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# OUR COAST - OUR FUTURE PILOT<sup>1</sup>



## Positive Steps towards Gender Equality in Participatory Coastal Spatial Planning. Case of Tien Lang district, Haiphong, Vietnam

Brief no. 2

### Gender and Participatory Coastal Spatial Planning

Vietnam has made a move towards promoting multi-sectoral and coordinated approaches to coastal management and planning, with a legal framework for integrated coastal planning provided by the 2015 Law on Marine and Island Resources and Environment. With its long and densely populated coastline, Vietnam is among the countries actively preparing to respond to sea level rise and climate change. Within this, an important component of coastal management is protecting coastal forests such as mangroves, given their critical role in protecting infrastructure, livelihoods, and ecosystems. Decree No. 119/2016/ND-CP, issued in August 2016, provides policies on sustainable management, protection, and development of coastal forests to cope with climate change. Moreover, a Planning Law has been approved in November 2017 and includes a chapter on marine and coastal spatial planning.

While Vietnam has carried out successful mangrove planting across its coastline, the current challenge is to identify appropriate ways of managing these mangrove forests in the context of socioeconomic development. These coastal landscapes have multiple land use pressures that include aquaculture, fisheries, clam farming, tourism, and biodiversity conservation, among others. Women and men access, use, and manage these coastal natural resources in different ways. The key to managing mangroves, therefore, is to identify ways of carrying out coastal spatial planning at a local level through the participation of key stakeholders, both women and men, so that a collective vision for the local coastal landscape can be formed and implemented. Within this vision, specific plans for managing mangroves can be drawn up to meet the needs and interests of the people actively working and living in these coastal areas.

In order to identify appropriate approaches to coastal spatial planning and mangrove co-management, the U.S. Agency for International Development-funded **Our Coast – Our Future** pilot is being carried out over the period October 2016 to December 2017 in Vietnam's Tien Lang district of Haiphong municipality.

<sup>1</sup> This pilot was developed through the USAID-supported Tenure and Global Climate Change (TGCC) Program and implemented by the Vietnam Forests and Deltas Program. <https://www.land-links.org/project/tenure-global-climate-change-vietnam/>



## How Women's Engagement Improves Coastal Spatial Planning

Globally, land use planning and mapping is conventionally considered highly technical and therefore gender-neutral. As such, land use planning and decision-making is often top down and expert-led. Even when the active participation of local community members is sought for coastal management planning, most often only men are involved in the process as it is assumed they are the primary land and resource owners in the area. The invisibility of women leads to their inevitable exclusion from planning and decision-making processes.

However, land use planning and management are not gender-neutral at all. As the gender analysis for Tien Lang's coastal communes revealed, there are significant differences between women's and men's access and control of natural resources. In practice, women have played a significant role in mangrove planting since the mid-1990s and depend more than men on the natural resources that thrive in mangrove ecosystems for both household food security and income generation, by gleaning in open and common areas of the coastline.

In contrast, men are able to get access to more formal opportunities to earn higher income because of their assets and social networks. Men have been awarded the mangrove forest protection contracts to look after specific areas and are able to harvest aquatic resources with tools (such as nets and traps) and boats, as well as rely on large investment in aquaculture ponds and clam farming. The emerging trend of privatization of the previously common mudflats and mangroves through aquaculture pond construction, clam farming, and individualized mangrove forest protection agreements is likely to adversely affect women and women-headed households. As a result, women will have to increasingly rely on income from their agricultural land where they grow rice, vegetables, and tobacco, as well as raise livestock and fish. Their decision-making power over production choices may be limited because the Land Use Rights Certificates are typically in the husband's name, even if the law enables joint ownership by both husband and wife.

At the level of decision-making and government administration, the relative lack of women in positions of authority means that women's needs are not necessarily represented in decision-making. Vinh Quang commune, like the other two targeted communes of Tien Hung and Dong Hung, has two men serving as land administration officers. The coastal communes have no female village heads and only 5 of the 26 Commune People's Committee members are women. These bodies have missed the opportunity to carefully consider the risks to women's use rights over aquaculture ponds in the current individual-signed contract system where male heads of households are contract holders.

When the land administration officers were told about the case of a divorced woman who had difficulty claiming her use rights over her half of the household aquaculture pond which was under contract only to her husband, the officers immediately recognized the importance of including the wife's name in the contract format (Box 1). Such changes may seem small, but they can have a large impact on women's equal rights to land use and management, and lead women to actively participate in coastal spatial planning.

