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# Pathways to Gender Mainstreaming in Rural Revitalization: An Analysis of the Experience Based on ADB's Yangtze River Green Ecological Corridor Comprehensive Agriculture Development Project

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## Abstract

*Gender mainstreaming is pivotal in achieving gender equality and fostering holistic social development in rural revitalization endeavors. Despite ongoing rural revitalization initiatives in China, women in these regions still encounter significant disparities in education, health, employment, and social engagement. The absence of gender mainstreaming hampers women's potential realization and impacts resource allocation, social equity, and governance efficiency. Drawing on the project experiences of the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Yangtze River Green Ecological Corridor Comprehensive Agriculture Development Project, this paper extensively explores the significance of gender mainstreaming in rural revitalization and delineates the implementation pathway. By offering novel perspectives on gender mainstreaming theory and practice, the aim is to ensure the widespread promotion of gender equality principles as rural areas progress, fostering a more harmonious and equitable society.*

## Keywords

*Gender mainstreaming, Rural Revitalization, Gender equality, Gender Action Plan*

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary society has entered a phase of rapid development, with the widespread adoption of the Internet significantly amplifying the speed and reach of information dissemination. In this evolving landscape, public awareness of gender dynamics is transforming, and the concept of gender equality is gradually gaining traction. Gender equality has emerged as a pivotal criterion for gauging societal progress. The strategy of gender mainstreaming, conceived to realize the objective of gender equality, not only constitutes an indispensable pathway to achieving gender parity but also serves as a fundamental catalyst for overall societal advancement. The inception of gender mainstreaming has spurred further scholarly inquiry into gender equality

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and furnished novel strategies and methodologies for advancing gender parity in practical contexts. Increasingly, nations and organizations are directing their focus toward the advancement of gender mainstreaming. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) stands out in this regard, implementing the Gender Action Plan (GAP) within its Comprehensive Agricultural Development of the Yangtze River Green Ecological Corridor Project. This initiative underscores the pivotal role of gender equality in fostering an inclusive and sustainable development framework in rural areas. By spearheading proactive gender mainstreaming initiatives, the GAP facilitates enhanced employment prospects for rural women and prioritizes initiatives aimed at augmenting awareness and building capacity among rural women. These endeavors not only engender fresh economic avenues in rural locales but also foster social inclusivity and cultural diversity within rural communities.

Rural revitalization stands as a pivotal strategy aimed at addressing the disparities between urban and rural development while fostering the modernization of agriculture and overall progress in rural areas. The successful execution of this strategy is intricately linked to the attainment of gender equality. However, amidst efforts to promote rural development, the significance of gender mainstreaming often goes unrecognized, leading to inadequacies in policies and measures that fail to account for the unique gender roles and power dynamics prevalent in rural settings. Consequently, rural areas have long borne the brunt of gender inequality, with women facing disadvantages in education, healthcare, employment, and political participation. The absence of gender mainstreaming has hindered the full realization of women's potential in rural development and has also impacted men's roles within families and society. This, in turn, has resulted in the unfair distribution of resources, heightened social inequality, and diminished efficiency in rural governance. By integrating the perspective of gender mainstreaming with the rural revitalization strategy and re-evaluating the factors contributing to gender inequality, it is possible to enhance gender relations in rural areas and elevate rural development to a higher echelon(Bettina, 2015). This paper aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the importance of gender mainstreaming in rural revitalization and to explore the intrinsic connection between gender mainstreaming and rural revitalization. By leveraging the framework and experiences garnered from the ADB's Yangtze River Green Ecological Corridor Project GAP, the paper seeks to offer a fresh perspective on the theory and practice of gender mainstreaming. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that as rural areas progress, the principles of equality between men and women are widely embraced, fostering a more harmonious and equitable rural society.

## 2. Conceptual Framework of Gender Mainstreaming

The concept of Gender Mainstreaming (GM) emerged from the international women's movement of the 1970s, aiming to combat gender inequality and social discrimination. Initially proposed at the UN's Third World Conference on Women, Gender Mainstreaming gained global recognition as a strategy for promoting gender equality at the 1995 World Conference on Women in Beijing (Zhu, 2015). Gender mainstreaming involves integrating gender equality principles and considerations across all policies, programs, and practices to eradicate gender discrimination and foster equal participation and benefits for individuals of all genders across social, economic, political, and cultural spheres (ECOSOC, 1997).

