

PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN MU CANG CHAI DISTRICT, YEN BAI PROVINCE: SITUATION AND SOLUTIONS

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ARTICLE INFO		ABSTRACT
Received:	10/3/2023	This study aims to assess the situation of people's awareness of issues related to gender equality. At the same time, the study also proposes solutions to improve the effectiveness of gender equality promotion in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province in the coming time. The study was carried out using the method of analyzing secondary data from different reporting sources, combined with the collection and analysis of primary data through survey questionnaires and group discussions. Research results show that the issues of gender equality were fully and positively perceived by the community in the direction of further empowering women. At the same time, the residents in the study area also made suggestions affirming the importance of gender equality in the family and community. In addition, the study also pointed out the limitations of gender inequality that still exists in the locality. The research is the initial basis for the authorities at all levels to come up with specific policies and activities, contributing to promoting gender equality in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province as well as other localities with similar socio-economic conditions in the future.
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KEYWORDS		
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THÚC ĐẨY BÌNH ĐẲNG GIỚI TẠI HUYỆN MÙ CANG CHẢI, TỈNH YÊN BÁI: THỰC TRẠNG VÀ GIẢI PHÁP

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO		TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài:	10/3/2023	Nghiên cứu này nhằm mục đích đánh giá thực trạng nhận thức của người dân về các vấn đề liên quan đến công tác bình đẳng giới. Đồng thời, nghiên cứu cũng đề xuất các giải pháp góp phần nâng cao hiệu quả của công tác thúc đẩy bình đẳng giới tại huyện Mù Cang Chải, tỉnh Yên Bái trong thời gian tới. Nghiên cứu được thực hiện theo phương pháp phân tích số liệu thứ cấp từ các nguồn báo cáo khác nhau, kết hợp với việc thu thập và phân tích số liệu sơ cấp thông qua phiếu câu hỏi điều tra và thảo luận nhóm. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, vấn đề bình đẳng giới đã được cộng đồng nhận thức khá đầy đủ và tích cực theo hướng trao quyền nhiều hơn cho người phụ nữ. Đồng thời, người dân cũng đưa ra những đề xuất khẳng định sự cần thiết và quan trọng của bình đẳng giới trong gia đình và cộng đồng. Bên cạnh đó, nghiên cứu cũng chỉ ra những mặt hạn chế của vấn đề bất bình đẳng giới còn tồn tại tại địa phương. Nghiên cứu là cơ sở bước đầu để các cấp chính quyền đưa ra những chính sách và hoạt động cụ thể, góp phần thúc đẩy bình đẳng giới tại huyện Mù Cang Chải, tỉnh Yên Bái cũng như các địa phương khác có điều kiện kinh tế xã hội tương tự trong thời gian tới.
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1. Introduction

Gender equality is one of the important criteria to evaluate the development of each society and each country [1]. In other words, gender inequality is a major problem that places women at a disadvantage thereby preventing economic growth and societal advancement [2]. Gender inequalities between men and women have existed for a long time and are caused by a variety of factors including socio-cultural factors, religious conditions, politics, and the state [3]. Therefore, gender equality is one of the striving goals not only of Vietnam but also of countries around the world towards a progressive, equal and sustainable society [4]. However, understanding and applying knowledge related to gender equality in practice face many difficulties. In fact, the roles and social status of women still exit a large gap; women are discriminated, even receiving a lot of unfair treatment [5]. In Vietnam, the situation of "respect for men and despise women" is still serious; women and girls still suffer many disadvantages in many localities throughout the country, especially in rural, remote and isolated areas, ethnic minority areas [6]. Therefore, many solutions need to be implemented synchronously to create a balance between the positions and roles of women, and at the same time raising the awareness of the whole society about gender and gender equality to gradually erase the gap between women and men in Vietnam [7].

