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A photograph of a young woman with long dark hair in two braids, wearing a yellow floral shirt, smiling as she harvests mangoes. She is using a traditional wooden basket with a woven handle. The background is a lush green field with many trees and foliage. A semi-transparent blue banner is overlaid on the bottom half of the image, containing the title and subtitle.

Gender Analysis of Mango, Pomelo, Durian and Passion fruit value chains in Vietnam

GQSP Vietnam Phase 2

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Acronyms and Abbreviations

FDG	Focus Group Discussion
FWED	Fund for Women Economic Development
GAP	Good Agricultural Practices
GESI	Gender Empowerment and Social Inclusion
GQSP	The Global Quality and Standards Programme
HH	Household
MARD	Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
PPC	Provincial People's Committee
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SOFRI	Southern Fruit Research Institute
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
VC	Value chain
VIEAP	Vietnam Institute of Agricultural Engineering and Post-harvest Technology
WEE	Women's Economic Empowerment

1. Introduction and Context

1.1 Project context

The Global Quality and Standards Programme (GQSP) is a strategic partnership between Switzerland and UNIDO to promote trade and competitiveness through strengthening the quality and standards compliance capacity to facilitate markets for SMEs. Continuing from the successful GQSP Viet Nam Phase 1 with a focus on “Increasing quality and standards compliance capacity of Mango value chain in Mekong River Delta”, the Phase 2 expands the learnings to a wider tropical fruit industry following logical progression. The objective of the Phase 2 is “enhanced competitiveness and sustainability of Vietnamese tropical fruit exports through innovation, diversification, quality improvement, and standards compliance that meet modern market requirements.” GQSP phase 2 targets 4 key value chains, including mango, pomelo, durian and passion fruit in the Mekong River Delta and Central Highlands (5 provinces of Dong Thap, Ben Tre, Tien Giang, Dak Nong and Dak Lak).

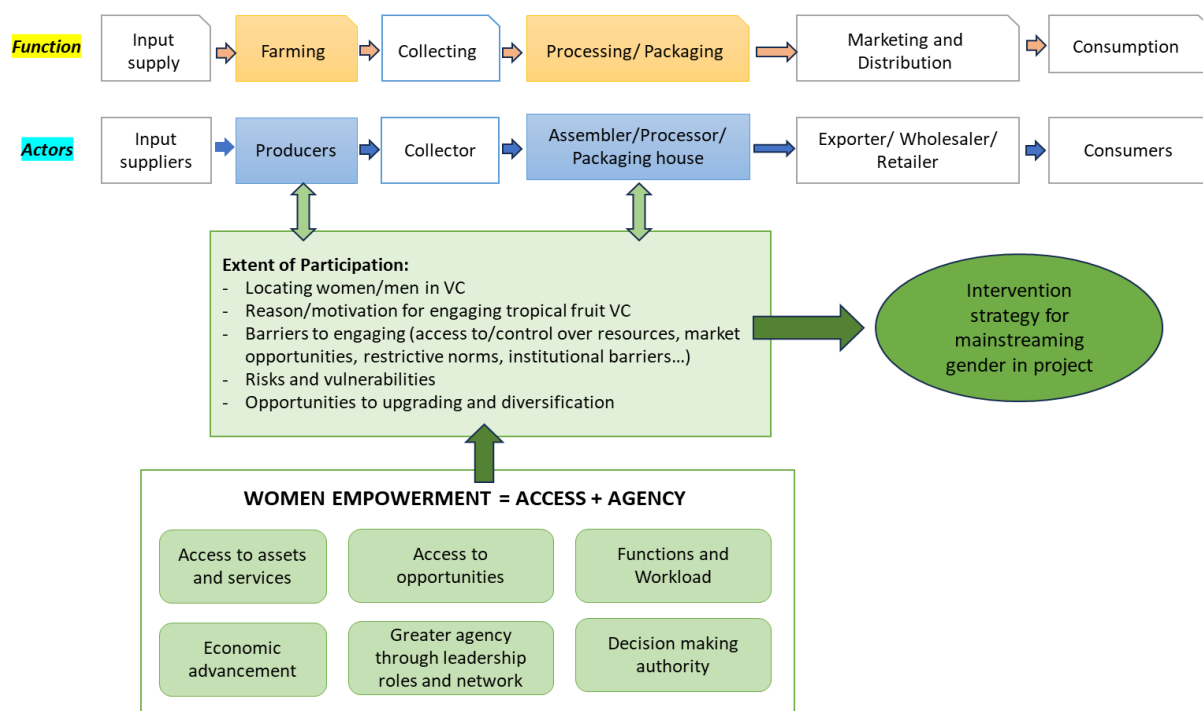
Vietnam's tropical fruits sector serves as a vital component of the nation's agricultural economy, contributing significantly to both domestic consumption and export revenue. However, behind the lush orchards and bustling markets lies a nuanced narrative of gender dynamics shaping the industry. Recently, there has been growing recognition of the important role gender plays in agriculture, prompting a closer look at the contributions of both women and men in the tropical fruits sector. So, understanding gender dynamics within the target value chains of the GQSP project is crucial for designing project specific activities, in a view of not only promoting gender equality but also maximizing the sector's potential for sustainable growth and development. By acknowledging and addressing these disparities, stakeholders can work towards creating more inclusive and equitable pathways for both women and men to thrive in this vital agricultural domain.

The objective of this study is:

- (1) to perform a gender analysis along the selected value chain of the project to shed light on women's agency and power.
- (2) to assess potential opportunities for improving the role of women in the selected value chains.
- (3) to obtain basic characteristics and data on profiles of women with regards to selected value chains.
- (4) to propose relevant interventions to mainstream gender in the project activities.

1.2 Approach and methodology

In this study, the Women Economic Empowerment framework is mobilized when examining different stages of the tropical fruit value chains, with a focus on farming and processing/packaging stages. The extent of participation of women in these value chain nodes allows us to identify the gender differences and gender inequalities, then come up with recommendations to mainstream gender in the project activities.

Figure 1. Analysis framework

Source: Author's conception

It collects and analyses relevant quantitative data and qualitative information as regards differences in women's and men's role, values power dynamics and behaviors that shape their access to economics assets, productive resources, and participation in decision-making.

