

Article

Benefits and Constraints of the Agricultural Land Acquisition for Urbanization for Household Gender Equality in Affected Rural Communes: A Case Study in Huong Thuy Town, Thua Thien Hue Province, Vietnam

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Abstract: The Vietnamese Government has implemented agricultural land acquisition for urbanization (ALAFU) since 2010 which has caused a high level of social-economic transition in the country. In this paper, we applied the gender and development approach to discover how ALAFU has influenced the household gender equality in affected areas in Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam. The data for this paper was mainly collected from two household group surveys, four group discussions, and six key informant interviews. Group 1 covers 50 affected households whose agricultural land was acquired for urbanization, while Group 2 consists of 50 households whose agricultural land was not taken away. The findings reveal that ALAFU has led to reduced access to agricultural land for group 1, but has contributed to an increase of economic status for women in both groups by creating non-farming job opportunities with a good income. However, most of their new jobs are still informal, contain potential risks, and the unpaid care work burden is heavy. Moreover, although the rate of women participating in household decision making has increased, the quality of participation is limited. Their participation in social activities and vocational training courses has improved insignificantly. Therefore, if the Government continues to promote ALAFU, they should take structural gender inequalities into account to achieve their sustainable development goals.

Keywords: agricultural land acquisition; urbanization; household gender equality; unpaid care work; women's economic position; women's participation in household decision making

1. Introduction

Agricultural land acquisition for urbanization (ALAFU) is the popular and cheap option of the urbanization process of developing countries [1–4], but it has disordered the life and livelihoods of people in the affected rural areas because they have strongly depended on agricultural land, and have low education and working skills causing low adaptive capacity during social-economic change [5–7]. Indeed, some research has shown negative impacts associated with ALAFU, such as decreasing farming employment, increasing poverty and environmental degradation, and rural-urban migration, which reduces arable land, degrades soil quality, raises the price of food commodities, and increases competition between the agricultural and residential uses of natural resources [7–12]. However, new opportunities have also appeared including high access to developed extension services,

good educational systems, and medicinal health care, a high demand for agricultural products and diversified non-farming employment [7,13,14].

Gender equality is one of the important components of sustainable development [15,16]. It relates closely to agricultural land accessibility [17] and urbanization [18,19]. In fact, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has stated that unequal access to land resources between men and women, which is common in rural areas, has hindered progress toward rural gender equality [20]. Additionally, according to Frank Ellis (2000), access to land is the most important asset of rural people. In many cases, it is a valuable unique asset for their livelihoods [21]. Hence, losing access to land has a direct impact on their livelihoods, causing a change of gender-based income and labor division in the family. In addition to the loss of access to agricultural land, urbanization has gradually merged the affected rural communities into urban areas [22]. One study revealed that urbanization has worsened the female dual-burden of paid and unpaid work, and that the sharing of unpaid work within the family has increased for males [18]. A second study via United Nation Women (UNW) concludes that urbanization does not yet advance gender equality [16]. Both papers do not consider gender equality in affected households (GEIAH). Another recent study shows that ALAFU has contributed to improving the socio-economic status of women in affected households, [23] but this is not enough evidence to conclude that GEIAH has generally improved. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned studies have not adequately considered GEIAH, therefore research on the benefits and constraints of ALAFU for GEIAH could significantly contribute to sustainable development in both urban and rural areas.

Over time, the social-economic transition has gradually improved gender equality in Vietnam's rural households. However, there are still inequalities between male and female members in families (especially between wife and husband) in terms of economic status, participation in household decision making and social activities, unpaid care work burden, as well as the access to social services [15,24,25]. These terms could be deeply affected by ALAFU.

Therefore, the objectives of this paper are to discover the changes in GEIAH through comparison of the above aspects between wives and husbands before and after ALAFU in Huong Thuy Town, Thua Thien Hue province, Vietnam, where ALAFU has been implemented over recent years [26]. Moreover, to understand whether such changes are associated with agricultural land acquisition (ALA) or urbanization, we compared two household groups in the affected areas. Group 1 consisted of 50 affected households whose agricultural land was acquired for urbanization, while group 2 consisted of 50 households affected through urbanization but with remaining agricultural land. We assumed that ALA could decrease the GEIAH, but then new opportunities associated with urbanization could also improve GEIAH.

