

# When the 'strong arms' leave the farms

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Seeds of Change, Gender conference Canberra April 4, 2019



# LABOUR MIGRATION FLOWS IN THE GREATER MEKONG SUBREGION

Greater Mekong  
240 million people  
~ 3 million  
(international)  
migrants

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# Rural transitions

Vietnam : 2011 - low to lower middle income country  
New (economic) reasons to leave agriculture (full/part time)

Ag advice the same (technology changes, crops, farming systems, information sources, innovation.....)

Gender roles and norms are changing

In the process of change, women and men have different opportunities/interests/capacities/needs



How do women and men respond to opportunities and challenges in small-scale farming?

How does off-farm/migration impact on farming strategies?

How do men and women experience migration while away?





## Site description

Comparative study 2 regions in Vietnam with different migration trends

- Ethnic – different gender norms (division of labour)
- Poverty vs unemployment
- Geography – mountainous vs coast → different disasters → labour inputs
- Agriculture – monocultures, scattered fields on slopes (travel distance to fields) vs diversified agriculture crops with home gardens (climate-smart village)





## Methods

### Households with $\geq 1$ is/was working off-farm

- Focus group discussions (gender, age): 24
- In-depth interviews : 12 (6 M, 6 W)
- Participatory videos : 4 (2 M, 2 W)
  - Women's video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fijq-41tQ&t=21s>)
  - Men's video: (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u00hv5bzbzBQ&t=4s>)
- **Guideline:** Kawarazuka 2017 (<https://genderinagr.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/a-guide-for-gender-responsive-participatory-video-final.pdf>)
- **Community event:** 50 (11 M, 39 W)
- **Remaining:**
  - Update questionnaire from 2011 (~600 households)
  - Household survey (n ~ 200) in 2 communities

## When the 'strong arms' leave the farms

- Men migrate and women are left behind
- Male out-migration means men are absent in agriculture
- Women 'left behind' implies they are suffering

Who goes	Who manages farm	Invest in ag	Invest in non-ag
<b>Wife</b> to Saudi Arabia	<b>Husband</b>	Acacia, pigs, rice	Healthcare, education
(1) <b>Both</b> to HCMC (2) <b>Husband</b> to Malaysia	(2) <b>Wife</b>	(1) Start farm	(2) Grocery store
<b>Wife</b> to HCMC	(husband ill), <b>daughter, husband's brother</b>		Support family
<b>Husband</b> to Angola	<b>Wife, husband's family</b>	Acacia, orange	Butcher business (wife)
<b>Widow</b> (1) to Angola (1) HCMC	<b>Her relatives</b> rent land	2 pigs	Sons' education, daughter's wedding
<b>Son</b> to Malaysia	<b>Parents</b>	Inherits acacia (hired labour)	Own wedding, 2 shops
(1) <b>As son</b> to HCMC (2) <b>As husband</b> to Laos	(1) <b>Parents</b> (2) <b>Wife</b>	(1) Buys farm	(1) Own wedding (2) Truck for business
(1) <b>Husband</b> to Malaysia (2) Commute in district	<b>Wife</b>	-	Son's healthcare
<b>Husband</b> to Malaysia	<b>Wife</b>	0	0
<b>Husband</b> (carpenter) to Angola	<b>Wife</b>	0	0





## Myth 1: Women are left behind

- Women are not always left behind
- Women are active agents
- Sometimes men are left behind



## Myth 2: Men are absent in agriculture

- Some men are invisible, while other male family members are visible
- Some family farms are managed in innovative ways, when men are absent – not necessarily depending on female labour force or labour shortage
- Women also have strong arms...



Myth 3: Men go away and have fun, women left home and 'suffering' – both have fun and suffer

- Both have fun and both sacrifice and suffer
- Men are also suffering from risks and challenges
- The poor are suffering more (no collateral, debts)
  
- Men's sufferings are rarely highlighted in literature
- Women can also have 'fun' – also not covered in literature



# Implications for agriculture

- **Reasons for doing agriculture** : Some return later by choice/by force - for subsistence/for selling/for business/for fun - farm is a back-up solution for survival during economic pressure
- **Remittance** : survival, invested in agriculture/hiring labour/stepping stone out of agriculture
- **Farms lack arms** : Migration changes farming systems, needs for technology
- **Missing** : Sustainable farming system options for single-headed households
- If labour shortage is compensated
  - With machinery : Are machines designed for women, can they fix them, will they prioritise & use them?
  - With hired labour/machinery: Implications for ag advise & climate services
  - Risk taking capability vary → consequences in production / agriculture



2017



## Preliminary conclusion

'Nuclear household farms' are changing

Are our 'standard household survey/questionnaires' updated and capturing this?

- *Notion of 'household', who lives on farm, and extended families*
- *Meaningless to compare % men / women participating, adopting, ...*
- *Use and decision over off-farm incomes*
- *Need for more dynamic questionnaires*



We would like to acknowledge all CGIAR Research Programs and Centers for supporting the participation of their gender scientists to the *Seeds of Change* conference.



Photo: Neil Palmer/IWMI

