

# The current status of gender equality in the Tay ethnic group in Vietnam's Northern Midlands and Mountainous Areas during the new countryside construction process today

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**Abstract:** The article is the research results on the current status of gender equality in the Tay ethnic group in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas of Vietnam in the new countryside construction process. The Tay is the ethnic group with the largest population among 53 ethnic minorities living in Vietnam. They reside mainly in the low mountain areas in the north of Viet Nam. The process of building a new countryside has brought many changes to the rural area in Vietnam. Farmers' lives have been significantly improved, many policies have been adjusted and supplemented to suit each region in the country. However, the current gender equality issue has not changed much. The main causes related to gender stereotypes and outdated customs... Therefore, we need to carefully study and propose recommendations for early successful implementation of the new rural construction program in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas in Viet Nam.

**Background:** Up to now there have been many researches on gender equality among ethnic minorities, but there has been no research on gender equality in the Tay ethnic group in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous area of Vietnam, especially in the process of new rural construction today. Based on the fact, we chose to do this research.

**Materials and Methods:** This article was conducted through 15 provinces where the Tay ethnic group living in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas in Vietnam.

**Results:** By analyzing the current situation of the problem, the article has pointed out the causes and recommended measures to effectively implement in the process of new rural construction in Vietnam today.

**Conclusion:** Gender equality is a long-term process, but that doesn't mean it can't be done.

**Key Word:** gender equality; new rural construction; the Tay ethnic

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## I. Introduction

Gender equality is not a new topic in Vietnamese society today. The Party, State and competent authorities in Vietnam have proposed many implementation policies to achieve equality between genders in society. Gender equality is being implemented in one of 19 criteria for new rural construction at commune level: "Ensure gender equality and prevent domestic violence; protect and support vulnerable people in the areas of family and social life". Tay ethnic group is one of 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam, they mainly live in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas. For ethnic minorities, especially for the Tay, equal opportunities between men and women have not been properly realized. Although the role of Tay women has basically been enhanced in the local socio-economic development process, gender inequality is still a dilemma. There are many reasons to explain this, but the biggest barrier of Tay women is that they are too heavily regulated by the outdated prejudices of their ethnic group.

## II. Material and Methods

This study was conducted by survey method, in-depth interview in sociology:

- **Research site:** 15 provinces in the process of new rural construction in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas in Vietnam.
- **Research object:** Tay ethnic group.
- **Research period:** From January 2021 to June 2022.

### **III. Results**

#### **1. Some theoretical problems**

##### *\* Equality*

The category of equality has been mentioned by Marxist-Leninist classics, such as Ph. Engels: "The notion that all men, as human beings, have something in common, that within that common ground all are equal, is, of course, an old notion. But the claim of equality is completely different from that concept, strictly speaking, that claim requires from the common attribute of man, from the equality of all people as human beings, to derive the political and social equal rights for all, or at least for all citizens in a country, or for all members of a society" [1]. In the Declaration of Independence read at Ba Dinh Square, Hanoi, Vietnam on September 2, 1945, President Ho Chi Minh solemnly proclaimed the equal rights of all people, to live freely, equally, and happily he said: "All men are born with equal rights. They are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights; Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"[2]. In the Communist Party's brief outline written in 1930, he also emphasized that "In terms of society, men and women are equal"[2].

Thus, people are born equal at birth, but whether that equality is properly implemented depends on many factors, both objective factors and subjective factors. Equality is the equality between people in all respects. It is equality of opportunities (study, training, intellectual development), equality of opportunities for everyone to have good health, and equality of opportunities to capture social information. Equality is an opportunity for all citizens to free themselves (According to Worldbank, 2006).

##### *\* Gender equality*

Gender equality is an important issue in realizing equal rights. According to the United Nations, gender equality means that women and men enjoy equal conditions for the full realization of human rights and have the opportunity to contribute and enjoy the fruits of development of society in general.

In Vietnam, the 2013 Constitution stipulates equal rights of citizens in all areas of social life, in which gender equality is always a matter of special priority. Article 26 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates: "Male and female citizens are equal in all respects. The State has policies to ensure equal rights and opportunities for gender. The State, society and family create conditions for women to develop comprehensively and promote their roles in society. It is strictly forbidden to discriminate on the basis of gender". Clause 3, Article 5 of the 2006 Law on Gender Equality stipulates: "Gender equality means that men and women have equal positions and roles and are given conditions and opportunities to promote their capacity for the development of the community, family and equally enjoy the fruits of that development".

