



# **Opportunities and Constraints for Women's Empowerment in Vietnam's Rural WASH: 5 Case Studies of WOBA Communes**

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*Disclaimer:* We have tried to represent the views of the participants as we understand them as best as we could. However, there are inherent limitations of the methods used in data collection and analysis. Thus, we cannot guarantee the accuracy, completeness or reliability of findings and their generalisation to the wider population in Vietnam. Readers are encouraged to read the report with caution and undertake additional research in support of their activities.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CPC	Commune People's Committee
CWU	Commune Women's Union
DWU	District Women's Union
EMW	East Meets West
GESI	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
GSI	Gender and Social Inclusion
HH	Household
PWD	People with Disability
PWU	Provincial Women's Union
SANOBA	The name of the EMW/WU sanitation enterprise
UN	United Nations
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WOBA	Women-led Output Based Aid

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Introduction

The Women-Led Output-Based Aid (WOBA) Vietnam is a project designed and implemented by Thrive Networks/East Meets West Foundation (EMW) to address challenges and inequities in Vietnam's rural water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector. A research study on the opportunities and constraints for women's empowerment through WOBA Vietnam aims to consider all relevant domains in which women's empowerment opportunities can arise through. The study aims to capture the gender experiences of women in WOBA from different perspectives: political, WASH work and entrepreneurship, community, households. The study also surmises that women must have the opportunities to engage and empowered as users, managers and change agents in their households, communities, political forums, and businesses.

The study was implemented from April to September 2022. In which, the quantitative survey was conducted from May to June, 2022, the qualitative data and secondary data for five case studies was collected in July, 2022.

### Methods

The study uses the mixed methods multiple case study approach, in which the quantitative and qualitative data collection, results, and integration are used to provide in-depth evidence for comparative analysis between and within the five cases of communes. The study conducts a survey with 442 WU staff at all levels and the women in the WOBA's partners about their perception of women's empowerment and experiences through WOBA.

From the results of this survey, 5 communes that represents 5 provinces with different geographic, economic and indigenous cultural characteristics were selected to collect the qualitative data via: focus group discussions 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 interviews with male leaders of CPC and WU staff at district level. This aims to gain further insights from both men and women about the meaning of women's empowerment, and to what effects (positive and negative) has their participation in WOBA generated based on their view of empowerment.

In addition, secondary data relating to gender statistics at the commune level was collected. These gender-disaggregated information include demographic characteristics, poverty and employment, domestic violence and the female proportion in the leader positions in 5 communes selected to collect the qualitative data.

All these data are used to develop 5 case studies of 5 communes in 5 provinces of WOBA.

### Key findings

#### ***Opportunities for the participation of women in social activities and leadership positions and women's empowerment***

Compared to men, from the individual perspective, women's personality traits such as carefulness and responsibility are factors that make women more trusted in Vietnamese society generally. This is identified in all five case studies with women from different ethnicities and in different regions. The case in Hoa Binh shows that economic independence from the women is also considered a favourable factor for women's participation and decision-making. When women are breadwinners, they have a much stronger voice than women in other places where their economic condition is much dependent on the

husbands. In addition, the perception that women consume less alcohol than men is also a factor for women to be trusted to make reasonable decisions at any time. This happens more popular in the mountainous areas in the study such as Lac Son (Hoa Binh), Quy Hop (Nghe An) or Huong Son (Ha Tinh).

From a family perspective, all five cases identify that parents-in-law and husbands who support the women are the main enabler for women to have the opportunity to participate and take up the leadership positions. A good economic condition is also a factor for women to feel more secure when participating in social activities as well as holding certain positions in the government structure.

From a social perspective, although all 5 case studies have not reached the target female ratio, achieving the current female ratio is a major change in local leadership planning. In addition, women are also respected and cared more, the movements to promote women's participation have created opportunities for women to participate in social activities, make decisions and keep leadership positions. As evidenced in the cases of Quy Hop (Nghe An) and Nghi Son (Thanh Hoa), the more attention women receive from leaders at all levels, the more opportunities for them to participate in decision-making and leadership positions. Information technology has given women the opportunity to access a lot of information to improve their knowledge and capacity to serve the process of participating in social activities and undertaking the work required in leadership positions. This is better utilized by young CWU staff, such as the CWU staff of the cases in Hoa Binh and Nghe An, in which they have acquired the ability to learn and use information from information technology faster than CWU staff in other provinces.

#### ***Constrains for the participation of women in social activities and leadership positions and women's empowerment***

The women in this study still face many constraints in the participation in social activities, decision-making and leadership. Gender norms and stereotypes are the greatest barrier for the women that are manifested from within the individual, their family and broader society. At the organizational level, regulations on leadership age, experience and Part membership limits women in accessing opportunity to leadership positions.

From a personal woman's perspective, in all five cases, gender stereotypes are not only from men, but also from women themselves. The feelings of inferiority, self-satisfaction, lack of determination, and unwillingness to strive are constraints that women cause for themselves. If a woman can take up their current leader position well, she thinks it is because of the husband who has taken care of the housework and sympathizes with her work rather than from her own capacity and efforts. This is more evident in the cases of Chau Cuong - Nghe An, and Son Linh - Ha Tinh which belong to the mountainous area than in Tan Hung - Ben Tre (Mekong River Delta), Hai Thuong - Thanh Hoa (industrialization zone) and Yen Nghiep - Hoa Binh (the high percentage of women going away for working in industrial zones). In all five cases, the women also recognize that their gendered self-understanding, communication and social relations are also obstacles for them in participating in social activities, decision-making and leadership.

From a family perspective, the views and opinions of husbands and parents-in-law are considered a major obstacle for women. This is emphasized more strongly in Son Linh (Ha Tinh) and Chau Cuong (Nghe An), especially when the wife's income from social activities or commune staff is insignificant compared to the total household income. The role of women in childbirth and breastfeeding also greatly reduces women's opportunities to enter and take up leadership positions. This is confirmed in all five cases in the study.

From a social perspective, the stereotype that women have to do housework and take care of their husbands and children hinders women a lot. This happens in four out of five communes in the studies. But in Yen Nghiep (Hoa Binh), at the current time, it is normal to see the men taking care the children and being familiar with housework. It is more important that the men themselves feel happy.

Regulations on leadership age, working experience, being a Communist Party member also make it difficult for women to hold leadership positions in all five cases in the study. In the process of communication on gender equality, it is always assumed that that is for women, so the participation of men in communication activities is limited. For example, under WOBA, very few men participate in the training and communication on gender equality and menstrual hygiene. The low allowance also makes it impossible for women to fully focus on social activities. This is clear in Yen Nghiep (Hoa Binh) and Tan Hung (Ben Tre). And finally, in all five communes, WU is only considered as an advisor department under the direction of the government and the communist Party. Therefore, WU's decision-making is limited.

From the above opportunities and constraints in each cases in the study, it can be seen that a number of key factors affect women's participation in social activities, decision-making and holding leadership positions, including ethnicity (the Kinh or ethnic minorities), geographical location (mountainous or delta, rural or industrialization areas), economic condition of household, income, gender stereotypes, the development of information technology, intervention programs and projects to improve women's capacity and skills. Climate change such as in Ben Tre and Nghe An is also considered as an indirect cause in hindering women when income from agriculture is unstable due to changes in weather and natural disasters.

### **Implications**

These results are symptomatic of the failure to reach requisite target of increased women's participation in managerial and leadership positions at the national level <sup>1</sup> and similarly in the WOBA project areas. The percentage of female leaders/ heads of a sector or locality is very low. The implications for policy is reforming criteria that discriminates women such as age difference between men and women in the leadership structure. The target roadmap for the percentage of women in leadership also needs to be developed and accompanied by specific solutions for each locality to ensure that the set target can be achieved. In addition, there should be policies and regulations to support women to be trained, improve their qualifications and degrees and be appointed to leadership positions after her pregnancy and breastfeeding period to create favourable conditions for the appointment time, especially in the localities where the ethnic minorities are living.

In term of the practical implications, communication activities related to gender equality need to be carried out for both genders in all communes. The relevant methods to encourage the men to participate should be considered in each specific locality. It is necessary to expand the target group to get the subsidies in all project area to enable the economically disadvantaged groups who are not included in the list of poor and near-poor households to access subsidized WASH services. Finally, general empowerment is inevitably based on the women's economic empowerment. Therefore, empowering women requires a wholistic availability of resources to women especially the employment and livelihood development opportunities.

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<sup>1</sup> Government Report No. 474/BC-CP dated October 6, 2020 on the implementation of the national objectives on gender equality in 2019 and for the period 2011-2020

## Introduction

### *1.1. Background*

The Women-Led Output-Based Aid (WOBA) Vietnam is a project designed and implemented by Thrive Networks/East Meets West Foundation (EMW) to address challenges and inequities in Vietnam's rural water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) sector. It is funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) through the Water for Women Fund over 4.5 years (June 2018 to December 2022) with a total budget of 5,893,086.43 Australian dollars. The project has two objectives:

Objective 1: To increase access to WASH services, especially for poor and vulnerable households in rural Vietnam. EMW partners with the government and the WU at all levels, private sector sanitation suppliers and water scheme operators, to deliver water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services to five provinces through an output-based subsidy scheme.

Objective 2: To improve gender empowerment and inclusion of women through program implementation and decision making. This objective is achieved by building capacity of women to lead WASH mobilization through partnership with the Women's Union at the district and commune levels, and through working with private sector sanitation suppliers.

### *1.2. The Study*

This study was undertaken to better understand the opportunities and constraints for women's empowerment through WOBA Vietnam and in the broader WASH sector. The study considers all relevant domains in which women's empowerment opportunities can arise through WOBA such as employment and training, political participation, health and reproduction, gender role and culture, women's rights and voice. Aiming to capture the gender experiences of women in WOBA from different perspectives: political, WASH work and entrepreneurship, community, households, the study involved the WU women at the provincial, district, commune and village levels. The study also surmises that women must have the opportunities to engage and empowered as users, managers and change agents in their households, communities, political forums, and businesses.

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?

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Mixed method multi-case study approach

The study uses the mixed methods case study approach comprising two stages of data collection. The first stage (May-June 2022) involved a survey with the WU staff at all levels and the women in the WOBA's partners about their perception of women's empowerment and experiences through WOBA.

The main contents in the survey include access to training and resources, employment and income opportunities; activities in family and community; WASH service provision.

From the results of this survey, 5 communes in 5 provinces were selected for the second stage data collection which comprised: focus group discussions 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 interviews with male leaders of CPC and WU staff at district level. The aim of the second stage is to gain further insights about what women's empowerment mean to these women, and to what effects (positive and negative) has their participation in WOBA generated based on their view of empowerment. The intention of including men is to understand the extent to which the WOBA women's perception and experiences of empowerment or disempowerment are shared with their male partners/colleagues and for which effects. The contents during the interviews and FGDs are around the topics: access to trainings and information provision, activities in family and community; women's empowerment activities; and attitudes of gender issues and participation.

Secondary gender related data for each commune was collected during the field visits in the second stage. These gender-related information include demographic characteristics, poverty and employment, domestic violence and the female proportion in the leader positions in 5 communes selected to collect the qualitative data.

The quantitative and qualitative data collection, results, and analyses are used to provide in-depth evidence to develop five case studies and a comparative analysis between the 5 cases.

## **2.2. Data collection and sampling**

### **2.2.1. Survey**

A questionnaire was developed to collect the primary quantitative data from the women who participated in WOBA, they included the WU staff at all levels and women from the partners of EMW in WOBA. This questionnaire was based on the questionnaire in a similar study under WOBA Cambodia and modified according to the context of WOBA Vietnam. The questionnaire in Vietnamese was tested with several WU staff, then revised and finalized before being sent to the respondents.

The survey was conducted via an online link. This link has been sent in the Zalo<sup>2</sup> group (established by the PWU for WOBA activities in each project province). All WU staff at district and commune levels join this Zalo group. The survey online link was also sent to some WU staff at village level who used mobile phone with internet connection. The respondents used their electronic devices with internet connection to answer and complete all questions in the questionnaire by themselves. The questions in the questionnaire were logically designed to avoid respondents missing or omitting questions. The research consultants spent two weeks to push the respondents to voluntarily answer the questionnaire.

It was estimated that there were about 2000 women who participated in WOBA. After two weeks when the survey link was opened, there were 474 respondents in total. However, there were 442 valid respondents only. Among that, the percentages of WU's staff at commune and village level are highest (47% and 38% respectively). The percentage of women who are in WOBA's partners is very limited, only 3%.

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<sup>2</sup> Zalo is a social network developed in Vietnam.

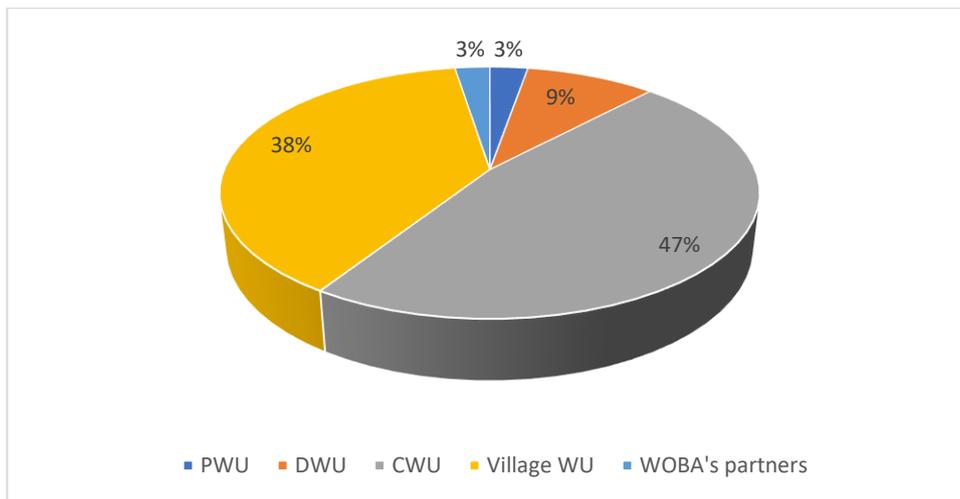


Figure 1. Survey sample by organisations (n=442)

Actually, the proportion of WU's staff at village level among the WU's staff at all levels is the highest. However, due to the limited accessibility to internet of WU's staff at village level, this proportion is even lower than the proportion of WU's staff at commune level.

### 2.2.2. Interviews

The interview guidelines include the open questions to get the deeper insights for the information from the survey. Especially, the FGDs with both men and women aims to see the attitude of the local residents with the gender equality and women's empowerment and leadership.

As originally planned, the interviews would be conducted virtually via Zoom or Skype. However, basing on the results of the survey, the research team decided to conduct the face-to-face interviews to ensure the quality of information.

Interviews with husbands and male colleagues of WU staff aim to provide a new perspective from men on gender equality as well as opportunities and barriers for women in empowerment and leadership in WOBA particularly and in society generally.

In each province, there are 6 interviews (two WU's staff, two husbands of WU's staff, a male leader of CPC and a district WU's staff) and 1 focus group discussions. Therefore, in 5 provinces, there are 30 interviews and 5 FGDs in the study.

### 2.2.3. Secondary data

Before the fieldwork to collect qualitative data (interviews and FGDs), one secondary data collection form was developed and sent to 5 CWUs in advance. According to CWUs, some data in that form were available, but some were not, especially the gender-disaggregated data. Therefore, the staff who were in charge of filling out this form had to contact with many stakeholders to collect the data.

## 2.3. Data processing and analysis

### 2.3.1 Survey data analysis

With the quantitative survey data, the processing of the data and analysis includes: (1) Run frequency counts for all questions; (2) Run cross tab to identify group differences for questions in Part 2,3,4,5,6 and

with the questions in Part 1. Groups are based on socioeconomic characters in Part 6; (3) Run Chi square correlation tests for all socio-economic individual characteristics; (4) The data were disaggregated by province to supplement the information for each case study in each province. The quantitative data was analyzed using SPSS software.

### 2.3.2 Interview data analysis

The qualitative interview data were processed in three steps: (i) coding by themes and sub-themes; (ii) cross-check the information from different sources (including the results of the survey data); and (iii) quotes and case studies used to make coded interview data clearer.

### 2.3.3 Secondary data analysis

The collected secondary data were used to analyze the demographic characteristics of each commune as well as to compare with some data at provincial or district level to see the difference/similarity.

Employing in-depth interviews, surveys and secondary data, the analysis of these mixed-method data focuses on differences between men and women, the opportunities and Constraints for women's empowerment and leadership, the contribution of WOBA or other factors to these changes in recent years.

## 2.4.1. *Limitations*

There are some following limitations in this study:

- Due to Covid 19 situation that prohibited travel to the communes, the survey must be conducted via online link. This made the many WU's staff (especially at village level) not be able to participate as they didn't have smart phones with internet connection.
- The respondents in the survey are mostly the WU's staff and WOBA's partners – all belong to the government organizations. Many of them were afraid of giving frank assessment and straight opinions, especially in the survey, even they agreed with all statements in the questionnaire although it's not really true with their community.
- In spite of being explained carefully, the provincial WU Nghe An mis-understood that this study was not under the WOBA, therefore, it was out of the jurisdiction of the WU. Therefore, it took more time for WOBA project team to issue the official letters and documents requested by WU Nghe An. And the initial planned commune in Nghe An had to be changed into another commune according to the request from the provincial WU.
- The leaders of CPC were so busy that the interviews were often interrupted many times. Although the leaders of CPC were key informants with many interesting information, they could not spend much time for the interviews.
- Some participants in FGDs in some provinces came late, this made other participants feel tired of waiting and the FGDs had to end later than expected. This also affected the time of the subsequent interviews.

### 3. Case Study of Hai Thuong ward, Nghi Son district town, Thanh Hoa province

#### 3.1. Context

##### Demographic and natural characteristics

Hai Thuong ward is located in the southeast of Nghi Son town, about 67km from Thanh Hoa city, with an area of about 24.21km<sup>2</sup>. Hai Thuong ward borders the sea. The natural land area in Hai Thuong was formerly mainly suitable for salt production and fishing. Other agricultural crops are not suitable. However, with successive industrial parks being built, people's salt production land has been getting less and less and with the change of the marine environment, the seafood near the shore has been also reducing significantly.

Most of the people in the ward are Kinh people (ethnic majority). The percentage of women accounted for 52%.

The population of the ward in 2021 is about 10,755 people, equivalent to about 3,165 households, the household size in the ward is about 3.4 people / household, lower than the whole country (3.6 people / household). The population growth rate of the ward in 2020 is 2.3%, which is higher than that in 2021 at 1.8%. The population growth rate of the ward is still lower than the national one (2.98% - in 2021).

Similar to the situation in many areas in Vietnam, in Hai Thuong, there is a gender imbalance between boys and girls. In 2020, there were 105 boys born for every 100 girls, this number had a strong difference in the following year 2021, there were 116 boys born for every 100 girls. This data was also equivalent to the general data of Thanh Hoa province, in 2020 and 2021, on average, there were 114 boys for every 100 girls born<sup>3</sup>.

The common education level of local people in the area is secondary and high school. The illiteracy rate is very low, only about 1% - focusing on the elderly group because they did not go to school in the past, or they once studied a long time ago, so they forgot how to read and write Vietnamese.