At its core, gender mainstreaming emphasizes systematically identifying and addressing the underlying causes of gender inequality throughout the policy formulation and implementation processes. It entails enhancing gender-sensitive governance structures and empowering women and marginalized gender groups to ensure that policies cater to the needs of diverse gender groups and mitigate the exacerbation of gender

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disparities. This strategy seeks to cultivate an inclusive social environment that transcends traditional gender roles, recognizing that gender issues extend beyond the purview of women alone (Liu, 2009). Ultimately, the goal of the gender mainstreaming strategy is to realize comprehensive social equality, enabling all individuals to fulfill their potential and enjoy equal social status and developmental opportunities.

## 3. Gender Dynamics in Rural Revitalization

Despite advancements in economic development and increased educational attainment among the populace, gender perspectives have seen improvement. However, rural areas in the country still grapple with a degree of gender inequality. Women encounter notable hurdles in political, economic, and cultural spheres compared to men (Liu, 2010). This not only curtails women's personal development opportunities and prevents them from fully leveraging their human resource advantages but also results in structural imbalances and squandered development potential. Therefore, in the comprehensive promotion of the rural revitalization strategy, addressing gender inequality is imperative. Failure to harness the wisdom and strengths of all groups in rural areas impedes their steady and sustainable revitalization.

The Gender Action Plan (GAP) of ADB's Yangtze River Green Ecological Corridor Comprehensive Agriculture Development Project encompasses six project provinces (municipalities), namely Yunnan, Guizhou, Hunan, Hubei, Sichuan, and Chongqing. It spans 47 project counties (districts/municipalities), categorized as national or provincial poverty-alleviation and development counties, or less-developed counties in central and western provinces receiving centralized financial transfers. These counties and districts exhibit low industrialization and tepid economic growth, relying predominantly on agriculture and traditional services. The homogeneity of their economic structure constrains local economic diversification and impacts overall social development. Concurrently, gender issues are more pronounced in these regions.

### *3.1 Reinforcement of Traditional Gender Role Division of Labor*

Gender perceptions in rural areas are deeply entrenched in traditional history and culture, often lagging behind the current economic and social development. The prescribed gender roles for women predominantly revolve around being dutiful wives and nurturing mothers, primarily responsible for household duties (Nan, 2013). Rural women are largely confined to domestic and agricultural chores, with their worth often assessed based on their ability to manage household affairs, rather than their involvement in village management or social activities. Despite increased political participation among women in general, rural areas still exhibit a predominantly male-dominated political culture, particularly in decision-making processes related to agriculture, forestry, and rural development. This marginalizes women in the public sphere, limiting their influence in village decisions and undervaluing the needs and opinions of women's groups (Oedl-Wieser, 2015). Such stereotypical gender role divisions deprive rural women of opportunities for growth and development, perpetuating traditional gender norms within villages. Attempts by rural women to challenge these norms are often met with resistance from both family and society, compounded by inadequate policies and resources to support their quest for greater autonomy and development opportunities. Consequently, rural women often find themselves isolated and disempowered.

### *3.2 Disparities in Educational and Employment Opportunities*

The educational and employment disparities faced by rural women are predominantly characterized by

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their generally low educational attainment and limited access to skills training. This impedes their ability to participate equitably in agricultural modernization and compete in non-agricultural job markets, resulting in the underestimation and neglect of rural women's contributions to rural economic development. A significant portion of women in project areas have limited employment options due to their educational deficiencies and lack of agricultural skills. For an extended period, rural women have opted for lower-paying jobs, affording them flexibility in working hours to accommodate male employment (Wang, 2017). Furthermore, households with limited access often exhibit a bias towards providing educational opportunities solely to males. In the realm of agricultural development, emerging agricultural technologies tend to be predominantly taught to men (Barik, 2021). Consequently, rural women find themselves marginalized, with their contributions and worth underrecognized, leading to a lack of self-esteem and societal acknowledgment. This glaringly points to pronounced gender inequality in the allocation of educational and employment prospects. Additionally, rural women encounter hurdles in accessing pivotal resources like land rights, vocational training, financial backing, and entrepreneurship and employment information (Wang & Zhang, 2023). These barriers not only stifle their potential for development but also diminish their involvement and impact on rural progress.

