Report

Double jeopardy

How gendered social norms and ethnicity intersect to shape the lives of adolescent Hmong girls in Viet Nam

Nicola Jones, Elizabeth Presler-Marshall and Tran Thi Van Anh

Abstract

This report explores adolescent Hmong girls' understanding of the role gendered social norms play in shaping both their current wellbeing and their futures. Women play a unique and vital role in consolidating development gains, and adolescence is a critical period for the formation of both gender identity and capacity development. It is therefore essential to understand how gendered social norms limit girls' capacity for self-realisation and identify ways to help them improve their current situation, imagine a future of expanded opportunity and achieve their goals. Part of a larger multi-country programme of research in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, this study draws on qualitative and participatory research methodologies to assess the key threats to gender justice facing adolescent Hmong girls in northern Viet Nam. By listening to members of the community, activists, service providers, family members and, most importantly, the girls themselves, we can better identify what types of programmes and policy responses they believe would be most useful to them, which in turn suggests the most promising avenues for development assistance.

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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CDC	Centers for Disease Control
DFID	Department for International Development
DHS	Demographic and Health Survey
DoET	Department of Education and Training
DoLISA	Department of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs
ECES	Enjambra Contra la Explotacion Sexual
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GSO	General Statistics Office
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HSPI	Health Strategy and Policy Institute
ICMMP	International Council on Management of Population Programmes
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDI	In-depth Interview
IFGS	Institute for Family and Gender Studies
ILO	International Labour Organization
IRFH	Institute for Reproductive and Family Health
IPU	Inter-parliamentary Union
iSEE	Research Institute on Society, Economics and Environment
IUD	Intrauterine Device
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
MCST	Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoET	Ministry of Education and Training
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoLISA	Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs
MPI	Multidimensional Poverty Index
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PHAD	Population, Health and Development
SAVY	Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth
SIGI	Social Institutions and Gender Index
SRH	Sexual and Reproductive Health
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
TFR	Total Fertility Rate
UCW	Understanding Children's Work
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCO	UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	UN Population Fund

UNIAP	UN Inter-agency Programme
UNICEF	UN Children's Fund
UNODC	UN Office on Drugs and Crime
US	United States
VGCL	Vietnam General Confederation of Labour
VLSS	Viet Nam Living Standards Survey
VOV	Voice of Vietnam
WGNRR	Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights
WHO	World Health Organization

Executive summary

Overview

This report explores adolescent Hmong girls' understanding of the role gendered social norms play in shaping both their current wellbeing and their futures. Women play a unique and vital role in consolidating development gains, and adolescence is a critical period for the formation of both gender identity and capacity development. It is therefore essential to understand how gendered social norms limit girls' capacity for self-realisation and identify ways to help them improve their current situation, imagine a future of expanded opportunity and achieve their goals. Part of a larger multi-country programme of research in Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, this study draws on qualitative and participatory research methodologies to assess the key threats to gender justice facing adolescent Hmong girls in northern Viet Nam. By listening to members of the community, activists, service providers, family members and, most importantly, the girls themselves, we can better identify what types of programmes and policy responses they believe would be most useful to them, which in turn suggests the most promising avenues for development assistance.

Vietnamese context

The World Bank (2013a) notes that 'is a development success story[1]' – moving from one of the world's poorest countries in the mid-1980's to middle-income status in 2010. Gross domestic product (GDP) growth has been over 5% a year since 2000 (World Bank, 2012b) and nearly half of Viet Nam's population escaped poverty in less than two decades (World Bank, 2013). That said, however, millions of households have 'incomes very near the poverty line and remain vulnerable to falling back into poverty as a result of idiosyncratic shocks […] or related economy-wide shocks' (World Bank, 2012b:1).

Minorities are particularly at risk. Their poverty rates are five times higher than the national average and the gap between Kinh (ethnic majority) and minority outcomes continues to widen. The Hmong, who live in Viet Nam's Northern Mountains, are one of the poorest minorities. Largely still practising subsistence agriculture, poor infrastructure not only has prevented their integration into the larger economy but also, until recently, has precluded education.

Vietnamese adolescent girls also face a variety of threats to the realisation of their full capabilities, many of which are related to the broader developmental context outlined above. Some of these threats, however, are related more specifically to age and the tradition of filial piety, which leaves girls focused on their parents' short-term needs rather than their own long-term futures. Other are related to gender relations: Vietnamese families have traditionally preferred sons, barred daughters from inheritance and forced girls and women to shoulder the lion's share of domestic work while excluding them from household decision making.

Study sample and methodology

Our research was conducted in Ha Giang province, in the Northern Mountains of Viet Nam.[2] Ha Giang is rocky, dry and sparsely populated. It is nearly one-third Hmong and among the most deprived regions in Viet Nam; its Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) ranking is .33, making it 61st out of 63 provinces, and 43% of its inhabitants are below the extremely low national poverty line. Additionally, Ha Giang suffers from a policy environment in which adolescent girls are nearly invisible. Institutional coordination and incentives for proactive approaches are weak.

[1] http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/vietnam/overview

[2] Note there is also a second report for Viet Nam on Khmer girls in Kien Giang province, which is part of the same broader study. See Jones et al. (2013).

Our primary research site was in Meo Vac district, which is recognised as the Hmong homeland. In consultation with local authorities, we purposefully selected a middling poor commune in which to carry out our research with girls and their families.

We employed a multi-layered participatory and qualitative research approach. Focus group discussions (FGDs), conducted with groups of adolescents and adults, in both single-sex and mixed settings, allowed us to explore general community-level definitions, views and experiences surrounding gendered adolescence and the ways gendered social norms are both persisting but malleable. In-depth interviews (IDIs), with younger adolescent girls, older adolescent girls – as well as a more limited number of their older and younger brothers – and key informants, helped identify how adolescents see their status, opportunities and challenges within the household and community. We also used life histories, case studies and intergenerational pairings to explore intra-household dynamics *vis-à-vis* adolescent girls by triangulating the views of adults and teens and paying particular attention to gendered themes. A variety of participatory techniques, including body mapping, rankings, timelines and family drawings, were used to stimulate conversation, facilitate recall and build consensus regarding the vulnerabilities that face Hmong girls – as well as the opportunities they would need to realise their full capabilities.

Capability deprivations facing Hmong girls

Situated at the nexus of disadvantage in terms of age, gender and ethnicity, Hmong girls are uniquely vulnerable. The girls, their parents and local officials reported the following vulnerabilities, which can be classified into five domains:

- **Educational domain:** Hmong girls are unlikely to begin – much less complete – a high school education. Hmong boys are prioritised in terms of higher education owing to a confluence of cultural norms that includes inheritance patterns, which lead parents to see sons' educations as an investment, and time-use patterns, which leave girls to fit schoolwork into a schedule already full of domestic responsibilities. Additionally, it emerged that, even in families that educate one or more daughters, it is often the case that another daughter is totally denied an education so she can work at home. Girls also expressed concern about the quality of education they received, noting that books were limited and Hmong language teachers nearly non-existent.
- **Economic domain:** The lives of Hmong girls are tightly restricted by the ceaseless work they must do in order to help their families make ends meet. Recognised as more obedient and diligent, girls begin work at a younger age than boys and work more hours each day. Opportunities for Hmong girls and their mothers to participate in the market economy are extremely limited, and poverty continues to be a constant threat that forces girls to prioritise their family's short-term economic wellbeing over long-term investments in their own futures.
- **Physical integrity and sexual and reproductive health (SRH) domain:** Early marriage and high fertility are prevalent in the Hmong community. Cultural prohibitions surrounding sensitive topics – and significant programming gaps – keep many girls ignorant about puberty, reproduction and contraception. Trafficking to China is also a growing threat; girls, their parents and community leaders all noted that fear of abduction was increasingly restricting girls' mobility even further.
- **Psychosocial domain:** As a result of time poverty, geographic isolation, mobility restrictions and cultural norms against sharing 'sad stories', many Hmong girls are extremely socially isolated. They are also often consumed by a desire to reduce their mothers' workloads and prevent them from being abused. Their leisure time is nearly non-existent.
- **Participation domain:** Hmong girls, because of both their age and their gender, rarely have spaces open to them to develop and exercise their 'voice'. School activities tend to be adult-oriented and top-down, community activities are nearly absent and parents generally do not impute the capacity for agency to unmarried children.

Evolving gender norms

Despite girls' continuing vulnerability, there are signs that gender norms are beginning to shift. Some, such as on child marriage and bride stealing, are changing quickly thanks to new national laws and their enforcement through fines. Other norms are giving way more slowly as a few girls and women claim previously closed space, especially within the educational and economic domains, and are allowed to keep it. A minority of girls are reaching upper-secondary school and a minority of their families are beginning to recognise the value of youth and letting their daughters have time off from household responsibilities to study, socialise and rest.

Policy and programme implications *vis-à-vis* promoting gender justice

Interactions with girls, parents and community leaders revealed key insights about how to address gendered vulnerabilities and promote gender justice, although clearly any future actions should also be informed by complementary forms of evidence, including a more systematic review of existing policy and programme interventions targeted at adolescents. They included the following:

- **Support that will enable girls to attend upper secondary school** including, for instance, promoting successful Hmong women as role models, providing educational stipends or other social protection support to compensate families for the direct and indirect costs of education and encouraging equal opportunity by providing Hmong language instruction for younger students.
- **More opportunities for income generation,** based on realistic market assessments and Hmong cultural preferences for local work that complements rather than replaces farming. Vocational training initiatives need to take account of girls' domestic workloads and strict mobility constraints, and consult community leaders, families and girls to find culturally acceptable solutions.
- **School- and community-based SRH programming** that is developmentally and culturally appropriate (including written materials in the Hmong language) and therefore easily accessible by adolescent girls and boys – married or unmarried, in school or out of school – and allows them to remain anonymous. Mothers also need support to help them talk to their daughters about physical and emotional development.
- **Safe spaces where girls can discuss their concerns with respected, independent (preferably Hmong) adults** and get sound, practical information (and logistical help where appropriate) that acknowledges their cultural realities. Girls are particularly interested in advice on domestic and gender-based violence.
- **More activities** aimed at adolescents, addressing their leisure and socialisation needs while helping them forge their identities, find their voices and negotiate the growing tensions between Hmong traditions and the modernising world around them.

1 Introduction

Adolescence is increasingly recognised as a critical period for capacity growth, one which presents development actors with a unique opportunity to alter life trajectories across generations. Adolescent girls in particular are seen as key. As the future mothers of the next generation, improving their lives offers a unique opportunity for a double return on investment. However, while progress has been rapid on some fronts, with today's girls far more likely, for example, to attend school than their mothers, gender-discriminatory norms and practices, such as burdening girls and women with the lion's share of domestic responsibility, continue to limit the options open to tomorrow's women. By exploring girls' unique vulnerabilities – *vis-à-vis* gender, age and culture – it is hoped that we can identify nuanced solutions that will help them shape identities of their own choosing.

This study is part of a multi-year policy research programme, funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), which explores gender justice for adolescent girls in Ethiopia, Nepal, Uganda and Viet Nam. The Overseas Development Institute (ODI), in partnership with national researchers, is exploring the key vulnerabilities that shape girls' current wellbeing and future potential. By focusing on five capacity domains – educational, economic, reproductive/bodily integrity, psychosocial and civic and household participation – it aims to render visible the all too often hidden experiences of adolescent girls and identify how policy and programme actors can better respond to their needs and priorities.

The Hmong remain one of the most vulnerable ethnic groups in Viet Nam. Geographically isolated by the country's northern mountains, culturally isolated by strong ethnic traditions and economically isolated by poverty rates many times higher than even those of their Kinh next-door neighbours, most Hmong families lag decades behind in terms of development indicators. Hmong girls and women are bearing the brunt of this disadvantage, as they are also bound by entrenched gender norms that are only now beginning to shift.

This report begins by laying out the conceptual framework – which is similar across all four countries – and then introducing both the Vietnamese governance structure, which is highly distinctive, and the broader Hmong culture. Both are critical to shaping girls' experiences. Organising the barriers to gender justice facing adolescent girls into the five capability domains, we first draw on academic and grey literature, as well as a variety of nationally and internationally collected data, to present the larger Vietnamese context *vis-à-vis* gender injustice. Where possible, we include information about the Hmong experience. We then briefly outline the study sites, sample, methodology and research tools, and provide an overview of the Ha Giang provincial context. Our primary research findings are presented in Sections 5 and 7. Integrating information from adolescent girls, their families and the leaders in their communities, we address each of the abovementioned five domains individually, identifying key areas in which gendered norms continue to define girls' lives – and areas in which they are beginning to shift. The report concludes with a discussion of possible policy implications, drawing on girls' ideas of what gender justice would look like from their perspectives.

2 Conceptual framework

2.1 Social norms, attitudes and practices

Social norms, attitudes and practices, long codified though tradition if not law, are increasingly recognised as key to shaping lives. As 'shared expectations […] regarding how people should behave', social norms mould not only our actions but also our attitudes and beliefs (Heise, 2011: 13; see also Bicchieri, 2006). Tightly interwoven, these actions, attitudes and beliefs together form the continually contested, constantly changing social web that we call culture (Mackie et al., 2012; Rao and Walton, 2004). Boudet et al. (2012) make an important distinction about how that change occurs when they delineate the difference between 'relaxing' versus 'changing' norms. They note that the former exists in spaces where individuals are 'challenging and perhaps crossing the boundaries' of traditional roles but are not fundamentally 'setting a new standard' (p.51). Their actions, to use Bichhieri (2006)'s language, 'violate descriptive norms', but leave the 'larger injunctive norms intact'. In comparison, genuinely changing norms involves recognition of the legitimacy of that boundary crossing – how we believe individuals *ought* to behave shifts to accommodate how they are now behaving.

As they 'permeate daily life and are the basis of self-regulation', gender norms both are at the centre of the cultural web and are particularly resistant to change (Boudet et al., 2012: 24). Children learn at a very young age 'what it is to be a girl or a boy, or a man or a woman' so that the gender norms that shape social institutions tend to remain largely invisible (p.25). Recent work developed through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) has focused attention on the gendered nature of social institutions. Grouped into five indices – Discriminatory Family Code; Restricted Physical Integrity; Son Bias; Restricted Resources and Entitlements; and Restricted Civil Liberties (SIGI, 2013) – those institutions are considered key drivers of girls' outcomes with regard to the five capability domains mentioned above: education, economics, physical integrity and sexual and reproductive health (SRH), psychosocial development and participation (Branisa et al., 2009a; OECD, 2010).

In the case of gendered experiences of adolescence, earlier work by Mensch et al. (1998) emphasised that adolescent policy and programmes must 'peel away the many layers of control over girls, challenge discriminatory familial and community norms, and confront male attitudes and behaviors that are damaging to girls' (p.80).[3] In doing so, they must also 'invent' a value for girls by counteracting customary perceptions of girls (and the legal frameworks that often support them) and by promoting the 'novel' concept of girls' rights and capabilities apart from reproduction. A recent attempt to apply the SIGI categories to an analysis of adolescent girls and young women in order to identify the role of discriminatory norms in perpetuating poverty and deprivation highlighted, among other things, the need for a framework that can adapt itself to a specific focus on adolescent girls who find themselves subject to discriminatory social norms linked to both age and gender (Jones et al., 2010).

This evolving framework is in turn underpinned by thinking about the intimate linkages between discriminatory norms, practices and group perceptions of social identity, themselves driven by collectively agreed-on understandings and belief systems surrounding group membership (such as gender, age, class, ethnicity, religion) and power relations (whether they be patriarchy, age-based hierarchies, capitalist modes of production etc.). The resulting norms, values and attitudes can have positive, neutral or negative effects; in their negative form, they can be discriminatory in nature. This discrimination results in exclusion and restricted opportunities to develop capabilities, the outcomes of which are unrealised potential, limited development and disempowerment. According to this framework, the overarching aim of policy and practice is to address both the

[3] Please note that this Section and Section 2.2 draw heavily on Watson et al. (2013).

manifestations – or outcomes – of discriminatory norms, values and attitudes and the driving forces that underpin and perpetuate them.

2.2 Capabilities and gender justice

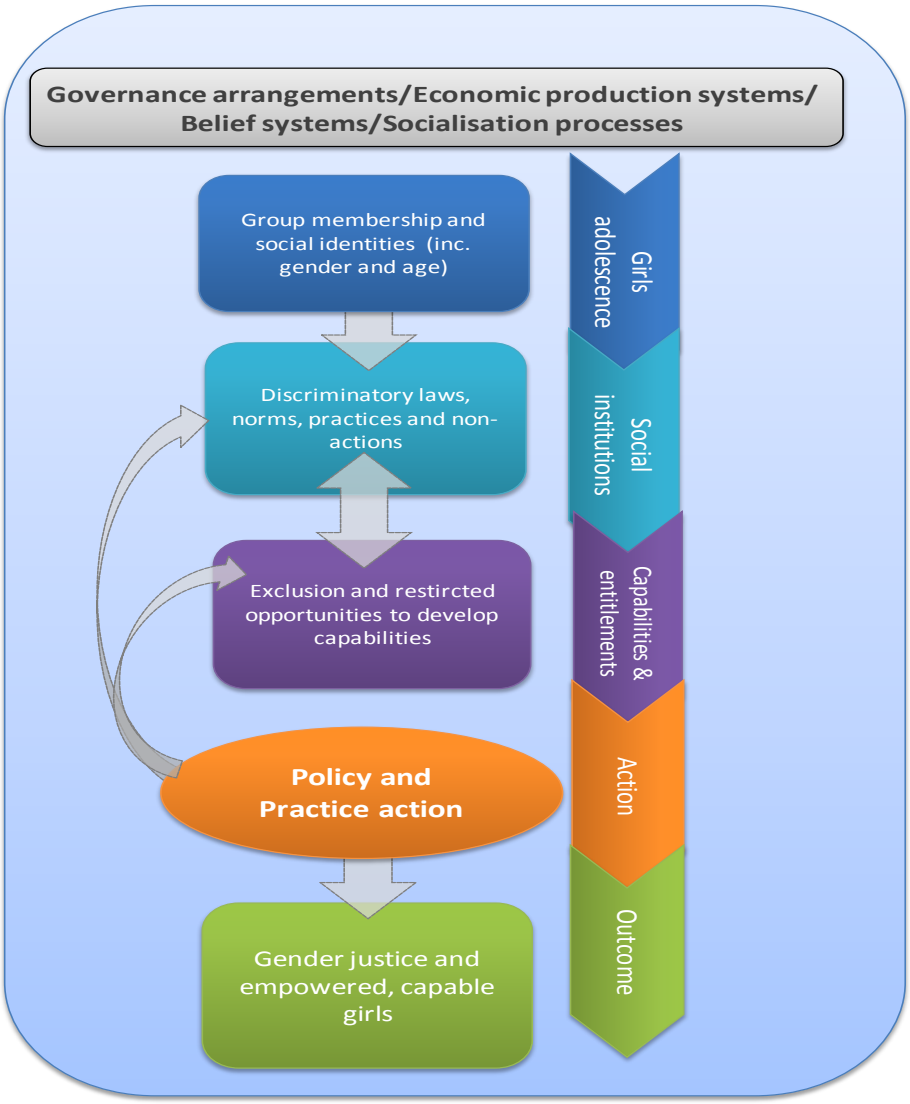
The conceptual framework that serves as the basis for our research draws on the 'capabilities approach' that has emerged over the past decade as a leading alternative to standard economic frameworks for thinking about human development, poverty, inequality and social justice. Based on Amartya Sen's (1999) theory of 'development as freedom', this approach posits development as a process of expanding 'freedoms' or 'capabilities' that improve human lives by opening up the range of things a person can effectively be and do, such as to be healthy and well nourished, to be knowledgeable and to participate in community life. Development from this perspective is about facilitating the acquisition and use of such capabilities as well as removing obstacles (such as illiteracy, ill-health, lack of access to resources or lack of civil and political freedom) to what a person can do in life (Fukuda-Parr, 2003).

The capabilities approach has evolved over time as a broad normative framework for the evaluation of individual wellbeing and social arrangements and the design of policies and proposals about social change in society. For some of the capabilities in question, the main inputs are financial resources and economic production, but for others they are political practices, such as the effective guarantee of freedom of thought, religion or political participation. For yet others, they are social or cultural practices, social structures, social institutions, public goods, social norms, traditions and habits. The capabilities approach thus offers a comprehensive approach to enhancing human wellbeing and understanding the social arrangements that either foster or inhibit it (Robeyns, 2003).

According to Fukuda-Parr (2003), the capabilities-based human development paradigm provides a more gender-sensitive agenda to public policy than its alternatives since gender equity is a central concern of the approach; it is sensitive to a range of inequities and discrimination that are important in women's lives; and it has the scope to delve into complex issues that constrain women's life choices, including discriminatory political processes, social institutions and norms that need to be tackled head-on. Through the work of feminist thinkers such as Martha Nussbaum, the capabilities approach has been used as a potent tool for construction of a normative concept of social justice and the promotion of 'gender justice' (Nussbaum, 2000; 2003; 2011). For this reason, it is important to conceptualise adolescent girls as evolving citizens to whom rights and entitlements accrue and to consider, therefore, the full range of actors at various levels – including family, community and state – who bear responsibility for creating the enabling environment and providing the services required to nurture and enhance these capabilities.

In seeking to understand how the development of capabilities is restricted and how discrimination functions, we need to go beyond recognition of compromised capabilities to understand the forces driving discriminatory laws, norms and practices. This discrimination results in exclusion and restricted opportunities to develop capabilities, the outcomes of which are unrealised potential, limited development, disempowerment and, ultimately, a lack of social justice, and particularly what we and others term 'gender justice' (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual framework



As Table 1 illustrates, drawing on the literature discussed above, the framework identifies five capability domains for attention: educational; economic; physical integrity and SRH; psychosocial; and civic and household participation. It should be noted that, while Table 1 is adapted from our international framework, it was prepared with the Hmong context in mind. To that end, it is similar, but not identical, to the frameworks used in other locations in the broader cross-country study on adolescents and gender justice.

Table 1: Adolescent girls' capabilities and entitlements framework

Framework capability domains	Norms and practices compromising capabilities and leading to exclusion	Non-actions compromising capabilities and compounding exclusion	Entitlements that underpin gender justice
Education	**Gender-based school exclusion at secondary level based on son bias** **Unequal care burdens** **Lack of choice over time use** Bullying in school or community	**Non-provision of accessible and affordable secondary education services** **Non provision of quality child care** **Non-enforcement of decent work conditions or child work laws** Non-provision of reproductive health services	**Education** **Health care** **Leisure time** **Decent work**
Economic/ productive	Limited access to assets Unequal inheritance and property rights Transfer and control of dowry Exclusion from labour markets and decent work Occupational discrimination – hereditary employment Effect of child labour – exclusion from schooling	Inequality in inheritance law Weak implementation Non-enforcement of labour law Gender discrimination in equal opportunities Non-implementation of children act on labour Weak access to justice	Income-generating opportunities, skills, training Productive assets – land, credit, technology
Physical integrity, SRH	Unequal quality and provision of care (son bias) Limited authority in family Early marriage Limited control over physical body safety Gender-based violence –directed at girls or mothers Harmful traditional practices Limited control over fertility Limited control over sexuality – in that girls are expected to be passive and asexual until marriage Polygamy Infanticide Unequal quality and provision of care Unequal care burdens Lack of choice over time use	Limited safe spaces Limited protective services Limited access to justice Non-provision of health services Non-provision of reproductive health education Non-enforcement of national laws and policies, including on gender equality and gender mainstreaming Non-provision of child care Non-enforcement of laws	Bodily integrity Care and protection Decision-making power in household Balance of time *vis-à-vis* care/domestic/ productive work and leisure Knowledge about health and reproductive health
Psychosocial and emotional wellbeing	Gender stereotyping Restricted mobility Time poverty Restricted access to education Limits on private roles Restrictions on associating	Lack of policy space for adolescents Lack of programming for adolescents Limited safe places	Inclusion in decisions that affect self Freedom of association Support and nurturing social life
Participation in the family and community	Restricted parental relationships Limit on private roles Limited authority in family Constrained marriage choice Stereotypes Control/surveillance Restricted mobility Limit on public roles	Lack of adequate child care Non-provision of information Non-provision of justice services Non-provision of activities for adolescents	Inclusion in decisions affecting self Parental rights Voice within the community Access to nurture and support from adults in caregiving roles Voice/representation Group membership Mobility

It is also worth noting that, unlike tables, which can clearly delineate columns of norms and rows of domains, the real world is messy. While we have separated the threats facing Hmong girls into the five domains mentioned above, which is requisite given that findings are meant to be comparative across countries, there are clearly multiple crosscutting themes that lead to a great deal of overlap. Early marriage, for example, restricts girls' educational and economic opportunities and has a negative impact on their physical integrity and reproductive health. Similarly, girls' lack of inheritance rights affects not only their opportunities to pursue high school education but also their time poverty and, ultimately, their loneliness. Thus, while the report is organised thematically – by capability domain – it is shaped organically, flowing out of the girls' stories and capitalising on the connections important in their lives. This at some points leads to redundancies – and at others forces us to overlay 'artificial' subheadings in order to contain 'messy' spill-over. Research is inevitably an interpretive exercise: our aim here is to help the reader shed light on the experiences of girls who are very often invisible in public policy debates while still retaining as many of their unique voices and perspectives as possible.

3 Setting the context

Overview of Vietnamese governance and Hmong culture

3.1 Viet Nam

Governance structure

The Socialist Republic of Viet Nam is a one-party state, led by the Communist Party, which, despite economic liberalisation and increasing decentralisation retains tight national control over a wide variety of policy areas (Fritzen, 2006). There are four layers of government in Viet Nam: central, provincial, district and commune (Nguyen-Hoang and Schroeder, 2008). There are 63 governments recognised at the provincial level and over 10,000 communes, each composed of several villages. Nguyen-Hoang and Schroeder (2008) note that, while the Communist Party has the overall leadership role at all levels, the party itself is 'functionally pluralist', which on the one hand offers more space for decentralisation than may be immediately obvious and the other hand leads to a certain fragility of power that often causes an overinvestment in maintaining credibility.

There is evidence across Viet Nam of increasing decentralisation – political, administrative and fiscal. Within the constraints of a one-party system, Viet Nam's 'grassroots democracy' movement has slowly been building space for political participation (Wells-Dang, 2010) (see also Box 1), while a need for efficiency has been encouraging the transfer of responsibilities to lower administrative levels (Fritzen, 2006). In addition, recent budget policy has ceded more and more fiscal control to subnational levels, leaving Viet Nam by some measures as fiscally decentralised as the US (Fritzen, 2006; Martinez-Vazquez, 2006; Painter, 2008).

Box 1: A unique approach to civil society organising: Viet Nam's mass organisations

Mass organisations, including the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, the Women's Union and the Youth Union were established in the last 1920s and early 1930s by the Communist Party as 'the people's front' in the pursuit of independence from French colonisation. The traditional function has been to mobilise citizens for various activities aiming to 'protect, construct and develop' the nation with a heavy focus on creating loyal citizens and cohesive communities. In recent years, they have implemented many development-oriented activities to improve the health, economic and social wellbeing of their members and have provided supplemental public services that the government does not provide (e.g. housing loans, microcredit for the poor, youth employment support, nutritional awareness classes for parents, intervening in the case of domestic violence disputes). They remain, however, very closely connected to the government, with cadres having public servant status, receiving salaries from the national treasury. Moreover, while there are nominal membership fees, most activities are state funded. Mass organisations usually have a four-layered organisational structure from central, provincial, district to commune level in order to effectively transmit decisions and instructions made at the central level down to the grassroots. On the one hand this structure has distinct advantages, including being well placed to identify households in need based on locally contextualised knowledge. On the other, however, there are significant questions as to whether mass organisations really have the capacity to reflect the priority needs of the poorest and most excluded given the broader hierarchical political culture in which they operate.

Source: Sakata (2005).

This decentralisation has been useful where it allows communes to target policies to their own needs – such as fining the families of truant children to encourage school attendance – but is hardly a panacea for development. For example, the elaborate system of tax sharing, which is aimed at reducing inequality and ostensibly favours poorer provinces such as Ha Giang, is still ultimately more beneficial to wealthier provinces that have more capacity to raise revenue (Beresford, 2008; Bjornstad, 2009; Fritzen, 2006; Nguyen-Hoang, 2008). This leads

Bjornstad (2009) to conclude that, while 'decentralization may contribute to poverty reduction outcomes' it is not 'inherently pro-poor' (p.3). Particularly since subnational governments have no capacity to create or alter taxes, leaving them with user fees as the only potential source of fundraising, there is concern that decentralisation may ultimately contribute to local services becoming regressively funded (Beresford, 2008; Fritzen, 2006; Nguyen-Hoang, 2008; World Bank, 2005).[4]

Furthermore, while *pro forma* decentralisation has grown significantly in recent years, '[d]iversification of authority in key decision-making processes remains limited '(Fford, 2011, in Jones et al., 2012: 13). Because 'the state share of economic output has remained relatively constant since 2002 at 37–40% of GDP [gross domestic product]' (Gainsborough, 2010: 482) and Viet Nam's citizens are represented *de jure*, if not *de facto*, by a plethora of state-sponsored organisations such as the Women's Union and the Youth Union, the central government remains monolithic in the minds of many. Policy tends to be top-down, rather than bottom-up, and, once enacted, 'actors involved are then expected to be bound by it' (Harris et al., 2011: viii). This tends not only to leave lower-level authorities in a holding pattern, waiting for proclamations from above, but also to stifle local innovation and targeted responses, particularly in areas where language and cultural barriers make it difficult for locals to make their needs known (Jones et al., 2012). For example, while there is, as is discussed in greater detail below, a unified push to encourage families to have no more than two children, there is insufficient attention paid to the diverse drivers of fertility. Similarly, targets for poverty reduction are often set by the central government with inadequate input from local authorities.

Ethnicity

There are 53 recognized ethnic minority groups among Viet Nam's population of 88 million people, representing approximately 15% of the population. Most ethnic minority groups are very small; only five have populations larger than 1 million: the Hmong, the Khmer, the Tay, the Thai and the Muong. With very few exceptions, most minority groups live in rural, mountainous areas (Baulch and Dat, 2012; World Bank, 2009). They are often, however, even minorities in their own homelands, owing to policies from the 1960s that moved millions of Kinh families into the mountains in order to reduce overpopulation in urban areas and help 'modernise' mountainous regions (Friederichsen, 2012). While Viet Nam's Constitution enshrines the rights of minorities to use their own languages and guard their cultural identities – at least insofar as 'they do not pose a threat to the socialist progress of the country' – policies designed to foster modernisation speak to a fundamental tension in that nation building and development often struggle to adequately incorporate diversity (Michaud, 2010: 32; see also Messier and Michaud, 2012; Mylonas, 2013).

Recognising that poverty is not only endemic but also growing comparatively worse among most minority groups, Viet Nam has enacted a plethora of policies and programmes to address minority disadvantage over the past two decades. Bonnin and Turner (2012) note that there were nearly two dozen such programmes in the late 1990s and that, while many have now been combined, the absolute number of programmes remains large – and diverse. Programme 135, for example, is aimed at infrastructure development in minority areas. Among other things, it has built roads, schools and hospitals. Programme 134 has allocated land to and built houses for minority families. Additionally, Baulch et al. (2010) observe that, 'by 2006, a higher percentage of the ethnic minority households were receiving social transfers for all categories except social insurance. For some categories, such as education and health assistance the improvement is very large indeed' (p.27).

