

# Seeds of Change and Rays of Hope in the Philippines and Vietnam: Towards Gender Mainstreaming in Agricultural Diversification in a Cross Southeast Asian Perspective

## INTRODUCTION

The Philippines and Vietnam have a long history of war, colonial rule, and internal conflicts. Both are members of ASEAN. Despite being close geographically their social, cultural and political developments have followed different directions. Both the Philippines and Vietnam place gender equality high on their development agenda. In Vietnam, a gender equality law and an anti-domestic violence law have been in force since 2006 and 2007 respectively. The Philippines has arguably the most comprehensive legislation on gender equality in the region. A Magna Carta of Women prohibits discrimination and guarantees women equality in the family. An archival survey in both countries reveals that little research have been carried out on women's empowerment in time of natural disaster and in a post-conflict setting (as in the Central Part of the Philippines). The current study aims to fill this gap of knowledge by examining the intersection between gender, economic empowerment, natural disasters and local politics.



*Hmong women selling vegetables at Bac Ha market*

## METHODOLOGY

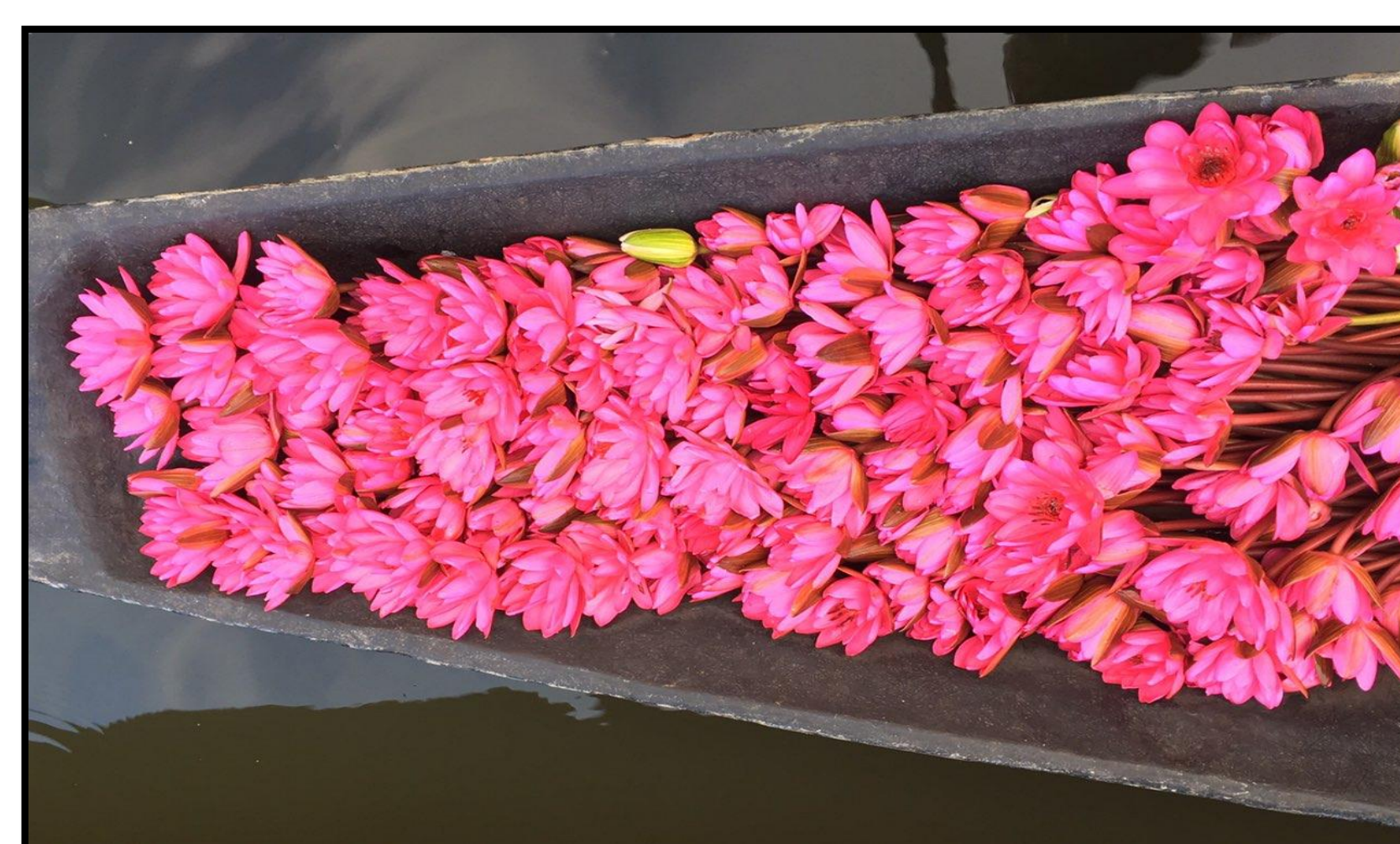
This research paper is informed by ethnographic data collected during various periods of fieldwork conducted in Northwest Vietnam (since 2007) and in the Central Region of the Philippines (2014-2015). The material which I refer to thus is multifaceted and offers a foundation for my analysis of lessons on mainstreaming gender equality in agricultural diversification in the two studied countries.



