Gender and labor in Sustainable Aquaculture – The case study from the Red River Delta, Vietnam

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Presentation outline

- Introduction
- Feminist Political Ecology Perspectives on Extractivism
- Research site and methodology
- Research findings
- Conclusion

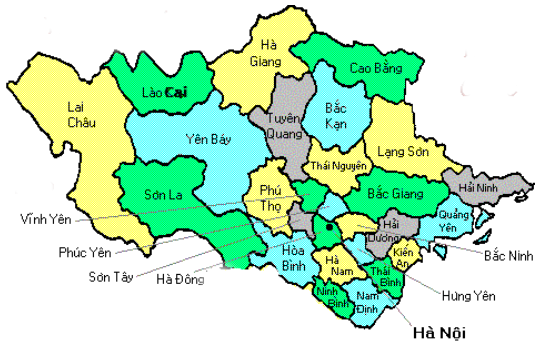
Introduction

- Women in the Red River Delta, North of Vietnam play a crucial role in small-scale aquaculture
- Women comprise half of the workforce within the fisheries and aquaculture value chain, most are concentrated in the least stable and least skilled segments of the sub-sector
- Their activities include small-scale fishing, shellfish harvesting, seaweed collection, aqua-product processing, and marketing
- They are essential to the rural economy, significantly impacting household nutrition, food security, and family health care, all while often remaining unpaid.

Feminist Political Ecology Perspectives on Extractivism

- Feminist political ecology (FPE) has called out injustices due to processes of allocation, dispossession and extractivism, unequal power and gender relations and the uneven spread of pains and gains from development processes (Elmhirst, 2018)
- In this paper, we look at extractivism through the lens of feminist political ecology
- The concepts of extracting women's undervalued labor to create value in fisheries.

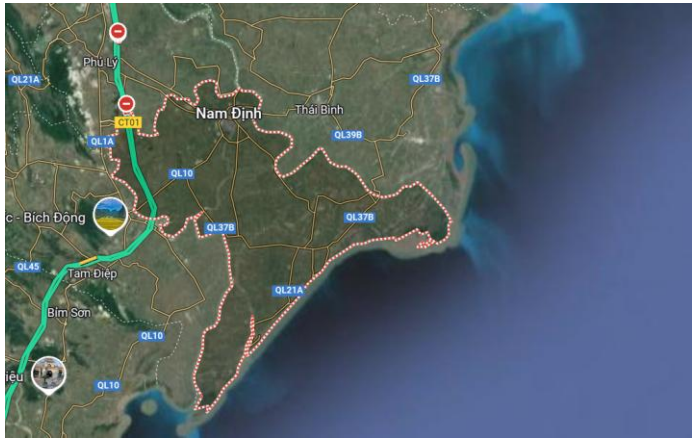
Research sites



Nam Dinh Province: Giao Thien and Giao Lac communes

- **Main sources of income:**

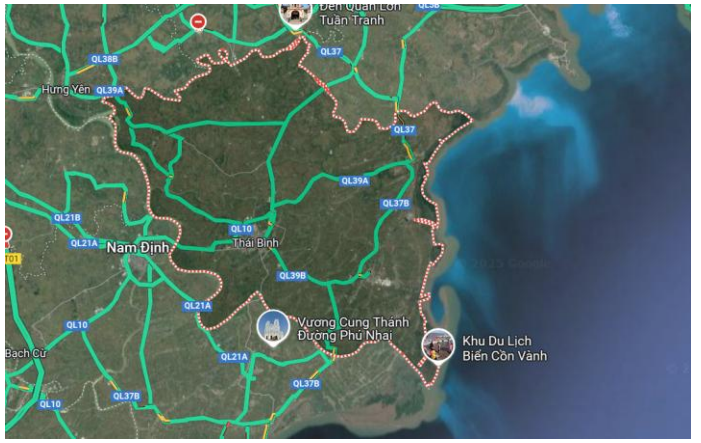
  Farming rice, vegetables, aquaculture, livestock, poultry, fishing, coastal fisheries, services such as small-scale handicraft, carpentry, construction materials production, garment, restaurants, and food processing.



Thai Binh Province: Nam Hung and Nam Phu communes

- **Main sources of income:**

  Aquaculture, mostly white-leg shrimp, a small amount of natural shrimp, livestock farming (cattle, poultry, waterfowl), beekeeping (April to June yearly), agriculture (growing rice and other crops), mechanics, construction, garment, handicrafts (carpentry, embroidery), fishing, coastal fisheries and food processing.



