



FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
SCHOOL OF GLOBAL STUDIES

Looking into the black box

The roles of development workers in enhancing climate resilience and gender equality for ethnic minority women through the EmPower project in Vietnam

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Abstract

The climate change-gender nexus has increasingly become the arena in which adaptation interventions take place. One such intervention is the EmPower program in the Asia-Pacific region by UN Women and UNEP. This research is a case study on how one program component on women's renewable energy entrepreneurship is implemented in Vietnam. Through the perspectives of development workers at CHIASE – EmPower's partner in northern Vietnam – the research examines what decisions were made about the project implementation, what or who influenced those decisions, and how the project strives to strengthen gender equality within ethnic minority communities. Semi-structured interviews with development workers constitute the main method for data collection, supported by an analysis of program and project documents. Thereafter, empirical data is analyzed using thematic analysis. The feminist political ecology of climate change by Noémi Gonda provides the theoretical foundation for the research. The theory prioritizes attention to the individual scale of analysis, power relations, and intersectional perspectives in the processes of knowledge-making and adaptation to climate change. In essence, this research aims at making visible the personal perceptions, understandings, and experiences of local development workers as well as the context in which they work. These individuals are not simply implementers of a development program but active agents playing different roles, navigating unique conditions and challenges, and ultimately influencing how the EmPower program can improve gender equality in Vietnam.

Keywords: feminist political ecology, development workers, climate change, gender equality, ethnic minorities, Vietnam.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CHIASE	Center of Help for Indigenous value promotion And Sustainable Environment
DRR	Disaster risk reduction
EM	Ethnic minority
EmPower	EmPower: Women for Climate-Resilient Societies (shortened name) or Strengthening Human Rights and Gender Equality through Climate Change Action and Disaster Risk Reduction (full name)
FPE	Feminist Political Ecology
GREAT	Gender Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism
GreenID	Green Innovation and Development Center
GSO	General Statistics Office
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NGO	Non-governmental organization
OCOP	One Commune One Product
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
ToC	Theory of Change
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
UNDAF	United Nations Development Assistance Framework
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
VFF	Vietnam Fatherland Front
VND	Vietnam dong
VWU	Vietnam Women's Union
WB	The World Bank

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1. Introduction

Our understanding of anthropogenic climate change has become more sophisticated to account for the nuanced differences in the ways individuals relate to the environment and environmental changes. Gone was the time of gender blindness in the discourses surrounding climate change vulnerability, impacts and adaptation. This is because such discourses revolve around societies and their expected behaviours – societies that are still fundamentally structured by the gender binary of male and female. Climate change is recognized to have gender-differentiated impacts wherein women, women in poverty, rural communities, indigenous, ethnic minority, and other marginalized groups tend to experience disproportionately negative impacts compared to men (UNFCCC, 2019). Existing inequalities and unique combinations of geographical, economic, social, cultural, and political factors further limit their capacity to prepare for, adapt and recover from disasters and environmental changes (UNFCCC, 2007). Conversely, successful adaptation efforts depend upon the meaningful engagement and participation of women and marginalized persons, who are often sidelined in political processes. This understanding has led development entities to integrate gender considerations into different stages of climate policies and interventions. Thus, the climate change-gender nexus increasingly becomes the place in which they operate.

Against this backdrop, the program “Strengthening Human Rights and Gender Equality through Climate Change Action and Disaster Risk Reduction” was initiated by UN Women and UNEP with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (UN Women, n.d.). This thesis will use the shortened name of the program – “EmPower” – from here onwards. EmPower is the first program to integrate human rights and gender equality with climate change and disaster risk reduction (DRR) actions in the Asia-Pacific region (Embassy of Sweden, 2018). Interestingly, UN Women and UNEP (2019) consciously refrain from using the program’s full name in Vietnam, stating that “human rights” is a sensitive issue in the country context.

EmPower is intended to be a five-year regional program (2018-2022) that targets three specific countries: Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The program’s full name captures its purpose, which rests on the achievement of five outcomes (UN Women, n.d.):

- 1) Enhancing the voice and leadership of women and marginalized groups in climate change and DRR decision-making processes.
- 2) Generating and applying sex-, age-, and diversity-disaggregated data to inform climate change and DRR policies.
- 3) Transforming national climate change, DRR, and energy policies to better integrate gender equality and human rights dimensions.
- 4) Supporting women's entrepreneurship in renewable energy for more resilient livelihoods.
- 5) Influencing regional normative processes, knowledge products, and dialogue platforms to become more responsive to gender equality and human rights.

This research is a case study of the implementation of Outcome 4 in Vietnam. This is because Outcome 4 has a more localized scope than the others, making it suitable for a master's thesis and feasible to be done at this stage of the EmPower program. Due to its attention to renewable energy interventions, Outcome 4 specifically concerns climate change while the other outcomes also include the DRR dimension (UN Women & UNEP, 2019). EmPower engages different partners for different outcomes in each country. In Vietnam, the partners for Outcome 4 are two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) called CHIASE and GreenID, responsible for implementation in northern and southern Vietnam respectively. This research is further delimited to the participation of CHIASE as the project implementer.

CHIASE (the Center of Help for Indigenous value promotion And Sustainable Environment) is a small Vietnamese NGO based in Hanoi with about eleven part-time personnel. Their expertise is in poverty reduction, livelihood development and women's empowerment. The NGO has an extensive focus on ethnic minorities (EMs) and poor, marginalized communities, serving to further the "voice of disadvantaged and natural resource-dependent people, especially ethnic minority, who lack access to resources and influence over decisions that affect their lives" (CHIASE, n.d., para. 1). *Chia sẻ* means sharing in Vietnamese, and this provides one way to view CHIASE's work. For example, the Center supports EM communities by sharing new knowledge and skills in livelihood development and natural resources management. Simultaneously, CHIASE promotes the utilization of indigenous, EM knowledge to a broader audience via seminars and conferences. In the aspect of women's empowerment, the Center

focuses on building the capacity of EM women and girls while encouraging EM communities to better value their capabilities and contributions (CHIASE, 2017).

Before going further, it is important to distinguish between two terms: While the EmPower *program* refers to the whole regional program by UN Women and UNEP, the EmPower *project* is used in this thesis to denote the component on women's renewable energy entrepreneurship in northern Vietnam by CHIASE.

1.1 Problem formulation

The research departs from the observation that in EmPower's communications materials, development workers who implement the program/project on the ground have very limited visibility. Instead, EmPower devotes extensive focus on local women as those who are vulnerable to climate change and whose capacities or potentials have not been sufficiently realized. While this depiction serves to justify the large-scale intervention by the program, it diverts attention away from the local actors who ensure that the plan becomes reality on the ground and achieves pre-determined goals.

Previous researchers such as Jackson (2005) have pointed to the understudied nature of this invisible middle, comprised of development actors who operate in the space between international entities and local communities, and between global agendas and the local contexts which they seek to change. These actors exercise unique power and agency, utilize different expertise, resources and strategies, while being confined by the structures in which they work. Especially, "local" development actors who were born and work in the country of intervention have different concerns, priorities, and ways of working from expatriates employed by international organizations for a time-limited appointment in that country (van Voorst, 2019).

In EmPower communications, CHIASE appears to be a black box. Outside observers might see what goes in and out of the box (i.e., project plan turned into activities) without much knowledge of who participate in the process, what challenges they face, what resources they employ or why. In essence, the research attempts to open up this black box by making visible the development workers at CHIASE, along with their opinions, understanding, values and concerns while implementing the EmPower project. In so doing, it seeks to understand the factors that influence their actions and the extent to which these development workers influence the achievement of project objectives.

1.2 Aim and research questions

The aim of the research is to examine the roles of CHIASE's development workers in implementing the EmPower project in northern Vietnam. This is done by uncovering the practical project decisions they made and what factors inform, enable or inhibit their decisions. As the EmPower project seeks to *empower* female entrepreneurs through renewable energy *power*, the project is neatly situated in the climate change-gender nexus. Therefore, the research has an overarching focus on the development workers' approach towards strengthening gender equality through the project.

To this end, the analysis is guided by the following research questions:

- How do development workers motivate their approach towards project implementation?
- How do development workers motivate their approach towards strengthening gender equality for the target group?

1.3 Delimitations

As previously discussed, the research studies a specific component of the EmPower program in northern Vietnam from the perspective of a Vietnamese NGO. The numbers of research participants and people in the target group of intervention are not large. Additionally, since EmPower is ongoing, the research is informed by information and materials that have so far been developed. For these reasons, the research findings are situated within a small yet clearly defined scope. It is not the intention of this research to generate generalizable findings, either to the project implementation in southern Vietnam by GreenID, or to NGOs in other countries under the EmPower program.

Another delimitation concerns the use of terms. Gender is a frequently used term in this research to refer to the social characteristics and differences attributed to being male and female. Similarly, gender equality refers to “the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys” (UNDP, 2014, p. 27) and the equal power to shape their own lives. For lack of more inclusive terms, I wish to use gender in this sense despite recognizing that such binary conception fails to reflect the complexity of other gender identities (i.e., non-binary).

1.4 Relevance to Global Studies

The discipline of Global Studies is as much about global phenomena and processes as it is about individual and local experiences. This thesis is relevant to Global Studies because it encompasses the global, the local and the middle space. Specifically, it studies an adaptation effort to climate change formulated by UN organizations that work across borders. These entities shape the global discourses on climate change and gender equality, and through such discourses, shaping individual lives. At the same time, the research looks at the roles of local development workers who act as agents of globalization, translating global agendas to the local context. This points to the interconnected nature of the world we live in, a world that can be described as “glocal” where both “the global” and “the local” constantly interact and shape one another.

1.5 Disposition

The thesis constitutes six chapters, with the first one presenting the research problem and research topic. The subsequent chapter on Background discusses the rationale behind the EmPower project from the standpoint of its designers, as well as the social context of northern Vietnam where the project is implemented. In the third chapter, feminist political ecology is presented as the Theoretical Framework for the research. Thereafter, the Methodology chapter considers ontological and epistemological positions and ethical issues alongside methods for data collection and data analysis. The empirical Results from data are accompanied by an Analysis in the chapter that follows. The final chapter concludes the research with a comprehensive summary of answers to the research questions. Directions for future research will also be suggested.

2. Background

2.1 The rationale behind the EmPower program and project

The formulation of the EmPower program and its outcomes was based on a Theory of Change (ToC) (UN Women & UNEP, 2019). ToC is a widely used method by development planners to simplify the complexity of development challenges and interventions. It provides a tool to explain “how a given intervention, or set of interventions, is expected to lead to specific development change” (UNDAF, 2017, p.4) in the short, medium and long term. Despite being called a *theory* of change, this method is not based on tested evidence. Instead, it establishes causal relationships between actions and impacts based on available data and certain assumptions (UNDAF, 2017).

Using the ToC, the EmPower program can be explained as follows: Once all five outcomes on women’s participation in climate change decision-making, availability of sex-disaggregated data, gender-responsive national policies, women’s access to renewable energy, and regional normative processes are achieved, then the program has addressed key drivers of gender-based vulnerabilities. As a result, women in the Asia-Pacific region become more resilient to disasters and climate change (UN Women & UNEP, 2019). I will argue in subsequent chapters why this argumentation can be overly simplistic. Regardless, an understanding of what guides program formulation is important to understanding the rationale behind the EmPower project in Vietnam.

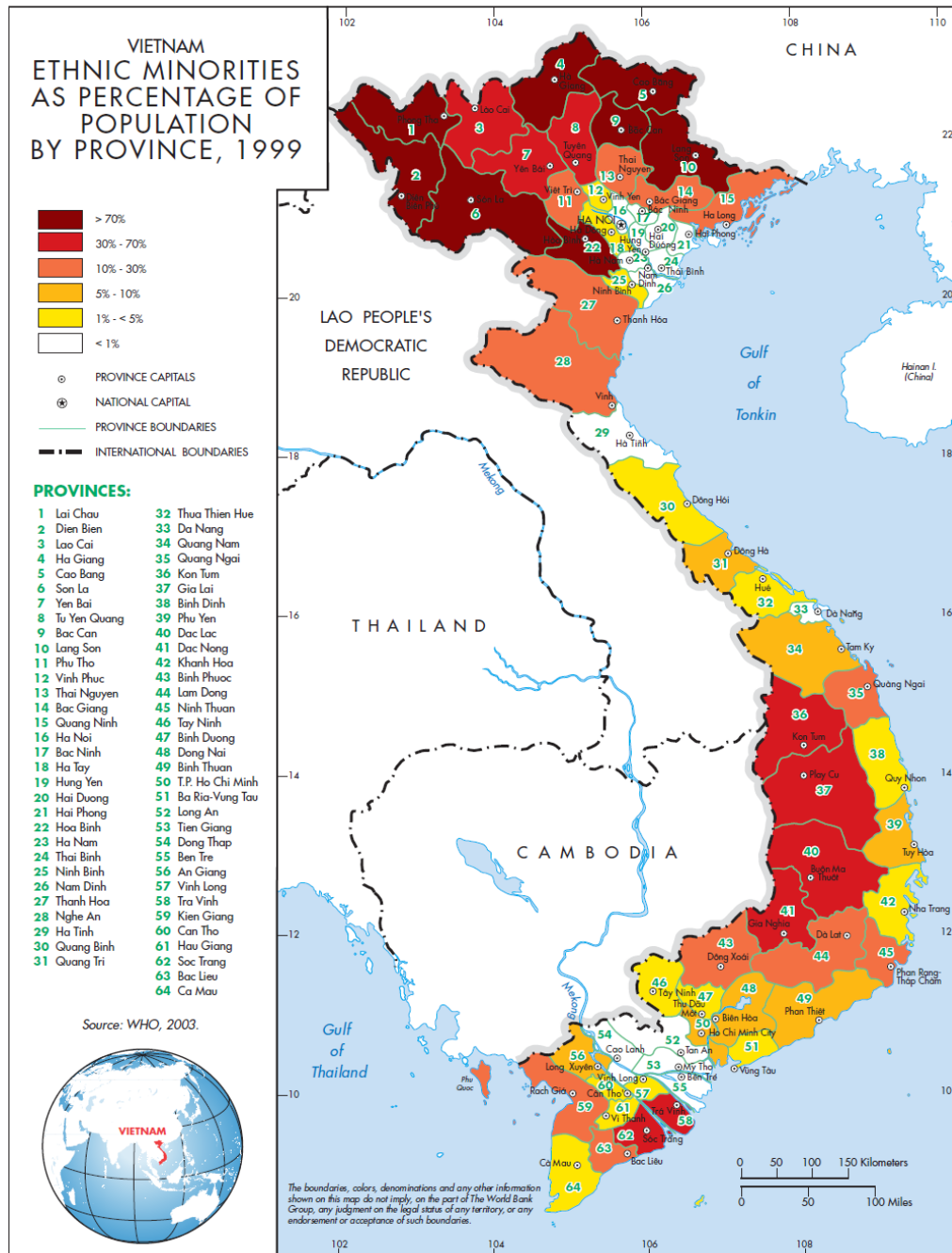
The EmPower project aims at enabling female entrepreneurs in northern Vietnam to use renewable energy to enhance climate-resilient livelihoods (CHIASE, 2020). The rationale behind this outcome is that: If women have increased access to new technologies, financing instruments, and markets for their products, then their access to and control of economic resources will be enhanced, thus contributing to more resilient livelihoods for themselves and overall resilience of their communities (UNEP & CHIASE, 2019). Consequently, the project invests in renewable energy equipment, develops business and financing plans, and provides relevant knowledge and skills for women-owned businesses. Renewable energy also is intended to serve as a catalyst for economic, social and personal development.