- *Desk study:* collect and review project documents, desk review of target tropical fruits, gender in agriculture sector, collect secondary data (statistics on population, agricultural employment in agriculture, local policies/programs on target tropical fruits, ...).

- *Key informant interviews* with key stakeholders of the target value chains (individual farmer, cooperative, processor, enterprise) are conducted to explore the different topics with a gender lens: (i) land access and ownership; (ii) participation in activities along the value chain (farming, processing, marketing); (iii) extension services capacity and access; (iv) availability of improved technology; (v) challenges for adoption. Alongside this, we facilitated *focus group discussions (FDG)* with mixed groups of male and female growers to further explore gendered differences and potential solutions to empower women. Each mixed FDG gathers 8 to 10 participants for discussions and exchanges on gender issues. In total, 11 FDGs were conducted (1 FDG for 1 value chain per province).

Besides, gender questions are incorporated with VIEAP baseline survey to shed further light on gender and indicators which serve designing a MERL framework. This sector level study is supplemented by additional national level gender included in the Gender Empowerment and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Table 1. Geographical coverage and target value chains

#	Value chain	Dong Thap	Ben Tre	Tien Giang	Dak Nong	Dak Lak
1	Mango	x		x		
2	Durian	x	x	x	x	X
3	Pomelo		x	x		
4	Passion fruit				x	x

2. A review of selected tropical fruit value chains in Vietnam

2.1 Production and markets

2.1.1 Mango

Vietnam is a prominent player in the global tropical fruit market, with mangoes being one of the key fruit crops. Vietnam's mango production is concentrated in several regions, including the Mekong River Delta, Southeast, and Central Highlands. The country's tropical climate, with distinct wet and dry seasons, provides ideal conditions for mango cultivation. Total area of growing mangoes is 114,000 hectares. In 2023, Vietnam produced approximately one million tons of mangoes, with the Mekong River Delta accounting for the majority of the production.

Vietnam grows a wide range of mango varieties, each with unique characteristics and flavors. Besides the most popular varieties including Cat Chu mango, Hoa Loc mango, Cat Hoa Loc mango, other notable varieties as Cat Chu Xoan, Taiwan mangoes are also cultivated in various regions of the country.

The country exports mangoes to several markets, including China, South Korea, Japan, the United States, and Europe. The demand for Vietnamese mangoes in these markets has been growing due to their high quality and competitive pricing. In recent years, there has been a shift towards value-added products, such as dried mangoes, mango puree, and mango juice, which cater to changing consumer preferences and extend the product's shelf life. This trend has been supported by advancements in processing technologies and improved supply chain management.

2.1.2 Pomelo

Vietnam is one of the world's leading producers of pomelo, with major cultivation areas located in the Mekong River Delta, Southeast, and North Central regions. The country's warm and humid climate provides optimal conditions for pomelo cultivation, with a production output of around 900,000 tons annually. Key provinces such as Ben Tre, Vinh Long, and Tien Giang are renowned for their high-quality pomelos.

The country boasts a rich variety of pomelos, which are highly regarded both domestically and internationally: Nam Roi pomelo, Da Xanh pomelo, Phuc Trach pomelo, Dien pomelo. Vietnam exports pomelos to the European Union, United States, China, and Japan. The export market has shown promising growth, particularly for premium varieties like Da Xanh and Nam Roi. Efforts to improve quality standards, packaging, and marketing have further enhanced the competitiveness of Vietnamese pomelos.

2.1.3 Durian

Durian, often dubbed the "king of fruits", is a highly distinctive fruit known for its strong odor and rich, creamy texture. Vietnam has become a significant player in the durian market, with increasing production and expanding export potential. Vietnam's durian production is concentrated mainly in the southern regions, particularly in the Mekong River Delta, Southeast, and Central Highlands. Provinces such as Tien Giang, Ben Tre, and Dak Lak are renowned for their durian cultivation. The country's tropical climate, characterized by warm temperatures and abundant rainfall, provides ideal conditions for growing durian.

In recent years, the area under durian cultivation and the volume of production have expanded significantly. This growth is driven by increasing domestic consumption and a burgeoning export market. The total production volume reached approximately 1.2 million tons in 2023¹, with continued growth anticipated.

The durian market in Vietnam has experienced robust growth, supported by rising domestic demand and increasing exports. Vietnamese durians are exported to several markets, with China being the largest importer. Other key markets include Singapore, Thailand, and Hong Kong. The Vietnamese government's efforts to negotiate better trade terms and meet stringent quality standards have facilitated access to these markets.

2.1.4 Passion fruit

Vietnam's passion fruit production is primarily concentrated in the Central Highlands and the Northern mountainous regions, where the climate is conducive to growing this tropical fruit. Provinces such as Gia Lai, Dak Lak, and Son La are key areas for passion fruit cultivation, benefiting from cooler temperatures and well-drained soils.

The country has seen a steady increase in the area under passion fruit cultivation, with annual production reaching above 100,000 tons in recent years. Passion fruit farming in Vietnam is often characterized by smallholder farmers, although larger commercial farms are becoming more common.

The passion fruit market in Vietnam is expanding, supported by increasing consumer awareness of the fruit's health benefits, including high vitamin C and antioxidant content. Passion fruit is consumed fresh and processed into products such as juice, pulp, jams, and flavored yogurts. Vietnamese passion fruit is exported to several markets, including China, Europe, and the Middle East. The export market has been growing, particularly for processed products, as Vietnam seeks to establish itself as a reliable supplier of high-quality passion fruit.

2.2 Challenges facing tropical fruits sector

These tropical fruits in Vietnam have seen significant growth in recent years, driven by favorable climatic conditions of different agro-ecological regions, diverse varieties, and expanding export markets. Despite its growth, these sectors face several challenges

¹ Report of Department of Crop Production at the Workshop "Sustainable Development of Durian Sector" organized by Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ho Chi Minh City, 10 May 2024.

- Quality control: Ensuring consistent quality and meeting international standards remains a challenge, particularly in terms of pesticide residues and post-harvest handling.
- Market access: While Vietnam has secured access to several international markets, stringent import regulations and competition from other tropical fruits producing countries pose challenges.
- Climate change: The sector is vulnerable to climate change impacts, including unpredictable weather patterns, pests, and diseases, depletion of natural resources which can affect yield and quality.
- Infrastructure and logistics: Inadequate infrastructure and logistics can hinder efficient distribution, affecting the freshness and quality of tropical fruits, especially in export markets.

