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Promoting gender equality among micro and small enterprises in the wood-processing industry – findings and recommendations from Viet Nam

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Authorship note

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1. Executive summary

Viet Nam has ratified major international human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, ILO Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration, and ILO Convention 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation). It has made important gender commitments embodied in national laws, such as the Law on Gender Equality (2006) and the Labour Code (in force since 2021) and adopted national strategies such as the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030.

While progress in the legal and policy framework is obvious, the implementation of gender commitments on the ground is an issue of concern. A review of the literature on gender-related issues facing workers in Viet Nam’s wood sector finds, in summary, that:

- Gender-based occupational segregation in the wood sector is pronounced
- Gender-based pay gaps persist
- Women are poorly represented in the sector and have limited decision-making power

The European Forest Institute (EFI) supports timber-based micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the Mekong region to operate legally and sustainably.¹ In the context of this support, and building on the literature review, EFI conducted a gender analysis of Dong Ky and Van Diem, two “wood villages” in the north of Viet Nam that produce furniture and other timber products. The analysis aimed to identify gaps between national gender commitments and the situation on the ground among the micro- and small-scale wood processors. It also characterised the main actors along the villages’ timber supply chains to identify opportunities for gender-related activities addressing these gaps.

Data collection was conducted through direct observations and 29 in-depth interviews with owners and workers of wood processing workshops, furniture and timber traders, and community-based organisations in Dong Ky and Van Diem. While analysis focused on the two wood villages, the recommendations are broadly applicable to other wood villages and the micro- and small-scale wood processing industry in Viet Nam.

Through in-depth interviews, the study found that:

- Roles assigned to men and women in the wood processing sector are strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context and norms and traditions. This is evident in wood villages where gender roles tend to mirror the typical characteristics of Vietnamese rural family structures and most wood processing workshops are family businesses owned by men.
- Women in the sector earn lower wages than men because men play the main roles in key production activities, such as wood purchasing, sawmilling, carving and assembly. These higher paid activities are perceived as unsuitable for women. Business owners assign women to tasks seen as “lighter,” mostly in the finishing process of furniture making, such as sanding. These activities are paid much less. Women support financial management, marketing and sales, but decisions are often taken by men. Women’s contributions are not always visible and tend to be unrecognised.

- Women's opportunities for vocational training are limited, in turn restricting their employment opportunities. Men are encouraged to learn woodworking from childhood to develop a career as master craftsmen, foremen and wood processing workshop owners. Men generally have better opportunities to access production resources than women. Most wood processing workshops in the wood villages, particularly in Dong Ky, are traditional operations inherited by the current owners from their parents and grandparents. A higher chance of inheriting a wood processing workshop means that men will inherit land, factories, machines, equipment and customers. These are important resources to maintain and develop production, make profits, and improve their power in the family and society. In contrast, women are usually expected to take care of housework and are seldom given the opportunity to learn woodworking. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to be hired for better paid tasks such as carving. Vocational training centres do not organise professional woodworking training that includes apprenticeships.
- The Labour Code is not fully adhered to among household businesses in the wood processing sector, because it is common practice to hire workers without formal labour contracts. Women are disproportionately disadvantaged by the lack of adherence with labour provisions, because they cannot access any welfare benefits for example during pregnancy and child rearing. Companies that are registered as enterprises generally have greater compliance with the Labour Code than household timber processors. Enterprises tend to hire workers under formal contracts and pay monthly wages. Most household businesses pay piece rate wages and use informal workers.
- In wood villages, women are more vulnerable to crises, such as market declines and material shortages, because their employment is more tenuous than men's. When orders decline, business owners respond by reducing production and female workers are at a higher risk of losing their jobs. Business owners tend not to let go highly skilled carpenters (mostly men) during downtimes.
- Some business owners utilise their family's everyday living space as wood processing area and install machinery and equipment that have a negative impact on the living environment. This creates occupational health and safety risks and further disadvantages women who are responsible for taking care of the home.

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations, which are mainly directed at local authorities, in particular the People's Committees of districts and communes. Cooperation and coordination among the relevant stakeholders is essential, in particular between the authorities and industry associations, as well as between industry associations and civil society organisations (CSOs). Coordinating activities with specialised administrative agencies at the provincial and district level, such as the Department of Industry and Trade and the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, is also needed.

Arrangements in wood processing workshops

- Local authorities responsible for inspecting the wood processing workshops could review the implementation of the Labour Code, in particular workshop arrangements and layout of production to detect potential occupational health and safety risks that need improvement. While conducting the review, they should assess the access to suitable workplace facilities for women, as mandated by Article 13 of the Gender Equality Law, Chapter X of the 2019 Labour Code and Section 2 of Decree 145

enforcing the Labour Code. With the support of the authorities, industry associations and wood processing workshop owners could work together to improve the workshop arrangements.

- Improving the workshops offers an opportunity to reflect on the equipment and arrangements that would create better opportunities for women to be engaged in wood processing, in line with the policy and legal framework on gender equality in Viet Nam.

Awareness-raising activities

- CSOs, industry associations and government authorities could cooperate to carry out communication activities to raise awareness about labour laws and policies associated with wood processing. Issues of occupational health and safety, job stability and social issues in the wood villages are important concerns for the government. Therefore, the coordination among civil society, associations and government authorities would bring about positive impacts. In addition, the local authorities, the People's Committees of districts and communes/wards oversee the timber processors and have influence on business owners. Activities should be carried out in cooperation with these institutions.
- Industry associations and CSOs could cooperate to raise awareness about gender equality, in particular gender roles to enhance the position of women in the family and society through trainings for owners of wood processing workshops, and female and male employees. For example, case studies telling the story of female business owners who successfully managed wood processing workshops might motivate other female business owners to cooperate and replicate the case studies.
- CSOs and industry associations could encourage and support the establishment of businesswomen clubs or associations in wood villages. These clubs would promote the role of businesswomen and women's ownership, and provide female business owners with access to information and support. The clubs could connect to the Social Policy Bank and the Division of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs at district level for access to finance and support.

Trainings

- Government authorities, with the support of local and national industry associations, could disseminate knowledge about policies and laws in force on wood processing and business activities, and forms of support for micro and small operators. Technical trainings could be used for this purpose. Including topics related to production, financial management, marketing and sales in trainings will raise the interest of business owners. Through these trainings, business owners would learn about the 2019 Labour Code's provisions and their obligation to "ensure gender equality and implementation of measures to promote gender equality in recruitment, job assignment, training, working hours and rest periods, salaries and other policies," as stated in Article 136.
- With the support of donor projects, industry associations could support timber processors with marketing research to better understand the preferences of different market segments, design new products and access new markets. Knowledge in this area will help timber processors develop their businesses, create more jobs and invest in machinery. This will have an impact on gender because households will have an incentive to pursue enterprise registration, improve working conditions and

diversify their workforce. It will also increase the use of domestic timber and reduce reliance on imports.