2.2 The country context: Ethnic minorities in Vietnam

CHIASSE implements the EmPower project in Lao Cai and Bac Kan – two provinces in the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands region of Vietnam. The region is home to almost 50% of Vietnam’s EM population (GSO, 2020) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Geographical distribution of 53 ethnic minorities in Vietnam



Note. Figure source: the World Bank (WB), 2019, p. 15

Vietnam is an ethnically diverse country with 54 recognized ethnicities, of which 53 are considered EMs. In 2019, 85.3% of the total 96.2 million Vietnamese identify as members of the Kinh majority group. The population of the remaining 53 ethnicities only constitutes 14.7% of the total national population (GSO, 2020).

Within 53 EMs, the Tay is the largest EM group with 1.6 million people. The Thai, Muong, Mong and Khmer also have populations of over 1 million. On the other hand, Ro Mam, Brau and O Du are the smallest EM groups with less than 500 people (GSO, 2020). In the region where Lao Cai and Bac Kan are situated, the main EMs are Tay, Mong, Thai, Muong, Nung and Dao (GSO, 2020). The region's ethnic make-up has important implications on the people that the EmPower project targets.

Diversity characterizes Vietnam's EMs in terms of languages, cultures, norms and practices, values and beliefs, as well as socio-economic situations. Nonetheless, EMs in Vietnam tend to share some things in common. Firstly, they concentrate in rural and remote areas: only 13.8% of EM people live in urban areas compared to the national average of 34.4% (GSO, 2020). Secondly, both "hard" infrastructure (e.g., road or electricity access) and social infrastructure (e.g., adequate housing, schools and hospitals) are often lacking in areas where EM people live, especially so in the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands (GSO, 2020). Thirdly, poverty is a persistent issue for EMs despite Vietnam's "remarkable progress" in poverty reduction. Observers have argued that this development has mostly benefited the Kinh group (WB, 2009). The share of EMs among the poor and extreme poor has increased dramatically over the years. In 2013, EM people made up 47% of the poor and 70% of the poorest population (CHIASSE, 2020; Demombynes, 2013). Out of six socio-economic regions of Vietnam, the Northern Mountains and Central Highlands has the highest rate of multidimensional poverty (Demombynes, 2013). Fourthly, EMs generally have low levels of education. 26% of EM people aged 15 and above have primary education as the highest educational level achieved. The same percentage is recorded for those below primary education level (GSO, 2020). These two groups together constitute more than half of the EM population in this age group. Additionally, due to the hegemony of the Kinh language in Vietnamese society (that is, Vietnam's official language is the Kinh language), school curriculum and teachers in EM communities use this as the medium of instruction (WB, 2009). The literacy rate in the official language is much lower for EM people (80%) than Kinh people (96%) (WB, 2009). The final

point concerns EMs' limited inclusion and participation in political processes and decision-making, partly due to their lack of education, time and resources. Another part can be attributed to the stereotypical perceptions that Kinh people, notably political and administrative actors, hold about EM people. Minorities are often depicted as “backward”, “ignorant”, “less educated”, “less capable”, and for their lives to improve, they should be “more like the Kinh” (WB, 2009). These perceptions are internalized by EM people themselves to varying degrees, thus serving to “disempower or deprive minorities of their ability to full participation in society” (WB, 2009, p. 43).

Gender inequality is also a relevant issue of concern about EMs. This can be observed through statistics. For instance, the sex ratio at birth¹ within EMs is 110.2 boys/100 girls (GSO, 2020) – higher than the naturally occurring rate of 103-107 boys/100 girls (Ritchie & Roser, 2019). This shows that interventions had been made in favor of male offspring – an unsurprising discovery in a patriarchal society. As they grow up, EM women tend to be more disadvantaged than EM men and Kinh women in terms of education, employment, health, socio-political and socio-economic aspects, consequently affecting their ability to shape life choices. Many EM women enter the workforce in their teens – much earlier than Kinh women – and are often self-employed in agriculture or vulnerable work in the informal sector (UN Women, 2019). UN Women (2019) argues that prevailing gender norms within EM communities and the heavy burden of domestic care work limit and even stigmatize women's mobility in search of better paid jobs with employment insurance.

It is important to note that the above-mentioned aspects do not apply equally to all minority people because EM people, women and men are not homogenous groups. That being said, the interactions of these aspects (i.e., access to and control of resources, power and voice, opportunities and choices) shape the vulnerability of EM people in general, and EM women in particular, to climate change.

¹ The sex ratio at birth is the ratio of male births to 100 female births

3. Theoretical framework and key concepts

3.1 Feminist Political Ecology (FPE)

To explain FPE is to distil decades of complex evolutions by its predecessors: political ecology and feminist literature. Robbins (2012) argues that rather than a single body of theory, political ecology is better understood as a “*community of practice* united around a *certain kind of text*” (p. 20) – text that concerns the political in ecology and ecological in politics. In other words, political processes, and ecological conditions and environmental changes, mutually interact and influence each other. Not only that, but our understanding of such interactions is “further delimited and directed through political and economic process” (Robbins, 2012, p. 20). As a result, Robbins (2012) believes that political ecology has a two-fold focus: It aims at uncovering and deconstructing the causes rather than symptoms of ecological and social problems, and in their place, planting new “seeds” of better, more sustainable ways of doing things.

In reviewing the lineage of political ecology, Robbins (2012) contends that at one point in the process, political ecologists found themselves insufficiently equipped, theoretically and methodologically, to inquire about their changing world. During the age of global development assistance following World War II, large-scale interventions and the consequently rapid restructuring of the world had resulted in differentiating impacts on different groups. The less powerful groups in the less developed countries, especially women, found themselves worse off rather than better off (Robbins, 2012). This development led to the incorporation of critical feminist development viewpoints into political ecology, expanding its framework towards the direction of gender considerations in the human-environment nexus (Robbins, 2012).

When FPE was introduced in the landmark work of Rocheleau et al. (1996), it retains the essence of political ecology: through an explicit consideration of power relations to understand the changing socio-ecological world, thus gaining new knowledge that can be used to build new and (assumably) more ethical socio-ecologies. As a framework that seeks to combine political ecology and feminist scholarship, FPE views ecology, society, power and knowledge in a certain way – through gender and gendered power relations – and also benefits from feminist tools and perspectives. In practical terms, FPE directs attention to the different ways through which men and women experience, relate to, claim control over, take responsibilities for, or get affected by the environment and environmental changes. Such differences are real and not

imagined (Rocheleau et al., 1996). They are also not a product of biological sex per se, but rather of how societies interpret the sexes and subsequently construct genders (Rocheleau et al., 1996).

Rocheleau et al. (1996) argue the need to view gender and environment in a complex and interconnected constellation of ecological, economic, cultural and social dimensions; as well as the interactions of those processes on different levels. For a comprehensive understanding of the gender-environment nexus, FPE analyses must consider gender alongside class, caste, race, culture and ethnicity. While the theme of intersectionality is central to FPE, gender is considered “a critical variable” (Rocheleau et al., 1996) and thus implied to have a superior position over other social factors. This is in fact a common critique of Rocheleau and colleagues’ work, which has propelled future scholars to find better ways to address. Another important characteristic of FPE is its bottom-up approach with an aim to constructing theories that stay true to and reflect local experiences. It does this by focusing on individual experiences, building on “analyses of identity and difference, and of pluralities of meanings” (Rocheleau et al., 1996, p. 287), and seeking to “understand and interpret local experience in the context of global processes of environmental and economic changes” (p. 4). This means that FPE’s strength lies in locally based case studies, which explains why most researchers use this approach (Nam, 2018).

Ever since Rocheleau et al. (1996), FPE has evolved substantially with the active and critical engagement by feminist political ecologists. They have examined different aspects of FPE with an aim to addressing its shortcomings and improving the framework. Some notable contributors are Nightingale (2006), Elmhirst (2011), Mollett and Faria (2013) and Gonda (2019).

Nightingale (2006) stresses the need to refocus attention to the mutually constituted nature of gender and environment instead of treating gender as the starting point of analysis. She also criticizes how gender in Rocheleau et al. (1996) is sometimes equalized with women and strives to re-define the term. Gender is neither women nor the “linear, structuring relation” between women and men, but the process through which subjectivities are performed, defined, (re)produced, and contested in particular ecological contexts (Nightingale, 2006). This conceptualization enables the dynamic interactions among gender, environment, society and culture to surface (Nightingale, 2006). It also offers lessons to development program planners. Firstly, programs that seek to address gender, environment, or poverty cannot afford to do so

separately because these issues are embedded within each other. Secondly, even programs that have the best intention to be gender-, caste-, or ethnicity-sensitive cannot be so in all contexts. What matters, according to Nightingale (2006), is paying attention to how programs are implemented and allowing flexibility to the constant and mutual interactions between programs and subjectivities.

Elmhirst (2011) discusses the “new feminist political ecologies” via three themes. The first two highlight the power of feminist conceptualizations of scale, especially less visible and more intimate scales (i.e., households, bodies, emotions) and intersectionality. The last theme concerns feminist conceptualizations of “politics and subject formation in political ecology, ... recogni[zing] that it is frequently at the level of the intimate that national and international power relations are produced and sustained” (Elmhirst, 2011, p. 131).

Mollett and Faria (2013) give considerable attention to FPE’s often ambivalent relationship with difference and advocate for a “more complex and messier” notion of gender by applying a postcolonial intersectional analysis. They contend that while feminist political ecologists generally acknowledge the need for an intersectional perspective, most of them fall back to privileging gender as the most important variable of analysis. What can be understood from this account is that conscious efforts are required by researchers to experiment, entertain or attend to other social variables. This perspective is extremely relevant and important for this thesis.

3.2 The FPE of climate change

The FPE of climate change was coined by Gonda (2019) to expand FPE towards the inclusion of climate change adaptation politics. Consequently, a discussion on climate change vulnerability and adaptation will first proceed.

3.2.1 Climate change vulnerability and adaptation

The 21st century ushered in another wave of global development interventions that also involves the massive and profound restructuring of societies, economies, ecologies and polities – that in response to the existential threat of our times: climate change. Different actors have different ideas about how adaptation, understood as “[t]he process of adjustment to actual or expected climate and its effects” (IPCC, 2014, p. 118), should be done and what it should achieve. According to Eriksen et al. (2015), there are broadly two ways to group these different ideas: those viewing adaptation as a technical, apolitical or politically neutral process, and those

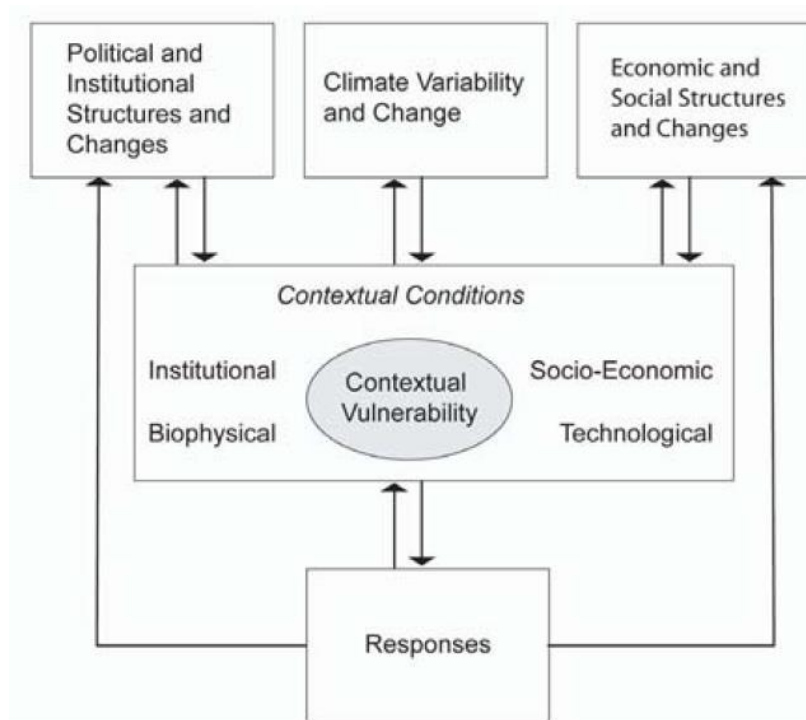
viewing adaptation as “political all the way through” (p. 523). The authors advocate for the latter, viewing climate change as part of multiple changes that affect a society, and adaptation as a process through which society manages diverse changes.

Before considering how a society can adapt to climate change, one must first understand its current properties or characteristics. The concept of vulnerability can be used to uncover some of those characteristics through such questions as: “If floods are predicted to become more frequent in this region in the future, which characteristics of this community are more vulnerable to this change than others?” and “In what ways are they more vulnerable?”. Brooks (2003) argues that vulnerability can only be meaningfully discussed in the specifics, that is “Who or what, specifically, is vulnerable?” and “Vulnerable to what specific thing?”. Like adaptation, conceptualizations of vulnerability also fall under two categories with different political assumptions. Here, the distinction between outcome and contextual vulnerability by O’Brien et al. (2007) is discussed.