In recent years, our Party and State have made great efforts in implementing measures to enhance gender equality in all fields, especially in ethnic minority areas. Many legal documents and policies on gender equality were issued [8] - [10]. Besides, recently the State has launched a lot of documents with separate regulations for ethnic minorities, of which the most notable ones include the Plan No. 43/KH-DCT dated June 3, 2022 and the Instruction No. 04/HD-DCT dated July 28, 2022 of the Presidium of the Central Vietnam Women's Union on deploying Project 8 "Implementing gender equality and solving urgent problems for women and children" under the National Target Program on socio-economic development in ethnic minority and mountainous areas in 2021 - 2030, phase 1 from 2021 to 2025... [11], [12]. It can be said that, at present, gender equality is not a new issue in Vietnam, but how to promote gender equality most effectively is a problem that is being raised for all levels of government in each locality across the country, especially in remote, isolated and ethnic minority areas with special difficulties.

Mu Cang Chai is a highland district located in the west of Yen Bai province, 185 km far from the center of the province. The whole district has 13 communes and one town [13]. As a difficult area of the province with low education level and high poverty rate, Mu Cang Chai district is known to be home to about 13 ethnic groups of whom, Hmong people account for nearly 91% [14]. Identifying gender equality as an important part of the local socio-economic development strategy, in recent years, local authorities have promoted propaganda and training on the issue of gender equality, contributing to raising the status of women, gradually improving people's living standards. Therefore, this study was conducted to assess the status of people's awareness on issues related to gender equality. On that basis, the study also proposes solutions to improve the effectiveness of gender equality promotion in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province in the coming time.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research subjects

Research subjects included 135 ethnic minority people (45 men and 90 women) who had participated in training workshops on improving community capacity of leadership and gender mainstreaming skills. Many subjects were leaders or in the pipeline in the local government at all levels.

2.2. Research duration and location

- Duration: The survey and assessment was conducted from February 21 to 24, 2023.

- Location: The study was conducted in La Pan Tan, Nam Khat and Pung Luong communes, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province.

2.3. Research methods

2.3.1. Secondary data collection method

The researchers collected secondary data from the final report on the implementation of socio-economic targets in 2022, tasks and solutions in 2023; the annual summary report of the Women's Unions of the 03 studied communes, which were then synthesized and analyzed to understand the general situation, especially on gender equality work in the localities.

2.3.2. Primary data collection method

The researchers consulted the Women's Unions of the districts and communes to collect general information related to the research problem. On that basis, the researchers conducted an assessment and collected information in the field according to the participatory rural assessment method (PRA) with the following tools:

- Survey questionnaires: A questionnaire was built on qualitative and quantitative indicators related to the content of gender equality and the training workshop "Promoting leadership, gender mainstreaming, and action planning skills" which was organized by Females from Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas Research and Development Center (FEMMA) – Thai Nguyen University in collaboration with Yen Bai Provincial Farmers' Association and Canada Fund for Local Initiatives. The questionnaires were distributed to all participants after the training workshops had finished. The total number of questionnaires which were distributed and returned was 135. The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using SPSS software. The questionnaires which do not provide enough information would be abbreviated as "no CCTT" in analysis tables.

- Group discussions: Group discussions were integrated in the content of the training program. Participants were guided to discuss, report and share opinions about gender equality.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. People's awareness about gender equality

3.1.1. People's qualifications

With the characteristics of the difficult area of Yen Bai province, Mu Cang Chai is known as a remote district of the province with low literacy level, where many ethnic groups live together, mainly H'Mong people. According to the survey data in Table 1, the H'Mong people account for 96.3%.

Table 1. General information of the research subjects

No.	Criteria	Number (people)	%
I	Ethnic group (no CCTT: 1)		
1	H'Mong	129	96.3
2	Muong	2	1.5
3	Tay	1	0.7
4	Thai	2	1.5
	Total	134	100.0
II	Literacy level (No CCTT: 18)		
1	Grade 1 - 5	12	10.2
2	Grade 6 - 9	34	29.1
3	Grade 10 -12	71	60.7
	Total	117	100.0
III	Professional level (No CCTT: 1)		
1	Untrained	93	69.4
2	Vocational school	3	2.2
3	College	6	4.5
4	University	32	23.9
5	Postgraduate	0	0
	Total	134	100.0