- Government authorities and industry associations could promote enterprise registration of wood processing workshops, which involves:
 - Providing support on legal procedures for enterprise registration
 - Providing information and knowledge related to the benefits of registering as enterprises
 - Providing information and knowledge related to labour recruitment, vocational training, mentoring and skill improvement for employees
 - Encouraging the implementation of social insurance policies and health insurance for employees

Further studies

- Academia could conduct further in-depth studies to understand the needs and aspirations of female workers for vocational training. Vocational training schools and industry associations could follow up on the findings, including by customising training courses to encourage women's participation, looking towards improving the status of female workers.
- The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs could support studies on wage pricing mechanisms for workers in wood villages, providing an objective basis and recommendations to reduce the gender-based income gap in villages. Industry associations and local authorities could follow up on the studies' findings.

2. Introduction

There are some 300 wood villages in Viet Nam specialising in producing furniture and other timber products. These villages are interesting from a gender perspective because they include many actors in the timber supply chain within an organised microcosm. These include the importers, larger timber traders (wholesalers), smaller retailers, sawmills, large processors, subcontractors providing services to the larger processors, furniture traders and other service providers (for maintenance and repairs, transportation, etc.). All these actors include female and male workers with different roles and tasks.

Building on findings from existing literature and based on interviews with MSMEs in two wood villages – Dong Ky (Tu Son town, Bac Ninh province) and Van Diem (Thuong Tin District, Hanoi) – this study aims to shed light on the roles and tasks of men and women engaged in wood processing and trading.

The villages are well known for their traditional carved furniture. Located in the Red River Delta, Dong Ky is 25 km from the centre of Hanoi in the Northeast, while Van Diem is 35 km to the South. MSMEs in Dong Ky and Van Diem mainly use tropical timber from natural forests, mostly rosewood. Both villages rely on imported timber for their products, use similar volumes of timber every year and have similar levels of capital investment. However, there are important differences between the two villages. These include a higher proportion of households without business registration in Dong Ky, and Van Diem's reliance on domestic markets compared to Dong Ky's export orientation. Another key difference is the practice of hiring workers from outside the village in Van Diem while most of the workers in Dong Ky are from the village itself.

This study characterises the main actors along the villages' timber supply chains, to better understand their roles, influence and benefits to others. The goal of this analysis is to identify gender-related opportunities for micro and small enterprises in the timber sector with a focus on the two wood villages.

3. Methodology

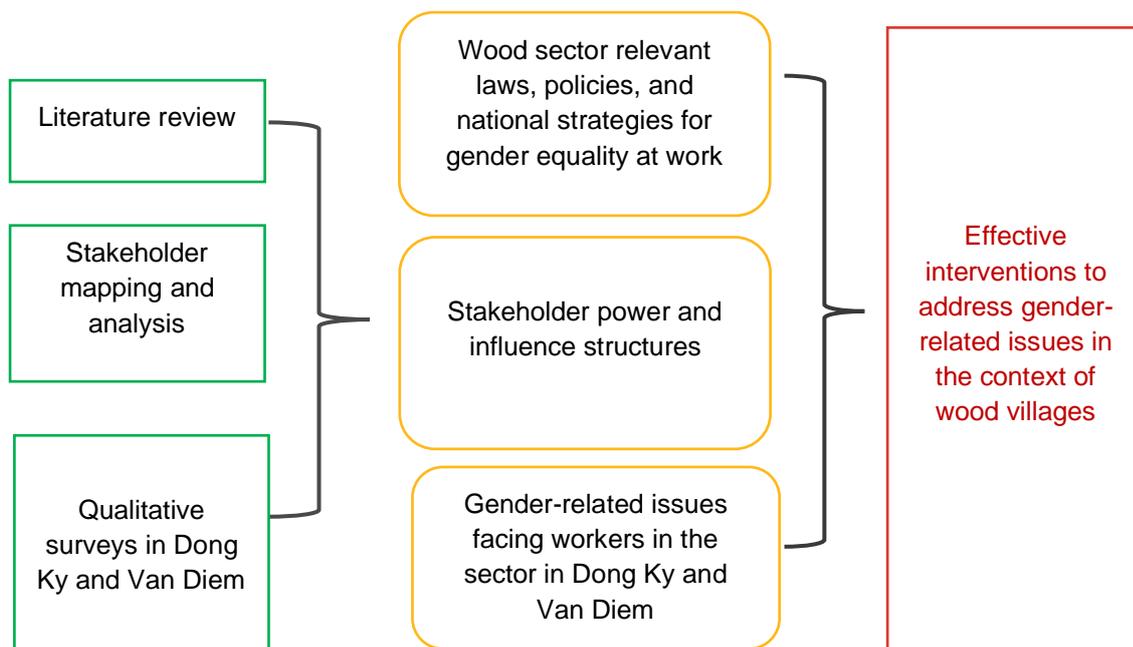
The first step in the study’s data collection was the review and analysis of legal documents, secondary papers relating to existing interventions/initiatives/programmes in the timber sector in Viet Nam in general, and the timber industry in the wood villages.

Data sources included:

- International agreements Viet Nam has subscribed to (labour and employment in general and relevance for the wood sector).
- National laws, policies, strategies, and national programmes on ensuring and promoting gender equality that are relevant to the wood sector in Viet Nam.
- Good practices of interventions/initiatives/programmes on promoting gender equality in the wood sector.
- Existing stakeholder mapping and analysis of relevant stakeholders in wood villages.

The second step was to carry out field interviews among MSME owners and workers. Please see Annex 1 and 2 for more information on the sample and in-depth interview questions.

3.1 Analytical framework



3.2 Critical research questions

- **To what extent do gender relations affect men's and women's access to the productive resources in wood production and trade?** These include physical assets such as land, capital, and tools, and intangible assets such as knowledge, education, and information (at household and enterprise level).
- **What are the perceptions that affect men's and women's behaviour, participation, and decision-making capacity in the production chain?** To what extent do these perceptions facilitate or limit men's and women's access to education, services, and economic opportunities in the wood production industry.
- **What are the norms that influence men's and women's type of activities they engage in and their roles and responsibilities?** The analysis focuses on men's and women's different roles, the timing and place where their production activities occur, their capacity to participate in different types of works/jobs, and their decision-making or work-related position mobility.
- **Do women and men workers have access to training to improve their skills and workplace competence?** The analysis explores whether the opportunity for enhancing skills, including skills in operating woodworking machines for women, would result in an increase of income for women workers and more benefits for employers.
- **What are the differences in men's and women's formal and informal rights, and how are they affected by the rules of production facilities?**
- **What are the power structures and who are the powerful actors in the various steps of the supply chain?** This understanding would inform who has, can acquire and can extend the power over the assets, contracting, income and benefits from production. Power also determines the way men and women are assigned to different types of tasks, their roles, employment status and job security.
- **What are the roles and responsibilities of men and women in the context of crises such as market decline, material shortages or outbreaks such as COVID-19? What are the impacts on them respectively?**

4. The policy context for gender equality in Viet Nam's wood sector

4.1 International conventions

The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) is one of the major human rights conventions under the United Nations, adopted by the UN General Assembly in December 1979. Viet Nam signed CEDAW in 1980 and ratified it one year later.