Outcome vulnerability communicates a linear process wherein vulnerability is the end point of analysis, and whatever negative outcomes that “remain after adaptation has taken place define the levels of vulnerability” (O’Brien et al., 2007, p. 75). On the other hand, contextual vulnerability communicates a more “processual and multidimensional view of climate-society interactions” (O’Brien et al., 2007, p. 76), stressing the importance of contexts and contextual conditions that make some people more vulnerable to a certain climactic change than others (see Figure 2). These different conceptualizations of vulnerability denote the “framings” of climate change by the people who adhere to the terms themselves. Framing means organizing and interpreting meanings using a certain framework (Goffman, 1986). Through framing, actors decide to include some voices and exclude others, promote certain knowledges on climate change at the expense of others, thus arguing for certain adaptation responses instead of others. In essence, the work of O’Brien et al. (2007) points to the importance of language in climate change politics – language that is seen, (re)produced or challenged in framings and discourses which are “embedded in institutions, actors and academic disciplines” (p. 76).

Figure 2

Conceptualization of contextual vulnerability



Note. Figure source: O'Brien et al., 2007, p.75

In fact, language, power and knowledge are central themes in climate change politics. This can be seen in the conscious effort by Eriksen et al. (2015) to reframe and politicize adaptation. They promote the conceptualization of adaptation as a “contested social-political process” (p. 524), taking place “in contexts of existing, dynamic patterns of social relations” (p. 531) and “through struggles over authority, knowledges and subjectivities across scales by multiple actors” (p. 531). It is clear that the acts of (re)framing climate change knowledge are political processes. As such, I find it almost impossible to reconcile how such processes can result in politically neutral interpretations of climate change vulnerability and adaptation. This should also clarify my stance on the issue.

3.2.2 Gonda's FPE of climate change

Climate change adaptation is not only political but also gendered. FPE has long argued that large-scale interventions to address the gendered impacts of climate change can themselves create “long-term, gendered effects on livelihoods, mediated by social, cultural, and institutional factors” (Nelson et al., 2002, p. 54). Even if they lack a gender content, planned

interventions by governmental and non-governmental organizations alike are situated within inherently patriarchal structures of power, informed by certain understandings of power, thus reflecting certain gender biases that tend to favor or serve male interests (Rocheleau et al., 1996). Consequently, failing to adequately recognize the gendered impacts of climate change interventions means failing to account for the power structures and conditions that make some groups more vulnerable to climate change than others in the first place. This will lead to the reinforcement of unequal power structures and the further discrimination or oppression against said groups.

The FPE of climate change arose from the context wherein the “nuanced understanding [within feminist scholarship] of the complex interlinkages between gender inequality and climate vulnerability ... has permeated the policy and project spheres, and in general the practice, in very limited ways” (Gonda, 2019, p. 88). Gonda’s work is therefore an effort to incorporate the scalar politics of climate change adaptation and knowledge creation into existing FPE literature. This allows feminist political ecologists, who tend to operate and engage with more personal, local scales, to expand into larger scales and help build climate change interventions that are more just and sustainable (in the spirit of political ecology).

The FPE of climate change studies the “workings of power in the inter-scalar processes that make particular people vulnerable to climate change” (Gonda, 2019, p. 90). To overcome the knowledge-practice gap, Gonda (2019) proposes questions that development workers can employ to problematize the workings of power on different scales (see Figure 3). This advocates for the recognition that adaptation politics is “an ensemble of policies, interventions, and everyday practices revolving around the feminist concept of social reproduction” (Gonda, 2019, p. 94).

Figure 3

Questions about the workings of power in climate change adaptation

Policy and project relevant questions for understanding the workings of power in the processes that make people vulnerable to climate change.

Main focus	Analytical foci	Questions for policy-makers and project practitioners
The <i>workings of power</i> in the processes that make people vulnerable to climate change	Emotions	How can we ensure that climate change policies and projects do not manipulate emotions? How can policies and projects build on positive emotions to create new pathways for transformation in the context of climate change?
	Subjectivities	How can the practices that support policies and projects' power to subjectivate their beneficiaries or participants be challenged? How can subjugated subjects become emancipated with the support of projects and policies? What do emancipatory subjectivities look like in the context of a changing environment and a society?
	Knowledges	How do existing power relations influence the translation of both "scientific" studies and input from local communities (especially from disadvantaged policy groups) into policies and project interventions? How can policy-makers and project practitioners creatively work with unequal power relations in climate change knowledge making and knowledge translating processes?
	Politics	What concrete policy and project measures are needed to envisage climate change adaptation as social reproduction and as a pathway for new ways of living life in common?

Note. Figure source: Gonda, 2019, p. 94

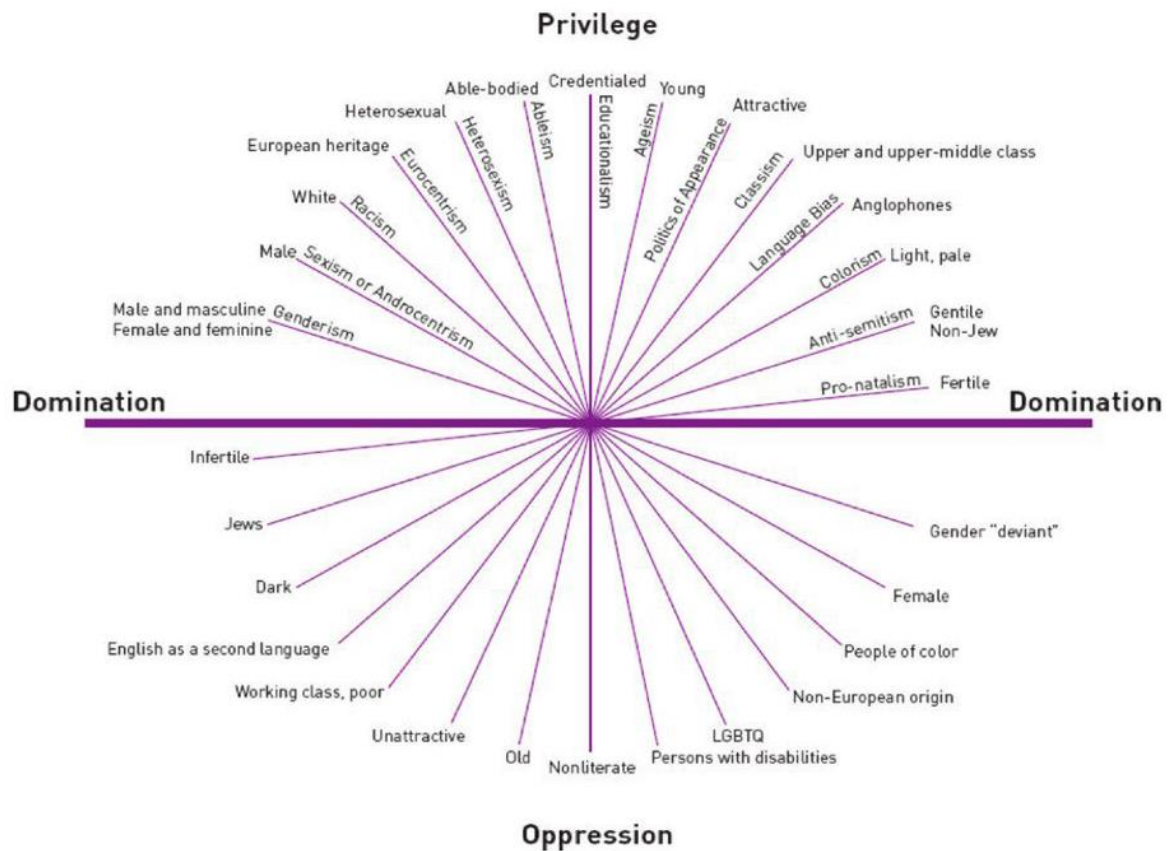
The questions put forward by Gonda (2019) are effective in re-politicizing the intimate, personal impacts of climate change that may be invisible in mainstream discourses. These questions also provide extremely relevant insights into this research. However, some concepts used by Gonda (2019) such as "subjectivate", "subjugated subjects" and "emancipatory subjectivities" are challenging to grasp even for a social science student with foundational knowledge in this regard. Policy makers, project planners and implementers who do not share this educational background may struggle to understand what is asked of them, especially so for those working in other languages. Instead of offering clarity, these formulations can serve to obscure and widen the gap in policies' integration of theoretical knowledge on climate change adaptation.

3.2.3 Intersectionality

FPE is not only multi-scalar but also intersectional, as "people are not "just" men or women: a variety of social factors such as ethnicity, age, and class intersect to shape both oppressions and privileges that ultimately add up in the processes that make particular people vulnerable to social and environmental changes" (Gonda, 2019, p. 90). In reality, the list of intersectionality is more open-ended, as can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Intersecting axes of privilege, domination, and oppression/resistance



Note. Figure source: AWIS, n.d.

In fact, Davis (2008) argues that it is precisely the ambiguity and open-endedness of intersectionality that make it a widely used, yet widely debated, theory among feminist scholars. They share little consensus over whether intersectionality is a concept, theory, methodology, perspective, or something else (Collins, 2015; Davis, 2008). This has led Collins (2015) to theorize three broad formulations of intersectionality as a knowledge project, analytical strategy, or critical praxis. This research views intersectionality as an analytical strategy that takes into account interrelated, mutually constructing social categories, which then shape intersecting systems of power and determine individuals' privileges and/or oppressions. The placing of individuals in these systems also (in)form their identities, subjectivities, worldviews, and knowledge (Collins, 2015).

4. Methodology

Methodology is best understood as “a critical design attitude to be found always at work throughout a study” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 39), rather than a standalone chapter in the thesis to be ticked off before the empirical results can be presented. Following that argument, this chapter should be read as where justifications for research decisions are presented, not where they actually take place.

4.1 Ontological and epistemological positions

The starting point for this research concerns the fundamental assumptions underlying it: ontological and epistemological assumptions, or assumptions about the nature of “being” and “knowing” respectively. In the words of Marsh and Furlong (2002), these assumptions or positions constitute a “skin” that is inseparable from the social researcher. In acknowledging my own skin, I wish to make explicit my constructivist position to ontology and interpretivist position to epistemology. It is important to clarify these positions because they shape my approach to the whole research project, the broader understanding of the world in which the project and I are situated, and the kind of knowledge I seek to gain about this world. My purpose with this thesis also becomes clear: to present what reality looks like for a certain group of people, interpret, and make meanings of their personal accounts in light of broader conceptualizations (or triple interpretations (Bryman, 2012)). In the process, I play an active part in furthering new forms of subjective knowledge and shaping the social world itself.

4.2 Research strategy and design

My research topic is qualitative in nature as I am interested in the development workers’ personal accounts and the meanings imbued in them. I chose a predominantly deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research by using FPE to guide research question formulation, data collection and data analysis. This approach should be understood as a tendency because there exist elements of inductiveness in a deductive approach wherein the inferences made from empirical data provide feedback to the existing stock of theory from which the research project departs (Bryman, 2012).

Research design refers to the framework for data collection and analysis (Bryman, 2012). This thesis takes on a case study design, whose strength lies in “understanding behaviour and the

meaning of that behaviour in its specific social context” (Bryman, 2012, p. 46). The unit of analysis is the Vietnamese NGO CHIASE. The country was chosen because of my familiarity with the dominant social, cultural, and political contexts (that of the Kinh majority) in which the research problem is set.

4.3 Methods of data collection

4.3.1 Semi-structured interview

Methods are research tools employed for a purpose. To inquire into people’s personal experiences, ideas and conceptualizations, semi-structured interviewing was considered the most suitable method. This means that data collection was guided by an interview guide with a standard sequence of themes and general questions to be covered (Kvale, 2007). At the same time, there is flexibility to adapt the questions and follow up after interesting or unclear aspects, especially regarding the participants’ personal views and conceptualizations. This flexibility proved to be vital for the self-reflection and adaptation by the researcher during interviews. This is because while interacting with the participants, I became aware of the presuppositions (Kvale, 2007) behind some interview questions despite my earlier efforts to minimize them. While I could quickly address these errors in the conversations to avoid further “contamination” of the social world (Bryman, 2012), I am aware that such contamination can be caused by other factors such as the researcher’s subjectivity and monopoly of interpretation (Bryman, 2012; Kvale, 2007). This will be further discussed in Section 4.6.

4.3.2 Choice of research participants

My interest in the implementation of the EmPower project in Vietnam influenced my choice of research participants, who are development workers at CHIASE – one of EmPower’s local partners in Outcome 4. The first person I contacted at CHIASE agreed to participate in an interview and introduced me to other people in the project team. This snowball sampling approach allowed me to reach the people relevant to the research quickly and directly (Bryman, 2012). Snowball sampling is the best possible approach for this research because of its limited scope and attention to a specific group of people. As the research does not aim to represent the experiences of Vietnamese NGOs as a whole, the critique that snowball sampling does not enable representation or generalization (Bryman, 2012) is not considered relevant.

Regarding the number of participants, it was originally seven people from CHIASE who participated in the Empower project (sufficient condition). Upon further communications with CHIASE, it became clear that only three people could satisfy the necessary condition wherein participants must have a thorough understanding of the project's implementation (given the research aim). The rest of the project staff were disqualified because they only participated in the scoping and pre-feasibility studies prior to project implementation.

While there is no correct answer to the question of "How many is enough?" in qualitative research (Bryman, 2012), I was nonetheless concerned about this small number of participants and attempted to add more participants via two ways. Firstly, I reached out to GreenID, the implementing partner in southern Vietnam, and conducted a fourth interview with the project manager there. However, the participant explicitly stated during the interview that there would be no opportunity to interview the rest of the project team. GreenID's equal targeting of Kinh and EM women in the project also complicated the analysis. Without the consent of other team members to participate in research, it was difficult to gain a thorough understanding of the project implementation in southern Vietnam. This led to the decision to exclude the fourth interview from data analysis due to insufficient information. The second way to increase the number of participants was to interview the manager from UNEP whom CHIASE and GreenID directly report to. Repeated efforts to contact this person were made without success. The difficulty in acquiring a relevant fourth interview propelled me to re-evaluate the additional value that this would bring to the research project. After carefully studying the three data items I had already acquired, I came to the conclusion that they already include rich information that would sufficiently answer the questions I set out to address.

4.3.3 Interview process

The first step in the interview process was to familiarize myself with the semi-structured interview's purpose, characteristics, implications and requirements (Kvale, 2007). In the next step, an interview guide was developed, informed by the research aim and questions, and revised a few times with the thesis supervisor. A final refinement to the interview guide was made after conducting a pilot interview. Given the timeframe and content of the research, I decided to do the pilot interview with a friend who works in an international NGO in Vietnam. While this NGO's structure and speciality differ from those of CHIASE, I nonetheless benefited from looking at the interview guide from a fresh perspective. That is the perspective of someone

who works in similar contexts and structures (e.g., daily operations, practical issues of concern, lingo). This allowed me to reflect on the gap between my knowledge and reality. In this sense, the pilot interviewee acted like a research informant. The data from the pilot interview was not included in the analysis.