3. Gender roles in selected tropical fruit value chains

3.1 An overview of employment by gender in targeted provinces

Women are the main labor force in the rural areas of Vietnam and make great contribution to rural and agricultural development. By 2022, female population of working age at 15 years old and above accounted for 47% of working-age population (GSO 2023)². This proportion is also reflected in the figures consolidated at provincial level (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). Among employed persons, at national level, 27.5% engaged in the agricultural sector. These figures don't include a significant number of informal labors working in agriculture. Bao (2015) estimated that 58% of rural population is women who are dependent on agricultural work for their livelihood. Table 3 shows that among 5 target provinces of the project, proportion of employed persons in agriculture, forestry and aquaculture in Central Highlands (Dak Lak, Dak Nong provinces) is more important than in the Mekong River Delta (Tien Giang, Ben Tre, Dong Thap).

Table 2: Labour force at 15 years of age and above by sex and by province in 2022

Unit: %

Province	Male	Female
Dak Lak	51.3	48.7
Dak Nong	53.7	46.3
Tien Giang	53.4	46.6
Ben Tre	55.1	44.9
Dong Thap	54.1	45.9

Source: Author consolidated from Statistical Yearbooks 2022 of 5 provinces

² Total population of Vietnam in 2022 was 99,461.7 thousand people (Male: 49,603.7 thousand – 49.9%; and Female: 49,858.0 thousand – 50.1%). Total population of working age at 15 years old and above: 51,704.9 thousand.

Table 3: Proportion of employed persons in agriculture, forestry and fishing (2019-2022)

Unit: %

Province	2019	2020	2021	2022
Dak Lak	68.4	66.0	68.4	67.2
Dak Nong	76.4	74.0	73.8	73.8
Tien Giang	38.2	35.6	42.0	38.0
Ben Tre	45.3	44.0	43.1	42.6
Dong Thap	40.3	37.4	35.7	32.0

Source: Author consolidated from Statistical Yearbook 2022 of 5 provinces

However, in enterprise sector, female employees represent from 37.9% (Dak Lak) to nearly 59.1% (Tien Giang) of total employees in acting enterprises (see Table 4). By economic activity, female employees in agriculture, forestry and fishing account for less than 1% of total female employees in acting enterprises in three provinces of Mekong River Delta. Female employees in agriculture, forestry and fishing account for 2.5% and 6.4% of total employees in acting enterprises in Dak Nong and Dak Lak respectively³.

Table 4: Share of female employees in agriculture, forestry and fishing sector to total employees in acting enterprises by province (2019 – 2022)

Unit: %

	2019	2020	2021	2022
Dak Nong	41.91	38.88	41.89	40.18
Dak Lak	34.15	34.24	34.17	37.97
Tien Giang	62.36	50.33	57.99	59.19
Ben Tre	56.37	54.51	47.31	53.44
Dong Thap	46.94	44.52	48.79	49.83

Source: Author consolidated from Statistical Yearbook 2023 of 5 provinces

Gender gap is reflected in the difference of trained labour force. At national level, the labour force is abundant, and the labor force participation rate is high, but just one fourth of labour force have received training (26.4% in 2022), and there is a clear difference between men and women. For women, one out of every three male workers who have a job has been trained (the rate is 28.8%), and for women, only one out of every four people has been trained (the rate is 23.9 percent). This rate is especially low for female workers in all five provinces (between 11.6% and 15.8% in 2022) (see Table 5). Accordingly, resources for training and vocational training should be given more priority to women in these provinces, including women who engage in production of tropical fruits.

³ Calculated from the figures published in Statistical Yearbook 2023 of 5 provinces.

Table 5: Percentage of trained labour force by sex in 2022

(Unit: %)

	General	Male	Female
National	26.40	28.80	23.90
Dak Nong	14.73	16.53	12.65
Dak Lak	17.98	20.07	15.78
Tien Giang	13.60	14.30	12.80
Ben Tre	12.70	13.60	11.60
Dong Thap	14.44	16.47	12.06

Source: Author consolidated from Statistical Yearbook 2023 of 5 provinces

The rapid expansion of tropical fruit sector in term of production, processing and export (as presented in the section 2.1) has opened a great employment opportunity for women. Roles of women in the sector will be zoomed in in the next part of this report.

3.2 Participation and Practices

In Vietnam's tropical fruit sector, women are freely engaged in the cultivation process. Yet, labor sharing in production activities at household level is still affected by the common view of community and biological characteristics and social role of women.

While men often undertake tasks which are considered more physically demanding and hazardous such as hoeing soil, spraying pesticides, transporting, and carrying equipment or fruits, women are responsible for tasks that are considered lighter and require more skills and meticulousness (weeding, fertilizing, harvesting, help husbands/sons to cut branches). Hired labor supplements household labor on the farm, especially for weeding and harvesting. Most of interviewed people (both individuals and in group) puts that women have weaker physical characteristics, and they have to take care of children, so they are not suitable for operating machinery, laborious and hazardous works.



Photo: A woman helps her husband do clearance work at a durian garden in Tien Giang

Photo credit: Mai Huong, March 2024

Table 6: Women role in different fruit value chain at field level

	Mango	Pomelo	Durian	Passion fruit
Planting	N	N	N	N
Fertiliser application	Y	Y	N	NA
Maintenance, nurturing	Y	Y	Y	Y
Cleaning/ weeding	Y	Y	Y	Y
Pruning	N	N	N	NA
Fruit care	Y	Y	Y	Y
Nursery plant care	Y	Y	Y	Y
Harvesting	Y	Y	Y	Y

* Y = Yes, N = No, NA = Not applicable. Source: Synthesis from field survey (Jan-March 2024)

At farm level, women participation in producing tropical fruits has been gradually changing while women more engage in tasks which are used to uniquely reserved for men or hired labor. The introduction of machinery also raises women roles and machines help to reduce labor, so women can help their husband and/or their sons to run the machines.

There are differences among women participation by value chain, and due to their family characteristics. Women engage more in growing passion fruit, mango, and pomelo than durian. Women whose husbands migrate to cities for work or who are widow show their strong participation in production activities as well as making decision on orchards farming. Many women in rural areas manage small-scale fruit farms.