### BOX 1: JOINTLY SIGNED AQUACULTURE POND USE RIGHT CONTRACTS

Mr. Nguyen Thu Hieu, the Land Administration Officer for Vinh Quang commune, noted:

"Since 2005, we have signed aquaculture pond use right contracts with individuals instead of households because we thought that it would increase the responsibilities of the contractors. In fact, aquaculture is never an individual's work. It requires huge resources from the household.

Now, after the discussion initiated by the *Our Coast – Our Future* project, I realize that individual contracts would make women very vulnerable. Almost all the contractors are men and the unofficial transfer value of the use right of aquaculture pond is very high, up to 1 billion VND per hectare.

We should make a change in the contract format to include both the husband and wife's names. For the annual contract of the ponds inside the dikes, we can make an immediate change this year; with longer-term pond contracts outside the dike, we can make changes from 2019."

## Women's knowledge and skills for coastal spatial planning make a difference

The *Our Coast – Our Future* pilot has not only helped to underscore how different women and men's use and rights to varied coastal natural resources are, but has also built up the foundation for transformative changes in the contribution of women to participatory coastal spatial planning.



During Step 2, analyzing and mapping current conditions, women were actively involved in commune-level discussions for the participatory coastal resource assessment as well as participatory mapping. During the data collection process for preparing a set of digital maps of resource condition, use, and management (which included maps of women's roles as short-term and long-term laborers in aquaculture farms), women were included on the data collection teams. Local women were trained for the first time in data collection and analysis that involved using a survey tool, a tablet, as well as reading and preparing maps. Later, during the spatial coastal planning and spatial implementation plan steps (Steps 3 and 4), women were keen contributors to discussions about future coastal visions and spatial scenarios for their local coastlines.

Three women<sup>3</sup> from Vinh Quang commune who participated in all five steps of the process shared their experience: “In first looking at the tablet, we were overwhelmed but after training and practice provided by the **Our Coast – Our Future** pilot project, we found them easy to use, just like our smartphones. The interview techniques are also very new to us. We had never done anything like that before. In the past, land use planning was the sole responsibility of the commune leaders and land administration officers. They only invited us to help solve the conflicts that arose later. However, we find out now that it is very necessary to have women's voice and engagement right from the beginning of the planning process to ensure consideration of women's needs and concerns. After all, we believe that men are changing their perception of our roles. They used to think that only men can make great decisions but now we can discuss the issues with them equally with confidence.”



Mrs. Phung Thi Phuong, a fisherwoman in Dong Hung commune, shared the same experience. She has been living in the commune since its establishment from a mangrove area in 1983 but this was the first time she and other fisherfolk were consulted and given the opportunity to participate in the mapping and planning of local coastal areas. Now she is very comfortable with the modern mapping technology introduced by the pilot project. She explained, “I could never understand the sketch map of the land administration officer. However, after the first workshop when I was instructed how to read this kind of map by the **Our Coast – Our Future** pilot project, I could see things very clearly and in detail. I did give a presentation and marked important locations on the maps. I always try to arrange to participate in these planning workshops because we hardly have such opportunity to have all the related people: gleaners, boat fishers, clam farmers, and aquaculture pond owners sitting

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together to talk and negotiate solutions to conflicts and raise our needs and concern to the local authorities. I had proposed to plan a small harbor and an entrance route free of traps, pots, and nets for fishing boats. Also, I proposed we should plant more mangroves. Mangroves can protect the dikes, the fishing boats, and even the paddy rice fields from strong winds, waves, and sea level rise. They also provide places for marine species to lay eggs and grow up, keep the mudflat stable, and enlarge our fishing and gleaning areas.”

Commenting on the role of women in the communities today, she added, “Women not being as equal as men is just our inertia. Many women, including female boat fishers, nowadays are very capable. We need to keep learning. Only knowledge makes us confident to speak out. For me, even if forbidden, even if hit, I still speak up.”

<sup>3</sup> Mrs. Dang Thi Thiet, 51 years old, Chair of the Women's Union; Mrs. Nguyễn Thị Đan, 38 years old, Vice-chair of the Women's Union; and Mrs. Ngo Thi Hoai, 55 years old, former Chair of the Farmer's Union.

