

## THE STATUS OF ACCESSING TO INFORMATION ON GENDER EQUALITY IN ETHNIC MINORITY COMMUNITIES IN THAI NGUYEN PROVINCE

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: 22/02/2023	This study aims to assess the current status of accessing to information on gender equality in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province; thereby proposing solutions to improve people's awareness of this issue in the study area. In addition to collecting secondary data from different report sources, the study mainly used primary data collection method by distributing survey questionnaires and conducting group discussions. Research results show that methods to help people approach the issue of gender equality have been widely deployed in many subjects with many different contents and forms. As a result, the content on implementing gender equality in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province has brought practical effects, contributing to gradually improving the socio-economic life of the people. This study is the initial basis for the authorities at all levels to come up with specific policies and plans, contributing to promoting gender equality in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province in the coming time.
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## THỰC TRẠNG TIẾP CẬN THÔNG TIN VỀ BÌNH ĐẲNG GIỚI TRONG CỘNG ĐỒNG NGƯỜI DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ TRÊN ĐỊA BÀN TỈNH THÁI NGUYÊN

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THÔNG TIN BÀI BÁO	TÓM TẮT
Ngày nhận bài: 22/02/2023	Nghiên cứu này nhằm đánh giá thực trạng tiếp cận thông tin về vấn đề bình đẳng giới ở vùng dân tộc thiểu số trên địa bàn tỉnh Thái Nguyên; từ đó đề xuất các giải pháp góp phần nâng cao nhận thức của người dân về vấn đề này. Bên cạnh việc thu thập số liệu thứ cấp từ các nguồn báo cáo khác nhau, nghiên cứu chủ yếu sử dụng phương pháp thu thập số liệu sơ cấp bằng việc phát phiếu câu hỏi điều tra và tiến hành thảo luận nhóm. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy, các phương thức nhằm giúp người dân tiếp cận vấn đề bình đẳng giới đã được triển khai sâu rộng ở nhiều đối tượng với nhiều nội dung và hình thức khác nhau. Nhờ đó, nội dung về thực hiện bình đẳng giới tại các vùng dân tộc thiểu số trên địa bàn tỉnh Thái Nguyên đã và đang mang lại hiệu quả thiết thực, góp phần từng bước nâng cao đời sống kinh tế - xã hội của nhân dân. Nghiên cứu này là cơ sở bước đầu để các cấp chính quyền đưa ra những chính sách và kế hoạch cụ thể, góp phần thúc đẩy bình đẳng giới tại các vùng dân tộc thiểu số trên địa bàn tỉnh Thái Nguyên trong thời gian tới.
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## 1. Introduction

Gender equality is defined as the fact that men and women have equal positions and roles, are given the same conditions and opportunities to promote their capacity for the development of the community, of the family and equally enjoy the development results [1]. However, despite the fact that women represent half of the world's population, they do not have the same level of health assistance, education, economic participation, potential earning, and political decision-making power [2]. In many places, women are discriminated, even receiving a lot of unfair treatment [3]. Gender inequalities have existed for a long time and are caused by several factors including socio-cultural factors, religious conditions, politics, and the state [4].

In Vietnam, socio-economic development and drastic changes in family and society have brought about many qualitative changes in gender and women's issues recently. Women's contributions not only create a progressive and civilized society, but also develop women themselves. Nevertheless, in many localities throughout the country, especially in rural, remote and isolated areas, ethnic minority areas, the situation of "respect for men and despise women" is still serious; women and girls still suffer many disadvantages [5]. Women's participation in management and leadership in the public sector as well as in business is still low and slow to improve; the rate of violence against women is high, and the income gap between men and women is large. Therefore, it is necessary to carry out synchronously many solutions to create a balance between the positions and roles of women, and at the same time raising the awareness of the whole society about gender and gender equality to gradually erase the gap between women and men in Vietnam [6]. In order to achieve certain progress in gender equality, according to many experts, it is necessary to have a connection of the whole society, including the responsible participation of the communication sector [7]. The communication has a particularly important impact in conveying information about gender equality, contributing to changing people's awareness and behaviors. Communication activities contribute to spreading correct, profound and comprehensive messages on gender equality [8].