However, as Turner (2012b) concludes, '[g]overnment programs to reduce ethnic minority poverty are often built on the assumption that activities which worked well for the Kinh and Chinese majority should also work well for ethnic minorities. When they do not, lack of understanding can lead to the conclusion that the target beneficiaries are backward, or unmotivated, or lazy' (p.410). Minorities, on the other hand, mindful of the painful collectivisation campaigns of the past, are often distrustful of government development initiatives and fundamentally do not, as Soones (2009) notes, see themselves in need of 'rescue, discipline or transformation' (p.184; see also Michaud, 2011; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012a and b). Recently, there have been increasing attempts to disaggregate the category of 'ethnic minority', as evidence is highlighting that their

[4] The World Bank reports, for example, that community contributions to road maintenance equal nearly 10% 'of the annual poverty line in the relatively poor Northern Uplands, compared with 4.6% in the country as a whole' (2005: 91).

development trajectories are often quite distinct, and this is indeed the case with the Hmong population, as we discuss in more detail below.

Gender

The Vietnamese government has a longstanding commitment to gender equality – with documents dating to the 1930s proclaiming it a key party objective (Abjorensen, 2010; Knodel et al., 2004). The country's gender machinery is relatively strong and it has a solid regional track record in terms of women's political and economic participation (Jones et al., 2012; Schuler et al., 2006). That said, there is significant space for improvement – in terms of both institutions and the widening gap between women's public and private roles (Abjorensen, 2010).

Although Viet Nam's gender policy infrastructure is comprehensive, there is 'considerable disconnect between these policy frameworks and their implementation at the provincial, district and commune levels' (Jones et al., 2012: 13). Top-down policymaking, combined with weak inter-sectoral coordination, poor capacity building and low budgets, have left many institutions – particularly at the commune level – unable to fully integrate gender into programming, leading to tokenistic, generic interventions (ibid.). Limited gender awareness on the behalf of many leaders – as well as an assumption that the Women's Union is responsible for all women's issues – has further reduced the impact of high-level policy (ibid.), particularly given that the Women's Union does not tend to encourage diversity in terms of gender norms (Schuler et al., 2006).

Additionally, the government's post Doi Moi emphasis on tradition and culture, intended to fight the 'social evils' (see Box 2) seen as accompanying globalisation, has had unintended consequences for girls and women – particularly their private roles (Abjorensen, 2010). By pronouncing women 'the soul of the family' (Werner, 2008: 75), the government has placed women's domestic roles at the 'mythic locus of traditional cultural values and a production mode worthy of governmental support' – ironically limiting their freedom by placing them on a pedestal (Leshkowich, 2008: 15). While women increasingly work outside the home and the gender wage gap has declined significantly, they continue to be almost solely responsible for domestic labour and have little access to household decision making (Knodel et al., 2004), primarily because of their husband's strong beliefs that 'that a woman's important role is to take care of her home and cook for her family' (Nanda et al., 2012: 2; see also Jones and Anh, 2010). This is also supported by time-use data: in rural areas Vietnamese women reportedly spend a daily average of 7.5 hours on household chores, compared with 30 minutes for men. In urban, areas the differences is 6 hours compared with 90 minutes (Le Anh, 2006, cited in Jones and Anh, 2010).

Box 2: The rise of the concept of social evils

Viet Nam's increased integration into the global market economy entails rapid and dynamic changes and has fostered new ways of acting, interacting and thinking. In the late 1990s, echoing similar campaigns begun in China in the 1980s, the Vietnamese government launched widespread public campaigns against 'social evils' (*te nan xa hoi*), encompassing a range of behaviours from sex work, gambling and drug addiction to a general lack of morality. Anthropologists such as Christophe Robert (2005) argue that the official language of 'social evils' has been kept deliberately vague and 'is an attempt to keep alive some of the keywords and practices of Vietnamese Communism, such as mobilisation campaigns and moralising language to build a civilised, unified people. Yet rapid economic development, urbanisation and rising gender and socioeconomic inequalities have created entirely new social phenomena. Because of its ability to play on anxieties about social chaos and its potential for endless reinvention, the language of "social evils" is an ideal disciplining tool in a time of political reorganisation in Vietnam'. Robert argues further that the 'fight for the common good, against vaguely defined "social evils," is part of the reinvention of Vietnamese politics'. Current Vietnamese leaders are drawing on familiar buzzwords to deal with new social problems 'thus lending an aura of ideological continuity to the radical break they effected in politics and the economy'. Rydstrom (2006) has argued that this broader transformation process is epitomised by the ambivalence and ambiguity with which female sexuality is imbued. Girls and women's sexual behaviours have become 'intertwined with anxieties about the forces of a global and "poisonous culture" (*van hoa doc hai*)' that require either self-imposed or government-imposed control in order to avoid the transgression of moral boundaries.

Highlighting the importance of the concept in Vietnamese society is the institutionalisation of the concept within government bureaucracy at national and provincial levels. The Ministry of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs (MoLISA) has a dedicated Department of Social Evils Prevention, which is responsible for dealing with policy and programming relating to trafficking, sex work, drug addiction and HIV. Similarly, social workers are instructed within this paradigm and thus often take a moralistic and punitive approach rather than seeking to address the rights and social and economic deprivations that often underpin such behaviours.

3.2 Hmong history and culture[5]

The Hmong are one of 53 ethnic minority groups in Viet Nam, and one of the poorest. Numbering just over 1 million in Vietnam, according to the 2009 Census, and originating from China nearly 4,000 years ago, there are, after migrations that began less than two centuries ago, significant Hmong populations in the northern mountains of both Viet Nam and Lao PDR (Lee and Pfiefer, 2006; Michaud, 2010). Hmong culture, which sees ethnic identity as more important than national borders, has both insulated them from the larger Kinh culture that moved into their mountains when the government was actively working to shift populations, and minimised recent internal migration (Michaud, 2008; 2010). While the Hmong diaspora, located primarily in the US, is now over three decades old, Hmong insularity[6] and a preference for 'selective involvement' with modernity fundamentally mean that many traditional practices and cultural preferences still shape Hmong lives on a daily basis (Turner and Michaud, 2009: 54-55; see also Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009).

History

While a full overview of Hmong history is well beyond the scope of this paper, there are a variety of comparatively recent events that continue to reverberate loudly today – primarily because they have tended to reinforce Hmong insularity and Kinh beliefs about Hmong 'otherness'. First, during the late 19th century, under French colonial rule, the northern mountains of Viet Nam were under military, rather than civilian, administration, in order to facilitate control of local populations (Michaud, 2010). Second, while upland minorities, including the Hmong, had hoped to secure local governance, this did not eventuate under Communist Party rule. Instead, sedentarisation[7] and collectivisation became official policy with important spill-over effects on Hmong land rights and farming practices (Michaud, 2010; Turner, 2012a).

[5] This section draws almost exclusively on sources – from the academic literature – identified by the Hmong Studies Internet Resource Center (http://hmongstudies.org/).

[6] It is important to note that Hmong communities communicate almost exclusively using the Hmong language. Many adults, who have rarely had the opportunity to attend school, speak only Hmong, and children who leave school early, particularly girls, often retreat into a world where Hmong is the only language – which has significant impacts that we discuss in greater detail below.

[7] The Hmong did not traditionally 'own' land and, as Lemoine (2009) notes, 'freely wandered in the forested mountains' (p.10).

After Doi Moi, land was returned to the Hmong, but a 'selective cultural preservation policy', which prohibited 'counter-productive' and 'superstitious practices',[8] was ushered in (Michaud, 2010: 32; see also McElwee, 2004; Messier and Michaud, 2012). Instead, the state has worked hard to bring the Hmong and other upland minorities into the modern Vietnamese fold – fostering a common language, encouraging education and building infrastructure (Turner, 2012a: 543).

Gender roles and family structure[9]

Additionally, traditional marriage,[10] which often takes place soon after puberty for girls, takes 'no account of the girl's feelings if she does not want to marry or does not want this particular husband' (Lemoine, 2012a: 5). The institution is historically seen – because it binds clans together – as more important than women's safety. Lee and Tapp (2010) note, for example, that clan ties are 'valued as more important than physical and emotional safety in an abusive relationship' and that large families are prised 'above the reproductive health or rights of women' (p.159). Finally, because Hmong girls become part of their husband's clan upon marriage—and are told 'your mother's womb is what you borrowed'—they often have no emotional or practical recourse if their married lives are difficult (Lemoine, 2012a: 16). These gender disparities are further reinforced by the ceremonial value of boys and men – who maintain 'a monopoly upon religious performances: death rituals, birth rituals, rituals to ancestors and wedding rituals' (Lemoine, 2012a: 17; see also Lee and Tapp, 2010).

Box 3: Hmong childhood

Lemoine (2012a) reports that, traditionally, the Hmong have had no concept of childhood. While relations are governed by strict hierarches of age, the child's world is not seen as fundamentally different from the adult's and children are treated 'with the same respect given a living adult individual', in part because of beliefs that 'he is but the reincarnation of a passed away adult' (p.8). He notes that this may explain why child abuse seems to be comparatively rare.

Work

Most Hmong families remain subsistence farmers who, owing to the climate in which they live, are able to harvest only one rice crop each year (Bonnin and Turner, 2012). They also typically keep a home garden, small livestock – in part for sacrifice – and buffalo if they are able; many also still practise rotational swidden-farming, although this is illegal (ibid.; Turner, 2012b). Turner (2012b) notes that 'Hmong households are also integrated into commercial circuits through selected agricultural intensification practices, including purchasing government-subsidized hybrid rice and maize seeds […] chemical fertilizers, and pesticides' (p.408).

Despite this, however, at least in Lao Cai, where the vast majority of research on Vietnamese Hmong has taken place, Hmong families' integration into the larger cash economy can be described as tenuous at best (Bonnin and Turner, 2012; Michaud, 2011; Turner, 2012a; 2012b). Tugault-Lafleur and Turner (2009) note that 'many do not actually express a desire to become further entangled in the global economic possibilities available' (p.399). While they are happy to plant hybrid rice, as its yields are better, crop cardamom, take tourists trekking and produce textiles, their fundamental identities remain rooted in the home, and their notions of happiness, as noted by Turner (2012a), are 'a big enough house for everyone, enough rice fields to feed everyone, and some buffalo' (p.550; see also Bonnin and Turner, 2012; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009).

[8] Acording to Michaud (2010), such practices included 'shamanism (banded sorcery), animal sacrifice, lavish funerals, bride-price and even swiddening' (p.32).

[9] It should be noted that the research cited here has been undertaken by Western, male academics who likely had relatively limited engagement with women and girls.

[10] Hmong marriage customs are shifting rapidly owing to both encroaching modernisation and the enforcement of Vietnamese law. Lemoine (2012a) reports that, as late as the 1970s, Hmong girls were given considerable sexual freedom beginning at puberty – and were in fact expected to have intercourse with boys who were courting them. At that point, marriage typically either was arranged by fathers to meet clan needs or, less often, involved bride kidnapping. The legal overtones associated with word marriage were largely absent, and if pregnancy occurred then most couples were simply considered married – though 'nobody will force him (the boy) to do so and stigma will attach more to the girl than the boy' (p.3).

Religion

While Viet Nam is officially an atheist state, albeit with longstanding traditions of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, most Hmong practice animism and believe that the physical and spiritual worlds are intimately connected . As the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) (2008) note, '[a]ccording to this system of beliefs, protective and wild spirits inhabit many objects and natural settings in the world' and offences against '[s]pirits are appeased through ceremonies that range from simple chants to lengthy rituals, including the sacrifice of animals' (p.17). Shamans, who serve as intermediaries between the spiritual and the physical, are well-respected members of the community and are responsible for performing these rituals (Lee and Pfiefer, 2006; Lemoine, 2012b; Michaud, 2011). While Shamanism is frowned on by the Vietnamese government, it is still widely practised, notes Michaud (2011), in 'highland hamlets, where outside observers are rarely seen after dark' (p. 9).

As Tam (2010) notes, '[o]ne third of the nearly 1 million Hmong population has converted from animists and ancestor worshipers to Evangelical Protestants over just two decades' (p.333; see also Lee and Pfiefer, 2006). Initiated by US-funded Christian broadcasting out of the Philippines,[11] the conversions have provided more fuel for ethnic tensions, as Evangelical Protestantism is not an officially recognised religion – and because of the source of the funding stream, which continues to be primarily the US (ibid.). The US Hmong community, which maintains close ties with its homeland, sends regular, albeit illegal, missionaries, who offer the Vietnamese Hmong 'a vision of modernity in itself' and present them with the opportunity to forge new, modern – but distinctly Hmong – identities (Tam, 2010: 41).

Despite the influx of Christianity, the Hmong largely continue to believe that many illnesses have spiritual roots. The human body is thought to house 12 distinct souls; if any of those souls becomes lost then ill-health might result (Lemoine, 2012b). Souls can be lost in a variety of ways, ranging from a child's 'sudden fright' over a loud dog, to grief, to 'capture by an evil spirit' (Lee and Pfeifer, 2006). Consequently, shamans, rather than medical doctors, often serve as first-line defenders for health care in many Hmong families (Lee and Pfeifer, 2006; Lemoine, 2012b; Turner, 2012a and b). In addition, many use herbal medicine and keep small herb gardens for their own use (Turner, 2012).

Box 4: Hmong birth rituals

Hmong birth rituals are intimately linked to these spiritual beliefs as well. Babies are usually delivered at home by their paternal grandmothers and their fathers and, because the placenta is seen as the 'soul's shirt', and must be collected by the soul at the end of life, it is buried in particular locations. Boys' placentas are traditionally buried under the main post of the house, reflecting their centrality in family life. Girls' placentas, on the other hand, are most often buried under their parents' bed, signifying their relationship with fertility. Women's diets are tightly controlled for the post-partum phase, which lasts one month, and revolve around warmth at all costs. Babies have 'soul-calling ceremonies' when they are three days old and are not seen as actual people until that point.

Source: Lee and Pfeifer (2006); Lee and Tapp (2010); Liamputton (2007).

Agency

Much is made in the academic literature about Hmong agency (see, e.g., Michaud, 2011; Tam, 2010; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009). For example, Turner (2012b) notes that, while the Hmong have options, they are in some ways 'rural renegades' (p.415); Michaud (2011) says that they are 'being tactically selective about modernity (p.2). They choose to grow their own varieties of rice, because they taste better and are 'traditional', they elect to given birth at home rather than at health clinics, they opt to use shamans rather than physicians, they engage with the cash economy only enough to meet their immediate needs, they prefer to make their own clothing rather than purchase cheaper ready-made substitutes, they see formal education as fundamentally less useful to their children than learning to do traditional tasks the traditional way and they convert to an unsanctioned, US-funded religion. Turner (2012b) concludes that both government and development agencies need to acknowledge that the Hmong are fundamentally happy with their identities and should 'acknowledge different cultural values, necessities, and priorities' (p.417).

[11] Written Hmong was created in the 1950s by Christian missionaries.

While this is true, and we agree that 'policy initiatives based on detailed ethnographic study, a greater understanding of cultural particularities and negotiated participatory approaches' are vital, we caution that the needs of Hmong adolescent girls are not necessarily synonymous with those of the adults in their families and communities (Turner, 2012b: 417). Michaud (2011) notes, for example, that, while adult Hmong in China wish to keep to the old ways, 'youth urgently want to become modern and successful' (p.18). Similarly, Duong (2008) observes – after years of ethnographic research with Hmong girls in Lao Cai – that those who engage in tourism-related activities 'transform themselves' in the process (p.254). As they engage with the larger world around them, their tastes in food and clothing change and they move 'far from the margins' on which they started their lives (ibid.). In order to ensure that Hmong adolescent girls are given the space and support they need to become the women they would like to become, these complex dynamics between a strong central state and a minority community with a rich cultural heritage will need to be skilfully negotiated.

4 Setting the context

Overview of gender and ethnic disadvantage among Vietnamese adolescents

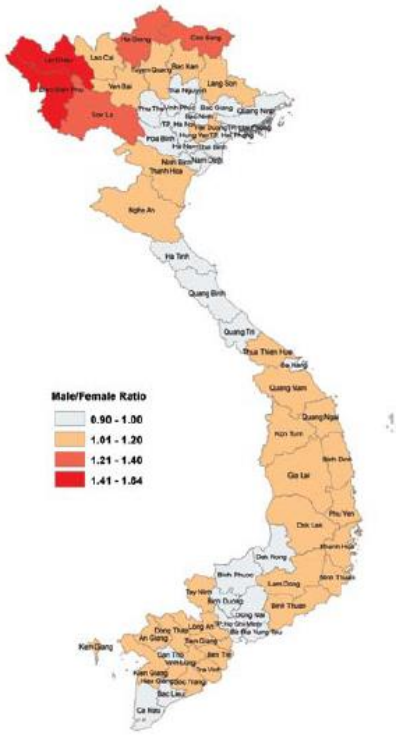
Vietnamese adolescent girls face a variety of threats to the realisation of their full capabilities – some related to age, others to gender, others to modernisation, others to age-old traditions. The threats facing Hmong girls are similarly diverse, but often unique. Where we have ethnically specific information we highlight it in boxes.

4.1 Education domain

The Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2012) note that '[b]etween 1992 and 2008, primary level completion rates rose from 45.0 per cent to 89.8 per cent' (p.1). Furthermore, on a national level, among current school-age children, Viet Nam 'has closed and even reversed gender gaps in primary, secondary and tertiary schooling' (World Bank, 2011a: 27). For example, net enrolment rates for Kinh primary-aged children are 97.1% for girls and 96.9% for boys (UNFPA, 2011b). Similarly, enrolment rates for upper-secondary school – across all ethnic groups – are 83.9% for girls and 81.4% for boys (ibid.). Even at college level, girls are now more likely to be enrolled in school than boys: 7.4% versus 6% (ibid.).

Despite this laudable progress in enrolment on a national level, 'disparities still remain and education attainment is much lower among several groups, particularly among ethnic minority groups' (MoET and UNICEF, 2012: 1). As Figure 1 shows, girls in the Northern Mountains remain the most disadvantaged. While minority students are only slightly less likely to enrol in primary school than majority students, fewer than 80% of ethnic minority children finish, while virtually all majority students complete their primary education (GSO et al., 2011). Indeed, Chi (2011) notes that, in the Young Lives sample, '85 per cent of the drop-outs at the primary school level are from minorities, and this increases to 91.8 per cent in the three poorest mountainous districts' (p.10).

Figure 1: Male/female ratio of primary school completion

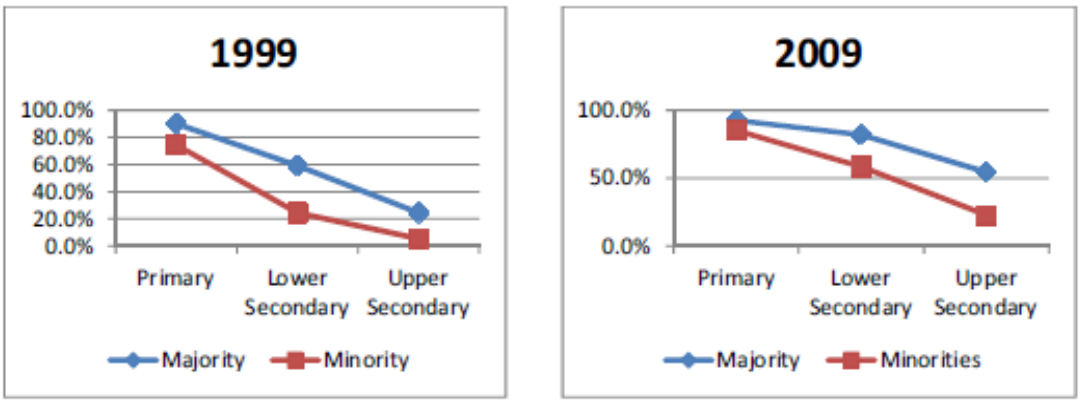


Source: UNFPA (2011c).

Higher minority dropout rates continue after primary school, and 'by the time they reach upper secondary school, majority pupils are more than twice as likely to be attending school as minority pupils' (Baulch and Dat, 2012: 5).

Higher education tips the scales even further towards majority children. In 2009, for example, the net enrolment rate for upper-secondary school was over 57% for Kinh children and only 24% for minority students, with some groups, like the Hmong and the Ba-Na, having rates below 6% (Baulch and Dat, 2012). While some ethnic groups, such as the Tay and the Hoa, have enrolment rates approaching those of the Kinh, Figure 2 shows that, overall, the enrolment gap at upper-secondary level has grown over the past decade, as Kinh students have made larger gains than minority children (ibid.). Addressing this gap is vital, given that Wells-Dang (2012) found that 'improved education levels' are an important factor (along with 'improved market access') in explaining why some ethnic communities are 'positive deviants' (p.37).

Figure 2: Net enrolment rates for rural areas, 1999 and 2009



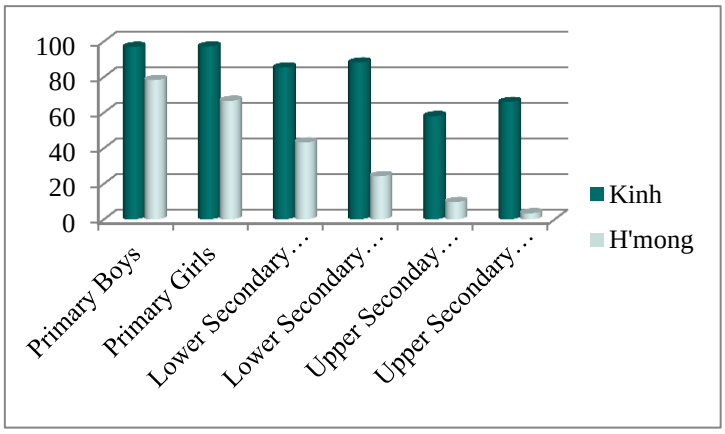
Source: Baulch and Dat (2012).

Furthermore, while gender-insensitive curricula have an impact on all girls, and the deficit of minority teachers affects all minorities, many minority girls are at the nexus of educational disadvantage (see Box 1). Thrust into classes taught in Vietnamese, which few speak at home, they often struggle from their first days (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; UNICEF et al., 2008).12 As they get older, they have to travel longer distances to school, and the increased risk to their safety and privacy is unacceptable to many families (ibid.).

Box 5: Hmong education

[12] UNICEF is currently working with the Vietnamese government on a small-scale pilot designed to improve Hmong educational outcomes. Nearly 500 children, one-third of whom are Hmong, are receiving mother-tongue primary education. Results thus far are very positive: children's attendance, confidence and test scores have shown significant improvement compared with peers who have not had access to the pilot (MoET and UNICEF, 2012).

As can be seen in the figure below, enrolment rates for Hmong children decrease as the education level increases, so much so that only a tiny percentage complete secondary school. There are two stories in these numbers. First, reflecting the reality that this is the first generation of Hmong children to have the option of formal education, enrolment rates are low for all children – regardless of gender. Second, Hmong girls are significantly less likely to attend school, particularly high school, than their brothers. While even at the primary level boys' enrolment (78%) is higher than girls' (67%), by upper-secondary school Hmong boys are nearly three times more likely to be enrolled (9.7% versus 3.4%) GSO and UNFPA, 2011). A variety of barriers make it difficult for Hmong girls to access education. For example, few begin school able to speak Vietnamese, which makes their school progress difficult and slow (H. Nguyen et al., 2012; UNICEF et al., 2008; World Bank, 2009). This is compounded by the fact that they are already, in Liu (2004)'s terms, seen as 'poor investments', because they will leave their natal families on marriage (see also DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Lee and Tapp, 2010; UNICEF et al., 2008). Given chronic poverty and the fact that Hmong families still average five children, Hmong girls are more likely to be chosen by their families either to assume domestic responsibilities or to work for pay. Their brothers, whose eventual labour will accrue to their family of origin, can stay in school (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; UNICEF et al., 2008). Baulch et al. (2010) note that many girls in the Northern Uplands 'drop out during grades 2 and 3, which probably corresponds to the point at which pupils have to start studying in the commune school rather than village classrooms' (p.21), making it more difficult for them to combine school and work. As was mentioned earlier, since '[g]irls who do not pursue further education eventually retreat to their mother tongue in their daily life far from the Vietnamese-speaking world', leaving school can have consequences that extend beyond lack of education (Chi, 2011: 21).



Source: UNFPA (2011b).Hmong families face unfavourable cost-benefit ratios in educating their daughters, particularly at secondary level. Secondary schools are most often boarding schools, which creates a plethora of concerns. First, they are co-ed, with supervision and hygiene levels (lack of running water) that are not acceptable to many families (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; UNICEF et al., 2008). Second, as Hmong families 'do not have the ability to convert their farm products and crops into income due to difficult transport issues', they are often unable to provide enough food for their children who are away at school (UNICEF et al., 2008: 21; see also DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009). Third, families are concerned about safety en route to and from school. Many communes are located in treacherous terrain, making even one trip per week a dangerous proposition (ibid.). Finally, given that Hmong women have little access to –and often interest in – wage employment, in part because of cultural constraints that encourage domesticity and discourage migration, the costs of secondary education are often seen as too high (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Turner, 2012a; 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009).

4.2 Economic domain

'Economic growth achievements in Vietnam stand as a spectacular success story' (UCW, 2009: 3). GDP growth has been over 5% annually since 2000 and the poverty rate dropped from nearly 50% in 1998 to less than 17% in 2008 (World Bank, 2012a). Vietnamese women, who have one of the highest rates of labour force participation in the world (UCW, 2009), have been critical in propelling Viet Nam into the tier of middle-income countries. However, care still needs to be taken to ensure that girls and women have the same opportunity to accumulate human capital that boys and men do and that they have access to labour market segments that offer both security and opportunity. In addition, despite decades of anti-poverty programming, minority poverty rates are five times those of the Kinh (Chi, 2011). Recent studies indicate that minority poverty is driven far less by the endowments that these programmes are designed to improve (such as access to land and

education) and far more by differences in returns on those endowments (Baulch and Dat, 2012; Baulch et al., 2012; H. Nguyen et al., 2012).

Gendered vulnerabilities

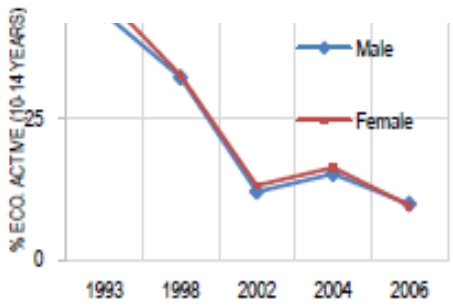
As Figure 3 shows, rates of employment for Vietnamese children have plummeted over the past few decades. Furthermore, while the Fourth Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS4) found in 2011 that, among children aged 5-14, 'relatively more girls (were) involved in such activities than boys (10.6 per cent versus 8.5 per cent)' (GSO et al., 2011: 172), overall 'children's work does not appear to have a strong gender dimension' (UCW, 2009: 18). There are, however, several key gender differences that bear discussion.

Figure 3: Trends in children's involvement in economic activity, ages 10-14

First, starting in childhood, girls are more likely to have domestic responsibilities. They are more likely than boys to engage in housework and they spend more time doing it. Nearly half (46.7%) of girls aged 5-11 years do household chores each week, compared with one-third of boys (32.9%) (GSO et al., 2011). This gap grows larger as children get older and has ramifications for girls' schooling, because housework takes up time they could be spending on their education. As Vietnamese children have noted, 'boys have more time to study' because 'girls have to do more housework' (Plan International, 2008: 22). While most working children are enrolled in school, they 'nonetheless lag 37 percentage points behind their non-working counterparts in school attendance' (UCW, 2009: 16).

Older children are more likely than younger children to work. MICS4 found that over a quarter of girls aged 12-14 were working for family businesses in 2011 (GSO et al., 2011). Furthermore, nearly 12% were working for 14 hours or more each week (compared with 8% for boys) (ibid.). Adolescents are even more likely to be involved in economic activity; the 2009 Census found that 'over 40 per cent of the youth population aged 15-19 […] participate in the employment sector' (UNFPA, 2011a: 32).

Source: UCW (2009).



This introduces a second interesting gender pattern: young Vietnamese women are more likely than young men both to migrate and to work in the formal sector (UNFPA, 2011a; 2011c). Not only is migration increasingly 'feminised', but also girls are migrating at earlier ages than boys – 'on average a year younger than their male counterparts' (UNFPA, 2011c: 30).

Ethnic vulnerabilities

Ethnicity is the primary driver of poverty, one of the largest barriers facing Vietnamese girls. Despite numerous government programmes targeted at minority groups, they account for almost half of Vietnam's poor and almost three-fifths of its food-insecure – but only an eighth of its population (Baulch et al., 2012; Chi, 2011). Geography has long been presumed to drive many of these ethnic differentials, but Baulch and Dat (2012) calculate a rural poverty headcount of just 17% for the Kinh-Hoa, compared with 51.5% for the Khmer-Cham and 82.7% for 'other Northern Upland minorities' (see Box 6). Indeed, Swinkels and Turk (2006) observe that majority households in remote, mountainous areas are nearly indistinguishable from their lowland peers.

Moreover, the gap between the Kinh and minority groups is steadily growing larger (Baulch and Dat, 2012; Dang, 2010). From 1998 to 2008, the poverty headcount for Kinh households fell more than threefold, from 38.8% to 11.7%, while the gains for minority groups over the same period were more modest, with poverty rates dropping by less than one-third, from 75% to 52.5%. One result of this growing gap can be seen in differential

rates of child labour. According to MICS4, only 7% of Kinh children aged 5-14 – but nearly 24% of minority children – were involved in economic activities in 2011 (GSO et al., 2011).

Box 6: Hmong poverty

The Hmong, with a poverty rate of over 80%, are disadvantaged even compared with other minorities (Baulch and Dat, 2012). For example, they 'have the lowest population using clean water sources (13%) and hygienic toilets (3%)' (UNFPA, 2011e: 3). Living primarily in remote mountainous areas of the north, and culturally quite distinct, they do not typically undertake non-agricultural work and rarely migrate (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Michaud, 2008; Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012a; 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009). While approximately one-third of Vietnam's Kinh population now lives in urban areas, less than 3% of the Hmong live in cities (GSO, 2010b). Furthermore, and directly related to poverty rates, less than a quarter of the income of 'other Northern upland minorities', of whom the Hmong are among the most numerous, is derived from non-farm sources – compared with over 70% of that of the rural Kinh (Baulch and Dat, 2012).

There are, notes Friederichsen (2012), a variety of reasons for this. First, when Kinh households were resettled to the mountains they were often given land along main roads, which made market access substantially easier. Second, Kinh families came into the mountain with strong ties to their natal communities – which again improved market access. Furthermore, because newly settled Kinh families were often given very small plots of land, they were forced 'into producing higher-value crops early on, which enabled them to accumulate sufficient capital to engage in off-farm activities such as processing, trade, and services' (p.42). Finally, as a variety of authors note, many Hmong are fundamentally not interested in pursuing other more lucrative livelihoods (Tugault-Lafleur and Turner, 2009; Turner, 2012a; 2012b; Turner and Michaud, 2009). While some do growing cardamom, deal with tourists and produce textiles, these activities are fundamentally seen as supplementary and the core of Hmong identity remains rooted in farming (ibid.).