*A local market in Tacloban*

## RESULTS

The research material on the Philippines indicates local development initiatives aiming to promote women empowerment through organic and sustainable farming in the Typhoon Haiyan affected areas in Eastern Samar. In the fore of my discussion is the case of the local non-governmental organization Sarilaya Kalayaan. Sarilaya Kalayaan has not only provided women survivors with skills that help augment their family income and broaden their abilities but also help to create a critical platform from where women can voice their experiences and develop strategies to challenge men's violence individually or collectively. The positive results of the 'Watch Group' initiative are both personal and societal; participants become part of a movement thanks to which they can find support while social problems are dealt with and maybe even prevented. These interventions provide a critical platform from where women can voice out their experience and develop strategies to challenge men's violence individually and collectively. The 'Watch Group' hence addresses misrecognition fostered by 'structural violence' and the dehumanization of women spurred by direct physical abuse. This indicates the significant role of women as woman-to-woman community networkers, multitaskers, and as reconcilers of disparate interests in the household and community in post-conflict settings.



*Water lilies coming on the market*

As for Vietnam, the issues are examined under the lens of the intersections between household dynamics, social capital and ethnicity in the agricultural production process and livelihood options of minority ethnic communities. Within the family, ethnic minority women are likely to be engaged in more traditional/routine types of production activities such as rice and maize, and raising pigs and chickens. Where activities require new techniques and higher investment such as managing fisheries or fruit tree production, men are more dominant. This seems to echo the standard explanation for the division of crops by gender in that women are responsible for feeding the family and thus they grow subsistence crops. Whereas men are responsible for providing cash income and therefore they grow cash crops. This brings to the fore that the approach of using the household as a basis for analyzing community-based and institutional relationships would not reveal the intra-family gender and generational dynamics of control between husband and wife, between parents themselves, between parents and young couples. Furthermore, land tenure plays a vital role in securing access to credit which is very crucial to the use of purchased inputs for cash crop production. Here the dimensions of ethnicity and local politics come into play as those in positions of power in the local political hierarchy appear to have more secured land rights. Seen from interethnic perspectives individuals or ethnic groups being perceived as better integrated into national political developments are likely to get a more prominent role in the local administrative system.



*Ha Nhi woman hoeing at sunset*

## CONCLUSION

Research findings show that the approach of intersectionality can serve as an effective frame for analysis not only in academic studies but also in development practice concerning the agricultural sector, helping shed light on the complexities inherent in the agricultural production process and livelihood options of minority ethnic communities.

Seen from intervention perspectives, there is a need for promoting changes in social norms that tolerate gender-based violence and gender inequality. This is a key component in promoting women's empowerment. Intervention implementation plan must be driven by the community and thus this must be part of the community mobilization efforts. Participatory/consultative/collaborative planning, monitoring and evaluation are needed throughout the development project lifetime.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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