This paper shows the gender impact of ALAFU that policymakers and planners, local authorities, women's unions, NGOs, and investors who acquired agricultural land for their business need to consider in planning, decision-making, and policies related to land management and gender development as well as rural and urban development. The structure of the paper is as follows: Section 2 introduces land acquisition policy and practice in Vietnam; Section 3 describes the conceptual framework of the study; Section 4 is about the research methods and study site; Section 5 contains the results; followed by the discussion and policy implications in Sections 6 and 7.

2. Agricultural Land Acquisition for Urbanization in Vietnam

According to the land law in 2013, land resources belong to the Vietnamese people and the Vietnamese state as the representative owner. The state issues land use rights for people through land use certificates. People can sell, transfer, inherit, and offer their land use right to others, but they have to return their land use rights when the State requests support for the social-economic development of the country. So ALAFU is a process whereby the State withdraws the agricultural land use rights from farmers in order to extend the urban area, develop infrastructure and industrial zones. The State compensates the loss of land use rights through financial and other support measures based on regulations of the land law [27]. Thus, ALAFU consists of three main components: the ALA (1),

compensation for losing farmland use rights and support to recover livelihoods (2), and urbanization (3). The first is the ALA component, which states that farmers have to return their agricultural land rights to the State. In the land use plans for each province, the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DONRE) and the Land Fund Development Center consider and propose ALA plans based on the social-economic development strategy of the provinces and then submit the plans to the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment (MONRE). Farmers do not have a voice in this step and they only receive ALA announcements from local authorities before ALA implementation. The second is the compensation component, which consists of compensation for losing land use rights and support in allocating alternative jobs or recovering livelihoods. In the Land Law, the State regulates compensations for the affected farmers, either financially or through provision of new land use rights in new areas depending on the land funds of each affected area. If by cash, the State decides on the compensation for each type of acquired land without the participation of affected farmers, and then totals the compensation based on the area of acquired land. If by land use right, the land area for which the affected people receive compensation must be equal or bigger than the acquired land area. The support includes vocational training courses and rice for 12 months (12 kg of rice per month per person). The support can also be converted into cash depending on the decision of the affected people. The last component is urbanization, which leads to the growth of cities due to industrialization and modernization. Urbanization in Vietnam always goes along with infrastructure and industrial development, creating non-farming employment, developing technology, and social equality [28].

In practice, to support the rapid urbanization since the 2000s, the State has acquired over 10 million hectares of agricultural land, most of which with fertile soil [29–32]. ALA projects have selected monetary compensation methods, and many studies have indicated that the compensative land price is inadequate compared to the value of the acquired land, and that compensation is often delayed for a long time [30,32,33]. Nevertheless, the cash amount is still significant enough to recover livelihoods, and is used for many purposes such as repairing or building houses, buying new equipment (e.g., motorbikes, washing machines, fridges, kitchen equipment, mobile phones), investing in children's education, investing in a new job, paying for health care, and adding to savings in the bank [7]. The vocational training courses offered do not coincide with the labor market demand and the affected people, and have not improved working capacities, especially of the middle-aged population group who are facing unemployment or must accept temporary jobs [34]. Considering urbanization, the Ministry of Construction (MOC) states that there was a total of 833 urban areas across the country with a current urbanization percentage of around 38.5% in 2018. The figures are expected to increase to 50% by 2025. Urbanization has created non-farming jobs for millions of rural laborers, contributing to socio-economic development and the infrastructure in both rural and urban areas [2,13]. However, the rate of urbanization causes many problems such as inadequate development between social infrastructure and technology, and it increases the poor–rich disparity [13] which could restrict the livelihoods of affected households, especially of women through their low adaptive capacity.

In the 1993 land law, all rural people were issued an agricultural land use right with an equal land area based on the land fund in each commune. From 1993 until the present, the Government has not re-allocated the agricultural land use rights of farmers, meaning that all rural people who were born after 1993 were not issued agricultural land use rights, and, in the case of people who died after 1993, their land belongs to their family after their death. Moreover, education and industry have been strongly promoted across the country since the 2000s, and, as the income from agriculture is low, many rural young people born after the 1980s have tried to get higher education to escape agricultural employment, and no longer depend on agricultural land. These people offer or sell their agricultural land use rights to others who still practice agriculture [23].