##### Income and poverty

In 2020 and 2021, the COVID19 pandemic situation had a significant impact on people's living conditions. In which, the most impact on income while service industries were not allowed to operate, activities in industrial zones were also reduced. In 2021, the average income/capita/year of the ward was estimated at 35-40 million/person/year. The ward strived for an estimated income/capita/year of about 45 million/capita/year in 2022. In general, the proportion of the poor (100 households) and near-poor (101 households) households in the ward were still higher than that of the whole country and Thanh Hoa province, specifically as follows:

Table 1. Percentages of poor and near poor HHs in Hai Thuong (Thanh Hoa)

	Unit	Hai Thuong Ward	Thanh Hoa Province	Whole country <sup>4</sup>
Poor	%	3.2	1.51	2.23
Near poor	%	3.2	5.78	3.11

Among the poor and near-poor households in the whole ward, the poor and near-poor households are headed by women, accounting for 45%. This rate was higher than the percentage of female-headed

<sup>3</sup> <https://thanhhoa.dcs.vn/tinhuy/pages/2021-8-17/Tinh-hinh-thuc-hien-cac-muc-tieu-quoc-gia-ve-binh-glscnb8zji4o.aspx>.

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

households (39.3%) out of 3,165 households in the whole ward. Among 142 GESI<sup>5</sup> households, female headed households account for 12.7%. This rate was lower than the percentage of female-headed households in the whole ward (39.3%).

### **Labor and employment**

The labor is mainly in the non-agricultural sector, accounting for about 70%. The local labor mainly work for industrial parks as well as small-scale and household services. Most of the labors in the ward are unskilled and unqualified. The skilled and qualified workers currently working in industrial zones in the ward or neighboring areas are people coming from other places. Despite the complicated situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ward's unemployment rate is still low, about 0.4 and 0.3% in 2020 and 2021. In spite of the low unemployment rate, the employment of local laborers was unstable and their income was decreased significantly during Covid.

In the first 6 months of 2022, the local authorities have not organized any training courses, vocational training for the people in the commune.

### **The female proportion in leadership and managerial positions**

According to the report from the Ward People's Committee, the percentage of women in the Standing Committee of the Commune's Party Committee accounts for about 20%, while the Executive Committee of the Commune's Party Committee currently has no female members. 13% of whom are secretaries of the village's Party Committee under the management of the Commune Party Committee are female. These percentages are all lower than the national target by 2020, the percentage of female cadres participating in Party Committees at all levels is over 25%<sup>6</sup>. The female members in the leadership of the ward People's Committee accounts for only about 6%, that is lower than the percentage of female key staff in state management agencies and local authorities at all levels in Thanh Hoa province, 12,61% of the whole Thanh Hoa province (2021). In the ward, 23% of women are members of the ward People's Council, this rate is also lower than the target of 35-40% of women being members to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels by 2020<sup>7</sup>.

## **3.2. Access to training and resources**

### **Participation in the training**

WU staff at ward mentioned the training course on gender equality and menstrual hygiene to be carried out under WOBA in 2022. In addition, the training courses on types of latrines and latrines for People with disabilities were also mentioned by ward WU staff. Meanwhile, the husbands of the WU staff replied that they had not attended any training courses related to either clean water and sanitation or gender equality. However, the husbands also commented that with the current 4.0 technology era, information related to clean water, sanitation, and gender can be viewed and captured on media channels and social

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<sup>5</sup> WOBA uses the GESI categorization used by Vietnam's Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs. While some government categorizations are quite narrow, implementing through government systems is more efficient, and provides a pathway for scale if this targeted GESI support is successful. There are six GESI categories: (i) children under 16 without parental or foster care; (ii) People aged 16-22 currently enrolled in secondary schools, vocational schools, colleges or universities (who also meet criteria (i)); (iii) HIV-positive people from poor households; (iv) poor single parents with custody of children; (v) the elderly; and (vi) people with a disability. WOBA Vietnam specifically target people with disabilities and elderly people.

<sup>6</sup> <https://thanhhoa.dcs.vn/tinhuy/pages/2021-8-17/Tinh-hinh-thuc-hien-cac-muc-tieu-quoc-gia-ve-binh-glsncb8zji4o.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> Resolution 11/NQ-TW-Ministry of Politics on 27/4/2007

networks. Therefore, they also had certain knowledge and understanding related to this content. The husbands often participated in professional training courses with his profession only.

Beside the training courses under the WOBA project as mentioned above, Women's Union staff participated in a variety of training courses such as leadership skills, organizational management... organized by the WU.

*"We are trained on how to organize conferences, and how to lead and manage the WU at each level, as well as how to develop related issues... There are a lot of topics under the capacity building program of WU"* (TH\_HPNN of commune)

### Assessment of the training courses

With three interviews of WU staff in Thanh Hoa, they all highly appreciated the content of the training courses and the trainers. The contents in the training are relevant to the actual situation, especially at the grassroots level, helping WU staff learn more skills in working and knowledge such as the different types of latrines.

*"We know different models of latrines, some having tanks are built with bricks. Unless the HH don't want to build with bricks, they can use a composite tub instead of brick tanks, they just dig a hole and put that composite tub in"* (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - Pham Thi N)

The trainees highly appreciated their trainers, *"Actually, the trainers explain very carefully, and trainers also understand very quickly, even if the trainees do the team work in each group, then one group member who is the presenter present the answer of the group."* (TH-NS-phuong Hai Thuong - Le Thi H).

However, regarding TOT training materials, WU staff at district and commune levels could not immediately use all materials provided by WOBA because the contents were too long. Therefore, WU's staff at the provincial and district levels had to edit the training materials so that they were concise and easy to understand in the trainings at the commune/village level.

These statements in the interviews with WU staff in Hai Thuong are similar to the assessment of Thanh Hoa WU staff in the survey. Above 80% of respondents said the topics in the training were clearly explained to the audience and nearly 70% said that they were able to apply the training contents to their work (see below chart).

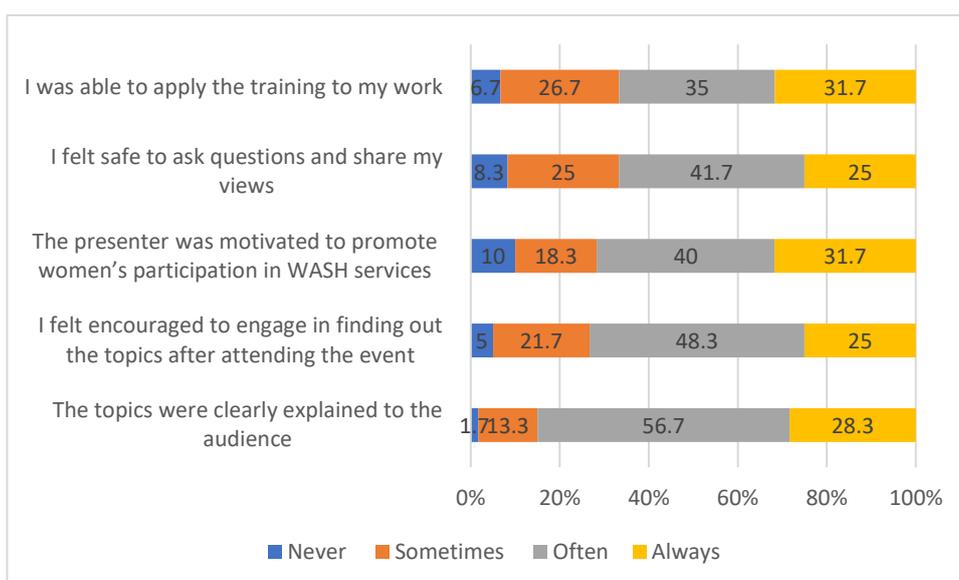


Figure 2. Survey respondents' assessment of the training provided through WOBA (Thanh Hoa Province)

One of the obstacles in the training process was the change of personnel in the WU staff. Newly appointed staff who were not allowed to participate in the training from the beginning of the project, had to work and ask the other experienced ones at the same time, sometimes they had to do again because it was not aligned with the project requirements.

*“During the implementation of the five year project, some commune WUs have changed their chairwomen. So, the new ones had to learn from the beginning, and I had to explain all components/phases in the project to them. I couldn’t coach all but provided the training materials then they read by themselves. If there was any problem they didn’t understand, they called me then I supported. That is a difficulty.” (TH-NS-phuong Hai Thuong - Le Thi H).*

In addition, as reflected by WU staff, young staff still didn’t have much experience, so their knowledge and skills in propagating the households to build latrines were still limited. This was also a constrain with the project activities.

*“Young people often have more surprises and still have many shortcomings in knowledge and communication skills..” (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - Pham Thi N)*

According to the survey data of the WU staff in Thanh Hoa province, 25.8% of respondents (N=83) said that there was at least one training for last 4 years that they couldn’t attend when being invited. Three main reasons include: they had to join another meeting at the same time; they couldn’t arrange the time to join; and couldn’t join due to Covid 19 travel restriction. This is one of barriers for WU staff participating in capacity building activities.

### **3.3. Activities in the family and community**

#### **Activities in family**

The traditional concept and way of thinking that "men build houses, women build nests" were emphasized in the focus group discussion with village heads and WU staff at village level. The wife was mainly responsible for house chores such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of the children. They had to take on more unpaid housework than men.

A fact confirmed by participants in the FGD that "the wife is always the one who keeps the money and manages the small expenses in the family". The male participants said, "Women often manage household’s finance better than men, they know how to allocate expenditures reasonably and do not spend impulsively like men". Women themselves felt not assured of "letting their husbands keep money". Frankly, the financial management also helped women have the right to decide daily living expenses such as food, electricity and water bills, and children's education, ...

*“Wife does a lot of things in the family, the woman in the family has to do housework, but there are many things in housework, not only having to take VND 50,000 to the market to buy food. The women feel pressure if they have to ask their husbands whenever the wives wanted to buy or sell anything. And the women can do those only when the husbands agree. This is very stressful for a woman to lose her freedom” (Focus Group Discussion in Thanh Hoa)*

The men have the right to make decision on the “big issues” in family such as building/upgrading houses, career orientation, organizing the weddings for children.

*“When the women are economically self-control, they can expense for themselves without asking the husbands for money. Unless some husbands want to control their wives. But now women make decision by themselves such as buying clothes. But the husband mainly make decision on building*

*house, latrines, kitchens...; organizing the weddings for the children. Very few women do those activities.” (TH-NS-phuong Hai Thuong - Le Thi H).*

There is a change in the responsibility of housework between men and women. Men now realize their "responsibility" to do housework with their wives, not only "help" their wives to do housework like before.

*“It's not that I help her do housework or not, it's the responsibility of both of us.” (Male participant \_ TH\_FGD)*

Earning money is also considered the responsibility of both men and women, this has changed compared to the past when it was considered that men were the breadwinners - earning the main income in the family.

*“It is said that that making decisions on the financial issues in family but not the person who earn the most money in the family. For example, both wife and husband earn an amount of money, the daily expenditure is depended on the wife, but both men and women, not only the men, make decision in spending a bigger amount of money. When the husband goes to work, the wife has to take care of the children and do housework. When the children grow up, the woman goes to earn money as well. After 6 months of maternity leave, women back their work, that is very equal, unlike in the past, it was said that men went to earn money while women stayed at home to raise children, now both earn money.” (TH\_TLN)*

Decision making in the family has been also changed, when both husband and wife have the same orientation and know how to arrange time and share the housework.

*“When I just got married, I didn't do much social work, so I still had to stay at home to do housework and cooking, but a few years ago it was different, for example, when I was busy, my husband shares doing housework more. In short, my husband agrees if I do all housework alone, but when he sees that I am busy, my husband also shares doing housework more.” (TH - NS - Phuong Hai Thuong - PVS Wife Pham Thi N)*

*“Housework is not the responsibility of the wife, that is my opinion. My point is that housework is the responsibility of both husband and wife, it is important how to make it harmonious and everyone has their own work, how to create conditions for each one to complete the own work in time. My opinion is not: “this activity is yours, that one is mine” (TH-Husband of Commune Women's Union)*

It is similar to the results of the survey with the WU staff in Thanh Hoa province. According to the survey, 30% of the WU staff in Thanh Hoa responded that their time spent on housework decreased for last 4 years, 18.3% said it increased and 45% said it kept unchanged.

### **Community activities**

Community activities such as visiting the difficult households, sick people, funeral, wedding, or movements... help increase the solidarity in the communities. Hai Thuong Ward is not an exception. Each activity requires participants to be appropriate and effective, some of which have taken into account gender factors. In particular, there are activities that require the participation of women more than men.

*For example, with the new rural development, for example, it will be easier to assign the women to manage this road and it will be easier to assign women to raise fund. It is still said that building a house is depended on men, but the money is in a woman's pocket, so it is more difficult for men*

*to ask the HHs for support or contribution in cash (TH-NS-phuong Hải Thượng - Nghi Sơn - Thanh Hoá. Lê Thị H)*

Women in Hai Thuong participate more in community meetings because they stay at home more than men. Now, women also participate and contribute the ideas in meetings, more confident than in the past.

*“There are more female participants than male in the community meetings. They are also frank and sincere in their sayings. Now, firstly, women’s understanding and awareness are also good. Therefore, they are also confident, even from the way they dress, from the way they talk, from the style in the meeting. It is different from the past, when women often sat down far away from the facilitators and didn’t dare to say anything. But now women are very confident, confident in the way they dress, confident in their behavior. So, they just sit there, anywhere in the meeting room, it looks more polite and solemn”. (TH-Husband of Commune Women's Union)*

When society develops, in addition to eating and wearing clothes, people think about entertainment activities, and health promotion by sports activities such as walking, playing badminton, playing volleyball .... Besides the clubs that have been established in the localities have attract many target groups and increase solidarity in the community.

*“In the past, playing volleyball was only for men, playing chess, then playing soccer, and gymnastics were for men. But now it’s different, women are equal, they exchanged and shared with their husbands and children to arrange work that is suitable, harmonious and happy.” (TH\_Nghi Son\_CT phường Hải Thượng)*

*In addition to this project, the women also have clubs such as 5-zero and 3-clean clubs, gender equality clubs, clubs for domestic violence prevention, clubs for women not having a third child, and anti-poverty clubs. Each year, the topic for propaganda is different. The topic of menstrual hygiene and GE under WOBA that will later be expanded to integrate with those above clubs. (TH-NS-phuong Hai Thuong - Lê Thị H).*

## **Opportunities**

The support of her husband and family is one of the most important favorable conditions for a woman to participate in social activities as well as take on leadership positions in the community.

*I can be a little limited to gather with friends so that I can complete the house chores. Because it is determined that the wife also has to go to work, but not gather or goes to the gym, right? Meanwhile, this is seen by mass organizations and others. So I have to know how to share (TH-Husband of Commune Women's Union)*

*The reason, I also think is from the husband's family, if the parents-in-law create favorable conditions to support the daughter-in-law, the women will definitely be able to participate (in social activities). (TH - NS - Phuong Hai Thuong - PVS husband Tran Van P).*

In fact, in Thanh Hoa, there are some WU staff who are widowed or single. Sometimes, they think that this is an "advantage" for them to participate in social work.

*“When I went to the grassroots, many WU staff said that it was lucky that my husband died when they worked all day and all night like this. My son sometimes even said that “my salary must be tens of millions... Only when women are economically self-control, they have a voice in the family and they have the right to participate in social activities” (TH-NS) -Phuong Hai Thuong - Nghi Son - Thanh Hoa. Le Thi H)*

Traditional gender stereotypes have been also gradually changing. Women, or men, have rights in their lives and they have the freedom to do what they want without being tied down by rituals like before. One in the interview said that "Life is more modern, so the view in society is also more open"

*In my opinion, the life is more civilized than before, it's more modern because the people go out to interact with many people, so their views and opinions are totally different than before. In the past, in my village, men only drank wine after working and then came home and bit their wives frequently, but now much less, they rarely curse their wives and beat their children after drinking. So, women are allowed to participate more in social activities (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - PVS wife Pham Thi N"*

### **Constraints**

The first constrain for women to take up leadership positions in the community is that they are not the members of the Communist Party. Due to the regulations, in order to hold a leadership position in the community, one must be a member of the Communist Party. This is especially true of middle-aged and elderly people.

*"In the past, the young women didn't have initial status at first, they couldn't be the communist party's members. The young men joined the army so the men were easier to join the party. There were more chances for men than for women to become the communist party's members"*  
(TH\_TLN)

In addition, according to the traditional concept, women always have to attaches to family responsibilities. They may give up work, give up personal interests to take care of their family, husband and children...this hinders their career progress.

*"In traditional opinion, the Vietnamese women always attach the responsibility in the family above all firstly, it means the women take care of all housework... If the women go out, they always think and worry that they don't prepare the meal for the husband and children ..."*  
TH\_CWU

For women who are capable but have the mindset of being satisfied with what they have, they don't dare to commit, don't dare to go further in thinking and are afraid of the risks for themselves.

*"For example, during staff planning process, the women said that, we don't want to get the higher positions, we are fine with the current ones. Even women themselves have to give up these thoughts themselves, have to strive more, not for themselves but also for organizations' development. But if all have the similar thoughts like that, never dare to assign higher positions, can the women become the outstanding, right? (TH\_Nghi Son\_CT phường Hải Thượng)*

Due to biological characteristics, women have the roles of being pregnant, being a mother, and breastfeed... this also hinders them in their work. There are women who are on the rise in their work, they can get promoted but because they are pregnant, have children...they lose the opportunity and give it to someone else. Or Some families that still wants a son to continue the family line, so the wife is always forced to give birth to have a son even though they may have two or more daughters already.

*"A woman have to be a mother, so she has to give birth, , to be pregnant, it is only a matter of women's role, it negatively impacts the woman's career" (TH\_Nghi Son\_CT phường Hải Thượng)*

### 3.4. Women's empowerment

#### *Job opportunities and earning income*

Participating in the WOBA project is considered as an activity for the community, not for the purpose of earning income. Both WU staff and their husbands have this perception.

Women's Union 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. But in their hearts, the activities in the project don't aim to have job opportunities, increase income or receive financial allowances for WU staff.

*If the allowances for WU staff are bigger, the womens are more excited, in short, when we work, we do not think about these allowances, what we think we should do for the poor near-poor households. We are already happy when these households get benefits. So, when we receive the support amount of VND 30,000, we also feel that it is normal to have an extra money, we don't think that we are doing it for earning money. (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - PVS wife Pham Thi N)*

Even husbands who do not know well the work of women staff (their wives) in the WOBA project do not think that their wives have more jobs, increased incomes, and financial benefits from the WOBA project.

*Q: So do you see that when your wife participate in the Woba project, does she share with you that she have 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. (TH-Husband of Commune Women's Union)*

*I don't see my wife talking about allowances when participating in the WOBA like you (consultant) said (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - PVS husband Tran Van P)*

It can be seen that WU staff have more work to do, but it does not mean that their income increases. There are also a few opportunities for employment and income earning directly from WOBA, but this happens in some business households with selling construction equipments and materials, and in some households with a husband or wife working as a mason.

*In fact, the WU staff usually make many efforts to mobilize people, that's all when participating in WOBA. There is no other purpose in WOBA, for example taking advantages to do something else or earn more money. There is a WU staff who are a vice chairman of CWU, her family is a business household, she also advises the other HHs should do the relevant latrines to their budget. When the HHs agrees, that gets more benefits to households building latrines and get financial benefits for the HH of that WU staff. (TH-NS-phuong Hai Thuong - Nghi Son - Thanh Hoa. Le Thi H)*

These statements of the WU staff in interviews in Thanh Hoa province are different from the results of the survey, when more than a half of respondents said that their income increased under the WOBA due to their improved business skills or increased demand of WASH in community. However, as mentioned in the limitations of the survey, some WU staff seemed to be afraid of assess the project activities as not good, therefore, they agreed with almost of the statements in the survey even those couldn't be true with their localities.