Research sites

Extensive Shrimp Farming:

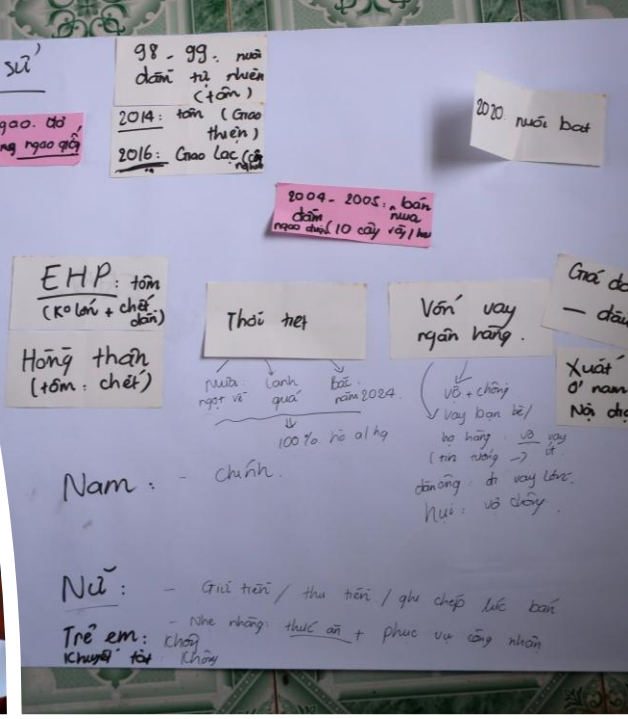
- Dominant in Giao Thien, Nam Hung, and Nam Phu (total area < 2000 ha)
- Located in buffer zone of Xuan Thuy National Park, with no major investments.
- High dependency on weather, water quality, and salinity
- Products: Tiger shrimp, wild shrimp, brackish shrimp, crab, seaweed, mullet
- Harvesting: Two annual crops/year.

RESEARCH SITES

Industrial and high-tech shrimp farming:

- Concentrated in Giao Lac (~500 ha)
- Requires significant investment (ponds, water systems, chemicals, antibiotics)
- Higher costs but lower product value
- Funding sources: Bank loans, family, Women's Union, Farmers' Union.

Key informant interviews and focus group discussion



Findings

- **Extensive shrimp farming** uses significantly more natural resources—including water, food, land, and aquatic organisms (shrimp, fish, crabs, seaweed)—than other aquaculture systems
- While extensive shrimp farming areas have stabilized or decreased, industrial and high-tech shrimp farming continues to expand regionally.
- Extensive farms serve dual purposes (household use + sales), while industrial and high-tech farms target only commercial markets.
- All shrimp farming systems discharge wastewater into the environment, which contaminates surrounding water sources and compromises water quality for extensive farming systems.

Preliminary findings

- The most physically strenuous work such as pond preparation is mainly done by men
- Involvement of women in aquaculture shaped by cultural norms and economic situations
- Women are heavily involved in certain aquaculture types such as small-scale fishing, shellfish harvesting, seaweed collection, aqua-product processing, and marketing
- Women's lack of access to land and pond ownership (industrial shrimp farming) - Without access to ponds, women cannot initiate aquaculture and assert control over the benefits from pond aquaculture.

Preliminary findings

- Women are excluded from training/education opportunities on shrimp farming techniques and pond/water treatment
- Women are totally excluded from industrial shrimp farming
- Women are involved more in extensive aquaculture because extensive aquaculture does not require much investment, and does not provide high yield
- Deep-rooted patriarchal norms within their community further confine women to domestic roles, dictate shared responsibilities for both genders, and restrict their access to higher-paying jobs.

Preliminary findings

- Women may have less say in household pond management than men, as they are often dismissed as 'not knowing anything' about aquaculture
- Women take financial risks as primary borrowers for shrimp farming
- Women are the ones who keep the money from selling shrimp, simply because “I need someone to keep money for me”.

Preliminary findings

- Women's labour has been mobilised at an unprecedented scale and concentrated in the most exploitative jobs to fuel economic growth in shrimp farming
- Extracting women's labour makes them more vulnerable to climate change especially in the work that they do
- Extreme weather events have been observed at the research sites. Women engaged in shrimp farming extensively use lime mixed with water, placing it in front of electric fans to blow the mixture into shrimp ponds to neutralize the water.

Conclusion

- Extensive shrimp farming uses more natural resources while industrial and high-tech aquaculture causes more impacts to environment.
- Women's work is also a form of social reproduction that 'subsidizes' production - it makes production possible
- Women have less access to aquaculture technology
- Women tend to benefit less compared to men because they have less access to ponds
- Industrial aquaculture is considered to be a male-dominated activity, women tend to lose out in training and other means of accessing information.

Conclusion

- ❖The gendered organization of aquaculture exploits poor, rural women's undervalued reproductive labor in extensive systems, while privileging men in capital-intensive production, thereby reproducing inequality.
- ❖They may also need other support to implement what they have learned and support to manage reproductive work
- ❖Lack of gender-focused policy in aquaculture serves to perpetuate gender inequality

=> Developing gender integration policies for aquaculture is crucial for advancing inclusive and sustainable aquaculture systems.

Thank you very much!