International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions ratified by Viet Nam include Convention 98 on the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining, Convention 100 on Equal Remuneration, and Convention 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation).

4.2 National laws, regulations, and frameworks

In 2006, the first-ever Law on Gender Equality of Viet Nam was enacted with a view to mandating governmental agencies to fulfil their responsibilities for gender equality and laying a legal foundation for the handling of violations in the field of gender equality. The Law covers responsibilities of agencies, organisations, families, and individuals in exercising gender equality.ⁱⁱ It aims to eliminate gender discrimination, create equal opportunities for men and women in socioeconomic and human resources development, reach substantial equality between men and women, and to establish and enhance cooperation and mutual assistance between men and women in all fields of social and family life.

Since then, the country's gender equality commitments have been embodied in several other policies and measures. The National Plan of Action for the Advancement of Women (1997–2000) was the first of this kind. **It was followed by the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-20 and 2021–2030, the Action Plans on Gender Equality 2011-15 and 2016-20, and other legislation defining the responsibilities for the implementation of the Law.**

Clear goals to ensure non-discrimination in the workplace, including an equal share of new jobs for men and women, and the reduction of the burden of family responsibilities on women, are included in the National Strategies on Gender Equality.

The Law on Gender Equality (2006)ⁱⁱⁱ enacts principles and measures to promote gender equality in the fields of politics, economics, education and training, science and technology, culture, sports, health and family.

Progress has been made in developing a supportive legal framework and gender-based discrimination in the workplace is prohibited through a number of legal documents. However, Viet Nam faces a number of implementation challenges, both in terms of specifying the operational guidelines for businesses (i.e., decrees and circulars) and in promoting enterprise and industry compliance through a combination of incentives and enforcement (i.e., labour inspection).

5. Literature review

A review of the literature on gender-related issues facing workers in Viet Nam's wood sector finds, in summary, that:

- Gender-based occupational segregation in the wood sector is pronounced.
- Gender-based pay gaps persist.
- Women are poorly represented in the sector and have limited decision-making power.

These findings are sustained by findings and analysis from in-depth interviews conducted in Dong Ky and Van Diem.

5.1 Gender-based occupational segregation

Available studies indicate that gender-related job segregation is prevalent. The diagnosis of small and micro enterprises (SMEs) in the Mekong region conducted by NEPCo and Forest Trends in 2018^{iv} suggests that male labourers tend to work in stages of wood processing that require more physical power or are in hazardous conditions, like heavy lifting, loading logs to machinery, and operating heavy machinery. Men also mainly take care of work such as selecting timber, designing products and managing workers. Female labourers tend to work on less demanding physical activities, such as sanding and polishing and also on financial management, shop management and sales.

A study conducted by VIFORES and Forest Trends in 2018^v suggests that processors in wood villages tend to employ male workers because they are seen as able to participate in many stages of the manufacturing process such as sawing, carpentry and spraying paints. Business owners generally consider these jobs not suitable for women.

5.2 Gender pay gaps

The analysis of gender and wood-based value chains in Viet Nam conducted by Forest Trends in 2019^{vi} shows that female labourers are more disadvantaged as regards access to higher-paid jobs, and women are generally paid less than men for the same work. On average (across all tasks) men were paid about 60% more than women. Respondents to Forest Trends' survey justified the difference on the basis that women's work was less physical and less skilled.

5.3 Representation and decision-making power

The literature shows that women experience significant gender inequalities in wood-based MSMEs compared to men. They have lower job security, less decision-making power, less access to credit and technical assistance, and are poorly represented in trade associations. Forest Trends' 2019 analysis found that women rarely participated in meetings or trainings, partly due to their restricted mobility compared to men. This limited their acquisition of technical and business skills, as well as their understanding of legal and policy issues.

Other studies confirm these findings. For example, a study conducted by the Hanoi Women's Association of SMEs and the Mekong Business Initiative in 2016^{vii} shows that timber-related trade associations are male-dominated and state-supported Women's Unions are not tackling this problem. According to the study, women's access to information and opportunities to develop their decision-making capacity is very limited.

The literature also suggests the underlying cause of gender inequity in wood-based value chains is prevailing cultural attitudes around women's domestic roles (including child-rearing and other household duties). As highlighted by Forest Trends in their 2019 analysis, these attitudes often discourage women from participating in meetings or having stronger decision-making influence.

6. The position of women in the wood processing sector: key findings

Analysis from in-depth interviews in Dong Ky and Van Diem identified the following key findings:

- Roles assigned to men and women in the wood processing sector are strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context and norms and traditions. This is evident in wood villages where gender roles tend to mirror the typical characteristics of Viet Nameese rural family structures and most wood processing workshops are family businesses owned by men.
- Women in the sector earn lower wages than men because men play the main roles in key production activities, such as wood purchasing, sawmilling, carving and assembly. These higher paid activities are perceived as unsuitable for women. Business owners assign women to tasks seen as “lighter,” mostly in the finishing process of furniture making, such as sanding. These activities are paid much less. Women support financial management, marketing and sales, but decisions are often taken by men. Women’s contributions are not always visible and tend to be unrecognised.
- Women’s opportunities for vocational training are limited, in turn restricting their employment opportunities. Men are encouraged to learn woodworking from childhood to develop a career as master craftsmen, foremen and wood processing workshop owners. Men generally have better opportunities to access production resources than women. Most wood processing workshops in the wood villages, particularly in Dong Ky, are traditional operations inherited by the current owners from their parents and grandparents. A higher chance of inheriting a wood processing workshop means that men will inherit land, factories, machines, equipment and customers. These are important resources to maintain and develop production, make profits, and improve their power in the family and society. In contrast, women are usually expected to take care of housework and are seldom given the opportunity to learn woodworking. As a result, they do not have the opportunity to develop the skills they need to be hired for better paid tasks such as carving. Vocational training centres do not organise professional woodworking training that includes apprenticeships.
- The Labour Code is not fully adhered to among household businesses in the wood processing sector, because it is common practice to hire workers without formal labour contracts. Women are disproportionately disadvantaged by the lack of adherence with labour provisions, because they cannot access any welfare benefits for example during pregnancy and child rearing. Companies that are registered as enterprises generally have greater compliance with the Labour Code than household timber processors. Enterprises tend to hire workers under formal contracts and pay monthly wages. Most household businesses pay piece rate wages and use informal workers.
- In wood villages, women are more vulnerable to crises, such as market declines and material shortages, because their employment is more tenuous than men’s. When orders decline, business owners respond by reducing production and female workers are at a higher risk of losing their jobs. Business owners tend not to let go highly skilled carpenters (mostly men) during downtimes.