## **Opportunities to make decision and leadership**

“More confident” is one of the benefits brought by the WOBA project to WU staff. Although, this is not a direct benefit to increase decision-making - leadership of women, but it is an important initial factor for WU staff to dare to frankly propose ideas to their superiors at higher level and be able to increase their voice and prestige in the political system and authorities.

*The important thing is that I am more confident. I see that although I am a woman, in all conferences and meetings, I speak out my opinion, which is my personal opinion, but also gather the thoughts and aspirations of the marginalized people. Therefore, I have more life skills, as it is said, to penetrate, to have a more understanding of people's lives so that I can give more accurate proposal and show people that the quality of their voice will be spread, and have more influence. ( TH\_HPNN commune)*

*That's right, I'm more confident, I dare to decide, for example, now I persuade a HH (to build latrine) once or twice but they still don't agree then I directly discuss with the Communist Party Committee, so they can involve to visit and persuade that HH directly. ( TH - NS - Phuong Hai Thuong - PVS Wife Pham Thi N)*

From the enhanced prestige and voice, WU staff are also assigned additional tasks and responsibilities, as well as the position of WU staff in the community is also enhanced.

*I see in the recent congress, my wife was elected to the executive committee, and she was assigned more tasks (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - PVS husband Tran Van P)*

*Yes, the near-poor and poor households are being cared a lot, so if I can make benefits for these HHs them, I also have great influence, in fact, in my heart, I have another position, this position is spread into the community and into the project. ( TH - NS - Phuong Hai Thuong - PVS Wife Pham Thi N)*

## **Constraints to make decision and leadership**

The biggest barrier for a woman is from her husband and family when she wants to take on the leadership role. In the focus group discussion, when mentioning to the women in leadership positions, the participants expressed their appreciation of such husbands as “excellent” and “rare”. Because, women were still considered the main responsible for housework.

*Women take most of tasks on housework. Women can't join the community meetings, parties and events as much as men. Men can sometimes participate these events late at night while women have to go home early to take care of their children. Women (if they are village heads) cannot travel at night (TH\_TLN)*

Even women themselves have to choose between being a village head and not being a village head or leader, they will choose not to be a village head or a leader if their husbands don't agree. This avoids the conflicts in family, even sometimes it may lead to divorce.

*If the husband does not agree that his wife keep the leader position, then the women choose their family right away. There are still women who are determined, but very rare. Such women must be able to boldly step over the barriers, accept the objection from the family and maybe even the marriage relationship is nearly broken. But the most of women in Vietnam still have the burden of family, keeping the role of “good” wife. (TH\_CT xã)*

The functions and tasks of the Women's Union are mainly propaganda, mobilization and consultation under the direction of the Communist Party Committee and the respective authorities. The decisions of

the Women's Union must be approved by the local government/party committee. Therefore, the fact that the WU are not on the list of the Executive Committee of the Communist Party is also a barrier in their proposals and voices.

*If I'm not in the executive committee, I don't have chances to give the opinions on an issue from the beginning, but I only can propose them later, and the executive committee meeting is the highest one. So that I will find a lot of voices, I can raise them and make decisions in that executive committee meeting when I am a member of the executive committee. So, it is much better when I am in the executive committee. ( TH\_HPNN commune)*

### **3.5. Attitudes and norms on gender and participation**

#### **The participation of individuals and community in the activities to support the vulnerable groups**

Hai Thuong ward is located in an urbanized area with many industrial parks, so economic conditions of local residents are better than the rural area in Thanh Hoa. The activities supporting the vulnerable groups are considered as the charity activities that attract many local people.

*I see a lot charity activities in my ward, even related to a volunteer team or something affiliated with Youth's Union or Women's Union, in general, I see a lot. My support is similar to others', for example, if 5 people in the village support VND 500,000, other 5 ones support VND 1,000,000 then I can't support more, it is not good if my support is VND 10,000,000. Otherwise, in villages, the local residents often compare, so all must be equal. In the village, all agree to support VND 500,000 then I have to support VND 500,000. I try to put myself in their (the vulnerable group's) situation when I have a hard time, what will I be like? Whole now I am in so much better conditions than others, why don't I help? (TH - NS- phuong Hai Thuong - PVS chồng Tran Van P)*

In addition to direct monetary contributions, ideas and fundraising activities to support vulnerable groups were also formed.

*I see that the number of people participating in the charity activities increases, then there are some more other activities for women. I see many women here have good models and bring benefits to the society. As a model of garbage collection, my children keep the bottles after drinking any beverages, the recyclable garbage to be sold and use that money to support the poor and near-poor households, I find that model good and practical (TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - PVS husband Tran Van P)*

The WOBA project not only directly affects vulnerable groups in the community, but also has positive effects on others in the community, such as changing not good behaviors into good behaviors on using hygienic latrines.

*But it is more importantly that they understand how not using unhygienic latrines can affect their health. Because the promoters visit HHs to say the purpose, task and goal so people are aware of that. And the non-poor or non-near poor HHs whose latrines are not hygienic also see that. It looks like a kind of competition, they upgrade the latrines, change behaviors. For example, people often had the habit of defecating in the sea or using the latrines of other's household, now these cases are very limited, their thoughts have been changed. (TH\_HPNN commune)*

#### **Changes in the attitudes of individual, organizations and community with the roles of women in society**

The WOBA project also contributed to positive changes in community's attitudes about the role of WU staff. Women do a lot of social work and they are recognized by their families and communities for their achievements. Even they themselves feel that they have changed.

*Yes, in short, similar to me, in the past other said that women should stay at home, what I can do if I go out all day. But over the years that I've been working, I can confirm my role, and through many cases and also through my projects, I can confirm that not only men but also women can do it, right?. Such as the way that I can do in WOBA? Assume that in the future I have a project to renovate the village hall, I must make a plan first, then it can be implemented ( TH - NS - phuong Hai Thuong - PVS wife Pham Thi N)*

When women participate in social activities, they play a certain role in society. Many women have gained life experiences, lessons learned at work ... this has made them increase their trust level and change their perspective from the organization and their community.

*Yes, firstly, I improved my knowledge to propagate to everyone. At the commune and ward level, at first, I only sent it to women, and later I learned from experience when I sent official documents, I also sent the official dispatch to the communist party committee so that later, the Management Board would have a direction. On the local side, they are also more interested, the leaders discussed to ask the provincial town (higher level) to support training, so the trainers also gain more knowledge, understand more about households and propagandists. (TH-NS-phuong Hai Thuong - Nghi Son - Thanh Hoa. Le Thi H)*

### **3.6. Participants' suggestions for improvement in women's empowerment**

According to the leader of the Ward People's Committee, gender un-equality is not an urgent issue compared to other issues that people in general and women in particular in the ward are facing. In particular, the issue of Gender Equality has changed in a positive direction in recent years. Despite this, the participants in the interviews and FGD still said that women still faced more barriers than men in participating in social activities, leadership positions and decision-making. Therefore, some solutions proposed by the participants include: (i) Propagate the role of women in society, in the family and their needs of being shared and understood in social work and family (ii) Conduct training sessions and seminars to improve life and communication skills for both men and women. Training on sex education and gender equality for both boys and girls. iii) Mainstream gender issues in new rural development program (iv) Organizing annual conferences to attract both men and women to participate; (v) give policies so that women are not disadvantaged during maternity leave (completing tasks, arranging leadership positions, etc.)

## **4. Case Study of Tan Hung commune, Ba Tri district, Ben Tre province**

### **4.1. Context**

#### **Demographic and natural characteristics**

Tan Hung commune is located on the left bank of Ham Luong river to the southwest with natural area 12.12 km<sup>2</sup> and it is far 13 km from the center of Ba Tri district, bordering the communes: An Ngai Trung, An Ngai Tay (Ba Tri), Hung Le (Giong Trom district); there are 4 hamlets in the commune: Kinh Moi, Tan Khai, Hung Nhon and Xeo Sau villages.

The population of the commune in 2021 is about 7,017 people, all are Kinh people (the ethnic majority in Vietnam). The percentage of women accounted for 46%. The number of households in the commune is about 1,750 households, household size is about 4 people/household, higher than the whole country (3.6 people/household). The commune's population growth rate in 2020 is 3.4%, lower than that in 2021 at 3.8%. However, compared with the population growth rate of the whole country (2.98% in 2021), it is still higher.

In 2020, in Ben Tre province, the sex ratio at birth is 110.4 boys/100 girls, which is classified in the group of provinces with high gender imbalance (from 109-112 boys/100 girls according to the group of provinces by the General Department of Population - Family Planning). However, Tan Hung commune is not in the high sex ratio birth category because Tan Hung's one is only 103 boys/100 girls.

The common education level of the people in the area is secondary school and high school. The illiteracy rate is very low, only about 0.2% - focusing on the elderly group because they did not go to school in the past, or studied a long time ago, so I forgot how to read and write Vietnamese.

### **Income and poverty**

The main income source of the local people is mainly from coconut plantation and animal husbandry. The family having members at working age tend to work far away in big cities such as Ho Chi Minh, Binh Duong, etc. There are no industrial parks in the commune, there are several private enterprises with small scale.

In 2020 and 2021, the COVID19 pandemic situation had a significant impact on people's lives. The average income of the people in the commune in 2020 was about VND 39 million/capita/year and in 2021 was 44 million/capita/year. Tan Hung commune belong to the district with the highest poverty rate (9.13%) compared to other districts in Ben Tre. In general, the rates of poor 12.2% (214 households) and near-poor 7.7% (134 households) of the commune are still higher than that of the district, province and the whole country as follows:

*Table 2. Percentages of poor and near poor HHs in Tan Hung commune (Ben Tre)*

<b>Poverty</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Tan Hung commune</b>	<b>Ben Tre Province<sup>8</sup></b>	<b>Whole country</b>
Poor	%	12,2	4,26	2,23
Near poor	%	7,7	4,24	3,11

Among the poor and near-poor households in the whole commune, the female headed households account for 44%. This rate is higher than the percentage of female-headed households (33.5%) out of 1,750 households in the whole commune. Among 116 GESI households, female-headed households account for a relatively large proportion of 49.1% (57 households). This rate is higher than the percentage of female-headed households in the whole commune (33.5%).

### **Labor and employment**

Labor is mainly in the field of agriculture, accounting for about 90%. Although the COVID-19 pandemic was complicated, the unemployment rate of the commune is very low, about 0.02% and 0% in 2 years 2020 and 2021. Because the main source of income of the commune is from agriculture (coconut farming and animal husbandry) so unemployment didn't occur but it impacted on the income only. All trade activities in the commune and in Ba Tri districts during the two COVID-19 years was delayed, causing people's life and income to be decreased.

In the first 6 months of 2022, the local authorities have not organized training courses, vocational training for the people in the commune.

### **The female proportion in leadership and managerial positions**

According to reports from the commune People's Committee, the percentage of women in the Standing Committee of the Commune's Party Committee is about 20%, and in the Executive Committee of the

<sup>8</sup> <https://baodongkhoi.vn/thong-nhat-ket-qua-tong-dieu-tra-ra-soat-ho-ngheo-ho-can-ngheo-cuoi-nam-2021-12012022-a95680.html>

Commune's Party Committee there is also a similar proportion (20%), 20% of whom are secretaries of the village's Party Committee under the management of the Commune Party Committee are female. These figures are still lower than the national target by 2020, the percentage of female staff participating in Party committees at all levels is over 25%<sup>9</sup>. No women are the leader of the Commune People's Committee. In the whole province, for the 2015-2020 term, the key staff in the Standing Board of the Party Committee is 23.1%<sup>10</sup>. In the ward, 20% of women are members of the Commune People's Council, this rate is also lower than the target of 35-40% of women being members to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels by 2020<sup>11</sup>.

#### 4.2. Access to training and resources

##### Participation in the training

All three men in the interviews in Tan Hung said they had attended training on Gender Equality. Similarly, all three women also responded that they had participated in many training courses organized by the provincial and commune Women's Unions, such as WU's activities, mobilization skills, environmental sanitation in villages, and they also mentioned WOBA's training activities such as types of latrines, gender equality, hygienic menstruation ...

*"I just attended the meeting on sex, gender, menstruation, gender equality, the role of women recently." (BT\_HPND of Tan Hung commune)*

*Yes, I once attended. Here, there are a lot of training, the WU attach with the propaganda. The law on gender equality is communicated twice per year. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P)*

##### Assessment of the training courses

With three interviews of WU staff in Thanh Hoa, they all highly appreciated the content of the training courses and the trainers. The contents in the training are relevant to the actual situation, especially at the grassroots level, helping WU staff learn more skills in working and knowledge such as not using hygienic latrines causing the diseases, ...

*Well, if I haven't been able to participate in training, I don't know what to do. The previous project, Choba, there was a guy from the project, he went directly to each hamlet, invited households to propagate directly, talking about the importance of building latrines. It was unhygienic to defecate to a fish pond, polluting the environment. That led to diseases of the digestive which account for more than 80% of the water we use, and would affect our health. He went to village by village. That was the new one. (BT\_HPND xã Tân Hưng )*

The trainees highly appreciated the trainers and the contents of the trainings.

*"It's very good, the trainers taught and I understood very well. When I understood, I back to propagande for those who did not understand. If they can't do it this month, I will try it next month. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P)*

However, there are also opinions that some of the training contents under the WOBA program should be implemented sooner, so that the effectiveness of the latrine building campaign would be better.

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<sup>9</sup> Nghị quyết 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị ngày 27/4/2007

<sup>10</sup> <https://baodongkhoi.vn/tp-ben-tre-quan-tam-cong-tac-can-bo-nu-can-bo-tre-25122020-a81478.html>

<sup>11</sup> Nghị quyết 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị ngày 27/4/2007

*“So if we assume that these contents such as menstrual hygiene were trained from the beginning of the project, then we integrate it into during visiting HHs to encourage them to build latrine, that is more reasonable, right? (BT\_HP N of Tan Hung commune)*

Besides, the promoters is currently facing many difficulties during mobilizing people to change their habit of using latrines because many households still keep the habit of defecate to the fish pond. Therefore, the members who participated in the trainings wanted to be trained with certain knowledge and skills on behavior change communication.

*We talked about the harmful effects of defecate outside the water source during the propaganda. But it is difficult for us to promote and change the awareness of men and women. Because now many HHs who built hygienic latrines already, still keep the fish bridge, they said, they would use it when they were old. (BT\_HP N xã Tân Hưng )*

### **4.3. Activities in the family and community**

#### **Activities in family**

In the focus group discussion for the village head and the village women's union staff, it was found that there were many activities in family listed by the participants such as: Cultivation, animal husbandry, small business, going out to earn money, housework, taking care of children and grandchildren, building/repairing houses, building/repairing water/sanitation facilities, financial management in the family. The overall average score of male/female roles in doing activities shows that female still holds the main tasks of performing activities in family (about 55.6% of women compared to 44.4% of men). In some activities, women play a key role such as housework, taking care of children (accounting for 70%) - the unpaid housework while 30% of these tasks was undertaken by men.

*Then I go to the market, I take care of the children, take them to school. My husband goes to work, he isn't at home. I feel uncomfortable a bit when asking him to give money to buy foods in the morning, right before he goes to work, so, finally, he gives all his money to me. (BT-BT-Tân Hưng PVS vợ Nguyễn Thị T)*

Especially, the role of women in financial management accounts for 80%. From the male participants's side, they said, "Women often manage their finances better than men, women know how to allocate money more reasonably than men". Women themselves are voluntarily responsible for keeping money.

*In a village, there are only about 3-4 men keeping money, the remaining are women. It is unreasonable for men to check the expenditure of his wife. That is the women's duty. (BT-BT-Tan Hung Village Chief - Women's Association)*

*Keeping money, allocating money is very tired and boring. Calculating, thinking and then spending, sometimes when I like it, I spend too much, I can't calculate it, I can't keep it, then I ask again and again, so, I give money to my wife to manage .... Even for weddings, funerals, or buying something, my wife spends all, but I don't know the small things such as cooking oil or fish sauce, soap, etc. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P )*

The men have the right to make decision on the “big issues” in family such as building/upgrading houses, career orientation, organizing the weddings for children.

*Well, now I'm a husband, I make decision on building a house, building a latrine for the children and guests to go to pit when visiting my household. In general, I didn't see people in front of me, but the neighbors looked at them, so I decided to build a latrine to keep polite with the relatives and neighbors. My house is generally a meeting place, to sing the songs. But in general, if they*

*came to the meeting, they had to pee outside, it's also weird. So, I decided to building a latrine inside the house. In the past, I did this one, now I do it separately, adding a bathroom with a toilet, I made decision..." (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P)*

There is a change in the responsibility of housework between men and women. Men now realize their "responsibility" to do housework with their wives, not only "help" their wives to do housework like before.

*Then husband and wife talk to each other. If the housework is too hard, I will also take on with my wife. ( BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P)*

*One is the higher awareness; The second is that life now is more civilized than before. Women made beauty for themselves more than in the past. Because now the life is improving, beautifying yourself, but in the past, sometimes due to economic conditions or family pressure, so, women didn't care of themselves. Now, every time women have a meeting on March 8 or October 20, they are very excited, the hall is crowded. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS Nguyen Van B TTX)*

The implementation of propaganda and communication to prevent domestic violence has changed people's attitudes and behaviors, so domestic violence has no longer occurred in the commune in recent years. According to reports from the commune in 2020 and 2021, there were no cases of domestic violence, however, in the past, there were several cases of domestic violence each year.

*Unlike before, in general, there has been no domestic violence in recent years. Now the relationship between the husband and wife are more harmony than before. There was a lot of violence in the past. Previously, the police handled some domestic violence cases per year. The men often drunk wine the beat the wives. But there were also some cases because of the husbands. ...In 2014, WU staff had to deal with a few cases, even some were fined. But now no more. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS Nguyen Van B TTX)*

However, in reality, domestic violence cases are mainly physical, but the other types of violence such as swearing, mental violence, economic violence have not been recorded as cases of domestic violence in the community.

### **Community activities**

Community activities such as visitation, sickness, funeral, wedding, or movements... help increase the solidarity in the community. This is similar to Tan Hung commune.

Women in Tan Hung participate more in community meetings because they stay at home more. In addition, women attending meetings are likely to exchange the meeting content with family members more than men. Women also participated and contributed ideas in meetings, more confident than in the past.

*In general, gradually in the society, in my village, there is also some changes. The biggest change is women, for example, in the past, men participated in the parties much more than women, but now women also join parties more. In meetings, women also participate more. In the past, I was in charge of the Self-Management Group for a few years, but at that time, almost men went to meetings. But now women go to meetings more than men and they also express their opinions more. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS wife Nguyen Thi T)*

*When women go to meetings, they often tell their and other experiences, but men don't do it. So, women go to meetings more (BT-BT-Tan Hung Head of village - Women's association)*

In social activities that require labor, such as building roads in villages and hamlets, men are involved more than women.

*Men do heavy work, such as cleaning canals and repairing the road more than women. (BT-BT-Tan Hung Village Chief - Women's Association)*

In general, outdoor activities and sports are not as vibrant local movements as in the northern provinces, this movement tends to attract men and the state officials and civil servants more, while the participation of people is still very limited.