Despite their agricultural lifestyles, many Hmong remain vulnerable to food insecurity. In Lao Cai province, for example, rates are estimated to be as high as 50% (Bonnin and Turner, 2012; see also FAO, 2004; Pandey et al., 2006). In Ban Lien commune, in Oxfam and ActionAid's 2011 participatory poverty monitoring, 71% of respondents reported 'often' experiencing food shortages. There is reason to suspect that this may worsen over time, as the area is 'an agro-ecological environment with limited areas capable of supporting irrigated paddy cultivation' and, combined with 'factors such as population growth, state-sponsored sedentarisation, land allocation and resettlement schemes', there is 'intense pressure on available arable land' (World Bank, 2009, in Bonnin and Turner, 2012: 98).

Minority women, who face double discrimination on account of their gender and ethnicity, have particularly few economic options (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009; Rockefeller Foundation, 2008). As McDougall (2011) notes, '[m]inority social customs commonly dictate that males control financial assets, livestock and land-use rights certificates, potentially creating difficulties for realizing the property and land rights of minority women' (p.9). Authorities' failure to recognise women's land use and local leadership roles is evident even among cultures with matrilineal traditions, in part because of women's lack of fluency in Vietnamese (ibid.; see also DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009). Language barriers constrain ethnic women's options in other ways as well. For example, 'large numbers of minority women reported being hesitant to go to markets for fear they will not understand prices or will be taken advantage of' (World Bank, 2009: 22). Furthermore, because few programme materials are available in languages other than Vietnamese, even 'access to a number of socio-economic development programmes such as credit, family planning, and agricultural extension' can be limited for minority women (Chi, 2011: 21; see also H. Nguyen et al., 2012).

4.3 Physical integrity and sexual and reproductive health domain

While Vietnamese adolescent girls face few health threats beyond those to their SRH, SRH remains a considerable concern. For example, many girls, particularly those of ethnic minorities, are still vulnerable to child marriage and, consequently, adolescent pregnancy. Furthermore, with limited information about and access to contraceptives, unmarried girls are increasingly at risk of pregnancy and HIV. Vietnamese women, particularly the youngest, are also vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV) and trafficking, both internally and cross-border.

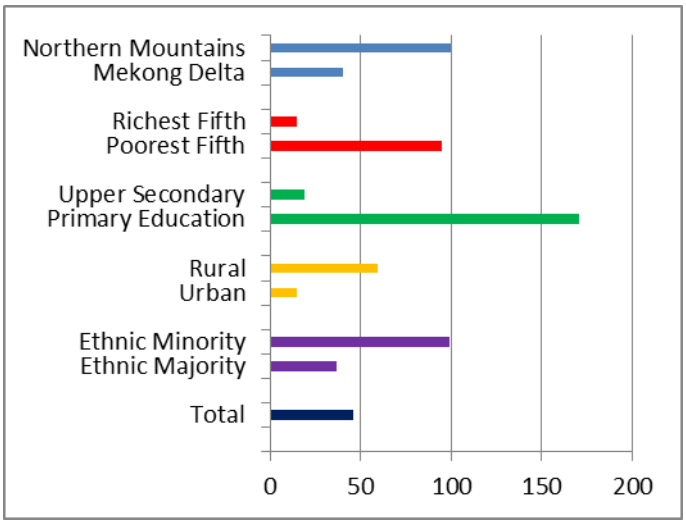
Reproductive health

As the age of first marriage rises, Viet Nam, like many other developing countries around the world, is caught in the nexus of a demographic transition. While the Second Survey Assessment of Vietnamese Youth (SAVY II) found that less than 1% of single girls under the age of 18 who had ever had a boyfriend reported sexual activity – as did only 6% of young women aged 18-21 (GSO et al., 2010c) [13]– 'data indicate that premarital sexual relationships have increased in Vietnam over the past decade' (Kaljee et al., 2011: 269; see also Hong et al., 2009; Pham et al., 2012). Furthermore, while reported sexual activity rates among the unmarried are fairly low, so are basic knowledge about sexuality and contraceptive usage rates. Teerawichitchainan et al. (2007), for example, note that unmarried young people 'appear to lack practical knowledge about puberty, safe sex, family planning methods, HIV/AIDS, and sexually transmitted diseases' (vii; see also Hong et al., 2009).

This is not surprising given that attitudes towards sexuality education in Viet Nam revolve around concern, with adults worried that they should not 'show the ways for the deer to run' (Hong et al., 2009). Most sex-related parent–child communication is reportedly limited to simple messages such as 'no sex' and 'no boy/girlfriends until schooling is complete' (Hong et al., 2009; Pham et al., 2012). Similarly, classes at school are 'traditional with imposing messages, which' make 'young people feel embarrassed' and tend to bury sexuality itself under other content, such as biology or population (WGNRR, 2012; see also Hong et al., 2009). Young people's knowledge and confidence suffers. For instance, in SAVY II, less than 30% of young people were even able to identify the fertile period in girls' menstrual cycles (GSO et al., 2010c). Furthermore, unmarried young people reported that fear and shame kept them from purchasing and using condoms, with girls noting far more negative feelings than boys (65% versus 51% (MoH et al., 2010). This is because, note Pham et al. (2012) '[v]irginity is highly valued for women, creating situations in which women have a decreased sense of need for knowledge and decreased perceptions of vulnerability to sexual risk' (p.2; see also Hong et al., 2009).

[13] While it is impossible to ascertain how honest adolescents were in this survey, we acknowledge that it is difficult for young people to frankly discuss their sex lives with adults, perhaps particularly when those adults work for the government.

Figure 4: Birth rate, 15-19, 2011



Source: GSO et al. (2011).

Reproductive health problems are not limited to young unmarried women, however. Married girls are far more likely than their unmarried peers to become mothers while still adolescents. This is often true even when girls themselves have no immediate interest in motherhood, as they are 'expected to get pregnant not more than 1 or at the most 2 years after marriage' (Klingberg-Allvin et al., 2008: 340). While contraceptives are free to the married, only 15% of young wives between the ages of 15 and 19 report using any modern method of contraception – far less than the 44% of women aged 20-24 and the 60% of women aged 25-29 (GSO et al., 2011).

Young minority women have 'significantly lower status [within their own communities] than […] their Kinh counterparts' and 'appear to lack bargaining power' when it comes to contraception (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007: 68). As they are also far more likely than their Kinh peers to marry as adolescents, minority girls' need for sexual and reproductive health care remains considerable (ibid.; Amin and Teerawichitchainan, 2009). This need is clear from Figure 4, which shows that adolescent fertility rates for minority girls (99/1,000) are nearly three times those of Kinh girls (37/1,000) – and the rates of the least educated (171/1,000) are more than eight times those of the most educated (19/1,000) (GSO et al., 2011). While the government's National Strategy on Reproductive Health, published in 2011, aims to address SRH by emphasising the rights and responsibilities of both women and men, it has thus far not 'had any great impact on ethnic minorities […] as there are no specific, culturally-sound programs and guidelines for implementation among ethnic minorities' (IWGIA, 2011). As Box 7 explains, Hmong girls are particularly vulnerable.

Box 7: Hmong girls and SRH

Early marriage and a total fertility rate (TFR) of five in 2009 – compared with the 'national average with a TFR of two children per woman' – have left Hmong girls and women, many of whom 'lack even the most basic knowledge of sexuality and sexual health issues […] because it still remains a taboo subject', among the most vulnerable in terms of reproductive health (IWGIA, 2011; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007; UNFPA, 2011c; 2011e).

As was mentioned above, many of the specific cultural determinants of this vulnerability are rapidly shifting. While marriage used to take place as early as 13 – and early sexual activity was reportedly the norm (Lemoine, 2012a) –the average age of Hmong marriage is now nearly 19 (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011). Furthermore, love marriages are becoming more common, with TH Nguyen et al. (2011) reporting that, in their sample of Hmong women, from Meo Vac district like our own, nearly all who had been married after the year 2000 had been allowed to choose their own husbands. They further note that, although Hmong love and marriage have been almost fetishised by the popular media – with interest in Hmong love markets rampant – in reality Hmong relationships look increasingly like those of the Kinh, with adolescent girls making more of their own decisions and going out of their way to send signals about how boys should treat them.

For example, because Hmong girls are expected – at all times – to 'uphold their family's face' and 'show their good manners' (H. Nguyen, 2013:145) in order to avoid shaming not only 'themselves but also […] their parents and the other families in the whole patrilineage' (Lemoine, 2012a: 10), they now often choose to wear modern, rather than Hmong, clothing. This serves as 'a clear message to a man that he may get into trouble if he tries to force her to be with him' (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011: 208). Girls and women in T.H. Nguyen et al.'s 2011 study made it clear that girls' increasing education was making it easier for them to speak up for themselves and prevent sexual harassment.

While there is no clear consensus in the literature about current Hmong beliefs about premarital sex, it is clear that premarital pregnancy remains deeply shameful – with both Lemoine (2012a) and T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) reporting that giving birth before marriage is considered a cultural anathema because it would necessarily take place in a girl's natal household. The latter indicates that, at least among schoolgirls in Meo Vac, premarital sex is not actually uncommon. However, respondents noted that not only were 'naughty' girls not seen as good marriage material, but also they themselves would be 'disappointed' if one of their friends became pregnant before marriage.

Finally, while T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) report, despite national-level surveys, that younger Hmong women in their focus group discussions 'had quite a good understanding about condoms, pills, the intra-uterine device (coil), calculating their menstrual cycle and even vasectomies' because they, unlike their mothers were able to obtain information 'from the Internet, television, newspapers, books and friends' (p.209), it is doubtful that girls in more remote hamlets have knowledge basis given their higher mortality rates (McDougall, 2011: 11). Discouraged by rugged terrain, custom and providers who rarely speak the Hmong language, Hmong women are far less likely to obtain prenatal care or use skilled delivery (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2011; Turner, 2012a).

Furthermore, while Viet Nam has met goals regarding prenatal care and maternal mortality at a national level, 'the maternal mortality rate in the central highlands and the northern mountainous regions is four to eight times higher than that in the lowland plains' (McDougall, 2011: 11). Nearly all Kinh women receive at least one antenatal check-up, compared with only 73% of minority women (GSO et al., 2011). Additionally, while nearly 95% of adult women receive care, less than 88% of girls under the age of 20 are seen at least once (ibid.). Poverty seems to be a significant barrier to antenatal care; women from the lowest wealth quintile are far less likely than other women to receive care (78% versus over 95% for all other quintiles) (ibid.). As early marriage – and adolescent pregnancy – is associated with poverty, this leaves the poorest, youngest women at the highest risk. They are also the least likely to have a skilled attendant at birth. Only 86% of women under the age of 20, compared with nearly 94% of older women, have a trained birth attendant. Furthermore, while nearly 99% of Kinh women are attended, only 63% of minority women are (ibid.). Minority adolescents are the least likely to be attended; SAVY II notes that '[l]ess than half the young women from ethnic minority areas (47.4%) reported having a health professional in attendance' (GSO et al., 2010c: 48).

Abortion rates are an increasing concern across Viet Nam – in part because data are difficult to come by. While the procedure is legal, is usually performed in a safe manner and seems to be less common in recent years than it was in the 1980s and 1990s, the increasing use of private providers, which offer greater privacy because they do not report to the government, means it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding either incidence or trends (Sedgh et al., 2011). Bajracharya et al. (2012), citing 2010 General Statistics Office (GSO) figures, give an abortion rate of 0.8%. Vijeyarasa (2010) reports a lifetime prevalence rate of between 1.3 and 2.5 procedures per

woman. The International Council on Management of Population Programmes (ICMMP) (2009) reports between 1.2 and 1.6 million abortions per year. Pham et al. (2012) note that it is 'estimated that adolescent women account for at least one-third of abortions in Vietnam […] and are more likely to wait past the first trimester to visit a medical facility out of fear of being stigmatized and/or poor knowledge regarding indicators of pregnancy' (p.2). Teerawichitchainan and Amin (2:2010) conclude that 'the prevalence of abortion is high in Vietnam, but not as high as previously reported'. Furthermore, rates vary considerably across groups, with abortion 'more common among married women aged 20 or older, those with more years of schooling and those with one or two children and women from the Kinh majority' (ibid.).

HIV and AIDS

Not surprisingly, given low rates of condom usage and transmission routes that are increasingly heterosexual (Pham et al., 2012; VOV, 2013), young women's exposure to HIV is increasingly problematic (T.H. Nguyen et al., 2008; Pham et al., 2012). While infection rates remain comparatively low (0.4% in 2009 according to Avert, 2013), particularly for women, SAVY II found that only 42.5% had comprehensive knowledge about how to prevent HIV transmission.[14] Rates were even lower for some groups: 36% for ethnic minorities and 30% for young women with only primary education (GSO et al., 2011). This lack of knowledge is reflected in incidence statistics; a 2010 report on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) report found that the number of people in Viet Nam contracting HIV through unsafe sex rose from 12% in 2004 to 29% in 2009 (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2010). Furthermore, '[o]nce HIV is brought inside the home, women bear a disproportionate double burden: greater discrimination for contracting the disease, and greater sacrifice as caretakers for other infected family members' (Pact et al., 2011: iv). Finally, ethnic minority women are particularly at risk. Of the 10 provinces with the highest HIV prevalence rates, 7 are located in the northern mountains (iSEE, 2010). UNICEF (2010a) notes that migration patterns play a large part in this trend.

Gender-based violence

A recent government survey on domestic violence found that nearly 60% of ever-married Vietnamese women had experienced at least one form of domestic violence: one-half reported emotional violence, one-third reported physical violence and one-tenth reported sexual violence (GSO, 2010a). These numbers match those of Nanda et al. (2012), who found that 60% of Vietnamese men admitted using some form of violence against their intimate partner – and that 'in Vietnam 90 percent men agreed that to be a man you need to be tough' (p.2).

Younger women were more likely than older women to experience abuse; over 12% of women between the ages of 18 and 24 reported abuse, compared with only 6% of women aged 40-44 (Nanda et al., 2012). Younger women are also more likely to be injured by a partner, with the age groups of 14-17, 18-21 and 22-25 reporting injury rates of 5.9%, 2.2% and 0.9%, respectively (Le, 2010). Migrant women are also particularly at risk of GBV. One study found that nearly half had experienced unwanted sex and nearly 20% had been forced (Piper, 2009, in UN Viet Nam, 2010). Interestingly, minority women were less likely than Kinh and Hoa women to report domestic abuse – although this may of course reflect cultural sensibilities more than violence rates *per se* (Rasanathan and Bhushan, 2011).

There is a close relationship between GBV and child abuse – with women who grew up in abusive households more likely to marry abusers as adults – and men who grew up in abusive households more likely to become abusers themselves. While one in four women in the GSO 2010 study reported that their children under the age of 15 had been abused by their husbands, '[w]omen who had a violent husband were twice as likely to report that their children were beaten' (GSO, 2010a: 22). Furthermore, more than half of abused women noted that their children had witnessed the abuse, which is alarming, since abused women are twice as likely to have abused mothers, 'and three times as likely to have a husband whose mother was beaten or who was himself beaten as a child' (ibid.: 22).

[14] Antiretroviral therapy access also remains low – 52% at the end of 2010 (Avert, 2013).

Trafficking

Trafficking – particularly internal trafficking – is also a significant issue, with 'women and girls, from poor, rural provinces [trafficked] to urban areas' where they may be 'sold into forced labor or commercial sexual exploitation' (US Embassy, 2011: 371). Dang Bich (2012) reports that about 15% of the female sex workers in Viet Nam are under the age of 18. Of those, monitoring by Viet Nam's MoLISA and UNICEF indicates that nearly half are under the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2010a).

Box 8: Hmong trafficking to China

'Along border areas of China, as a consequence of economic disparity, trafficking in women from northern Vietnam has emerged, with a precipitous rise in recent years' (He, 2006: 15). This has left Hmong girls and adolescents – almost all of whom live near that border – particularly at risk. Sexual exploitation, including forced marriage, is a 'popular aspect of cross-border trafficking', and as trafficked Vietnamese women are in China illegally, they are not only often abused by the Chinese men who purchased them, but they also have no access to 'community assistance in terms of access to health facilities, education, or cultural support' (ibid.: 16-17). Even if they are repatriated, trafficked Hmong girls and women can face lives of stigma and shame. 'Fearful that a fallen woman would cast shame on the whole family, several households quickly disowned their kidnapped daughters' (Cohn, 2011).

4.4 Psychosocial development domain

Vietnamese girls are in many ways caught between two worlds, both of which present psychosocial challenges. On the one hand, traditional Vietnamese culture, which is patriarchal and patrilineal, limits girls' options (Klingberg-Allvin et al., 2008; Nanda et al., 2012; Schuler et al., 2006; UNFPA, 2010). Many families still value girls and women primarily for their ability to produce and nurture children (ibid.). Minority girls are doubly disadvantaged. Despite policies that support ethnic diversity and self-determination, minorities are often perceived as 'backwards' and 'uncivilised' (Baulch et al., 2010). Minority girls, who often start school late, without Vietnamese language skills, and who are isolated by both poverty and cultural difference, are particularly constrained (Baulch et al., 2010; DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009). However, as Viet Nam becomes more tightly linked to the global economy, its norms, including those related to gender and sexuality, are increasingly challenged. 'As a result, both urban and rural Vietnamese adolescents and young adults are facing multiple and contradictory expectations and experiencing new stresses' (Lerdboon et al., 2008: 385; see also Dang Bich, 2012).

Traditional vulnerabilities

Early marriage

While Vietnamese law prohibits child marriage, 8.4% of young women between the ages of 15 and 19 were married in 2011 (GSO et al., 2011). Rural girls are twice as likely as urban girls to marry young (9.9% versus 4.5%) and the poorest girls are nearly six times as likely to be married as the richest girls (17.7% versus 2.8%) (ibid.). Ethnicity is also key, with 6.6% of Kinh girls but 19.3% of minority girls married before the age of 20 (ibid.). Furthermore, SAVY II found that marriage traditions in Viet Nam remain strong. Only one-third of married young people in the study chose their own spouse and three-quarters of all young couples lived with the husband's family (GSO et al., 2010c). For girls, this often means 'being subordinated to new extended family and having to adjust to their norms and values' (Klingberg-Allvin et al., 2008: 342). As mentioned earlier, it also often means familial pressure to conceive rapidly. Fortunately, as Oxfam and ActionAid (2011) note, the prevalence of child marriage is dropping across Viet Nam.

Son preference

Sons are seen as crucial to continue the family line and to provide support in old age; their birth improves the status of their mothers within the family and their fathers within the community (Nanda et al., 2012; Plan International, 2008). Son preference, while rooted in the past, is increasingly problematic because modern technology makes prenatal sex selection possible (UNFPA, 2011d). Since 2000 – and particularly since 2004 – there has been a growing imbalance in Viet Nam's sex ratio, with 110.6 boys now born for every 100 girls

(biological equilibrium is about 105/100) (GSO, 2011a). While this gender gap is moderate for Asia, particularly compared with China, it is alarming given that it took only about five years to reach an imbalance that took India two decades to achieve (GSO, 2011a; UNFPA, 2011d). Like India, the sex ratio is particularly skewed in well-off, well-educated families, who are able to best access the technology that assures sons (GSO, 2011a).

Box 9: 'Other people's women'

Because Hmong girls are often seen as 'other people's women' from the moment of their birth, they are, as was mentioned earlier, constrained by traditional vulnerabilities (Lee and Tapp, 2010: 153; see also Lemoine, 2012a). From early childhood they are given the lion's share of household chores, with girls tending to 'work twice the amount of boys: caring for siblings, doing household chores, collecting wood and water, and caring for buffalo' (DeJaeghere and Miske, 2009: 167). As DeJaeghere and Miske note, this lifestyle leaves little opportunity for either education or developing a sense of self-worth. TH Nguyen et al. (2011) concur, observing that, even when girls have educational aspirations, they 'lack confidence in their abilities' (p.211).

In part, the workload Hmong girls bear is to prepare them for their roles as wives and daughters-in-law. Of all Vietnamese ethnic groups the Hmong have the lowest mean age at marriage: 18.8 for females and 19.9 for males (UNFPA, 2011c: 19). Amin and Teerawichitchainan (2009) note that this is in large part a cultural preference – and is not necessarily tied to poverty. There is solid evidence, however, that this preference is not that of girls. DeJaeghere and Miske (2009), for example, report that, while 'this social practice is embedded in historical patterns […] most girls did not want to marry early', even though they recognised that their family was poor and that their husband's family needed 'to have more labour' (pp.168-169). Furthermore, although Lemoine (2012a) observes that girls know they cannot 'escape marriage' (p.13), T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) report that Hmong girls see marriage as 'complicated', owing to the complex relationships with in-laws that must be constantly negotiated, and would prefer to delay it until they completed their schooling (p.210).

Hmong marriage patterns are, as noted previously, shifting rapidly. T.H. Nguyen et al.'s (2011) sample from Meo Vac found that 70% of women under the age of 30 had married for love and only 8% had arranged marriages. This is markedly different from women over the age of 30, who reported 53% and 25%, respectively. Marriage by kidnapping accounted the remainder of both groups, with pre-arranged bride capture being far more common than forcible kidnappings (ibid.).

Bride-price, a longstanding Hmong custom in which the groom's family reimburses that of the bride, to compensate them for raising her, is increasing in recent years, according to T.H. Nguyen et al.'s (2011) respondents (though this is difficult to confirm, given inflation rates). Some families were forced to 'sell land to 'buy' a wife for their son' and one woman in the study noted that 'a daughter is worth a motorbike. Today a daughter will make you richer' (p.209). While women in that study did not report that bride-price had a negative impact on women's status, Lemoine (2012a) notes that one consequence of bride-price is that Hmong women are effectively trapped in abusive marriages because they have effectively been 'sold'.

Indeed, he reports that GBV is fairly common in the Hmong community and is fuelled both by strict gender roles and a cultural emphasis on shame. Believing that he is the 'only decision maker' (Lemoine, 2012a: 13), a husband may feel that he not only has a right to beat his wife, but also must do to restore 'his male—manliness-pride, badly hurt by some of his wife's behaviour' (p.10).

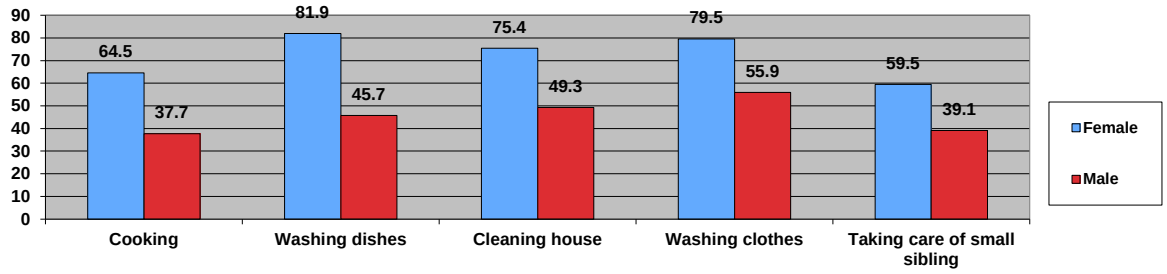
Son preference is damaging to girls in other ways as well, particularly the poorest girls, whose families are the most likely to have overt sex preferences (45.5% of the lowest wealth quintile versus 26% for the highest) (MCST et al., 2008). Families with limited resources typically prefer to invest in sons, which keeps girls out of school, places a too large share of housework on their shoulders and pushes them into the labour market in higher numbers. Some minority groups, notably the Dao and Hmong, are especially likely to prefer sons over daughters (ibid.) (see Box 9). The higher fertility rates seen in those populations are often attributed to son preference, with women feeling 'greater pressure, particularly from husbands and in-laws, to have a son' (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2007: 66). We do not know the extent to which these attitudes are correlated with poverty, as no data disaggregated by wealth quintile are available.

Household labour

As mentioned above – and as Figure 5 shows – girls in Viet Nam are responsible for more domestic work than boys. While boys are seen as 'clumsy, naughty and careless' (Plan International, 2008: 20) in the short term, they are considered good long-term investments (ibid.). Girls, on the other hand, are considered both more responsible and, as they most often leave their natal family on marriage, a less sure investment (Liu, 2004).

Taken together, these gendered beliefs often mean that the lion's share of childhood chores falls to girls. Girls are also disadvantaged by their mothers' increased labour force participation, as domestic chores still have to be done, regardless of whether women are at home to do them. As Jones (2009) notes, daughters and grandmothers increasingly fill this gap. Finally, as also mentioned earlier, some ethnic minority girls, including the Hmong, are especially likely to leave school early to work at home or on the farm.

Figure 5: Male and female adolescents (14-17) involved in daily housework activities (%)



Source: MCST et al. (2008).

Emerging emotional vulnerabilities

As mentioned above, culturally Viet Nam is in a state of flux. As its economy becomes more globally enmeshed – and its population becomes more urban, educated and 'connected' – young people are increasingly torn between two worlds – that of Confucius and that of Facebook (Dang Bich, 2012; Lerdboon et al., 2008; V.H. Nguyen, 2013). We Are Social reports, for example, that nearly all Vietnamese young people between the ages of 15 and 24 now have internet access and that Viet Nam represents Facebook's fastest growing market (Kemp, 2013). On the other hand, V.H. Nguyen (2013) notes that, even in the face of this increased connectivity, traditional roles – including gender roles – 'remain deeply embedded in Vietnamese society' (see website in references).

That said, while youth culture is in many ways in a state of flux, there is little evidence that adolescents' mental health is suffering. SAVY II, for example, found that '[o]verall young people felt valued by their families and were connected to them' (GSO et al., 2010c: 28). Familial violence – at least that directed towards youth aged 14 to 25 – is fairly rare and is more likely to be directed at males (1.5% versus 2.9%) (ibid.: 70). These figures are markedly lower than those found by the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism (MCST, 2008), in which '11.2 percent of adolescents at 15-17 years old reported being beaten by their parents' for serious mistakes (in Dang Bich, 2012: 5). Both figures, however, stand in stark contrast with the child abuse figures mentioned previously – perhaps indicating that violence towards young people drops as they age and perhaps indicating merely that older children and adolescents are less likely to report violence than their mothers who are reporting on their behalf.

In SAVY II, boys and young men were also more likely to report that they had tried to injure themselves (GSO et al., 2010c).[15] Girls and young women were more likely to report being so 'sad or helpless that they ceased doing their normal activities' and to have had thoughts about suicide (ibid.: 85). Ethnic minority girls were particularly likely to report feeling 'really hopeless about the future' (34%) (ibid.: 85) and were the least likely to have positive views about their own personal futures. Despite this, however, most Vietnamese young people, including over 80% of ethnic minority girls, 'expected that their lives would be much better than their parents' (ibid.: 83). Furthermore, Amstadter et al. (2011) found that, despite the vast social change taking place in Viet Nam, adolescents were no more likely than US adolescents to have mental health problems. They did, however, find that both economic and social capital had a protective influence, with poorer adolescents more at risk of

[15] Note percentages are quoted where available but exact figures are often not available in the SAVY reports.

mental health issues. Interestingly, 'gender was not significantly associated with overall rates of mental health problems among Vietnamese youth, a trend consistent with data from China and other Southeast Asian countries' (ibid.: 99), but markedly different from Western populations, where boys and girls present different mental health issues – the former more likely to be externalising and the latter internalising (p.99).

4.5 Participation domain

Adolescent girls have limited capacity to make decisions in their families and communities. While youthfulness itself precludes voice in many contexts, girls are particularly disadvantaged given Viet Nam's patriarchal culture. In many ways, the strict hierarchy of linguistic etiquette, where personal pronouns are determined by age, sex and relationship, captures girls' inferior rights to participation (UNICEF, 2010a). Isolated by poverty, geography, language and culture, minority girls remain the most disenfranchised.

Age vulnerabilities

Family

In Vietnamese culture, youthfulness is a significant barrier to participation, as reflected in the saying 'Trung sao khon hon vit', which translates as, 'How can the egg be wiser than the duck?' (UNICEF, 2010a: 282). Children are expected to do as their elders tell them, but as they age, they often get more input into family decisions. For example, one study found that adolescents participated in family decision making at least some of the time (MCST et al., 2011). One-third of respondents noted that they had been asked for their opinion about at least one common family issue in the past. Both girls and boys were equally involved – with the exception that girls were not asked as frequently about the division of property.

School

Traditional beliefs about childhood obedience still form the core of Vietnamese education. Research, which has not produced sex-disaggregated data, has found that children are punished without consultation and that schools have no formal grievance mechanisms (Michaelson, 2004, in Volkmann, 2005). However, Vietnamese children do learn about their rights in primary school (Save the Children Sweden, 2006) and research has shown that over half of adolescents are aware of the Law on Protection (MCST et al., 2008).

Community

While there has been growing acceptance of the notion of listening to children, there is little evidence that young people have access to decision-making fora about community or school issues. Children and young people are often involved in a variety of youth organisations, such as the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, the Viet Nam Youth League and the Viet Nam Students' Association. It is unclear, however, whether girls have equal access to participation and leadership – or whether the organisation exists merely to exert top-down control over the actions and beliefs of young people.

4.5.1 Gender vulnerabilities

Family

Girls' family lives, according to tradition, are bound by three rules. Before marriage, they must obey their fathers, during marriage they must follow their husbands and after widowhood they must listen to their sons (Nguyen, 1995, in Volkmann, 2005; UNICEF, 2010a). Girls are supposed to be obedient and gentle; those who prefer to express their own opinions are often seen as rebellious and boyish, characteristics that are rarely appreciated, particularly in rural and ethnic families (UNICEF, 2010a). Girls' activities also tend to be more heavily monitored than those of boys.

While the attitudes of young people are more open that those of adults, V.H. Nguyen (2013) reports that Vietnamese young people, 'often held up as being very open and liberal, hold on to traditional gender roles' within the family. Young men between the ages of 15 and 24 report that they would prefer for their eventual wives to be 'skilful, hardworking and self-sacrificing'. Young women, on the other hand, 'prefer husbands who are strong'.

School

Gendered images and expectations are still common in Vietnamese schools. The World Bank, reporting on a UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) analysis of textbooks, notes that 'boys are presented in mathematics textbooks, particularly in illustrations, as "strong, masculine, leaders, able to use modern technology, able to work hard, interested in challenging and competitive sports, while girls are presented as singing and dancing, folding origami, able to use household equipment and do housework"' (World Bank, 2011a: 28).

Community

Given the constraint of youthfulness, girls' participation in local and national affairs is more anticipatory than actual. However, to the extent that the political success of women shapes girls' consciousness, it is important to note that Viet Nam is a regional leader in Asia when it comes to women's political representation. For example, the 2012 Global Gender Gap Report notes that 'Vietnam's improvement in the 2012 rankings is the most significant improvement in the region' (Hausmann et al., 2012: 27). However, while women's representation is increasing, it remains uneven. As Oxfam and ActionAid (2011) note, only one of the ten communes it monitors was able to meet both gender-related participation targets; half were not able to meet either. They attribute this to women's low educational levels and the fact that 'women continue to be expected to assume household responsibilities and care for the children rather than participate in social activities' (ibid.: 110). V.H. Nguyen (2013), however, stresses the importance of injunctive norms; a recent survey by The Asia Foundation and its partners found that only half of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 reported that women ought to pursue government positions, and most associated leadership characteristics with those of men (e.g. strong and decisive).

