

RESEARCH FOR ALL PODCAST SERIES 1

EPISODE 3 – GENDER EQUALITY

Full transcript

Nguyen: Hello! I am Nguyen Nguyen, SUMERNET fellow. Our guest in this episode is Dr. Le Thi Van Hue, Gender Equality Adviser for SUMERNET. She is currently a senior researcher and lecturer at Central Institute for Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at Vietnam National University in Hanoi. Dr. Hue, welcome!

Dr. Hue: Thank you very much for the introduction. And it is my great pleasure in this episode.

Nguyen: Thank you, Dr. Hue. So, can we start with why it is important to integrate gender perspectives in research projects?

Dr. Hue: Thank you very much for your question. I think before I answer your question, I just first talk a bit about the definition. So, what is gender? According to the UNDP Resource Guide on mainstreaming gender in water management, gender refers to the different roles and responsibilities that men and women and the relations between them.

Gender does not simply refer to women or men, but to the way that qualities, behaviors, and identities determine the process of socialization. Gender is generally associated with unequal power and access to choices and resources. The different positions of women and men are influenced by historical, religious, economic, and cultural realities. These relations and responsibilities can and do change over time.

Why gender? According to Mason and colleagues in 1916, adopting a gender approach requires projects to recognize social differences, role expectations and the need accorded to women and men and between people within these gender categories. This means going beyond the women-men binary to look at the intersection between and in the action of different social identities; for example, gender status, ethics, class, ages, religions, and disability.

Why is gender important to water management research? According to the Chapter two in UNDP Resource Guide on Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management, the key principles of integrated with the resources management include water should be treated as an economic, social, and environmental good. Water policies should focus on the management of water as a whole, and not just as on the provision of

water. Governments should facilitate and enable the sustainable development of water resources by the provision of integrated water policies and regulatory frameworks. Water resources should be managed at the lowest appropriate level. Women and men should be recognized as central to the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

When we talk about water resources management, we should focus on general issues. For example, like identifying the social context, which includes a gender analysis for water management project as part of the planning process. Or we are ensuring equity of participation in developing community-based plans for the management of water resources.

So now I would like to give you an example to see why we should look at the gender issues when we do research on, for example, like women's differentiated vulnerability and adaptation to climate related agricultural water scarcity in rural central Vietnam because we know that the community is not homogeneous; and women even in the same community, but they are not the same. They don't accept, you know, in the same manner to climate change. So, in this article, the authors use the film-based study, and use the mixed methods approach that combines both qualitative and quantitative. They analyzed the data to investigate the differences in women's vulnerability and adaptation. So, as they tried to highlight the heterogeneity of women as a group. And they are in the sectional dynamics as they adapt to increasing agricultural water scarcity on their rural livelihood. The findings; the authors have come up with so that social differences, including gender, class, household headship, age, and stage of life shape women's differentiated experiences in vulnerability and access to water, to forest land, and credits. And the most important thing about this study is that it marks their adaptation differentiation to climate related agricultural water scarcity. The authors stressed that existing development policies can cause inequality in resource access in practice, running the risk of further marginalizing certain groups of women. So, they also found that the current national target program to respond to climate change of Vietnam is applied to the issue of women's differentiated vulnerability and adaptive capacity. So, they recommend that these development and climate programs have to be redesigned to accommodate more context specific policies, instead of a one size fits all packages. That will effectively address women or men's differential needs and unequal relations and circumstances

Nguyen: Okay. Thank you, Dr. Hue. That's very clear. Your perspectives and examples are very useful. So maybe the more experienced researchers have done

it and they have a lot of know-how. But for like, say, early career researchers, do you have any advice for them on how gender perspectives can be better integrated into projects?

Dr. Hue: I think the young researcher, when they do research, they need to integrate gender issues into your research. It is a very important as I mentioned earlier that if you don't integrate the gender issues into your research, that means it would miss a lot of important facts and issues in that picture.

