

The Green Edge: Women's Employment and Leadership for Sustainable Business in Viet Nam



A Viet Nam Diagnostic

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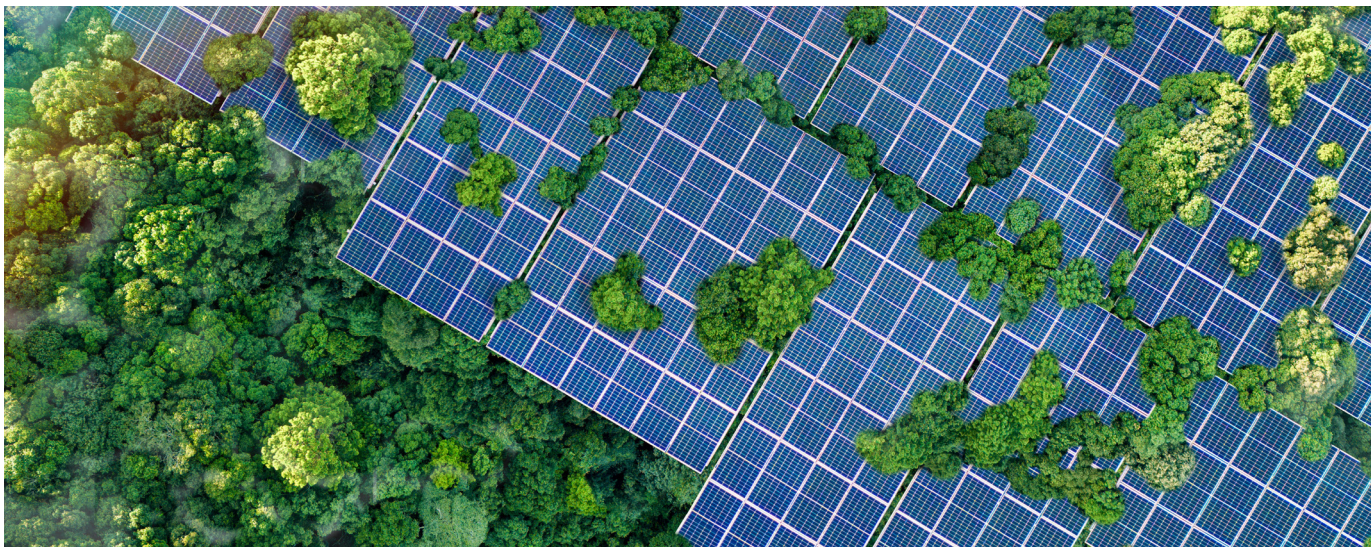
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Executive Summary

Viet Nam is among the countries most vulnerable to climate change. The country is taking action to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions and to adapt to the impacts of a warming world—and its private sector is playing a central role in this green transition. Navigating climate change effectively requires creating climate-resilient livelihoods that prioritize job creation in green sectors while addressing the disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities, particularly women who face greater barriers to accessing information, resources, and markets. However as this first-of-its-kind diagnostic shows, to successfully reduce climate-related risks and capitalize on competitive advantages, companies must identify and address gaps in women's and men's economic participation.

In Viet Nam, like many emerging markets, women are disproportionately impacted by climate change. Sectors in which women play a major role, such as smallholder agriculture, are particularly vulnerable to climate change, and this affects women's livelihoods and contributes to business disruptions and productivity losses. Currently, gender gaps in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) mean fewer women have the right skills to benefit from significant job growth expected under the green transition, particularly

in traditionally male-dominated sectors like energy, manufacturing, construction, and transport.

Addressing these gaps and meaningfully engaging women in the green transition helps businesses manage risks and identify new growth opportunities. For example, gender-inclusive recruitment strategies can expand talent pools and help meet growing demand for skilled labor in green industries, particularly for STEM positions. In addition, increasing gender diversity among management and executive leadership teams can enhance decision-making when addressing climate risks and shaping corporate climate strategies. Women leaders bring valuable perspectives that can drive the adoption of innovative approaches, including strategies with climate co-benefits. Companies that engage women in their supply chains can strengthen the resilience of their value chains, better manage climate-related disruptions, and reduce emissions.