### *3.3 The Feminization of Agriculture*

With the rapid urbanization and surplus labor in rural areas, many rural men opt to migrate for higher economic opportunities, leaving agricultural production and household care responsibilities solely to women. This trend has gradually led to the phenomenon known as the "feminization of agriculture" (Duan and Wang, 2010). Compared to industrial and service sector labor, income from agricultural activities tends to be lower, and the domestic chores performed by women are often undervalued as unpaid labor. A significant portion of women in project areas are engaged in low-income, labor-intensive agricultural tasks, while men supplement their income with part-time work during leisure hours, in addition to agricultural duties. Moreover, women typically receive lower hourly wages than men for similar agricultural activities, and achieving equal pay for work of equal value remains elusive. These disparities exacerbate gender income inequality and diminish women's influence in household economic decision-making. The feminization of agriculture has had adverse effects on the overall development of rural women (Cai, 2019). It confines women to familial roles, limiting their interactions with society and depriving them of opportunities for personal growth. Furthermore, it restricts their ability to pursue higher-level occupations, perpetuating traditional gender role stereotypes of "men dominating the outside world and women dominating the domestic sphere." This impedes societal recognition and promotion of gender equality.

## 4. Analysis of Experiences with Gender Action Plans

In today's global landscape, gender inequality persists in various domains, such as education, employment, and politics. This status quo not only stifles women's potential for development but also impedes societal progress. ADB's Strategy 2030, unveiled in 2018, underscores the imperative to accelerate gender equality, aiming for at least 75% of ADB's committed business volume to be gender-responsive by 2030. Through collaboration with governments, the private sector, civil society organizations, and international partners, ADB facilitates the establishment of gender mainstreaming mechanisms via technical assistance and knowledge exchange initiatives.

The implementation of the Gender Action Plan seeks to advance gender equality, elevate women's societal

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status and economic participation, and enhance their living conditions and quality of life, thereby fostering social harmony and advancement. Specific objectives include:

1. Encouraging women's active involvement in modernized agricultural systems and pollution prevention projects, while broadening their access to technical roles.

2. Creating employment opportunities for women during project construction and operation phases to boost their income levels and promote economic empowerment.

3. Enhancing women's participation in project management entities, bolstering their technical and coordination capacities, and amplifying their voices in decision-making processes.

This Project operates over a 5-year cycle (2019-2024) and significantly contributes to poverty reduction and socioeconomic benefits. Numerous farmers engage in activities such as land rehabilitation, sustainable agricultural practices, waste management, and voluntary land transfer. Approximately 1,787,000 residents in the project area have benefited, with 25,078 full-time and 45,883 part-time jobs created for residents, including impoverished groups, ethnic minorities, and women. Since its initiation in 2019, the project has positively impacted hundreds of thousands of people in the project area. By the first half of 2023, 854,171 direct beneficiaries, including 285,637 females, have been recorded, accounting for 33.44% of total beneficiaries. Female participation in the project across most provinces has exceeded 40%, effectively contributing to gender equalization efforts in the project area.

### *4.1 Fostering Specialized Industries to Enhance Women's Employment Income*

The widening gender gap often intersects with economic and cultural contexts (Li et al., 2022). Influenced by factors such as traditional gender stereotypes, women encounter numerous barriers to education and employment, particularly in rural areas. While China has made significant strides in poverty alleviation, the underdeveloped local markets and lack of land and financial support limit rural women to low-skilled and less productive work. This vulnerability in livelihoods exacerbates their marginalized status and anti-poverty risks, posing a threat to rural sustainability (Yakovleva, 2007). To address the vulnerability of women's livelihoods, there is a crucial need for their economic empowerment to secure stable income sources. By integrating ADB's loan projects with the development of local specialty industries, each project area achieves dual objectives of infrastructure construction and industrial upgrading. This strategy links women's development with the revitalization of rural industries, facilitating their active participation in rural economic construction and promoting regional economic sustainability. For instance, Fuling District in Chongqing Municipality has leveraged the ADB program to vigorously develop smart orchards, effectively stimulating the local forest and fruit industry. This initiative has generated new employment opportunities and increased income sources for local farmers, particularly female farmers. Ms. Xia, a local farmer, exemplifies this success by managing her orchard while actively assisting other community farmers. The orchard has expanded to 360 acres with an annual output of 300,000 pounds. Approximately 20 to 30 individuals, with a notable 60% being female employees, work collaboratively to manage the orchard. Recognized as the Chongqing Rural Employment Support Base and Chongqing Women's Farmers Cooperative Demonstration Society, Ms. Xia's orchard serves as a model for promoting local economic development and gender equality, injecting new vitality into rural revitalization efforts.