*The movement of sports for women here is limited, probably because they do not have the habit of exercising. Only the women who are teachers, and civil servants sometimes walking for a morning exercise along this route. But there are more men than women, but all are very limited number. (BT-BT-Tân Hưng PVS CTX Nguyễn Văn B)*

### **Opportunities**

According to the views of the respondents in the interviews, it shows that women now have many advantages when participating in social activities (i) women's education level has increased (ii) family's consensus, the support/encouragement of local authorities and superiors when encouraging them to participate in social activities (iii) Economic development (iv) more leisure time (v) women's voices in society are more persuasive and they are skillful in external affairs.

*The advantage is, now in general, the young women have enough education level, so they also wants to get the higher position. So, they make a lot of effort. That is an advantage. The second advantage is that when they have agreed to work in government agencies, they have had the consent of their family, because it is very important to participate in social work. The third advantage is that in general, as I said at the beginning, the economic condition has been now developed. Life is generally better than it used to be. In spite of not being rich, but it is better so it is somewhat comfortable. The fourth advantage here is that people often grow coconuts and raise livestock, so they have a lot of free time. Breeding three times in the morning, noon and afternoon. So they also have time to serve this well, this is advantage. So whoever makes efforts, actively learns and researches, they will improve quickly. The reason, I also think that from the husband's family, the parents-in-law create favorable conditions to support the daughter-in-law, they will surely will join. ( BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS Nguyen Van B sub-contractor)*

*In general, many people do that task, I see that my wife has enthusiasm to persuade, the other women also listen to, understand, and follow. There are also many good models. (BT-BT-Tân Hưng PVS chồng Lê Minh P)*

### **Constraints**

There are still disagreements from the family, especially the husband. The concern for family is a barrier that prevents women from being fully committed to social work.

*Women always take care of the family. When they go to work, they have to take care of their family first. Only when they can take care of their family, then they will accept the task. With some women, their husbands always complains, and doesn't want his wife to do social activities, so, how can the women participate? (BT-BT-Tân Hưng TLN trưởng thôn - chi hội PN)*

*Men do not care about family, children much. Wherever a woman goes out, she still remembers her family and children. But when a man goes to drink, he doesn't need to think about family and children. He feels free to go without worrying, he does not do laundry for your children. Women*

*who go to work but still have to take care of the housework and children. Men who stay at home don't worry about this. (BT-BT-Tân Hưng TLN trưởng thôn - chi hội PN)*

According to the survey, 67.5% of WU staff in the survey spend 1-4 hours per day for housework. And there is only 18.3% said that the time for their housework decreased and 22% said it increased. 47.6% said it kept unchanged. This results help confirm housework is still a constrain for women in participating in social work.

If the economic condition in family is not good, it is difficult for women or even men to participate in social activities.

*The most difficult thing is that my economic conditions is not good enough to participate the social work, so it is a bit limited there. There is no salary or allowance for social work, doing is because of the passion only. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P)*

*Not only women, men also want to participate in social work, commune officials have to visit the family to mobilize. Because our basic salary is not guaranteed to live, the important thing is that the family's economy, this is just an auxiliary job. The main job must earn several millions, about 2 million is not enough to spend. In the family, men and women rarely participate. The main thing is allowances (BT-BT-Tan Hung TLN Head of Village - Women's Association)*

Lack of human resources to carry out social activities, young people often do not stay at home but have to going out to work, away from family.

*If the human source can be created, there will be the inheritance, then it will be able to run for election. For example, if a woman who never participated in social activities, how can she be nominated to be the head of the village, right? So human resource is very important. In Tan Quang village, we are also trained the women, it means that these trained women can be elected next time. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS Nguyen Van B sub-contractor)*

#### **4.4. Women's empowerment**

##### *Job opportunities and earning income*

Participating in the WOBA project is considered as an activity for the community, not for the purpose of earning income. Both WU staff and their husbands have this perception. It is seen that the WU staff have more tasks to do without any allowances.

Women's Union 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. But in their hearts, the activities in the project don't aim to have job opportunities, increase income or receive financial allowances for WU staff.

*My paid jobs don't increase in WOBA, neither does my income. But with an assigned target by the superior, I have to mobilize households to achieve. But in the past two years, due to the impact of this covid pandemic, it has not been achieved. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS wife Nguyen Thi T)*

*Yes, if we don't have that allowance and don't have WOBA, we have to do it (encourage the households to build latrines). In general, if we don't have a project, we have to do it. But when there is a project, in addition to paying the allowance of 70 and 100 thousand for encouragement of the poor, near-poor households and GESI, that is considered the fee of gas for travelling. Unless, the WU staff are still responsible for mobilizing HHs to build latrines under the new rural development. The second thing is the subsidy for HHs as a reward for latrine construction is really*

*low. But because of that, we visit HH and talk about that reward, in general, households also have a spirit to do because of their own benefits. (BT\_HPND of Ba Tri district).*

This is similar to the result on the paid working hours in the survey with the WU staff in Ben Tre. Nearly a half (45.8%) spend only below 10 hours for paid work. It means that, they have time to participate in social activities.

Even husbands who do not know the work of WU staff (their wives) in the WOBA project do not think that their wives had more jobs, increased incomes, and financial benefits from WOBA.

*No, just mobilizing, but there is no salary. Currently not available. Only working as managing the loans of Vietnam Social Policies Bank can earn interest, you can only earn a few hundred thousand but not much. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS husband Le Minh P.*

### **Opportunities to make decision and leadership**

The element of policies and laws on Gender Equality is also an opportunity for women to take up leadership positions at their workplaces.

*In general, before that, in fact, the female proportion in the leadership positions were very low. Then, since issuing the law on gender equality, there were programs in WU that stipulate that there must be a female proportion in the leadership structure. Therefore, since the introduction of the Law on Gender Equality, the percentage of women participating the leadership has increased more and more. For example, the previous term of the People's Council stipulates only 15% of women, but this term stipulates 25-30%. Then I think when there are regulations, the grassroots have to restructure to meet the quota. (BT\_HPND huyện Ba Tri)*

### **Constraints to make decision and leadership**

Women lack of a degree, women have to go to work to earn money, the husbands do not want their wives to be leaders, women still carry the burden of household chores, these are the main barriers that prevent women from having many opportunities in participating in social work in general as well as holding leadership and decision-making roles from the point of view of a male leader.

*Women have to earn money, while the salary of WU staff is very low. The salaries of commune staff are low, too, so they have not been able to attract women to participate in leadership positions in the village/commune government. Secondly, women do not have enough suitable qualifications for those positions, the village head must also have a high school diploma, and the husband himself does not want his wife to be leaders, because she won't have much time to do housework. (BT\_Husband of Commune Women's Union Chairman)*

*In the past, women did not have the qualifications and did a lot of housework, so they did not have time to participate in social work or state organizations. Now they have conditions, but sometimes when they have to go to late at night, their husbands complains. In my opinion, women can participate more actively than men. (BT-BT-Tan Hung TLN Head of Village - Women's Union)*

*Women here also have a limitation that they still depend on that family, so it is also limited, with small children, they have to go home in the afternoon but can't continue to play sports or do anything more. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS CTX Nguyen Van B)*

Women create the main barrier for themselves because of feeling that their capacity is not enough to meet the job, not bold, assertive, or have weaker communication than men.

*Seeing that female leaders are really not as brave as men. Even communication, even speaking, I would say that even in round table relationships, women are much more limited than men. But nowadays it is more necessary to take up the leadership. (BT\_HP N Ba Tri district)*

*I don't mind, but I'm afraid that I can't do it, but I can arrange my time to the head of the village (BT-BT-Tan Hung TLN Head of the village - Women's Union)*

Motherhood, age and self-compassion hinder women's progress in career.

*I am not afraid of the possibility of advancement. But I'm afraid that during the time I am in maternity leave, there will be new jobs that I can't keep up with. That's all. (BT\_HP N xã Tân Hưng)*

*I think the age also hinders. But with the birth of another child, some women suffer the same fate. There are a number of women who are in the human resources for leadership then sent for training. But there are some other women don't want to take up leadership, they do not attend these training classes. If they themselves do not agree, how can they be appointed? If they want a leader position, they have to be trained, but they don't accept it, so they have to quit. ( BT\_HP N huyện Ba Tri)*

#### **4.5. Attitudes and norms on gender and participation**

##### **The participation of individuals and community in the activities to support the vulnerable group**

Like many other communes, the movement of mutual assistance, mutual support to help each other to do business also took place in the villages of Tan Hung commune.

*Oh yes, an assistant fund. Each member in the group, a model of mutual aid association, contribute VND 200,000/month. Each group has about thirty people. Each month, one member gets the money of more than VND 6 millions from other members, and that one spend VND 50,000 for tea and water in the meeting. This money is used to develop the economy of household such as buying a pig or buying chickens, they raise some animals. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS wife Nguyen Thi T)*

In addition, some hamlets in the commune have established happy family clubs and a reliable place for women when experiencing domestic violence from their husbands.

*The club meets every month. In this commune, there is a happy family club with at least 5 couples participating. In a group like that. I feel so happy that I go to the meeting and then my husband goes to the meeting, too. Going together avoid misunderstanding each other and not complaining... In the hamlet, a reliable address has been established. If that husband is bullying, I tell the wife to stay at my house, then I go there and I urge men not to do that anymore. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS wife Nguyen Thi T)*

The WOBA project not only directly affects vulnerable groups in the community, but also has positive effects on other objects in the community, such as changing bad behaviors of not using hygienic latrine.

*Recognizing the importance of building latrines, helping women be healthy, family members also healthy. Building a latrine helps prevent defecating in open air, it protects ourselves first. Some members of the group have bad perceptions, affecting that environment. When I had a group meeting, I also propagated together, then they changed. Garbage is thrown indiscriminately, dead animals are thrown into the river to pollute the environment, so I encourage people to implement that 5 clean 3 zero model. It's fine to see a latrine, a garbage pit somewhere tidy, it's good to have a good environment. (BT\_CWU)*

### Changes in the attitudes of individual, organizations and community with the roles of women in society

The WOBA project helps the individuals participating in the project realize that they have changed compared to before project, they find themselves more confident and stronger in community communication.

*In the past, I used to talk very little, and I trembled when I said anything. But when I came home today, my mother said, "Oh my god, today you can talk about many things, while in the past, you say nothing (BT\_HP N xã Tân Hưng)*

*What the project brings to women? Firstly, it is boldness. Be bold in contact, approach, speech, and movement. For example, if they can't go today, they can go tomorrow... They all have the patience. BT\_HP N of Ba Tri district.*

This is similar to the results from the survey that the WU staff can recognize their positive personal changes when they participated in WOBA as the below chart.

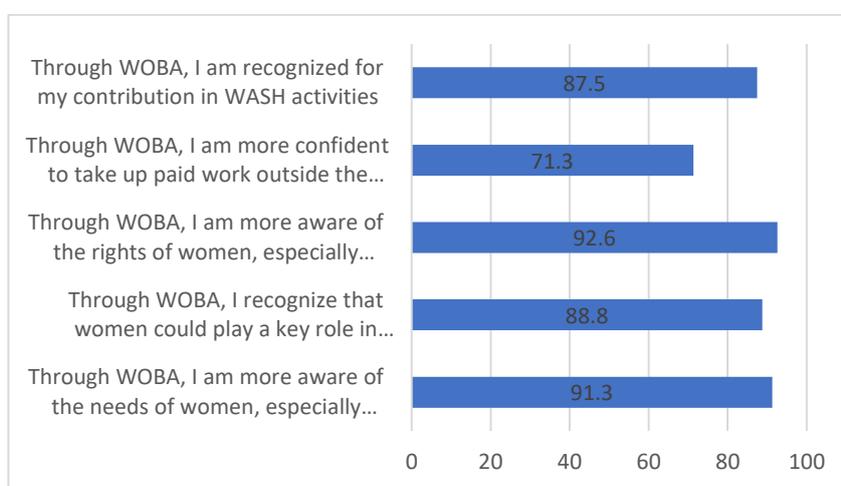


Figure 3. Proportions of survey respondents' that indicated "agreement with personal changes through WOBA" (Ben Tre province)

The WOBA project also contributed to positive changes in community attitudes about the role of WU staff. Women do a lot of social work and they are recognized by their families and communities for their achievements.

*In general, it is reasonable for WU to undertake this WOBA project. Previously, the chairwoman of the Women's Union, who now is the the Standing Deputy Secretary, was also very active with this project. Later Dung who was appointed to WU chairwoman continued to do the activities in the WOBA. Currently, the "fish pond latrine" is limited. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS Nguyen Van B TTX)*

*In the past, there were many people who thought that because I was a husband, I have the right, the women have to do all housework including take care of children, cooking, and other things. But now there are many men who understand, share the housework with their wives, they understand better, they do housework together. (BT-BT-Tân Hưng PVS chồng Lê Minh P)*

When women participate in social activities, they play a certain role in society. Many women have got experiences, lessons learned at work... this has made them increase their level of trust and change the view of their organization and community. Not only that, they are also the agents that help the commune reach the new rural destination soon.

*Because my commune have been also preparing to achieve the title of “a new rural commune”. When I mobilize, the HHs tend to build latrines – it is also one of the criteria of the new rural commune. (BT-BT-Tân Hưng PVS vợ Nguyễn Thị T).*

#### **4.6. Participants’ suggestions for improvement in women’s empowerment**

Gender equality has changed positively in recent years in Tan Hung commune. Even so, participants in the interviews and focus group discussion still said that women still face more barriers than men in the process of participating in social activities, leadership positions and decision-making. Therefore, a number of solutions were proposed by the participants for the project as well as related to gender issues such as: (i) increasing the reward level for WASH promoters (ii) increasing the level of subsidy for households as the beneficiaries (iii) training more skills for the propagandists (iv) Training with pictures, vivid visualization, not taking much notes (v) Continuing to carry out propaganda on GE to enhance the role of women in society.

*Like me, I don’t have high degree of education, so my taking note is not good. So, training by voice, by action, I get it faster. I take notes very slowly. ( BT-BT-Tân Hưng PVS vợ Nguyễn Thị T)*

*If possible, the subsidy should be raised for latrine construction of households, and increase the allowances for promoters. The subsidy should be around 2-3 million, while the allowance for promoters is VND 100 or 150 thousand per HH. ( BT\_HP N huyện Ba Tri)*

*I see now that the local residents are aware of gender equality. People may understand all about that equality between men and women, but this propaganda should still be the top priority. As for specific measures, this one I really have not thought of. (BT-BT-Tan Hung PVS CTX Nguyen Van B)*

### **5. Case Study of Yen Nghiep commune, Lac Son district, Hoa Binh province**

#### **5.1. Context**

##### **Demographic and natural characteristics**

Yen Nghiep is one of communes in Lac Son mountainous district, Hoa Binh province. Yen Nghiep is 15 kilometers from the center of Lac Son mountainous district. There are 02 National Highways running through the commune, namely Ho Chi Minh Road and National Highway 12B. The whole commune has 14 villages. The total area of the commune is 2,257 ha. The population is mainly Muong ethnic minority, accounting for 98%, the rest are Kinh, Dao and Thai people.

The population of the commune in 2021 is 6,549 people. The number of households in the commune is about 1,416 households, the average household size is about 4.63, higher than the whole country (3.6 people/household). The commune's population growth rate in 2020 and 2021 are 1%, lower than the growth rate of the whole country (2.98% in 2021).

Sex ratio at birth (SRB) is calculated as the number of live birth boys per 100 live births in the same period. According to the Decision 3671/QĐ-BYT dated 2/8/2021 of the Ministry of Health promulgating Hoa Binh is one of 21 provinces with high SRB (over 112 boys/100 girls). However, the SRB of Yen Nghiep commune in 2014 2021 is lower, only 104 boys per 100 girls.

The common education level of people in the area is secondary school and high school. There is no illiterate people in the commune.

The commune has awarded the title of new rural commune in 2018 and announced in 2019, it is expected that in 2023 the commune will have awarded the title of “the advanced new rural commune” and “the typical new rural commune” in 2025.

According to the report from the CPC, no domestic violence cases occurred in 2020 and 2021. However, the reported case domestic violence is often mentioned as the physical violence, not included the mental, economic or sexual violence.

### **Income and poverty**

The average income in Yen Nghiep commune in 2021 is about VND 50 million/capita/year. In general, the proportion of poor households (180 households – 12.7%) and near-poor households (117 households - 8.3%) of the commune is lower than that of Lac Son district and Hoa Binh province but still much higher than the figure of the whole country, specifically as follows:

*Table 3. Percentages of poor and near poor HHs in Yen Nghiep commune (Hoa Binh province)*

	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Yen Nghiep commune</b>	<b>Lac Son District<sup>12</sup></b>	<b>Hoa Binh Province<sup>13</sup></b>	<b>Whole country</b>
Poor HH	%	12.7	24.13	15.49	2.23
Near poor HH	%	8.3	19.71	10.65	3.11

Among the poor and near-poor households in the commune, the poor and near-poor female headed households account for 28.6%. This figure is higher than the percentage of female-headed households (9.7%) out of 1,416 households in the commune. Among 233 GESI households (16.5%), female headed GESI households account for a relatively high proportion of 36.9% (86 households). It is also higher than the percentage of female-headed households in the whole commune (9.7%).

### **Labor and employment**

The proportion of laborers working far away from home is relatively high, accounting for about 60-70% among the households in the commune. They often work in industrial parks in neighboring provinces such as Thai Nguyen, Bac Ninh, Bac Giang, and Hai Duong. Because of the increase in the labor force working in industrial zones, in 2019-2020, the unemployment rate in the commune increases significant to 50-60%. It is because many companies had to be closed due to Covid 19 pandemic. This has a significant impact on the lives of the households. In the first 6 months of 2022, the district and provincial authorities focused more on conducting vocational trainings when many labors stayed at home. There were 220 people in the commune participating in vocational training courses organized by the province/district authorities. In which, 160 people are female (accounting for 72.7%).

### **The female proportion in leadership and managerial positions**

According to CPC’s reports, the percentage of women in the Standing Committee of the Commune's Party Committee accounts for 20%, and 20% in the Executive Committee of the Commune Communist Party 1%, 5.8% of secretaries of the Communist Party Cell are female. Although there are women in the

<sup>12</sup> <https://kinhtedouong.vn/hoa-binh-con-tren-57-nghin-ho-ngheo-ho-can-ngheo-89442.html>

<sup>13</sup> <https://kinhtedouong.vn/hoa-binh-con-tren-57-nghin-ho-ngheo-ho-can-ngheo-89442.html>

committees, this rate is much lower than the national target by 2020, the percentage of female staff participating in Party committees at all levels is over 25%<sup>14</sup>. 20% of women are on the leadership board of the Commune People's Committee. In the commune, among the delegates of commune People's Council, 6% are female. This rate is also lower than the target of 35-40% female delegates to the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels by 2020<sup>15</sup>.

## 5.2. Access to training and resources

### Training and information provision

It can be seen that there is a difference between men and women when participating in training on gender equality. Men are less likely to participate than women. Among 3 male interviewees in Yen Nghiep, only one replied that he once attended the gender equality training, the two remaining members, the husbands of the CWU and village WU, had not attended the gender equality yet. They only listen to information about gender equality on the radio and participate in some local trainings such as cultivation, animal husbandry, expertise in village health.

*I haven't had any opportunity to attend training on gender equality, only read online newspapers. (HB\_husband of CWU)*

*I once participated in the training on malaria, on maternal and child care in general, health care and medicine, even trainings on farming and livestock, but never in training on gender equality (HB\_Husband of DWU)*

All three WU staff in the interviews said that they had participated in training on gender equality organized by the province, district and WOBA project. In addition, they also participated in many other training courses such as leadership and management skills, soft skills, knowledge and expertise.