*\* New countryside* in Vietnam is understood as a rural area with sustainable economic development, people's material and spiritual life is improved, and people's traditional culture is preserved. From those, creating a strong political system contributes to maintaining political security and social order.

New rural construction criteria include 19 criteria: 1- Planning; 2- Traffic; 3- Irrigation and natural disaster prevention and control; 4- Electricity; 5- Education; 6- Culture; 7- Rural commercial infrastructure; 8- Information and Communication; 9- Residential houses; 10 -Income; 11- Multidimensional poverty; 12- Labor; 13. Organization of production and rural economic development; 14- Medical; 15- Public administration; 16- Access to the law; 17- Environment; 18- Quality of living environment; 19- Defense and Security.

#### **2. The current status of gender equality in the construction of new rural areas of the Tay ethnic group in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas of Vietnam**

##### **2.1. Overview of the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas in Vietnam**

The Northern Midlands and Mountains, administratively, is a region consisting of 15 provinces: Ha Giang, Cao Bang, Lao Cai, Bac Kan, Lang Son, Tuyen Quang, Yen Bai, Thai Nguyen, Phu Tho, Bac Giang, Lai Chau, Dien Bien, Son La, Hoa Binh, Quang Ninh. This is an area where mainly ethnic minorities live, such as: Tay, Nung, Dao, Muong, Thai... This is an area with an important position in terms of national security and defense of Vietnam with a large geographical area, the climate is quite favorable for socio-economic development. In the process of implementing the new rural construction program, ethnic minorities have always actively implemented the documents, policies and laws of the Party and the State and so far, many localities have completed the program criteria.

New rural construction is a comprehensive program on socio-economic development, politics and national defense developed and implemented by the Government of Vietnam on a rural scale nationwide, in the spirit of Decree No. Resolution of the 7th Conference of the 10th Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam on agriculture and rural areas (August 5, 2008). Up to now (as of February 2020), there are 9 provinces and cities nationwide that have 100% of communes recognized as meeting new rural standards, which are Thai Binh, Nam Dinh, Ha Nam, Hung Yen, and Da Nang, Binh Duong, Dong Nai, Can Tho, Vinh Phuc.

Along with the process of economic, cultural and social development of new rural construction, socio-economic conditions of localities and people have been improved. With the improved economic conditions,

many fine customs and practices have played an active role in building internal solidarity, supporting the implementation of the law in the process of building a new countryside. Building national pride and respect for their own culture, ethnic minorities have made great efforts in preserving the nation's unique cultural values. Many new factors are established when conducting new rural construction, but besides that, many factors are outdated and customs cannot be changed immediately, which need a process. Among these residuals, gender inequality is an issue that needs carefully and seriously study in Vietnam in general and the Northern mountainous and Midland areas in particular.

The Tay people live mainly in lowland areas in the Northern Midlands and Mountains region of Vietnam. The Tay have the second largest population in Vietnam. According to the 2019 Population and Housing Census, the Tay people in Vietnam have a population of 1,845,492 people, which is the second largest ethnic group in Vietnam, present in all 63 provinces and cities in the country mainly concentrated in the northern midland and mountainous provinces.

## ***2.2. The status of gender equality in new rural construction in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas in Vietnam***

In Vietnam, women and girls are still more disadvantaged than men and boys in some areas. The proportion of women in wage employment is only about half that of men. Women's wages are lower than men's. For example, the actual average hourly wage of women is only about 80% of that of men. The time women spend on housework is not paid twice as much as men. The number of hours worked for men and women is about the same. However, women spend twice as much time on housework as men, these are unpaid jobs. Therefore, they do not have time to participate in recreational, cultural and social activities and continue to improve their education. Not to mention, the nutritional condition of women is worse than that of men. Adult women, especially women in rural areas, poor families and ethnic minorities, are still more likely to have impaired health than men. In addition, they still face more obstacles than men in accessing credit, especially since women often do not have collateral such as land. Although land law in Vietnam does not discriminate against women, common practices make them vulnerable, as land use rights are often in the husband's name. In addition to the information in the above report, it is clear that in fact women still face more obstacles than men in participating in work and social activities. Especially domestic violence and gender-based violence still exist in many places (as reported by UNFP)[4].