Given the implications of COVID-19 on overseas travel to Vietnam and related financial, time and health concerns, conducting interviews virtually was considered the most practical decision. The interviews were conducted using Zoom because of my familiarity with this videoconferencing software. One advantage with virtual interviewing was that participants could partake in the interviews from their own home where they felt safe and comfortable (Bryman, 2012). They also had the flexibility to pick an interview time from a timeframe that was most convenient for both sides, given our different time zones. Most importantly, the interviews could be easily recorded and saved for transcription at a later stage, allowing me to devote attention to the conversations. Meanwhile, a major disadvantage concerns the kind of information that comes through in an online interview (Bryman, 2012). Two of the participants preferred to have their cameras off, making it impossible to detect any facial expressions. The lack of sufficient non-verbal cues meant that data analysis would only be an analysis of words spoken, although this should not undermine the quality of analysis in any major ways. While Bryman (2012) cautions the difficulty of building rapport in an online interview, this was not the case thanks to previous communications between me and CHIASE in the months leading up to the interviews. In other words, rapport was already being established in that process.

The interviews were conducted in June and July 2021, and lasted between 1 and 1.5 hours. Vietnamese was the language of communication because it is both mine and the participants' native language. Below is a short introduction of the participants (denoted as P):

- P1: Male, employee of CHIASE, Empower project manager.
- P2: Female, employee of CHIASE, Empower project manager.
- P3: Male, Director of CHIASE, Empower strategic director.

4.3.4 Analysis of acquired project and program documents

Just as “channels of communication determine what may pass along them” (Clough & Nutbrown, 2012, p. 33), choosing different methods allows the researcher to access different kinds of information. To complement the personal accounts acquired from semi-structured

interviews, I also analyzed some Empower project and program documents in order to situate these accounts in the broader context of the Empower program. Documents were acquired from two main sources. Firstly, documents concerning the Empower project in Vietnam were shared with me by the research participants. The second source was the program manager for the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok's cooperation with Empower. I had utilized my contact at NCG Sweden, where I previously interned, to reach this manager after failing to acquire the program documents directly from EmPower.

The analysis of documents also serves to triangulate empirical findings, where triangulation is understood as “[t]he use of more than one method or source of data in the study of a social phenomenon so that findings may be cross-checked” (Bryman, 2012, p. 717). Triangulation can be achieved by using different kinds of qualitative methods to avoid errors linked to a specific method, and uncover where or why there might be inconsistencies in empirical findings (Patton, 1999).

4.4 Method of data analysis: Thematic analysis

Informed by the work of Braun and Clarke (2006), the thesis employs thematic analysis as the method for analyzing data. Thematic analysis is “a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 79). To do thematic analysis is to acknowledge the different assumptions that underlie the researcher's approach to individual steps in the analysis, such as how themes are decided or what themes represent in relation to data. Thematic analysis is broken down into six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006):

- 1) Familiarizing yourself with data
- 2) Generating initial codes
- 3) Searching for themes
- 4) Reviewing themes
- 5) Defining and naming themes
- 6) Producing the report

Conducting thematic analysis is a recursive instead of one-directional process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes and thematic map that I produced were constantly refined until I found them representative of the overall data set and satisfactory in helping answer the research questions. While doing so, I was cautious to avoid endless refinements of insignificant or unnecessary

aspects (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo was used to operationalize thematic analysis where codes and sub-codes in the software represent themes and sub-themes (see Appendix 1).

4.4.1 Translation and language concerns

The transcription of verbal data into written form constitutes the first step of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interviews were transcribed in Vietnamese and cross-checked with the original audio files to make sure that the transcriptions are “loyal” to the oral statements of participants (Kvale, 2007). Transcriptions were subsequently translated into English, including efforts to exclude irrelevant details and repetitions that were deemed to have no intended purposes. This was done so that the translated transcripts are more comprehensible and accommodating to data analysis. In this process, I encountered a common concern for researchers working in two languages: Some words or expressions in Vietnamese do not have equivalents in English. Other words that do have “suitable” English translations fail to retain their original meaning and connotation. In the context of this thesis, these words (in their original meanings) happen to communicate vital and valid points about the analysis itself. Therefore, I have decided to keep such words in Vietnamese while attempting to provide a translation that is as close to original and inclusive of context as possible.

4.5 Reliability and validity

The concepts of reliability and validity originated in quantitative research and need to be “adapted” for qualitative research (Bryman, 2012). This means that there is little shared consensus on the exact meaning of the concepts. Here, I discuss Kvale’s (2007) interpretations in relation to the construction of knowledge in interviews and epistemology.

To Kvale (2007), reliability in social sciences “pertains to the consistency and trustworthiness of research findings” (p. 123). It concerns whether the findings, as well as the interview transcriptions that informed them, would be reproducible at other times and by other researchers.

Validity in social sciences “pertains to the issue of whether a method investigates what it purports to investigate” (Kvale, 2007, p. 123) and reflects the social phenomena that the researcher wants to study. To researchers adhering to an interpretivist epistemology, striving towards validity does not mean striving towards an objective truth, but to make knowledge claims that are sound, defensible, and convincing (Kvale, 2007). The researcher validates her

work throughout the process by constantly, critically and systematically checking, questioning and theorizing so that validity is intimately built into each stage of knowledge construction (Kvale, 2007). This should result in a final piece of research that is intrinsically transparent, convincing, and valid.

4.6 Ethical considerations

Research ethics are norms about what is considered “good” practices in research (Swedish Research Council, 2017), which researchers are asked to consciously reflect upon throughout their work.

4.6.1 Informed consent

Prior to conducting interviews, I sent out a consent form to the research participants. This was done more than one week prior to the interviews to allow the participants enough time to properly read through and understand the implications of their participation. The form outlines the research purpose and procedure, the justification for the selection of research participants, as well as the participants’ rights before, during and after the interview is conducted. This consent form is attached in Appendix 3. At the beginning of the interviews, I asked if the participants had read and understood the consent form. When all of them had said yes, I proceeded to acquire their consent orally.

4.6.2 Confidentiality

Confidentiality does not have a fixed definition. To Kvale (2007), this means the exclusion of private data that can be used to identify the research participants, ultimately serving to protect their privacy. Confidentiality is sometimes used interchangeably with anonymity (such as in Swedish Research Council (2017) where the same definition is used for anonymity). Others argue that anonymity is “one way to operationalize (or apply) confidentiality” (Lancaster, 2017, p. 98). In this sense, practical efforts to uphold confidentiality include storing the data shared by the participants and their private data (i.e., names and contact details) separately. The latter is stored in a password-protected folder to which only I have access. Given the specialized focus of CHIASE and its small number of staff, maintaining confidentiality proves to be difficult in the sense that people familiar with the NGO could quite easily “connect the dots”. As a researcher, I can only do my utmost to maintain a certain level of confidentiality for the participants.

Confidentiality also protects the sharing of information given in confidence from unauthorized persons (Swedish Research Council, 2017), which extends to the documents mentioned in Section 4.3.4. These documents are the private properties of CHIASE, EmPower and the Swedish Embassy in Bangkok, and I am only permitted to use them in the scope of this thesis.

4.6.3 Power relations in feminist research

This thesis is underpinned by feminist research which stresses the need for contextualized knowledge in order to prevent the reproduction of “normalizing” notions of gender (Loftsdóttir, 2011). This requires the researcher to critically reflect on her “position of power” and “embeddedness within past and present inequalities” (Loftsdóttir, 2011, p. 203). In practical terms, I need to problematize the terms and concepts used to divide the diverse social world into simplified boxes (i.e., marginalized women). I must also question the implications of my social identities and roles on my research, and of the research communication on other subjectivities, power relations and knowledge.

4.6.4 Positionality

Positionality is one way to make explicit the researcher’s positions in relation to who and what she studies (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). This helps the researcher achieve a greater degree of subjectivity and understand whether these positions encourage or inhibit the possibilities for critical representation of knowledge. Firstly, I am a young, middle-class Vietnamese woman from the Kinh majority group. This means that I am familiar with a specific portion of Vietnamese society which informs my assumptions, prejudices and understanding. Secondly, I am a social science student while my participants have an educational background in natural sciences. I recognize that my worldview and the concepts I employ in research can differ from those of my participants, and approach the data collection and analysis with an awareness of my subjectivity and bias. This concern is extremely relevant when working in two languages as several layers of interpretation are involved and often context-specific. Finally, while Kvale (2007) argues that there is a power asymmetry in interviews favoring the researcher, I contend that being a young student tilted this power balance towards the participants who are older professionals. This is because seniority generally entails power in Vietnamese society.

5. Results and analysis

In this chapter, findings from empirical data are presented and simultaneously analyzed. The chapter starts with a description of the participants and the project, followed by a summary of factors that the participants used to justify project decisions. Next, some challenges during implementation are presented. A description of the participants' conceptualizations of and approach to gender equality follows thereafter. The final section analyzes the awareness and personal impacts of the participants on the project.

5.1 Description of the participants

The three research participants are employees at CHIASE who dedicate different portions of their time to the EmPower project. P1 and P2 are project managers whose responsibilities are to oversee and manage all project activities, and coordinate with project partners on provincial, district and local levels. The last participant, P3, works with multiple different aspects of the project. Firstly, he acts as the representative of CHIASE to EmPower staff, working to clarify the donors' intention behind project objectives, outputs and outcomes. This helps him determine the strategic direction of the project, which is his second responsibility. Thirdly, P3 develops methods for data collection to inform the project decisions. During project implementation, he also engages in the demonstration of new activities on the ground, examines financial reports, and writes project reports in English to EmPower. Finally, he takes charge of the project's gender aspect.

All the research participants belong to the Kinh majority group. The participants' educational backgrounds are in agriculture, agriculture and forestry, and biology/biodiversity respectively. All of them have worked with EMs in different capacities (i.e., vocational teacher, project/program staff in NGOs, researcher at a state agency) for 16, 9 and 20 years respectively. The participants' long-term engagement in the social development of EMs provides an explanation for the close and positive relationship they have with EM people, as shown through the interviews. Additionally, the participants also have extensive knowledge of different EM cultures, customs and practices. The participants agreed that these factors work to their advantage during the project design and implementation.

5.2 Description of the project

To the research participants, the EmPower project is known as the “Women, livelihoods and renewable energy” project (CHIASE, 2020). Specifically, CHIASE installs renewable energy equipment in women-owned enterprises to assist them with livelihood generating activities and enhance their adaptive capacity (CHIASE, 2020). These are only intended to be pilot business models to “showcase the use of renewable energy as one of the important tools for creating climate resilient communities and enhancing women entrepreneurship” (UN Women & UNEP, 2019, p. 23). For this reason, the project’s time and budget were considered limited by the participants: The project is implemented and funded on a yearly basis, with a new budget being determined every year “depending on the implementation progress of the whole Empower program” (P2).

The EmPower project seeks to address three main problems: 1) Women’s limited capacity in production and market access; 2) Women’s limited ability to adapt to natural disasters and climate change; and 3) Gender inequality (CHIASE, 2020). CHIASE cooperates with and reports directly to UNEP (hereafter referred to as “the donor”) about the project’s implementation and progress.

5.2.1 Determining the project locations and renewable energy type

It is clear from the interviews that CHIASE has overall authority over the practical approaches of the project in the local context, namely where it is implemented, whom it targets, whom to cooperate with and which renewable energy equipment to install. Regarding project locations, CHIASE chose Cho Don and Bach Thong districts (Bac Kan province) and Bao Thang district and Lao Cai city (Lao Cai province). Due to the districts’ location in the mountainous regions of northern Vietnam, far from major rivers or coastlines, solar energy was argued to be the only suitable type of renewable energy for the project.

The EmPower project targets small- and medium-sized enterprises and cooperatives² that are owned by EM women. These are existing enterprises engaged in agricultural production and processing, specifically tea, medicinal herbs and noodle drying, incense making, and chicken

² In Vietnam, cooperatives are a form of collective economic organization with legal status and co-ownership, established voluntarily by at least seven members (Cooperative Law, 2012). In practice, cooperatives operate as enterprises (“Vietnam”, n.d.), thus explaining the inclusive use of the term “enterprises” from here onwards.

rearing. CHIASE considers these enterprises to have high potential gains from energy intervention and works to “identify certain stages in their operations where [the project] can apply renewable energy, which they otherwise have yet had access to” (P2).

5.2.2 Determining the target group of intervention

The target group – understood as the group of people whom the EmPower project actively targets – includes women who receive support in two ways (CHIASE, 2020):

- 1) Directly participating in livelihood models linked to renewable energy.
- 2) Directly participating in capacity development trainings on livelihoods, climate change, renewable energy usage, and gender equality.

The participants made a distinction between the target group and the direct beneficiaries of the project. They discussed that the enterprises owned by EM women can have both female and male members, of both minority and Kinh majority backgrounds. Thus, all members benefit from the project in the first aspect. However, when it comes to capacity trainings, P3 expressed that male members are excluded: “All our capacity building work is focused on women”. Additionally, P1 discussed that the project prioritizes women from EMs over Kinh women in this aspect.

Regarding the ethnic make-up of the target group, about 90% belongs to the Tay minority, which is also the largest EM group in Vietnam (GSO, 2020). The second largest ethnicity in the target group is Dao, followed by Mong, Giay and Kinh. The participants were asked why these particular EMs were targeted, to which P1 replied that it was simply a matter of population distribution in the project locations. Similarly, P3 expressed that CHIASE’s approach was not to target EMs per se, but to find locations that best fit the donor’s interests:

P3: When designing the project, I had chosen Bac Kan and Lao Cai, provinces with 90% of the population being ethnic minority people. The decision was arrived at after considering the Center’s work and discussing with Empower staff. In the project locations, there are mainly ethnic minority people and it is very difficult to find anyone from the Kinh majority. So with this decision, what mattered was choosing the right target, meaning women, women in poverty and disadvantaged situations, or identifying whether certain enterprises are indeed women-owned.