In these value chains, women belong to the middle-aged group (about 35 years old or above) as young women have more employment opportunities than middle-aged women. Young women can migrate to cities for job or learn new job. At processing and packaging stations, on average, 70% - 80% of employees are women, but majority of them belong to age group of between 35 and 50 and are seasonal workers. For instant, at the Nguyễn Chí Long processing facility⁴ that is specialized in passion fruit, 90% workers are women (50 out of 55 workers), of which 50% of 35-50-year-old group, 40% of 18-35-year-old group and 10% above 50 years old; 100% of its women workers are seasonal and unskilled labor. At Chanh Thu's packaging house in Ben Tre, 60% employees are women (35-50 years old: 36%; above 50 years old: 35%; and under 35 years old: 29%) and 76% women workers are unskilled labor. This figure of unskilled women workers, to some extent, aligns with the low percentage of trained female labor force shown in the Table 5.

Upstreaming the four value chains, women outnumber men in post-harvest handling and processing activities, but they are involved more in non-technical tasks or 'light' tasks. In fruit processing facilities, post-harvest operations such as processing, handling, and storage of fruits for distribution and export are principally carried out by women. Women are responsible for activities that require high care and meticulousness such as sorting, washing, packaging while men do loading, unloading, container belt baling as these tasks

⁴ Address: Village 6, Quảng Tâm commune, Tuy Đức district, Đắk Nông province

require strength and power. These women's roles are often labor-intensive and time-consuming but are critical to maintaining the quality and marketability of the produce. Women also do not involve in operations that put them in contact with chemicals. Additionally, women often play key roles in adding value to fruits through processes like drying, canning, and making fruit-based products like jams and preserves. It rarely sees the presence of women technical staffs as well as women engaged in quality control, as these jobs require travelling a lot to orchards and gardens for checking quality of fruit and handle procurement of fruits. For example, 100% technical and quality control staffs at Vina TnT are men. Limited mobility of women doesn't favor women to takeover such responsibility.

Table 7: Women role in different fruit value chains at packing/processing station

	Mango	Pomelo	Durian	Passion fruit
Receiving of fruits and unloading	N	N	N	N
Pre-processing and Sorting	Y	Y	Y	Y
Washing, Blushing and Bleaching (surface disinfect)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Fungicides treatment	N	N	N	N
Drying	Y	Y	Y	Y
Waxing	Y	Y	Y	Y
Drying	Y	Y	Y	Y
Stickers	Y	Y	Y	Y
Weighting fruit	Y	Y	Y	Y
Weighting trays	Y	Y	Y	Y
Packing	Y	Y	Y	Y
Sorting – Transportation	N	N	N	N

(Y = Yes, N = No, NA = Not applicable). Source: Synthesis from field survey (Jan-March 2024)



Photo: A working shift at a processing and packing house in Ben Tre

Photo Credit: Mai Huong, March, 2024

In general, at processing and packaging units, there are very few permanent laborers among both men and women due to the seasonal nature of the industry. Women workers in the processing units usually temporary employees who serve as daily wage earners, even those who are employed year-round. Besides, **there is no difference in working time between male and female workers**. During the fruit harvest season, workers often work

overtime, and both men and women are entitled to the same overtime compensation and lunch. There are, however, a number of challenges and constraints associated with overtime. Firstly, night shifts give priority to men to ensure health conditions. Secondly, regular overtime poses difficulties for women because they still must tend to household and family responsibilities. During the peak harvest time, to prepare all received orders, processors have to hire additional seasonal workers directly in surrounding villages, or through a representative supplier of seasonal labors. All seasonal workers are trained and retrained before fulfilling their allocated tasks.

Increasing role of women in marketing and sales of fruits is acknowledged in all studied value chains. Women contribute to marketing and sales effort in the tropical fruit sector. In these fields, we have a number of companies and enterprises take over of institution management (as cases of Chanh Thu, Hoang Phat) who are very actively promoting Vietnamese fruits both domestically and internationally. They are successfully establish their own fruit distribution business, connecting farmers with market and consumers.

The number of women-led cooperatives, women-led enterprises working in tropical are still limited, but they are proactive in pushing sector development. For example, in Tien Giang province, only 2 out of 7 cooperatives having large area of pomelo, 2 out of 30 cooperatives having large area of durian are led by women (Table 8). However, in the surveyed value chains, a number of outstanding women-led enterprises (such as Chanh Thu) and women-managed cooperative (such as Buoi Da Xanh Ben Tre Cooperative) are appreciated.

Table 8: Women-lead cooperatives having large of tropical fruit area in Tien Giang provinces

#	Name of cooperative	Address	Crop	Area (ha)	Yield (ton/year)
1	Thành Công Đạo Thạch	Village 3, Dao Thanh commune, My Tho city	Pomelo	13	300
2	My Phong production, trading and agricultural services Cooperative	My Loi village, My Phong commune, My Tho City	Pomelo	2	60
3	My Duc Tay Cooperative	Nghia 1 village, My Duc Tay commune, Cai Be district	Durian	15	374
4	An Thai Dong Agricultural Cooperative	Thai Hoa village, An Thai Dong commune, Cai Be district	Durian	10.13	210

Source: Synthesis from the report of DARD Tien Giang (2024)

While perhaps less visible, women also contribute to research and development within tropical fruit sector. They may work in agricultural research institutes (like VIAEP, SOFRI, laboratories) or private companies conduct research on fruit cultivation techniques, pest

control, and developing new fruit varieties (climate resilient varieties, etc.) suited to Vietnam's climate and market demands.

3.3 Access to production inputs, technology, training and finance

Both men and women farmers have equal access to inputs supply. With market economy and market opening, farmers can easily procure different kinds of productive inputs for their production (seeds, seedlings, fertilizers, pesticides, etc.). The systems of agricultural inputs distribution are widely established at local market while agrochemical companies set up pesticides' retailer distribution to the village level. Although the majority of informants reported that agricultural inputs are easily accessible, the quality of the inputs cannot be guaranteed, and farmers have no means to verify the quality of inputs. Besides, the high price of fertilizers and pesticides is a difficulty for farmers. In the context that the prices of fruit products fluctuate continuously, it is a burden to farmers.