Ethnic vulnerabilities

Ethnic minorities face a variety of barriers to participation, including geographic, cultural and economic isolation (Cotton and Pohlman, 2011a). H. Nguyen et al. (2012) also highlight the particular importance of language, which not only leads to higher school dropout rates, but also, as noted earlier, often precludes minority uptake of government services. Furthermore, while the Vietnamese government has a variety of policies stipulating ethnic minorities' rights to cultural and linguistic differentiation, and highlights those differences as a 'national resource', including *vis-à-vis* tourist promotion, it is also striving to '[incorporate] these communities within the nation-state' (ibid.: 1). This policy approach has had, however, a mixed reception among different ethnic minority communities (Taylor, 2004) and remains a source of tension, particularly among the Hmong and Khmer (HRW, 2009).

Minorities are, however, making progress towards political participation. Viet Nam had its first National Ethnic Minority Congress in 2010, with over 1,700 minority delegates evaluating minority affairs (Cotton and Pohlman, 2011b). Furthermore, while 'local officials who are ethnic minority people are now inadequate in number and limited in capacity' (Thuat, 2009: 2), representation is quite good at the national level (ibid.). 'The number of People's Deputies representing ethnic minorities in the National Assembly is growing higher […] in [2007-2011] the figure was 87, accounting for 17.65%, while ethnic minority people account for 13.8% of the total population in the whole country' (ibid.: 1).

Box 10: Hmong women and girls forge new identities

As noted by the World Bank (2009), some Hmong women are beginning to forge their own new identities. For example, over a decade ago, 20 Hmong women came together to form the Hmong Hemp Cooperative, which is located in Ha Giang. Now employing over a hundred women, most of whom who have been victims of domestic violence, the cooperative enables women to earn their own incomes by sewing and doing embroidery, both traditional activities for Hmong women. Members are offered lessons on budgeting and financial management, which, with their increased incomes, improves their household decision-making opportunities. The cooperative also provides social support for abused women and offers a venue for them to interface with the outside world.

There are also signs of change for Hmong girls, especially those regularly interacting with foreign tourists. One ethnography, conducted over the course of a decade, followed Hmong girls who came to tourist villages to earn money for their families. While there is no doubt that their economic activity denoted the end of their formal schooling, for some girls this work meant that their education was effectively just beginning (Duong, 2008). Duong observed that, when they first arrived, the girls enjoyed their tastes of freedom and spent significant time playing with their friends. Years on, however, many girls were approaching fluency in tourist languages and had made close friends, with whom they kept in contact, from around the world (see also Michaud, 2008; Turner, 2012a and b). Over time, these girls staked out modern identities and were better able to pick and choose their activities and lifestyles.

5 Gendered adolescence among Hmong communities: Primary research overview

5.1 Situating our research

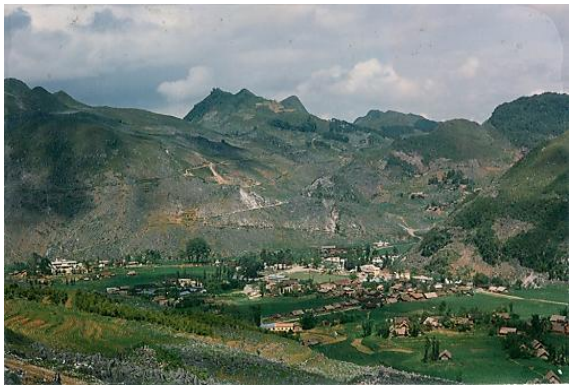
In order to capture local understandings and experiences of gendered adolescence, unpack impact pathways and explore transitions in social norms across generations, our team interviewed a variety of Hmong adolescents and adults, as well as key informants (see Appendix 1 for details). Our research was conducted in Ha Giang province, which is in the Northern Mountains of Viet Nam bordering China (see Figure 6). Ha Giang is rocky, dry and sparsely populated. It is also nearly one-third Hmong and among the most deprived regions in Viet Nam. As Table 2 shows, its Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) ranking is .33, making it 61st out of 63 provinces, and 43% of its inhabitants are below the extremely low national poverty line.

Figure 6: Map of Ha Giang

Table 2: Poverty characteristics in Ha Giang

MPI	MPI rank (out of 63 provinces)	Headcount	Intensity of deprivation	National poverty line
0.3325	61	73	45.6	43

Source: Viet Nam HDR 2011, based on Viet Nam Living Standards Survey (VLSS) 2008.



Within Ha Giang, we chose Ta Lung commune in Meo Vac district to site our research. Meo Vac is regarded as the homeland of Viet Nam's Hmong population, and Ta Lung commune, which is home to approximately 2600 people living in 400 households, is 98% Hmong. The commune's poverty rate, which is verified annually, is 58%, making it one of the six poorest communes in Meo Vac. This figure represents progress on last year, when the poverty rate was 65%. It is targeted for Programme 135 support, which includes infrastructure investments and educational fee exemptions for minority students. The district is also a current focus of Plan International's Because I Am a Girl programme. One commune official, however, noting the history of a completed World Bank programme, commented, *'[The] problem is projects come and go – they are like the wind.*'

5.2 Policy context in Ha Giang province in relation to adolescent girls

Outside of education, where there is clear evidence of national and local attention, adolescent girls are largely invisible to community leaders and policymakers. Provincial officials in Ha Giang report that parents are responsible for making decisions about their girls' lives and that the government exists largely to give advice. Even this, however, is seldom implemented, given the lack of locally relevant goals, poor inter-agency coordination, low budgets and a small and untrained staff at the commune level. For example, key informants (KIs) from Viet Nam's Department[16] of Labour, Invalid and Social Affairs' (DoLISA's) Social Evils Prevention Team mentioned that, in terms of programming targeting adolescents they are responsible only for trafficking-related concerns, while sexual abuse is handed off to the Child Protection Team under a 2012 governmental decision. That team, however, had no information, or programmes on child abuse. Furthermore, DoLISA's sole activity in terms of trafficking is to reintegrate returnees; it makes no effort to address the underlying causes of trafficking and work towards prevention, and informants emphasised that anti-trafficking was largely in the hands of the police.

Coordination is also lacking on other fronts. For example, when asked about the specific challenges facing adolescent girls in the province, focus group discussion (FGD) participants noted that the Department of Gender Equality was established in Ha Giang only in 2009, and KIs indicated that the concept of gender remained new, unfamiliar and not integrated into programming except that put together by the Women's Union. Moreover, when questioned about the issues facing minority families, KIs indicated that only the Cultural Department would have answers – and likely only at the district level. When pressed to identify how they might tackle a crosscutting issue like early marriage, which would potentially touch the mandates of multiple DoLISAs, KIs referred to a lack of data and dismissed the issue as one outside their mandate. Instead, they considered it the purview of the Department of Legal Affairs.

Data – and guidance on how to use it – is clearly an issue. KIs indicated that they received little guidance from the central government in terms of policy implementation. They were also almost entirely unaware of statistical evidence collected by the national government and donors. For example, KIs knew nothing of the SAVY, the Study on Domestic Violence in Viet Nam or even the MICS. As one KI noted, *'In western countries you have research, we don't […] we just deal with issues at a very small scale.'* Given that Viet Nam actually collects very good data, this is evidence of a lack of both communication and political will.

In sum, the policy environment for addressing the specific vulnerabilities of adolescent girls at the provincial level in Ha Giang is generally unfavourable. While officials are not actively opposed to engaging with this age cohort, they are poorly informed and resourced, have very weak institutional incentives to take a proactive approach and lack the institutionalised space in which developing a holistic and inter-agency approach to tackling multidimensional vulnerabilities might be possible.

[16] Note that at provincial level ministries are referred to as departments.

6 Methodological approach

6.1 Instruments

We used a variety of qualitative and participatory research instruments to explore the ways in which Hmong adolescence is gendered, drawing on a purposively selected sample. This is presented in Table 3; details of the actual interview respondents are represented in Appendix 1.1.

Table 3: Instrument type, purpose and sample

Instrument	Purpose	Who	Number
Focus group discussions (FGDs)	To explore general community-level definitions, views and experiences of gendered adolescence; to identify areas of consensus and debate	Younger adolescent girls (11-14) Older adolescent girls (16-19) Mixed adolescents Mixed adults Women	5
In-depth interviews (IDIs)	To understand individual girls' experiences of adolescence and its gendered dimensions	Younger adolescent girls (13-15) Older adolescent girls (16-18) Adolescent boys (13-18)	• 6 • 4 • 3 13
Life histories	To explore key moments in girls' lives present and past	Older adolescent girls (16-18) Adult women	• 4 • 5 9
Case studies	To explore intra-household dynamics *vis-à-vis* adolescent girls by triangulating views of adults and children; and by gender; includes researcher observation for 24 hours	Family with 17-year-old girl Family with 17-year-old girl	2
Inter-generational pairings	To explore key moments in girls' lives present and past; generational differences in adolescent experiences; could include examples of positive deviance	Family with 16-year-old girl, mother and grandmother Family with 13-year-old girl, mother and grandmother	2
Key informant interviews (KIIs) – provincial and local	To find out about adolescent girls' status, opportunities, challenges, changes over time at the provincial and commune levels	Commune level District level Provincial level	• 8 • 3 • 7 18
Key informant interviews (KIIs) – national	To find out about adolescent girls' status, opportunities, challenges and policy and programming at national level		16
TOTAL interactions			65

A variety of participatory techniques, including body mapping, rankings, timelines and family drawings, were used to stimulate conversation, facilitate recall and build consensus regarding the vulnerabilities of Hmong girls and the opportunities they would need to realise their full potential. Of particular note, in order to elicit girls' opinions about the specific programming they thought would improve their lives, we presented them with a list of possibilities and asked them to choose their top three options – as well as selecting two they could not envisage working. This list can be found in Appendix 2.7.

At design and data collection stages, the field research team consisted of a team of four senior researchers from the Institute for Family and Gender Studies (IFGS), a Hmong research consultant known to the research team lead and a research fellow from ODI. The team lead and the Hmong research consultant participated in a training of trainers in London and then there was a follow up training in Ha Noi for the rest of the research team. Drawing on previous contacts with the Ha Giang province DoLISA, we were able to secure official permission to undertake the research, which was critical given that the research site is in a sensitive frontier area.

At the analysis stage, the research team lead, together with an ODI team consisting of a research fellow, a research consultant and a research assistant, was involved. In order to ensure maximum consistency, following translation of the Vietnamese language transcripts into English, we used a common coding framework. The framework was designed to capture the key themes from our conceptual framework, while also providing ample space for additional sub-themes to emerge from respondent voices. This framework can be found in Appendix 2.8.

6.2 Caveats

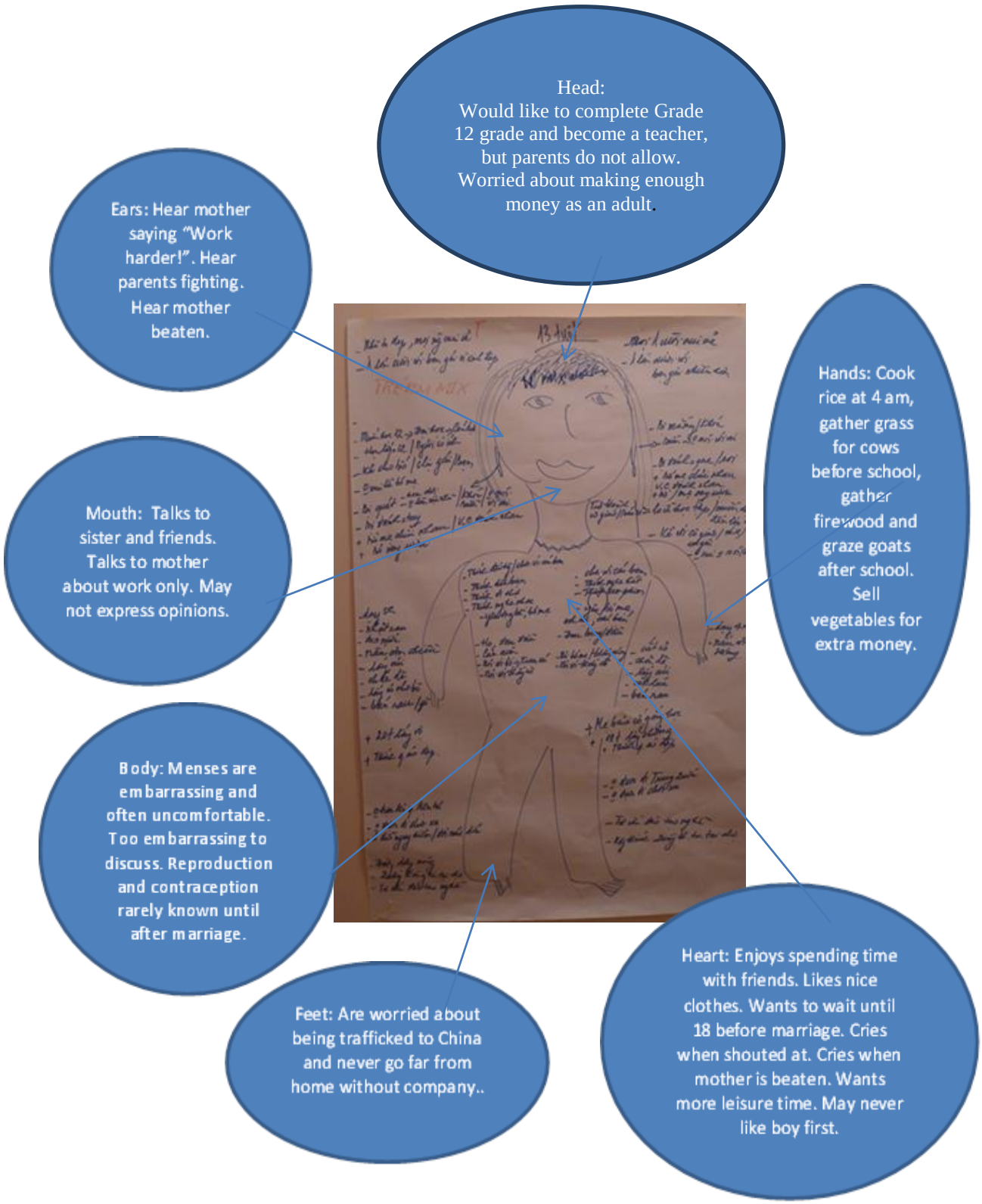
It is important to bear in mind a number of caveats regarding our data. First, it is critical to note that Ha Giang not only is a province with a high ethnic minority population and very high levels of poverty and deprivation, but also is categorised as a frontier state, given its shared border with China (with which the Vietnamese government has a tense relationship). This brings heightened security and surveillance measures and no doubt makes information sharing and open discussions at all levels more challenging.

Second, language barriers were significant. While KIs from the Youth Union assured us that there would be no difficulty communicating with girls, even out-of-school girls, in Kinh, we did not find thid to be the case. Many of the adolescent girls were unable to convey their thoughts fluently in Vietnamese and asked to switch to Hmong. While we had translators available, girls may have felt less secure in the privacy of these interview situations as they were outnumbered.

Third, and linked to both of the first two points, we were not always allowed to interview the younger adolescents alone. The presence of teachers, police and local officials surely restricted the stories those children had to tell, particularly those regarding child–teacher interactions, since many of the interviews took place at school. Similarly, we did not always get to choose our respondents. Local officials in many cases made the decisions about who we were allowed to talk to, albeit following our rubric regarding gender and age.

Finally, while much has been made of inter-ethnic variation among Viet Nam's ethnic minority population, our research points to considerable intra-ethnic variation as well. Even in the context of Ta Lung's poverty, some Hmong families are doing well. The experiences of their daughters speak to positive deviance and may point a way towards the future – but they are not necessarily representative of the experience of most Hmong girls.

Figure 7: Body mapping exercise from an FGD with adolescent girls



7 Gendered adolescence in Hmong communities: Capability deprivations and opportunities

The lives of Hmong girls in Ta Lung are defined by traditional vulnerabilities such as son preference, educational exclusion, excessive work, early marriage and social isolation. Gender norms surrounding the ideas about what makes a good daughter versus a good son are key to understanding girls' experiences from early childhood.[17] As they progress through adolescence, girls are pushed more and more to develop the skills and traits they will need to become good wives and mothers. Understanding these norms – which define not only what girls and women do but also what they *ought* to do (Bicchieri, 2006; Heise, 2011) – is thus required in order to capture the nuances of girls' lives *vis-à-vis* the five capability domains around which our data are organised.

It is also important to understand what Boudet et al. (2012) call 'relaxing' versus 'changing' norms. They distinguish between the two by noting that the former exists in spaces where 'women and men are challenging and perhaps crossing the boundaries of traditional gender roles […] but are not setting a new standard' (p.51). In comparison, changing norms involves recognition of the legitimacy of that boundary crossing. To use Bicchieri (2006)'s language, relaxing norms leads to spaces where descriptive, but not injunctive, norms have altered – because while people *are* crossing boundaries they are not *supposed* to. In comparison, changing norms involves recognition of the legitimacy of that boundary crossing because even what *ought* to be has altered (ibid.). This difference is key to understanding the shifting world of Hmong girls. As Table 4 shows, while some norms have changed, with girls as well as boys now expected to be diligent students, and other norms are relaxing, with some women contributing to family incomes and some men providing care for their children, the overall shape of girls' lives remains largely unchanged from that of their mothers.

[17] This framework draws on Boudet et al. (2012), who found that conceptions of what makes a good wife, husband, daughter or son were 'very consistent across countries and communities' (p.36).

Table 4: Gender norms in Hmong families

A good daughter	**A good wife**
Does not go anywhere alone where she might be kidnapped and trafficked to China	**Does not argue with her husband**
Is obedient in all things	**Works very hard at home and on the farm**
Does the work her mother asks her to do	**Raises her children to be respectful**
Uses her 'free time' to make extra money	**Defers to her husband's decisions**
Keeps her opinions – and feelings – to herself	**Works hard enough to please her in-laws**
Does not ask challenging or sensitive questions	**Does not harass her husband when he has been drinking**
Learns to be a good wife and daughter-in-law	**Contributes to the family income**
Studies hard and does well in school	**Is literate**
A good son	A good husband
Studies hard and does well in school	Is able to support his family
Is not too playful and does not hang around	Does not spend too much time drinking with his friends
May use his free time to watch TV or play ball	Comes to eat when called
Doesn't get drunk	Does not beat his wife, even when he has been drinking
	Helps take care of his wife after childbirth
	Helps watch the children when his wife must work

Key: Black indicates stable norms; orange indicates changing or relaxing norms.

7.1 Education domain

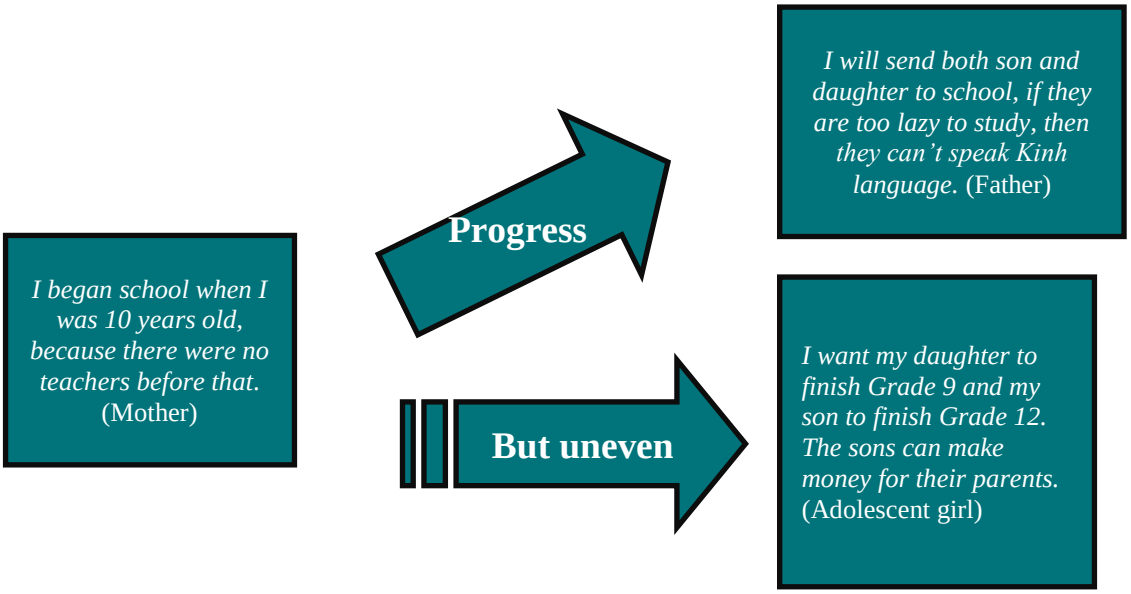
Significant progress is being made towards meeting the educational needs of Hmong girls in Ta Lung. They are, for the most part, now staying in school through Grade 9. This is remarkable, given that the vast majority of their mothers are totally unschooled and largely illiterate, as are many of their fathers. This progress is driven by Viet Nam's commitment to expanding educational opportunities for minority students. With few exceptions, the adults in our research indicated that they had not been able to attend school for the simple reason that there were no schools when they were children. This has now changed. With nearly 400 main schools, which are located in commune centres, and an ever greater number of smaller satellite schools, scattered in the more distant villages, it is now significantly easier for parents in Ha Giang to educate their children. Ta Lung, for example, has its own commune school up to Grade 9 and there are a number of comparatively local options for secondary school (although most involve either day or weekly boarding). While some of the more remote hamlets have schools that only go through Grade 4, there has even been a significant push to enrol children in kindergarten in these schools, in part so their exposure to the Kinh language comes earlier. Schooling options are also increasingly available for older children. KIs note, however, that each district still only has one upper-secondary school, although Meo Vac now also has a continuing education centre providing upper-secondary education as well.[18]

Hmong children in particular have benefited from educational subsidies for minority students. All of the children in our study reported that their education – through Grade 9 – is essentially free. While they are often asked for some small contribution to the school – such as a broom or a lock – they are not responsible for paying tuition fees or buying books. In almost all cases, they also receive free school supplies such as notebooks and pencils. In addition to these incentives, the village levies fines on families who do not keep their children in school through Grade 9. Children are required to attend school daily unless they are ill or have another approved reason. If they are absent without permission, village officials go to their homes and impose a fine of

[18] Physical infrastructure in Meo Vac is still developing, and electronic infrastructure is essentially non-existent. With time, however, distance education via the internet may be an option for children in the most remote villages – and may be more palatable than boarding school for many families.

VND20,000-50,000/day on their parents.[19] One KI noted that when the rules were first imposed about a decade ago many parents were regularly fined. Today, few fines are needed, as families are largely compliant. The key, according to our Youth Union KIs, is simple awareness. They noted, *'Even though the parents are illiterate, they invest a lot of time in their children's education. Even though they don't have much money. The awareness has changed greatly.'* A commune KI, however, noted that, while this process had been very effective at encouraging attendance – which now averages 95% - it remains very labour intensive for villages to implement, as each month *'The Mobilisation Unit will visit each household with absent children to find out about the reasons, and then mobilise the students to go to school.'*

Even more remarkable, given the gendered statistics for Hmong enrolment, is that parents increasingly recognise the value of educating their daughters, at least through Grade 9. Evidencing not just norm relaxation but also a genuine norm change, many of the adults we interviewed – mothers and fathers – made similar comments: *'I do not discriminate between son and daughter. I will let her to go to school.'* There is also growing recognition, long overdue from the girls' perspective, that girls are better students than boys. They are less playful, more obedient and more serious about their studies. As one mother put it, *'Girls never drop out, but boys are playful, I can waste my money. The boys are more stubborn, but girls are more willing to go to school.'* One girl noted that this diligence paid off: *'The girls have better performance.'* A Youth Union KI confirmed, *'At the secondary age group, the girls are more confident and quicker than the boys.'*



Some parents value education for what it will do for their daughters, such as enable them to calculate better, speak Kinh fluently or merely understand the world on a different level. One noted, *'If I keep her at home, she won't know how to do business. If she doesn't go to school, she won't know how to buy goods. If she goes to school, she can learn the language, and can go to the market and take care of the family.'* Another said, *'Fifth graders can't speak the popular language very well so I let them go to Grade 9, so that no one can bully them.'* The importance of upper-secondary school was clear to a few mothers, who observed that children with either a Grade 5 or a Grade 9 education were equally disadvantaged in terms of employment, as the only relevant credential in terms of local employment is a high school diploma. One brother was particularly concerned that his sisters be literate as a way of reducing their risk of being trafficked to China. *'Now many people are deceived and trafficked across the border, so literacy is the first thing you need when going out.'* Other parents tied girls' education to their reproductive capacities, noting that if they were educated then they would be more likely to have healthy babies.

[19] This is a village initiative and is not linked to MoET. Fines, which vary by village, are collected by local Mobilisation Units and are pooled and distributed at the end of the year either to poor students, to help offset costs, or to particularly good students.

Barriers to graduation

However, the overwhelming pattern for the girls in our research was for them to leave school after completing Grade 9. A commune official noted, *'Most of them finish Grade 9 and stay at home. Rich families who are fond of learning send their children to school, poor families don't want their children to go to school and let them stay at home to help parents, find and marry a good husband who will support the family and their children in the future.'* One 15-year-old girl, out of school, commented that of her Grade 9 graduating class, only three or four continued on to upper-secondary school. Another said, *'Out of 32 friends, only a boy is going on in school. He is richer and really wanted to go. The teacher asked me to carry on in school because I was a very good student but I said I had to help my mother.'*

Leaving school is rarely a choice that girls make. Nearly all of the out-of-school girls we interviewed wanted – in most cases desperately – to be in school. They missed learning, they missed the social opportunities school entailed and which were nearly totally absent once they left and they recognised that by leaving school they were limiting their future career options. One very aware and verbal 15-year-old noted, *'I would like to be a teacher but I can't because I've dropped out.'*

In some cases, the decision to leave school early was made by the mother; in most, however, it was made by the father – often despite the fact that the mother had already told her daughter that she could stay in school. *'Mother told me to study if I want. Father said no, because we didn't have money to pay, so I had to stay at home and work.'* While many of the fathers were clearly not supportive of their daughters' education, there were notable exceptions. One girl, finishing Grade 12, said, *'My father is different from other parents. My father always encouraged his children to learn.'* Another girl, 16 and in Grade 10, commented that it was her mother who often did not understand why she worked so hard to stay in school. *'Sometimes she doesn't understand. But I need to explain to her – I need to be in school so I don't have a very poor life – so I can get a job and a better life – and then she understands. Father understands – he wants me to go to school – he doesn't want me to have the same problems as my parents do.'*

KIs confirm that girls leave school after Grade 9 in part for the same reason their brothers do — their labour is needed to help the family make ends meets. *'When I had finished school [Grade 9] there was no money so my parents asked me to stop and come home and work. I wanted to carry on in school but […] there would be no one to help my parents in the rice field. It is the same case with my brother – he had the same reason for dropping out.'* Children can contribute some labour to family endeavours while they are in elementary and lower-secondary school, because those schools are usually local and only half-day, but upper-secondary school usually entails boarding elsewhere, which limits the extent to which children can help with domestic and agricultural chores. The best-case scenario from most parents' perspective is that their older adolescent children come home each weekend and work nonstop while there. Depending on where a family lives, however, and where a child goes to school, visits home may be only every few months.

Girls are not blind to the tensions of this economic reality. While most simply do not continue in school to work with their mothers in the house and fields, they see the costs and benefits of both options. *'I love my family and I know there is now only me to help them out,'* mused one 16 year old, *'but if I don't go to school then I can't help them. I know I can do better to help them if I keep studying.'*

In addition to these opportunity costs, actual expenditures can keep Hmong adolescents out of upper-secondary school. A commune official commented, *'To go to boarding school you need to be a very good student with an excellent record; you need to belong to a poor family. But you also need a lot of support. There is also cooking gas, money to rent a house, transport fees to school.'* Another official acknowledged that government support was not nearly enough: *'The government is providing monthly allowances for them, but based on the market*

price, it's not enough […] it cannot ensure the quality and nutrition requirements of the children in school.' Nearly all of the out-of-school girls we interviewed indicated that cost was a major reason they had had to leave school.

When both opportunity and actual costs are higher than a family can bear, if a child is to be sent to school then in Hmong families it is almost always a son who will be chosen. One girl, unhappily out of school, commented, *'I think that they are boys, so they are allowed to learn more. I am a girl and I have to work, so I am not allowed to learn so much.'* Commune officials confirmed that, when resources are tight, boys are prioritised. Not only do boy children have ceremonial value, because only they can correctly honour the dead, but also, economically speaking, they are vital because they are responsible for providing old-age support. Many mothers – and some girls – confirmed the ubiquity of this belief: *'The daughter will get married and can't make money for their parents. The sons can make money for their parents after graduating.'*

Parents are also very worried about their daughters' safety if they go away to school. As we discuss in greater detail below, concerns about children in general, and girls in particular, being trafficked to China are rampant. In our research, girls, their brothers, their parents and their teachers all mentioned concerns about kidnapping to China. Girls are watched very closely and several mothers reported being nearly frantic when their daughters were late home from school. Mothers attempt to alleviate this concern by ensuring their daughters *'go in groups of two or three people',* but as fewer and fewer girls progress in school this option often ceases to exist. In this context, boarding school is a challenge many mothers simply cannot face.

Interestingly, even in families that clearly value education – and have let one daughter reach Grade 12 or have sent a son to university – it is often the case that another daughter is completely deprived of her rights to an education. For example, one girl, in Grade 12 and planning on becoming a doctor, had two sisters, only a little older than her, who had never been to school. Another family allowed all of its children to graduate from high school except one – a daughter, who was chosen to leave school after only Grade 5. One brother explained this practice, *'Because my parents are old, nobody cares for the family, all of us go to school far away from home, only the 12-year-old sister doesn't go to school. I do ask my parents to send her to school, but my parents have so many children, some of my siblings are too young, at the same time all other siblings go to school, no one is there to help my parents except her.'*

It is worth noting that, while our respondents were silent on the matter, Turner (2012a) found that in Lao Cai Hmong families 'would rather their children learn life skills in the home and fields than learn to write Vietnamese in formal schools' (p.416). It may be these cultural preferences, and not economics, drive school leaving in Ta Lung, and respondents were simply not comfortable speaking out against what they perceived to be politically correct. Regardless, it is very clear girls themselves wish to continue their education.

Barriers to a quality education

Girls who are allowed to stay in school often still face a variety of obstacles. For example, KIs confirmed that all instruction in Ta Lung is in Kinh; the commune is not part of the mother-tongue instruction pilot mentioned earlier. This can make learning difficult for Hmong children, particularly girls, who have less Kinh exposure because of their domestic workloads and close confinement. One girl noted, *'In my case I didn't always understand what was being said very well. Sometimes I could follow, sometimes not. Only one of our teachers could speak Hmong language.'* That same girl reported that some of her teachers were not sympathetic and shouted at her for not understanding. This was not an uncommon experience within our sample. Moreover, in our research we found that even many of the girls who were still enrolled in school struggled to express themselves in Kinh. Out-of-school girls, typically surrounded by only Hmong, struggled even more.