There have been many studies on communication and propaganda about gender equality issues in the world. For instance, Alleyne [9] examined the propaganda role of the United Nations in the struggle for gender equality; Zubarieva and Mykolaichuk [10] investigated tactical aspects and results of propaganda of gender equality in Ukraine. Besides, Sharda [11] assessed the role of media in gender stereotyping, of which media can either be an accomplice to gender based discrimination or it can challenge the gender bias by providing balanced coverage. In term of accessing to information on gender equality, there is also a few studies such as Neuman [12], [13]. In Vietnam, the research on this issue mostly appears in online journal or magazines of government, The Central Propaganda Department such as [6] – [8]. These are normally news of gender equality propaganda activities in Vietnam in general. As far as the researchers know, there has been no scientific research on accessing to information of gender equality conducted in Vietnam recently. Therefore, it is necessary to have scientific research on this issue in a certain area of the country to assess the situation and propose solution to raise people's awareness of that issue.

Thai Nguyen is a province in the Northern midlands and mountainous area, a gateway for socio-economic exchanges between the Northern midlands and mountainous area and the Northern Delta. Thai Nguyen has 09 district-level administrative units (03 cities and 06 districts) with a population of over 1.3 million people, where women account for 51.1% of the total population and 50.6% of the labor force (in 2022). Thai Nguyen province is the home of many ethnic groups, the majority of which include Kinh, Tay, Nung, San Diu, Mong, San Chay, Dao, and Hoa. Ethnic minorities account for nearly 30% of the province's population... Thai Nguyen province has 1,412 villages, in which the number of villages in ethnic minority areas is 1,062 and 142 ethnic minority villages are specially difficult [14]. Therefore, Thai Nguyen is a province located in the implementation area of the National Target Program for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas including Project 8 on "Implementing gender equality and solving urgent

problems of women and children". Having identified gender equality as an important part of the socio-economic development strategy of the locality, all authorities of the province have promoted propaganda on gender equality, contributing to raising the status of women.

For the above reasons, this study was conducted to assess the status of access to information on gender equality issues in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province; then propose solutions to contribute to raising people's awareness on this issue.

## **2. Methodology**

### **2.1. Respondents**

Respondents were divided into 04 groups, including ethnic minority men; ethnic minority women; ethnic minority children; local officials, village elders, village leaders, and reputable people in the community.

### **2.2. Research duration and location**

- Research duration: December 13 - 30, 2022, specifically as follows:
  - + Survey and assessment at the site: December 13-18, 2022.
  - + Researching secondary information, analyzing data and writing reports: December 19 - 30, 2022.
- Research location: The study was conducted in 05 specially difficult communes (Region III) including Van Lang commune (Dong Hy district), Thuong Nung commune and Than Sa commune (Vo Nhai district); Quy Ky commune and Linh Thong commune (Dinh Hoa district) and 04 ATK communes in Regions II and I, including Lam Vy commune and Tan Thinh commune (Dinh Hoa district); Yen Lang commune and Phu Thinh commune (Dai Tu district). The classification of communes in regions I, II, III was determined according to the Prime Minister's Decision No. 861/QD-TTg dated June 4, 2021 approving the list of communes in Region III, Region II and Region I belonging to ethnic minorities and mountainous areas in the period of 2021 - 2025.

### **2.3. Research methods**

#### **2.3.1. Secondary data collection method**

The research team collected the reports summarizing the implementation of socio-economic targets in 2021, tasks and solutions in 2022; the annual summary report of the Women's Unions of the 09 survey communes; then, synthesizing and analyzing data to understand the general situation on gender equality in the localities.

#### **2.3.2. Primary data collection method**

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

- Sampling method was conducted according to stratified sampling (based on groups of objects). Averagely 30 people/group/commune were asked to fill in the questionnaire. Survey data were analyzed using SPSS software.

- Survey questionnaires: The survey questionnaires were built on qualitative and quantitative indicators related to 04 contents of Project 8. They were distributed to communes through the Provincial Women's Union, including questionnaires for ethnic minority women (266 sheets); questionnaires for ethnic minority men (128 sheets); questionnaires for local officials, village elders, village heads, and reputable people in the community (212 sheets) and questionnaires for ethnic minority children (341 sheets). All distributed questionnaires were collected back. The survey sheets which did not provide enough information would be abbreviated as "no CCTT" in the contents of the analysis table.

- Discussion groups:

+ For ethnic minority women and men: Group discussions were conducted in 09 communes (18 women and 12 men each commune), including female group discussion (24 groups), male group discussion (09 groups) and group discussion of men and women (01 group).

+ For ethnic minority children: Group discussions were conducted in 06 communes (Thuong Nung, Than Sa, Quy Ky, Linh Thong, Lam Vy and Tan Thinh) with a total of 18 groups of children, including both girls and boys. Discussion topics were related to gender equality in schools, especially girls.