But being a young researcher, I think when you are in the field, you should be confident and critical, but be a good listener, and try to involve women in your water project from beginning to the end of the project. That means when you just go there to talk about your project. You talk about your objectives and the activities of the project and try to involve people, you know, like women, an officer from, you know, different levels like a provincial level, district level, communal level or even village level. So at the provincial level, you could involve women at the department of natural resources and environment, or the department of agriculture and rural development. It's depending on your project. Or at the district level, it would be the same. And at the commune level, it would be like the head of women's union. Or at the district level, the head of the women's union at the district level. And at the village level, it's the same. You should involve the head of women's union in the village level.

And for me, I normally employ the citizen science approach because I would like to bring the local women to my project so that they would have an experience and then they could become a local researcher. And that, you know, I would like to provide them the opportunity to become researchers in my project design (and) data collection. And even when I have, you know, analyzed the data and then I come up with findings. I would like to go back and present my findings to them so that they can give me feedback to see what I have understood is right or wrong; or how can I adjust my findings and especially for the research findings.

Definitely, I would like to bring them, you know, to those workshops so that, you know, they can better understand the research findings that I have done with them. Those citizens science approach also provides them with the capacity and confidence to raise their voices and opinions water resources are threatened. For example, in the case of, you know, like a southern Vietnam in the Mekong River Delta, when the water for this season, people have, you know, faced with drought and saline intrusion, but they should understand that, for example, China has kept a lot of water upstream. So that's why little water just goes all the way down downstream where they live. So, if they know about that, you know, they can make their voices heard. So, I think it is very important to let them be involved in the entire process of the project.

Nguyen: Thank you, Dr. Hue, for those tips. They're very useful and especially the citizen science approach. I think it's very interesting. The last question is, do you have any suggestions for resources that we can link to so that everyone can consider it in our research?

Dr. Hue: Yeah, I think the young researchers could do research or, you know, read journals, for example, 'Gender and Development', 'Water Alternatives' or 'Integrating gender into water'. And then they have a practical guide. I think it's very interesting. They just go, you know, like a step by step (on) how to integrate gender into water resources management. And they talk about what gender is and water resources management is and how to interlink the two aspects together. I think this one is very useful, even for me. I have read that one, and then I found it very useful for me before I go to the field and even for me when I designed my research.

Or another one is the online journal like 'the Center for Global International and Regional Studies' or 'the Journal on Environment and Urbanization' or 'Climate and Development'. That is the publication that is also online. So, I think in order to read those journals that would guide you, like what kind of approach that you can use. You know when you go to the field, all of these information would help you, you know, to get prepared and what you would expect in the field and how you can integrate women; for example, like a gender issues into your data collection process.

For example, I was thinking about like why the gender issues is important in the Mekong region. Why? Why do we care? You know, and always keep in mind that gender relations and inequalities influence collective responses to water resources management issues. Women and men tend to organize in different ways, and women often face specific obstacles to participating in a project, joining a water users committee or providing input into a concentration section.

And I would love to talk to you more about gender, water masculinity and water governance and then when you are in the field, you need to recognize that women as a resource users and managers. For example, like in case irrigation and rights to water or water and masculinity. For example, like a gender in irrigation, has mostly been about making women visible, documenting gender patterns of what the work and gender division of rights and responsibilities as a first step to recognizing and establishing women's importance as a water actor and gaining legitimacy for their demands on water rights and power. And for the water governance, you just know, look at the aspects like resources and mechanism outcomes. We need to look beyond the mechanism for accessing water at the local level to wider processes of governance in order to understand how gender inequality is embedded and reinforced.

Water governance cannot be good governance if there is no deliberate attempt to address the institutions, policies, legal frameworks and technology instruments that both perpetuate gender inequalities, a gender approach in governance should be an integral part of stepping up governance structures and mechanisms.

Nguyen: Thank you so much, Dr. Hue, and I think that's a great way to end our episode today. Thank you once again for sharing your knowledge and experience with us. It's been a real pleasure talking to you.

Dr. Hue: Thank you very much. It was my great pleasure to be in this episode as well. Thank you.

Link to the resources mentioned in the conversation:

UNDP Resource Guide: Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management

https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/environment-energy/water_governance/resource-guide-mainstreaming-gender-in-water-management.html

Gender and Development Journal

<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/cgde20>

Water Alternatives Journal

<http://www.water-alternatives.org/>

Journal on Environment and Urbanization

<https://www.environmentandurbanization.org/>

Climate and Development Journal

<https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/tcld20>