Several girls also commented about the quality of schooling available to them. One noted, 'In remote areas, education is reported as good, in fact it is not good. The school faces many difficulties; there is no library and reference books are insufficient.' Several others commented that those students with less than 'excellent' grades, who were left to attend local lower-secondary schools rather than being sent to boarding schools, received a poorer quality education. Commune officials also commented that boarding schools offered a better education: 'The student who goes to boarding school will learn more advanced academic knowledge; for sure this student will know more than the other one who doesn't go to boarding school.'

I want more information to open my mind, to learn more – about which university to choose, about news, about other countries, other societies – the world. (Adolescent girl)

VS

I am always busy, so I don't think of anything. I only think that I live with my parents. I don't know how to think. I think that I live with parents and work with them. (Adolescent girl)

In part, the perception that a boarding education is better than a local education is driven by girls' time-use patterns. Girls, far more than boys, are juggling both school and work. Girls who live at home often wake by 4am in order to do chores before school, spend their mornings at school and then come home to more chores, all of which have to be done before they can focus again on their homework. This is particularly problematic, as one KI observed, for remote families that do not have electricity at home, because girls do chores up until nightfall and are then forced to do schoolwork by firelight. One girl, determined to complete her high school education, said, *'Chores are a problem as it means I don't have enough time to study and get the knowledge that my friends have. I worry about this. It makes me very stressed about my studies.'* A Youth Union KI echoed this theme: *'Every child is born with intelligence, but that intelligence depends on their access to opportunities. The boys can go out and about, so of course they can develop more, because they have more opportunities.'* Similarly, and we discuss in greater detail below, girls who board during the week are often trying to cram a week's worth of labour into a weekend worth of time. It is only those who board long term who are perceived to have the time to focus on their studies. *'My friends in boarding school had more time to do homework and to read books – so they had better knowledge of Kinh language than me.'* This was confirmed by several girls who used to board, who noted that life was much more pleasant and learning was much easier when they lived at school and had the time to invest in homework. Boys, on the other hand, are often given far more time to study; one girl noted that they were *'given more priorities and parents rarely ask the boys for help'.*

Imagining a way forward

Adolescent girls in our study had highly variable educational goals and aspirations. Many were interested in completing their education and applying to university. They wanted to know how to apply and what education at the university level might look like for them. Several wanted to be doctors – and several more wanted to become teachers and move back to their hamlets in order to help other Hmong students learn. Some girls, as mentioned earlier, recognised that their educational trajectories were already broken and that they needed new – more vocational – goals, such as tailoring skills. Others, the poorest and most remote, could not imagine lives different from those of their mothers. *'I am always busy, so I don't think of anything. I only think that I live with my parents. I don't know how to think. I think that I live with parents and work with them.'*

Even out-of-school girls, however, still have paths open to brighter futures – if they can imagine them and make the financial space to explore them. Several girls commented that, while they were out of school for now,

helping their parents at home, they expected to go back to school once older siblings completed their education and were able to contribute to the family economy. One mother told her daughter, *'When we have better conditions [more economic resources], I will send you to school again.'* While such dreams are presumably largely wishful thinking, given the low number of girls who do make it past Grade 9, and given – as one KI noted – the fact that by that age *'their families have already prepared for them to get married',* these dreams do speak to rising awareness on the part of both girls and their parents.

Several girls also noted that they had married sisters or sisters-in-law who were back in school. Some of these young wives are also young mothers juggling multiple traditional roles while still pursuing their own education. This bears mentioning because, while early marriage is a barrier that precludes education in many cultures, this does not seem to be the case for Viet Nam's Hmong. Even when girls marry young, they do not seem to be leaving school because they are getting married. They get married because they have left school. While this speaks to the restricted life options facing Hmong girls, the difference is critical. As this is the first generation of Hmong girls who have had the option of secondary school, it will be interesting to see how the tradition of early marriage melds with the uptake of modern education.

While a commune KI noted that, 'Once students drop out and stay home and participate in family work, it is hard to have a chance to continue their education,' it is also the case that even adults have options. Other commune KIs noted that the village had an evening class for adult learners – and that adults were paid VND15,000 for each class they attended. One mother, in her mid-30s with young adolescent children, had gone back to school and was now completing her Grade 12 education, although admittedly this was linked to her party affiliation. She was encouraged by the Party to finish secondary school – and is supported by her husband, who watches the children when she must attend class. 'We have a new party secretary who said that those members who haven't completed Grade 12 should go back to school.'

Television also emerged as an important vehicle for non-school education. Almost all of the adolescents – and many of the mothers – mentioned watching television for educational purposes. *'I've learnt a lot of good things from the television,'* said one mother. Most respondents watch the news and many watch Hmong programming, if not at their own homes, since not all families can afford a television, then at a neighbour's. Several mentioned that watching Kinh language films improved their language skills.

I will let them reach Grade 12 and try to send them to vocational training by any means. Both of them. I am poor. We parents are illiterate – so I will grow the cows and pigs to pay for their education. By any means. (Mother)

+

I can choose my own happy life. My parents can't provide the life I need or afford it – they can't make me happy so I have to make my own choices, and treasure my happiness. I want to finish school. (Adolescent girl)

I went to kindergarten by my own. My mom didn't allow me to go but I sneaked out. My uncle took his child to kindergarten and I went with him. My uncle registered me. A few days after, my mom knew. (Adolescent girl)

My aunt and uncle encouraged me to go to school when I was in the primary school. They said that I ought to go to school. (Adolescent girl)

The key to keeping girls in school is the ability – either individually or through encouragement by others – to envisage a different sort of future. Girls – and the adults in their lives – have to be able to imagine a better future if they are to continue to invest time and money in schooling. Particularly once opportunity and real costs increase, with the transition to upper-secondary school, girls and their families must have a clear vision of what they are working for. They must also, of course, have financial space that allows them to maximise their earning potential by delaying their entrance to the labour market. Interestingly, in our study no clear patterns emerged about which girls and which parents were most able to dream. In some cases, it was clear that girls with big plans for themselves came from wealthier families. In other cases, as can be seen in the boxes above, girls – and mothers – were obviously extremely poor and yet still willing to sacrifice the present in order to secure the future. It is also important to note that a number of girls with dreams said it was the men in their

lives who had helped them see new possibilities. While several girls mentioned the importance of their father's support, several others also spoke of the roles played by their uncles or brother-in-laws.

Given the close relationship between dashed dreams and disenchantment it is important not only to foster imaginations and enable girls and their parents to dream, but also to make sure those dreams connect in the adulthood to life options that validate them. This is, as has been mentioned, the first formally educated generation of Hmong children. If these children are able to see and grasp a better future, educating subsequent generations will be significantly easier. On the other hand, if this 'test' generation does not see their investment pay off, there is a real chance that girls could become discouraged, further entrenching low educational aspirations and poverty – as well as gender inequality.

7.2 Economic domain

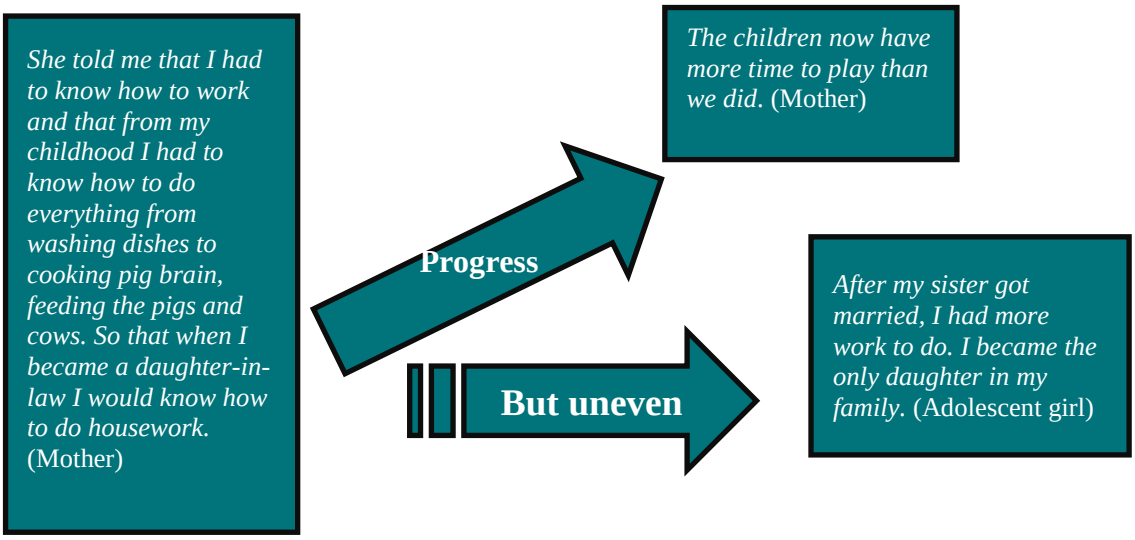
Ta Lung commune and Meo Vac district are situated in an area in which agricultural land and water are scarce. Given that most Hmong families in the area still practise subsistence farming, it is not difficult to understand why poverty rates are so high. Conditions have, however, significantly improved compared with a generation ago. Infrastructure projects have brought roads – and some jobs – and poverty relief programmes have reduced hunger. This is borne out in our research; very few girls mentioned being hungry. While they often spoke of a generalised fear of hunger, usually then noting that they would be very sure to give birth to only two children as two are easier to feed than many, only a very small minority of adolescents said they ate less than three meals a day. One grandmother commented that this was because the government provided rice to families in economic hardship as part of its safety net package; one girl said that when her family was hungry she enlisted her teacher to get help from the commune authorities.

Recent targeted support programmes have worked well enough, noted one KI, that Hmong migration rates in Ta Lung have actually dropped over the past decade. While out-migration is a common strategy that many Vietnamese families use to improve their economic mobility – with older adolescent girls among the most likely groups to migrate – migration is less common among minorities in general and the Hmong in particular (GSO, 2011c). While this may, as Catherine Locke notes,[20] be the 'elephant in the room' – in that the migration may be necessary in order for Hmong families to move beyond subsistence farming and out of poverty – Hmong culture tends to see ethnic identity as more important than national borders and a strong cultural attachment as more critical than economic success (Michaud, 2008; 2010). The fact that the Hmong of Ta Lung have reduced migration therefore speaks to the fact that their poverty has eased enough for them to stay home. Even so, for many, coping with the costs of accessing basic services and ensuring children are adequately clothed to cope with frequently hostile winters remains a struggle – and one, as noted previously, that is likely to likely to intensify with increasing pressure on arable land and water.

Moreover, work remains a constant theme of concern for the adults and adolescents in our study. With few exceptions, everyone we interviewed commented about the plethora of tasks they had to accomplish every day in order to make ends meet. One brother said, *'The difficulty is in money matters – because people in the mountainous areas face economic difficulties.'* A girl noted that, *'In my village people work harder, life is more difficult, food is insufficient.'* While several KIs observed that there were more opportunities recently for wage labour – as a highly sporadic, weather-dependent supplement to farm income – most of these opportunities are available only to men. One adolescent girl noted, *'You can earn VND80,000 per day for market work but*

[20] Personal communication.

typically this is just for men, not for women.' This has meant that, while men are expanding their repertoire of economic activities (to include, for example, carpentry or construction site work), girls and women are left at home, doing not just the same work but also more of it. Finally, it is worth noting, given that the vast majority of recent research on the Hmong has taken place in Lao Cai, not Ha Giang, that economic opportunities are very different across provinces. While the former has seen an influx of tourism that has brought both job opportunities and a broader exposure to new ideas, there are many fewer visitors to Meo Vac district.



Gendered economics

Gender norms surrounding economics are only just beginning to relax. Most Hmong men are farmers and work in the fields. As mentioned above, some also take on wage labour if it is available and if their land allocation is not sufficient – in terms of either size or soil fertility – to provide a decent income. Most Hmong women are also engaged in agricultural tasks – they have primary responsibility for livestock, field maintenance and harvesting – and are also responsible for domestic caretaking. Some also sew and make and sell wine, contributing to family incomes at least minimally. Hmong children, boys and girls, typically work with their mothers until the boys become old and strong enough to work beside their father. Hmong girls are very busy. In addition to attending school, often a morning shift that runs from 7am until noon, they gather grass for cows, gather fuel wood, graze goats, feed pigs and chickens, harvest vegetables, cook and sweep the house and in some cases also care for younger siblings.

Box 11: 'Time off' for Hmong women

As Boudet et al. (2012) note, around the world '[u]nlike men, women use their free or spare time to work; they simply shift activities' (p.53). This is certainly true for Hmong women.

One mother explained that when she was a child her family was both very large and very poor. When she was 10 years old her mother gave her her 'own' piece of land, so that she could grow her own crops and sell them to make money in order to buy her own clothes. She noted, *'I spent my time off to work. I grew the corn and sold it to make my own money.'* She used that money as seed money to purchase the supplies she needed to make wine – again learning from her mother. By the time of her marriage, at 18, she had amassed enough money to purchase livestock of her own to take with her into marriage. *'In the year when I was 18 years old, I had saved VND1 million. In the past money was more valuable. When I got married the savings were used to buy the pigs and chicken to raise in my family.'* Because her husband was also willing to work very hard, they were able to save enough money to move into their own home after only two years of marriage. She noted, *'Hmong people up here work together on the field to have food, harvesting corn and share with parents-in-law. We spend time off to make our own money.'*

Confirming the traditions of the larger Hmong community discussed earlier, almost all the adolescents in our research agreed with the KIs that the hardest-working person in their family was their mother. *'In my family, my mother works the hardest,'* was a constant refrain – sometimes coupled with statements such as, *'My father doesn't help my mother,'* or, *'Mother works very hard, father just stays home.'* Most girls believed that, after their mother, their father was the hardest worker. Owing to internalised norms, few girls were able to recognise their own contributions to the family economy – only one girl admitted her role: *'I have the main responsibility for the house. Still my mother works even harder as she has to work when I'm at school too.'*

While boys and girls are largely engaged in the same type of tasks, the overwhelming consensus, of girls, brothers, mothers and KIs, was that girls work more – and at younger ages – than boys. Because they are seen as less 'playful' and more obedient, daughters are given more responsibility around the farm and home. One mother explained, *'In general, in the Hmong ethnic group, the boys do less than the girls. It is because daughters are nicer. When I give orders to my daughter she is more active.'* A commune official noted that, '*In the Hmong group, usually girls start working one to two years earlier […] because girls often complete the tasks better*.'

For example, many girls – and none of their brothers – mentioned that they must rise at 4am in order to cook breakfast for their family. *'In the morning I get up earlier than my parents, and then I have to finish the housework before coming to school.'* As mentioned above, in the afternoons after school, most girls have a full set of tasks they must finish before they can begin their homework. Girls who live at school, while protected from endless chores during the week, often spend their weekends engaged in labour. Finally, as was eloquently expressed above by an older brother, even in families in which some girls are given the time off work to pursue an education, often another daughter is left at home to be a drudge.

Some girls clearly see their brothers as lazy, noting, for example, that, *'Many times he is lazy and doesn't get up to cook.'* Others, however, particularly those with older brothers, acknowledged that their brothers worked very hard; several girls said, *'They work more than me.'* One even commented, *'When I am cooking, for example, I can ask my brothers for help.'* Similarly, those with younger brothers are often careful to ascribe the lack of work the brother does as a factor of his age, rather than his gender. When talking about gathering firewood, for example, one young adolescent graciously explained, *'Sometimes my brother also does it, but he only does it when I'm away because he's still small.'* Given the gender roles surrounding work in the Hmong community, which not only sees girls' extra burden as a normal part of life – *'That is how work is divided. For adults, the wife does more than husband, so the daughter has to do more than the son.'* – but also views the nature of boys' work as harder and more important *'because their work is heavier'*, it is little wonder girls do not complain.

While a more complete account of girls' 'free' time – or lack thereof – follows shortly, it bears mention here that even girls' recreational experiences often involve work. For example, many of the adolescents in our research noted that their time with friends was limited to gathering firewood and cutting grass for cows. While these experiences were called 'joyful' and girls very much looked forward to them, the focus of girls' time remains work. See Box 11 for a more complete story of what 'time off' means to Hmong women.

As noted earlier, marriage often means girls' already busy lives become even busier. One mother commented, *'Old ladies are demanding. Living with husband's family, it was difficult to take a rest.'* Another said, *'When moving to live in the husband's house I should do such thing as getting up as early as 4am and cooking meals for the parents-in-law.'* Girls clearly understand this lifestyle; most said the difficulties of being a daughter-in-law represented one reason they did not wish to marry early. Above and beyond the difficulties in finding a good boy to marry, one confessed, *'I worry that the parents of the groom will get angry that I won't be able to do all the work they give me to do.'* This work is acknowledged even by younger sisters-in-law. One girl, commenting that her brother used to do the dishes and cook before he got married, said, *'After he married, his wife does those*

things, my sister-in-law washes dishes.' Ironically, marriage can be burdensome for unmarried girls too: when their sisters leave home they are forced to shoulder two shares of work. One younger sister explained, *'After she got married, I had more work to do. I became the only daughter in my family.'*

Changes over time

As mentioned above, the economic situation of Hmong families in Ta Lung is getting better over time. In part, this has to do with the penetration of electricity, which now reaches 80% of households in the commune, and the spread of technology. Many women and girls mentioned that their families had motorbikes, which allow them to get crops to market more easily, thus increasing their incomes. *'The motorbike carries heavy loads for me, making me less busy,'* said one woman. Another girl noted that her life was much easier now because her family had a corn grinder. *'Having the machines helped me to work less – it means I can take corn and make flour easily. Before we had to do a lot of grinding – now we just put it in the machine. My dad's carpentry job allowed us to afford this. When I was younger – about 10 years – we had to work much harder.'* Furthermore, while several women mentioned that they had been responsible by the age of five or six for minding smaller siblings, none of the girls in our research said they were responsible for familial child care.[21] While they almost certainly do spend time helping with younger brothers and sisters, today's smaller families are clearly translating into a less onerous burden of care for big sisters. Overall, while women and girls were very clear that they still worked all the time, there was a consensus that things were getting better. One girl commented, *'I see that they (my grandmother and mother) are more disadvantaged than me. They have to work on the field so much.'*

Inheritance, assets and money

Inheritance rights – or lack thereof – play a significant role in shaping girls' economic lives. Girls and their mothers explained that land was always divided among sons, as daughters were expected to have access to their husband's land. One mother said, *'When my sons were small, I gave the land to their older sisters only. When my daughters had grown up and got married, I took back the land and divided again and gave it to my three sons.'* These inheritance patterns play into not only how much schooling girls are allowed to pursue, as there is little point seen in investing in 'other people's women', but also, as we discuss below, their time poverty.

Interestingly, other assets do not seem to follow the same pattern as land. Given that adolescents have a different relationship with assets than do adults, owning few themselves, the girls in our research did not report any gendered access. Not only are they, for example, allowed to use 'family equipment' such as the corn grinder mentioned above, but also they speak of it as if it is joint property. Furthermore, many girls mentioned owning their own mobile phones – and that they were sometimes the sole owner of the only one in their household. Some use them to 'check in' with their parents when they are away at school. Some use them to keep in touch with married sisters who have moved to other communes. Some use them to listen to music or stay in touch with friends. All, however, were clear that the phones were personal property that had been gifted to them, primarily by their parents.

Money also failed to emerge as a strongly gendered theme in our research. None of the women and few of the girls saw men as being in charge of all financial decisions. Some women said they shared responsibility for purchases with their husband: *'When I was going buy something, I had to discuss with my husband before buying,'* said one woman. Many women, however, were very clear that money was actually theirs to distribute: *'I keep the money, I am prime caretaker of the family so I keep money,'* insisted one. Another commented, *'He brings money to me. If he needs money to spend on something else, he will ask me.'*

[21] A KI noted that primary school girls – not adolescent girls – often mind their younger siblings. While this did not emerge in our interviews, it bears mentioning.

Few of the girls in our research actually have their own income.[22] When they do, however, they turn their money over to their mothers. *'I sell vegetables to have money and give my mother,'* said one. This does not, however, mean girls do not have access to money. All the girls who mentioned money said their parents, usually but not always their mother, gave them money to spend on things for themselves: *'She would give me if I asked her*.' While some girls purchase necessary items like sanitary pads and a basic wardrobe – *'two skirts, two tops and a jacket each year*' – with their allowances, others buy candy and small items they think are pretty. Only one girl noted that she was not allowed to make her own purchases. She explained that her family was so poor that if she needed something her mother would buy it for her. *'I ask both parents for money, then I go with mother and she buys it for me. Many times, I want to buy a thing, but my family is poor. My mother doesn't have money and father doesn't have money so neither do I.'*

Only one mother expressed any gendered preferences regarding money. While she knew it was wrong, and would result in hurt feelings, she admitted that if she had only a little money she would give it to her son first. *'I will give the son first and the daughter later. I will give it to the son first. The daughter will get married and follow her husband, the son is responsible to care for the family, but I should give both. Otherwise, one of them will be hurt and sad.'*

Ethnicity-related barriers

Hmong girls, and their families, face several economic barriers related to ethnicity. First, as one girl noted, they lack the connections that are often required in order to obtain a good job. *'I'm worried as I don't have a relative in government – so I worry I can't get a good job like Kinh people. You need good connections to get a good job – need money to get a job. Even if you have the knowledge you can't always get a good job. It is harder for Hmong people than Kinh people. Teachers, doctors, police – you need more connections, to be richer, to have more opportunities.'* While minorities are supposed to be given preferential treatment in local hiring, with quotas for some government positions according to our KIs, the reality is that most Hmong, even those who are qualified, find it difficult to obtain jobs. This is highly problematic given that, if girls are to dream, they need evidence that their dreams can come true.

In comparison, one KI noted that education – or lack thereof – was the single largest obstacle to Hmong employment. *'After lower-secondary school, they can't find a job. It requires the applicant to finish upper-secondary school with a vocational certificate of a certain vocational high school. Many people who finished lower-secondary school or Grade 9 can't find a job.'* While Hmong educational attainment is much higher today than it was only a decade ago, the minimum required education for employment is also increasing. In the past, it may have been sufficient for a Hmong applicant merely to be literate. Today, jobs often require substantially more.

It is again worth highlighting differences between our respondents and those who have participated in research in Lao Cai. While acknowledging that our research was not aimed fundamentally at livelihoods, we sensed no reticence about wage employment. Most of our respondents spoke as if they would like to have more opportunities to make money, and girls in particular were interested in more regular employment. This could, of course, be an artefact of the reality that such options are vanishingly rare in their world.

Finally, while national policy is directing efforts towards the provision of vocational training for out-of-school adolescents, these efforts tend not only to reinforce traditional gender roles, but also to be disconnected from the local context and actual employment opportunities. One KI commented, *'Skillsets often don't match actual needs or job requirements.'* For example, boys are being taught masonry skills, even when masonry jobs are rarely available, and girls are being taught sewing and weaving, laboriously making items that sell for very little in local markets given that tourists are rare. Girls often see training as futile: *'After the sewing class, I will stay at home to do housework only.'* Furthermore, little effort seems to be being made with regard to tracking the efficacy of training. KIs reported that they kept statistics only on the number of youth trained, and which training courses they took. Statistics are not gender disaggregated.

[22] The research team noted that when they saw adolescents working for pay, selling vegetables and such, girls were more likely than boys to be engaged. Boys almost exclusively worked – without pay – for their family.

While the Hmong are less likely than other ethnic groups to migrate, as mentioned above, they are not immune to the pull of jobs in China. Given the location on the Chinese border, KIs reported that some young men – and very occasionally whole families – were illegally migrating to China for work. While an agreement has been signed between Viet Nam and China, theoretically providing a measure of protection for these Vietnamese migrants, commune-level KIs reported that they actively discouraged migration – while recognising the power of poverty. Based on our interviews with girls, parents and KIs, migration does not appear to be a path open to girls; for them, the door to China involves trafficking.

7.3 Physical integrity and sexual and reproductive health

Evidencing genuinely changing – rather than merely relaxing – norms, significant progress is being made towards meeting the SRH needs of Hmong girls, at a number of levels. First, laws prohibiting the marriage of Vietnamese girls under the age of 18, and boys under the age of 20, are slowing, if not stopping, the incidence of child marriage. That none of the girls or mothers in our study expressed a preference for early marriage suggests awareness-raising campaigns are having an impact. Second, while Hmong families are still very large by national standards (they average five children, compared with a national average of two), many of the mothers had used contraception to limit their family size, and none of the girls wanted more than two children. On the other hand, reproduction is clearly a topic that makes Hmong families deeply uncomfortable. With girls getting little information at home – and little from the community around them –more efforts are clearly needed to prepare girls for the challenges of womanhood.

Menstruation

While a few girls admitted being scared, and several ashamed, when they began menstruating, most of the girls in our research indicated – at least retrospectively – that they knew the onset of menses was a normal part of growing up: *'Why was I worried if it didn't kill me?'* asked one. That said, while girls' retrospective reporting was focused on 'normal', most conversations about girls' first periods were coloured by fear, despite the words they chose. As girls' information seems to come mostly from their friends, those who lived at boarding school had a definite advantage. *'I was not scared. I lived in the boarding school where there were many friends and older girls in my room.'* Information about puberty from other sources seems to be lacking. One mother said, *'Hmong children never touch the sensitive issues'.* Youth Union KI's said school-based classes provided *'consultations and introduction about the development and changes in their body, so that they wouldn't be bewildered when they saw too rapid changes'.* While KIs claimed these classes were *'a requirement that the school programme must include'*, not all girls mentioned having had such instruction. Furthermore, most reported being unable to remember much if anything about the content. Finally, basic hygiene remains an issue. Although girls were well aware of modern hygiene products, their access was quite limited, particularly if they lived in more remote communes. Similarly, while all girls reported that their schools had bathroom facilities, Youth Union KIs noted that for parts of the year some schools lacked running water owing to severe shortages in the region.

Mothers only rarely provide instruction to their daughters. There is a strong cultural taboo that women were willing to break only if their daughters had not acquired information in another way. One mother said, *'Hmong people up here hesitate to talk about it so I can't teach her in advance. When she has her period, if she doesn't know, I will tell her. If she knows, I won't.'* This taboo is strong both ways. While girls talk about their periods with their sisters and their sisters-in-law, they are very hesitant to talk to their mothers. One girl expressed concern that her mother would talk to her friends, which might ultimately mean boys would hear that she was menstruating – a horrifying thought for her. There are exceptions. One mother, for example, taught her daughter how to clean her clothes. *'She told me to wash clothes carefully.'* Another went so far as to warn her daughter

about premenstrual syndromes. The girl explained, *'They told me that when I had my monthly, I would have changes such as quick-temperedness and anger.'*

Premarital sexual activity

While again acknowledging that sexual activity is a difficult conversation topic, in our interviews neither adolescents themselves nor their parents were able to mentally decouple sexuality from marriage. This is surprising on several fronts. First, as mentioned earlier, traditional Hmong customs blurred the line between the onset of sexuality and marriage, with some sources reporting early sexual experiences as more common than not and most describing marriage customs as simple as a single shared night.[23] Layered on top of culture is the emerging modern reality, unfolding around the world, that suggests that a rising age of marriage is ultimately inevitably linked to increasing rates of premarital sexual activity. This link is evident in T.H. Nguyen et al.'s (2011) study, also undertaken in Meo Vac, which reported that premarital sex was not uncommon, especially for Hmong girls who were still in school.

> *I don't allow her to have nonsense relationship. She is strictly forbidden to hang around and flirt with boys. She will be allowed to sleep with her husband only when she gets married, not now.* (Mother)

In our sample, however, all of the teenagers we interviewed, boys and girls, reported that serious relationships between students were a bad thing because they would interfere with studying. Adolescents in our FGDs indicated that out-of-wedlock pregnancy would result in expulsion. Out-of-school girls, on the other hand, clearly lack the time and mobility required to engage in recreational activities, sexual or otherwise. Boys reported that they would not seriously pursue girls until they had a stable job and could support a family, and girls reported that they were wary of even being seen with boys. *'If I walked with them outside then people would understand something different, would gossip,'* said one, clearly thinking of her reputation and the Hmong requirement to 'uphold the family face'.

Our KIs confirmed these experiences. One said that the issue of premarital pregnancy was confined largely to Kinh families, and *'increases due to the cultural and social development in many forms such as pictures, internet, restaurants and karaoke. The access to such things leads to higher emotional levels and knowledge, resulting in unwanted pregnancy.'* Another KI noted that, while premarital sexual activity was rare among Hmong adolescents, it was easily dealt with, as any pregnancy could rapidly be followed with marriage.

Marriage

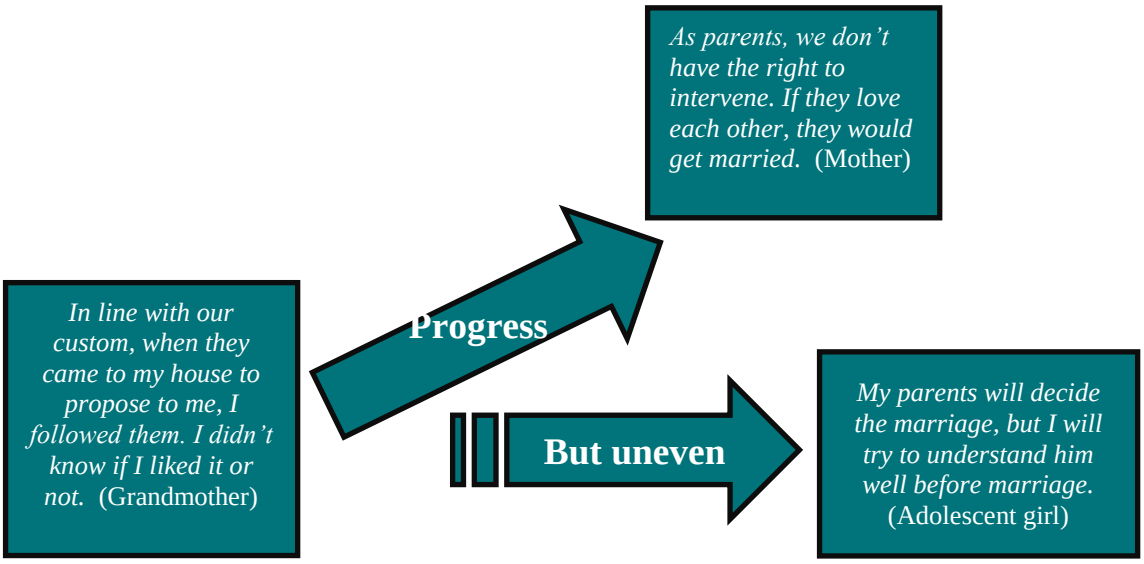
Hmong girls, as was noted above, are very likely to marry early, sometimes, according to our KIs, as early as 13 or 14. Many of these child marriages are to relatives and, as they are illegal, are neither registered nor trackable. One mother commented that all of her 17-year-old daughter's cohorts had already married. Several girls mentioned friends and cousins – and in one case a sister – who had married underage. All of these girls believed the partners involved wanted the marriage. One said, *'My older sister also went to school until Grade 9 and then she got married. I don't agree with that but she wanted to.'* A mother in an FGD confirmed that early marriage could be driven by personal choice. She said, *'If my daughter wants to get married when she is 16 years old, I will agree. She may be happy or may not, but I trust her and agree.'* While girls and their mothers reported that early marriage was a 'choice' that many girls make, it is important, as mentioned previously, to note that it is a highly restricted choice. In the face of longstanding cultural norms and a near absence of other options, Lemoine (2012a) notes that marriage is less a free choice than simply the only open path.