The lack of access to new technologies that could reduce drudgery and save women's time is a significant obstacle to their advancement. As can be observed in the cultivation of tropical fruits, whenever machines are used, such as sprayers or tractors, it is the men who perform the work. According to the explanation of interviewees, men possess greater physical strength than women. Because men are culturally more mobile than women, they have a greater opportunity to access technology.

There is gender gap in access to training and knowledge while women less participate in extension trainings of technical topics. Public and private extension services deliver different training courses and classes on procedures, methods on growing fruits and care for orchards (select good varieties, seeds and seedlings, use of fertilizers and pesticides, pests and disease treatment, practices to ensure producing fruits with good size, beautiful appearance, and delicious taste, etc.). At farm level, women participate more in models of farming and cultivating than models on mechanization or technical. This hinders the participation of women in tropical value chains while technology and innovations are drivers of sector growth and development. In many research and development projects and programs, women participate actively in kick-off meetings and trainings, but very limited involvement in post-training implementation, management, and monitoring. Thanks to the development of communication channels and improved transportation, women are able to expand their knowledge and grasp cultivation techniques like their husbands. Therefore, they become more financially independent and their decisive role in the family's economy has also improved.

In addition to the training (both in classes and farmer field schools), both male and female farmers highly appreciate information provided via knowledge dissemination programs broadcast on mass media (television, radio, newspapers) and social network (facebook, tictok, zalo).

At processing and packaging facilities, there are training and retraining programs for staffs and workers, possibly from support sources in state programs, or the company hires experts to deliver trainings. On average, workers are normally trained once or twice a year, and priority is given to permanent staff and focus on technical processing procedures. After being recruited, seasonal workers are trained and instructed before taking on assigned tasks by a trainer, and then guided by experienced workers during their operations.

Current training programs focus on production and processing techniques that call limited participation of women. Training topics are various, covering quality control, processing/production procedure, application of new technology, market information, etc. However, training on application of processing and preservation technology are underlined and more paid attention by companies than topics on governance and quality culture. Compared to men trainees, women less participate in training on good farming practices, processing technology, quality control, safety at workplace, environmental protection. It is said that men perceive and adopt faster SOP than women. While companies put that they have demand for women employees equipped with professional skills (production practices, use of technology and equipment, safety), there is room to build capacity of women workers in these field.

For cooperatives and companies that have benefited from different state or private-supported program, theoretically men and women share equal opportunities of knowledge, information, and technology access. At these facilities, automated machines, and preliminary processing lines (washing, sorting) are more installed that help to reduce labor. But in fact, most of these operations are run and handled by men. It is necessary to increase the quality of labor to meet the use of equipment.

Table 9: Participation by gender to trainings delivered at processing/packaging stations

Subject/Theme of training	Male (%)	Female (%)
Quality control	60%	40%
Food Safety	45%	55%
Safety at workplace and fire prevention	57%	43%
Farming practices, GAP, VietGAP	55%	45%
Processing and Preservation technology	60%	40%
Market Information	37%	63%
Environmental protection and management	55%	45%
Organisation management and governance	50%	50%
Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)	50%	50%

Source: Synthesis from field survey (Jan-March 2024)

Access to finance and credit is open to both men and women. Access to finance is a pivotal requirement for all value chain stakeholders, including farmers, small-scale processors and retailers, storage operators, and traders. Access to credit enables them, for instance, to invest in fruit orchards, buy processing or packaging equipment, develop storage facilities, and differentiate products. In these four value chains, women can get credit from either formal or informal channels. Through formal channels, women access to inclusive capital from Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (Agribank), the Bank for Social Policy (VBSP), the People's Credit Funds, or microfinance provided by Women's Union and other social organizations. It is put by interviewed that many households are interested in borrowing capital from VBSP for family needs or small production investments because of lower interest rates and guarantee secured by communal social groups (Women Union, Farmer association, veterans association). For example, in Ben Tre province, six micro-

finance programs run by Fund for Women Economic Development – FWED) perform well. FWED renders microfinance operations in all 157 communes and wards which are organized into 6,731 credit groups belonging to 1,614 lending clusters. Out of 19,727 members (90% women), 18,872 members are having loans at FWED⁵.

In individual interviews and FGDs, it was found that both wife and husband discuss production activities together, but the husband makes the final decisions. However, when talking about credit need and loans, in all five provinces, the final voice of women is strongly affirmed. It means that in family, women have stronger voice than men regarding debts and repayment of debts.

3.4 Gender and pay

In all four value chains, women consistently earn less than their male coworkers.. As previously mentioned in the section 3.2, in these tropical fruit value chains, women mostly work in packing/processing units and often paid by results. Under normal working conditions, there is a difference in wage paid to men and women workers, both permanent and seasonal ones. For the same task, men are better paid than women. The daily wages and remuneration of male workers are higher because men can take on more heavy tasks⁶. Therefore, the primary reason for pay disparities is not that women are usually paid differently for the same work. Instead, it is that the tasks women are assigned are typically less well compensated than those assigned exclusively or preferentially to men. Tasks considered more technically challenging or physically demanding are generally better compensated and are typically assigned to male workers. This differential is based on the belief that women have less physical strength. While women reported that their wages were low and needed to be increased, they also agreed that men's work was heavier and required more physical strength. Additionally, during high or peak production periods, there are often more opportunities for overtime at duty station, which are usually reserved for men.

While women working in the office or management section have a stable income that does not fluctuate depending on the season, salary and income of seasonal workers are not stable during the year but depends on harvest calendar, and orders of customers. Normally, women workers have stable income during fruit harvesting month (from April to November)⁷, and unstable income from December to the March of the following year. Accordingly, besides fruit farming activities and working at packaging house, women have to earn their living further from agricultural activities at home, auxiliary and non-farm work.

⁵ Review Report of 6 months in 2024 of FWED (<http://www.fwedbentre.vn/noi-dung/tin-tuc/so-ket-hoat-dong-chuong-trinh-du-tai-chinh-vi-mo-quy-i-nam-2024-trien-khai-phuong>)

⁶ Daily wage for women is VND 250,000 – 300,000, while daily wage for men is VND 350,000 – 400,000, depending on nature of work assumed.