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### *4.2 Establishing a Modern Agricultural System and Enhancing Women's Labor Participation*

Participation Amidst the trend of the feminization of agriculture, women play an indispensable role in agricultural production activities, contributing significantly to the high-quality development of agriculture (Zhang and Lu, 2023). Recognizing the pivotal role of women in constructing a modernized agricultural system is paramount. It is imperative to actively promote agricultural technologies tailored to women farmers to ensure their optimal utilization of modern agricultural techniques, thereby enhancing productivity and economic returns (Zhao et al., 2009). The project endeavors to establish a modernized agricultural system by introducing advanced agricultural technologies and management methods to improve production efficiency and boost residents' income. Special emphasis is placed on increasing women's participation, with a targeted participation rate of not less than 40% in all project tasks. Women are encouraged to engage in pollution prevention and control projects, which involve voluntary participation in constructing economic or ecological forests or providing input and consultation for the Rural Pollution Management Handbook within the community. These initiatives effectively enhance the human environment, ensuring the well-being of farmers and promoting environmental awareness, particularly among women in rural areas. In the latter half of FY2022, 15 training sessions were conducted in Hunan Province, covering 8 administrative villages with 1,103 participants, achieving a female participation rate of 40.80%. To foster agricultural technology innovation, experts from the Hunan Provincial Academy of Agricultural Sciences and the Hunan Provincial Rice Research Institute provided training and technical guidance to local farmers on low-cultivation techniques for oil tea and high-quality, high-yield cultivation techniques for rice. Tailored technical measures were prepared based on the local planting environment, and distributed to farmers for learning purposes. The training sessions employed multimedia teaching methods, distributed learning materials, and provided direct access for farmers to seek expert advice. Additionally, farmers could maintain communication with experts via phone even after the training concluded, establishing a comprehensive "training-Q&A-follow-up counseling" system. The program prioritizes women by offering employment opportunities, fostering independence, and providing technical skills training, thereby enhancing women's self-awareness and capacity for self-improvement.

### *4.3 Enhancing capacity development and fostering women's engagement in diverse training programs*

In China's rural areas, many left-behind women have limited education and few opportunities for continuing education or skills training, resulting in gaps in their knowledge regarding production, market awareness, and policy environments, thereby affecting their labor returns (Jiang and Huang, 2023). To address these challenges, it is crucial to strengthen capacity-building and awareness-raising among rural women through high-quality education and training programs, which can stimulate their motivation and initiative to participate in village development. Various training and awareness-raising activities have been implemented across project districts, including promoting water-saving irrigation techniques, soil improvement measures, conservation tillage methods, and enhancing awareness of environmental protection. Additionally, training in micro-business and e-commerce is provided, especially for farmers' cooperatives, to support sustainable development and enhance market competitiveness. These activities prioritize the principle of gender equality, with gender mainstreaming training on agricultural inputs ensuring equitable income distribution, with a requirement that 30% of participants be women. Furthermore, women are actively consulted on the timing, content, and location of training sessions to ensure their voices are heard, and their needs and preferences

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are met, thereby allowing for flexible scheduling and more effective, participatory training. This approach ensures that rural women acquire the knowledge and skills they need to grasp development opportunities and achieve economic independence for themselves and their families. For instance, the Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development in Yanjin County, Yunnan Province, collaborated closely with construction organizations to plan and implement a series of technical training activities throughout different project phases. These training sessions focused on Yanjin's "3+N" strategy for developing lucrative industries, the direction of water conservation forest projects, and their development prospects. Leveraging a comprehensive rural women's training network, the training adopted a principle of equal emphasis on popularization and improvement, offering diverse forms of instruction tailored to local conditions. By 2023, 113 technical training sessions had been successfully conducted, benefiting 1,900 village women and distributing over 2,000 copies of technical materials, significantly enhancing the capacity of women in project villages to achieve economic prosperity.