While family formation among the Hmong remains precocious by Vietnamese standards, it is clear that the law is helping stem the tide. Our respondents indicated that when child marriages came to the attention of the authorities the children were returned to their family, and a fine was levied against parents.[24] As one mother observed, *'Without the state's attention, some Hmong people married their daughters at the age of 12 or 13 years. Thanks to the state's attention and close control, the girls now have lovers when they are matured.'*

[23] Sources report myriad, diverse customs: see Lemoine (2012a), the *Hmong Studies Journal*'s bibliography on Hmong Courtship and Marriage Practices (www.hmongstudiesjournal.org/hmong-courtship-and-marriage-practices.html) and blogs, written primarily by US Hmongs.

[24] This is reported to be quite rare now.

That having been said, none of the girls we interviewed was interested in early marriage. All of them were more interested in finding a job first: *'I don't want to get married early because I won't have a job by then.'* Likewise, all of the mothers were committed to their daughters waiting until at least the legal age of 18 – and often much longer. Most respondents thought 20 or 25 was a good age for marriage; one mother thought 30 would be best, so her daughter could finish university and establish a career first. Fathers also evidenced understanding of the benefits of delaying marriage, with one pointing out that, *'If she gets married too early, she won't be able to educate her babies and the babies will not develop well.'*



Despite the fact that delaying marriage was universally seen as desirable, most of the girls, presumably reflecting the culture in which they live, were very worried about being forced to marry too young, before they were ready. Some were concerned that they did not know enough to get married: *'I want to get married once I know more things and have more experience – cooking corn, working in the field – only then do I want to get married*.' Others were worried they would not be able to please their in-laws. KIs confirmed that new brides were placed in a difficult situation: *'According to Hmong group traditions up here, a new bride has to do more work than her sisters-in-law; she can also be judged by the sisters-in-law and parents-in-law, they will say that this bride doesn't know to do family work.'* Most girls, however, were very worried that if they chose early then they might choose a boy who would not make a good husband. '*Loving relationships may be broken easily and we may hate each other quickly,'* said one girl. Given, as we discuss in greater detail below, the prevalence of alcoholism and domestic violence in the Hmong community – both known first-hand to many girls – their trepidation is well founded.

As mentioned earlier, the choice of marriage partners seems to be increasingly left to the young men and women involved, albeit in a very specific context that has roots in arranged marriage and even today still relies heavily on parental approval. *'Hmong people,'* explained one mother, *'can't accept forced love.'* Over the course of our interviews, only two marriages – one of an interviewed grandmother and one of the parents of an interviewed girl – ha been arranged. *'I have heard about my parents. They said that they didn't love each other but their parents told them to marry. It is unlike today. My parents told me that they allow me to choose.'* The other marriages mentioned in our research were all explicitly discussed as being 'freely' chosen – and often based on local notions of romantic love. Even the one girl who said her parents would choose her husband was very clear she would get to *'understand him well'* before the marriage. While the girls clearly do have say in whom they will ultimately marry, it is also clear they are constrained in other ways. For example, they are not, according to several respondents, to express any interest in boys before boys express an interest in them. One mother said of Hmong custom, *'I have to tell you that women don't have the right to be interested in men first. It is the men who are interested in you first.'*

Bride kidnapping

Bride kidnapping, or 'seizing a wife after Tet',[25] is a traditional Hmong custom, but one that appears to be dying out quickly. One respondent explained, *'The custom of wife kidnapping no longer exists because two years ago the commune authority decided to stop it. Some people didn't obey. But every time when they kidnapped wives they were fined from VND500,000 to VND1 million, then they obeyed it.'*

While several mothers – and a fair number of girls – reported being worried about kidnapping when explicitly asked, this anxiety seemed to be generalised rather than specific. Few girls reported knowing anyone who had been kidnapped, and all agreed that, even if a girl were kidnapped, it would be relatively easy for her to leave before 'marriage' took place. While she might have to stay with the boy's family for one or two days, she could always simply walk away after that. Most of the mothers were very blunt and simply pronounced, *'Now two people get married only both of them reach consensus, they don't kidnap.'*

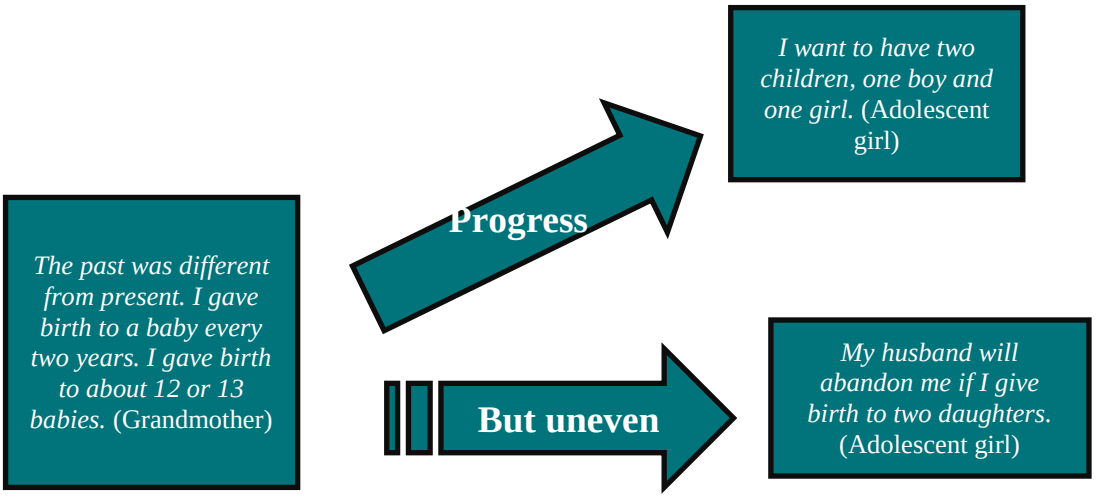
Given the figures about wife kidnapping collected by T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011) in 2008, the sentiments expressed by our respondents are interesting on two fronts. In their sample of Hmong women in Meo Vac, the authors found that nearly one-quarter had been married after abduction, but that most of these (15% of the total) had been captured voluntarily in order to marry someone of their own choosing. It is therefore intriguing that girls in our study reported only fear of kidnapping – and nothing that suggested they could use the custom to meet their own needs. It is also surprising how few actual kidnappings our respondents were able to identity. Perhaps the commune-specific fines can explain the latter.

Contraception

As mentioned above, the Hmong birth rate, while high, is dropping rapidly, largely because of the national government's drive to lower population growth. Mothers reported that the Women's Union provided good training on contraception – through its No Third Child Club – and commune KIs reported that the local health clinic worked hard to provide contraceptives compatible with remote conditions and heavy workloads – *'Because in this high-land area, if we give contraceptive injections, maybe they won't remember; the women have to work in the fields all day, maybe they won't have time to think about the monthly injections. The main method is contraceptive coil.'* Several mothers specifically noted using contraception to ensure they had no more than two children. One said, *'People urge me to have more babies but I say no. It is difficult to feed two children, so I cannot have more babies.'* Interestingly, it was occasionally **their** mothers, who had raised very large families (10-13 children) in desperate poverty, who encouraged them to embrace family planning. *'My mother told me I should use the contraceptive ring and let the first baby to grow up before giving birth to the second baby,'* explained one mother. Girls themselves were very clear that they wanted no more than two children – preferably one girl and one boy. Choosing to have no children, however, did not seem to be an option open to the girls in our sample, one of whom noted that if she did not have two children, including at least one boy, her husband would leave her for another woman.

Unlike the girls in T.H. Nguyen et al.'s study, adolescent Hmong girls in our research knew few specifics about contraception. Like menstruation, the topic is largely taboo between mothers and daughters, although older sisters and sisters-in-law again shared information with some girls – who knew enough details to specify that they preferred rings over pills, which were less efficacious if forgotten. The KI from the Women's Union explained that mothers were afraid that if they gave their daughters details about reproduction and contraception it would encourage sexual experimentation. One mother confirmed this: *'Daughters don't talk about intimate matters with mothers. I just forbid her instead of teaching her.'* While the KI mentioned a Women's Union initiative to help teach mothers how to talk to their daughters about SRH, it was unclear whether this type of programming had made it to Meo Vac – or whether, given cultural predilections, it would be accepted if and when it did. Several older adolescents, closer to marriage and motherhood, expressed a desire for more information regarding contraception. The younger adolescents, however, made comments such as, *'I will ask my mother when I get married.'*

[25] Tet is the Vietnamese New Year based on the lunar calendar.



Adolescents also receive little information about contraception in school. While several commented that they had been explicitly taught about family planning in class, they were uniform in the sentiment that, *'We do have classes but they don't provide practical advice. They don't share information for example about menstruation or family planning.'* Another explained, *'I know about injections, IUD, pill – but just heard about them – I never really learned.'* Youth Union KIs reported that this information was covered in their When I am 18 programme, which is allegedly presented to all secondary students in all secondary schools. However, while the curriculum appears to be fairly comprehensive, its delivery leaves much to be desired: it is broadcast over school loudspeakers during flag-saluting ceremonies.[26]

A KI at the health clinic confirmed that, like in much of Viet Nam, there was little classroom information available to girls. Furthermore, she noted that information was presented as a one-off subject and was poorly integrated into the curriculum. With more staff, and a larger budget for education, she believed there could be much better information disseminated through the schools: *'It [reproductive health] is important to introduce to school, integrate into classes and lectures, so that students see it as an important issue. If I just come to talk, they may or may not listen to me. If it is integrated into classes, it will be more valuable.'* Another KI observed that even these limited school-based classes were often unavailable in remote villages. Furthermore, because of the *'too difficult'* conditions in mountainous Ha Giang, *'life skills education classes',* which include information on puberty and reproduction, are taught, according to our Youth Union KIs, not by trained outsiders but by main classroom teachers, who are usually Kinh men. An older girl astutely identified the problem with this approach: *'My teachers are shy and everybody is shy. In general, we read about it in books and newspapers.'*

Unmarried adolescents in Ta Lung also have little access to community-based contraceptive education, because they are not allowed to join the Women's Union, which does disseminate information, until they are either married or 18. This is particularly problematic for out-of-school girls. One KI noted that each quarter the health clinic visited each hamlet to provide HIV education, and that family planning was sometimes implicitly covered in this programming. She noted, however, that this programming was not aimed at adolescents, did not cover information relating to puberty and did not explicitly address contraception. She concluded by explaining that often the only community-based information provided to adolescents came in the form of a 30-minute class that they are given when they apply for their marriage licence.

Despite these inadequacies, the government is heavily invested in family planning as a means to lower local birth rates. One girl explained what she had learnt in her reproductive biology class: *'I have also learnt in school only to have two children. If you have fewer children, the government doesn't give you problems.'* Health clinic workers visit each hamlet, according to our KIs, twice a year, and perform gynaecological exams, place devices such as vaginal rings and intrauterine devices (IUDs) and dispense contraceptive pills. Condoms, on the other hand, are rarely used – either in our study site or in Viet Nam at large.[27] Our health department KI noted that

[26] These ceremonies take place once a week and serve as a time for schools to make announcements to students.

[27] In both the 1997 and 2002 Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) samples, less than 6% of currently married couples were using condoms (http://statcompiler.com/).

women would sometimes get them for their husbands, if they could not tolerate hormonal family planning methods, but that this was unusual.

As part of a push to get the Hmong population to utilise health services – rather than the shamans discussed earlier – the health clinic hires and trains Grade 9 graduates in local hamlets to provide basic health care and make referrals. However, the clinic KI noted that all of these local providers, who are paid VND300,000/month, were male – either because women are busy with their own families or because it is assumed that soon after marriage they will be. Furthermore, while each Hmong village is supposed, according to a 2013 government directive, to have its own paid midwife, Ta Lung has – of yet – been unable to locate and train a suitable candidate. This makes it difficult for adolescents to access local information, as *'there is a distance and hesitation between hamlet medical male workers and […] female teenagers aged from 15 to 19 years if they talk about contraceptive methods'.*

Childbearing

Hmong girls in our research expressed concern about the prospect of becoming mothers. Several made statements such as, *'If I get married one day then I'm not sure how I would look after children.'* While most of their concern seems to be driven by economic fear, several of the mothers we interviewed explained that Hmong women had a relatively unique set of concerns – at least in the Vietnamese context – with regard to childbearing, driven largely by the specific cultural constraints mentioned earlier. For example, all of the births explicitly mentioned in our study took place at home, attended only by husbands and mothers-in-law, both of whom have more power to make decisions than young mothers. Even the relatively educated women, who understood the value of modern health care, were unable to negotiate the distance to the health clinic when they were in labour, given the confluence of geography and culture.

Furthermore, Hmong women, because they must work so hard in order to makes ends meet, get little respite during pregnancy and delivery. Women reported working as usual right up to delivery and taking only one month off their work after birth – at which time they take their babies with them into the fields. Additionally, as mentioned earlier, dietary restrictions for post-partum mothers seem challenging. One mother said, *'My ethnic group raises the child worse than the other ones. We eat normally but nutrition is insufficient*.' Some women reported that they were allowed to eat only rice and water after giving birth; others were allowed to eat chicken but not other meat or vegetables. Women did report, however, that their husbands were supportive of their post-partum needs, with one explaining that, after she gave birth, *'My husband did the housework and also the outdoors work such as collecting firewood, cutting grass for the cows and collecting vegetables for the pigs.'*

HIV

The adolescent girls in our research also had limited information regarding HIV and AIDS. Some girls reported learning about the subject in school, but noted that, like their contraception classes, little practical information was conveyed. One said, *'For HIV we are told – don't play around with boys.'* Most girls had never heard of condoms and those who had had few facts – believing that condoms were something women used. One young woman summarised the limited knowledge most girls had regarding HIV, saying her teachers had *'taught about HIV as well as traffic safety'.*

Access to health care

Even though 'modern' health care is heavily subsidised and our respondents all discussed health clinics as being as widespread as schools, few girls reported having been to a doctor or facility for care. Many mentioned that their family relied on shamans and herbs. Others noted that they had never been to see the doctor as one *'just*

needed to go when it's serious'. Some girls did, however, mention taking their mothers or sisters-in-law to the hospital, because they were needed to translate for older relatives who were unable to speak Vietnamese. One explained, *'If an elder takes her there, the elders can't speak Kinh.'* For more remote families, access is still an issue. One mother reported that her husband had walked – carrying their sick child – 5km to the hospital.

Gender-based violence

Confirming what is reported in the literature, none of the girls we interviewed reported any concerns about sexual abuse or harassment and none indicated that they were physically abused (Lemoine, 2012a; Michaud, 2011). While two girls had stories about encountering drunken men out in the community, both framed these experiences as unusual and expressed no concern that such experiences would be repeated. Similarly, as mentioned above, while several girls mentioned that they took great care to participate in Tet festivities in groups, so they would not be harassed or kidnapped by boys, they expressed no real fear.

As we discuss in greater detail below, the biggest form of abuse these girls are likely to face is domestic violence at the hands of their future husbands. One commune-level KI said the issue of alcohol-fuelled domestic violence was something almost all women faced: *'Hmong people up here, only one [out of ten] does not get drunk often. All those men will drink, but one will not get drunk and beat his wife and children, the other nine men like drinking and then will beat their wives when they get home.'* Despite this, our KIs indicated that girls were not given any information about how to avoid becoming a victim – or how to respond to violence if they were victimised. The Women's Union briefly discusses violence in its 30-minute pre-marriage counselling session – and there is a local reconciliation committee[28] that becomes involved if violence is extreme – but local attention is clearly minimal, as officials do not even keep count of how many women report abuse. In fact, Youth Union KIs boldly asserted that GBV was largely a thing of the past, although without a clear explanation as to why this was the case: *'Thanks to the development of basic infrastructure conditions […] domestic violence is mostly non-existent in Youth Union members' families.'*

Trafficking

Girls – and their parents – reported significant fear of trafficking to China. One said, 'They [Chinese men] steal to marry girls off. They get married off to Chinese men but they are poor and use them for working. So I'm scared of this.' This issue, which seems to have spiked since 2010, with reports of up to a dozen children in the commune having gone missing in suspected trafficking cases, has led to considerable awareness-raising efforts. The Women's Union has encouraged mothers to keep very close watch over their children, particularly their daughters, and local schools have begun to provide some education for children. 'The teachers have discussed this in school too – they said if someone calls out to you or talks to you that you don't know – don't communicate.' Local KIs reported that, while there is a hotline – run by DoLISA – for people to report trafficking, there is little coordination with the police and actual efforts to fight trafficking are most often limited to repatriation.

7.4 Psychosocial development

Girls' stories about their psychosocial development evidence norms that are beginning to shift only slowly. As mentioned previously, the traditional gender norms surrounding ideas about what makes a good daughter versus a good son largely continue to define girls' lives. Increasingly pushed as they age towards the skills and roles they will need in order to be good wives and mothers, and facing social sanctions in the form of ostracism for non-compliance, the overall shape of girls' lives remains largely unchanged from that of their mothers (see Bicchieri, 2006).

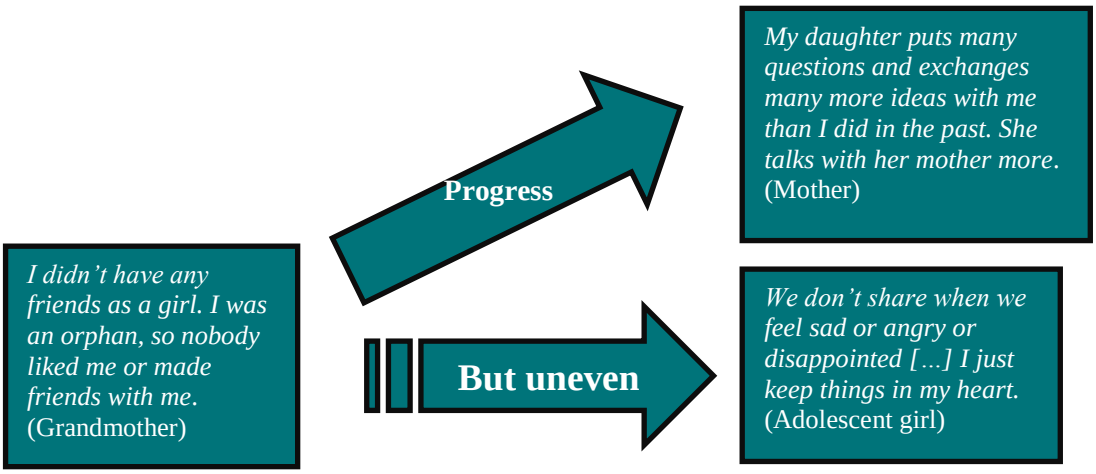
As also mentioned above, because these girls are Hmong, and are situated in culture that is very different from our own, several key caveats are required if we are to understand what they are trying to tell us. First, mysticism matters. It would be easy to dismiss ghost stories as the fanciful tales of children, but that would be a mistake. For many of the Hmong girls we interviewed, ghosts are just as real as menstruation. One girl, whose mother

[28] The Reconciliation Committee is formed under the Fatherland Front and is composed of representatives from the local village, the Women's Union and the Youth Union. It handles complaints about domestic violence as well as other inter-familial complaints that cause public disturbances.

was very ill and unable to shoulder much of the workload, said, *'Mother is possessed by a tiger ghost. It is a very bad, very strong ghost. The shaman comes several times a year to pray at our house.'* Her mother had never seen a doctor despite being ill for years. Another girl, expressing worry about traveling far from her house, explained, *'Once I was seriously sick. I fell into a water hole. After that my soul seemed to fly away, so I had to ask the sorcerer for help and he called my soul back.'* Situating girls' stories in their local context is vital if we are to hear what they have to say – and understand how they feel.

Second, the impact of very limited education and exposure on parenting practices in general cannot be ignored. Hmong families do, on average, have more children than they can adequately care for. Hmong women acknowledged this when they said their ethnic group cared for children poorly or that they had no time to teach their daughters well. Hmong girls acknowledged this when they said their mothers had no time to talk to them. It is also true that, because most Hmong women have never been to school and are illiterate, they have been exposed to fewer 'modern' ideas, ranging from sanitation to the importance of good nutrition, than most Kinh women. Furthermore, because most speak only Hmong, informational campaigns – led by both the government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) – require translation. KIs reported, for example, that, while the Women's Union brings parenting information to towns and uses translators where necessary, it does not go to villages and makes little effort to coordinate with local officials to ensure information is presented in context.

Finally, because this generation of Hmong girls is the first to be broadly presented with a world larger than their immediate community, Hmong parents are comparatively unprepared to meet the challenges of the life-stage that has only recently been codified by the international community as adolescence. Indeed, given that many Hmong parents moved straight from childhood into adulthood, marrying soon after puberty, this generation of Hmong parents is the first to deal, *en masse*, with children who are teenagers in terms of not just age but also socialisation. Given the penetration of globalisation, parents are having to rapidly shift set in order to keep up with their children's horizons.



Challenges to girls' psychosocial development *vis-à-vis* their larger communities

Around the village

Asides from concerns about trafficking to China, and the occasional ghost or snake, girls did not report being concerned about their safety. They are clear that they are not being teased or bullied by boys. While one of the brothers mentioned being bullied by 'Playboys 135' – richer boys from communes that are targeted for Programme 135[29] support – girls, even poor girls, reported no such harassment.

Girls, however, unlike boys, face significant mobility restrictions that impede their interactions with the larger community. Girls go to school, do their extensive chores and go to bed. Not only do they lack the time to move about the larger community, but also they are tightly controlled through parental permission. One girl explained,

[29] As mentioned earlier, Programme 135 is aimed at reducing minority poverty.

'If I don't get my mother's permission she too can get angry with me – she is scared I may not come back, that there was a problem, she worries about my safety. She is scared if I go to work in the rice or corn fields or to collect wood and nobody knows.' Besides school, their main social outlet is the market, but many girls reported that even their attendance here was irregular. One mother commented that, while she allowed her daughters two or maybe three hours at the market, after that *'they have come back to help their mother'.*

At school

Hmong girls reported that they enjoyed school. With only one exception, the girl mentioned earlier who reported that her teachers occasionally shouted at her for not understanding her lessons, the girls we interviewed said their teachers were kind, supportive and enthusiastic. Few girls mentioned being punished at school and those punishments that were mentioned, such as writing a *'self-criticism paper and taking a heavier form of labour'*, were not seen as onerous – and usually were directed at misbehaving boys.

It is important, however, to put these reports in context. As mentioned previously, many of the interviews with schooled adolescents took place at school, under the watchful eyes and ears of the single Hmong-speaking teacher in Ta Lung. The overall feel of the classroom, to the research team, was hierarchical and non-participatory – mirroring the larger community. It is therefore unclear how to interpret girls' reports of their teachers. A commune KI noted that teachers were being trained to be more sympathetic to children's feelings, as *'We think it is important that teachers say soft words or children will leave school.'* Reading between the lines suggests considerably more tension than girls are reporting.

It is the social experiences of school that light up girls' lives. All of the girls mentioned how *'joyful'* it was to see their friends every day. Most mentioned singing, playing games and doing performances with great fondness. Particularly for the girls who enter boarding school in Grade 6, some of whom are only 11 or 12 years old, the importance of a tight peer group cannot be overstated. Several girls mentioned their absolute misery at being separated at such a young age from their families. All were clear that it was only their friends, also miserable, who kept them from abandoning school and going home.

This is not to say that schooling does not come with its own set of worries. All of the schooled girls were concerned about their grades. They were worried they would not do well enough to progress to the next grade, particularly those who were forced to balance school work with heavy domestic workloads. *'Chores are a problem as it means I don't have enough time to study,'* commented one girl. Similarly, those aiming for university were worried they would not win a space. The biggest concerns, however, belonged to the younger girls who knew their days in school were running out. Most of them desperately wanted to continue their education – *'I want to have more time to study'* – and understood that door was being closed on them.

Challenges to girls' psychosocial development *vis-à-vis* their families

Son preference

Son preference is clearly still a significant issue in the lives of Hmong girls in Ta Lung. Many mothers noted that their sons would care for them in their old age and light the funeral pyres at their death, but that their daughters would move away to become daughters-in-law. As mentioned earlier, this has ramifications for girls from their earliest years. *'I have few children,'* noted one mother, *'My daughter will help me with my housework and then she will get married. My son won't go anywhere, he will live with me.'* As noted above, this logic was used to explain why sons – and never daughters – inherited land and why sons might be more likely to have access to money. Some girls clearly felt these customs were perfectly reasonable, noting that they would eventually replicate them with their own children. One local KI said son preference was also a major driver of Hmong fertility. He said, *'The son is preferred here; if a couple don't have a son, no one worships them in the future because the daughter will get married and move out. Some families here have five daughters and they*

keep trying to have a son.' Given that high fertility is closely linked to poverty, with obvious impacts on children's futures, son preference may very well ultimately constrain even boys' life options.

Despite a general preference for sons, there was also strong evidence in our interviews that daughters were loved and wanted. The women who had one daughter and one son were very happy to have achieved gender balance. The girls who detailed their future families all specified a desire for this balance as well. As one mother explained, *'A son belongs to his father, a daughter to her mother.'*

What is unclear from this sentiment is how much instrumentalism it reflects. While mothers no doubt love their daughters – with Lemoine (2012a) noting that they often dote on them – it is also true that daughters have significant value purely in terms of the work they can do. Not only does the day-to-day housework fall largely on girls' shoulders, but also daughters must step in and fill their mother's shoes when the latter is too ill (or drunk) to work. One mother noted that she told her daughters to be quick about working, *'otherwise their father comes home and scolds me'.* Another parent, echoing the theme noted by T.H. Nguyen et al. (2011), said daughters brought their own financial rewards. Daughters require a smaller cash outlay at the time of marriage, as parents must shoulder only the cost of the ceremony, not bride-price. Moreover, daughters who marry into rich families will still help their parents. *'I prefer daughter. She can take care of the family and in the future I don't have to pay for the bride's family. If she is rich, she will give parents. You will never lose money if you have daughters.'*

Child abuse

While several girls said they had been beaten when they were young, for misbehaving, all were clear that it was boys – and not girls – who were the focus of physical discipline. Local KIs, as well as the KI from Plan International, confirmed that child abuse was not a significant problem in the commune – and that incidence was decreasing. *'Violence against the girl is less than the boy. The acts of beating and scolding are on the decrease from the past, first, thanks to the national development, second, thanks to higher awareness brought about by such things as television helping people to understand.'* The comments of parents in our FGDs illustrated this shifting norm.[30] While one father found no problem with physical violence – *'She is my child, so I would beat her slightly, physical punishment helps her understand that she has to do it next time'* – another was resolutely opposed – *'I am her father, all of us are human being and made of flesh. My daughter was born to me; I couldn't bear it if she was beaten painfully.'*

Being shouted at, on the other hand, is something most girls reported – and disliked. One noted, *'I am very scared of my father. Because when I do something wrong, he shouts at me, frightening me.'* Most girls, however, reported that their mother was more likely to shout at them, usually because they were not working diligently enough. Several girls noted that their brothers were equally likely to be shouted at – but that they did not seem to care. One brother was very aware of this situation, commenting, *'I told my mother to give my sister VND100,000 for school. My sister is scared of being reproached by our mother, who was drunk.'*

Drunkenness

Parental drunkenness was a theme across many of our interviews. While most girls reported that their fathers were more likely to drink than their mothers, many girls also reported that their mothers were often drunk. One commented, *'My parents don't do so much. They are often drunk, asleep.'* Other girls reported proudly that their fathers did not drink. Noted one, *'He normally stays home and doesn't drink. So he knows how to think better – if he were a drinker he worries he would be sick. Father thinks like this himself – he didn't learn it from anybody.'*

[30] We note that Lemoine (2012a) says Hmong children have traditionally been parented permissively. Other online sources, primarily emerging from the US Hmong community, speak of authoritarian parenting. We choose to let the data speak for themselves.

KIs reported that alcohol use and abuse were a significant issue in Ta Lung, one driven partially by tradition. When men visit one another's homes in the evening they are expected to drink with one another. When fathers are not at home, *'the son must receive the guests'* – meaning some boys as young as 12 are consuming alcohol as a 'social nicety'. It is impossible to ascertain how common this type of occurrence is, but several mothers noted that boys liked to drink a lot.

Parental gender-based violence

Confirming reports about its prevalence in the larger literature, GBV was a top concern for many of the adolescents in our study, both boys and girls. While few women reported that their husbands abused them, a clear majority of adolescents had witnessed significant, usually alcohol-induced, spousal abuse. Some of the children reported that parental fights made them sad, particularly when they were younger. *'They fought and quarrelled, no one could intervene, and so we just sat and cried,'* said one. Others reported that they were scared. *'I'm scared when my mother and father are fighting together – really scared. Sometimes I go to my aunt and uncles – if things get dangerous – until they have stopped being so angry.'*

Many adolescents reported, and KIs confirmed, that their mothers left after major fights, returning to their natal home for a few days of emotional respite. Most reported that they attempted to intervene in fights, almost always by telling their mother to be quiet in order to defuse their father's anger. *'I told her not to scold each other.'* Only one, a 17 year old described by her mother as *'being as tiny as a 12 year old'* reported attempting to physically intervene in an active dispute: *'I told him not to beat her and I told her not to argue with him. I pulled his hands back not to beat her.'* The prevalence of GBV, and the intensity of emotion it causes, is demonstrated by the fact that, when girls were asked what programmes or information they wanted, most listed helping their mothers *'avoid scolding'* as one of their top three wishes.

Lack of leisure time

As mentioned earlier, neither girls nor their mothers have much time for leisure. Most girls, even those carefully expressing no discontent over their lives, made statements such as, *'I have no time to see my friends – I have to work hard.'* Some went further, expressing sentiments such as, *'I think it is very miserable to be a girl'* or, *'Usually my brothers have more freedom.'* One girl, forced to leave school after Grade 9, was particularly sad that even ethnic festivals were rarely an option for her, because of her workload. *'I think that I want to join the celebration, but there were a lot of things to be done in my house so I didn't go.'*

Again, there are some tentative signs of progress. Two of the mothers we interviewed spoke of how they made sure to give their daughters time off to play. One said, *'My mother told me to work in the days off, now I let my daughter free. She in her age can't work, so I let her play with her best friends.'* While most families clearly did not have the financial space that would facilitate thinking these thoughts – much less enable action – these rare sentiments are hopefully harbingers of change.

Filial piety

Girls' filial piety was often absolute. Girls who discussed leaving school against their will ultimately framed the experience in terms of how they were glad they could help their mothers. Girls who explained they had no free time and few opportunities to see their friends presented their lives as 'normal'. Girls who had dreamed of becoming teachers or doctors – and were now taking weaving classes or working around the home – spoke first not of what they had lost but of what their mothers had gained. *'Because my family was in difficulty – my mom got older, she got sick. I'm worried – so I will help my mom. Helping my mom makes me happy,'* said one girl, who left school after Grade 9. Interestingly, while many mothers and much of the larger community clearly see Hmong girls as 'other people's women', the girls themselves do not see their situations through that lens. One girl, out of school and working to support her widowed mother and younger siblings, reported that her friends tried to convince her it was not her job to support her family. As she put it, *'My friends said it's not my family in the long run. But I told them that now I am living here, eating here, it's my family.'*

Box 12: Filial piety and social isolation

Leaving school in order to help out at home was a common theme among the girls we interviewed. Many presented it as a choice they had freely made. However, as Boudet et al. (2012) conclude, '[f]inancial issues and family loyalties are so intertwined […] that it is not that clear that this is an *empowered or strategic choice*. We can mark their decision as either a sign of self-determination or a passive choice due to pressure and lack of alternatives' (p.79). Indeed, UNICEF (2010b) notes that social pressure – both positive and negative – make it not uncommon for girls to act against their own best interests.