⁷ Passion fruit is harvested between late summer to early fall (August to December). Harvest of durian is between March and May in the Mekong provinces and is between August and September in Central Highlands. Main harvest season of Da Xanh pomelo shall be from May to July. Mangos can be harvested all year round, depending on the place of origine.

3.5 Occupational health, safety and environment for women

Tropical fruit production presents many health and safety concerns for both men and women. For example, aerial pesticide spraying poses significant risks to workers and surrounding communities. In packhouses and processing units, women, particularly those who are pregnant, are often kept away from tasks involving chemicals.

The burdens women face are particularly severe due to their "triple workload" – juggling long hours of physical labor in the fruit export industry with domestic responsibilities before and after work. This relentless schedule leads to unique health issues, causing heightened stress and exhaustion levels that far exceed those experienced by their male counterparts.

Companies do not have documents regulating specific policies for female workers but comply with the provisions of labor law. Permanent employees are fully guaranteed social security policies such as social insurance, pregnant female employees, and employees raising children are entitled to benefits according to the provisions of law, with reduced working hours. or arrange work suitable for health. The policies of establishments are generally the same for both male and female workers regarding overtime and lunch compensation. In addition, female workers can also participate in welfare activities on special days (such as Women's Day, March 8; Vietnamese Women's Day, October 20). For seasonal workers, safety benefits are available.

Corporate social responsibility is now widely accepted by business and has led to the adoption and implementation of codes of conduct for fair labor practices. However, it is found from the field study that in small and medium processing units there is little understanding of or knowledge about such codes, not only among the laborers but also among unit management.

There are more employment opportunities for women both as agricultural laborers and as workers within processing units because of the expansion of tropical fruit production and export. However, recruitment and employment opportunities in preliminary and processing facilities follow a straightforward set of criteria without special provisions for female workers. For processing roles, the basic requirements include being at least 18 years old, in good health, and a high school graduate. Technical staff positions demand a college degree or higher, while management roles require a university degree. These general conditions aim to ensure a capable and educated workforce across all levels of operation.

3.6 Decision making and women in community

In general, in these fruit crops, women have less power for decision making in cultivation (decisions on seeds, technology, expansion of production, etc.) as men has more technical knowledge than women on these matters. Even in households that husbands share knowledge with women after training, women find less confident in making any definitive decisions. Regarding other decisions on loans, sales of products, women are decisive in making decision. In regard to households' affairs, the majority of respondents share that both husband and wife discuss together before making any decision.

Table 10: Decision makers in the production of tropical fruits

Decisions on	Mango	Pomelo	Durian	Passion fruit
Seedlings	M	M	M	M
Farming practices (fertilizers, use of agrochemicals)	M	M	M	M
Buy productive tools and equipment's	M	M	M	M
Financial loans for production activities	W-M	W-M	W-M	W-M
Sales of products	W-M	W-M	W-M	W-M

(W = Women, M = Men). Source: Synthesis from field survey (Jan-March 2024)

According to the results of interviews with preliminary processing and processing facilities, female workers are encouraged and facilitated to participate in collective activities and give their opinions, especially their insights on working conditions, health and local culture. Although there are gender differences in raising voices, it is noted that men are more active in giving opinions. At packing stations where there are more women workers, the women voices are more raised.

Social network and support systems for women in the sector is still weak. Social networks and support systems play a crucial role in facilitating women participation in the tropical fruit value chain. Access to farmer groups, cooperatives, and women's organization can provide women with valuable resources, knowledge, and collective bargaining power. Additionally, Women in the study sites tend to belong to women groups, which are revolving savings and credit schemes, but these schemes are reported to offer small amounts of credit meant for meeting immediate household needs.

Even though there are more women-led cooperatives, the women members to these cooperatives are very few. In all cooperatives met and interviewed, majority member names are men. At cooperatives' meetings, men outnumber women. Although collaborative decision-making is increasing, especially among the younger generation, it is still customary for women to defer to men on a range of issues and in many public settings. Women have smaller social networks outside their villages and generally have lower levels of education.

4. Factors impacting participation of women in the tropical fruits value chain

4.1 Land

Vietnamese land law explicitly prohibits gender discrimination in land access and ownership. For common property, both spouses must be named on the ownership and use right certificate unless they agree otherwise. Consequently, a husband can only sell the land with his wife's consent. Jointly titled land-use right certificates enhance women's access to finance and credit. However, in practice, most agricultural land titles are held in men's names, and women's landholdings are generally smaller. Additionally, land fragmentation impedes agricultural mechanization and production development, including the introduction of new technology and quality control measures.

4.2 Characteristics of individuals and households

In these surveyed locations and value chains, cultural norms and societal expectations shape gender roles in tropical fruit production. Women are still burden by housework, family chores. Besides, women's health and nutritional status impact their ability to engage in agricultural activities and contribute to household food security. Only in households in that husband migrate to cities for non-farm job or husband pass away, female farmers take over all responsibility and make decision on fruit orchards.

4.3 Supporting services

Technical access and training for technology transfer is vital in order to enable farmers to be able in charge of work with requires more skills and technique and produces higher productivity. In these value chains, training courses and workshops on agricultural science knowledge and techniques were organized through diversified channels, especially through agricultural extension system. At provincial and district level, the public agricultural extension is organized as Agricultural Extension Center/Station or Agricultural Service Center⁸. Since 2022, MARD has launched a project to setting up community agricultural extension network⁹. These agent in tandem with local Women's Union, and Farmer's Association as well private actors (agrochemical companies, fruit processors, research institute) to disseminate knowledge and innovations to farmers. While local women are directly involved in growing fruits, they are in high demands for training course to acquire information and knowledge on technical sciences.

Female farmers in the tropical fruit value chains underline the role of agricultural extension services as to some extent, they and their family are equipped with cultivation techniques and skills to raise productivity and yield. However, it is noted that domestic chores (preparing meals, taking care of children and parents, etc.) hinder women from attending the training courses and agricultural extension workshops, so that unsuitable timing of training course result in limited participation of women. Besides, current training courses don't meet women's needs for agricultural knowledge and skills to be successful while there are no training courses for farmers on the marketing, pricing and selling of fruits.