3. Conceptual Framework

Nowadays, gender researchers and development projects can apply different approaches to understand gender equality including Women in Development (WID), Women and Development

(WAD), and Gender and Development (GAD). Of these, the Gender and Development approach of 1980 does not only focus on women like WID and WAD, but on both women and men through assessment of their relations and interactions with society and family. This approach defines specific characteristics of women and men to help understand the similarities and differences in respect to economic development and how they respond and adapt to changes in socio-economic conditions, and it helps to identify the roles and responsibilities of women and men [35]. Therefore, the approach taken in this study elucidates the changes of GEIAH.

FAO has defined gender as: "Gender is the relations between men and women, both perceptual and material. Gender is not determined biologically as a result of the sexual characteristics of either women or men, but is seen socially. It is a central organizing principle of societies, and often governs the processes of production and reproduction, consumption and distribution" [36]. According to Frank Ellis (2000), gender is the socially determined division of roles, responsibilities, and power between men and women. These socially constructed roles are usually unequal in terms of power and decision making, control over assets and events, and freedom of action and ownership of resources, among other things [21]. Gender equality is when men and women have the same rights and opportunities in all sectors of society and their different behaviors, needs, and aspirations are equally valued [37]. Based on these definitions, gender equality on a household level refers to equal responsibilities, roles, and power division in all household activities.

In practice, gender equality in Vietnam's rural areas has been considered by the socio-economic national strategy and rural development programs in the past decades. However, the position of women is still low. In rural areas, 65% of women work in agriculture and 45% work as self-employed without social security benefits and access to insurance. They still take strong responsibilities in the unpaid care work [38]. The participation of women in decision making has improved but is still limited and only a few rural women can access vocational training courses, extension services, finance, technology, markets and trader networks, as reflected by 70.9% of rural women laborers being unable to access vocational training [15,24,25,38]. Many aspects still need to be improved, including the economic position, the participation in household decision-making and social activities, the unpaid care work burden, and the access to the social services of women. The gender preconceptions such as "men in public life, women stay at home", "men build the house, women make the home" are still deeply rooted in rural households [15,24,25].

At present, most of the heads of farming households (husband or wife) in rural areas in Vietnam are from the middle-aged group and their children, who have not been issued agricultural land use rights, do not want to go into agriculture. In these households, the wife often stays at home, does agricultural work, and takes care of the family. The husband often takes a non-farming job or does both farm and non-farming jobs to secure the family's income. [39]. Therefore, ALAFU could strongly impact husband and wife's roles in farming households and cause a restriction in agriculture [31,32,39] in which women participate more than men [5,38]. ALA has also created non-farming opportunities through urbanization with the result that the affected people can abstain from traditional cultivation work and take other employment opportunities with higher incomes in the non-farming sector if their working capacity is good, which lead to improved status [23,40]. On the other hand, it can also increase unemployment and increase the dependency of women on men [41]. Additionally, ALA increases the family food supply burden that is often the responsibility of women [12,38]. Furthermore, ALA contributes to rural-urban migration [29,35], leading to the feminization of agriculture [38] and increasing the responsibilities of women in unpaid care work such as caring for children and elders, washing, cleaning, and cooking. Compensation and support measures could help the affected people overcome and adapt to the new situation after ALA.

In this study, we have selected the aspects that we assume might clearly be impacted by ALAFU, consisting of economic status, participation in decision-making and social activities, the burden of unpaid care work, and access to the social services for both wife and husband in the two affected household groups before and after ALAFU. Their economic status is measured by the type of

employment, income, and working days; the participation in decision making and social activities is measured by the participation percentage of wife and husband; the burden of unpaid care work is measured by the time allocation and the division of responsibility between wife and husband; and access to social services is measured by the accessibility to vocational training courses, credit services, and health care.

Based on these definitions and the situation in Vietnam, we have built this research framework, which shows the relations between ALAFU and GEIAH (Figure 1).