### *4.4 Safeguarding Women's Rights and Interests and Strengthening Rights and Interests Protection Measures*

During project implementation, provinces have implemented a series of measures to safeguard women's legitimate rights and interests, ensuring their equal access to corresponding rights, information, and resources for comprehensive economic, social, and health development. Firstly, adherence to labor laws and core labor standards, such as prohibiting child labor, enforcing the minimum wage system, ensuring pay equity, and providing occupational health and safety measures, creates a fair and safe working environment for women. It ensures that 100 percent of female workers receive training on their rights. Secondly, health and safety campaigns are conducted. Due to rural women's imperfect risk defense mechanisms, there remains a significant lack of health risk awareness, particularly concerning AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (Wu and Wang, 2020). Therefore, the project enhances public health knowledge, conducts training on HIV and STD prevention and control, and distributes relevant promotional materials to raise women's awareness and provide necessary information on prevention and treatment. A total of 614 trainings on labor rights and occupational health, along with 221 trainings on health and safety promotion regarding AIDS and STDs, have been conducted in project provinces. At the provincial and municipal levels, 516 consultations and discussions on project-related matters were held, with female participants comprising 13,475, or 58.04%. It is also crucial to ensure women's equal access to toilets and bathing facilities at construction sites, with facilities segregated for men and women. Ensuring women's access to separate sanitation facilities is not only part of gender-sensitive design but also integral to completing and respecting the GAP. This design aspect is based on an understanding of women's general needs and fully respects their biological characteristics and needs. Additionally, the accelerated urbanization has led to increasing land acquisition and expropriation issues, posing challenges to rural women's land rights protection (Kang, 2023). Safeguarding rural women's land rights can prevent grassroots women from falling into poverty, safeguard family autonomy and decision-making power, and contribute significantly to the sustainable development of the agricultural economy and fairness in land distribution (Xue, 2023). The project ensures that farmers, especially women farmers, benefit from land use in terms of land transfer by providing detailed project information, conducting gender, ethnic, and geographically sensitive counseling and consultation, and ensuring fairness and transparency in land transfer contracts. Grievance mechanisms are also established in case of disputes, and contracts are written in clear language to ensure understanding and recognition of costs and benefits by all parties involved, including couples. These measures not only protect women's rights and interests but also contribute to the sustainable development of

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the agricultural economy and the overall well-being of rural communities.

### *4.5 Establishment of Social Commissioners and Complaint Mechanisms to Improve Efficiency of Response to Claims*

The establishment of social commissioners and grievance mechanisms within the GAP has significantly enhanced the responsiveness to gender-related issues. Each provincial, municipal, county, and district project office is required to appoint a social commissioner and provide them with training to ensure the effective implementation of the GAP. Acting as gender equality advocates and monitors, these social commissioners are tasked with overseeing the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and assisting in resolving gender-related issues arising within the program. Provinces and municipalities actively engage external social consultants to provide professional external monitoring and support to all project counties. These experts offer operational guidance throughout all stages of project implementation, participate in inspection and evaluation activities, and propose effective solutions to implementation challenges. This approach not only enhances project transparency and accountability but also ensures the effective implementation of the GAP. Moreover, the project mandates the establishment of a comprehensive and systematic complaint and grievance mechanism. Before project initiation, district project offices must extensively consult and obtain the consent of relevant stakeholders, ensuring that all residents have a clear understanding of the complaint grievance mechanism. During project implementation, stakeholders have the right to submit complaints to the county project office. If unsatisfied with the district office's response, complainants may escalate the issue to the provincial project office, which is responsible for investigating and proposing corrective measures, as well as monitoring their implementation. This effective grievance mechanism guarantees transparent, fair, and sustainable project implementation in promoting gender equality and inclusive development. For instance, Chongqing Municipality has established a comprehensive complaint grievance mechanism comprising four main channels: on-site grievances, meeting grievances, telephone complaints, and online reporting through the Chongqing Government Services Network. Additionally, Chongqing has implemented a complaint grievance ledger system to enhance processing efficiency and transparency, recording detailed information about each grievance, including content, time, processing method, and resolution length, to ensure timely and effective responses to all complaints.

## *5. Project Achievements and Challenges*

The implementation of the Gender Action Plan (GAP) has yielded significant benefits in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment in project districts. By creating job opportunities, enhancing women's capacity, and increasing their participation in various activities, the project has improved rural women's economic status and boosted their social involvement. However, practical constraints have presented numerous difficulties and challenges throughout the implementation process, exposing various shortcomings.