It can be deduced that targeting women with certain EM backgrounds was not originally intended by CHIASE, but rather a consequence of the earlier decision on project locations and a reasonable approach considering CHIASE's expertise. In the original program document, this approach was also not intended. Instead, the document broadly formulates "women entrepreneurs" as the target group of Outcome 4 (UN Women & UNEP, 2017). One might argue that this broad formulation allows for flexible interpretations by CHIASE, who has a better understanding than the program planners about which Vietnamese population would benefit most from the intervention. While this might be true, the data that informed the original program, its planned activities and allocation of resources may have been generated from studies of certain women entrepreneurs. Neither women entrepreneurs, nor women entrepreneurs in agriculture, are homogenous groups. As will be discussed in Section 5.4, women entrepreneurs with EM backgrounds face unique challenges due to their socio-economic situations that Kinh women entrepreneurs do not face at all or to the same extent. Consequently, the decision to support EM women entrepreneurs in Bac Kan and Lao Cai can have important implications for CHIASE in terms of time, financial and human resources, the achievement of goals as well as what happens after the project is over.

5.3 The Vietnam Women's Union and the institutional context

CHIASE's partner in the EmPower project is the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU). This institution is dedicated to women's development in the domestic and public spheres, and the promotion of gender equality in Vietnam. The VWU has an extensive network of representatives on four administrative levels: central, provincial, district and commune. In 2017, the VWU has 17 million women as members (VWU, 2018), although P3 believed their prominence is more pronounced in rural areas.

The VWU is officially known in Vietnam as a civil society organization despite being a state organization. The VWU is a member of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF), which simultaneously acts as an umbrella organization for civil societies and a function of the Vietnamese government. Like the VFF, the VWU is led by the Vietnamese Communist Party. Its missions are to support and inform the Party on policies related to gender and women issues, while propagating the Party's ideology, guidelines and policies to Vietnamese women (VWU, n.d). Being a state organization, the VWU enjoys legitimacy, recognition and support from the government, public and private institutions, and the Vietnamese female population. For

example, women and women's groups can access microfinancing for their livelihoods through the VWU thanks to the organization's close ties with the State Bank of Vietnam (UN Women & UNEP, 2019). This makes the VWU an important partner of the EmPower program in general, especially in informing national policies to be more gender-responsive or upscaling the pilot business models into other provinces after the completion of the EmPower project.

5.3.1 Partnership between CHIASSE and the VWU

The partnership between CHIASSE and the VWU extends beyond the EmPower project. In fact, the VWU has been an indispensable partner to CHIASSE ever since its first project:

P3: In Vietnam, there are only three organizations you can work with if your work concerns women: the Vietnam Women's Union, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, and the Ministry of Labor, Invalids and Social Affairs. For the Ministry of Labor, women are an insignificant part of their agenda because their target group is the poor and the disadvantaged. They are a governmental unit which supports groups to access social security, such as health insurance and health insurance cards for ethnic minorities. They don't talk a lot about women, but they also don't object to incorporating women-related issues like the Ministry of Agriculture does. (P3 had previously argued how the Ministry of Agriculture cared more about crop yields than women and would cross out any sentences in agricultural policies that mention women or farmers). The Fatherland Front is essentially an umbrella term for socio-political organizations in Vietnam. They are a governing body but apart from election and campaigning, they do almost nothing practical. That leaves the Women's Union. They are the best choice for someone who wants to work with women.

Firstly, this quote justifies why the partnership with the VWU is not only beneficial but also unavoidable for the EmPower project. According to the participants, this partnership greatly influenced the choice of project locations. P1 stated that CHIASSE is bound by a cooperation agreement with the VWU of Bac Kan and thus committed to supporting the women in this province with economic and social development. A similar relationship exists between CHIASSE and the VWU of Lao Cai and influenced project decision in the same way (P3). Additionally, Lao Cai was also picked following the donor's suggestion to integrate EmPower with the GREAT program that is simultaneously running there (P1). The roles of the VWU are even more important during project implementation and will be examined in Section 5.4.4.

Secondly, P3 highlighted the institutional context in which the EmPower project is set, drawing from his 20-year experience with women and gender issues. A gender-blind approach still characterizes the policies and operations of many key institutions in Vietnam, despite the country's commitment to international frameworks (e.g., the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women) and national legal policies (e.g., the National Strategy on Gender Equality 2011-2020). In a country where many people, especially rural women, rely on agricultural production for their livelihood, the example of the Ministry of Agriculture shows that the gender perspective is still superficially incorporated. Economic, social and political processes are still widely regarded as external to the individuals who perform and get affected by these processes. This also points to the potential dangers of having a state institution dedicated to women issues. Ministries and policymakers can use this as an excuse to leave women or gender concerns to the VWU, failing to meaningfully integrate gender considerations in their operation. A similar mindset has been observed in the local population during the project:

P3: When it comes to awareness raising on gender equality, the biggest challenge is to attract male participation. When men hear things like trainings on gender equality, they always consider it a matter of the VWU and that women should know more about that than men.

A gender perspective alone is not enough. The treatment of women, farmers, the poor and the disadvantaged as mutually exclusive groups fails to reflect the intersecting identities that Vietnamese people inhabit. Such identities not only concern gender, but also ethnicity, age, education, socio-economic class, (dis)ability, etc. They reflect the multifaceted nature of social inequalities that privilege certain groups of people over others. Consequently, an intersectional perspective is vital for the EmPower project as it simultaneously engages with diverse identities, power relations and development processes.

An assessment of the EmPower project shows that while intersectionality is an important tool, it is one that must be wielded with consciousness. In determining the target group of intervention, CHIASE has prioritized certain social identities over others: women over men, EM women over Kinh women, EM women who are generally wealthier and higher educated over poor EM women with no prior knowledge of running a business. This approach was informed by the understanding that men and Kinh people tend to be seen as privileged groups

compared to women and EM people. However, just because a member in a targeted enterprise is a Kinh man does not necessarily mean he is better off than a Tay woman. These two individuals may live in the same neighborhood and get affected by poverty or natural disaster in similar ways. Following this argument, the exclusion of men from the project's capacity building activities on livelihoods, climate change and gender equality cannot be justified solely on the basis of gender. Nightingale (2006) has discussed the need for development actors to be attentive to the different social identities and relations that preexist development interventions. She cautions that even interventions that aim to be gender- or ethnicity-sensitive cannot be so in all contexts, let alone one that lacks this intention in the first place (concerning the latter aspect). In excluding a Kinh man from gender equality trainings, for example, the EmPower project may further reinforce the notion that men and/or the majority population need not care about the gender equality situation for EMs. This approach also prevents the personal accounts and experiences of Kinh men from being heard, muting the complexity of realities on the ground – realities that might differ from the assumptions that guided the original program formulation. This discussion supports the argument that adaptation interventions reflect and reinforce certain knowledge and power, but it also begs the question of whether and how “local knowledge is brought into the debate” (Gonda, 2019, p. 93).

5.4 The social and environmental contexts

This section discusses the reasons that development workers evoked to support the project approaches, specifically why EM women in Lao Cai and Bac Kan are targeted. In so doing, social and environmental conditions that inform, enable or confine such approaches become visible.

5.4.1 Women's centrality in agricultural production

The first justification concerns how agricultural production constitutes the main source of livelihood for the population of Lao Cai and Bac Kan (CHIASE, 2020). Within this population, EM women are the dominant labor force in the value chain of agricultural products. However, like the prevalent situation for producers in Vietnam, the application of technology and machineries in agricultural production is limited for EM women-owned enterprises (GSO, 2019). They thus rely heavily on traditional means of production, such as this noodle-drying enterprise in the EmPower project:

P3: Take the example of drying rice noodles. The normal way of doing it is to dry it outdoors and appoint a person to keep watch in case it rains. If it rains before you manage to move the noodles inside, it becomes wet, and when it gets wet, it spoils. Consequently, drying noodles is very time-consuming, and it only takes a rainfall to spoil everything, not to mention the problem you will have if the rain persists the whole week. The spoiled noodles can only be fed to pigs because it is too mouldy for human consumption.

In addition to being labor-intensive and low value, the operation of these enterprises is dependent on, yet negatively affected by, the weather and changing climatic conditions. P3 stressed that Bac Kan and Lao Cai experience similar natural disasters, namely flash floods and hails, and bitter cold with severe frost in winters, resulting in tremendous loss of agricultural products. This loss can amount to billions of Vietnam dong (VND) for a region where the per capita income is only 2.7 million VND/month/person (GSO, 2021). In one extreme case, Lao Cai Newspaper reported that within five days of severe cold this January, Lao Cai lost more than 3.2 billion VND in agricultural production (Nguyen, 2021).

The situation for EM women engaging in agriculture is expected to worsen as weather conditions and disasters increase in frequency, intensity and unpredictability due to climate change. The EmPower project is argued to help address the target group's vulnerability by making weather conditions external to their livelihood production, reducing losses, increasing the quantity and quality of agricultural products. In short, reduced costs and increased sales mean an increase in income: According to CHIASE's (2019) scoping and pre-feasibility studies report, the income can be expected to increase by between 81% and 245%, depending on the models and where baseline data is available. In practical terms, the members of targeted enterprises can make more money as a result of renewable energy intervention.

5.4.2 Poverty

The second justification concerns how widespread poverty in Lao Cai and Bac Kan affects the target group's access to other types of financial support outside the project. Lao Cai and Bac Kan are situated in the region with the highest rate of multidimensional poverty (Demombynes, 2013). Poverty was argued to affect the financial resources that business owners, regardless of gender or ethnicity, can allocate to their enterprises:

P1: I think both ethnic minority women and men always need to think about livelihood and how to improve that for their families first. That means they need to think about basic needs like food and clothing first because they are still very poor. In contrast, the Kinh have higher standards of living and thus face fewer limitations when they do business.

Widespread poverty also means that the EM business owners receive limited financial support from their provincial governments, compared to Kinh business owners in bigger cities. This situation is believed to affect EM female owners more negatively:

P1: Because the resources within these provinces are limited, it is already a tough job to support enterprises in general. Supporting women-owned enterprises in this case will be even more difficult because women tend to be more timid, right? They are often more reluctant to approach sources of support.

This argument motivates how the EmPower project is a rare opportunity that otherwise may not be available for the specific target group due to the limited resources available to them. Furthermore, P3 argued that the project's investment in renewable energy equipment could overcome the poverty-related challenges that often confront development planners. He discussed how development interventions for EMs or poor people in Vietnam usually need to consider the situation after the interventions have finished. Poverty often means that the beneficiaries lack the financial means to reinvest in the intervention on the same scale. In other words, such interventions would be short-lived and their impacts (if they exist) cannot be sustained.

P3 believed that this is not the case for this project because "EmPower's energy equipment can last up to 20 years without the need for replacement", while maintenance costs are insignificant. This cancels out the need for the target group to reinvest in the same equipment after the project withdraws. The women in the target group are also not considered poor in their communities. According to the participants, to become owners or board members of enterprises, these women must already have a good financial foundation.

This argument is reasonable but not flawless. While the target group might be more well-off than women in their communities, there are several factors that can affect their finances. For

example, their dependence on renewable energy technologies can backfire if natural disasters destroy the equipment, especially considering the difficulty in accessing replacement parts (to be discussed in Section 5.5). Governmental policies or the lack of business skills can also negatively affect the target group, as shown in this quote:

P2: The owner of the Hong Luan Cooperative, whom I have known for a long time, confided in me that she ... was forced into establishing her cooperative. This is because the Vietnamese government at the time initiated the OCOP program, which stands for One Commune One Product. That means every commune was required to have one product unique to that locality. Cho Don district of Bac Kan had a candidate product, a type of rice called Bao Thai, but no one initiated any cooperative to enter that product into the district competition. So this woman founded her cooperative not out of her own aspiration or will, but because her husband is a commune official who had to make sure their commune would present a product.

This enterprise owner, despite being “more knowledgeable and educated thanks to her husband’s work” (P2), has been running her enterprise without a business plan. She learned how to run her business through doing it step-by-step: developing a product, then finding a market for it, accessing other forms of funding, and learning how to sell products online. P2 further recounted that this owner “never had any money in her pockets. She invested everything she had into her enterprise without knowing whether she was making profits”. This points to the target group’s susceptibility to poverty and the real impacts of institutional, political and technological factors on the project’s sustainability. Drawing from FPE, one can conclude that developmental interventions such as EmPower do not exist independently of the context in which they are set, but constantly impact and mediate other processes (i.e., the EmPower project is addressing the unintended impact of a government directive on some EM female owners) and vice versa. Therefore, development workers should be careful about future changes in policies and avoid jumping to conclusions at this stage of the project.

5.4.3 Prevalent social norms within EM communities

In addition to poverty, prevalent social norms within EM communities also impact the target group’s ability to access technology and financial support. Social norms governing gender, gender division of labor, and access to resources are a visible theme across the interviews. The participants articulated how *trọng nam khinh nữ*, the way of thinking that values men and their

work while holding women in contempt, is still prevalent in the Vietnamese society, especially in many EMs.

In terms of division of labor, social norms define what kinds of work women or men should do and where. For EMs, there is a strong view that women's place is in the home and their domestic responsibilities are theirs regardless of what they have achieved outside. For instance, P2 shared the personal account of a female owner in the project:

P2: I once interviewed the owner of Thien An Cooperative about the most difficult thing that a woman-owned business faced. She replied that ethnic minority women who want to start a business must first overcome the pressure of social prejudices. As they enter the business world, they are bombarded with voices telling them that only men can do business well and only men can maintain the business to attract more workers. The public view is that such jobs are only suitable for men and not women. The second challenge comes from the burden of domestic care work in the family.

The quote also points to how social norms dictate that leadership, business, technology, and training are areas that only men can do or do well. As a result, social norms legitimize the exclusion of EM women from participation, education and training in these aspects, while underplaying or dismissing their capacities. P3 articulated how the men and communities in the project locations are convinced that EM women are not capable of working with technical equipment. This view is even shared by the target group, who requested that the project should include men in capacity trainings. These women “wonder who would help them fix the renewable energy equipment should they break, if not men” (P3). More research is needed to determine whether this perspective shows the strong influence of social norms on EM women (UN Women, 2019) or signals women's practical strategy, considering their limited skills in business and technical management that cannot be addressed in a short time, as well as the greater control of resources by men in the communities.

The target group of the EmPower project falls precisely in the intersection of male-designated areas: they are EM female owners/leaders who would be trained in using and managing technical equipment. This justifies CHIASE's approach to targeting EM women-owned enterprises, as predominant social norms within EM communities would otherwise prevent women from competing on equal terms as men should both genders be targeted.