As shown in Table 1, most people had qualifications of grades 10 - 12, accounting for 60.7%. In addition, people with low qualifications from grade 1 - 5 accounted for a significant proportion (10.2%). However, many of them did not participate in vocational training to improve professional qualifications, accounting for 69.4%. The number of people with university, college and vocational degrees accounted for 23.9%, 4.5% and 2.2% respectively. There were no participants in postgraduate training. Under the circumstance that the survey participants were mostly leaders or potential leaders in the government/ mass organizations at all levels in the locality, the number of people with high training level was still low... Thus, it can be seen that the residents' qualifications here were limited. This means that people were not highly aware of many social issues including gender equality.

Mu Cang Chai is known as one of the extremely difficult highland districts of Yen Bai province. Along with the backward customs, people's lives here are mainly associated with terraced fields; the area is divided by high hills and mountains; the travel is difficult. Therefore, the issue of gender equality has not been widely propagated to the people; prejudice and precepts about gender still exist. As a consequence, the rate of child marriage is still quite high.

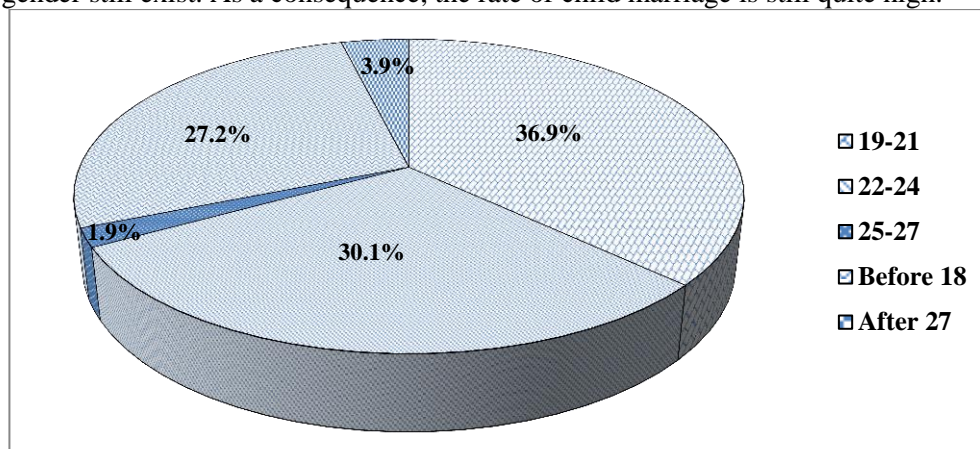


Figure 1. The age of marriage in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province

The results of investigating the marriage situation of 135 people (including 32 non -CCTT questionnaires) are shown in Figure 1. Accordingly, child marriage accounts for a high proportion (27.2%). Most cases of child marriage were 14-or-15-year old girls. The situation of child marriage comes from many different causes. For many people, getting married for children also means that there are more people doing housework or working in the fields, so it is necessary to have a daughter-in-law as soon as possible. On the other hand, due to the low literacy level, gender inequality or bad customs like child marriage still persist for many years.

Therefore, in order to completely eliminate gender prejudices and precepts, all levels of government need to provide more effective interventions and measures to raise people's awareness about gender equality issues; at the same time, contributing to gradually changing people's thought and living styles.

3.1.2. People's awareness about gender equality

In recent years, communication activities on gender equality and social issues in Mu Cang Chai district in general and in the study area in particular have been widely implemented in different subjects with many contents and forms. Through communication sessions, the participants have been fully and positively aware of gender equality in the family in the direction of giving more rights to women. Women should have equal rights to men in the family, share housework, participate in economic activities to contribute to the common income of the family, and can join in deciding all family affairs. As stated by Hasyim et al. [15], that gender roles are divided equally between men and women and the wives are permitted to work and earn income for household affairs can improve welfare in the household. The role of working women has a positive impact on the family economy.