Despite the growing availability of financial services at the local level across all five provinces, women still face significant challenges in accessing these services due to the collateral requirements for bank loans. Unsecured loans provided by mass organizations are often small and have short repayment periods, making them unsuitable for long-term production development for both male and female farmers. Furthermore, the process of obtaining credit is typically lengthy and bureaucratic. Many women lack the confidence to apply for traditional types of loans, further limiting their access to necessary financial resources.

⁸ At district level, there are also either Agricultural Services Center (consolidation of Agricultural Extension Station, Plant Protection Station, and Veterinary Station) or Agricultural Extension Center (under the DPC).

⁹ Decision 1094/QĐ-BNN-KN dated 25 March 2022 of Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development approving the Project "Increasing effectiveness of agricultural extension activities through strengthening community agricultural extension".

4.4 Infrastructure and market access

Over the past years, infrastructure supporting agricultural production in general and tropical fruit sector in particular has been improved greatly and benefit the growth of the sector. While remade or concreted inter-commune and inter-village road not only enable farmers to care for their orchard, but also make buyers, collectors and trader easily and conveniently reach fruit orchards, cement concrete roads facilitate transportation of fruits by trucks. Improved road system enhances mobility of women and enable women more linked to the market. Accordingly, women have increasingly get involved in all stages of marketing their fruits, from growing crops to selling fruits to buyers.

4.5 Vulnerability of women to climate change

Tropical fruits production in Vietnam, especially in the Central Highlands and Mekong River Delta depends greatly on weather conditions and climate. Climate changes (changing temperature and rainfall pattern, rise of sea-level, extreme weather events, etc.) may impact tropical fruits in different ways: shift in growing season, increased pests and diseases pressures, water stress and saltwater intrusion, etc. Most of FDG's respondents reported that their crops are more and more negatively impacted by extreme weather phenomena, which have been more uncertain. Farmers are aware of the impacts of climate change, especially drought in the Central Highlands and saltwater intrusion in the Mekong River Delta.

Women farmers are more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and adaptation to climate change than men in triple roles: productive role, re-productive role, and role in community. Poor climate change adaptation leads to significant economics losses. In surveyed value chains, both men and women put that they feel unprepared to mitigate these increasing threats and women farmers are still very passive in coping with climate change. They are not equipped with adequate knowledge and skills to deal with climate change. Exception from big hardcore investment by the Government (irrigation system, infrastructure system withstanding extreme weather events), women and their family need to be provided with salinity/drought-resistant crop varieties, integrated pest management strategies, and climate-smart farming practices. These adaptation measures often require financial resources and technical expertise, which may be limited in these regions.

4.6 Enabling environment

In recent years, Vietnam has made significant efforts to promote women economic empowerment in agriculture sector. All stakeholders in the tropical fruit sector share common positive view and attitude to gender equality and participation of women in different stages of the value chain.

Vietnam has developed a National Strategy for Gender Equality for 2021-2030 period¹⁰, which provides a framework for promoting gender equality across all sectors, including agriculture. The strategy outlines specific objectives and action plans to address gender disparities in access to resources, participation in decision-making, and economic empowerment. Different efforts by different stakeholders have been made and committed

¹⁰ Resolution 28/NQ-CP dated 3 March 2021

to mainstreaming gender considerations into agricultural policies, programs, and projects. For example, the National Target Program on Rural Development 2021-2025¹¹, the Project Supporting women-led cooperatives participating management and employment generation for women employees to 203¹², etc. have promulgated incentives to empower women, especially women-led organizations, women-created innovation, etc. Regarding representative voice, the Vietnam Women's Union (WWU), which is organized until village level, plays a key role in advocating for women's rights and gender equality in agriculture. Taking account Global Gender Gap Index 2023¹³, Vietnam ranks 72nd out of 146 countries in gender equality progress (31st for dimension Economic Participation and Opportunities; 89th for dimension Education Attainment) (WEF 2023).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

5.1.1 Women's engagement in income generating activities

In all target value chains, we have seen the participation of both men and women farmers. However, it is popular that men do most of the work and responsible for hard assignment, while women are engaged only at the nursery stage or some light garden work. A major impact of the commercialization of these tropical fruits and impact of climate change has been the erosion of women's traditional knowledge of traditional farming practices, as farmers must adapt to climate change and buy/growing hybrid seedling for higher yield and adapt to climate change. On the other hand, it is acknowledged a high number of female staffs and workers are found in the fruit processing areas. In all processing and packing houses visited, more than 70% of employees are women, but they are mostly concentrated in unskilled job. This is not an indication of women's inability to carry out alternative roles, but rather than that gender segregation (refers to the division of labour by gender) in the tropical fruit industry is a manifest of both cultural and attitudinal circumstance. At these facilities, while women often do lighter work (such as sorting, washing fruits), men workers do other hard job as transportation, operating machines, loading fruits, etc. Hardship nature of these duties explains the wage gaps between male and female workers. However, women-led cooperatives and enterprises are firms very active in the tropical fruit industry (for example, Buoi Da Xanh Ben Tre Cooperative, Chanh Thu, Hoang Phat).

5.1.2 Factors that enable Women's Economic Empowerment

Stakeholders in the selected value chains shared positive perception and attitude towards gender equality and women's engagement in economic activities. Previous successful development initiative on gender empowerment could be replicated and scaled up for further impact (for instant, women of Buoi Da Xanh Ben Tre Cooperative were empowered by Canada's Socodevi). Furthermore, current enabling environment (policies, programs) favor women's economic empowerment and market development such as the support for

¹¹ Decision 263/QĐ-TTg dated 22 February 2022 of Prime Minister

¹² Decision 01/QĐ-TTg dated 3 January 2023 of Prime Minister

¹³ https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2023.pdf

cooperative development, favourable policies supporting women-led innovations, etc. Plus, there are potentials for women in these value chains to expand their income-generating opportunities (exploring 'multi-value' of tropical fruit orchards through agrotourism, processed products and cultural experiences).