+ In-depth interviews: The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with 15 people in 09 communes, including representatives of commune leaders, leaders of commune Women's Unions, and village heads.

### 3. Results and discussion

#### 3.1. Status of accessing information on gender equality

Over the years, gender equality in general and social issues in the study area in particular have been deployed in many different subjects with many contents and forms. The results in Table 1 show that the two contents of "Family violence prevention" and "Population, family planning, safe birth, and child-rearing care" were propagated at the largest scale, accounting for 73.1% of the total 266 women surveyed. This result was similar for men, reaching the rate of 77.3%. Next was the content on "Policies and regulations to support ethnic minorities" accounting for 69.5%, "Prevention of abuse, building a safe living environment for women and children" accounting for 61.9%, "Prevention of human trafficking" accounts for 55.8%... The content "Men and women do housework, develop the economy and make decisions in the family together" was the least interested content, accounting for only 45.0%. However, there is a significant difference when comparing the rates of these problems between female and male subjects.

In addition, children's accessing to gender equality and social issues in the study area are concerned. However, the survey results revealed that with the topic "Prevention of abuse, building a safe living environment for women and children", 84.5% of the children had access to information, reaching the highest rate. The communication contents on the issue of "Men and women do housework, develop the economy and make decisions in the family together" and the issue of "Policies and regulations to support ethnic minorities" had lower rates (accounting for 42.8% and 53.7%, respectively).

**Table 1.** Status of people accessing information on gender equality in the study area

No.	Topics	Subjects			
		Women	Men	Officials	Children
1	Policies and regulations to support ethnic minorities	51.2	69.5	78.2	53.7
2	Men and women do housework, develop the economy and make decisions together in the family	45.0	1.9	74.5	42.8
3	Preventing abuse, building a safe living environment for women and children	1.9	0.3	4.7	84.5
4	Family violence prevention	3.1	77.3	89.8	0.1
5	Prevention of human trafficking	55.8	1.9	81.9	72.7
6	Communication on population, family planning, safe birth, children care and parenting	3.1	77.3	83.8	65.1

Table 1 also shows that officials always accessed the information of gender equality relatively effectively. All of the contents that were communicated to this study subject accounted for over 74%, especially the content about "Family violence prevention" accounted for 89.8%. This is due to the fact that local officials, village elders, and village leaders are prestigious and influential groups in the community. Their participation in local activities in general as well as

communication and training activities on gender equality in particular plays an important role in the success of such activities. This proves that, if communication and training activities can reach this group of people more in a newer and closer way, its effectiveness and spillover effects will be extremely large.

The survey results on 212 local officials, village elders, and village heads about their participation in gender equality training and communication activities in the study area are presented in Table 2. Accordingly, it was found that 93/212 respondents said that they were "very interested in participating in communication and training activities on gender equality" (accounting for 40.7%). In addition, there were 23.7% of the respondents who were "ready to participate in gender communication and training activities", 17.5% "actively acquire knowledge and express opinions" and 8.4% "disseminated knowledge to others".

**Table 2.** Participation level of local officials/village elders, village heads in communication and training activities on gender equality

No.	Participation level	%
1	I don't like it but if I'm sent, I'll join	6.4
2	I'm very interested in participating in communication activities, training on gender equality	40.7
3	I actively acquire knowledge, actively express opinions	17.5
4	I can disseminate knowledge to others	8.4
5	I am willing to participate in gender communication and training activities	23.7
6	I'm not interested in the above activities	0.9
7	I haven't been sent	2.4

### 3.2. Reality of people's awareness of gender equality

Through communication sessions, the issue of gender equality in the family was fully and positively perceived by the community in the direction of more empowering women. Women have equal rights to men in the family, in terms of sharing housework, participating in economic activities to contribute to the family's common income, and having a voice in all domestic decisions. According to the survey results, over 50% of the respondents strongly agreed with the criteria on women's equal rights, and completely disagreed with the criteria on the affirmation of men's rights in families.

The results in Table 3 show that over 50% of survey respondents in all target groups completely disagreed with the view that "Housework is women's own business, women must take care of all housework". Among them, female subjects agreeing with this view accounted for the highest rate of 75.1%. On the contrary, the opinion that "Housework belongs to all family members, men must be responsible for sharing housework with women" was completely agreed by the majority of survey respondents with nearly equal proportions (64.8% and 68.8%). The views that "Women have the right and obligation to participate in economic activities and contribute to the family's income", "Women are equal to men in using the family's common income", or "Women are allowed to make joint decisions with men in all family matters"... were completely agreed by most of the survey groups. Besides, there was still a certain percentage of people who had completely opposite views or were uncertain about which point of view they should follow.