This report examines women's roles in three sectors that are particularly relevant to Viet Nam's green transition: solar energy, plastics recycling, and rice production. These sectors were selected for their significant influence on Viet Nam's efforts to create sustainable, low-carbon economic growth, along with their potential to drive investment in the country.



Solar Energy

Viet Nam's revised Power Development Plan 8, which was approved in 2025, sets out bolder emphasis on renewable energy. Solar energy is already experiencing immense growth and under the updated plan it will account for the largest share of the country's energy mix by 2050, at 34 percent. However, substantial investment is needed to meet Viet Nam's renewable energy goals, along with more highly-skilled workers, especially for STEM and technical roles. This diagnostic explores women's current representation in the sector and identifies interventions that can help companies unlock the wide-ranging benefits that flow from a gender-balanced workforce and leadership teams.



Plastics Recycling

Viet Nam's National Action Plan for Circular Economy (NAPCE) through 2035 prioritizes plastic waste management and recycling. The sector needs investment to meet national recycling commitments, comply with extended producer responsibility legislation, formalize waste collection, and improve sorting infrastructure and recycling capabilities. Women already make up a major share of the informal workforce in this sector, and this diagnostic examines how they can help meet growing demand for more skilled, formal positions, while enhancing supply chain efficiency.



Rice Production

As part of its efforts to drive green economic growth, Viet Nam is committed to the sustainable development of one million hectares of high-quality, low-carbon rice in the Mekong Delta by 2030. Rice production is a significant economic driver for Viet Nam, but it also contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Furthermore, the rice sector urgently needs to adapt to climate risks, which are already reducing farmer productivity, threatening smallholder livelihoods, and disrupting supply chains. This diagnostic explores women's participation in the formal segments of the rice production value chain while touching on entrepreneurship potential in informal segments, and opportunities to upskill women for higher-value jobs.



Key Findings

- **There are gaps in women's participation in employment in Viet Nam's solar energy, plastics recycling, and rice production sectors, most notably in technical and STEM roles.** On average, women account for 23 percent of the total workforce across the three sectors. Women play an integral role in the supply chains of plastics recycling and rice production, but they are concentrated in lower-value segments with few resources to scale operations or access better jobs. Their jobs are also more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.
- **Women are also underrepresented in leadership positions across the three sectors.** Women hold 21 percent of senior management roles and 23 percent of board member positions among companies surveyed for this diagnostic. Of the three sectors, solar energy has the lowest share of women in leadership positions, followed by plastics recycling and rice production. This may be attributed to perceptions that women are better suited for positions in recycling and agriculture, which in turn lead to a better pipeline of women leaders.

Box A: Methodology




This diagnostic draws on a combination of primary quantitative and qualitative data collection. Data was collected through online channels and via telephone interviews from October to November 2024. The findings were triangulated with secondary literature on the three sectors of interest.

An enterprise survey examined women's representation in employment and leadership, as well as company policies on women's recruitment, retention, and promotion. Sixty-three complete responses were collected across the three sectors: 23 for both solar energy and rice production and 17 for plastics recycling.

Twelve key informant interviews were conducted with company officials, investors, and policymakers to provide more in-depth understanding of women's representation in these sectors.

- **The diagnostic identifies several major barriers to women's participation and leadership across all sectors.** The recruitment and retention of women is impacted by occupational stereotypes—for example, that men are more suitable for certain technical roles, and concerns related to parental leave and women's care and household responsibilities. Most firms have not developed mentoring or sponsorship programs to support women's career development, particularly in the plastics recycling and rice production sectors. Formal non-discrimination policies are also lacking in these two sectors.
- **Women are integral to supply chains in plastics recycling and rice production, but they remain concentrated in lower value segments with limited resources to expand operations or secure quality jobs.** Most informal waste collectors in the plastics recycling sector are women, and they lack access to training, finance, and technologies that could enhance their productivity. Similarly, women smallholders in rice production face constraints adopting climate-smart methods. In both sectors, skills development, financial inclusion, and access to technology would simultaneously improve women's economic opportunities while strengthening supply chain resilience and productivity.