- Some business owners utilise their family's everyday living space as wood processing area and install machinery and equipment that have a negative impact on the living environment. This creates occupational health and safety risks and further disadvantages women who are responsible for taking care of the home

These findings are explored in more detail below.

6.1 Gender roles

Roles assigned to men and women in the wood processing sector are strongly influenced by the socio-cultural context and norms and traditions.

“My husband and I have a workshop in the village. Although I was born here (Dong Ky), I do not know much about woodworking because I am the daughter, so my parents only guided me to study, not work in wood industry. Although I keep the money, the expenses-related operations of our workshop are decided by my husband; whatever my husband says, I will pay the money and take notes...”

In-depth interview with the wife of the owner of a wood processing workshop, Dong Ky

In traditional wood villages, households are wood production establishments. In these households the role of women is clearly identified as "helping the husband", with primary responsibility for unpaid care work: housework and childcare. Women spend considerable time on these tasks. They must often make trade-offs between better job opportunities and those that are closer to home with flexible hours, allowing them to invest more time in their housework roles. Men have a greater role in generating family income and hold most decision-making power.

Power relations between men and women in production is determined by access to resources. The main wood production resources in Dong Ky and Van Diem are land, facilities and capital investment in machinery and equipment. Sons are much more likely than daughters to inherit production resources. In this way, gender roles are reinforced, and men have better access to and control over the operation of processing enterprises.

“Men rarely do housework because in the village, they mainly do heavy work in the wood products manufacturing and processing workshops, so they get tired when they come home from work. Men do great stuff; housework is for women...”

In-depth interview with female workers, Dong Ky

6.2 Value chain participation

Men play the main role in production activities in Dong Ky and Van Diem, taking on the most important stages in the production value chain such as timber purchasing, cutting, carving and assembly. Women participate at most points in the value chain, but their contributions are not always visible or recognised.

Male workers are regarded as responsible for work requiring high levels of skill, and good health for operating heavy, dangerous machinery. Work considered unsuitable for women includes wood sawmilling, assembling and rough carving.

Despite the fact that occupational accidents and minor injuries such as hand cuts do occur (fewer than 10 cases a year in the village, in which injured workers were mostly men), an assessment to identify occupational risks at production facilities has not been conducted in the wood villages.

Assessment of risks in operating machinery and equipment is very important to address unsafe points, to guide safety procedures and ensure strict compliance with safety requirements for both male and female employees. If equipment is safe, safety procedures are strictly enforced and complied with, and workers are trained on safe procedures, it is possible for both men and women to operate wood processing equipment. This will remove the stereotype that handling machinery for raw materials cutting – which is perceived as more important and is more highly paid than most other jobs in the processing chain – is only for men. In the context of Dong Ky and Van Diem where traditional furniture is carved from heavy logs, the physical strength needed to position and move the logs is another barrier which could be addressed through forklifts, tripod winches and other lifting devices.

Wood purchasing: This is mostly done by men because it is perceived as requiring knowledge of wood types, product designs and processing steps such as cutting and rough moulding. In purchasing wood, besides knowledge about the wood and the production process, the buyers often turn the log upside down to closely examine its grain and check for irregularities or cracks. In the past, this was often done manually so it was relatively heavy and difficult for women. At present, most timber stores have lifting devices to make wood checking easier for buyers, so women could also participate in this production stage. However, most timber purchases are still overseen by men.

Men are generally perceived as more knowledgeable about legal documentation and procedures related to wood purchasing. In reality, wood buyers in both villages surveyed do not have a clear and strong understanding of the legal procedures required for wood purchasing, and buyers often rely on sellers for fulfilling procedures and papers if required.

Wood material preparation: This is the most difficult and most important step as it requires knowledge of types of wood and product designs which decides product costs and eventually prices. This work is mainly done by men who are owners of wood processing businesses or husbands of female owners.

“Women cannot do the raw cutting and preparing component sizes because they do not understand enough about wood. Inaccurate calculation might lead to excess wood that would only be used for firewood, causing economic loss because they are all precious woods... A few women also know how to buy and mix wood, but only for small wood to make some small details. Men still must be in charge of big timber.”

In-depth interview with male owner of a wood processing workshop, Dong Ky

Basic shaping, paring and carving: Most men undertake basic shaping while women take care of paring (cleaning up by taking off fine shavings with a chisel) for better-shaped products.

Woodwork is considered a "hereditary" profession, with sons tending to receive guidance from their fathers when they were young, gaining frequent exposure to the production process. Through this process of socialisation, men are perceived to have better knowledge and skills in raw materials handling. Each log has different characteristics in terms of structure, texture, and shape; men are expected to know to select and cut the log into suitable pieces for certain types of products while ensuring minimised waste wood. Men learn this from young age through apprenticeship at family workshops. Women, due to limited guidance and training from young ages, have little contact with wood and rarely undertake this task.

At Dong Ky village, workshops produce sophisticated and quality products, involving more craftsmanship to create many intricate and decorative patterns onto the products. For most of the products (tables and chairs), it can take up to a total of 70–80 person-days by skilled labourers (two to three labourers working over two to three months). Almost all of the main carvers are male. Before being skilled enough for carving, the carvers must do an apprenticeship for one to two years. Basic shaping and carving are completely manual, so workers need to possess skills, combining physical strength and aesthetic sensitivity to construct shapes and figures of different patterns with different depths. Labourers who have the training to perform this are entirely men who learned it and practised it from early on in their careers. Wages for this work are high, from 300,000 to VND 400,000/day.

Sanding: This job is done entirely by women, as it is viewed as light work, not requiring specialised skills, and the simplest stage in the finishing process. A further reason for women's involvement in this work is that it does not require qualifications. Limited opportunities for training and apprenticeships for women, combined with social and career prejudices, limit their opportunities for attaining qualifications that would make them eligible to expand their productive roles.

Labour management: Men are directly in charge of labour management and assign jobs to workers in the workshops, while women are in charge of managing timekeeping records and paying wages to workers. Labour management is recorded daily.

There are differences in management styles between the two villages of Dong Ky and Van Diem. In Dong Ky, most of the processing workshop owners hire day labourers, while most of the owners in Van Diem hire groups of labourers by the products they make.

In Dong Ky, workshops produce highly sophisticated handicraft products. Labourer management includes managing workload and the quality, so it requires the managers to be knowledgeable about the products and different stages of production. This is often done by men (owners/husbands of owners). Local workers will go home for lunch and rest; while migrant workers stay at the workshop and organise their own cooking if they do not have their own accommodation.