*I received training on gender equality, training on menstrual hygiene under WOBA and received professional trainings every year, in general, many training courses (HB\_DWU staff)*

In general, the commune's vocational trainings usually take place every year, but due to the complicated situation of the COVID-19 pandemic in the two years of 2019-2020, the trainings were stopped. During the first 6 months of 2022, some trainings on economic development have been conducted in the commune.

*Two years ago, the commune did not organize any training courses. In the first 6 months of 2022, the commune also opened 4 training classes on animal husbandry and cultivation for the local people. (HB\_Male leader of CPC)*

In addition, the commune also organized seminars and propaganda on clean water and environmental sanitation for people.

*Every year, the local authorities organize communication programs on clean water and environmental sanitation. Several years ago, when the communication content was on how to use a water purifier. (HB\_Male leader of CPC)*

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<sup>14</sup> Nghị quyết 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị ngày 27/4/2007

<sup>15</sup> Nghị quyết 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị ngày 27/4/2007

## Training assessment

The interviewees and participants in FGD highly appreciated the content of the training courses they attended. They consider the training courses as being able to share and discuss enthusiastically and gain more technical knowledge and soft skills in *mobilization* and communication.

*This is shared from the WU staff at higher level such as the district, provincial or central WU, then I come back and share it with the women in my commune and they are also interested and love to listen. And they say that if this training is organized again, the WU must invite them – the farmers to go, and let their husbands come and listen to it (HB\_CWU staff)*

However, there are also opinions that some of the training contents under WOBA program should be implemented earlier and learned lessons for the implementation of the next phase if the project continues, such as the training on the menstrual hygiene program for women.

*Then if the project continues next phase, the training should be conducted earlier. Because about gender as well as gender equality in everything we have discussed, and the benefit is not only men or women alone. ( HB\_DWU staff)*

The training course should have rich training methods, sharing, building/handling situations that will help participants remember for a long time and make them not sleepy. And the menstrual hygiene training program should be expanded to more target group, parents should participate more so that they can take care of their children.

*Because in the past, the women who participated in some trainings said that they were so sleepy that they didn't want to join. If there are discussion and exchange opinions like Q-A, the women will surely respond and enjoy it more. Or the type of discussion, integrating the content in cooking competition. (HB\_CWU staff)*

*This menstrual hygiene training to tell me the truth, it aims to wake up the parents so that people can take care of their children at that teenager age. It involves a lot of things. Therefore, training should be given to parents and children. ( HB\_DWU staff)*

### 5.3. Activities in the family and community

#### Activities in the 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: Caring for children, grandchildren, elderly parents (ii) educating children, (iii) doing housework such as cooking, washing, housework, etc. (iv) earning money, (v) wedding, funeral, (vi) farming, animal husbandry, (vii) construction/ repair house, sanitation works/auxiliaries (viii) financial management. The overall mean score for the roles of men/women participating in activities showed a significant difference in the commune compared to other communes in the study. Men hold the main responsibility to carry out about 57.5% of activities while this figure of women was 42.5. Notably, in which activities such as taking care of children, grandchildren/old parents, guiding children to do housework, farming and raising animals, the men were responsible for up to 70%. The participation in weddings, funerals, men accounted for 80%. Men and women are equal in construction and repair of houses/sanitary works. A very interesting activity – earning money, the men were responsible for 20% while women 80%. of men make money and 80% of women. There was a customary in other provinces that men earned money more than women, women

were responsible for financial management, but in Yen Nghiep, women were responsible for both earning money and financial management (75%).

*When building houses, the men stay at home to supervise and the women to send money to build house. Women are still responsible for managing money, they are afraid that men at home do not know how to keep money. Women have to protect themselves in case the men spend all money on drinking and eating. The women only send money that is enough for each item such as the tuition fee for children, the foods. (HB-FGD)*

Men are responsible for the unpaid and un-named jobs but they are not responsible for financial management. This is so different to other communes in the study because they often earn money in faraway industrial zones such as Bac Ninh, Hai Duong which require female workers. Therefore, in most families, the men stay at home to take care of the house chores, while women earn money.

*Both men and women have to do that, everyone has responsibilities in the family. According to the company's regulations and I encourage my wife to go to work. Men who do housework are not weak at all, having enough money to pay for their children's tuition is ok. I have to tie or braid the hair for children, wash their feet, hands then I take the children to school in the morning (HB-FGD)*

However, the fact that the wife works far away also causes the consequences and risks for the family, especially the relationship between the husband and the wife. Some couples divorced because the wife no longer felt love for their husbands. As of the first 6 months of 2022, the whole Lac Son district has about 150 divorced couples and in Yen Nghiep commune<sup>16</sup>, there have also been divorced cases with couples whose spouses work far away. According to Lac Son DWU staff and leader of CPC in Yen Nghiep, this is an alarming problem happening since the women went away for working in the industrial zones. This doesn't happen in the four other communes.

*The husband looks very miserable, he has to care dozens of buffaloes at field whole day, take care of children, does housework while the wife goes to work in an industrial park. He was born in 1976 but looks like he was born in 1960. When his wife comes home, she feels bored, we also tell him that he should have to take care of himself more... While the wife working in the company look more and more beautiful than before when she was at home, but the husband looks darker like a mole.*

*There are many husbands who do not want their wives to work in the industrial zones, they are easy to change after 4-5 years. In some cases, the husbands are afraid of being divorced when their wives fall in love with new, more beautiful guys. ...In those cases, after having a small saving budget, the women should stop working at industrial zones, stay at home to keep the marriage relationship and they raise cows, pigs, chickens together. Unless, there are some women leaving home with other guys and not going back home anymore.*

*(HB-FGD with male heads of village and village WU staff)*

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<sup>16</sup> <https://consosukien.vn/thuc-trang-hon-nhan-tai-viet-nam-nhin-tu-ket-qua-tong-dieu-tra-dan-so-va-nha-o-nam-2019.htm>

According to General Statistical Office, in general, the divorce rate in Vietnam is low, however, this rate is trending up in the past 10 years (in 2009: 1.0%, in 2019: 1.8%). Divorce rate differs by sex and urban and rural areas: The divorce rate of women is higher than that of men (2.1% versus 1.4%), higher in urban areas than rural areas (2.1% versus 1.6%).

The economy of Yen Nghiep commune was mainly dependent on agriculture and people mainly grew sugarcane. However, in the past 3-5 years, sugarcane was no longer purchased from the companies in Nghe An, the price of sugarcane decreased, so people had to change their livelihood. Meanwhile, the development in industrial zones in the neighboring provinces increase. The companies came to recruit local workers at commune, so the trend of going to work in industrial zones also increases. Working in industrial zones has a more stable income and is not as risky as farming.

*About 20 years ago, my hometown was developing, the main source of income was agriculture, the main crop was sugarcane all year round, the price of sugarcane was also around VND 5-7,000/cane. But about 3-5 years ago, the sugarcane is only VND 1-1,500/one, the sugarcane was no longer valuable. In the past, the companies in Nghe An purchased the sugarcane here, but since a few years ago, they stopped purchasing the sugarcane here, especially during COVID 19 period. The local people switched to planting cassava and maize, but the income of agriculture was also precarious. So, people go to work in industrial zones, industrial zones are not much far away, but right in Hai Duong, Bac Ninh, Hai Phong, it is convenient to travel. The companies came here to recruit, or the people went there to apply for jobs. Salary is also around VND 8-12 million/month, much more than doing agricultural activities. The only disadvantage is to live far from family. (HB- male leader of CPC)*

There is a change in decision-making power in the family, partly due to the economic factor wherein the person earns more money will have more voices. The voices of elderly parents have also reducing compared to before.

*For example, if you want to use money for big things, then both the husband and wife discuss, but the person who decides withdraw the money or not is the wife. It is the equality; the women have the rights that they didn't have in the past. The women were very dependent, for example, they had to work in the field, raised pigs, but when the parents sold them and kept money, the women also had to bear it, it was the grandparents' right, so it was a miserable day for the women. But now, if the parents are not nice enough, they can be taken out out of the house. Because the person who has money has rights. Money it always follows the right. (HB\_DWU staff)*

*Before, Muong women were very closed, they had to ask the husbands to give money when going out, but now it has been changed. In the 4.0 era, the women have left all the housework for these men. Even men are drunk, they have to breed the pigs first. In the past they (husbands) threatened us (wives), they took a rest after working, but now the women work in the company and they beautify after working hours, the men are responsible for the housework, breeding the animals. The voice of women has been increased. The companies never hire the drunk ones like the men here. (HB- FGD with the male village head and village WU staff)*

Empowerment for women in the HHs with women working far away also extends to HHs where no women have to work far away. In HHs where no women go away, the voices of both the husband and wife are more equal than in the past, housework is shared for both.

*For example, my wife comes home late from work, for example, if I come home early, I still cook normally. (HB\_husband of CWU staff)*

*Regarding the money, both of us make decision, for example, if you earn a small money from extra-work, you can keep it for the own spending. And the main salary of both is used for mutual budget. If there is anything, both will discuss and make decision together before spending (HB-husband of village WU staff).*

According to the results of the survey with WU staff in Hoa Binh (N=100), similar to other provinces in WOBA, 65% of WU staff in Hoa Binh spend 3 hours and above for doing housework. More than a half (51%) said there was no changes in the time for housework in the last 4 years. And only 17% said their time for housework reduced, this figure is even lower than the percentage of respondents said their time for housework increased.

The survey results also show that (WU staff in Hoa Binh, N=100), 53% of respondents do less than 10 hours per week for the paid work in average. And 32% do from 26-40 hours per week and only 11% do more than 41 hours per week. However, the time they spend for the social activities is much more than that. Even the village WU staff don't consider mobilizing HHs to build latrine as the paid work.

### **Community activities**

The community activities mentioned by the participants include (i) community meetings, (ii) participating in funerals/wedding, (iii) participating in sports and cultural activities (iv) building, repair common infrastructure works in the commune (v) organizing parties in villages. Similar to activities in households, men still play a major role in community activities, accounting for 70%, except for cultural and sports activities, in which women account for more than 80%.

*In short, men also stay at home, so they attend funerals, attend meetings, men also do agricultural activities, and activities in relation to relatives, neighbor, community as well. Ony in terms of sports activities, there are more women participating than men. The old women can holding their grandchildren when join the art or sport activities. But the men can't take the grandkids to drink wine.*

*Funerals are a common business, if the wife goes to work, then the husband has to come.*

*(HB- FGD with the male village head and village WU staff)*

In general, the movement of sports, culture, dance and music in Yen Nghiep commune in particular and the movement of sports in Lac Son district in general is very active. In Yen Nghiep commune, some young women go to work in the companies near their house, they still join this movement enthusiastically because they have more time.

*A: For example, in the past, there were not many participants to play volleyball, but now there is no competition but many women still participate, even they turn on the lights to play badminton, volleyball at night.*

*Q: Why it has changed?*

*A: It must be because of the passion, and the work is not as hard as before, they have time to play volleyball – good for health, but the day before, the women work all day and night, they are so tired that they couldn't play. But now, theyl still have time to rest after working in the companies. (HB-husband of village WU staff)*

*Cultural, arts, sports and folk dancing activities... women participate more than men. These activities are mostly in the evening in the playing yard of the village, not in the afternoon or morning. Women also participate enthusiastically in all singing activities. (HB\_DWU staff)*

According to the survey with WU staff in Hoa Binh (N=100), more than two thirds said that there was no change in the person in charge of the activities in family and activities.

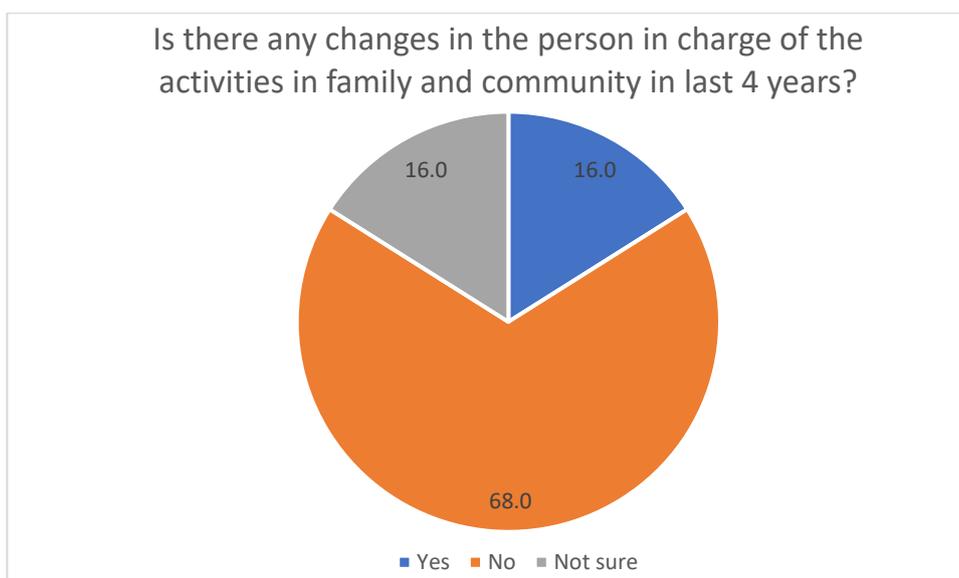


Figure 4. Proportions of survey respondents that indicated there has been “changes in the person in charge of activities in family and community” (Hoa Binh province)

There is only 16% said that there was a change. The changes are mainly in doing housework because the children can help do housework. Because the respondents are still working at home, so their family don't have changes like other HHs whose wife started working far away from home, so, the husband had to undertake everything at home.

#### **Opportunities for women to participate in the social activities and make decision in family**

According to the participants in FGD and interviews, at the moment, the women have more advantages to participate in the social activities and make decision in family.

Firstly, women are more active, self-reliant, and self-determined to earn their own money regardless of their family or husband. As analyzed above, the person earns more money will have more voices. The women can make decision for the issues that need to pay a big amount of money. The voices of elderly parents – in - law have also reducing compared to before when their daughters – in – law are the breadwinners in the family.

Secondly, they receive sympathy from their husbands and family members for their work. Especially, with the WU staff with the low income, the women themselves need to be encouraged from their husbands and family to keep their position.

*Well, of course, each person has their own job, how can they be complete, you also have to sympathize with your wife. (HB\_husband of CWU staff)*

And finally, women's capacity and qualifications are higher than before. Due to participating in the trainings, the women know to manage finance, calculate the interests in the agricultural activities.

*The women's capacity has been increased. They were also trained, including training in household expenditure management and so on. Those trainings were organized by the commune authorities. For example, how to calculate it, it must be calculated for it all, not today I go to a harvest session, that is just me or my family doing by ourselves (excluding the labor), if including the labor, there is maybe non-profitable, they know how to calculate from those small things, then they pass it on the other women. ( HB\_DWU staff).*

## Constraints

Although in Yen Nghiep, there is a big change in the person who is responsible for the housework, due to social activities with low allowance, and women do not go to work far away, housework and small children are still the factors that hinder women. They are the reason why the wives cannot participate in social activities. Especially, in the families that do not sympathize and share the housework with the women.

*For example, in my CPC, there are 6 female staff, most of them have difficulty having small children, so they often go to work late. (HB – the male leader of CPC)*

*The biggest difficulty for women to participate in social work is that their families do not understand that it is the first thing, and the second is the women have to be responsible for both housework and social work. that participating in social work and taking care of the family is the most difficult thing for women. women participating in social work. (HB – husband of village WU staff)*

There is still a gendered view that women have to be modest, good, gentle and take care of family and children. This is a barrier for women to participate in social activities.

*In rural areas, women are still heavily prejudiced against having to be modest and gentle as a bride in general, with many duties, so the voice of women is still limited in all areas. (HB- male leader of CPC)*

## 5.4. Women's empowerment

### The opportunities for employment and income increase

The purpose of WU staff participating in the WOBA is to bring the benefits to the community through improving the hygienic latrines of HHs but not aiming to increase income and employment opportunities for themselves.

*WOBA bring the benefits for the women, WU members only. We ourselves, like me, are supported with a small allowance. The benefit of the project is to support the HHs to build new latrines for their hygiene condition. (HB\_CWU staff)*

*There is no job opportunity, this is my mission (with the position of WU staff). (HB-village WU staff)*

The husbands of WU staff in the interviews also think that mobilizing the HHs to build latrine is the own duty of a WU staff. It is not for the income generation for the WU staff.

*There's no income, I've heard people say that if they can mobilize HHs to build latrines, they can get small allowances, but it is not important (HB-husband of village WU staff)*

### Opportunities in decision making and leadership

Leadership opportunities of the women are also dependent on women's qualifications and on whether the local people trust the women who do social work or not. Decision-making opportunities are only for the leaders of the organizations.

*She must win the hearts of the people, the people follow her words, then she will be able to keep this position, that is the leadership capacity of each person. As for the decision-making power, she*

*is also the head of organization, so she must have the right to make decisions for her organization (HB- husband of village WU staff).*

The leadership structure planned by the superiors determines whether a woman is allowed to take a leadership position or not.

*If I didn't agree, they still moved me to the new position, because the human structure need to be rotated... In short, I still have to move to this position according to the planned structure. (HB-CWU staff)*

WU is still only a stakeholder like the advisory department, WU only have their own vertical line of authority, decision making of WU is still limited in some activities, which is similar to the engagement of WU in WOBA project.

*The local authorities can direct the stakeholders to implement. Therefore, in any project in the commune, there must be chairman or vice chairman of CPC in the project management unit to implement more effectively and conveniently. (HB\_DWU staff)*

### **Constraints in making decisions and leadership**

As analyzed above, if a woman is not in the planned leadership structure, she can't hold the position although she makes many efforts. Another constrain relating to the gender stereotype that women are less decisive, less confident and more limited in communication than the men. These characteristics are perceived to be required for a leadership position.

*Many factors. One is leadership structure, and the other one due to the understanding level of women. Perhaps the superiors recognize that this woman is not active, not assertive, not good at communication for example. (HB\_CWU staff)*

The low salaries for the leaders, even not enough for daily living expenses is another factor that hinders women from taking up leadership positions.

*Honestly, we at this grassroots level are very difficult in terms of economy. I think salary determines many things. I have been working for 7 years, my current salary is still VND 5 million. Many people like the current chairman of CPC, his salary is only a bit over VND 5 million. (HB-CWU staff)*

*The salary of my wife even isn't enough for herself but not including the children. (HB\_husband of CWU staff)*

Another barrier for women is from her family such as taking care of husbands and children, husbands don't share the housework with their wives, don't want their wives to be leaders..

*The women undertake most of housework. If taking up this leadership position, can they arrange their time for their work and their family. Because in that position, she must think what should do but not keep that seat only... But when taking up that leadership position, they have to have dinners with the guests, so who will prepare meal for my husband and my children, that is a problem if the husband doesn't share housework with the wife. (HB\_DWU staff)*

With the mother's roles of pregnancy and childbirth, women's opportunities to improve their education are also more limited than men. It is difficult for women to get promotions without the required degree and the opportunities for promotions are not often made available to them.

*For example, if you want to go to school to improve your degree when you are pregnant, who want let you go? How can I quit while breastfeeding? That's also a matter that even creates opportunities for women, but they can't do. The opportunity can't be grasped, but also can't leave the small children to go (HB\_DWU staff)*

In the survey with the WU staff in Hoa Binh (N=96), most of respondents agreed and totally agreed with the positive changes for themselves from the WOBA.