**Table 3.** People's perception on issues related to gender equality in the family

No.	Issues	Opinion	Subjects			
			Women	Men	Officials	Children
1	Housework is women's own business, women have to take care of the housework	Completely disagree	75.1	54.7	54.6	54.8
		Completely agree	6.8	7.0	10.2	4.4
		Most disagree	15.1	18.8	11.1	22.0
		Most agree	-	3.9	5.6	2.1
		Wondering	2.9	7.0	2.3	15.5

No.	Issues	Opinion	Subjects			
			Women	Men	Officials	Children
2	Housework is shared by all family members, men are responsible for sharing	Completely disagree	9.2	10.2	14.4	5.9
		Completely agree	68.8	66.4	64.8	66.9
		Most disagree	1.2	1.6	2.3	2.6
		Most agree	7.7	12.5	6.9	15.8
		Wondering	0.4	4.7	2.8	7.3
3	Women have the right and obligation to participate in economic activities and contribute to the family's income	Completely disagree	9.6	10.2	12.0	4.1
		Completely agree	60.4	58.6	67.6	57.2
		Most disagree	0.8	3.1	1.9	6.7
		Most agree	7.7	18.0	6.9	19.4
		Wondering	1.6	4.7	1.4	11.7
4	Women are equal to men in the use of the common household income	Completely disagree	6.9	9.4	13.0	6.7
		Completely agree	56.9	56.2	63.0	44.0
		Most disagree	2.3	2.3	2.3	5.6
		Most agree	13.1	18.0	7.9	22.3
		Wondering	0.4	8.6	3.2	20.55
5	Women have the right to make decisions together with men in all household matters	Completely disagree	9.2	10.2	13.4	8.8
		Completely agree	60.0	59.4	9.4	49.3
		Most disagree	0.4	1.6	0.5	4.4
		Most agree	10.0	19.5	6.9	21.4
		Wondering	0.4	4.7	0.9	15.0
6	Men have full control over major family matters	Completely disagree	40.4	39.8	39.8	34.0
		Completely agree	11.2	18.8	18.1	8.2
		Most disagree	10.4	10.9	12.5	17.9
		Most agree	8.1	14.8	9.3	15.0
		Wondering	5.0	7.8	2.8	23.8

Regarding the long-term effectiveness of the training programs, the survey results of 212 local officials, village elders, and village heads in Table 4 show that 44% of the respondents "can only remember part of the trained knowledge". The number of people who "can apply learned knowledge and skills into practice" only accounted for 21.4% and only 6% "can pass on knowledge and skills on gender equality to others". Thus, it can be seen that training activities need to be promoted and implemented more deeply.

**Table 4.** *Outcomes of gender training activities*

No.	Outcomes	%
1	I can't understand, can't remember the content	7.2
2	I can only remember part of the content, knowledge	44.0
3	I can repeat the knowledge and skills about gender that I have learned	9.5
4	I clearly understand the knowledge and skills on gender equality that I have learned	11.9
5	I can apply the knowledge and skills I have learned	21.4
6	I can pass on knowledge and skills on gender equality to others	6.0

The activities on gender equality have been bringing practical effects in the lives of ethnic minorities in Thai Nguyen province. It has partly changed people's thoughts, living styles, and treatment, but somewhere, the limitations still exist. In order to completely eliminate gender stereotypes, authorities at all levels need to come up with more effective interventions and remedies in the coming time.

### **3.3. People's practical needs of access to information of gender equality**

It can be said that the method of accessing information is one of the necessary factors contributing to the transformation of community awareness and behavior. The more we understand the needs of the people, the more effective the communication will be. From the

current situation of social problems in the locality, the survey results on 212 officials, village elders, and village heads show that people wanted to access more information of this issue with more diversified contents and forms. As shown in Table 5, issues related to gender equality in families with the content "Men and women do housework, develop the economy and make decisions in the family together" got the most concern. Although this content is only limited in family, it is extremely practical because gender equality is essentially formed on the basis of such respect and sharing inside the family.