In Van Diem, workshop owners contract groups of workers by products. Therefore, workers often try to make best use of their time to manufacture more products so that they can earn higher income. Employees often eat lunch at the workshop. In this case, women (usually wives or female owners) go to the market, make lunch for the whole family and for the employees. This creates an additional burden for women.

“At noon, I am in charge of cooking lunch for the workers because seeing the workers working hard, I want them to have enough nutrition, and eating out is both expensive and unsafe. Early in the morning, around 5 or 6 a.m., I get up to go to the market, prepare food, then go to the workshop to help with the work. Around 10:30 a.m. to 11 a.m., I come home to cook.”

In-depth interview with the wife of the owner of a wood processing workshop, Van Diem

Financial management: Management of general operations as the “money keepers” is done by women. Accounting, expenditure planning, and making financial decisions is done by men.

Marketing, approaching customers and making sales: Although both men and women are involved in sales and products marketing, the roles of men and women are different. Most of the sales and products introduction at showrooms are done by women. However, women usually sell products at prices that have been discussed and agreed with their husbands in advance. When customers request products that require special quotations, women support the negotiation process but the ultimate decision on the price is taken by men.

“For the products ordered by customers according to their preferred design, I will need to call my husband to offer them a price quote. My husband is knowledgeable about the products, types of wood, and labour so he could do that. I just deal with selling; I don’t know much about these things. I am afraid of quoting too low, causing loss in profit and we might not be able to pay the workers.”

In-depth interview with the wife of the owner of a wood processing workshop, Dong Ky

Women often look after the stores and showrooms, offer consultation and sell goods when customers come. They also play the role of cashier and bookkeeper. Most of them sell at home-based stores or workshops for people they know. Many also sell their products on social networks like Facebook, Zalo, and YouTube with limited investment in design and administration. Men carry out marketing activities on a larger scale or target the high-end segment. This is partly due to the fact that men have broader networks and relationships than women.

In terms of marketing and sales, the key influencing factor is significantly different between Van Diem and Dong Ky. Typical workshops in Van Diem have a number of key customers who are intermediary agencies based in southern provinces; they sell semi-finished products to these customers. Both women and men participate in the sales and maintain regular customers.

Up to 80% - 90% of the products produced by small manufacturers in the village are sold to these intermediaries. These intermediary buyers can easily switch from one manufacturer to another which drives competition among manufacturers in Van Diem. To maximise profits, they must reduce production costs, including labour and marketing costs. They must always allow buyers to owe a certain amount, sometimes up to several hundred million VND. The maintenance of this credit and debt balance is a factor for manufacturers to retain customers. Few establishments have booths to display and sell their own products. Manufacturers in Van Diem village tend to produce popular products but not the high-end type of furniture as in Dong Ky.

Although declining rapidly, Dong Ky is still exporting furniture to China. Chinese traders often go to wood villages to select and purchase products. Communicating with customers and maintaining the relationship with traders are usually the responsibility of men. Business owners, usually men, are well connected to traders from China and bring them to the village. In other words, men possess more advantages and have better access to social relationships and social assets that are important to approach customers and sell products.

In addition to the regular domestic and Chinese customers, the workshops in Dong Ky promote their products through booths at trade fairs in different provinces across the country. The organisation and participation in fairs and exhibitions are all through the Dong Ky Wood Association, whose members are mainly men because the registration of membership is on a household basis and almost all households are headed by men. Overall, women’s ability to sell wood products is disadvantaged by their limited involvement in wood processing, associations and restricted access to social assets.

The following two tables disaggregate and summarise the involvement of men and women in the wood production value chain.

Table 1: Production and business process of high-grade carved furniture

No	Task	Technology		Labour allocation ^{viii}		Outsourcing of task	
		Machine	Hand tool/Manual	Male	Female	Yes	No
1	Selecting & buying wood			Mostly	Limited tasks		x
2	Saw milling – producing rough-sawn timber (RST)	x		Mostly	Unusual	x	
3	Drying sawn timber	x		Mostly	Unusual	x	
4	Rough sawn timber cutting (band saw & crosscut)	x		Mostly	Unusual	x	x
5	Rough moulding: preparing dimension timber/component sizes	x	x	Mostly	Unusual	x	x
6	Soft moulding: tenon-mortise, drilling, edging (router)	x	x	Mostly	Unusual	x	x
7	Carving	x		Slightly more male dominated	Female participation is significant	x	x
			x	Mostly	Seldom	x	x
8	Assembly – using manual presses & elastic bands		x	Mostly	Unusual	x	x
9	Fine-tuning: quality control (QC) & repair		x	Mostly	Unusual	x	x
10	Sanding		x	Seldom	Mostly	x	x
11	Painting		x	Even	Even	x	x
12	Packaging		x	Some tasks	Mostly		x
13	Liaising with customers ^{ix}			Shared	Shared		x

Table 2: Production and business process of other products

No	Task	Technology		Labour allocation ^x		Outsourcing of task	
		Machine	Hand tool/Manual	Male	Female	Yes	No
1	Selecting & buying wood			Mostly	Seldom		x
2	Saw milling – producing rough-sawn timber (RST)	x		Mostly	Unusual	x	
3	Rough sawn timber cutting (band saw & crosscut)	x		Mostly	Unusual		x
4	Rough moulding: preparing dimension timber/component sizes	x	x	Mostly	Unusual	x	x
5	Soft moulding: tenon-mortise, drilling, edging (router)	x	x	Mostly	Unusual	x	x
6	Carving	x		Some tasks	Significant female participation	x	x
7 7	Carving		x	Mostly	Seldom	x	x
	Assembly – using manual presses & elastic bands		x	Mostly	Assisting role	x	x
8	Fine-tuning: quality control (QC) & repair		x	Mostly	Assisting role	x	x
9	Sanding		x	Seldom	Mostly	x	x
10	Painting		x	Painting mostly men	Polishing mostly women	x	x
11	Packaging		x	Some tasks	Mostly	x	x
12	Liaising with customers			Shared	Shared		x
13	Bookkeeping & accounting			Decision-making role	Mostly		x

6.3 Ownership of wood processing workshops

Traditionally in wood processing households, sons will be guided by their parents to apprenticeship, and will be assisted in inheriting the family business. Women are most often oriented by their parents to aspire to office jobs. If their academic performance is not good enough, they will stay home, get married and help their husbands in selling furniture.

Roles assigned to men and women across the production chain are defined by the historical and social-cultural context. Most of the workshops in the wood villages, particularly in Dong Ky, have been operating for a long time, inherited from parents and grandparents. Men generally have better opportunity to access production resources than women. A higher chance of inheriting a wood processing workshop means that men will inherit land, factories, machines, equipment, and customers – important resources to maintain and develop production, make profits and improve their power in the family and society.