5.4.4 Social marginalization of EMs

While the above-mentioned social contexts explain CHIASE's approach prior to the project implementation, social marginalization is more relevant for its approach during implementation. This issue has propelled CHIASE to utilize its strategic partnership with the VWU to overcome challenges that arise during interactions with the target group. Two main issues will be discussed: the target group's limited command of the official language and limited access to information.

Language barrier

Language is cited as an everyday challenge for the participants when working with the target group. It is important to clarify that the Vietnamese language is the language of the Kinh majority. Consequently, "Vietnamese", "official language" (*tiếng phổ thông*) and "Kinh language" were often used interchangeably by the participants, although the last term is mostly evoked when other ethnicities were involved. For example:

P1: [I]n meetings where ethnic minority people with limited command of the Kinh language are present, we must ask for support from the local VWU or anyone around who are both more fluent and can understand the issue being discussed.

The target group includes women from the Tay, Dao and Mong minorities who have their own languages which they use within their communities (GSO, 2020). Their command of the official language varies between location, ethnicity, gender, and education levels: The participants articulated that EM women tend to be less fluent than EM men, and those living in remote areas have more difficulty than those in lowland areas where more Kinh people live.

Considering the social hegemony of the Kinh majority in Vietnam, the Kinh language is the default means of communication and information transmission. This was implied throughout the interviews wherein the participants communicated information about the project and conducted capacity trainings using this language. In this process, the importance of the VWU becomes vital. According to the participants, the large EM population in Lao Cai and Bac Kan means that VWU staff with EM backgrounds can constitute up to 80% or 90% of the total staff. They are either fluent in two languages (Kinh and an EM language) or able to converse in both. Therefore, cooperating with the VWU allows CHIASE to overcome the language barrier quite easily and effortlessly.

Nonetheless, there exists limitations to this way of working, mostly concerning what gets lost in translation. P3 recognized that the VWU staff “find it difficult to discuss more technical subjects”. This is problematic as the EmPower project aims to train the target group on using and managing renewable energy equipment. It also shows the limitation of working within a mostly gender-blind institutional context, wherein the VWU’s lack of expertise in technology cannot simply be overcome through cooperation with officials from the Ministry of Science and Technology, for example. On the ground, the participants resolved this issue by simplifying what they wanted to say, or opting for demonstration and visual representation of information to remove the need for words. In prioritizing some forms of information over others, the participants actively make compromises. For example, they can show the target group how to use simple functions of a solar dryer at the expense of a more comprehensive understanding of how individual parts connect, or how much sunlight is needed for the equipment to work efficiently. This ties back to the issue of sustainability and the need for male participants who may better understand technical issues, and who remain after the project is over to support the target group. A similar argument about what kind of information on gender equality gets communicated by the development workers will be discussed in Section 5.7.1. Together, these concerns draw attention to the content and processes of knowledge making and knowledge translation on climate change adaptation (Gonda, 2019).

P3’s reflection on the language barrier also brings up an important discussion about how the use of concepts and terms can have far-reaching implications, such as in consolidating the hegemony of the Kinh language and culture, and dismissing those of EMs:

P3: In terms of language, men speak the official language more fluently than women, and many women in remote villages can barely speak the official language. I am used to calling it the official language in Vietnam. I personally don’t like to call it – and especially ethnic minority people don’t call it – the Kinh language. I also never call it Vietnamese. Calling it Kinh language implies that ethnic minority people have to communicate using another tribe’s language. Calling it Vietnamese is inaccurate because their languages are also Vietnamese, not only that of the Kinh majority. The term often used by ethnic minority people is tiếng phổ thông (official language), which is a language that is popular.

This highlights the importance of the everyday practices of adaptation, especially how

development workers may reproduce the marginalization of EMs. It requires development workers who implement adaptation interventions on the ground to put themselves in the shoes of those they help, consciously observe and reflect on how simple interactions may shape subjectivities and power relations (Gonda, 2019).

Access to information and exposure

The participants often discussed the language barrier together with EMs' lack of access to information and exposure to the outside world. EM women were generally described as being *ngại va chàm*, literally meaning "afraid of collision". This refers to them being afraid of coming into contact with the unknown or unfamiliar world outside their communities. I call this "exposure" for simplicity. Limited exposure is in fact not unique to EM women, as "only 18 percent of ethnic minorities had ever ventured outside of their home province" (WB, 2009, p. 22), compared to the frequent and extensive exposure that the Kinh report.

P1: If you visit rural areas, especially remote mountainous areas, you will see that women there are ngại va chàm. I want to use the word "ashamed/embarrassed", that these women feel ashamed in some matters because women there have never been encouraged to participate in social activities or economic development.

P2: [I]n Vietnam, especially areas where women are less educated and less exposed to the outside world, women themselves feel really shy and uncertain. They don't dare to speak up or voice their opinions, unlike their husbands who dare to do so in meetings. Women make themselves feel discriminated.

All the participants discussed the self-discrimination that EM women inflict on themselves in different aspects, i.e., participating in economic and political processes or learning new skills. This self-inflicted discrimination can be attributed to the women's internalization of prevalent social norms and practices throughout their lives. One can argue that EM women suffer from triple discrimination because of their ethnicity, gender and self-perception. However, this conception is flawed, firstly because it prioritizes ethnicity and gender as the most important social identities, whether or not this correctly reflects the situation on the ground or the participants' beliefs. It is possible that the interview questions were framed in a way that made other factors such as socio-economic status, education, age, etc. less visible. Secondly, this

conceptualization implies that EM women are constantly discriminated in different ways, promoting women's subjectivity as victims.

Feminist researchers such as Loftsdóttir (2011) have repeatedly cautioned how the use of concepts in research can carry far-reaching implications for the perpetuation of oppressive discourses and relationships. Taking this lesson to heart, I was careful of my own positionality and role in producing knowledge that is ethical. It is true that a researcher's ability to make sense of personal experiences and interpretations within broader concepts and theories is crucial for a good piece of research. However, this focus on conceptualizing may lead one to misread the reality from the viewpoints of the research participants and the target group. In recognizing this pitfall, I want to consciously avoid misrepresenting diverse viewpoints in an effort to align empirical results with certain conceptualizations.

Logic can explain the interrelation among EM women's self-discrimination, their limited command of the official language, and limited information and exposure. For example, not knowing the official language prevents EM women from accessing information on mainstream channels, such as the Internet, TV, radio, newspapers, etc. This also makes them unable to interact with people outside their communities, further missing out on information via informal channels. When EM women do come into contact with the Kinh, such as via governmental or non-governmental projects, their lack of information and inability to communicate become amplified. Naturally, as "fishes out of water", they may feel uncomfortable, afraid or ashamed, thus wanting to remain in familiar and safe situations (i.e., their own communities) where they do not feel those emotions. If the issue remains unaddressed, these personally sensible behaviours can create a vicious circle and widen the marginalization of EM women.

CHIASE resolves this problem by working with the VWU, namely through utilizing the contacts, familiarity and trust that have already existed between the VWU and EM women:

P1: As this project targets women, it will be easier for them to reach us. These women are also members of the Women's Union and thus partnering with the provincial Women's Unions helps us easily reach and disseminate information on the project ... Women will know directly that they are prioritized in this project.

5.5 Challenges during implementation and the technical context

While the participants shared a positive outlook on the benefits of renewable energy intervention to the target group, they expressed that COVID-19 had been preventing them from installing any equipment. Social distancing rules in Vietnam had delayed the implementation schedule from February to June, then from June to August 2021.

However, the biggest and most astounding challenge for the project was discovered during the interview with P3:

P3: This project combines renewable energy and livelihoods, but we face tremendous problems finding service providers for this. There is nobody providing such models that use renewable energy to dry agricultural products in Vietnam. They are widely available in other countries but not here. We have sought out all energy providers of all sizes in Vietnam, including big players in the renewable energy market like Viettel or Vu Phong Energy Group, but none was willing to do this. They said they had never done it. They only produce solar power; they have never connected that power to a chicken coop, for example. They don't see it as their job to produce a renewable energy unit for noodle drying. So the situation we find ourselves in now is that there is no packaged, readily made equipment for sale. What is available to us in Vietnam are some small-scale, spontaneous energy providers who self-assemble these products. CHIASE is not an engineering or mechanical designing center, so that presents us with a huge challenge ... The Center is currently partnering with a unit of the Hanoi University of Science and Technology. Universities tend to be interested in experimenting with new things, and they have agreed to install the equipment for us. The problem is that nobody is certain about how the whole thing will function, so this really is still a testing phase for us. However, we have installed a dryer for wild bitter melon in another project and that has been working well. I really hope, provided that this project is extended, to work closely with the university unit and monitor the data to see how it holds up in practice.

Interviewer: That sounds like you are simultaneously implementing this project and experimenting along the way. That you do not have everything ready?

P3: That's correct.

While COVID-19 can be considered an externality that did not exist at the time of planning (the program proposal by UN Women and UNEP was made in 2017), the availability of renewable energy equipment provides the foundation for the intervention itself. Therefore, this problem has serious consequences for the progress, effectiveness and sustainability of the EmPower project. For example, CHIASE cannot compare between different offers to find the most cost-effective energy provider or equipment. Other concerns include where the target group can acquire new parts if their equipment breaks down, or who has the expertise to fix the equipment. It is not clear whether the donor is aware of this issue, or what has been done to support CHIASE access the equipment needed. The program document by UN Women and UNEP (2017) does mention technology transfer as an approach under Outcome 4, although further inquiries into the extent to which this is implemented in Vietnam are needed.

In the larger context, development workers like P3 act as a catalyst for technological change in Vietnam by influencing “big players in the energy market” as well as less conventional actors to experiment with new technologies, explore new directions for research and development, and identify new markets. This is relevant to the issue of knowledge-making in climate change adaptation (Gonda, 2019) – knowledge that propels social, economic and technical changes.

5.6 Personal conception and approach towards gender equality

Gender inequality is one of three issues that the EmPower project wants to address (CHIASE, 2020). Consequently, this section discusses how the research participants conceptualize gender equality, how they plan to achieve this through women’s renewable energy entrepreneurship and why.

5.6.1 How development workers conceptualize gender (in)equality

The participants were asked to describe what gender inequality means to them and their replies were as follows:

P1: Depending on the angles from which you look at it. But in my opinion, regardless of the angles, you still see gender inequality. Some examples can be how men in ethnic minority communities are reluctant to support their wives with domestic care work, or that they prefer drinking liquor to working. It can also be that men only work to earn money and never to take care of his children.

P1's answer points to the multidimensional nature of gender inequality, although an explanation of what it is was not given. Rather, he provided some manifestations of gender inequality within EMs. P1 also drew attention to how gender inequality is worse for EM women than Kinh women because Kinh men have a more open attitude towards what women can do (i.e., participating in social activities outside the home) and need to do (i.e., they do not need to shoulder all domestic responsibilities). Gender (in)equality also differs across space and time: "it becomes rarer and not as popular with time" due to increased access to information and education (P1).

P2: In my opinion, social prejudices are essentially causing gender inequality in Vietnam. People think that men are supposed to do this and women are supposed to do that. Basically, it is humans who set up such things for themselves which then leads to inequality. I am not talking about physiology here because we are endowed with different rights, no, different thiên chức (divine functions/positions) as male or female. I am talking about equality in terms of our relationships or the division of labor.

P2 explained gender inequality in the sense of relationships between men and women, one that can be seen as unequal where men can do certain things which women cannot. A distinction was made between gender and sex – the latter being expressed as a heavenly endowed position. In Vietnamese, the word is mostly ascribed to women and used in a positive sense when talking about their divine positions as wives and mothers. The word use can therefore act to legitimize the society's control over women's bodies and choices, downplay their agency and confine them to certain roles. While the thesis cannot problematize this issue at length, it is important to recognize the value-laden nature of words and concepts. This is especially relevant for development workers who act as promoters of global agendas (Jackson, 2005) and knowledge-makers on gender equality and climate change (Gonda, 2019).

The last point about P2's response is how prejudices and human actions cause gender inequality – otherwise conceptualized as gender being a social construct. Consequently, the solution to gender inequality according to P2 is women stepping out of their comfort zones, hinting at women's agency in challenging the situation.

P3: To start with, I must say I always consider myself to have a deep understanding of gender equality. I even oppose some illustrations on gender inequality that UN Women

often presents online. There are two: In the first one, two people are watching a football match, one taller than the other. The shorter one is a woman whose view is being obstructed by a fence, preventing her from watching the match. In the second picture, someone has provided her with a stool to stand on and she now has a clear view. They [UN Women] say that the first picture illustrates gender inequality, and gender equality has been achieved in the second one because both genders can watch the football match. I disagree with such illustrations. I don't believe women need someone else to provide them something to stand on. They themselves have their own values. Don't ever say that women need to be prioritized. They don't need that either because their own value is not inferior to any man's. Instead of prioritizing women, people need to properly recognize and appreciate women's value. The more accurate thing to do is cutting down the fence rather than giving women a stool. Who has constructed fences that prevent women from watching the match? The real barriers to gender inequality lie not in capacity, but in legal, cultural, and customary barriers. It is more about social barriers than women's capacity or awareness. The root cause does not lie in a women's capability to fix a machine; root causes run deep and we cannot change them overnight. That's why in the short term, we need to work so that it is a good thing to have women fixing machines. Going back to those illustrations, what I mean to say is that it's not the woman's fault that she is shorter than the man, since that's a matter of biology. The problem is in whoever it is that put up a fence with the purpose of preventing short people from watching football. That's why we need to abolish it instead of giving women something to stand on.

As the gender expert of the EmPower project, P3's explanation was articulate and thorough. Similar illustrations to what P3 discussed can be found by looking up the word combination: "equality", "equity" and "football". These illustrations provide the medium on which metaphors were made and interpreted, allowing the concept of gender (in)equality to traverse easily and effectively. At the same time, they simplify complex concepts and present a certain framing (Goffman, 1986) of those concepts. What exists outside the frame can have important implications for the discussion. For instance, are women interested in watching football or would they rather do something else? Do they understand football? What material is the fence made of, and how easy is it to abolish the fence? Who has constructed the fence and what for? Is the fence being policed? etc.

Through his interpretation of the illustrations, P3 showed a clear stance between what needs to be done to effectively address gender inequality and what can realistically be done with the available resources. To overcome gender inequality means to do away with the male-centric frame of reference to which women are judged, along with other social, cultural, legal barriers. However, given their limitations, what development workers can do in the EmPower project is to provide EM women (who indeed want to “watch football”) with steady “stools” in order to meet their needs until structural barriers can be removed. Regardless, P3 acknowledged that working towards gender equality means ensuring that both genders have access to the same rights, which should be distinguished from needs.