As seen in Table 2, most of the survey participants agreed with the views that "women rarely participate in cooperatives, clubs, groups to develop family economy", or "women rarely participate in training programs " and "women are afraid of social communication" (accounting for 62.2%, 65.2% and 67.5% respectively). In addition, 45.9% of the surveyed people disagreed with the view that "Housework is women's own business, women have to take care of the housework". Similarly, 43.3% of people agree that "men rarely share housework and children caring with women". All of these views have reflected the level of social awareness and reality in many places, not only in the study area because in fact, according to Vietnam's tradition, women must be responsible for carrying most of the non-merit tasks such as housework, family care and this is a factor that restricts the position of women in social life.

Table 2. *People's views on issues related to gender equality*

STT	Contents	Opinions	Number (people)	%
1	Women rarely participate in cooperatives, clubs, groups to develop family economy.	Completely disagree	10	7.4
		Completely agree	32	23.7
		Most disagree	23	17.1
		Most agree	52	38.5
		Wondering	18	13.3
2	Women rarely participate in training programs.	Completely disagree	9	6.7
		Completely agree	17	12.6
		Most disagree	20	14.8
		Most agree	71	52.6
		Wondering	18	13.3
3	Women are afraid of social communication.	Completely disagree	8	5.9
		Completely agree	37	27.5
		Most disagree	24	17.7
		Most agree	54	40.0
		Wondering	12	8.9
4	Housework is women's own business, women have to take care of the housework.	Completely disagree	36	26.6
		Completely agree	16	11.9
		Most disagree	26	19.3
		Most agree	38	28.1
		Wondering	19	14.1
5	Men rarely share housework and children caring with women.	Completely disagree	10	7.4
		Completely agree	30	22.2
		Most disagree	27	20.0
		Most agree	42	31.1
		Wondering	26	19.3
6	The percentage of girls in high school is low mainly due to social prejudice.	Completely disagree	10	7.3
		Completely agree	16	11.8
		Most disagree	32	23.6
		Most agree	43	18.2
		Wondering	34	25.1
7	The problem of family violence is largely caused by men.	Completely disagree	12	8.9
		Completely agree	20	14.8
		Most disagree	30	22.3
		Most agree	45	33.3
		Wondering	28	20.7
8	The child marriage still exists mostly due to the awareness of young people.	Completely disagree	6	4.4
		Completely agree	41	30.4
		Most disagree	20	14.8
		Most agree	52	38.5
		Wondering	16	11.9

Although Mu Cang Chai district in general and 03 communes in the area of research in particular have made advances in gender equality, the progress has not been uniformly distributed among population groups. The most significant problem is the chance to go to school of girls is not equal to boys. Is this really due to social prejudice? The results in Table 2 showed that each citizen was not aware of this clearly; the rates of agreement, disagreement and wondering were not significantly different.

Besides gender equality, social evils such as violence are also paid attention. 48.1% of the surveyed people agreed with the view that "the problem of family violence is largely caused by men". In fact, men often have social evils such as alcohol, gambling, addiction, prostitution... which are the direct causes of family violence.

In addition, child marriage is also considered a painful issue of Yen Bai province in general. Child marriage not only violates the law but also has great consequences for individuals, families and society; rapidly increase the number and reduce the quality of the population, directly affect the care and education of children and the local socio-economic development. When surveyed, up to 68.9% of people agreed with the view that "child marriage still exists mostly due to the awareness of young people". Obviously, people's low literacy level will lead to the limited awareness of the people. Finding the cause and identifying its consequences, the authorities need to come up with solutions to contribute to the elimination of bad customs that exist in their localities.