In the case of female-based wood processing workshops, usually women inherited the business when their families did not have sons, or the sons worked away or lived in other places and did not wish to work in the wood industry. It is seldom that women start wood-processing workshops in the wood villages.

6.4 Earning capacity

Women in the sector earn lower wages than men do, earning on average two thirds of what men earn. This is due to several factors related to divisions of labour.

In Dong Ky, most of the male and female workers are paid on a daily basis, the wage determined depending on each stage of production that requires different levels of skill, workload, toxicity and hazard. For example, the salary of workers shaping wood is higher than those who do paring and assembling. Among the carpenters, there is also a master carpenter and his/her assistants. Their pay depends on their skill levels. However, in Van Diem, women receive daily wages while men are paid by the products they make, so men's wages are much higher than women's. Another reason exacerbating the income inequality is that men tend to work overtime to earn higher income while women can only work eight hours per day due to their role in taking care of children and the home.

"In the family, 70% of the income is earned by the husband and the wife only earns 30%. Men must have the responsibility to earn money to support their wives and children..."

In-depth interview with female workers Dong Ky

6.5 Training and employment opportunities

The nature of products from these two craft villages is wooden handicraft furniture which requires workers to be skilled. Men who were allowed to learn and apprentice from childhood to adulthood can become master craftsmen, foremen and owners of workshops. Meanwhile, women are expected to take care of housework and meals, so are not given the opportunity to learn woodworking. If women were also trained from a young age, they would likely have had sufficient knowledge of wood and woodworking techniques during the production process. In addition, if the processing machinery is safe enough for the operators, both women and men are trained in machine use, and compliance with safety procedures is ensured, women should be able to participate in more production stages and gain higher-wage positions.

It is difficult for women beyond a young age to learn about woodworking professionally like men, as owners tend not to hire unskilled labour for important production stages such as carving. Even if they are hired, they are only offered limited training. On the other hand, vocational training centres do not organise professional woodworking training activities that also include apprenticeships. For these reasons, women do not have the same opportunities to get vocational training and understanding of woodworking as men. As a result of limited vocational training opportunities, women's employment opportunities are very limited compared to men's, and men have better access to jobs and income in the sector.

6.6 Labour Code adherence

In both Dong Ky and Van Diem the Labour Code is not fully adhered to in the wood processing sector. The Labour Code 2012^{xi} stipulates that *"1. Before contracting an employee, the employer and the employee must directly enter into a labour contract. In case the employee is from 15 years old to under 18 years old, the agreement on the labour contract must be agreed by the legal representative of the employee. 2. For seasonal jobs or certain jobs with a term of less than 12 months, the group of workers may authorise one employee in the group to conclude a written labour contract; in this case, the labour contract has the same effect as signed with each person"*. As per this provision of the Labour Code 2012 as well as the Labour Code 2019^{xii}, the wood processing workshops in the two wood villages have not been in full compliance because it is common practice to hire workers without formal labour contracts.

Without signed labour contracts, workers are not entitled to prescribed working hours, break time, paid leave and other welfare benefits. This situation makes employees less committed to their employment. It also makes it more difficult for a business to retain skilled workers or recruit workers during peak seasons.

Women are disproportionately disadvantaged by lack of adherence with labour law provisions. For female workers, lack of adherence to the Labour Code and lack of access to any welfare benefits is a big disadvantage for their period of pregnancy and child rearing. And worse, falling pregnant or needing to take time off for childcare poses a risk of losing their jobs in the future.

“Women mainly work as sanders in the workshop. They are often in contact with wood dust, sitting for a long time on low chairs, so they could not continue during the late half of their pregnancy. Women who have been pregnant for about three months can still do it, but after three months, they will ask for leave; until their children are about 2–3 years old, they will begin to apply for work again ... if their former workshops are still in need of people, they could continue, otherwise they will find jobs in others.”

In-depth interviews with the wife of employer and female employees, Dong Ky

In cases where labour contracts are in place, enforcement of regulations differs between types of businesses in both wood villages. Performance of labour contracts by enterprises (registered with licence for production and business) is better than in the case of household businesses. Some enterprises have signed labour contracts with workers and are complying with labour regulations. This has to some extent better ensured job safety of workers compared to the situation in household businesses.

6.7 Production space shortages

Some wood processing workshops utilise their family’s everyday living space as production space. A small area is used both as a place of residence and a place for production with machinery and equipment installed. These conditions have an impact on the quality of the living and working environment. This is particularly evident in Van Diem. It has led to many risks to labour safety, fires and explosion risks, and environmental pollution. Small production areas prevent households from applying labour safety measures including fire and explosion prevention measures in accordance with relevant laws. The separation of work and living areas for the two wood villages is a challenge. However, it is difficult to identify appropriate solutions at present.

This arrangement of production and residence significantly affects family’s life, for both women and men, but the impacts on women are more negative. This is because women participate in production but also take full responsibility for taking care of the family like preparing everyday meals and doing laundry. It is challenging to perform both tasks in such environment. In Van Diem, many families install one to several computer numerical control (CNC) machines at home that operate around the clock, emitting noise and dust which affect people’s health. Placing CNC machines at home but not at the factory is a practice of many households as the carving duration for each product is lengthy, up to 8–10 hours continuously. Placing the machine at home allows the family to look after the machine during its operation. This significantly affects family members’ health, especially when the machine is operated at night. This is particularly serious from mid to the end of the Lunar Year, the peak time for producing and stocking goods for sales.

6.8 Vulnerability to crises and risks

In wood villages, women are more vulnerable to crises such as market decline and material shortages, with their employment more tenuous than men's. If orders decline, workshop owners will shrink their production and female workers are at higher risk of losing jobs.

At Van Diem especially, paying workers by output puts women at a higher risk of losing their jobs. A workshop normally hires two to four teams of workers; each team has 3–5 employees working together to finish a product. Workers in the team will often try to work "day and night" to make as many products as possible, with hopes of earning a higher income. Women cannot fully join these teams as they have to spend time taking care of family and children. This means that women do not have the opportunity to join the co-working groups, work on more technical tasks to improve their skills and participate in better paid production steps. Instead, women are automatically assigned with sanding tasks and receive low wages. Given that they don't play a central role in the production process, cost-saving measures tend to make women redundant.

"Over the last two years, the market has shrunk so my factory has also performed worse than in previous years, especially due to the impact of COVID-19. My workshop has narrowed production to only about 50% of capacity of previous years. We used to hire three to four teams of workers, and now only one to two teams, all men. As for female workers, I used to hire them only for sanding, so I need to stop hiring them now because I do not have enough money to cover their wages. Currently, the market is difficult so every workshop is facing the same problems."