Some conclusions can be reached before moving on. Firstly, the three conceptions by the participants overlap in the socially constructed nature of gender (in)equality: i.e., how it varies across space and time, how it is caused by and can change with human interactions and perceptions. Two participants also shared the distinction between gender and sex. Secondly, the personal articulations of gender (in)equality hint at different aspects which the participants deemed most important. P1 and P2 actively engaged with their positionality in their answers. P1 tended to articulate gender inequality from the perspectives of men, saying that men’s changed perception about women’s capabilities contribute to equality. Talking from a female perspective, P2 challenged the sexist view that society imposes on Vietnamese women and through that expressing agency over herself, i.e., re-defining her ability to do any job/task. Interestingly, P3 evoked his positionality not as a man but a gender expert/development worker. His response nicely complements the first two with a comprehensive yet practical explanation of the gender equality issue in Vietnam.

5.6.2 The EmPower project’s approach to gender equality

The personal conceptions of gender (in)equality by the development workers, especially P3 who determined the project’s direction, explain the approach they and the project employ to achieve the gender objective. According to the participants, the EmPower project addresses gender inequality for the target group through women’s empowerment. P1 and P3 expressed this in practical terms: increasing women’s capacity in business, agricultural production and management of renewable technology. On the other hand, P2 discussed the emotional impact of the project:

P2: Since this project targets women-owned cooperatives and enterprises, I believe it seeks to bring a new push of encouragement to the female owners, to reassure and convince them that they can do an even better job. We want them to know that it is not only men who can be successful owners and managers of a business.

When taken together, these responses cover three dimensions of empowerment by Kabeer (2001): resources (including material, social or human resources), agency (including individual action and reflection), and achievements (the outcomes of combined resources and agency). In the project, women's empowerment means providing the target group access to areas which they were previously excluded from or deprived of. Additionally, the women's personal development and financial gains from their enterprises can grant them financial and social power, allowing them the ability to decide what they want to do and which direction they want to steer their enterprises.

The participants argued that directly targeting women and building women's capacities essentially equal working towards gender equality in Vietnam, where women's rights are not yet equal to men's. While insights from FPE (Nightingale, 2006) point to this approach's risk of equalizing gender with women, I argue that from the perspectives of development workers, this should be considered a pragmatic decision rather than a lack of awareness or knowledge on the issue.

This is firstly because the EmPower project's main focus is not to address gender inequality, but to provide EM women-owned enterprises with new technology. Arguably, the whole EmPower program only partially addresses structural barriers to gender inequality in the focus countries. As the research has argued, even if EmPower provides EM women with the time and space to participate in communal decision-making processes about climate change and gender equality, deep-rooted inequalities within EM communities mean that women may feel uncomfortable about speaking up. Consequently, five years of program implementation is too little time to change the structural barriers that deem it "inappropriate" for women to share their opinions in the first place. Another example is how the assumption that women entrepreneurs will have greater "control over economic resources" (UN Women & UNEP, 2017, p.2) through the project may not hold in the context of EM households. The increased income for some EM women may be used in ways that program planners did not expect, such as to satisfy their husbands' indulgence:

P1: Even to this day, in the Mong ethnic group, when Mong people go to the market, the husband will sit down at a liquor store and drink while his wife or child bring chickens, pigs or vegetables to the marketplace. Once they have the money, they will return to pay for the husband's booze since morning ... The Mong women consider it their happiness to be able to take care of their husband that way.

Secondly and as a result of the first, development workers are confined in what they can do about gender inequality. This is despite the shared consensus that the project is nowhere near enough to achieve “true” gender equality in Vietnam, “especially for ethnic minorities” (P2).

P3: [I]n the short term, the project seeks to meet the needs of those women who are working the jobs that society has assigned to them, whether or not that is equal. The logic of the argument is that, without this project, it is still women who dry noodles in these communities, following the gender division of labor. To allocate these jobs to men will take a long time, and it won't be an easy feat. That's why in the short term, our job is to make sure drying noodles becomes less burdensome for women, requires less effort, and takes a shorter time. That's the best thing you can do in the beginning instead of immediately transferring the job to men. It's called gender needs, meaning that we leave men and women to continue doing what they have been doing. You cannot change the gender division of labor in the short term. What you can do is to help people do their jobs more efficiently, and consequently you can reduce work burden that society has assigned to them.

Interestingly, the project goes further than addressing the symptoms of gender inequality for the target group. It also creates the conditions for future work on gender equality within EMs. For instance, through lightening EM women's burden in their productive work, the participants expected women to use the freed-up time for relaxation, personal development, and participation in social activities, women's forums and training courses:

P2: If we can shorten the time they have to work, they can instead participate in activities that women should have been able to attend. For example, they used to have to say no to communal meetings because they are too busy, and so all the men went.

On top of catalyzing women's increased participation in communal activities and decision-

making processes, the project also challenges the dominant social norms within EM communities, although to a “safe” and limited extent. P1 and P2 agreed that the project’s focus on EM female owners turned out to be beneficial. Since the female owners in the target group have already established themselves as enterprise owners, they have overcome discriminating stereotypes against women and achieved a certain “social status” (P2), “support and acceptance” (P1) within their communities. As a result, the EmPower project is “not doing anything new or disruptive” (P1). By operating in this enabling context, the project receives welcoming attitudes from the men and leaders in the communities, arguably because they also benefit from the increased incomes for women and their enterprises. In contrast, this may serve to disincentivize more intrusive changes to structural inequalities.

5.7 Development workers’ reflections on their own impacts

This final section discusses the participants’ views on how they personally impact the project and the research process.

5.7.1 Reflections on own impacts on the project

It was observed from the interviews that an intersectional perspective was constantly at work in the participants’ discussions on gender and other issues. For example, the target group was not seen as a homogenous group:

P2: I think the women who participate in this project already have confidence in themselves and an understanding of information and the Internet. That’s the female cooperative and enterprise owners. The female members who have shares or simply participate in the cooperatives are still quite timid. Some of them have a harder time sharing their perspectives or understanding certain things. Some of them only care about the days they work and how much income they will receive. That’s the difference between an ethnic minority woman who owns a cooperative and one who is a member.

The participants not only showed an intersectional perspective towards the target group, but also towards themselves as a part of that context, with possible implications on the work they do. For example, when articulating the intricate linkage between gender equality for EMs and their social marginalization in the Vietnamese society, P2 was conscious of her Kinh ethnicity and the power relations inherent in this identity:

P2: Regarding gender inequality, I think the discrepancy is greater for ethnic minorities than Kinh people. To make a distinction among ethnic minority groups, I would say the discrepancy is greater for the Mong and Dao compared to the Tay, Nung, Muong or Thai. Maybe that's their styles or characteristics, from which the women have not broken out of, out of the system where women must do whatever the men say without deviation. That's what I would say if I had to distinguish between the minorities, although to me, we are all the same and equal.

Overall, the participants showed a consciousness of their own privileged positions when it comes to ethnicity, language, knowledge, etc. The degree to which they call into question their own positionality differs, with most effort being made by P3. He was the only one discussing a careful use of the term “Vietnamese language” and the moral dilemma when working with gender equality in this project.

P3: [A]ctually, many women have absolutely no concept of gender equality, nor do they realize that they should be more equal. I may be wrong, but maybe these women see nothing wrong with their situation. By the way, I have to say we are people with double standards. That means if we see a community in which women have fewer rights than men, we think it's not okay because that is gender inequality. But when we ask the people in that same community, everyone agrees that the way life is is very reasonable. Where then does the truth lie? In us or in them? When everyone in the community thinks that way, our job is to help them look outwards, to see how people outside their community live, so that they have something to compare their situation with. We cannot say that we are right. What is right depends a lot on a society's moral standards, correct?

This is an important reflection on the contradictions that confront development workers on the ground. How do they, in the process of bringing about assumably positive changes to a group of people, avoid imposing their own normative values and beliefs on them? This poses bigger questions for those working with gender equality in different contexts, conditions, languages, etc. from which their own understanding of gender equality derives from.

When reflecting on whether their gender has any impact on their work, the participants took two conflicting positions. P2 and P3 agreed that being a female development worker is an advantage in interventions that target women. As a woman, P2 found it easier to communicate

and cooperate with the target group: “It’s easier to feel sympathy for one another”. In addition to her gender, P2’s close-knit relationship with the female owner of Hong Luan Cooperative allows valuable insight into the unplanned consequence of a planned government program (previously cited in Section 5.4.2). It is thanks to this established trust and relationship that outsiders hear the voices of EM women and the stories they do not widely share with everyone. These personal accounts provide important lessons to development planners and workers alike, such as how development is constantly being “mediated by social, cultural, and institutional factors” (Nelson et al., 2002, p. 54). This shows the importance of utilizing local knowhow and expertise through organizations like CHIASE and the VWU to sufficiently account for these diverse factors. By actively giving development workers the space to share their voices, those of marginalized individuals and groups can be heard, even if only partially. This is important because those most marginalized often face difficulty raising their voices. Following Gonda’s (2019) argument, this also allows development workers to build on positive emotions for climate-resilient changes.

Similarly, P3 considered his gender a drawback in projects that concern more “sensitive and secretive subjects”:

P3: In needs assessment, I myself doubt whether male staff have captured all the needs that women want to say, or whether these women hold themselves back from discussing certain issues so as not to ruin the prevailing good mood during their interactions.

In contrast, P2 believed that his gender makes no difference in his work because both female and male staff work towards the same goal. His response implies that the means to an end does not matter as much as the end itself. The purpose of this research is precisely to disprove this perspective: By examining the roles and agency of development workers in the EmPower project, I argue that the means are as important as what they achieve. Regardless, P2’s response provides a counter-scenario to consider: What happens when development workers dismiss the power relations inherent in their work and their interactions with a marginalized group? What happens when they, as political actors, evoke their impartiality and fail to recognize how their everyday actions influence the social, ecological and political lives of others? What implications does this perspective have on (re)enforcing unequal power relations, authority, subjectivities and knowledge?

5.7.2 Reflections on own impacts on the research process

The participants' awareness of their own impact was also reflected by their responses to the interview questions. As the target group inhabits different social identities, the participants regularly stressed which groups or categories they were referring to when making observations. They also avoided making generalized statements, pointing to insufficient data to reflect the complexity of the matters being discussed. For example, when asked whether EM female owners within the same ethnic group face the same challenges when doing business, P1 replied:

P1: This is difficult to evaluate because it also depends on the type of production. The Tay are not as strong in models of medicinal plants as the Dao, so if we judge based on this type of models, the Dao are better and more confident. I think we must approach this question from a certain angle.

Interviewer: Can we make any comparison from the angle of this project?

P1: No, that's difficult to do. Like I said, the scale of this project is not very big.

The participants also showed an awareness of their impact on the researcher, as they would sometimes caution me against getting the wrong idea from their statements. In one instance, P2 corrected my overwhelming focus on gender as *the* factor when formulating questions.

Interviewer: In terms of climate change, do men and women who run enterprises face similar challenges?

P2: There is no difference between men and women in terms of climate change. No, not that there is no difference, but men and women have certain advantages and disadvantages. I think when talking about climate change or any other problem, it is not so much a matter of gender, rather the individuals or individual businesses in question, what their concerns are and what problems they struggle with.

This exchange alerted me to the presuppositions that informed the formulation of interview questions (Kvale, 2008), specifically the tendency to privilege gender as the most important variable (Mollett & Faria, 2013) despite repeated efforts to avoid this. I also became acutely aware of my active participation in producing and communicating knowledge on climate change adaptation and gender.

6. Conclusion

The research set out with the aim of turning the black box containing CHIASE's implementation of the EmPower project into a transparent one. This chapter returns to the research questions to examine how this aim has been achieved.

“How do development workers motivate their approach towards project implementation?”

CHIASE has overall authority in determining the questions over where, what, for whom, and with whom of the EmPower project in northern Vietnam. Regardless, these decisions were not made in a vacuum but strongly influenced by its partner (the VWU), and to some extent by the donor (UNEP). As a result, two districts each in Lao Cai and Bac Kan were picked as project locations. The high concentration of EM people in these locations justified why the target group mostly includes EM women. There was no prior intention to focus on women with EM backgrounds per se. The EmPower project supports women-owned enterprises instead of individuals or households. Solar-powered renewable energy equipment would be installed in these enterprises to mechanize their agricultural producing and processing business. Surprisingly, it was found at the time of data collection (June-July 2021) that no such equipment was available in Vietnam in the first place, and that CHIASE has been relying on a university unit to develop early-stage experimental models.

The development workers evoked social, environmental and institutional factors to justify why the particular project approach is important for the target group. Firstly, it is because EM women in Lao Cai and Bac Kan mainly participate in and derive their incomes from agricultural production. However, their limited access to modern machineries makes their production low-value, labor-intensive and vulnerable to the weather and climate change. These problems can be overcome with new renewable energy equipment. Secondly, the high poverty rates in Lao Cai and Bac Kan limit the economic and financial resources that the target group can access. Poverty motivated why the intervention by EmPower is important, yet at the same time, poverty was implied to be an out-of-the-equation issue due to the long lifespan of renewable energy equipment and relative wealth of the target group. Thirdly, discriminating social norms against EM women's participation and capacity in leadership, technology, business and training would have excluded the target group from similar support. Fourthly, the social marginalization of

EMs in Vietnam further discriminates and discourages EM women from education, information access, mobility and social interactions. This has led EM women to impose a mental barrier on themselves from participating in different aspects of social and economic life. In this regard, the partnership with the VWU becomes vital to CHIASE, given the limited time and resources it has to implement the project. The rationale behind this partnership also highlights the gender- and intersectionality-blind institutional context in Vietnam. Benefits and drawbacks of a heavily state-directed institutional context were also briefly analyzed.

In identifying these contextual factors and how they interact to influence project decisions, the EmPower project aligns with the conceptualization of contextual vulnerability (O'Brien et al., 2007). EmPower further advocates for the reduction of future vulnerability by “altering the (present) context in which climate change occurs” (O'Brien et al., 2007, p. 76), specifically through addressing the three problems outlined in Section 5.2.

“How do development workers motivate their approach towards strengthening gender equality for the target group?”