The story of SMT highlights this reality. SMT is a 17-year-old girl who lives at home with her parents and her 10-year-old brother, who is still in school. Her 15-year-old sister has already married and moved away. Her father is a carpenter and she and her mother work in the fields and raise small livestock. SMT left school after Grade 9, despite being *'a very good student'* and wanting to continue so she could come home and help her mother with her work. Her mother, who has been ill for several years because she is possessed by a tiger ghost, has never seen a doctor, even though she is often so ill that she must stop working at noon. SMT explained, through a heavy cough of her own, *'She coughs, has lots of pain – can't work, can't eat.'*

SMT is glad she is at home instead of school. *'I don't feel sad about not going to school – the important thing is I can help my mother. I can help her by working – this means she doesn't have to work too much.'* While she admits that, *'Because I'm worried about my mother I don't have much free time'* and *'I can't talk to anyone – not to friends, not my sister, not my father – because I don't want to make them sad,'* she also claims to be content with her life. Her father's carpentry job has allowed the family to purchase some equipment that makes her work feel lighter, and she likes to watch television shows about orphans and love stories.

She is concerned for her future and that of her parents, as she does not know who would help them if she could not. She would love to have a hotline to call for information about how to help her mother. She would also like to ensure she only has two children, so she will be better able to care for them and to afford both food for them and clothes for herself.

Sources of social support

Several sources of emotional support emerged over the course of our interviews as key to Hmong girls. First, as mentioned above, girls are clear that their friends are important to them for recreation and, occasionally, having a shoulder to cry on. Most girls mentioned that their afternoon tasks, gathering wood and grass, were often done in the company of friends, which made the work feel less burdensome. Girls at boarding school rely on one another for information about growing up and help dealing with the pain of early separation from their parents. *'When in school I see many people, all the sadness disappears, and I smile again. I feel happier,'* commented one. Some girls specifically mentioned that their friends had kept them in school: *'My friends thought for me, they told me that studying is for me myself – not for anyone else. They advised me to go to school.'*

Family members are also supportive of some girls. Several girls mentioned that, when they were sad they were able to talk to their mother. One mother noted that her daughter was a veritable fount of questions – and very different from herself as a child. She said she tried hard to match answers with questions. One girl mentioned the key role of her father in exploring her dreams. *'Father understands,'* she said. Girls with sisters and sisters-in-law were very clear about the support roles that they played, particularly with regard to difficult subjects, such as contraception or GBV. One explained, *'I told my sisters-in-law my sad stories. Friends are only for happy stories.'*

Social isolation

While most girls mentioned having some sources of emotional support, it was also true that many, primarily the most remote and the poorest, felt totally isolated and alone with their problems. One explained that she was unwilling to burden her friends with the things that genuinely troubled her. *'I don't share these types of feelings with my friends. With girlfriends we only talk about small things – about study and what we don't understand with homework. I wouldn't want to share about my family quarrelling or my parents not giving me permission to hang out with friends – we don't like to share about family problems.'* Another, reflecting the filial piety mentioned above, was most interested in ensuring she did not add to her family's burdens. She noted that, when she and her friends were sad at school, they never told their parents, as *'We didn't want to make them sad.'* Even the girls who mentioned that their mothers were sources of support often later clarified that they spoke to their mothers only about work. One girl, who said she spoke to her mother regularly, explained, *'She just tells me where she had been. She doesn't ask me many questions.'*

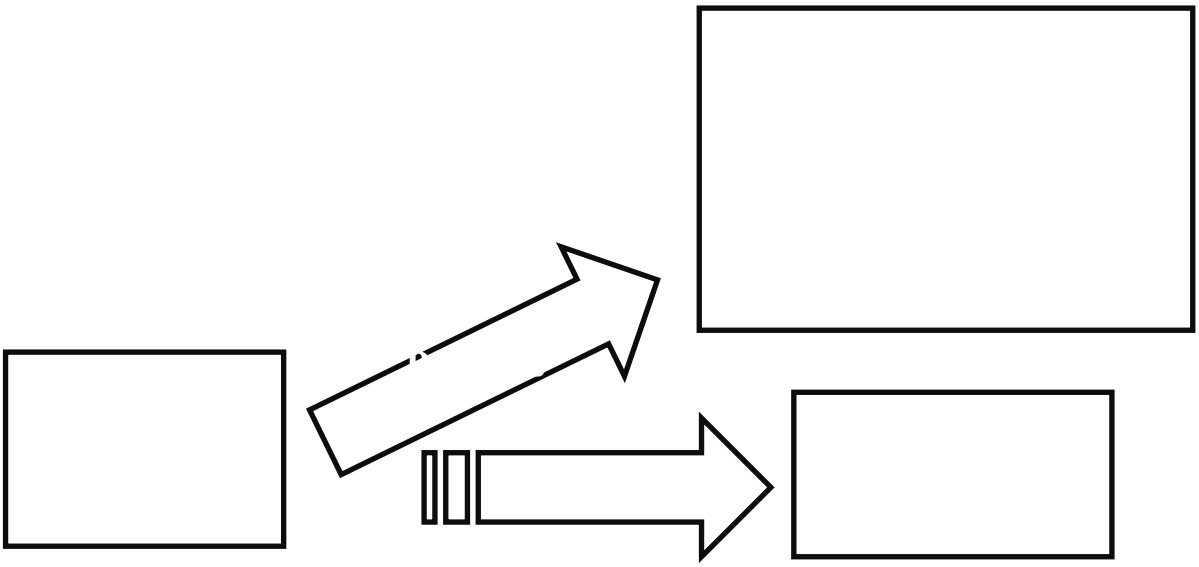
The mothers we interviewed echoed this isolation theme. One said she was able to speak to her daughter, but later amended her statement to limit the scope to work. Another commented that she was too tired to talk to her daughter. Several women noted that they themselves received little support from their husbands. *'He doesn't say anything. He never responds to my stories, so I don't tell him. When my stories go unresponded, so I never tell him,'* said one. *'I have nothing to tell him,'* said another, who had moments before claimed that her husband was the member of her family to whom she was closest. These feelings of isolation are clearly reflected in the services Hmong woman chose as most useful for their daughters – hotlines and community counsellors.

Mobile phones improving girls' lives

As mentioned above, Hmong girls, like girls around the world, are beginning to find that mobile phones are making their lives easier and more pleasant. One, for example, noted that she liked to use her phone to listen to music when she was sad or when she was working alone in the fields. *'What I really like doing is turning on the music from my mobile phone and just enjoying listening,'* she said. Several girls mentioned how important their phone was for staying in touch with their parents while they were away at school. Others spoke of using their parents' phones to call their married sisters, who live in other communes. Mothers also see the benefits of mobiles. One said she had bought her daughter a phone as a way of staying in touch with her when she transitioned to secondary school and was gone longer each day. Knowing her daughter had a phone did much to alleviate her concerns about her daughter's safety.

7.5 Participation at home and in the community

Most Hmong girls have limited space for participation in their lives. Gender hierarchies – and, more importantly, age hierarchies – constrain the options they have for forming and expressing their own opinions. While some Hmong girls are, for the first time, being encouraged to imagine and pursue new futures, evidencing relaxing norms, most are either too busy or too bound by family loyalties to envision lives substantially different from those of their mothers. Furthermore, given that most girls feel they cannot confide in their parents, are too scared to speak personally to their teachers and have limited access to local elders, even a girl who has formulated a goal will be unlikely to get the encouragement and network support necessary to achieve it.



Girls' participation *vis-à-vis* school and the larger community

There are only two community spaces theoretically open to girls in terms of participation: school- and government-sponsored organisations such as the Young Pioneers, the Children's Union and the Youth Union. Most girls expressed genuine confusion when asked whether their teachers elicited their opinions and input at school. They reported that their teachers were good teachers, kind and enthusiastic. They said their teachers checked in with them to ensure they did not need more Programme 135 support – such as school supplies or food at home. They reported no difficulties asking for academic help. *'If I don't understand, I ask immediately. I*

don't hesitate. The teachers will explain what I don't understand.' With only two exceptions, however, they seemed unable to imagine that their teachers would care what they thought beyond a mastery of academics. One exception, a girl who thought the grading in her class was unfair, was still unable to bring herself to speak up: *'I want to speak out my comment but I didn't dare.'*

Girls generally did not feel they could speak to their teachers about non-academic matters. Most, even the very young girls miserable about their recent arrival at boarding school, said they were *'too worried'* to tell their teachers how they felt. Only one girl felt secure enough to approach a teacher for help solving a family problem. When her family was in financial distress she went to her teacher to get help interfacing with commune officials: *'I told my teacher and she asked the People's Committee for help. I told her my family was in need and asked her for help. She told me she would ask the commune authority for help.'*

This is not to say girls are not participating at school – they are. However, they are participating in roles, like choir leader or classroom monitor, created for them by adults. The girls are proud of their classroom participation. *'I was a deputy monitor who was in charge of learning issues in the class,'* explained one girl who was ranked very highly academically. Several others noted how much they had enjoyed leading classroom performances, particularly those involving Hmong songs.

Many girls said they were members of the Young Pioneers, Children's Union or Youth Union. Only one, however, reported any meaningful engagement – a young woman who said, *'Every month, there is an activity for youth volunteers and I participate. For instance, we build roads or voluntarily give blood.'* The remaining girls either indicated that their villages were too remote – *'The problem is that the Youth Union doesn't do any activities in our village that I'm aware of'* – the activities were too old-fashioned and boring or their workloads prohibited participation.

Overall, women's opportunities for participation seemed limited as well. For example, only five of Ta Lung's twenty-three People's Council members are women. Similarly, while one woman noted that her Party affiliation was behind her return to school, most women – and adolescents – indicated that it was men, and not women, who were engaged in community activities. One boy noted, *'My father participates, instead of my mother.'* One woman, a member of the Women's Union, commented that her inability to speak Kinh made communication difficult. *'I can't read and write. It is difficult to convince people. I can't speak their language and they can't hear what I speak, so I won't do it anymore,'* she said as a way of explaining why she was quitting. On the other hand, a 16-year-old girl in Grade 10 reported feeling empowered by being able to balance work and school and to plan for a different future. She said, *'I think now I have enough confidence to talk to them – the commune officials – if I needed support.'*

Girls' participation *vis-à-vis* their families

Girls' reports of their familial participation were highly varied. A few girls, for example, had been allowed to choose their educational trajectories; many others, however, had not. As mentioned above, most out-of-school girls did not leave school by choice. Most wanted to stay in school and were denied permission to do so by their parents. Similarly, many of the younger girls knew their schooling days were limited. Interestingly, many of these same girls reported that they had been allowed to choose their lower-secondary schools. *'I choose this school because it's a joyful one. I choose by myself,'* noted one.

As also discussed earlier, girls – and their younger brothers – go nowhere without permission. '*I would be scolded if my mother doesn't know where I went,'* explained one girl, *'My mother is worried about kidnapping.'* Another worried she would be unable to visit her parents after marriage: *'When I become a wife, my husband*

won't allow me to visit my parents.' Interestingly, however, she immediately added that her older brother went nowhere without consulting his wife, suggesting these concerns are as much about safety as about gendered restrictions. *'He does ask his wife. He only goes if she agrees.'*

Overall, girls did not report feeling that the restrictions on their mobility, besides the time poverty concerns discussed above, were onerous. *'I am only banned from hanging around with friends, singing or so on. I am banned from following playful children. I am allowed to do everything legitimate,'* said one. Another commented, *'I am not allowed to leave school at will and hang around at night.'* Given the larger social context – in which KIs reported that karaoke and hanging out were at the root of emerging 'social evils' – girls seemed to understand and respect that their parents were setting boundaries for their own good. While several noted that boys were rarely bound by these same limits, primarily because boys do not actually follow their parents' rules, they seemed more disturbed by boys' transgressions than by the restrictions on their own lives. A key exception was one 16 year old, living with her cousin and her aunt so that she can attend school, who rued, *'It is not good to indulge the boys more.'*

With regard to participation in day-to-day family decisions, experiences were quite varied. Some girls reported that they had no input. *'I don't decide anything. Everything I do, I have to ask my parents for permission,'* said one. Another girl, introducing the importance of age, eschewed the opportunity to contribute to decisions: *'If they ask, I tell them to consult with my older brothers and sisters only.'* Mothers also felt age was an issue. In our FGDs, mothers referred to even 17-year-old adolescents as 'small' and seemed confused as to why parents would solicit their opinions. One mother commented, effectively ending the discussion, *'Adults never do anything wrong.'*

On the other hand, some girls felt their opinions were valued and taken seriously. One girl, for example, taught her siblings to read before they started school, and, as a result, felt they loved her more for it. Another felt confident in her opinions about livestock purchases: *'I told my father this pig was good and he should buy it.'* One young adolescent, concerned about her health, insisted her father take her to the clinic. He did.

It is difficult to tease out the relative importance of gender and age for girls' decision making. Adolescents consistently reported that their mothers worked harder than their fathers and that mothers were often rewarded for their work by drunken beatings. This does not speak well to women's relative authority in the household. Some girls, confirming the observations of Lemoine (2012a), also made statements such as, *'Mother only decides if father isn't around.'*

Still, over half of the adolescents reported that their parents shared all decisions or that their mother was the most important person in their family. One girl said, *'Mother is the most important person in my family, but mother and father have different ways to do it.'* Another noted that, when her father said 'no', she asked her mother, and, if that answer was affirmative, she ignored her father. One mother commented that she made all decisions in the household except for those related to marriage. Another woman, speaking of GBV, exclaimed, *'I told him that I am a human being so is he, so if beat me I would beat him too.'*

Hmong participation

While many of the Hmong girls we interviewed were unable to conceive of the restrictions on their mobility as unfair or burdensome, they were able to detail forms of participation that were important to them – and easily ignored from a Western perspective. For example, most girls considered Hmong clothing vital to the identity they were creating for themselves in the larger world. *'I need clothes. As a Hmong, I have to buy Hmong ethnic clothes,'* they explained. When grandmothers discussed the poverty of their childhood, they framed it in terms of clothing. *'In the old days, I was very poor. I just wove white garments to sew my own clothes.'* When girls were explaining their parents' love for them, they measured it

in terms of clothing purchased. When girls expressed concern for their future lives, that concern was again expressed in terms of clothing: *'After having children, I won't buy more. I will have to give them food and clothes, I can't buy for me.'* For some girls, vocational classes in weaving and sewing were not seen so much as vocational but as a way of ensuring they would be able to have beautiful Hmong clothing of their own. Given the importance of clothing to ethnic identity for the Hmong girls in our research, programming might use traditions such as clothing as an entry point for introducing and exploring new ideas about participation.

Access to the market also emerged as very important to the girls we interviewed. A Youth Union KI noted that markets in Ha Giang are not merely venues for buying and selling; they are places to see and be seen. For many out-of-school girls, weekly trips to the market were their only opportunity for socialisation – and relative freedom. Those girls reporting the most isolation were often denied even this. *'I only go to the market on weekends occasionally – my parents don't let me if there is too much work to do,'* said one. The importance of the market was underscored by those girls who wanted an information kiosk – and those who did not. The former explained that the market was a natural congregation space and therefore a useful venue for information. The latter said girls at the market were busy talking to one another and had no time for a kiosk. Youth Union KIs noted that the market was already a key locus of communication efforts, with regular plays and performances about topics ranging from domestic violence to drug education to marriage and the family.

It is worth noting that government is actively working on some fronts to facilitate Hmong participation in political and community affairs. A commune KI, for example, noted that, of the six official commune positions in Ta Lung, Hmong residents filled five. He also said Hmong students were given priority in terms of upper-secondary boarding school, as the district considers it important *'to train potential staff for the district'.*

8 Conclusion and future directions

Gender norms, note Boudet et al. (2012), 'permeate daily life and are the basis of self-regulation' (p.24). Because children learn so young 'what it is to be a girl or a boy, or a man or a woman', gender norms tend to be far more difficult to change – or even see – than most norms (p.25). We certainly felt that to be true across our interviews with Hmong women and girls. Carefully socialised to accept Hmong feminine identity and largely isolated from the modernising world, they were often unable to even separate their own best interests from those of their families, much less identify specific changes they desired.

There is nonetheless evidence that gender norms are relaxing – and even changing – in the Hmong community of Ta Lung, sometimes shifting slowly and at times making nonlinear leaps. Laws encouraging education and prohibiting child marriage, for example, have had a tremendous impact on immediate behaviour. Programmes pushing family planning have clearly altered girls' aspirations regarding the size of their future families.

Change is slower with regard to 'gender contract' obligations, which reflect, for example, dominant norms about the division of labour among family members (Boudet et al., 2012: 52). There are girls who recognise that it is not fair that they work more than their brothers – but not many. There are mothers who recognise that girls' upper-secondary education is just as important as that of their brothers – but not many. There are fathers who watch their children when their wives are busy – but not many. As Boudet et al. (2012) note, 'change is surely happening, but […] it is often patchy, gradual, and difficult to discern' (p.59).

Change is also nonlinear, with '[a]dvances toward more equitable norms on some fronts […] not [being] matched by progress on others' (Boudet et al., 2012: 59). Parents do, for example, recognise the value of educating girls through Grade 9. They do not, however, see how the ceaseless toil in which girls engage might threaten that education. Women are, according to our interviews, gaining more access to household decision

making and family finances. They are not, however, able to translate that power into an ability protect themselves from domestic violence. Girls are, in some case, beginning to dream of a different future that involves medical school or a career in teaching. Aside from rare exceptions, however, they are still unable to connect those aspirations to the reality in which they live.

Overall, while we find that the conclusions of Boudet et al. (2012) resonate with our findings regarding the lives of Hmong adolescent girls, we also note the importance of diversity and texture. For example, Viet Nam's political environment – a Communist one-party state – colours the ways laws influence norms. While exceptions continue to exist, incidence of child marriage is dropping rapidly among Hmong communities and bride stealing appears to be largely a thing of the past. Similarly, because Viet Nam has worked hard to frame the 'two-child family' as an ideal – and has facilitated that choice with readily available contraception while avoiding China's heavy-handedness – norms regarding family size are shifting rapidly. Girls and women's stories indicate no longing for the past, no wistfulness for what they cannot have and confidence that two is the right number of children.

Age also matters with regard to perceptions about gender norms: adolescents' views are shaped by their unique developmental stage and the fact that they often represent the next step in the evolution of norms. For example, with few exceptions, Hmong girls are not worried about being the victims of violence as unmarried daughters. They are, however, desperately worried about their mothers' victimisation and about being abused by their future husbands. Similarly, while adult women, according to Boudet et al. (2012), report that they 'often keep themselves busy because they feel the need to' (p.54), adolescent girls in our study were very clear that their work ethic was more externally motivated. They, like teenagers everywhere, want congenial time with their peers in an environment, such as the market, geared towards nothing other than socialising. On the other hand, when it comes to reproductive choices, adolescents' views are clearly shaped less by age itself than by generation. While some of the mothers we interviewed had used contraception and deliberately planned their families, all of the girls were planning on no more than two children.

The unique intersection of age and culture is also relevant to capturing the local texture that is vital to understanding how and where norms are relaxing and changing. Finding this intersection can involve reframing concepts – both the concrete and the abstract. For example, even in a Hmong context, assets mean different things to adult women and adolescent girls. Inheritance rights shape lives, but mobile phones and Hmong clothing are seen by girls as far more critical to both day-to-day life and identity. Decision making also requires a rethink. In a context where unmarried adolescents, regardless of gender, are seen as children, it is difficult for girls to imagine negotiating with their parents. Filial piety for Hmong girls is absolute.

This is not to say generalisations are irrelevant: clearly there are themes that transcend age and place. Time poverty, for example, applies equally to Hmong girls and to the women involved in Boudet et al.'s (2012) research. Conceptions of 'the good daughter' and 'the good wife', while varying by culture, continue to be shaped by the same genre of deep-seated discriminatory gender norms. However, while broad brushstrokes are invaluable for finding the general shape of shifting norms, a more fine-grained approach triangulating girls' voices with those of their male peers, family and community members and secondary documentation is often necessary to tease out the full story.

8.1 What is working now

Girls, mothers and KIs reported that Viet Nam has implemented a variety of policies and programmes that are having a positive impact in terms of shifting the norms that define Hmong girls' lives and limit their capabilities and futures. While some are related to economic support, others draw on Viet Nam's unique governance context – the strength and directiveness of a developmental one-party state and the grassroots reach of mass organisations. These include the following:

- Fee exemptions for school are enabling poor families to send their children to school, while boarding schools for ethnic minority children are allowing children from remote locations to better access their rights to education. Fines for not going to school are encouraging parents to take school seriously.

- Laws defining the minimum age for marriage are beginning to shift people's beliefs, while fines for not obeying those laws are reducing the most egregious violations. Similarly, fines for bride stealing have nearly eliminated the practice.
- Community access to family planning has made it easier for women to limit their families, and this has been reinforced by family planning education, which is changing what people see as ideal.
- Activities organised by the Women's Union are raising awareness about aspects of gender justice, including intra-household violence prevention and the risks of sexual violence and trafficking.

Box 13: Gender norms and the evolution of gender justice for Hmong girls

Usually, Hmong women:

- Are Illiterate
- Are the mother of many children
- Are pushing their daughters to work harder and faster
- Are constantly tied to domestic and agricultural activities
- Are not engaged in community activities
- Feel they have little to offer the community as they are illiterate
- Feel they have little to offer their daughters, as their daughters are more educated than them
- Feel like dialogue with their husbands is often pointless

But some Hmong women:

- Are going back to school
- Recognise that domestic violence is a violation of their human rights
- Take charge of family finances
- Use contraceptives to ensure they have only the number of children they can afford to feed
- Recognise that their daughters need to play too
- Will do anything to keep their children in school
- Talk to their daughters about what it means to grow up and become a woman

Hmong girls dream of:

- Completing school
- Having time to see their friends
- Having time to rest
- Sharing their work with their brothers
- Having time to participate in local activities and important ethnic traditions
- Being able to go where they want without fear of being trafficked to China
- Learning skills and having a good income – now and for their future families
- Seeing their married sisters, even though they have moved out
- Helping their mothers get through their work
- Helping their mothers stay safe from their fathers' drunken violence
- Marrying a boy of their choice – who treats them in an egalitarian manner, does not drink too much and does not beat them
- Staying in touch with their parents, even after they have married and moved out
- Having only two children – a boy and a girl – so that they can provide a good life for them

8.2 Next steps: policy and programming for tomorrow

Despite progress, however, the lives of Hmong girls in Ta Lung continue largely to be shaped by the same forces and norms that shape those of their mothers. Economic poverty pushes girls out of school and creates the time poverty that precludes social interaction and participation in community events. Taboos keep many girls ignorant about their bodies and force them into silence around the women who ought to be able to guide them to adulthood. The men who ought to love them best often terrify them the most.

Based on our interviews with Hmong girls and their families – as well as a wide variety of KIs – there is considerable scope for new policy and programming to address these capability deprivations. We suggest the following, although clearly any future actions should also be informed by complementary forms of evidence, including a more systematic review of existing policy and programme interventions targeted at adolescents.

Educational domain

1. Support to complete Grade 12:
   - Sending girls to upper-secondary school needs to entail fewer costs for families. Possible options could include conditional cash transfers, educational stipends and no-interest loans.
   - There need to be more local options for upper-secondary school, so girls are better able to combine family responsibilities and education.
   - Hmong language instruction needs to be provided for younger students so girls begin their educations in an environment in which they feel more confident.
2. Information about how to get into university and what to expect: girls have no access to career and educational counsellors – familial or otherwise – to help them map out how to pursue tertiary education. Exposure to Hmong role models is vital, as it would not only help girls imagine new futures but also reassure parents that it is possible to be both a Hmong woman and educationally and economically successful.

Economic domain

1. Securing incomes sufficient to raise their own families: almost all girls listed ‘income’ as their number one worry. While they would like to make money now to help support their parents, their larger concern was that they would be unable to provide for their future children.
2. Reduced domestic work responsibilities so as to have opportunities to socialise and rest: girls would like to see their friends. They would like to go the Sunday market regularly. They would like to have more time to study. They would like to rest.
3. Access to vocational training that will ultimately increase their incomes: training must be based on realistic market assessments and linked to jobs that are reasonably well paid. Where girls with sewing and weaving skills have access to tourist markets, those skills may make sense. Where, however, girls are being taught to make things by hand that can be more cheaply purchased elsewhere, training is not useful.
4. Access to networking opportunities, given that social capital is perceived to be an important determinant of employment success.

Physical integrity and SRH domain

1. More comprehensive and practical classes at school with adequate time to fully understand the subject matter.
2. Community sources of information. All girls, but particularly out-of-school girls, need better community-based information. Health centres are currently not targeting adolescents, nor are efforts by mass organisations, and information on television is lacking.
   - Girls, mothers and KIs expressed interest in the idea of health kiosks in the market. Girls were clear, however, that such kiosks would need to provide more than SRH information, so visits would not be embarrassing. They suggested linking more sensitive information to knowledge about general health care, educational opportunities and vocational experiences.
   - Several girls suggested written forms of information were particularly desirable, as they could be consumed privately and without embarrassment. Materials need to be available in both Kinh and Hmong.

- Mothers and KIs saw considerable scope for information to be presented on television, and many indicated that Hmong language television was desirable to ensure understanding.

3. Training on how to talk to their mothers about sensitive topics such as menstruation and related pain relief, family planning or early marriage. Girls are not comfortable talking to their mothers about these subjects before marriage, but would like to be able to do so.
4. Freedom from fear regarding trafficking: most girls, and their mothers, mentioned a fear of trafficking as being relevant to both mobility and feelings of security.

Psychosocial domain

1. More leisure time and less housework: none of the girls was clear about how they might achieve these goals, but both younger and older girls identified this as a top priority.
2. To know how to help when their parents are fighting: possible solutions included mobile phone hotlines and/or local councillors, who would sit with them in a private room and talk to them about how they could help.
3. To know how to talk to their parents about things that concern them, like wanting to stay in school, and how to talk to friends with whom there is conflict: most girls wanted to learn how to talk so that people would listen. Many again thought councillors would be useful.

Participation domain

1. Recognition that 'becoming Vietnamese' in terms of nation building does not reduce the importance of Hmong ethnic identity in terms of self.
2. Training for adolescents to help them learn how to talk to their parents and respectfully push at the boundaries that constrain their future – early marriage and school leaving, for example.
3. More activities targeted at adolescents, rather than young married women or children. Spaces need to be engaging and local and provide a venue not just for socialisation but also for developing and practising voice, especially for older adolescents, who are almost always out of school and are in need of spaces where they can express their needs and practise decision making.

Finally, but certainly not least, a number of KIs highlighted the high levels of social exclusion experienced by the Hmong community in terms of broader socioeconomic and political participation. This is reinforced by the secondary document review presented in Sections 3 and 4. Any such programming changes for adolescent girls will therefore need to be complemented by ongoing government and civil society efforts to address these broader structural barriers, which continue to significantly limit the realisation of Hmong adolescents' full human capabilities.

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Appendix 1: Overview of study methodologies

Purpose: To capture local understandings and experiences of gendered adolescence; unpack impact pathways; explore changes/transitions over time over the life-course. Research teams will be informed by regional and country literature reviews, with a particular interest in community-level views, to provide a baseline for the four-year research programme and a broad goal to inform policy and practice.

Research instrument	Purpose	Who?	No. of each	Days	Sequencing	Researcher requirements
FGDs (4) 6-8 participants **Look for talkative engaging girls for life histories and possibly case studies while doing FGDs (snowballing technique)*	To explore general community-level definitions, views and experiences of gendered adolescence; to identify areas of consensus and debate	Younger adolescent girls (11-14)	1	1 (assuming 2 pairs am and pm)	1	1 facilitator, 1 note-taker
		Older adolescent girls (15-19)	1			
		Mixed adolescents	1			
		Adults (mixed)	1			
Ha Giang details						
KIIs (10) International team focal point to do additional KIIs at national and regional levels	To find out about adolescent girls' status, opportunities, challenges, changes over time	Government and NGO service providers at provincial, district, commune and village levels, community leaders [*adult men will not be included as IDIs*]	8	1.5 (assuming 1 team at district and commune levels)	2 and at the end (5) for small group discussions	1 interviewer, detailed notes or taped interview
		Small group discussion among key actors at each level to capture inter-sectoral dynamics (half day – 1 pair)	2			
Ha Giang details						
IDIs (16)	To understand	Younger adolescent girls (11-14)	5	2.5 (2 per day	3	1 interviewer, taped

2 main entry points for adolescent girls: Educated/non-educated (split) Marital status – married/with children and single Aim to select girls from 'average' vulnerable households rather than examples of positive deviance	individual girls' experiences of adolescence and its gendered dimensions	Older adolescent girls (15-19)	5	per researcher)		interview
		Adolescent boys (2 older/2 younger – brothers of the IDI girls)	4			
		Older women	4			
Ha Giang details						
Intra-household case studies (2) Critical to include cases of positive deviance – families that have more egalitarian gender relations; supportive of girls' capabilities	To explore intra-household dynamics *vis-à-vis* adolescent girls by triangulating views of adults and children; and by gender	2 households with adolescent girls; 1 with sons; 1 without?/nuclear and extended household arrangements	2 households	1.5 (*need to organise early on in fieldwork to ensure multiple visits; staying overnight?)*	3 and ongoing	2 researchers; detailed note taking/observations, including quotes
Ha Giang details						
Life histories and generational pairings (8) Critical to include cases of positive deviance – families that have more egalitarian gender relations; supportive of girls' capabilities	To explore key moments in girls' lives present and past; generational differences in adolescent experiences; could include examples of positive deviance	Older adolescent girls	3	1.5 (1 day for individual life histories; 1 for pairs)	4	1 interviewer, taped interview 2 researchers for the pairings – one interviewer, one note-taker
		Older women	3			
		Generational pairings	2			
Total			42	8		

List of actual interviews by instrument type

KIIs	
Commune level (8)	
Vice head of Ta Lung Commune Party Committee	
Manager of Ta Lung Commune Health Centre	
Commune contract staff	
Vice-head of Commune Women's Union	
Head of Commune Youth Union	
Commune Police Head	
Lower-secondary School Teacher	
Hamlet Women's Union	
District level (3)	
KIs from Plan International in Meo Vac town	All Plan field staff (3 women, 4 men)
Meo Vac DoLISA Head	
Meo Vac Upper-secondary School Teacher	
Provincial level (7)	
Head of Reproductive Health Centre	Mai Thi Lam
Child Protection Officer, DoLISA	Phung Thi Giang
Vocational Training Division, DoLISA	Nguyen Thu Huong
Head of Family and Social Issues, Women's Union	Hoang Thi Van
Vice-head, Ha Giang Provincial Youth Union	Dao Quang Dieu
Head of Committee for School Youth and Children, DoET	Phung Thi Thuong
Head of Because I am a Girl Campaign, Plan Ha Giang	Thang Nguyen Chien
National level (16)	
International Relations Division, Youth Union	Nguyen Thi Viet
Deputy-secretary, Office of Central Council for Teenagers, Youth Union	Tran Van Tuan
Deputy Standing Chair, Central Council for Teenagers; Director, Centre for Vietnamese Teenagers Support and Development, Youth Union	Hoang Thi Tu Anh

Department of Family and Social Issues, Viet Nam Women's Union	Ha Thi Oanh
Department of Policy and Legislation, Viet Nam Women's Union	Le Thi Phuc
Head of Department for Mother and Children's Health, MoH	Nguyen Duy Khe
Officer of General Planning Division, Department of Child Protection and Care, MoLISA	Nguyen Hoai Duc
Chief of General Planning Division, Department of Child Protection and Care, MoLISA	Do Thuy Hang
Country Head, UN Women	Suzette Mitchell
Academic/Oxfam, Head of Advocacy Support Coalition, Ha Noi	Andrew Wells-Dang
Academic, independent	Colm Ross
Culture Programme Coordinator, UNESCO	Duong Bich Hanh
Gender Specialist, Gender Team Leader, UNFPA	Phan Thi Thu Hien
Gender Advisor, World Bank	Mette Bertelsen
Manager, Ha Noi Programme Unit, Plan in Viet Nam	Le Quynh Lan
Vice-director, PHAD Institute	Liem Nyuyen
Subtotal	34 KIIs;

FGDs	
Mixed adolescents	3 girls and 3 boys aged 13-14
Younger girl adolescents	6 girls aged 13-14
Older girl adolescents	6 girls aged 15-19
Mixed adults	3 women and 3 men aged 27-44
Adult women	6 women aged 33-41
Subtotal	5 FGDs, total of 30 participants

Case studies	
	MTH –17-year-old girl – her mother and her father
	VTD – 17-year-old girl and her mother
Subtotal	2 in-depth case studies with two households; total of 5 participants

Intergenerational pairings		
LTS – 16-year-old girl – her 33 year-old mother and 74 year-old grandmother		
TTP –13 year-old girl – her 35-year-old mother and 70-year-old grandmother		
Subtotal		2 inter-generational pairings; total of 6 participants
Life histories		
GTV – 15-year-old girl		
SMT – 17-year-old girl		
VTM – 18-year-old girl		
VTX – 18-year-old girl		
LTM – 35-year-old woman		
LTM – 39-year-old woman		
TTM – 31-year-old woman		
VTM – 36-year-old woman		
VTS – 34-year-old woman		
Subtotal	9 life histories	

Individual interviews	
CMM – 13-year-old girl	
GTM – 14-year-old girl	
LTM – 13-year-old girl	
MTS – 16-year-old girl	
MTD – 16-year-old girl	
MTM – 18-year-old girl	
MTY – 15-year-old girl	
TTM – 13-year-old girl	
TTM – 15-year-old girl	
VTP – 17-year-old girl	
CMM – 17-year-old boy	
MMN – 13-year-old boy	
MMT – 12-year-old boy	
Subtotal	13 individual interviews
TOTAL	65 instruments; 104 individuals

Appendix 2: Research tools

A2.1 Focus group discussions

2 parts – body mapping (45 minutes); general discussion (45 minutes)

1. Body mapping

- The body map is a participatory tool that helps young people explore their experiences, views and feelings on a particular issue.
- Get participants to draw a picture of an adolescent girl; divide into two halves – vulnerabilities/challenges on left; solutions/coping responses/ capabilities on right.