In-depth interview with the owner of a wood processing workshop, Van Diem

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study makes the following recommendations, which are mainly directed at local authorities, in particular the People's Committees of districts and communes. Cooperation and coordination among the relevant stakeholders are essential, in particular between the authorities and industry associations, as well as between industry associations and civil society organisations (CSOs). Coordinating activities with specialised administrative agencies at the provincial and district level, such as the Department of Industry and Trade and the Department of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, is also needed.

Arrangements in wood processing workshops

- Local authorities responsible for inspecting the wood processing workshops could review the implementation of the Labour Code, in particular workshop arrangements and layout of production to detect potential occupational health and safety risks that need improvement. While conducting the review, they should assess the access to suitable workplace facilities for women, as mandated by Article 13 of the Gender Equality Law, Chapter X of the 2019 Labour Code and Section 2 of Decree 145 enforcing the Labour Code. With the support of the authorities, industry associations and wood processing workshop owners could work together to improve the workshop arrangements.
- Improving the workshops offers an opportunity to reflect on the equipment and arrangements that would create better opportunities for women to be engaged in wood processing, in line with the policy and legal framework on gender equality in Viet Nam.

Awareness-raising activities

- CSOs, industry associations and government authorities could cooperate to carry out communication activities to raise awareness about labour laws and policies associated with wood processing. Issues of occupational health and safety, job stability and social issues in the wood villages are important concerns for the government. Therefore, the coordination among civil society, associations and government authorities would bring about positive impacts. In addition, the local authorities, the People's Committees of districts and communes/wards oversee the timber processors and have influence on business owners. Activities should be carried out in cooperation with these institutions.
- Industry associations and CSOs could cooperate to raise awareness about gender equality, in particular gender roles to enhance the position of women in the family and society through trainings for owners of wood processing workshops, and female and male employees. For example, case studies telling the story of female business owners who successfully managed wood processing workshops might motivate other female business owners to cooperate and replicate the case studies.
- CSOs and industry associations could encourage and support the establishment of businesswomen clubs or associations in wood villages. These clubs would promote

the role of businesswomen and women's ownership, and provide female business owners with access to information and support. The clubs could connect to the Social Policy Bank and the Division of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs at district level for access to finance and support.

Trainings

- Government authorities, with the support of local and national industry associations, could disseminate knowledge about policies and laws in force on wood processing and business activities, and forms of support for micro and small operators. Technical trainings could be used for this purpose. Including topics related to production, financial management, marketing and sales in trainings will raise the interest of business owners. Through these trainings, business owners would learn about the 2019 Labour Code's provisions and their obligation to "ensure gender equality and implementation of measures to promote gender equality in recruitment, job assignment, training, working hours and rest periods, salaries and other policies", as stated in Article 136.
- With the support of donor projects, industry associations could support timber processors with marketing research to better understand the preferences of different market segments, design new products and access new markets. Knowledge in this area will help timber processors develop their businesses, create more jobs and invest in machinery. This will have an impact on gender because households will have an incentive to pursue enterprise registration, improve working conditions and diversify their workforce. It will also increase the use of domestic timber and reduce reliance on imports.
- Government authorities and industry associations could promote enterprise registration of wood processing workshops, which involves:
 - Providing support on legal procedures for enterprise registration
 - Providing information and knowledge related to the benefits of registering as enterprises
 - Providing information and knowledge related to labour recruitment, vocational training, mentoring and skill improvement for employees
 - Encouraging the implementation of social insurance policies and health insurance for employees

Further studies

- Academia could conduct further in-depth studies to understand the needs and aspirations of female workers for vocational training. Vocational training schools and industry associations could follow up on the findings, including by customising training courses to encourage women's participation, looking towards improving the status of female workers.
- The Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs could support studies on wage pricing mechanisms for workers in wood villages, providing an objective basis and recommendations to reduce the gender-based income gap in villages. Industry associations and local authorities could follow up on the studies' findings.

Annex 1. Introduction of qualitative tools and sample size

Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews and direct observation. The researchers made use of guiding questions for in-depth interviews.

Key informants

- At enterprise level:
 - Owners, managers (personnel, training unit, head of workshop/production line).
 - Trade union or workers’ representatives.
 - Workers in the production unit (male/female; different age groups; highly skilled workers/skilled workers/unskilled workers; local/migrant workers; workers with/without small children).
- At household level: business owners or decision makers.
- Community-based organisation: Chairman of People’s Committee, women unions, associations, village leaders, bank service providers (People Credit Fund), vocational training institutions.

The snowball method was used to access informants. The leaders of Dong Ky’s and Van Diem’s furniture associations were approached. These first contacts provided the basis for referrals to MSMEs and other stakeholders. The first interviews to owners and workers then unlocked access to more MSMEs in the two wood villages. The sample size is skewed towards Dong Ky because it was the original focus of the study.

Table 3: Sample size of qualitative survey in Dong Ky and Van Diem

#	Description	In Dong Ky		In Van Diem	
		Number of FGD/IDI	Number of participants	Number of FGD/IDI	Number of participants
1	In-depth interviews with representatives of the Joint stock Commercial Bank for Investment and Development of Viet Nam (BIDV) – Bac Ninh city Branch; Women’s Union of Dong Ky Ward; Dong Ky Fine Art Wood Production and Business Association; Bac Ninh City Vocational Training Centre	4	4		
2	In-depth interviews with male/female workers	4	4	2	2
3	In-depth interviews with owners/managers of wood processing workshops and sawmills	3	3	3	3
4	In-depth interviews with large/small timber traders, small retailers, furniture traders, service providers, subcontractors – male and female informants for each actor	10	10	2	2
	Total	21	21	7	7

Annex 2. Guiding questions for in-depth interviews

Tool 1. Group discussion/interview questions for owners of wood processing workshops

1. Brief introduction about backgrounds of enterprises/business:

- Type of operation.
- Size based the number of employees.
- Characteristics of main products: what, what kind, product category, main market.
- Main features of the workshop: manual production, mechanisation, extent of mechanisation.

2. About employees:

- Number of male/female workers.
- Main characteristics of labour: origin, characteristics, skills.
- Management of labour: daily payment, piece-rate payment, if a combination of the two, then clarify characteristics for each.
- Salary payment: salary payment method, criteria for calculating salary for different groups of employees in the factory.
- Other benefits.
- Skills: who are the most skilled, tasks they undertake, salary, male/female, characteristics, extent of dependence of the factory on highly skilled workers, why.
- Training and mentoring at the factories: how to organise it.