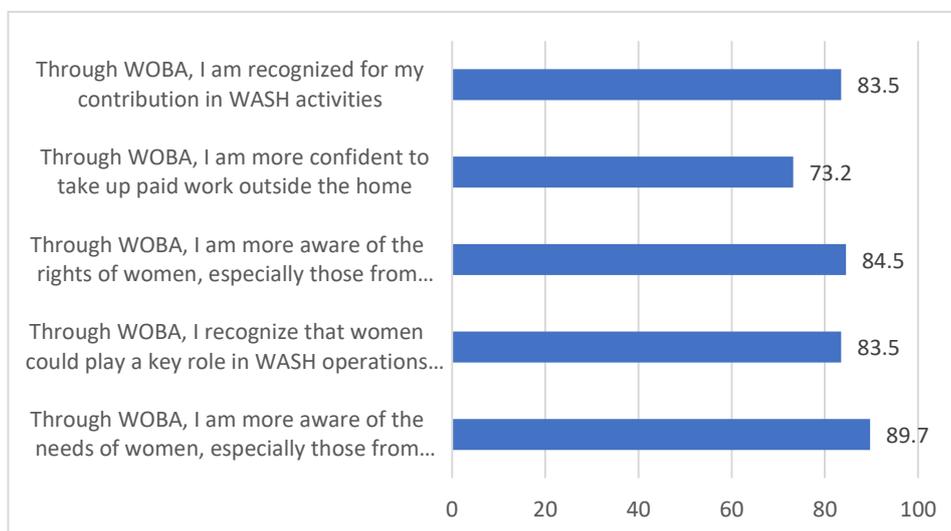


Figure 5. Proportions of survey respondents that indicated “personal changes through WOBA participation” (Hoa Binh province)

As the analysis from the participants in FGD and interviews, although WOBA has not brought the benefits of earning money, employment opportunities or leadership positions, it has given the WU women knowledge on WASH, GESI as well as the confidence and soft skills in communication and mobilization which is the main task of WU.

### 5.5. Attitudes and norms on gender and participation

#### The participation of individuals and community in the activities to support the vulnerable groups

Community activities such as helping each other in funerals, weddings or labor exchange in the harvest are quite popular in Yen Nghiep commune. There is also the activity of “hụi” (revolving capital contribution) movement among the women to help each other develop livelihood.

*For example, if there are sick people in the village or in the harvest season, or a funeral, the WU also informs WU members to go to support for 1-2 working days. Household with few people or difficulties are helping each other (HB – Husband of village WU staff)*

*Each woman contributes VND 1 million per year in minimum and VND 3 million in maximum – like the savings. These savings are contributed quarterly and then given to a woman to develop livelihood. It is impossible for a woman to spend VND 30 million during 3 year by herself, they call it “revolving capital contribution” (HB - village WU staff)*

Individuals and communities have changed awareness about hygienic latrines, which they feel will help them to live a more healthy and civilized life.

*The change is their view and improved awareness on health relating to hygienic latrines, and its impact on the environment. After the latrines in this project is in operation, the members of WU can see the effect of the project for their own families. (HB – male leader of CPC)*

The WOBA project not only directly impacts vulnerable groups in the community, but also has positive effects on the community, contributing to the achievement of the commune's new rural development-related targets.

*The Woba program directly affects the whole population, not only disadvantaged households. When we developed to get the target of the new rural commune, it contributed a lot because the rate of HH having hygienic latrines at that time was only about 70%, in 2018, this Woba program in Yen Nghiep commune deployed 90 households more. The benefits of this project also contribute greatly to what we set up the target of hygienic latrines for local people in general and women in particular. (HB – male leader of CPC)*

### **Changes in the attitudes of individual, organizations and community with the roles of women in society**

The change in the community's attitude towards the role of women in society also depends on the perception of that individual or household. There is also an opinion that there have been changes in society's view of the role of women, and the information technology era has a strong contribution to this change.

*Some people still think that women are still ignorant, still limited. This attitude depends on each individual's view (HB-husband of village WU staff)*

*Change a lot. Society is getting better and better, so we have to follow society, I can't just follow my thoughts like before. Now is the 4.0 era, not the old days (HB\_Husband of CWU staff)*

*Since about 10 years ago, there has been a change in the role of women in earning money and in the perception of society, the roles between men and women are equal. (HB-male leader of CPC)*

The WOBA project has made a small contribution to the promotion of gender equality in the community and women also find themselves more recognized. The women become more confident in the meetings and propagandas.

*In this project, people see that the role of women is very necessary and practical for the local people, the men's view on women is also different, it is more positive. (HB-male leader of CPC)*

*Women have changed quite a lot, women are more confident in the conference during the mobilization process, is trusted by WU members and local residents, and is more enthusiastic than before, people in the village are also more actively participating than before. (HB – FGD with heads of village and village WU staff)*

### **5.6. Participants' suggestions for improvement in women's empowerment**

The participants in FGD and interviews give some recommendations for the women's empowerment to enhance the gender equality as follows:

Firstly, the communication on gender equality should be continued. In which, the target groups should focus on the men more.

*The propagandists must have in-depth family knowledge of the target audience, including men and women, and have a deep awareness of the gender equality. (HB – male leader of CPC).*

Secondly, it is necessary to have supportive policies for women to have more opportunities for career advancement, especially policies that give priority to women during pregnancy and lactation.

*For example, at that time the women were pregnant, for example, that opportunity they passed, but they have to prioritize other opportunities next time when they have the conditions. Especially the training classes, improving the professional skills (HB- DWU staff).*

In addition, there should be intervention programs for children whose parents work away from home or even children living with parents because 4.0 technology has many temptations that make children not know how to filter information and it will adversely affect their thoughts and actions.

*...now communicate with each other via Zalo, Facebook, then all kinds of things on the phone the children and grandchildren are watching and learning. It doesn't matter if they are good things, but the children don't know how to screen, so there must be some kind of intervention program. (HB\_ DWU staff)*

Finally, the family model in which the wife has to work away from home constantly has potential risks. Therefore, if there are companies in the district or neighboring districts and recruit local workers, and the salary may be lower but still ensure income for women, it will avoid the risks to family life when the women working far away from home.

*There is a company around here so that women don't have to be far from their family. The husband and wife do not have to be divorced; children are taken care of by both the father and the mother.*

*As long as there are 2 companies, they will basically solve this problem, so the women will be able to get jobs. The salary of VND 5 million is fine. The salary of VND 12 million but working far away from home is not as good as the salary of 5-6 million but sleeping at home. (HB – FGD with heads of village and village WU staff).*

## 6. Case Study of Chau Cuong commune, Quy Hop district, Nghe An province

### 6.1. Context

#### **Demographic characteristics and population**

Chau Cuong is a commune in Quy Hop mountainous district, Nghe An province. It has a natural area of 83.88 km<sup>2</sup>, of which forest land accounts for more than ½ of the commune's natural land area.

The population of the whole commune in July 2022 is 5,465 people, with 2,737 women (accounting for 50.1%). The natural population growth rates in 2020 and 2021 are 0.79% and 0.67% respectively. The gender imbalance situation also occurs in Chau Cuong, when the number of boys is often higher than that of girls. In 2021, the ratio is 106 boys/100 girls. This rate is still lower than the rate of gender imbalance in Nghe An province when the average rate in previous years was 114 boys/100 girls.

More than 70% of Chau Cuong commune's population is Thai ethnic minority. The rest are Kinh and Tho people. Local people often communicate mainly in Thai language but they can use Vietnamese. The illiteracy rate in the whole commune is 0%.

#### **Poverty**

The total number of households in the commune is 1,238 households (average 4.41 people/household). In which, the number of poor households is 317 (25.6%), and the number of near-poor households is

154 (12.4%). The poverty rate of Chau Cuong commune is higher than this rate in Quy Hop district (15.41%); but the rate of near-poor households is lower than the whole district (16%). The number of GESI households in the commune is 228, of which 80 are female headed households (35%).

### ***Labor and employment***

The unemployment rate in the whole commune was 1% in 2020 and 6.5% in 2021 (due to the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic). In which, the female unemployment rate in 2020 and 2021 were 0.4% and 2.5% respectively, lower than these rates of the whole commune.

Labor in the agricultural sector still accounts for the majority of 90%, of which female labor account for 45.5%. The proportion of workers in the non-agricultural sector accounts for only 10%. However, in reality, a lot of laborers work in agriculture for only a few months of the year, the rest of the year they go to find jobs elsewhere to increase their income. Agricultural production mainly focuses on rice cultivation and afforestation. Agricultural productivity is not high, causing households to look for other jobs – mainly unskilled and unstable jobs.

### ***The female proportion in leadership and managerial positions***

The percentage of women in the Executive Committee of the Communist Party is 9.02%, in the Standing Committee is 20%. Only 7.14% of the Party Secretary in the commune is female. There is not any woman in the leadership staff of the Commune People's Committee. The proportion of women in the Commune People's Council is 36.4%, which is higher than the proportion of women in the Commune People's Council in Quy Hop district of 29.97%. Among the village heads in whole commune, 11.2% are female.

## ***6.2. Access to training and resources***

### **Participation in the training and access to information**

In Chau Cuong, propaganda and training activities are targeted at both men and women. The contents related to clean water and sanitation are mainly carried out through propaganda, not through training.

*They (the health station) integrate the content of water during propaganda in the villages (NA - QH- Chairman of the Commune People's Committee)*

Based on the survey results with WU staff in Nghe An, 17% respondents said that they couldn't join some trainings that they were invited to attend last year. Of which, 50% said that they didn't join because they had another meeting at the same time. The WU staff are responsible for many tasks, so, they had to give priority for the most important tasks whenever they were organized at the same time. Meanwhile only 12.5% said they couldn't join due to Covid 19 travel restriction.

The training contents focused mainly on agricultural production techniques. The fact that women stay at home more than men, men often work far away during the day, while training sessions take place during the day, so only women can join.

*A: There are many trainings every year such as training on rice cultivation, animal husbandry, mushroom growing techniques and programs of district.*

*Q: In your opinion, do women or men participate more in these training programs?*

*A: Most of them are women who participate more in rice farming techniques, animal husbandry techniques and mushroom growing techniques.*

Q: Why?

A: Because most of men work far away to work in quarries and stone ore making companies (NA - QH- Chairman of the Commune People's Committee)

Propaganda sessions on gender equality are often organized by the Women's Union. However, because the women's union is organized, the participation of men is limited, as they consider the issue of "gender equality" to be WU's.

*For gender equality training, I have not been able to participate. But I once participated in a propaganda session about preventing violence against women and children (NA-QH\_Husband of CWU staff)*

*That is, just promoting gender equality is only women, those meetings are only women, even if men are now invited to participate in a seminar on promoting gender equality, many men said they didn't know if they would attend or not. Sometimes men are also afraid, do not want to participate in those meetings. (NA\_QH\_HPND of district)*

### **Assessment of the training courses and provided information**

With the contents of the WOBA Project, the chairperson of the Commune Women's Union was trained, and then she instructed the vice-chairperson of WU according to training content. Because of not being able to directly participate in all training contents, commune WU staff may not be fully informed and that may cause misunderstandings about the project's policies.

*When I researched and collected the information of WOBA in internet, I still read it but I didn't understand all, for example WOBA was a project to improve sanitation and clean water, but how it improves the sanitation and clean water, what is clean water, steps. .... I also told the HHs that but they said differently. The subsidies from the WOBA would be delivered soon, but the subsidies from the province would take longer. Village WU staff didn't understand that, so they made others confused like them... (NA\_QH\_CWU staff)*

WU staff also commented that, for communication activities in the project in Chau Cuong under WOBA has been still limited, it is necessary to strengthen communication activities from the beginning and expand the scope of communication, target audience.

*I still want to have more communication activities. Communication helps change the awareness. Actually, the communication activities under WOBA were few, not many, not widely spread to the target audience, only communicated to the propagandists and some households. It's necessary to expand the audiences, promote communication activities and direct consultation. (NA\_QH\_DWU staff)*

### **6.3. Activities in the family and community**

#### **Activities in family**

For family activities, women still take on more housework, while men are considered to be in charge of "bigger" tasks such as building houses, building latrines, and directing the development of children. In the opinion of male CPC leaders, it seems that decision-making power in the family is still implicitly reserved for men.

A: With decision making in the family, most of them are still men. They still have the role of deciding where to go and do. So Any family members have to go back to ask their father's

*opinion. Taking care of children is the duty of women, but if women can't decide if children want to cut hair, the children have to ask your father, for example, to get permission of going to a concert or a public service in the district or commune. They still have that mindset, and the decision of Thai women is still passive. (NA - QH- Chairman of the Commune People's Committee)*

*Q: Who makes the decisions such as to build a toilet and design a toilet?*

*A: Also, be the men, now most of the men want to have a latrine because it is an essential part of a woman's family, so they decide on how that latrine is. (NA - QH- Chairman of the Commune People's Committee)*

However, male interviewees also said that financial management in the family should be managed by women. Because women know how to spend more rationally, while men holding money often do not know how to allocate spending.

*A: Because men can't spend on small things, they only know big things. With women, it is more reasonable to spend money on electricity, water, and noodles, in general. And men, no matter how much they have, they spend all. (NA\_QH\_CWU staff's Husband)*

When analyzing the change between the roles and voices of men and women in the family, the participants in the interviews and group discussions all confirmed that women had more voice in the family.

*A: Nowadays, in family meetings, women's voices are respected more*

*H: Why?*

*A: It's probably because the perceptions of the villagers and men and parents have changed too, causing the change. (NA\_QH\_village WU staff)*

In particular, mobilizing households to build latrines in the WOBA project also affects women's voices and decisions. The "bigger" tasks like building toilets used to be decided by men, but now women also have the right to demand "using the toilet" rather than waiting for their husbands to agree.

*A: Since the project started, women have had more authority to make decisions in the family, such as building toilets, constructing auxiliary works. For example, next to my house, there was a case in the past when two old couple used a dug latrine in that corner of the garden, and then they saw that there was a subsidy to build a latrine. We both mobilized and threatened (How unhygienic latrine can influence on their health), the wife came back and said her husband that if he didn't do the toilet, she would go to the company to use the toilet and the bathroom there. Finally, he agreed to just build it last year (village HPN)*

One of reasons for this change is the women participate more social activities and access information, they learn and improve their knowledge more.

*About ten years ago, the women were used to only stayed at home so they didn't know how the society develop. They also didn't know how to discuss with the husband about building "beautiful" latrine, but now it has been changed... (FGD with male hamlet and CWU at village)*

The women themselves are also pressured with housework, especially financial management. Especially when their income is low, it is difficult to allocate their income for the basic needs of daily life.

*A: Are you under pressure when managing finance in your family?*

*Q: Yes*

*A: Can you specify?*

*Q: When the money's almost over, I don't know how to have more. Like electricity and water bills, tuition fee for children. Sometimes, I thought I lost my money but it turned out I spent it all. (NA\_FGD)*

Therefore, with their understanding, women have also actively changed their ways of doing things to also share housework with men. For example, financial management is often assumed by women, but now women also share it with their husbands.

*Electricity, internet cost is deducted from my husband's bank account. I have 2 children, so I pay for one child and the husband pay for the another one. That lets the husband understand how much money to spend a month (NA\_FGD)*

With the help of information technology, sharing the burden of financial management in the family is also an innovative way for women when they have knowledge and information.

According to the survey results, nearly 70% of WU staff said that they spend more than 3 hours per day on average for housework. And more than a half of respondents said there was no change in the time for housework in last 4 years. While 22.2% said the time that they spent for housework decreased in last 4 years and 17.8% said it increased. It means that the housework is still a burden for the women.

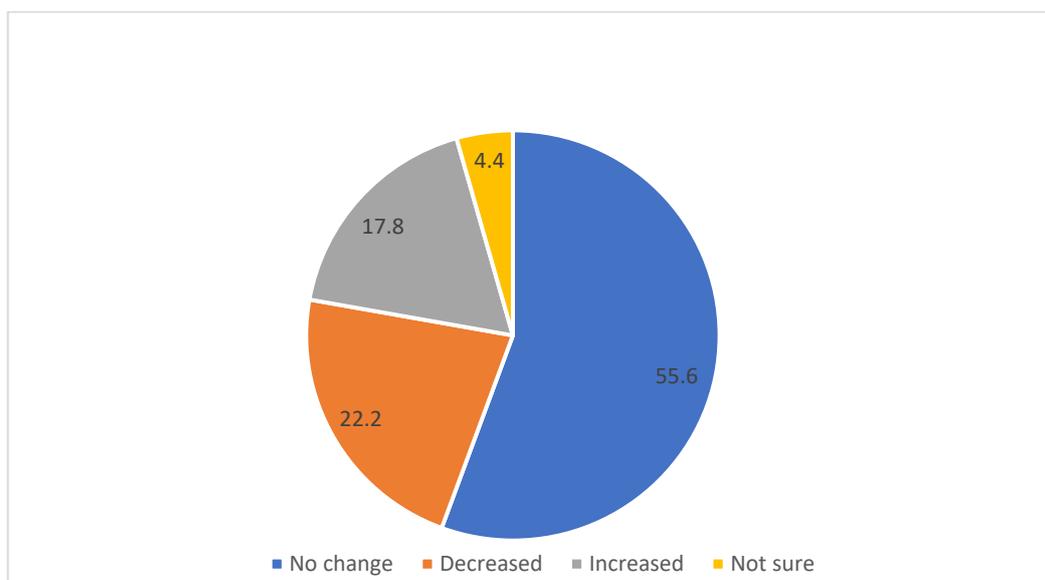


Figure 6. Proportions of survey respondents that indicated “change in spending time for housework in the last 4 years” (Nghe An province)

### Community activities

Women in Chau Cuong also participate more in recent years in cultural and sports activities in the community. This is due to the movements organized by government and mass organizations. *“Yes, they participate in movements, in cultural and sport activities mobilized by the commune authorities.” (NA\_the husband of village WU staff)*

However, earning income also makes Chau Cuong women less likely to participate in community activities. Those who attend meetings are mainly the elderly, while young and middle-aged women rarely go to meetings.

*It’s difficult to gather the women who are working away from home. In my village, there are more than a half among 100 women working away from home. They do mainly the seasonal work, for example, a lot of them go to the quarry, so in the meeting can’t gather like before. When there was no such company, the women almost fully attended. But now most of women around 40 years old go to work for company. (Village WU)*

## Opportunities

There is a significant difference in Chau Cuong compared to other communes in the study. In other communes, the husband's family is often seen as an obstacle for women to participate in social activities, in Chau Cuong, the husband's family is considered as an opportunity for women to participate in social activities. The husband's family is often very supportive of their daughter-in-law's participation in social work. Both men and women make this statement.

*The ladies (mother – in – law) are very supportive. They said (to the CPC staff) that whenever there is any communication meeting/workshop, they are available to take care the grandchildren at home so that their daughter- in – law can join. (NA\_QH\_HPND of commune)*

*I think that at present, Chau Cuong commune is a relatively difficult commune under program 135, if their daughter-in-law is commune or village staff, I think they are very supportive. They want their daughter in law to be the authority's staff. Moreover, they really want their daughter-in-law to have a stable job, rather than working as a worker away from home, so, they are very supportive. (NA\_Husband of CWU staff)*

In particular, the stories of the interviewees show that participating in the WOBA project also helps WU staff improve their own knowledge and skills such as awareness, attitude, self-esteem, seriousness, discipline and confidence. These are the prerequisites to create opportunities for women to participate in social activities.