### *5.1 Project Effectiveness*

#### *5.1.1 Enhanced Gender Equality Awareness and Safeguarding of Women's Rights and Interests*

The implementation of the GAP has significantly raised awareness of gender equality and safeguarded women's rights and interests in the project areas. Through a series of gender education activities, GAP has

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effectively promoted the concept of gender equality, enhancing rural women's awareness of self-reliance and self-improvement, and deepening the understanding of gender equality among rural residents. Across all provinces, GAP programs have been widely promoted, with the participation rate of women exceeding 40% in most provinces. This has ensured women's timely and effective access to project-related information and resources. As part of the project implementation, each province appointed social commissioners as required, and engaged independent external monitoring organizations to oversee GAP implementation. Additionally, a comprehensive grievance and complaint mechanism was established to ensure all stakeholders have a clear understanding of and access to the grievance mechanism, thereby enhancing project management democratization and transparency. Moreover, through various training activities on labor rights, health awareness, and gender mainstreaming, women's awareness of their legitimate rights and interests has been strengthened. These efforts have empowered women to learn how to effectively safeguard their rights by the law, thereby advancing the cause of safeguarding women's rights and interests in rural areas.

### *5.1.2 Increased Employment Opportunities and Economic Independence for Women*

The enhancement of women's economic independence can significantly alter their societal status (Jenderedjian & Bellows, 2020). The project offers rural women diversified vocational skills training, broadening their career choices and creating abundant employment opportunities. This results in a stable income source for women, thereby improving their economic independence. Achieving economic independence also brings additional economic benefits to families, amplifies women's voices in family decision-making, and advances gender equality within households. Moreover, active participation in economic activities empowers women to realize their self-worth and societal value, fostering a sense of achievement and fulfillment. Such active social engagement not only enhances women's quality of life but also dismantles the constraints of traditional gender roles, enabling society to recognize and support women's comprehensive development in economic and social spheres.

### *5.1.3 Optimization of Local Industries and Improvement of Living Standards*

The GAP's implementation has fostered women's economic independence, indirectly contributing to the optimization of local industries and significant improvements in living standards. Increased female participation in economic activities has boosted production efficiency and product quality, driving economic growth and industry optimization. Additionally, infrastructure development and environmental enhancements resulting from project investments have improved local land utilization efficiency and agricultural production levels. The emergence of new economic entities like cooperatives has provided women with nearby employment opportunities, breaking traditional gender roles and addressing the vulnerability of rural women's livelihoods. This transformation uplifts rural society's overall well-being, promoting social equality, and providing sustained motivation for rural revitalization.

## *5.2 Challenges Faced by the Project*

### *5.2.1 Inadequate Female Participation and Capacity Building*

Despite active efforts by project offices and external monitoring units to encourage women's involvement in project activities, female participation remains low in certain project areas, particularly in key phases such as project construction, operation, and decision-making. Further efforts are needed to enhance publicity and

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promote active participation among women, ensuring their meaningful engagement across all project stages, including planning, implementation, and supervision. Additionally, resource constraints have hampered capacity-building initiatives for women, limiting their involvement in project planning, implementation, and supervision. In some provinces, limited education and training opportunities in areas such as modern agriculture, health and safety promotion, and infrastructure maintenance have restricted women's vocational skills development and their ability to engage in a wider range of economic activities, consequently impacting their competitiveness in the labor market.

### *5.2.2 Insufficient Project Implementation and Monitoring Mechanisms*

Discrepancies persist between the project's gender equality objectives and its actual implementation at the local level, with insufficient cooperation among organizations. Female representation at decision-making levels in the workforce remains below target, with leadership positions predominantly held by men, perpetuating gender disparities in decision-making processes (Abhishek et al.□2020). Moreover, frequent turnover and replacement of project managers pose challenges to project management continuity and stability. New managers require time to familiarize themselves with project details, potentially leading to delays and increased implementation risks. To address these issues, it is imperative to deploy staff with specialized knowledge and experience to oversee project management at all levels, ensuring continuity and professionalism. Additionally, the stability of external monitoring units is essential for effective project progress tracking and timely strategy adjustments to address emerging issues.