3. About the production organisation

- The preliminary procedures of production chain: (1) Covering every stage of the production chain or (2) outsourcing of some stages?
- If (1): the key factor throughout the production cycle for each specific stage such as:
- Designs: who, how, who in establishments has the biggest decision-making role (owner, wife, parents, managers and others, why).
- Purchasing wood: who, how, who in the establishment plays the biggest decisive role (owner, wife, father, mother, manager, others, why).
- Buying other materials: who, how, who in the workshop has the largest decision-making role (owner, wife, parents, managers and others, why).
- Raw materials preparation: e.g., wood-cutting, preliminary processing: who, how, who in the workshop has the biggest decision-making role (owner, wife, parents, managers and others, why).
- Producing raw products: the stages involved, using machines or manual work? Who is in control of the machines, complexity in operating the machines – time to learn to use the machines, proficiency needed to operate the machines.
- Paring, assembling, grinding, sanding, who does the most, are there requirements for skills?
- Selling products: form of selling, retailing at home stores, selling by agents, selling to provinces, selling to retail buyers.

- In the case of selling to direct users, what is the main channel of communication to reach customers?
- In the factory, who is in charge of this work (male/female)?
- What are the main marketing methods?
- What are groups of target customers?
- According to your observations, who is the person to make the final decision to buy the product, what is the decisive role, male or female, why?

4. Production management

- Do you (the owner of the workshop) directly manage/supervise the daily operation or hire a manager?
- Who decides/arranges the daily work/acceptance of the product?
- What methods to ensure quality/sample code?
- During the entire production process from start to final products, what stage and factors are most important?
- What forms of management are used to manage employees/employees' products?
- What are reward/penalty mechanisms?

5. Financial management

- Who is the financial manager?

6. Labour management

- What forms of management are used to manage employees/employees' products?
- What is the reward/penalty mechanism?
- What forms of training are there to train workers, or improve skills for workers?

7. Marketing and sales

- Who are the main players/roles of women and men (husband/wife/son/daughter) in selling, finding markets?
- What factors affect sales, why?

8. Switching to new products

Your intention in switching to new products:

- New design.
- New market.
- New production technology.
- In order to implement the above intentions, what difficulties and barriers are the factories facing? Which are the most important? What are the biggest difficulties and problems today?

9. Joining professional associations

Does the factory join any associations? If yes, what activities, if not, why?

10. The influence of COVID-19

- The level of impact, specifically: on revenue, production scale?
- Impact on life/employment of workers, who lost their jobs/suffered reduced employment/how is it specifically for men and women?

Tool 2. Group discussion/interview questions for workers in wood processing workshops

1. Introduce, get acquainted

2. Employee's employment history

- Jobs before, where, why work at this factory?
- How long have you worked, skills, experience with this job?
- A detailed description of the job?
- Salary, bonus, other benefits?
- Working time, form of payment?

3. Characteristics of work

- Are there women doing the same jobs as yours (if the respondent is male) or are there men doing the same work as yours (if the respondent is female), if not why?
- What is the duration of apprenticeship/training?
- Do you wish to improve your skills? Specifically, what and how to improve?
- Do you have opportunities to do more demanding jobs with higher wages? Barriers? Why?
- Comparison between the work of male/female workers about:
 - Work performance: importance of their work in contributing to the final product.
 - Required skills.
 - Aptitude/experience.
 - Difficulty level.
 - Working time.
 - Salary.
 - Other.

4. Reproductive role

- Who, at what stage, what?
- Why is it assigned like that?
- Participation in production.

5. Opportunities to participate in learning/skills improvement

- How did you start working here, what do you do, skills?
- How does the process of learning and improving skills happen?
- What are the differences between women and men in learning to improve their skills or learning to move to higher-income jobs?
- What difficulty did you encounter when learning to move to better jobs/higher wages? Do you think these difficulties are different between men/women? If yes, what is the difference?

6. Working conditions

- What is your assessment of the work environment; working time; tools, equipment, working site arrangement; sanitation/living; food and drink?

References

ⁱ With funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), EFI has been testing approaches to enable forest- and timber-based MSMEs in the Mekong region to operate legally and sustainably since 2016. Please see <https://forestsmaillholders.org>

ii The 2006 Law on Gender Equality includes the following provisions:

Gender equality in the field of labour: (i) Men and women are equal in terms of qualifications and age in recruitment, are treated equally in workplaces regarding work, wages, pay and bonuses, social insurance, labour conditions and other working conditions; (ii) Men and women are equal in terms of qualifications and age when they are promoted or appointed to hold titles in the title-standard professions.

Gender equality in the field of education and training: (i) Men and women are equal in terms of age for schooling, training and fostering courses; (ii) Men and women are equal in choosing professions and occupations for learning and training; (iii) Men and women are equal in accessing and benefiting from the policies on education, training, fostering of professional knowledge and skills; (iv) Female officials, public servants bringing along their children less than 36 months of age when participating in the training and fostering activities shall be given assistance and support as provided by the Government.

Measures to promote gender equality in the field of education and training include: (a) to provide for the proportion of men and women participating in the study and training; (b) To assist female workers in rural areas in vocational training under the law.

iii Article 13 on gender equality in employment specifies that:

Men and women are equal in terms of qualifications and age when recruiting, are treated equally at work in terms of employment, wages, bonuses, social insurance, labour conditions and other working conditions. The Law introduces measures to promote gender equality in employment, including: a) Structuring the ratio of male and female employees; b) Training and capacity building for female employees; and c) Employers to ensure occupational safety and sanitation conditions for female employees working in certain heavy and dangerous occupations or jobs or exposure to hazardous substances.

Article 136 also provides the responsibilities of the employers as to (1) Ensure the implementation of gender equality and measures to promote gender equality in recruitment, placement, employment arrangement, and training, working time, break, wages and other incentives; (2) Consult female workers or their representatives when deciding issues related to women's rights and interests; (3) Ensure adequate number of suitable bathrooms and toilets at the workplace; and (4). Help and support the construction of kindergartens or cover a part of childcare and kindergarten expenses for employees.

iv NEPCon, Forest Trends. 2018. Viet Nam Diagnoses and Regulatory Assessment of Small and micro forest Enterprises in the Mekong Region.

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viii Data from interviews with furniture associations and MSMEs in Dong Ky and Van Diem.

ix Bookkeeping and accounting is uncommon for these types of products.

x Data from interviews with furniture associations and MSMEs in Dong Ky and Van Diem.

xi Law No. 10/2012/QH13 dated on 18/6/2012 of the National Assembly

xii Law No. 45/2019/QH14 dated on 20/11/2019 of the National Assembly

About the Forest Smallholders Project

Since 2016, the European Forest Institute (EFI) has been supporting wood-based micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in four Mekong countries to operate legally and sustainably. Under its Forest Smallholders Project, EFI has been testing solutions to MSMEs' key challenges in pilot projects. Lessons learnt from these pilots are documented and disseminated nationally, regionally and internationally. Through its support to MSMEs, the Project promotes gender equality and women's economic empowerment in the forest sector.

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