The Tay follow the patriarchal system, the father has the main decision-making role in the family. All the big issues in the family are decided by the father, from organizing weddings, funerals to social relationships. According to traditional custom, most Tay people get married in the same clan. The Tay family follows the nuclear, patriarchal, and monogamous family system. Young men and women are free to get to know each other before going to marriage. However, whether to go to marriage or not is up to the two families to decide. The traditional wedding ceremony of the Tay people is conducted through the following rites: wedding ceremony, betrothal ceremony, New Year's Eve ceremony, wedding day announcement ceremony, wedding ceremony, reception of the bride and bridegroom..., showing the cultural identity of a ethnicity. After the wedding, the bride stays at her parents' house until she is pregnant and gives birth, then comes back to stay with her husband's house. Tay families often prefer sons and have clear rules in the relationship between family members.

A son is a person who inherits the family line of the father. The son is responsible for worshipping his grandparents and ancestors in the family. Among family members, the basic relationship is equality, working together and enjoying the fruits of labor together. The eldest daughter, before the age of marriage, is often raised a separate capital by her parents from planting cotton, weaving, etc. The division of property is done according to the principle, divided among all sons and parents, in which the share is shared between the eldest son and the parents slightly more than the other children. In the kinship relationship, the Tay also have a hierarchical relationship like the Kinh. About customs and habits such as weddings, funerals. The Tay people practice the regime of foreign marriage and the stable monogamy and monogamy. The phenomenon of adultery, unmarried pregnancy, and divorce are rare in this ethnic group. If the wife voluntarily leaves the husband, they must return all the gifts that the husband's family has paid for the wedding and get back their "lucky destiny" note. If the husband takes the initiative to divorce, the property will be divided in half and compensated for an amount called "đào nả" (face wash) for the bride's family. That wife is allowed to bring all the belongings, personal belongings and all the dowry. Children are also divided, usually the son follows the father, the daughter follows the mother, if the younger child will belong to the mother. In cases where the husband dies, the woman must stay with her husband's family for at least 3 years before she can marry another man. At that time, if the children are still young, either leave them to their ex-husband's parents, or bring them with them. Absolutely, all property must be kept by the ex-husband's brothers and the woman can only bring her personal belongings. It takes at least 3 years for a man to marry a new wife when his wife dies. This second wedding is not as expensive as the previous one and as usual.

In the process of implementing new rural areas, Tay women, as well as women of other ethnic groups in Vietnam, have been directly participating in and mobilizing family members to build infrastructure, carry out

the transformation change the agricultural economic structure, participate in production and business. There are more and more examples of brave, dynamic female farmers who overcome difficulties to get rich from their own homeland. They participate in preserving traditional crafts, creating safe agricultural products to bring to the market. Many women have donated land, contributed to the construction of rural roads, in-field irrigation, education, health care, and culture projects and are a key force involved in sanitation and environmental protection. With a proportion of more than 50% of the population, Vietnamese women play an important role in the fields of economic and social development of the country in general, and in the construction of new rural areas in particular. Women are both participants in the construction of new rural areas and beneficiaries of the program's results. Women have a particularly important role in building families, preserving and passing on traditional cultural values. With love and responsibility, women always preserve and promote traditional family values, care for and raise children with their husbands, and build a harmonious and happy family. Cultural, artistic and sports activities in the community always have the shadow and contribution of women.

Gender equality is a goal that needs to be directed to build a new cultural life, perfecting cultural criteria in building a new rural area. However, according to the customs and habits of the ethnic groups, the issue of equality between men and women still has many limitations, which are clearly reflected in a number of areas: the family nature of ethnic groups is a patriarchal sub-family, husband has a decisive role in the family. Stemming from the idea of respecting men, the status of women in the family and society is not promoted, although they have an important role in the family and society is not promoted, although they have important role in the economy and other activities. According to the custom of the community, women have little chance to participate in social activities, so they are not the representatives of families to discuss the common affairs of the village/village; religious activities have some taboos forbidding women to participate. The following table is the survey results of 105 Tay households, in Ngoc Phai and Dai Sao communes, Cho Don district, Bac Kan province.