3.2. Some solutions to promote gender equality in the locality

3.2.1. Solutions proposed by local people

Based on their aspirations and practical needs, the residents in the studied areas proposed some solutions that they thought the most feasible and effective to overcome existing problems in the locality. The detailed results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. *Solutions proposed by local people*

No.	Solutions	%
1	Encourage women to participate in training programs on family economic development.	53.4
2	Encourage women to join cooperatives, clubs and groups to develop the family economy.	53.4
3	Encourage women to participate in training programs on fostering skills of family violence prevention, child care and education, human trafficking, and abuse of women and children.	58.6
4	Organize training sessions, exchanges and sharing on gender equality: men share housework and women have the right to discuss and decide on family and community affairs.	45.9
5	Implement propaganda, advocacy, and creating the best conditions for girls to finish high school.	24.8
6	Implement propaganda, advocacy for eradication of outdated and harmful customs for women, prevention of domestic violence.	30.8
7	Implement propaganda, advocacy for elimination of child marriage, which is harmful to the health of girls.	30.8
8	Propagate and foster knowledge and skills to ensure occupational safety for border labors.	17.3
9	Propagate and foster knowledge and skills for disaster prevention and adaptation to climate change.	4.5
10	Propagate and foster knowledge and skills to detect smuggling and social insecurity.	6.0

Table 3 reveals that gender equality is considered the most concerned issue of people in the study area. The solutions chosen by the majority of people are related to the promotion of gender equality in the locality. The most recommended solution is encouraging women to participate in training programs on fostering skills of family violence prevention, child care and education, human trafficking, and abuse of women and children, followed by encouraging women to participate in training programs and joining cooperatives, clubs and groups on family economic development to develop the family economy. Thus, it can be seen that the issue of gender equality in the locality has been fully and positively recognized in the direction of women's empowerment.

3.2.2. Some solutions proposed by the researchers

On the basis of people's awareness of gender equality and their suggestions, the researchers recommend a number of solutions to contribute to promoting gender equality in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province as follows:

Firstly, the local authorities should continue to promote propaganda to raise awareness of gender equality for all classes of people, especially women. Propaganda activities and models on gender equality should be organized in various forms suitable to the locality to attract more people to participate and respond such as photo contests on gender equality on popular social platforms such as Facebook, Zalo; cultural festivals with gender mainstreaming; Art exhibitions related to gender equality and prevention and response to gender-based violence... Besides, the authorities at all levels need to develop public communication messages and campaigns to eliminate gender stereotypes and build a safe living environment for women and children in accordance with the actual conditions, culture, and customs of the locality.

Secondly, it is necessary to organize communication, training programs and building action plans on improving gender equality knowledge and gender mainstreaming skills for officials of the local political system; at the same time, guiding the implementation of the action plans after the training effectively. In addition, the Party committees and authorities at all levels need to raise their awareness and responsibilities, especially promoting the role of the heads of agencies and localities in realizing the national goals on gender equality; arrange and assign work to female officials in compliance with regulations on gender equality.

Thirdly, it is important to strengthen the organization, human resources and capacity building for the contingent of officials, especially potential female cadres and consultants on gender equality work; promote the implementation of programs and models for young female leaders; develop the network of female cadres, and plan training, retraining and guidance between experienced female cadres and young female cadres.

Fourthly, it is necessary to promote the mobilization of domestic and international resources in gender equality work, protecting women's rights and strengthening the inspection of the implementation of gender equality and women's advancement; implementation of the law on gender equality.

4. Conclusion

Over the years, Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province has made efforts to implement measures to strengthen gender equality in all fields. Research results show that the issue of gender equality has been fully and positively recognized by the community in the direction of empowering women. At the same time, people also made suggestions that once again affirmed the necessity and importance of gender equality in the family and community. It can be said that promoting gender equality in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province has been bringing practical effects, contributing to raising people's awareness of this issue, and gradually improving people's socioeconomic life.

However, the limitations of gender inequality still exist. Understanding the causes and consequences, authorities at all levels need to issue more effective interventions to contribute to the complete eradication of gender stereotypes, thereby promoting gender equality in the locality. Based on local people's awareness and practical suggestions, the study has proposed a number of solutions to contribute to promoting gender equality in the locality. The research is expected to be the initial basis for the authorities at all levels to come up with specific policies and plans, contributing to promoting the implementation of gender equality in Mu Cang Chai district, Yen Bai province in the nearest time.

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