**Table 5.** Contents proposed to be communicated more extensively in the coming time

No.	Contents	%
1	Men and women do housework, develop the economy and make decisions in the family together	57.1
2	Laws and policies on gender equality related fields	20.8
3	Event organization skills	15.1
4	Skills in monitoring, evaluation, and social criticism	14.2
5	Content about digital transformation, information technology application	8.5
6	Soft skills (communication, presentation, teamwork, strategic thinking)	5.2
7	Gender analysis, gender mainstreaming skills	4.2
8	Management and leadership skills	3.8
9	Content about international integration	1.9

Besides the content of communication, the form of communication also plays a very important role. According to the survey data in Table 6, over 56% of the respondents wanted to communicate in Vietnamese. However, there was also an average of about 38% of the surveyed people who wished to communicate in both Vietnamese and ethnic languages. Only a very small percentage of people wanted to communicate in their ethnic languages. In terms of communication forms, the results of questionnaires, interviews, and group discussions revealed that people want to communicate through mass media such as social networks, television, radio, etc... Recently the rate of people using smart devices as well as the media has increased, so the combination of communication on social networks such as Zalo, Facebook ... would bring good results. In addition, propaganda in direct forms, through contests, cultural and artist festivals were appreciated by the participants.

**Table 6.** The form of communication desired by the people in the near future

Unit: %

No.	Content	Subjects			
		Women	Men	Officials	Children
<b>I. Languages</b>					
1	Vietnamese	57.7	61.7	59.7	56.7
2	Ethnic languages	0.20	1.6	-	1.74
3	Both	42.1	34.4	35.6	41.6
<b>II. Forms of communication</b>					
1	Television	38	53	39	62
2	Radio/ loudspeakers	36	48	28	26
3	Newspapers	15	16	2	28
4	Billboards, posters, flyers	19	20	8	7
5	Social networks (Facebook, Zalo...)	40	42	19	46
6	Direct propaganda	56	72	30	39
7	Contests, cultural and artist festivals	43	43	20	31

### 3.4. Proposed solutions to raise people's awareness of gender equality

On the basis of the current status of accessing to information of gender equality and people's needs of this issue, the study proposes a number of solutions to improve the effectiveness of implementing activities promoting gender equality, contributing to improving people's socioeconomic life in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province as follows:

Firstly, it is necessary to establish a pioneering, professional and creative communication team/group with awareness and capacity on gender issues and gender equality in each village. The team/ group should be trained skills of communication and writing gender mainstreaming news. Ethnic minority people, especially ethnic minority women and pioneer men should be encouraged to participate in and implement key contents in the communication team/group.

Secondly, communication work needs to be done creatively in accordance with the culture of each village. Communication is not only one-way but requires flexible multi-dimensional interaction among the people, the government and the communication team.

Thirdly, forms of communication should be diversified to attract more people to participate and respond such as photo contests on gender equality on popular social platforms such as Facebook, Zalo, cultural festivals with gender mainstreaming, art exhibitions related to gender equality and prevention and response to gender-based violence...

Fourthly, it is necessary to develop community communication messages and campaigns related to the eradication of gender stereotypes, and build a safe living environment for women and children in accordance with actual conditions, culture and customs of the locality.

Fifthly, communication activities on gender equality, eliminating gender stereotypes and prejudices, building a safe living environment for women and children should be integrated into cultural clubs in the community such as singing then clubs, folk dance clubs...

Sixthly, it is essential to organize communication, training and action plans on raising gender equality knowledge and gender mainstreaming skills for officials of the local political system; at the same time, guide the implementation of the action plan after the training and immediately apply the action plans and initiatives related to gender mainstreaming effectively.

#### 4. Conclusion

Over the years, many localities across the country have jointly made efforts to implement measures to enhance gender equality in all fields in ethnic minority areas, including Thai Nguyen province. Many methods of accessing to information on gender equality in ethnic minority areas in the province have been widely deployed with many different contents and forms to many subjects such as local officials, village elders, and village heads. Through different accessing methods, the issue of gender equality in the family was fully and positively perceived by the community in the direction of empowering women. It can be said that activities on gender equality in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province have been bringing practical effects, contributing to raising people's awareness on this issue, gradually improving people's socio-economic life.

However, the limitations of gender inequality still exist somewhere. In order to completely eliminate gender stereotypes to promote gender equality, authorities at all levels need to come up with more effective interventions and remedies in the coming time. Based on surveying people's wishes, the study also proposed some solutions to further improve the effectiveness of activities on gender equality promotion. The research is the initial basis for the authorities at all levels to launch specific policies and plans, contributing to promoting gender equality in ethnic minority areas in Thai Nguyen province in the nearest time.

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