**Table: The right to make decisions about big family matters and participate in community activities**

(ratio: %)

Activities	Male	Female	Both sexes
Building and repairing houses	86,5	10,5	3,0
Shopping for expensive assets in the family	71,2	19	9,8
Participate in community activities	70	24,5	5,5

The family organization of the Tay is usually a small patriarchal family (including two generations of parents and children living together). The patriarchy in the Tay family is very strong, the man plays the role of deciding everything and is the heir to the property. A woman is not allowed to inherit property, when she gets married, the only property a daughter can bring back to her husband's house is silver jewelry and clothes. Men have the obligation to shoulder the family chores: go to work in the fields, make vows to ancestors, welcome shamans, and participate in important work on behalf of the family, which any woman has no right to do instead. With the Tay, the daily work in the family, the man rarely shares with his wife. As for women, it seems that economic calculations in the family are not allowed, but they are assumed that this is for men. They only know how to work, they always have to listen and comply with the requirements of their husbands. They have no voice in the family, in the village. They feel guilty when communicating with others, especially with strangers, maybe it's due to language differences or psychological apprehension.

The majority of women from ethnic minorities in the study areas are less able to participate in community activities and make important decisions in the family. Therefore, women's rights are limited in the lives of ethnic minorities, they have little conditions to promote their abilities. It can be seen that gender stereotypes about the division of labor in production exist not only in the perception of men, but also in women themselves - who have been taught and raised according to the model of the people mothers, former grandmothers and in turn will also "contribute" to educating their daughters in the same way. It is in that spirit that a woman's life is like a closed circle. From an early age, she has to sacrifice for the economy and family welfare. When she grows up, she becomes a wife and mother erroneously sacrificing their own interests for their husbands and children and in-laws. The concept related to the role and position of women in the family and society has been deeply rooted in the thoughts and psychology of each woman herself and the whole community, making the woman committed completely dependent on her husband, not daring to decide or solve family problems.

#### **IV. Discussion**

In order to soon successfully implement gender equality in the Tay ethnic group in the process of building new countryside in the Northern Midlands and Mountainous areas, we make the following recommendations:

*Firstly, for the management levels in Vietnam*, from the central to the grassroots level, it is necessary

to continue to pay attention to, adjust and supplement appropriate policies in a timely and quick manner to soon achieve effectiveness. For example, target 18.6 added on January 5, 2018 by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in the new rural implementation period 2016-2020: ensuring gender equality and preventing domestic violence; protect and support vulnerable people in the fields of family and social life, have at least 01 female leader in the commune.

**Secondly, for propaganda:**

- The authorities need to propagate to the Tay women about their position and role in the family and in modern society. Propaganda through the women working in the village, through the enlightenment of the Party Committee, village leaders, and communes. Only in this way can they see that they are not just a housewife, not someone who always obeys and listens.
- Through the media (through programs on television or radio) it is necessary to have opinions and publications that remove the encouragement of women's conception of sacrifice and male tolerance.
- Through the media, documents should be released calling for equality in the family, not overemphasizing the role of men and emphasizing the role of women in the modern family.
- Through the media, it is necessary to emphasize that illiteracy eradication and education improvement are extremely important for people of this ethnic group. Therefore, when there is understanding, both men and women have an awareness of the age of marriage; awareness of phenomena such as early dropout, shyness to communicate, no information, low self-esteem for women. Since then, both men and women themselves self-regulate in their activities and behavior.

**Thirdly, for educational task:**

- The teacherstaff and educators in schools where the Tay live and study should continue to design reasonable lessons to educate girls and boys to help them live independently, have the spirit of helping others, know how to share from an early age.
- The Communist Party and the Government of Vietnam should continue to implement policies to support Tay students to study in boarding schools for ethnic minorities. This is the premise that the Tay people can study and work in the country and abroad, so that they have a thorough awareness of the phenomenon of gender inequality of their nation, from which they will be the ones to directly implement the elimination of male-female distinctions in the family and in society.

## V. Conclusion

In the current context, with the strong development of science and technology, with the strong exchange and integration with countries around the world, with the strong development of the process of industrialization and modernization, the Tay people as well as other ethnic minorities in Vietnam have many opportunities to expand their cultural exchange relationships with other ethnic groups in the country and around the world. Thereby, more or less they have assimilated progressive and positive elements and have changed to suit the new trend. In order to limit and progress to overcome the phenomenon of gender inequality for ethnic minorities in general and for the Tay in particular, females themselves cannot change that phenomenon, but need the support of male cooperation. For women, when born, they seem to have "inferior" status compared to men, specifically: in terms of health (females are often weaker than men), in personality (females are not as strong as males), on social mobility (females are not as good as men), on the level of political influence (females are less than males),... To achieve gender equality, let males of the Tay ethnic group has a share with females in all aspects, in order for the Tay female's voice to be respected, it is necessary to have a system of specific solutions. Therefore, it takes a process, even the experience of a whole generation to do this.

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