics field. This sub-index is calculated based on three criteria: the proportion of women in the parliament; the proportion of women in ministerial positions and the ratio of women to men for many years in the executive office (prime minister or president) in the past 50 years.

Gender inequality in the politic field can be reflected in the subindex of gender gaps in this field. The data from the WEF's reports on Global gender gaps indicate that Vietnam's rankings (year of 2017) were down 13 places, ranking 97<sup>th</sup> among the 144 countries surveyed. This is very modest compared to many countries in Southeast Asia such as Philippines (13<sup>th</sup>), Laos (87<sup>th</sup>), Indonesia (63<sup>rd</sup>) ... and many countries in other regions such as Sweden (8<sup>th</sup>), Germany (10<sup>th</sup>), Bolivia (14<sup>th</sup>), Cuba (19<sup>th</sup>) ... This shows that the gender gaps in the politic field or gender inequality in this field in Vietnam had been increased in 2017, needed to find the causes and solutions to overcome this situation.

### Rate of women in the parliament and people's councils in Vietnam

An important criterion for assessing gender equality in the politic field is the proportion of women in the Parliament and the People's Councils at all levels. Although many regulation and legal documents have been developed to facilitate the participation of women in social activities and state management, Vietnam is only in the middle level group on the world's Map of women participating in politics. Although the percentage of female deputies in the Parliament and People's Councils at all levels increased compared to the previous periods; However, Vietnam have still not reached the goal of Resolution No. 11 of the Politburo (the proportion of female parliamentarians is 35% or more) (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** The proportion of female parliamentarians throughout 14 legislatures.

On the participation of women in the Parliament, Vietnam has made significant progress in enhancing the participation of women in election agencies, from 2.7% of female members of the Parliament in the first legislature to the rate of 26.7% of the XIV legislature. However, the proportion of female parliamentarians in each legislature has increased, but not sustainable. "The proportion of female parliamentarians was 21.77% in the 7<sup>th</sup> legislature, 17.8% in the 8<sup>th</sup> legislature, 18.5% in the 9<sup>th</sup> legislature, 27.3% in the 11<sup>th</sup> legislature, 24.4% in the 13<sup>th</sup> legislature

In election agencies at the localities, the percentage of women deputies to the People's Council in 2011-2020 at the provincial central city level was 25.17%, this criterion was 24.62% at district level and 21.17% at ward, commune level. These data show the proportion of women in the Parliament and People's Councils at all levels in comparison with the objectives of the Politburo Resolution No. 11 and the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2011-2020 is still quite large gap. Vietnam needs to take stronger and more effective solutions to reach the target of 35% or more of female members of the Parliament and the People's Council at all levels in 2016-2021 as Resolution No. 11.

### The obstacles to the development of political career of Vietnamese women

**Institutional obstacles:** First, women have to retire earlier than men, are limited the opportunities to take on leadership roles in state agencies and to stand for election to the Parliament. Furthermore, this regulation also reduces the opportunity for training to improve the experience or advancement of women; this leads to the elected ability of women is lower than men's.



Secondly, women suffer a lot of "structural things". Most members of the Parliament and People's Councils are Party members, while the percentage of female leaders in Party committees is very low. On the other hand, women now have to meet many "structures" represented by the criteria of ethnic minorities, young people, self-nominated, gender. This makes the female candidates less competitive than those who only have to meet one criterion, especially if they are senior and male candidates.

**The obstacles of social perceptions:** First, the perception of the traditional role of gender is still bold in society and the institutions of Vietnam. It said that women's thought is limited in comparison with men's thought and women have to spend a lot of time for families, so they have less condition to be involved in politics.

Second, the lack of confidence of women in politics has limited the development of women's capacity and strength.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

### Conclusions

Research shows that gender equality in Vietnam in the period 2007-2017 has made some progress. The GGI has risen by 0.009 points, placing Vietnam at 69/144 ranked and ranked 7<sup>th</sup> in the Asia-Pacific region, ranking 15<sup>th</sup> in Southeast Asia. The level of gender equality in Vietnam is even higher than that of many more developed countries such as Japan, Korea, China and Thailand. In which, the gender gap in Education field has improved the fastest with a 0.08 percentage point increase from 2007 to 2017. The GGI subindex in the fields of economic, education and health is higher than the sample average score. Meanwhile, just only the GGI sub-index score in the politic field is lower.

The study also identifies the qualitative relationship between gender equality and economic growth in Vietnam. As the economy falls into recession, the GGI sub-index of the economics and health fields have fallen, leading to an increase in the gender gap. When the Vietnamese economy starts to recover, the gender gap tends to be narrowed. However this study has not found any clear relationship between the gender gap reduction and the economic growth.

In the economic field, female laborers work mainly in the informal sector with more limited working conditions, vulnerable and lower-income than male laborers. In addition, the GGI index score in the politics field in Vietnam is lower than the sample average score. The gender gap in politics tends larger.

The profound causes of the gender gap is due to institutional obstacles, traditional social perceptions on the role and position of Vietnamese women, leading to the less opportunities of women in participation and development in the politic and economic fields.

### Policy implications and solutions proposition

#### Some general solutions on reducing the gender gaps in Vietnam

In order to reduce gender inequality in Vietnam, it is necessary first to change the perception of the role and position of women in society. Through education and advocacy, women are encouraged to participate in socio-economic activities, to take control of opportunities and assert their role in decision-making and leading.

Implementing the gender equality through legislation systems. Improving gender equality law and state regulations to promote employment opportunities, opportunities for participation in social activities, decision-making and leadership opportunities for women.

#### Solutions on reducing the gender gap in employment and income in Vietnam

First, removing the barriers and increasing the access opportunities to quality employment for women in the labor market by: (1) Developing policies to support female laborers moving from the informal urban area to formal urban areas; (2) Eliminating the barriers of gender in employment opportunities for women laborers such as barriers on working age, list of occupations not employing female laborers; (3) Strengthening the systems of child care services to release time for women; (4) Implementing and monitoring the implementation of gender equality in the workplace.

Second, increasing the proportion of female-headed businesses with solutions on supporting the credit and resources for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) owned by women; promote administrative support for women-owned enterprises; support for trade promotion and investment promotion with these enterprises. Establishing the women's business association with the role of supporting women's and women's SMEs.

#### Solutions on reducing the gender gap in the politic field in Vietnam

Firstly, strengthen the leadership and direction of party committees and organizations at all levels for the gender equality issue. Need to thoroughly grasp the perspective of gender equality in the agencies, creating the best conditions for female staff involved in management, leadership, considering it is the responsibility of the head of each agency, localities.

Secondly, continue to promote communication activities to raise awareness, change behaviors on gender equality in general and gender equality in the politic field in particular.

Thirdly, develop the training strategy of women scientists, leaders, managers in all levels and sectors in each field and locality, combining the training and fostering with the planning and arrangement of the use of female cadres.

Finally, propose agencies to promulgate a number of solutions to promote gender equality, such as: giving priority to women in recruitment, planning, training, retraining and appointment. To stipulate the percentage of women who are assigned titles in state agencies, etc.

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