Body part probes

Arms and hands: What kinds of activities are young people involved in (leisure, work within the home, external work, education, etc.)? Are there things you would like to be doing but can't? If so, what are these and what are the barriers?

- Legs and feet: Are there any restrictions on adolescent mobility and time use? For example, for work, study or income generation? Is this the same for boys and girls?
- Head: What are the main things you think about? How do you learn and from whom? Do you think there are differences in this regard between boys and girls?
- Eyes: How do adults view adolescents? Are there differences in thinking *vis-à-vis* males vs. females? How have these perceptions affected your own views of the world?
- Ears: How do community members listen to young people, or do young people only listen to adults?
- Mouth: How do adults communicate with young people and/or the way young people communicate with one another?
- Main body: What particular health issues are relevant to adolescents? Is there adequate protection from different forms of abuse or exploitation?
- Heart: What are some of the feelings young people have to deal with? Who do you get support from in times of need? Mental/emotional health?

Probe based on:

- Gender;
- Age;
- Disability;
- Ethnicity;
- Geography;
- Socioeconomic background;
- Socio-political context;
- Living context (e.g. internal displacement from homes and communities); positive as well as negative impacts.

2. Follow up discussion questions

- How do you define adolescence? What is unique about adolescence compared with childhood or adulthood?
- What do adolescents in this community value and why?
- What are the challenges for achieving this understanding of wellbeing/social justice? What are the gender dimensions? How have these changed over time and why?
- What are the key coping strategies and sources of resilience (migration, transactional sex, drug/alcohol use, violence, religious guidance etc.)? Are there gender differences?
- What are the key opportunities for overcoming these vulnerabilities?

A2.2 Key informant interviews

The following guide for KIIs is a general set of questions for the different types of KIs to be interviewed.

Proposed interviewees

Capability domain	Key informant
All domains	Programme implementers Local government officials in health and education planning Local/regional social welfare officers NGO leaders Youth workers Traditional leaders Religious leaders Academic analysts Head teacher of local secondary school Health workers (SRH) Leaders of youth-led groups and organisations Women's group leaders
Specific focus areas KIIs	
Educational	Head teacher of local secondary school Local education officer
Economic	Vocational training provider Local employer
Physical	Health workers (SRH)
Psychosocial	Leaders of social support NGOs Religious leaders Counsellors/psychologists Social workers
Political	Leaders of youth-led groups and organisations Judiciary/legislators/community justice implementers

Prior to the interviews, a selection of questions will be chosen (and perhaps additional specific questions added) that correspond to the individual to be interviewed.
** changes over time?
** differences between girls and boys
** differences between ethnic minority and mixed communes

Indicators	Questions	Capability
Employment/economic activities		
Young people's relationship with employment	At what age do young people start working in paid employment in this community? Are there gender differences? What kinds of roles do young people undertake in paid employment? Are there gender differences? Are there expectations as to the kinds of roles that girls and boys should undertake? Do young people work in unpaid roles within this community? Are there gender differences? Are there differences in wages between young women and young men? Do you believe there is a problem with youth unemployment in this community/how does this relate to youth unemployment at the national level? Is this a recent or long-term problem? What has been the government's response to the problem of youth unemployment? Has there been a different response to the situation of young women and men? Has this response been effective? In what ways? Are there NGO/community-based organisations/private businesses supporting youth employment? Who are programmes targeted to? How do they aim to help young people?	DoLISA Youth Union Commune leader
Young people working without contracts Young people working extended hours Young people working in dangerous conditions Young people experiencing greater pressure/ harshness from employers Perceptions of job insecurity Sexual harassment at work	What kinds of work do young people do? Are there gender differences? What are some of the challenges to gaining access to employment? Both informal and formal? For girls, and for boys? What are some of the work-related risks young people face in the country or community (such as informality, long hours without compensation, dangerous conditions, harshness from employers, job insecurity)? Are there differences between boys and girls? Are there any public, NGO or private interventions in place to improve the conditions of working youth? When did these interventions start? Are there differences between boys and girls? Is there any evidence of cases of sexual harassment for young women at work? Has it changed in the past two years?	Youth Union DoLISA Commune leader Women's Union
Main geographical sources and destination areas of young migrants Migrant youth unable to access key services	Do youth migrate in this community/country/district? Gender/age difference? Where do youth migrate from and to? What are the main reasons for youth migration? Gender differences? Are young migrants able to access key services in the same way as local youth (e.g. health, education, water/sanitation, housing, utilities, government support or benefits)? Where/how do young migrants access social networks and support? What challenges do youth migrants face? Are there gender differences, age differences?	Youth Union DoLISA Commune leader Women's Union
Limitations on young caregivers' economic independence and education	What responsibilities do young people hold for household and care work (e.g. caring for dependants including young children, those with chronic illness and the elderly – and household tasks such as collecting water/firewood, cleaning etc.)? Are there gender differences or age differences? For those who do have care work/household responsibilities do you think combining these with work responsibilities poses a particular challenge to young people? Do you think that there are gendered differences? If so, how does this affect their capacity to continue working and/or going to school?	Women's Union DoLISA

Education		
Young people accessing and attending education	Is education a priority for young people in this community? Is there a difference between young women and men? Does the importance people in this community place on participating in formal education differ for young men and young women? What are the main reasons for adolescents not attending school or dropping out of school early? Are there any programmes to help young people stay at secondary school/college? Are they run by the government or by NGOs? Are there differences between experiences in local and boarding schools?	DoET Teacher
Gendered norms in the learning environment	Are there any differences between the education girls and boys receive? Do teachers treat young men and women differently within the classroom? If so, why do you think this is? Do teachers in this community receive any training, or resources on understanding gender differences in teaching? From where? If so, what has been the effect/response?	Education
Opportunities to learn skills valued in labour market – e.g. English, Kinh language, ICT	Have any measures been taken to increase the availability of technical training, particularly including areas that can increase young people's employability? If so, what have been these measures? Are they led by government, NGOs or the private sector? Are there different programmes for young men and young women? If so, what is the rationale for this?	Education
Health		
Young people's access to and the youth-friendliness of health services	There is a gap in most health systems between health care for under 6 (Viet Nam specific) and then health care for adults. Are providers aware of this gap? Are they trying to address it? Reproductive health? Safe sex? Family planning? Abortion? Are they adequately tailored towards adolescents? If so, how?	Health
Psychosocial wellbeing		
Psychosocial/ emotional impact of different wellbeing issues	Are you aware of any emotional/psychosocial wellbeing issues within this community/nationally? Such as unemployment, lack of opportunities, limited schooling, isolation and lack of friendship — causing stress, depression, anxiety, fear etc. Has the consumption of drugs/alcohol by young people ever been a problem in the community? Are there differences between girls and boys? Why do you think these changes are happening? Are there any mental health services (e.g. counselling services provided by government or NGOs to youth)?	Psychosocial

Physical security		
Vulnerability of young people to different crimes	Is violence, crime etc. an issue in this community? Are there differences in the gender of perpetrators and victims? Which kinds of crime? Are measures being put in place by government or NGOs to reduce the incidence of violence? If so, are any of these measures focused specifically on youth? What are they? Are these measures gender-sensitive?	DoLISA Women's Union Department of Justice
Treatment of suspects by police/justice system	Is there a specific treatment for youth offenders? Are there different justice systems, how do they work? Do they take gender differences into account? Are young people aware of their relationship with the justice system and their rights?	
Intra-household violence/perceptions of domestic violence	What is the prevalence of domestic violence in this community/nationally? What kinds of relationship is this most prevalent? Between couples? Between generations? In what kind of households is violence prevalent (e.g. older couples, younger couples, early marriage)? If domestic violence is perceived to be present, are there any measures being taken to reduce its incidence? Is domestic violence viewed as a crime justiciable by the state?	
Participation and social connectedness		
Young people involved in local decision-making structures	Are there opportunities for young people to participate in local decision making? Have the voices of young people been heard in discussing ways to promote social change in any specific goal areas such as economic recovery, HIV and AIDS programming, child-friendly education services? Have data been disaggregated by gender? If so, through what mechanisms?	All
Social networks	Are there many groups or clubs (at school, in the community) for young people to participate in? Are there differences between girls and boys? If so, when, where, what? Why do you think young people participate in these groups?	All
Use of phones (landline or mobile), use of internet	Are there any actions being taken to promote the use of information technology by young people? Is there a gender gap? If so, what is the purpose of this?	DoLISA Teacher
Policy responses – Shape to specific capability domains being focused on		
Programming affecting young people	What youth programmes are in place (by government or NGOs)? (Mention all, across sectors) What is the youth population targeted by these programmes? (All youth/vulnerable youth/females/males) How effective have these programmes been? (Impacts?) Are there any plans for future programming?	All

A2.3 In-depth interviews with adolescent girls and boys

1. Explain the purpose of the research and what you will be using your answers for.
2. Explain that you will ask the interviewee questions and they can respond what they think and what they know (not only yes or no answers); they can also reply that they don't know when it is the case.

Basic demographic information: gender, age, ethnicity, religion, type of respondent, community name, date, etc.

Probes throughout

- Gender differences;
- Ethnic minority or caste differences;
- Traditional institutions and cultural norms;
- Power dynamics within households, peers, communities.

Probes: Why, what, where, how, when, how often ...

- Keep the focus of the questions on the interviewee – their life and reality as opposed to other adolescent girls, as this will be covered in the FGDs.
- Probing sentences:
  - Tell me more about it ...
  - What do you mean by that ...
  - Can you explain better/more ....
  - Give me examples ...
  - How is that/how/what do you mean ...

Questioning matrix

- The coloured columns on the right hand side reflect the capability domains that each question relates to. One question may produce responses relevant to one, several or all five capability domains.
- The scoring of '1' in each column is simply to enable counting of numbers of questions asked per domain.
- The 'Time' column, shows where questions engage with trying to understand 'change over time'.

	Thematic area	Questions
1	Family status and living arrangements	Are you single, married, divorced, widowed? Who do you live with (number of people in the household)? Who is the head of the household (age, gender and relationship to them)? Since when have you lived with them? How many siblings do you have? Younger? Older? Gender?
		• If a mother: How many children do you have, number of other dependants (e.g. older family members, members living with a disability or illness)? • How old were you when you had your first child? • How old would you like to be/have liked to have been when you had your first child? • Do all your children live with you? If no, where do they live, since when, why? • Who is the primary caregiver in your household (in terms of caring for others)?
2	Intra-household decision making	For what things to you have to ask permission? And from whom? Do you feel you have a voice in decision making within your household? If you don't feel you have a voice/decision-making power in the household, why is this the case? If yes, what kinds of decisions can you make now? Money, asset/land ownership, health, education, labour, employment, time use, marriage, expenditure, income? How is it different for male and female young people within your household? What are your main activities inside the household (household chores, child care)? How long does it take you to do these? Are these different from other members of your household? Who decides on who does what? Why?
3	Education and vocation	Do you go to school/college? If yes, what school/college do you go to? What costs do you incur going to school? Who pays for you? If not in school, at what age did you leave? Please tell us why you left. If you never went to school, please explain why. What do you require to go to school (uniform, books, bag, shoes, transport money etc.)? Who provides you with these items/supplies? Is it the same for girls/boys? How was the school/college selected? Why, by whom, etc.? What do you like about your school? What do you not like about your school? Do your parents encourage your education/to go to school? If so, how? Do they encourage your siblings the same? If not, why not?
		(If at school) Are you ever consulted at school/by teachers about your opinions (about the school, about your ideas, plans, home situation, concerns, etc.?) Is it the same for your siblings?

		Are you able to express your thoughts/concerns to teachers if you have any? If not, why do you think not?
		How are you treated at school? In the classroom, in the schoolyard, on the way to and from school? (Comfortable, uncomfortable, under pressure, happy etc.) (By peers, by teachers etc.) Is there anyone you can talk to when you have concerns at school?
		Do you have/would you have access to vocational training if you chose to continue learning after school? If so, what are the processes offered? Do you think they are useful? If not, would you do them anyway? If so, what are the courses offered? Do you think they are useful? Is there a cost for attending? If so, are you/your family able to pay for it?
4	Leisure time	What types of leisure/recreational activities do you do (extracurricular, not linked to school – church, clubs, sports, bars, informal community etc.) Is it the same for your siblings? (Gender and age differences) Have your leisure activities changed over time? If so how? Has the amount of time you spend on them changed over time? More or less leisure time ...
5	Livelihood strategies	Do you have a source of income? How, where, when, how often? When did you start having a paid activity? Why did you start? What is your family's economic situation like? How many meals do you have per day? Are there some hungry months? Have you ever felt hungry with nothing to eat? Who else makes money in your household? How did you make the decision to do so? Who was involved in that decision? What do you do with the money you make (save, give to someone, spend)? If you had more money for yourself what would you spend it on?
		(If interviewee does work) Do you feel safe at work? Is there anything that makes you feel very good or very bad at work? Have there been any specific changes/incidents at work that have caused this feeling? What difficulties/challenges etc. do you face in meeting your and your family's needs/securing a livelihood? When your livelihood is in difficulty/you face economic security, what do you do? What are your coping strategies (economic/social – include issues around risky behaviours: commercial sex, substance abuse, others)? How effective are these/each coping strategy (after each coping strategy ask how effective it is)?
6	Migration	Have any of your friends migrated? What do you know about this experience? Why did they migrate?
7	Forming adult relationships (marriage, cohabitation, divorce) [Married girls only]	Are you in a relationship? At what age did you separate from your parents (either to marry, to go live on your own, to live with a partner)? Why? How did you feel about the age that you got married? How would your life have been different if you had not married? If you are not married, at what age would you like to marry? Why? Who decided when you should separate from your parents? How did you feel about that decision? How do you feel about the relationship you are in?
8	Sexual and reproductive health	Do you have any current health issues/concerns? How do you deal with them? Do you receive any reproductive health education at school? If so, what were you taught about (family planning, menstruation, abortion etc.)? Where

		else do you access health information/education, in particular reproductive health information or advice? Probe: Family, religious leaders, local health services, radio, TV, mobile phone, leaflets, NGOs, husband/wife, peers, siblings, health extension workers, etc. Were you satisfied with what you were taught, they way you were taught etc.? Do you still have questions? Which? [When you get to this stage, say that it is sensitive, reiterate that it is confidential, if they don't want to answer it's fine etc. It would be useful for us to know.] What did you feel when you first started menstruating? What are your experiences with menstruation (including when at school – somewhere to dispose menstruation towels etc.)? What do you use when you menstruate? Where do you get it? How did people react to you? Did it restrict your mobility? Do you use family planning methods (pill, injectables, condoms, IUDs)? If so, which, where do you get them from, how did you decide, what is your experience of using these methods? Who knows about this? How do people react to you if they know? What do you feel about using them? Have you ever had an unwanted/unexpected pregnancy? How did you deal with it? If you had a termination/abortion, how, when, who helped you with it, what did you feel about it? Who else knew about it? What do you know about HIV and AIDS and STDs? From where did you get this information?
9	Violence	[Reassure again here is confidential, do not need to give names, etc.] For married girls: In some households husbands beat their wives. Does this happen much in this village (e.g. people facing many difficulties, economic problems, educational problems)? When does this type of violence tend to happen? Do women complain or just tolerate this situation? What about you? For unmarried girls: We know that sometimes girls face violence in their house or in school or the way to school. Do you know whether this happens in your village? What usually happens when this type of problem emerges? What about you? Have you ever faced any violence? Has anyone in the household/school/community ever: (can range from physical (beating, hitting), psychological (insults; pressure; shouting, verbal abuse; prevented you from seeing friends, relatives, taking part in activities, leaving the house etc.; denying food, water, clothing), sexual (unwanted sexual contact), etc.) What did you do about this? What sources of support, if any, could you access?
		Have you ever felt pressured in relation to a sexual experience? Probe expectation from husband, peer pressure, loneliness, transactional sex etc.
10	Self-esteem and mental health	Adolescence is a difficult time with lots of changes – in your bodies, in the way you think etc. Do you ever feel sad, disappointed, upset, angry? (Link back to specific situation that they told us about earlier in the interview.) How do you cope when you face these difficulties? Who do you turn to and why? Do you have any worries about the future?
		What type of support do you receive and do you think it is adequate? Sometimes young people who are stressed or depressed find it useful to have counselling services, to talk to, or get help from psychologists. Have you ever used services of this kind? Why/why not? Do you think the services were adequate?
		Have you ever been involved in taking drugs or consuming alcohol? If so, what have been the reasons for this? Probe: Social activity, escaping reality, peer pressure, depression. What were the effects on you when taking drugs/stimulants or alcohol? Are you aware of any services to support you if you have concerns about drug and alcohol-related activities/ behaviour? If you have used these services, were they adequate? What types of responses/interventions do you think could help young girls like you?
11	Wellbeing and social	Do you have friends in this community? How often do you meet with them? What do you do? Where do you go (e.g. doing chores such as fetching

	connectedness	water, safe spaces)? Do you have to ask permission from someone to meet your friends? If so who? Have your interactions with friends changed over time (as you became an adolescent) etc.?
	Horizontal social capital	If you are in trouble (e.g. need support at school, financial support, feeling sad etc.), what do you do? Where do you go? Who do you turn to? What kind of help do you receive (focus on wellbeing and relationships)? Has this changed as you entered adolescence?
		Are you a member of any group or club (at school, in your neighbourhood, youth groups)? If so, since when, where/which (social or political)? What do you do in the group? How many members are there? How do you become a member? How often do you meet? What benefits do you get from belonging to the group? If you're not a member of a group or club, why?
	Vertical social capital	Are there spaces for you to participate in community decision making (including political) (e.g. discussing with assemblyman/woman or other members of the assembly; participation in town council meetings or equivalent)?
	Engagement in decision-making structures	If 18-19 years old: Do you vote (if you are old enough/ elections of any type)? Why/why not? How do you decide? Are you aware of how to participate in the existing mechanisms/channels for civic participation? Have you ever participated? If so when, why, how? What happened?
12	Access to communications	Who do you communicate with on a regular basis and how? Are there other people you would like to communicate with but are unable to? Why? Do you have access to a mobile phone and use the internet? If no, would you like to have access to these types of communication technologies? Has your access to these communication technologies changed in the past five years?

Additional participatory instruments for in-depth interviews

1. Your family

- Who is in your family? (Draw stick figures to represent each key family member.) Who has the most influence over decisions about your life in the family? (Rank the most important members 1-4.) Who does what type of activities in your family? Who works the hardest? (Rank from most important to least important – a, b, c, d …)

2. Main worries

- Rank the 5 most important using *****

For in-school adolescent

- Not enough leisure time;
- Too much homework;
- Weak grades in school;
- Dropping out of school;
- Being scolded by teacher;
- Too many chores around the house, including taking care of siblings;
- Risk of early marriage/captured/kidnapped for marriage;
- Parents quarrelling;
- Feeling unsafe;
- Can't find a good job;
- No one to share problems with;
- Going hungry.

For out-of-school adolescents

- Not enough leisure time;
- Too many chores around the house, including taking care of siblings;
- Risk of early marriage/captured/kidnapped for marriage;
- Feeling unsafe;
- Can't find a good job;
- No one to share problems with;
- Going hungry;
- Not making enough income;
- Parents/husband (if married) quarrelling;
- Not knowing how to take care of infants/children.

3. Social capital

- Who can you talk with? Get advice from? (Draw bubble diagram about most important, and physically closest relationship.)
    - Family, friends, teacher, mass organisation, community leader, health clinic, neighbour, relative.

4. 5 things you wish you had more information about (rank the top 5 with ***)**

For in-school adolescents

- Vocational training;
- How to persuade my parents to avoid early marriage;
- Menstruation relief;
- How to solve a quarrel with my friends;
- How to have a small family when I get older;
- How to help my mother when she has a hard time with my father;
- How to enter university;
- How to cope with another student who is bullying me.

For out-of-school adolescents

- Vocational training;
- How to persuade my parents to avoid early marriage;
- Menstruation relief;
- How to solve a quarrel with my friends;

- How to have a small family when I get older;
- How to help my mother when she has a hard time with my father;
- How to earn more income;
- How to deal with health problems.

A2.4 Intra-household case studies

	Tools to use	Entry point for talking about the following themes	Sub-themes to probe	With whom
1.	House/ village mobility diagram	Household chores, livelihood; permission to move about	Differences between boys and girls Differences between married and unmarried girls	Girl Brother
		Safety	Safety esp. *vis-à-vis* risk of violence/sexual violence/trafficking	
2.	Family drawing	Intra-household decision-making power	Key decision maker? Who makes what decisions, especially about children? Are there different expectations of boys and girls?	Girl Mother
		Relative workload	Who works the hardest and why?	
		Domestic violence	Tensions between parents; parents and children? What happens? Why? How do you cope?	
3.	Time-use diary	Education	School experience Interest in content? Relationships with teachers? (How are they treated?) Relationships with other students (friends; but also problems, bullying)?	Girl
		Leisure activities	Free time? What do they do? What do they wish they could do (TV, reading, spending time with friends, clubs, sport)?	
4.	Bubble diagram	Social capital	Key sources of support/advice. People in authority they would feel comfortable seeking support from.	Girl
		Emotional wellbeing	Relationship between mother and daughter? What can/can't they talk about? Why? Relationships with friends? What can/can't they talk about? Why? Who else can they confide in? Is this adequate?	
		Role models	Is there anyone they particularly admire/look up to as guidance for their future life?	
		Access to communication	How do they communicate with key people in their lives (identified in diagram)?	
5.	5 main worries/ concerns	Future employment/ vocational training /migration	Hopes and concerns about employment. Access to vocational training. Thoughts on/ opportunities for migration.	Girl Brother Mother, but about her daughter Father, but about his daughter
		Access to justice	If a victim of a crime (e.g. sexual violence or domestic violence) what would you do? Is there someone in authority or an organisation you would feel confident approaching?	
		SRH	Understanding of SRH including menstruation, family planning, HIV, STDs; source of information/advice.	
		Forming adult relationships	Hopes and fears for finding and living with a marriage partner (including early marriage, marriage by kidnapping).	

A2.5 Life histories

Preparation

- Once oral consent is taken, the life history will be recorded and then translated and transcribed verbatim.
- Additional notes, observations, will be noted by the researcher.
- A sheet of paper and pens need to be brought to the interview.

Please be prepared that in some cases a life history will not work, so if after around 10 minutes the researcher feels it is not working, either bring the interview to an end politely or convert the conversation into an IDI. This may be especially the case with youth who have shorter histories to be reflected on and probably less experience at articulating their life story. Note: Working with older people can also take time – needs to be built in as stories and memories are often important sources of information – may be same for persons with disabilities.

Please also be prepared that people who have suffered various tragedies may not want to speak in any detail about these and researchers need to be sensitive as to whether they should continue the discussion, whether they should give the person the option for a short break or whether being a sympathetic ear is in fact of value.

Introduce the project and its purpose

Explain the objective of the life history interview and its format: you want the person to tell us about their life, and you will prompt them with some questions related to special areas of interest for the research. The interview will take from 60 to 90 minutes. Reiterate that all comments will remain confidential. The key point of inquiry is understanding change over time.

1. Collect basic background information (age, place of birth, living arrangements, position in the household)

Interviewer then draws key events on a timeline from birth, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, adulthood, older age; depict positive events above the line and negative events below the line.

2. Ask the following questions about the individual's recent past

- Can you tell us about any major life events that have happened over the past three to five years?
- Can you tell about any particularly happy moments or milestones within this three-five-year period?
  - Do you feel in control of these happy events?
  - What decisions did you make building up to these events (e.g. education, economic opportunities, family events such as marriage, childbirth, social interactions)?
- Can you tell us about any difficulties/challenges that have happened in your life over the past five years (e.g. with regard to getting enough money, employment or work opportunities, education, health, social interactions (e.g. staying in touch with, being able to communicate with others), security, participation in the community)?
- What can you tell us about the cause of these challenges? Can you explain why you think you have faced these challenges?
- Have you/your family tried to overcome these challenges? What strategies have you used? How well have these strategies worked? How important have your family resources/networks been in assisting you overcome challenges? Have they changed, deteriorated, improved etc. over time, then, now?
- How do you think your options/strategies have been similar or different to those from adults?
- How do you think your options/strategies have been similar or different from girls/boys of the same age?
- In particular, have there been any government programmes or services that have helped you overcome these challenges? What about any programmes or services provided by NGOs?
- Who else has helped you overcome problems (family, relatives, peer group etc.)?

3. Probe about the individual's longer past

- Thinking back to your life since you were a child until now, can you tell us what have been the key events (positive and negative) that have marked your life? This includes thinking about things that have happened to you that have influenced the type of choices you have made or the alternatives you have had since you were a child until now as a young person.
  - At individual level (e.g. schooling, work, health, engaging in early sexual activity, deciding to get married/have child (if relevant));
  - At household level (e.g. livelihood opportunities; available household resources; decisions in the household to spend on schooling, your health or that of other members; changes in the family (birth, death, marriage, divorce etc.));
  - At community level (e.g. participation in community activities or discrimination/exclusion from community activities; participation or exclusion from participating in community decision making, situations of security/violence).

4. Probe about the individual's future plans

- Given your present circumstances, what are your plans in the next one or two years? What about your longer-term plans?
- Have these plans changed with respect to the plans you had five years ago?
- Do you know if there are any youth programmes in the community (to promote employment opportunities, education, health, participation etc.)? Have you ever made use of any of these? If so, how do you think that youth programmes in this community can be improved to better meet your needs?

A2.6 Generational pairing

Focus on 10-19 year olds only
Pick two 18 year olds, their mothers and their grandmothers. Aim to select girls of positive deviance/good news stories.

Undertake each interview separately (owing to sensitivities/greater likelihood of being frank in absence of parents) but ensure the three interviews are undertaken by the same researcher.

Ask to reflect on key capability dimensions and what made a difference. Was their experience gendered? If so, what made them realise these gender differences (e.g. restrictions on mobility, dress code, different levels of household chores etc.)?

- Economic opportunities;
- Education experience;
- Relationships within the family;
- Observations about parents' interactions;
- Social connectedness;
- Cultural/decision making;
- Reproductive/health;
- Bodies;
- Time use;
- Physical security;
- Mental health.

A2.7 Policy responses

- Safe spaces for girls;
- Clubs – providing leisure activities, information services, mentors;
- Information stalls at market places;
- Access to microcredit;
- Night or weekend classes for school dropouts;
- More tailored vocational training;
- Extra-school language classes;
- Bilingual teachers/service providers;
- Mobile phone-based information;
- TV or radio programmes with relevant information re changing gender roles;
- Community-based crèches to take care of younger siblings to free up girls' time;
- Mobile reproductive health clinics;
- School-based /NGO-based counsellors;
- Guidance counselling re employment options and opportunities;
- Helplines – e.g. for GBV, marriage by capture.

A2.8 Coding framework

Background information

- Initials of name;
- Ethnicity;
- Gender;
- Age;
- Location;
- School grade;
- Household composition;

- Any mitigating factors during interview.

Education domain
- General;
- Gender-specific differences;
- Ethnicity-specific differences;
- Age-specific differences;
- Stories re teachers.

Economic domain
- General;
- Gender-specific differences;
- Ethnicity-specific differences;
- Age-specific differences;
- Health stories;
- Inheritance/elder care plans – which child.

SRH domain
- General;
- Gender-specific differences;
- Ethnicity-specific differences;
- Age-specific differences;
- Contraception stories.

Psychosocial development domain
- General;
- Gender-specific differences;
- Ethnicity-specific differences;
- Age-specific differences;
- *Vis-à-vis* parents/children;
- *Vis-à-vis* peers/age mates/siblings;
- *Vis-à-vis* spouse;
- Stories re interface with technology/modernism.

Participation domain
- **Vis-à-vis** school/community;
- **Vis-à-vis** family;
- Gender-specific differences;
- Ethnicity-specific differences;
- Age-related.

Services/knowledge
- Used in past/present.

Wanted for future

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Overseas Development Institute
203 Blackfriars Road
London SE1 8NJ
Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300
Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399