### *5.2.3 Challenges of Gender Awareness and Cultural Change*

Rural areas are deeply influenced by traditional gender roles and cultural perceptions, necessitating sustained efforts to effect change. Insufficient awareness of gender equality among rural residents hampers the full implementation of GAP. Furthermore, the intangible nature of gender equality outcomes compared to other program results may lead to the neglect of gender mainstreaming strategies, reducing them to rigid tools that overlook the complexity of achieving substantive changes in gender relations. Consequently, some gender equality promotion measures may become overly complicated or symbolic, resulting in resource wastage. Efforts to address these challenges should focus on promoting sustained gender awareness and cultural change, ensuring that gender mainstreaming strategies are integrated effectively into project implementation (Brenner, 2009).

## 6. Policy Recommendations for Achieving Gender Mainstreaming in Rural Revitalization

### *6.1 Optimizing the Employment Environment for Women and Enhancing Their Self-Development Capacity*

Women constitute a vital segment of the rural workforce. By ensuring equal employment opportunities and fostering a conducive working environment, we can mitigate gender disparities, fully unleash women's economic potential, and augment family income, thereby fostering sustainable growth in rural economies. Notably, it's essential to recognize the inherent biological differences between men and women. Therefore, gender-specific needs must be thoroughly considered when devising employment policies and programs, aim-

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ing to cater to the distinct requirements of rural women and safeguard their rights and interests (Zhang and Lu, 2020). Firstly, there's a need to comprehensively grasp the practical and strategic needs of local women and provide tailored vocational training programs. Encouraging active participation among women in these initiatives will enhance their ability to contribute to various projects and ensure they reap tangible benefits in suitable roles. Secondly, offering guidance and financial assistance to female entrepreneurs can empower them to pursue self-employment opportunities through entrepreneurship, expanding their career options and bolstering overall employment rates. Moreover, promoting flexible work arrangements will provide rural women with more opportunities for employment within proximity to their homes, facilitating better work-life balance and enabling them to fulfill both professional and familial responsibilities effectively.

### *6.2 Promoting Gender Equality Education and Intensifying Publicity on Gender Mainstreaming*

Advancing gender equality education and enhancing awareness of gender mainstreaming are essential steps toward achieving comprehensive gender equality in rural areas. By intensifying publicity efforts on gender mainstreaming, awareness of gender equality within society will be heightened, fostering a gender-sensitive mindset among rural residents. Establishing gender equality awareness is a continuous and gradual process, particularly targeting the youth demographic, who play a pivotal role in shaping societal attitudes. Gender equality has been integrated into the curricula of primary and secondary schools in rural regions, ensuring that young individuals are instilled with a sense of gender sensitivity and equality from an early age. Simultaneously, leveraging the communicative power of internet-based mass media platforms can effectively disseminate the concept of gender equality. Continuous positive messaging can gradually reinforce societal acceptance and understanding of gender equality at a social and psychological level (Zhang and Qiang, 2015). In rural areas, employing diverse and innovative publicity strategies that align with local cultural norms and values is paramount. Utilizing local dialects for communication, crafting easily understandable slogans, and incorporating relatable messaging into daily life can bridge the gap between rural residents and the concept of gender equality. This approach enhances the accessibility and effectiveness of publicity efforts, integrating gender mainstreaming seamlessly with rural cultural heritage in the process of revitalization.

### *6.3 Enhancing the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism for Gender Equality*

The establishment of a robust gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation system is essential for assessing the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming policies, identifying implementation challenges, and enhancing policy pertinence and efficacy to benefit all genders. Additionally, a well-structured monitoring and evaluation mechanism encourages public engagement, fosters social awareness of gender equality issues, and cultivates a conducive environment for collective efforts in advancing gender equality. Firstly, it is imperative to develop a set of gender-sensitive indicators that encompass all stages of project design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation across various socio-economic, cultural, and political domains. These indicators should comprehensively reflect progress toward gender equality goals. Secondly, fostering collaboration among diverse sectors, including government agencies, social organizations, and village committees, is crucial for comprehensive data collection, analysis, and joint action to address gender disparities. Lastly, there is a need to enhance the training and capacity building of project personnel in gender mainstreaming awareness. Equipping staff with the necessary knowledge and skills enables them to conduct gender-sensitive assessments effectively. This includes the ability to collect and analyze gender-disaggregated data, promptly identi-

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fy gender inequalities, and facilitate the implementation of GAP measures more efficiently.

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