*Working in the project with demands of precise, serious and disciplined, so it is seen that the staff of the village WU and commune WU have a change in perception, action, attitude... They also have to be adapted to change in attitude towards work. Many women are also more agile, and then communicate more confidently, they gradually practice more skills as well. (NA\_HPND district)*

*Maybe at home I never spoke out, but since she became WU staff, she went out, increased her knowledge, she, like a propagandist, was more confident when standing in front of a crowd. (NA\_Husband of CWU staff)*

However, there isn't any evidence from survey results to show a significant change in decision making in the family in the last 4 years. 77.3% WU staff in Nghe An said that there is no change in decision making in the family in the last 4 years. Only 18/3% said, it has been changed and 4.5% said they were unsure.

Besides the project, propaganda and information activities also contributed to the positive change of women.

*Women have not had access to information, so they have not changed. After propaganda sessions and policies, women have gradually changed (NA\_FGD)*

## Constraints

Women's participation in social activities is significantly influenced by their husbands. If the husband does not agree, they will make it difficult for their wives to participate, including they are jealously, so they do not want the wives to talk/contact with other people. It is also because there is not any salary or allowance or it is too small (if any) when participating in social activities.

*Frankly, working as a village head is very hard, it takes a long time, very low allowance, it is like "a fool for one's pains". So, perhaps many husbands don't like, don't want their wives to do. (NA\_HPND district)*

*There are some women in difficult conditions and they want to participate but they can't. There are also many husbands who don't let their wives go out to dance in the evening, so, their wives are not comfortable to go, either. (NA\_village WU staff)*

Economic conditions can be considered as a barrier for women as if their household's economic condition is difficult, they are unable to focus on social activities when they have to focus on earning money.

*Firstly, it is my family. My economic condition must be quite good, even better than other households. In general, you have to feel secure at home first before you can work at the office. (NA\_Husband of CWU staff)*

Like other communes in the study, housework is still an obstacle for women to participate in social activities. From the perspective of men, men themselves also realize that this is a disadvantage for women, while men when participating in social activities will not face this disadvantage.

*Women have to do more housework and they are more disadvantaged. Because men don't have to do housework. After finishing working at office for example, they can go out to exchange and have party to enhance the relationships. But with women, there are still many things to do, the simplest example is which foods for the meals, who cooks for husband and children, whether the children take a bath or not, etc. (NA\_Husband of CWU staff)*

*Now women have more free time, but in the new era, women meet difficulties to improve themselves. For example, after working, men can play volleyball or gossip with each other, while women have to go home to do housework, take care the children. And men can go out with friends. (NA – QH – Chairman of the Commune People's Committee)*

#### **6.4. Women's empowerment**

##### **Job opportunities and earning income**

Similar to the other communes in the study, WU staff did not see any opportunity to increase income or employment while participating in the WOBA project. Although WU staff receive allowance from the project when each household completes the latrine construction. But *"In my opinion, if you are a propagandist, such income is not worth the effort they made"* (NA\_QH\_village WU staff). Because, it takes a lot of time, effort, even money for gas, transportation and phone to mobilize a household to build latrine. Women's Union staff perform their duties for political responsibility to the community.

However, in reality, although the WU staff may not directly have the opportunity to earn money or increase income under the WOBA project, participating in the WOBA project has contributed to the building or improving their skills and attitudes. For example, CWU staff has an opportunity to access highly demanding jobs in the future.

*Q: Now, for example, in your commune, there is another development project, do you and your CWU dare to confidently accept that work?*

*A: Yes, I also wish there will be more and more projects to bring the benefits to the WU members.*

*Q: For example, now that you are working as a part-time staff or CWU only. Now there are some organizations that need project field staff to deploy in the field, not only in Chau Cuong but the neighboring communes too, if they want to recruit a field officer to do it, are you willing to apply and join?*

*A: I'm ready. I also know that the requirements of organizations, they have more strict demands than the work of that State, in terms of progress and quality, it must be guaranteed, I am also ready to participate. (NA\_CWU staff)*

### **Opportunities to make decision and leadership**

The WU staff assess themselves to have all required qualifications to hold a leadership or decision-making role. According to the observations of DWU staff for all communes in Quy Hop district, the female commune leaders seem to work more efficiently than men because they do not have to attend parties and drink so much wine that affects their mind devoted to work.

*Now sometimes male leaders at commune level don't do as well as female ones. The ladies are both careful and thoughtful, then they have a foretaste, their nature is foreboding, so they undertake the tasks very well. I also observe and find that no matter which position women work, they almost always do better than men. It's just that they take on fewer number of positions. But with the results, if women can do better than men.*

*- Men often go back to sleep after drinking wine, but women do not drink, when they come back, they can make plans for tomorrow. I see most of the communes where there is a female secretary of the Party Committee, the results of those communes are always excellent. That is, the female leader shows that it is more efficient and more thoughtful. That is not to say that they (male) are not good, but sometimes there are factors that are detrimental to them in the process of working, even in the way of taking care of work, women are still different from men. (NA\_QH\_DWU staff)*

The confidence at work is also an opportunity for women to get the leadership positions. In particular, participating in the WOBA project has made WU staff much more confident. This is also an important initial factor, a premise for women to be appointed to leadership positions in the future.

*H: What do you see that it's really different since you participated in WOBA?*

*A: As a woman, I can still do many things, everything a man can do, a woman can do as well.*

*Q: So, do you feel more confident?*

*A: Yes, so much. (NA\_QH\_CWU staff)*

*One woman keeping the leadership position that is also an opportunity for other women to be appointed to leadership positions. The case in Quy Hop district clearly shows this statement.*

*Now, there is no female leader in Quy Hop, in the past there was one female leader, now she is working at the provincial level. It's true that when she was the female leader in Quy Hop district, she really cared about women, such as organizing many activities for women and tried to include women in leadership planning. That is more actions and stronger impacts on women, while the male leaders didn't do that. (NA\_DWU staff)*

### **Constraints to make decision and leadership**

While competence is an opportunity for women to be in leadership positions, education degree are an obstacle for women. The reason is that women were not able to attend school much in their youth, while men were given priority to study more than women.

*Because women are not educated. At the same with my age, ten or fifteen years ago, there was a pattern of respect for men and contempt for women. Men were given more priority to go to school than women. So, the consequence is that women have the lower degrees at the present. (NA\_HPNC commune)*

Besides, maternity and having small children also hinders women's higher education.

*It's true that they are always struggling, but because of the small children, when the children are grown up, there is no chance, it's over again. So many women who had chances to get the higher education were busy. The opportunities for women to participate in higher education were also less than that of men. Men could study at any time if needed, but women had to arrange the housework, especially taking care of their children and family before they could go to university, which is also a barrier. (NA\_HPNDistrict)*

Besides hindering women to improve their education, maternity and having small children are also obstacles for women when senior leaders plan to appoint women into the leader positions. In the opinion of leaders, maternity and having small children take women a lot of time and enthusiasm, that cause negative impact to their work. Meanwhile, the age structure of women for leadership positions is lower than that of men, which further reduces women's opportunities.

*Actually, now that it's planning. But the women at the age below 50 can be planned for leadership positions, but the men can be longer, until the age of 55. Women take time to give birth, after that, taking care of small children, when the children are grown up, the women are out of the required age (below 50). That is a disadvantage of the women. Actually, it is not correct to say that amending the law, but it means to create conditions for women to participate. For example, the local authorities themselves create conditions and can include them in the planning leadership positions. But actually, when the leaders see that a woman is still having small children, no training, no fostering, no caring, so, when they start to care, that woman will be late. (NA\_QH\_HPNDistrict)*

*Yes, that's right. It is true that women miss a lot of opportunities during the maternity. With my experience, I couldn't get any jobs since I was pregnant... I lost the opportunities. (NA\_QH\_PCT Commune Women's Union)*

A major factor from the women is also an obstacle for themselves to take up leadership positions. When women themselves see leadership positions as a "burden", they do not want to be held responsible for their decisions. Women are afraid to challenge themselves in new positions. Meanwhile, men's willingness to perform is more obvious.

*There are women having full degree and qualifications, but they to give way to men. That is, even the women themselves say that they do not need to participate in this or that leader position, they feel that it is a burden, carrying a heavier responsibility. For an example in Tam Hop commune, there was a woman who was the vice chairperson of CPC. But when she started her tenure as a leader, her husband did the same, she resigned to push her husband to become that position. Even that was not the husband or relative, but the women were willing to back down, let the men keep the leader position, the women don't want to be leaders. (NA\_district WU)*

Even the superior leaders themselves sometimes do put their trust in women to assign leadership positions. This is caused by gender stereotypes, in their thought, women are not strong and decisive enough to take on a leadership position, it is suitable for the leadership position must be reserved by men.

*In the men's opinion, men still have to keep the leader positions, but women have to be considered whether she is strong enough or assertive enough to do this position (NA\_HPNDistrict).*

The barrier from the family indirectly affects women as well. If the superiors see a woman who has to take care of the family, they also do not recommend women to hold leadership positions because of affecting the work of the organization.

*When the Communist's Party Committee considers a woman, they also take into account whether her family creates conditions for her to assign the leader position, that's the prejudice (NA\_DWU)*

Although women face many constraints on their way to the leadership positions as well as decision-making, WU staff still see that in the future, the proportion of women in leadership positions will definitely increase, due to movement and propaganda on gender equality have positive impacts and women having full degree as men.

*In next two terms of 10 years. With the current development, I am sure that after 10 years, it is certain that the number of women who keep the leadership positions will increase when women have the opportunity to have a full degree like men. (NA\_CWU staff)*

According to the survey results, more than 80% of respondents stated that there are positive individual changes since joining WOBA. 83.1% felt the changes are the results of involvement in WASH activities. 93.2% felt that they could play key role in WASH operations and policy making under the WOBA.

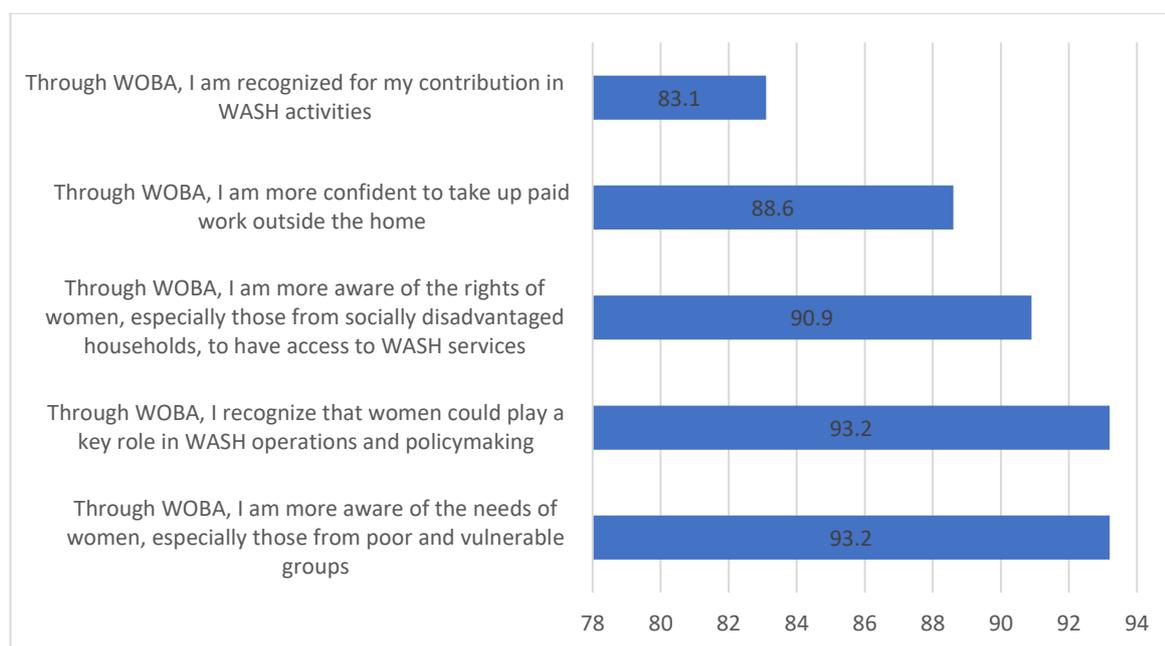


Figure 7. Proportions of survey respondents that indicated “personal changes since joining the WOBA” (Nghe An province)

### 6.5. Attitudes and norms on gender and participation

#### The participation of individuals and community in the activities to support the vulnerable groups

In Chau Cuong, the Commune authority and mass organizations also have activities to support the vulnerable groups. These are considered as charity activities and often mobilize many households in the village to participate. Especially for WU, the vulnerable women often receive the support and help from WU members in the different ways.

*Specifically, every year our village WU collect membership fees, we help women with more difficult circumstances. Well, like my village, every month, we elect a household that needs help. For example, her rice field can't be cultivated. Each WU member contributes one kilo of rice to help that woman because she is living in the village. If any women are sick, have to go to the hospital, we will visit and encourage them. (NA\_village WU)*

## **Changes in the attitudes of individual, organizations and community with the roles of women in society**

Participants in FGD and interviews all affirmed that gender equality has not really taken place in all aspects of life. Women still face more difficulties than men. Especially domestic violence sometimes still occurs in some households.

*On the radio, it says gender equality, but it's not really equal. Domestic violence still exists, it proves that equal rights are not yet available. (NA\_FGD)*

*I still see that there are some "patriarchal" families, where the daughters-in-law have to do all housework and taking care of the children. But that's not all, just a small number, just a few families. (NA\_CWU)*

However, the interviewees still assert that the gender inequality gap is gradually narrowing. As men have shared housework with women, especially in young families.

*Now there are a large number of progressive young people, men still do the housework, still do laundry and go to the market. But I see the men at middle age, very few ones go to the market. That is, in their opinion, the market, the food, and the children are women's business. (NA\_DWU)*

Gender stereotypes are also seen as reduced, less harsh on women.

*Q: Do you think people's views on gender equality have changed in recent years?*

*A: In recent years it has also been better than before. Before, it was still backward. The simplest thing is the daughter – in – laws are not allowed to wear shorts when going out.*

*Q: I mean, it is still thought that a few years ago?*

*A: Ten years. It's different now, it's comfortable now. The society is developing. The women can wear dress, make up when participating in a wedding, in the past, the women could wear the traditional dress of Thai people only.*

*Q: It means that other dresses were unacceptable, right?*

*A: Anyone wearing other dresses had to stay in bed room, were not allowed to welcome the guests. And now it's comfortable to welcome guests, talk to guests.*

*Q: It's changed now, hasn't it?*

*A: It has changed much. (NA\_CWU husband)*

They felt that the future will bring about gender equality not only in the law, but also in real life.

*Women are becoming more and more equal with the men, after next 10-15 years, this equality is not only under the law, but also in the reality (NA\_FGD)*

### **6.6. Participants' suggestions for improvement in women's empowerment**

Women themselves need to be empowered through providing the training and information so that they can be active in their work and taking on leadership positions in the organization.

*There should be training programs and propaganda for women so that they can access the information on supporting policy such as taking the initiative, implementing the project, similar to this WOBA project (NA - QH- Chairman of the Commune People's Committee)*

In order to create opportunities for women to participate in social activities and take up leadership positions, specific policies and regulations should be in place for men to share housework with women and to reduce women's time and burden for housework.

*If Vietnam had such policies such as when giving birth, the husband and wife take turns staying at home to take care of the children, it would certainly create more opportunities for women compared to now. (NA\_CWU)*

In addition, the regulations on the age of women to be assigned as leaders should also be reviewed. As analyzed above, women face more disadvantages than men if women over 45 years old are difficult to consider for leadership positions, while this age for men is 50 years old. Meanwhile, women who are 30-35 years old have to take maternity leave and take care of the small children.

*When I was young, I took care of children. By the time you have worked for a period of time to strive, you have not been recognized until your age is over. There are leadership positions where women are required under 30 years old or under 35 years old. But women at that age had to take care of other things, family affairs. (NA\_QH\_HP of district)*

In addition, the support policies from similar projects to WOBA need to expand the target beneficiaries to ensure that there are many households with difficult conditions that are not on the list of poor households provided by CPC still get benefits from the similar programs.

*My village has gained the title “the new rural commune”, so there are many households that are not in the category of poor households, near-poor households. But they don’t have latrines, they also want to be supported to build latrines. Then I would like to propose to expand the beneficiaries of the project's funding so that these households can have access to those sources of support so that they have the motivation to do it even though the support is not much (NA\_village WU staff)*

In addition, economic empowerment is very important dimension of women’s empowerment. Therefore, the allowances for participation in social activities also need to be increased so that women can have enough income when undertaking social work, as well as being the leader in the community. “The allowance is too low, but the work is too much, so they want to receive more support for gas and transportation costs” (NA\_village WU staff). In addition, local economic development projects are needed to increase employment opportunities for local women. So that women who can't go far to work are still able to participate in employment .

*The second thing is that we want the provincial authorities to develop a project to support women (in Chau Cuong commune and Quy Hop district), such as husbandry, cultivation. ... Because I feel that if women have the opportunity to work, they will have more income, and if they have income, they will be able to raise their voice more. (NA\_husband of CWU staff)*

Finally, gender equality activities should be propagated not only to women but also to men. These activities in the past were mostly undertaken by WU, so they are often directed at the main group of WU’s members. This is a gap in gender equality propaganda.

*I don't remember any program that propagandizes to the husbands, but I don't remember it anymore, but it should focus more on the husbands who often beat and curse the wives (NA\_Husband of Village WU staff)*

## 7. Case Study of Son Linh commune, Huong Son district, Ha Tinh province

### 7.1. Context

#### **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 km<sup>2</sup>), 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)<sup>17</sup>. 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 (2.98% in 2021), 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.

### 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 rate of poor households (68 households) and near-poor households (84 households) of the commune is still quite higher than that of the district, province and the whole country as follows:

*Table 4. Percentages of poor and near poor HH in Son Linh commune (Ha Tinh)*

	Unit	Son Linh Commune	Huong Son District <sup>18</sup>	Ha Tinh Province <sup>19</sup>	Whole country
Poor	%	7.6	5.4	4.68	2.23
Near poor	%	9.3	7.1	5.09	3.11

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 cities such as Hanoi, Hai Duong, and Bac Ninh. 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

<sup>17</sup> <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/>

<sup>18</sup> <https://baohatinh.vn/xa-hoi/ket-qua-ra-soat-ho-ngheo-ho-can-ngheo-cua-ha-tinh/224925.htm>

<sup>19</sup> <https://baohatinh.vn/xa-hoi/ket-qua-ra-soat-ho-ngheo-ho-can-ngheo-cua-ha-tinh/224925.htm>

of the people in the commune is still mainly agricultural, so unemployment is not available in the commune.

In the first 6 months of 2022, the local authority has organized some vocational trainings for people in the commune with 29 participants, of which mainly women account for 82.6%.

### **The female proportion 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%<sup>20</sup>. 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 City Party Committee, has 2 female one (1 3.3%<sup>21</sup>). 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<sup>22</sup>. And the percentage of female heads of villages in the commune is not much, 14.3%.

## **7.2. Access to training and resources**

### **The training**

From the representatives of the commune's local government, the commune's WU staff as well as their husbands who were consulted, it is said that every year the commune regularly organizes training courses related to agricultural extension training in cultivation and animal husbandry, programs related to labor export, programs on clean water, rural sanitation are also integrated into the activities of the commune under the new rural development program. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the training and communication was stopped.

*For example, training on livestock, farming, raising this worm and then tea for development, while raising livestock follows the model (HT-husband of WU staff)*

Due to the nature of each household's work and agricultural experience, there is no gender difference when more men or women participate in training.