5.1.3 Factors that hinder Women's Economic Empowerment

Some barriers are observed in the surveyed locations. Household duties appear to be a critical impediment to women's engagement in economic activities, their mobility as well as their social network. Burdened with childcare and other housework obligations, women are not able to establish and maintain social networks (for example, male participants outnumber female participants in training classes delivered by agricultural extensions or others; limited number of women members in the surveyed cooperatives). Household-level land and tree ownership and decision-making is male dominated. Smallholder farmers find it difficult to access to official credit due to complicated application procedures, collateral requirements, and lack of flexibility in payment schemes. Besides, livelihood of women in these tropical fruit value chains are facing critical threats posed by natural disasters (salinity intrusion in pomelo-growing areas in Ben Tre, drought in Central Highlands, etc. negatively impacting their fruit crops) and market uncertainties (high prices of inputs, unstable output market, etc.)

5.2 Recommendations for mainstreaming gender in project activities

We have performed a quick study on gender issues of the selected value chain to shed light on women's agency and power. Overall, women play diverse and essential roles in Vietnam's tropical fruit sector, contributing to its growth, sustainability, and resilience while also facing unique challenges that require attention and support from stakeholders across the value chain.

The mere increase in the numbers of women participating in the tropical value chains does not automatically result in sensitivity to women's issues. It is to propose double-fold intervention approach: (1) **Gender mainstreaming** through the project cycle across all activities; (2) **Empowering women-led cooperatives and enterprises** throughout investment support and business development services in an aim to ensure that women and men can access, participate and benefit from the projects' interventions on an equal footing; and women participating in the tropical fruit value chain will have improved social and economic status and increased resilience. The intervention strategy will be anchored on 3 axes: (i) promoting women's entrepreneurship and leadership; (ii) addressing institutional gender blindness through a gender awareness strategy; (iii) alleviating low status of women in tropical fruit value chains through innovation, technical assistance and capacity building.

Specific Intervention Strategies:

(i) Promoting women's entrepreneurship and leadership

- Promote women role in the project not as mere beneficiaries but rather as leaders and partners of the project for delivery of results.
- Engage women-led cooperatives and companies; support developing business plan.

- Support networking/market connection/certification for women-led producer groups/cooperatives/companies
- Build capacity women-led enterprises, women led cooperatives on leadership and management skills, market information, digitalization.
- Opportunities for private sector partnership can be identified by engaging women-led firms to make business cases for greater engagement (initiating joint corporate social responsibility pilots to address specific issues).
- Facilitate and ensure representation of women led groups, entrepreneurs, and representative bodies on national and local public-private dialogues and turn into gender responsive policy recommendations to support the industry's export.

(ii) Addressing institutional gender blindness through a gender awareness strategy:

- Ensure value chain interventions are gender-sensitive through developing an integrated strategy addressing the barriers from production to marketplace (access to credit, training, markets, etc.) and working with relevant stakeholders.
- Offer technical assistance to processing units, official of local state agencies partners on gender issues.
- Provide training to sensitize the principal actors at all stages of the supply chain, especially those in decision-making posts, to gender issues
- Develop gender-sensitive quality schemes and sustainable standards of targeted export markets.
- Deliver technical assistance and training to community and industry networks on the national and international production standards, labor codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility mandates. These codes and standards reinforce the importance of addressing gender issues and the labor concerns of women

(iii) Alleviating low status of women in the tropical fruit value chains through innovation, technical assistance and capacity building

- Facilitate and promote women led innovation through increased digital access to value addition, branding, promotion and e-commerce.
- Direct support to application of good practices by women led producer groups and enterprises along the value chain
- Engage women extension staffs in ToT trainings and build capacity/skills for deliver ToE trainings.
- Develop gender-sensitive SOPs and training modules
- Elaborate R&D technology/ innovation packages which are gender sensitive
- Deliver training on gender-sensitive and climate-smart agriculture, and good practices to value chain stakeholders.

- Develop gender sensitive community-led training videos, education in financials service for women, addressing women's under-presentation in farmer producer organizations such as cooperatives.
- Initiate programs to identify the relevant technologies that could lead to women's skill development, access to agro-processing, and drudgery reduction

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Annex 1: List of policies

	Name of policy	Coverage level
1	Resolution 28/NQ-CP dated 3 March 2021 of the Government Promulgating the 2021-2030 National Strategy on Gender Equality	National
2	Project “Supporting women-led cooperatives participating management and employment generation for women employees to 2030” (Decision 01/QD-TTg dated 3 January 2023 of Prime Minister)	National
3	Document number 2747/KH-UBND dated 15 May 2023 of Provincial People’s Committee of Ben Tre approving the Plan implementing the Decision 01/QD-TTg dated 3 January 2023 of Prime Minister on Project “Supporting women-led cooperatives participating management and employment generation for women employees to 2030”.	Bến Tre
4	Document number 02/KH-UBND dated 02 June 2023 of Provincial People’s Committee of Tien Giang approving the Plan implementing the Decision 01/QD-TTg dated 3 January 2023 of Prime Minister on Project “Supporting women-led cooperatives participating management and employment generation for women employees to 2030” in the province of Tien Giang	Tiền Giang
5	Document number 279/KH-UBND dated 12 August 2023 of Provincial People’s Committee of Dong Thap approving the Plan implementing the Decision 01/QD-TTg dated 3 January 2023 of Prime Minister on Project “Supporting women-led cooperatives participating management and employment generation for women employees to 2030” in the province of Dong Thap	Đồng Tháp

Annex 2: List of processors, packaging houses interviewed.

	Name of company	Province	Crop
1	Chanh Thu Export-Import Co. Ltd.	Ben Tre	Pomelo, Durian
2	Huong Mien Tay Agricultural Export-Imported Co. Ltd.	Ben Tre	Pomelo
3	Buoi Da Xanh Cooperative	Ben Tre	Pomelo
4	Quoi Son Green Pomelo Cooperative	Ben Tre	Pomelo
5	Anh Loc Fruit Company	Tien Giang	Mango, passion fruit, durian, pomelo
6	Hoa Loc Cat Mango Cooperative	Tien Giang	Mango
7	Hoa Loc Export-Import Limited Company	Tien Giang	Mango
8	Cai Lay Durian Cooperative	Tien Giang	Durian
9	DT Co. Ltd.	Dong Thap	Mango, Durian
10	Tuan Dat Fruit Processing and Trading Co. Ltd	Dong Thap	Mango
11	Hoa Phat Fruit Co. Ltd.	Long An	Mango, Pomelo, Longan, Dragon Fruit
12	Vina T&T Group	Ben Tre/HCMC	Mango, Fruit, Durian