Table A: Summary of Findings by Sector

	 Solar energy	 Plastics recycling	 Rice production
Leadership			
Share of women in corporate boards	13%	22%	34%
Share of women in senior management	10%	17%	37%
Employment			
Share of women in formal workforce*	25%	21%	22%
Share of women in high-skilled STEM occupations	5%	21%	52%
Share of women in medium-skilled technical/operational roles	6%	20%	14%
Workplace Policies			
Firms that offer flexible working hours	87%	76%	100%
Firms with formal policies referencing non-discrimination or equal opportunities	91%	59%	48%
Firms with mentoring or sponsorship programs to support women's career development	65%	47%	17%

*Excluding informal workers.

Source: Viet Nam Gender-Smart Climate Diagnostic enterprise survey conducted in 2024.

Call to Action

To realize new opportunities in the green transition and manage climate risks to business productivity and performance, companies can take a range of actions to enhance women's participation including the examples below.

1 Target recruitment and retention of women in STEM and technical roles.

- Implement targeted outreach programs through universities and technical schools to develop a strong pipeline of STEM workers, with specific targets on reaching women.
- Partner with educational institutes to create internship and apprenticeship opportunities specifically for women to encourage their early entry in STEM and technical roles.
- Showcase women in technical roles through company websites, recruitment materials, and industry events to challenge stereotypes and encourage job applications from young women.
- Establish re-entry programs that encourage women to return to work after starting families.
- Make hiring practices inclusive by using gender-neutral job descriptions and gender-diverse interview panels, for example.

2 Promote women's leadership and diverse management teams.

- What gets measured, gets managed—collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data on women's representation and promotion to identify and close gaps in leadership.
- Establish specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, time-bound (SMART) goals for women's representation in senior management and board positions.
- Incorporate leadership diversity metrics into company performance indicators.
- Clearly communicate non-discriminatory promotion pathways and criteria to all employees and provide regular feedback.
- Create career advancement pathways for high-potential women by developing and targeting accelerated leadership programs.
- Provide women with executive coaching and sponsorship by senior leaders, including male champions.
- Develop targeted networking opportunities for women within the business and help women access networking opportunities across the industry.

3 Develop an inclusive and resilient supply chain.

- Strengthen women's participation in supply chains by integrating gender-related criteria into procurement processes and supplier evaluations.
- Collect sex-disaggregated data across supply chains to identify women's roles and enhance their participation, productivity, and resilience to climate shocks.
- Develop supplier programs to build women entrepreneurs' climate adaptation and resilience capacity, for example, through training in adaptive techniques, digital tools, and business continuity in extreme weather events.
- In rice production, support cooperative business models and technology platforms that aggregate the outputs of women smallholders and improve their market access.
- Establish digital platforms and recycling collection hubs that integrate informal women workers into formal supply networks.
- Integrate gender metrics in annual sustainability reporting or environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments.

4 Build respectful and inclusive workplaces.

- Develop and implement comprehensive anti-harassment policies with clear reporting mechanisms and conduct regular training for all employees on how to recognize and prevent harassment.
- Develop and customize protocols for workers in vulnerable contexts, such as those traveling to remote installation sites or agricultural areas.
- Embed gender considerations when developing business strategies, such as consulting women and ensuring climate adaptation activities consider women's needs and aspirations.
- Introduce comprehensive parental leave policies that go beyond legal minimums, such as encouraging paternal leave and flexible parental leave.
- Provide on-site childcare facilities or childcare subsidies to help parents balance work and family obligations.
- Implement flexible working arrangements including part-time options, remote work, and flexible hours.

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