*Training at the commune level is sometimes about labor export, but in my commune it is often related to rural agriculture, crops, animal husbandry..One of member in household who is the representative for household participated, if the husband is busy, the wife goes and if the wife is busy, the husband goes, so the number of men is similar to the number of women who participated in the training. Secondly, if the wife does the agricultural activities in the household, she goes, and if the husband does the husband goes. (HT- village WU staff)*

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<sup>20</sup> Nghị quyết 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị ngày 27/4/2007

<sup>21</sup> <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>

<sup>22</sup> Nghị quyết 11/NQ-TW-Bộ chính trị ngày 27/4/2007

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 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? ... (HT-DWU staff)*

### **Assessment of the training**

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. (HT-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.

*When I have a 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. ( HT-DWU)*

### **7.3. Activities in the family and community**

#### **Activities in the 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.*

*(HT\_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.*

*(HT\_CWU staff)*

There was consistency 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 (HT-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. (HT\_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. (HT- 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. (HT-FGD)*

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. ( HT-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. (HT\_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.

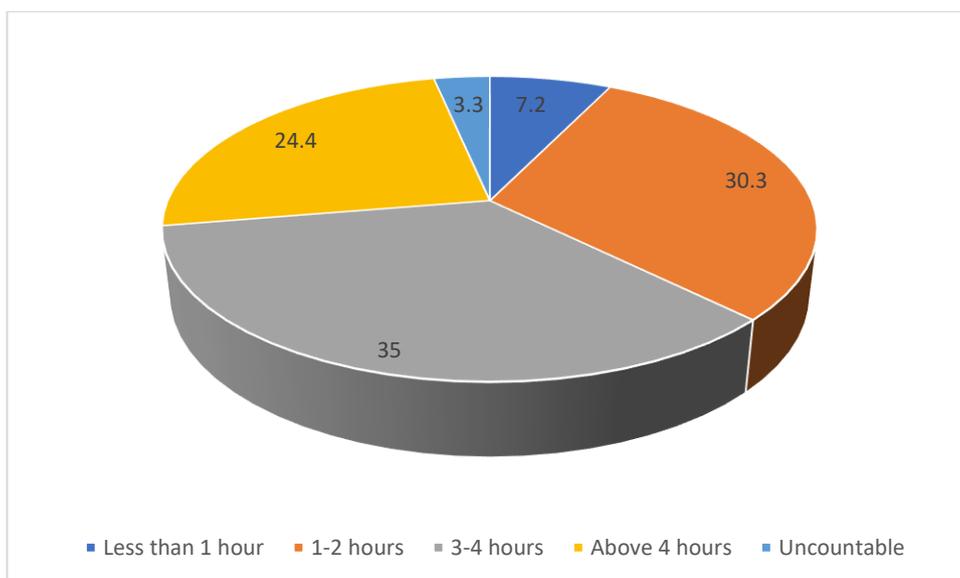


Figure 8. Proportions of survey respondents that indicated time spent on housework (Ha Tinh province)

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.

### Community activities

It can be seen that the movement of gymnastics, sports, entertainment ... in Son Linh commune is quite exciting and attract many participants. The participants in FGD analysed that 80% of participants in the sport activities are women while 20% are men. The big change from the women in Son Linh commune that they thought for themselves and knew how to arrange their household work and social work with entertainment activities. Along with that there is a sharing from their husbands.

*Change a lot, as I said, the first thing is to change for ourselves to untie ourselves when we arrange time for ourselves to exercise and join dancing and sport clubs and beautify yourself. But we still do housework, but we know how to organize it more logically, for example, to play the volleyball this afternoon, I have to arrange the tasks such as feeding cows, pigs, chickens and buffalos at noon, I reduce time of the nap at noon to do these tasks in advance so that we can have more time to participate. Sometimes we ask the husbands to support more. ( HT-village WU staff)*

It is said that both men and women participate in the new rural development movement. However, there are differences in charge of the roles in activities in relation to sanitation. About 80% of participants in sanitation activities and meeting in community are female because men still have to go out to earn money, they often do not have much time at home.

*All men go out for working, they don't stay at home so that there are women who stay at home participate in meetings, environmental sanitation activities. (HT-FGD)*

In addition, the WU also established An Binh Club on gender equality in the villages and attracted many members including both husband and wife to join, it also contribute to the change in gender equality in the commune. The lives of families are happier.

*Specifically, I have An Binh club in relation to gender equality that meets once every 2 quarters, the couples to share their stories, join Q&A games. There are about 25 members in the club. It was established by a previous project lasting for 3 years, but after the project, we still maintain it and WU is currently in charge of management. When participating like this, couples have the opportunity to interact with each other and the domestic violence also reduces, the couples seem to get along better (HT-FGD).*

74.9% the WU staff in the survey said in their households, there was no change in person in charge of activities in the family and in the community in the last 4 years. There is only 19.6% said that it has been changed. This is consistent with the statements from FGD and interviews that the changes in doing housework and participation in community activities of women has happened for about last 10 years.

### **Opportunities for women in participating 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. (HT\_CWU staff)*

From another side, the women even think that everything they can do due to the support and sympathy from the husband more 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. (HT\_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. (HT- village WU staff)*

### **Constraints**

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. (HT\_DWU staff)*

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 will be 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. (HT- village WU staff)*

*Frankly, the allowances to participate in the community activities are very limited. The husband must scarpify 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. (HT\_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 (HT-village WU staff)*

#### **7.4. Women's empowerment**

##### **Opportunities in making decision and leadership**

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. (HT\_ 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. (HT\_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. (HT-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. (HT-male leader of CPC)*

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

*In the previous tome, 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. ( HT- FGD)*

### **Constraints in decision making and leadership**

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... (HT-WU at village)*

A barrier from the women themselves, "peaceful" content with what they have, many women have "opportunities" in their hands but they also 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. (HT-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 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. (HT\_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. ( HT- 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.

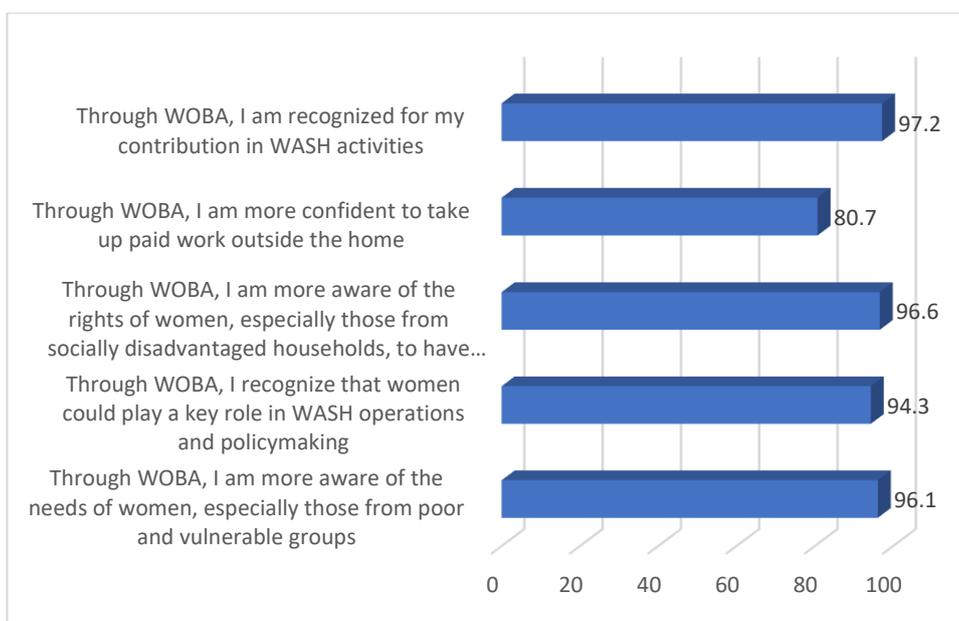


Figure 9. Proportions of survey respondents that indicated “personal changes through WOBA (Ha Tinh province)

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.

### 7.5. Attitudes and norms on gender and participation

#### The participation of individuals and community in the activities to support the vulnerable groups

The role of WU staff in the WOBA project has promoted disadvantaged households in the commune to access sanitation services, thereby changing the community's awareness.

*There is also some changes, the most change is the awareness of women about environmental sanitation, when they have access to this, they also change their opinion, in fact, local people's awareness also change much compared to before. (HT-male leader of CPC)*

Like many other communes, community initiatives in Son Linh commune have been promoted to increase the connection and sharing of difficult family members. Garbage collection is an example.

*Like classifying the garbage, collect garbage and raise funds, then sell to take money to buy chickens, aiming to support livelihood models for poor women (HT\_CWU staff)*

#### Changes in the attitudes of individual, organizations and community with the roles of women in society

The members of the WOBA project themselves have changed and their family members have also changed. They think they also need to be a good example in society and community

*In this project (WOBA), I learned the skills of persuading others, becoming more self-aware in cleaning the environment, and propagating to others that I have to self-clean in my family first then others will follow me (HT-HS- Son Linh – FGD)*

Women have a certain voice in the family and they themselves spread to other households. This has changed the rural areas like their commune. Women themselves also have many changes compared to before. They are confident, brave, knowledgeable, qualified and have promoted.

*When my wife goes out to work, she can expand her knowledge, then develop the village's movement such as sports, culture and art,... I'd like to... ( HT\_Husband of CWU staff)*

The roles and positions of women in the human resources related to the Standing Committee, Executive Committee of Commune Communist Party has been stated in the local resolution. Gender issue has received more attention than before and it has gradually improved.

*With the gender equality issue, women now are concerned as well, but in the past most of the Standing Committee were male. Since this term of Standing Committee, according to the required structure, the ratio of women must be ensured, when women are given more attention to be leaders... For example, in female leadership positions, the ratio of women has also been paid attention. (HT\_CWU staff)*

### **7.6. Participants' suggestions for improvement in women's empowerment**

The participants in FGDs and interviews suggested that the allowances for social activities should be increased to enhance the roles and positions of women. That help them focus more on their tasks instead of thinking of earning more income.

*I am the main breadwinner in my family, otherwise my wife has to find another work. The commune staff, the salary is very low without any allowances (HT\_Husband of CWU staff).*

In addition, 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.

*The model of Binh An club brings a lot of benefits for the relationship between men and women if it can be maintained for a long time. This is not only for the purpose of propaganda but to learn from each other, understand each other, both husband and wife will feel happy when they go to work tomorrow morning. (HT-HS- Sơn Lĩnh - PVS Chồng Cao Đình L)*

*Propaganda should be aimed at both men and women. In particular, it is necessary to propagate and encourage women to participate in social activities and enhance their positions. (HT\_CWU staff)*

To ensure that all have access to latrines, it is necessary to increase the number and subjects who have access to latrines. So that women in these households have the opportunity to use hygienic latrines.

*There are still some households with more difficult conditions who have not latrines. But the WU can't support them and they need to have access to social security. As in the extremely difficult households that have not been able to build toilets, there are also some women living there, so it is inequality. (HT\_DWU)*

## **8. Conclusions and implications for policy and practices of women's empowerment**

The survey results and five case studies show that there are both opportunities and constraints for women in participating in social activities including WOBA activities, as well as in decision making and leadership.

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

There are many opportunities for women, from both the woman's personal perspective, her family and the community and society.

From a woman's perspective of herself, women's personality traits such as carefulness and responsibility which are the factors make women more trusted. This is identified in all five case studies, with the women in different ethnicities and in different regions. Women having degree and economic independence are also considered as favorable factors in women's participation and decision-making. This story is very obvious in the case of Hoa Binh, when women are breadwinners, they have a much stronger voice than women in other places where their economic condition is much dependent on the husbands. In addition, women having much less alcohol consumption that is also a factor for women to be trusted to make reasonable decisions at any time. Although the statistical data<sup>23</sup> in Vietnam show that 64% of adult men and 10% adult women use alcohol, this factor seems to be more prevalent in the mountainous areas in the study such as Lac Son (Hoa Binh), Quy Hop (Nghe An) or Huong Son (Ha Tinh).

From a family perspective, parents-in-law and husbands who support the women are the main opportunities for women to participate and take up the leadership positions. In addition to agreement, the husband also shows sympathy and do housework, which also helps the woman to better undertake her work. A good economic condition is also a factor for women to feel more secure when participating in social activities as well as holding certain positions in the government structure. These factors are found in all cases in the study, including the Northern, the Central or the Southern provinces.

From a social perspective, the law on gender equality in the family is the basis for regulations on the proportion of women in the leadership structure. Although none of the 5 case studies have reached the target female ratio, achieving the current female ratio is a major change in local leadership planning. In addition, women are also respected and cared more. The movements to promote women's participation are also opportunities for women to participate in social activities, make decisions and keep leadership positions. As evidenced in the cases of Quy Hop (Nghe An) and Nghi Son (Thanh Hoa), the more attention women receive from leaders at all levels, the more opportunities for women to participate in decision-making and leadership positions. The explosion of information technology, which gives women the opportunity to access a lot of information to improve their knowledge and capacity to serve the process of participating in social activities and undertaking the work of the leadership positions. This is better utilized by young CWU staff, such as the CWU staff of the cases in Hoa Binh and Nghe An, the ability to learn and use information from information technology faster than CWU staff in other provinces.

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

The women in this study still face many constraints in the participation, decision-making and leadership. These constraints also exist in all three aspects: individual, family and community and society.

From a personal woman's perspective, feelings of inferiority, lack of self-satisfaction, lack of determination, and unwillingness to strive are constraints that women cause for themselves. Gender stereotypes are not only from men, but also from women themselves. This finding is evident in all five cases in the study. As women often let themselves be "attached to housework". If a woman can take up their current leader position well, she thinks it is because of the husband who has taken care of the housework and sympathizes with her work rather than from her own capacity and efforts. This is more evident in the cases of Chau Cuong - Nghe An, and Son Linh - Ha Tinh which belong to the mountainous area than in Tan Hung - Ben Tre (Mekong River Delta), Hai Thuong - Thanh Hoa (industrialization zone)

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<sup>23</sup> <https://vtv.vn/xa-hoi/cu-3-nam-gioi-lai-co-1-nguoi-uong-ruou-bia-o-muc-nguy-hai-20220707182104714.htm>

According to the Ministry of Health, the percentages of dangerous alcohol consumption has increased over the years, especially among men.

and Yen Nghiep - Hoa Binh (the high percentage of women going away for working in industrial zones). Self-understanding, communication and social relations are also considered as obstacles for women in participating in social activities, decision-making and leadership. It is because men are often more confident than women. This constraining factor is found in all five cases in the study.

From a family perspective, the views and opinions of husbands and parents-in-law are considered a major obstacle for women. If the husband or parents-in-laws do not like the wife/daughter-in-law to be the leader and do not doing housework, then women will not be able to participate in social activities. This is emphasized more strongly in Son Linh (Ha Tinh) and Chau Cuong (Nghe An), where women's family economy is still dependent on their husbands, and the wife's income from social activities or commune staff is insignificant compared to the total household income. If the household economy is difficult, women are still burdened by the household economy, which also hinders women. The role of women in childbirth and breastfeeding also greatly reduces women's opportunities to enter and take up leadership positions. This is found in all five cases in the study.

From a social perspective, the gender stereotype that women have to do housework and take care of their husbands and children hinders women a lot. This happens in four out of five communes in the studies. Only in Yen Nghiep (Hoa Binh), the men have to be responsible for doing all housework when their wives go away for working in the industrial zone. Now, it is normal to see the men taking care the children and being familiar with housework. It is more important that the men themselves feel happy. Regulations on leadership age, working experience, being a Communist Party member also make it difficult for women to hold leadership positions in all five cases in the study. In the process of communication on gender equality, it is always assumed that that is for women, so the participation of men in communication activities is limited. For example, under WOBA, both men and women were encouraged to participate in the training and communication on gender equality and menstrual hygiene in all five communes, however, there were very few men participating. The low level of allowance also makes it impossible for women to fully focus on social activities. This is clear in Yen Nghiep (Hoa Binh) and Tan Hung (Ben Tre) where the women can find other jobs with better salary. And finally, WU is only considered as an advisor department under the direction of the government and the communist Party. Therefore, WU's decision-making is limited. This happens in all communes in the study. This is a challenge for any interventions with the purpose of increase the decision making and leadership positions for WU.

In summary, the key factors affect women's participation in social activities, decision-making and holding leadership positions, are ethnicity (the Kinh or ethnic minorities), geographical location (mountainous or delta, rural or industrialization areas), economic condition of household, income, gender stereotypes, the development of information technology, intervention programs and projects to improve women's capacity and skills. Climate change such as in Ben Tre and Nghe An is also considered as an indirect cause in hindering women when income from agriculture is unstable due to changes in weather and natural disasters.

*Research Question 3. What implications do WOBA offer for policy and practices of women's empowerment in similar contexts of WOBA Vietnam?*

The government's report on the implementation of the national objectives on gender equality in 2019 and for the period 2011-2020, mentioned that all three targets of the objective 1 "To increase women's participation in leadership and managerial positions to gradually narrow the gender gap in the political sphere" are under-achieved.<sup>24</sup> This underachievement is affirmed in the WOBA project areas in which the objective to increase women's participation in managerial and leadership positions has failed to reach

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<sup>24</sup> Government Report No. 474/BC-CP dated October 6, 2020 on the implementation of the national objectives on gender equality in 2019 and for the period 2011-2020

the requisite target. The percentage of female leaders/ heads of a sector or locality is very low. Comparisons with international statistics have revealed 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<sup>25</sup>. As discussed in the analysis of constraints of women in participation above, the age difference between men and women in current leadership structure is hindering the women in take up the leadership positions. The implications for policy are multifold. Firstly, it is necessary to remove the age difference between men and women in the leadership structure. Secondly, the target roadmap for the percentage of women in leadership should be developed and accompanied by specific solutions for each locality to ensure that the set target can be achieved. Thirdly, there should be policies and regulations to support women to have access to appropriate training, to improve their qualifications and degrees and be appointed to leadership positions after pregnancy and breastfeeding period to create favorable conditions for the appointment time. In addition, with the localities where the ethnic minorities are living, the ethnic minority women also should be encouraged to participate in trainings, social activities and providing the priority to hold the leadership positions.

Some practical implications for future projects include communication activities related to gender equality should be carried out for both genders in all communes. Training courses should be organized for both men and women to participate similar to WOBA's activities; however, it is necessary to consider the relevant way to encourage the participation of men in the communication activities in each commune. For example, in Hoa Binh, the men actively participated in the activities of Farmers' Union, so WU can collaborate with Farmers' Union to organize the related communication activities. In Ben Tre, the participation of local residents in the meetings/trainings organized by the mass organizations is very limited, so the communication at the household level should be undertaken; for example, "happy family club" models with both men and women participating are good practices for the couples to share and understand each other better. These models can be applied for different areas in the different ways to adapt to existing forums.

WOBA has provided opportunities for the poor, near poor and GESI HHs to access WASH services and the output-based subsidy model is relevant to encourage household participation in improving accessibility of WASH services themselves. However, it is necessary to expand the target group for subsidies. For example, it is necessary to consider other economically disadvantaged groups that are not included in the list of poor and near-poor households. Because, without the subsidies, these HHs can't access WASH services. This happens in all project areas.

Finally, women's economic empowerment is a critical factor for women's empowerment and gender quality. When women are economically independent, they have a better voice and better participation in social activities. Therefore, any project aiming for empowering women requires an integrated approach to provision of resources. As WOBA directly focuses on interventions to empower women in WASH, the effectiveness of these interventions can be improved by additional interventions, especially livelihood and employment development, and income improvements for women.

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<sup>25</sup> WEF (2020): Global Gender Gap Report

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