Development workers hold different yet overlapping conceptualizations of gender (in)equality. In essence, they all refer to the different positions of power that women and men hold in society – positions that are susceptible to change. The approach towards gender equality is through women’s empowerment: both through practical activities to enhance the target group’s capacity and knowledge, and through emotional support to catalyze a positive change in how they view themselves. Given resource limitations, these are practical and immediate impacts expected to result from the project.

While it is not within the project’s scope to address structural barriers to gender equality, development workers do challenge some discriminating social norms, albeit moderately because the project benefits from not too radically changing the ways of life in EM communities. A similar contradiction is observed in how UN Women and UNEP (2019) decided to exclude the words “human rights” in EmPower communications in Vietnam to avoid political censorship, despite their wide advocacy for gender equality to be considered a human rights issue (UNDP, 2014). Such contradictions are interesting, important and deserve further enquiries. They show how development workers must compromise or underplay certain aspects of their work to be able to do it, yet without these aspects, the impacts of their work will not be effective, meaningful and sustainable.

The definition of gender equality must also be problematized, especially when working with EMs or other groups which might not consider themselves gender-unequal. Development workers and researchers alike must ask what gender equality means and for whom, as such concepts do not mean the same thing to different people. When carried from one context to another, concepts, their meanings and connotations may not “fit” or remain whole. What happens then if people do not share the same understanding of the issues they discuss? How do we avoid imposing our “brilliant” and “righteous” ideologies on other people, and to what extent are we responsible for ideological colonization over those we (subconsciously) deem “backward” and “ignorant”? Future research into how EM people understand gender (in)equality is needed and this would require a long, intimate process of scene-setting, trust-building and the arduous stripping of long-held ideologies.

Reflection on the use of theory

FPE proves to be a useful theoretical framework for this research as it enables the analysis of power, knowledge, and identity on the individual scale of analysis. FPE also equips the researcher with tools to examine the diverse context behind the EmPower project and Vietnam. By putting on an intersectional lens, I uncover how the project risks excluding the personal accounts of those deemed more socially privileged, and how I as a researcher risk misrepresenting the complexity on the ground.

A theory-related problem arose during the research process which is the same one that feminist political ecologists have widely criticized. As gender and environment constitute the foundational pillars of FPE (Rocheleau et al. 1996), I have tended to prioritize gender over other social factors. Fortunately, this problem can be overcome with an active and critical engagement with positionality alongside FPE. Positionality devotes equal attention to all the relevant identities that the researcher and the researched inhabit in a specific setting, consequently making visible other power relations aside gender. Positionality can be applied throughout the different steps of research, such as in formulating interview questions, conducting interviews and analyzing data. In the words of Loftsdóttir (2011), feminist researchers need “processes of critical self-positioning ... to recognize ourselves as historically constituted subjects who are thereby entangled in particular relationships of power in relation to other individuals” (p. 200). This is an important lesson to the researcher and the development workers alike.

In this sense, development workers at CHIASE are not simply implementers of global agendas governing climate change and gender equality. UN Women and UNEP show that they value local knowhow by allowing CHIASE the authority to utilize their expertise, experiences, resources, networks, etc. to interpret and implement what they consider best for the target group. However, the donors need to re-examine whether they have given sufficient resources and support to CHIASE, i.e., in accessing energy equipment or delivering gender objectives.

Far from being politically neutral, development workers are intrinsically political actors. Their everyday interactions and word use have tremendous consequences on the (re)enforcement of dominant discourses and power relationships. They influence what kinds of knowledge on climate change and gender equality get communicated to a group that has limited access to information in general. In reverse, they also determine what local knowledge gets through to us by actively including some voices and excluding others. After all, it was through them that one learns the hidden stories of EM women which would otherwise remain hidden due to self-censorship or lack of intention and condition to ask. This shows development workers' potentials in capitalizing on positive emotions for progressive change (Gonda, 2019). It also shows their power in influencing influential actors (i.e., the government, international organizations, private actors) and broader processes (i.e., catalyzing technological development and more inclusive policies). Consequently, the development community can greatly benefit from local development workers' increased awareness of their roles in shaping political, social, cultural and ecological changes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: NVivo code list

<input type="radio"/>	1 Understanding of wider contexts surrounding project
<input type="radio"/>	Access to information and exposure
<input type="radio"/>	Agricultural production
<input type="radio"/>	Command of official language
<input type="radio"/>	Environment and climate change
<input type="radio"/>	Poverty
<input type="radio"/>	Social norms
<input type="radio"/>	2 Positioning of NGO workers vis-a-vis other actors
<input type="radio"/>	Interactions with other national actors in project
<input type="radio"/>	Interactions with the donors
<input type="radio"/>	Other projects
<input type="radio"/>	Partnership with the Women's Union
<input type="radio"/>	3 NGO workers' interactions with target group
<input type="radio"/>	Close relationships with ethnic minorities
<input type="radio"/>	General impression of ethnic minorities
<input type="radio"/>	Perception of group differences
<input type="radio"/>	View on women and gender issues
<input type="radio"/>	4 Personal conception and awareness
<input type="radio"/>	Conception of gender (in)equality
<input type="radio"/>	Reflection & awareness of own impacts
<input type="radio"/>	5 Project implementation by NGO
<input type="radio"/>	Advantages
<input type="radio"/>	Approach
<input type="radio"/>	Challenges
<input type="radio"/>	Potential impacts on gender
<input type="radio"/>	Project value addition

Appendix 2: Interview guide (in Vietnamese)

Câu hỏi bắt đầu

1. Anh/chị có đồng ý với đơn tham gia nghiên cứu không?
2. Anh/chị có thể giới thiệu sơ qua về mình không?
3. Mình thuộc dân tộc gì?
4. Vị trí công việc trong dự án này là gì?
5. Anh/chị có làm việc hay tiếp xúc trực tiếp với người dân tộc thiểu số (DTTS) trong dự án không?
 - Nếu có, ấn tượng như thế nào khi làm việc với họ?
 - Đây có phải lần đầu tiên chị làm việc với vấn đề liên quan đến người DTTS ở Việt Nam không?
6. Anh/chị có thể giải thích qua về sự tham gia của CHIASE trong dự án không?

Dự án về phụ nữ khởi nghiệp trong ngành năng lượng tái tạo

1. Anh/chị có thể giải thích về phần dự án mà CHIASE chịu trách nhiệm không?
 - Ai định hướng và quyết định hướng đi này?
2. Theo anh/chị hiểu thì dự án này liên quan như thế nào đến mục tiêu phát triển của chương trình Empower?
3. Phần dự án này nhằm giải quyết vấn đề cụ thể gì trong cộng đồng?
4. Theo chị, nam và nữ giới làm chủ doanh nghiệp ở các tỉnh này có gặp khó khăn như nhau đối với thiên tai và biến đổi khí hậu không?
 - Nếu không thì họ khác nhau như thế nào? Tại sao?
 - Có sự khác biệt giữa phụ nữ người Kinh và người DTTS trong những khó khăn mà họ gặp phải không?
 - Có sự khác biệt giữa phụ nữ từ các DTTS khác nhau không?
 - Có sự khác biệt giữa phụ nữ trong cùng 1 cộng đồng DTTS không?
5. Đoàn ông có thuộc nhóm đối tượng thụ hưởng trực tiếp hay gián tiếp của dự án không?
6. Anh/chị đã chuẩn bị cho dự án như thế nào?

Giải quyết vấn đề bất bình đẳng giới

1. Chương trình này muốn góp phần giải quyết bất bình đẳng giới. Theo anh/chị, bình đẳng giới nghĩa là gì?
2. Bình đẳng giới mà dự án muốn hướng đến là gì?
3. Đối với những người phụ nữ DTTS anh/chị làm việc cùng trong dự án, anh/chị thấy họ gặp phải những vấn đề bất bình đẳng giới gì?
 - Những vấn đề bất bình đẳng giới gì dự án này có thể giải quyết được?
 - Anh/chị mong muốn dự án sẽ tạo ra thay đổi gì liên quan đến vấn đề giới đối với những đối tượng này?
4. Theo anh/chị, bất bình đẳng giới có giống nhau giữa người Kinh và người DTTS không? Tại sao?
 - Giữa các DTTS thì sao?
 - Tại sao chúng ta cần làm việc về vấn đề bình đẳng giới với người DTTS?
5. Khi làm việc về vấn đề bình đẳng giới và BDKH với người DTTS, anh/chị có từng trải nghiệm khó khăn gì không?
 - Thường thì chị giải quyết như thế nào?
6. Anh/chị có từng trải nghiệm thuận lợi gì không? Tại sao?
7. Trong quá trình làm dự án, bản thân anh/chị có bao giờ gặp khó khăn trong công việc vì giới tính của mình không?
 - Thường thì chị làm gì trong trường hợp đó?
8. Anh/chị có nghĩ mình có thuận lợi trong khi làm việc với dự án vì giới tính của mình không? Tại sao?
9. Chị nghĩ như thế nào về tác động của dự án đối với phụ nữ DTTS làm chủ doanh nghiệp tham gia trong dự án này, cho đến thời điểm hiện tại?
10. CHIASE có từng gặp khó khăn gì với tư cách là một tổ chức trong quá trình triển khai dự án ở Việt Nam không?
 - Tại sao?
 - CHIASE làm gì trong trường hợp đó?

Appendix 3: Consent form (in Vietnamese)

ĐƠN CHẤP THUẬN THAM GIA NGHIÊN CỨU

Đề tài: Bình đẳng giới và phụ nữ khởi nghiệp ngành năng lượng tái tạo

Giới thiệu về nghiên cứu

Tôi tên là Nguyễn Hồng Hạnh, hiện đang theo học chương trình thạc sĩ ngành Quốc tế học (Global Studies) tại trường Đại học Gothenburg, Thụy Điển. Tôi tiến hành nghiên cứu này nhằm thu thập thông tin cho khóa luận tốt nghiệp của mình với đề tài bình đẳng giới và phụ nữ khởi nghiệp trong ngành năng lượng tái tạo ở Việt Nam.

Tôi muốn mời anh/chị tham gia một cuộc phỏng vấn kéo dài khoảng 60 phút. Cuộc phỏng vấn này sẽ được thực hiện qua phần mềm Zoom. Nội dung chính sẽ xoay quanh sự tham gia của anh/chị trong dự án “Phụ nữ, Sinh kế và Năng lượng tái tạo” (EmPower: Women for climate-resilient societies). Cụ thể hơn, tôi muốn được nghe kinh nghiệm và ý kiến của anh/chị khi làm việc với chủ đề bất bình đẳng giới và phụ nữ khởi nghiệp trong ngành năng lượng tái tạo, mối liên hệ giữa hai chủ đề này, cũng như đánh giá về tính hiệu quả của dự án trong việc giải quyết bất bình đẳng giới trong cộng đồng. Mọi thông tin thu thập được sẽ được sử dụng cho việc hoàn thành khóa luận tốt nghiệp của tôi về chủ đề này.

Mọi nghiên cứu khoa học đều cần phải thỏa mãn đạo đức nghiên cứu (research ethics), ví dụ như việc đảm bảo sự tham gia tự nguyện của các đối tượng nghiên cứu, đảm bảo những đối tượng nghiên cứu hiểu rõ về quyền lợi của mình trong quá trình nghiên cứu cũng như mục đích sử dụng của những thông tin mà họ cung cấp. Đơn chấp thuận này sẽ tóm tắt những thông tin quan trọng trên:

Tham gia tự nguyện và rút khỏi nghiên cứu

Sự tham gia của anh/chị trong nghiên cứu này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện. Thậm chí khi anh/chị đã đồng ý tham gia, anh/chị có quyền lợi từ chối không tiếp tục tham gia cuộc phỏng vấn hoặc không trả lời các câu hỏi vào bất kỳ thời điểm nào nếu anh/chị cảm thấy không thoải mái. Những quyết định này sẽ không làm ảnh hưởng đến mối quan hệ giữa anh/chị và người nghiên cứu là tôi hay dẫn đến những hậu quả gì khác. Nếu anh/chị quyết định rút khỏi cuộc nghiên cứu, tôi sẽ xóa toàn bộ thông tin mà anh/chị cung cấp, trừ trường hợp anh/chị cho phép tôi tiếp tục sử dụng những thông tin này cho mục đích nghiên cứu.

Giữ bí mật thông tin

Mọi thông tin trong nghiên cứu đều được giữ bí mật và chỉ phục vụ cho mục đích nghiên cứu. Thông tin cá nhân của anh/chị sẽ được mã hóa trước khi tiến hành phân tích và được lưu trữ riêng. Tên của anh/chị và những thông tin có thể dùng để nhận dạng anh/chị sẽ không xuất hiện trong khóa luận thạc sĩ của tôi. Thay vào đó, khi thông tin anh/chị cung cấp được sử dụng trong nghiên cứu, tôi sẽ dùng tên giả và mã số với mục đích ẩn danh hóa. Chỉ có tôi và thầy hướng

dẫn khóa luận mới có quyền tiếp cận với thông tin và băng ghi âm. Những thông tin và băng ghi âm này sẽ được lưu trữ trên máy tính cá nhân của tôi và bảo vệ bằng hai lớp mật khẩu.

Lợi ích và nguy hại

Về lợi ích, những thông tin mà anh/chị cung cấp sẽ có giá trị rất lớn trong việc góp phần nâng cao hiểu biết của tôi về vấn đề bình đẳng giới ở Việt Nam, nhất là trong cộng đồng người dân tộc thiểu số. Thông qua đó, tôi có thể hoàn thành một khóa luận tốt nghiệp có giá trị và hữu ích cho những người quan tâm đến vấn đề tương tự, cũng như có thể mang tính tham khảo cho công việc của anh/chị.

Về nguy hại, tôi nhận thấy hầu như không có nguy hại gì đến anh/chị khi tham gia nghiên cứu này.

Chấp thuận của người tham gia

- Tôi đã được người nghiên cứu giải thích đầy đủ về mục đích cuộc nghiên cứu cũng như quyền lợi của mình khi tham gia nghiên cứu.
- Tôi đã có cơ hội hỏi người nghiên cứu những vấn đề tôi thắc mắc trước khi bắt đầu tham gia. Nếu tôi có những câu hỏi khác về nghiên cứu này trong tương lai, tôi có thể liên hệ những người liên quan theo thông tin được cung cấp phía dưới đơn này.
- Tôi đồng ý tham gia trả lời phỏng vấn.
- Tôi đồng ý cho phép người nghiên cứu ghi âm cuộc phỏng vấn này.

Liên hệ

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