

Education for the most disadvantaged communities in Viet Nam: strategy for delayed marriage?



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Presentation outline

- Background context
- Viet Nam Lower Secondary Education for the Most Disadvantaged Regions Project (LSEMDP)
- Paradoxes & Dilemmas
- Future directions





Background context

- National averages hide pockets of disadvantage
- Multiple deprivations of ethnic minority girls – poverty, son preference, traditional gender roles (e.g. only 4% Hmong girls in secondary school)
- 10% early marriage nationally - 26% amongst poorest quintile, 17% amongst primary educated, estimates twice as high for some ethnic minority groups (e.g. Hmong)
- Legal age for marriage: 18 for girls & 20 for boys
- Education as an enabling tool for challenging social norms and delaying marriage for girls



Lower Secondary Education for the Most Disadvantaged Regions Project (LSEMDRP)


Approved: December 2007

Impact: universal lower secondary education (LSE) and greater social and economic inclusion

Outcome: improve net enrolment rate in LSE, particularly for ethnic minorities and girls

- 17 target provinces
- 103 most disadvantaged districts

Gender Equity (GEN) theme



Lower Secondary Education for the Most Disadvantaged Regions Project (LSEMDP)

4 Outputs:

- 1. Improved access to LSE:** classrooms, semi-boarding facilities, continuing education centers.
- 2. Enhanced quality & relevance of LSE:** teacher training, teacher housing, instructional materials, laboratories & libraries, ICT applications.
- 3. Pilot innovations to improve access & equity:** EM scholarships, public awareness, school-feeding.
- 4. Improved planning & management capacity:** capacity development, school-based MIS, project implementation support.



LSEMDP Gender and Ethnic Minority Action Plan (GEMAP)

Includes:

- 50% target of semi-boarding spaces for girls
- 50% target female participation in teacher training
- 50% scholarships for girls
- 50% school feeding for girls
- Gender neutrality in training modules & materials
- Separate male/female facilities
- Teacher housing - priority to female and EM teachers
- Sex & ethnicity-disaggregated data
- Inclusive school development plans

Encouraging results (end 2012)

- 45% boarding students are girls
- 48.2% girls from smallest EM groups on LSE scholarships
- School feeding program (49% girls) is incentivizing enrolment
- 46.2% core trainers and 46.8% key teachers trained are women
- 56.8% transitional teacher training scholarships to women
- Gender-responsive school management practices



Evolving gender norms & attitudes

- 'Gender Fair' school environment vs gender inequalities at home
- Gender roles challenged at semi-boarding school (e.g. domestic tasks)
- Girl and boy students expressed similar views towards LSE
- Girls articulated high aspirations, including in non-traditional areas
- Mothers felt their daughters were more empowered and respected.
- Female teachers feel more professionally respected & act as role models/mentors for girl students
- PTAs mobilizing community support for girls 'at-risk' of drop-out



Evolving gender norms & attitudes

"Girls and boys share all food preparation, cooking and washing up tasks at school – it is fair - food is better at school than at home"

"I want to study engineering and sciences".

"Educated women who speak Vietnamese are less dominated by men in families"

"A smart Grade 9 student married early but was allowed by her in-laws to continue studying"



Dilemmas & paradoxes?

ODI Report 2014 on Hmong Adolescent Girls

- Gender norms shifting slowly & unexpectedly
- Child marriage remains quite common, at times a result of abduction
- Young wives burdened with excessive work, high fertility rates & exposure to violence
- Need and integrated response



Photo credit: ODI, 2014



Contradictory voices

" If I didn't like him, I would just go away. My parents couldn't force me"

" After Grade 9, I will let her get married so the State won't fine me"

" My parents say upper secondary school brings nothing, so they let me stay home"

"I didn't want to get married. I wanted to finish my studies, but my husband dragged me away"

"The sister and brother wanted me to be their sister-in-law, so they told their younger brother to kidnap me"

Dilemmas & paradoxes?

Mixed views:

- Girls marrying later because fewer arranged marriages?
- Girls marrying earlier because more contact with boys outside home?
- Schooling encouraging early marriage of 16-17 year olds?
- Exposure to media changing expectations of romance – marry as soon as leave school?
- Uneven enforcement of legal age
- Traditional belief that girl spending 3 days in a boys home = 'married'
- Gender-based violence normalized
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Future directions?

- Multi-sectoral approaches to suit ethnic minority contextual realities – interface of law and culture
- Greater efforts to outreach and target girls excluded from LSE.
- Strengthen collection and use of disaggregated LSE data
- Importance of gender equality and life skills in curriculum
- Build aspirations through exposure to positive/alternative role models and mentors at school (even after a girl is married)
- Greater emphasis on sex education and reproductive health (with links to service provision)
- Strong measures to eliminate harmful traditional practices such as marriage by abduction e.g. fines, campaigns
- Focus on adolescent boys in LSE school to break down entrenched discriminatory attitudes, including towards gender-based violence

Thank you for your attention!