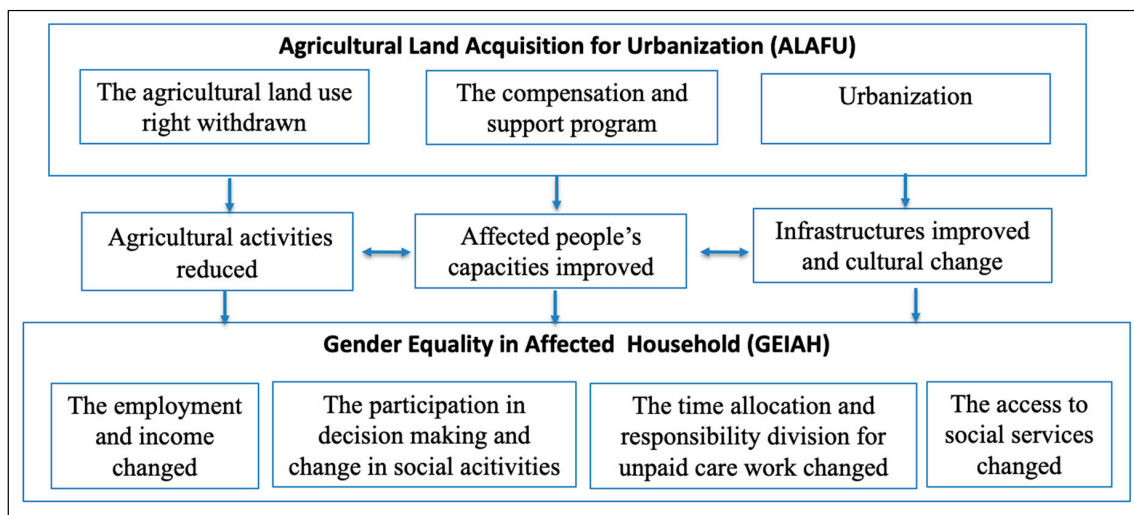


Figure 1. The linkage between Agricultural Land Acquisition for Urbanization and Gender Equality in Affected Household.

4. Study sites and Methods

4.1. Study Sites

Thua Thien Hue is a province of central Vietnam. According to the Department of Natural Resources and Environment (DoNRE) of Thua Thien Hue province, rice cultivation plays the main role in agriculture, but it has to face difficulties because most agricultural land areas have bad soil quality, and weather conditions are becoming more and more severe [42]. According to “Resolution No 72/NQ-CP of the Government of Vietnam”, DoNRE of the province has converted 7083 ha of agricultural land to non-agricultural land during the period 2010–2015. In 2014, Government plans were that this province should become a centrally controlled city in the future, and they approved the agricultural land conversion of 19,000 ha during the period 2016–2020 to extend Hue to be five times larger in the near future [26,43]. In 2019, the rate of urbanization of the province reached 52.7% and could reach 60–65% in 2020. The average income per person in the province was 3,136,000 Vnd/month in 2018 [44].

Huong Thuy Town, adjoining the south of Hue city, has traffic and transport advantages including road, railway, and airway to connect with large cities such as Da Nang, Ha Noi, and Sai Gon. The total land area is 45,466 ha, in which agricultural land occupies 80.9%, non-agricultural land occupies 18.3%, and unused land makes up 0.8%. According to reports from the Huong Thuy Town People Committee (HTTPC), 3527.8 ha of the agricultural land area was converted to non-agricultural land during 2005–2018, occupying 6.3% of the total agricultural land area of the town [31]. Since 2010, Huong Thuy became one of three satellite cities of Hue city and undertakes the main functions of the industrial and tourist development of the province. According to decisions No 368/QĐ-UBND and No 123/QĐ-UBND of the province, Huong Thuy Town has converted 2000 ha of agricultural land in order to speed urbanization in the period 2019–2020. The average income per person of the province was 4,333,000 Vnd/month in 2018 and the rate of urbanization reached almost 70% in 2019 [44].

To suit the research objectives, we selected two communes consisting of Thuy Van and Thuy Thanh in Huong Thuy Town to be our study sites. These communes, located closely to Hue city and with more than 200 ha of previously used agricultural land, have been converted to non-agricultural land such as road and residential land. On average, each household lost about 1500 m² of agricultural land, so that only 400 m² remains per household [33]. In the near future, these communes will be merged with Hue city. Most households whose land was acquired were not entirely dependent on agriculture before ALA. The Figure 2 shows mapping of study sites.

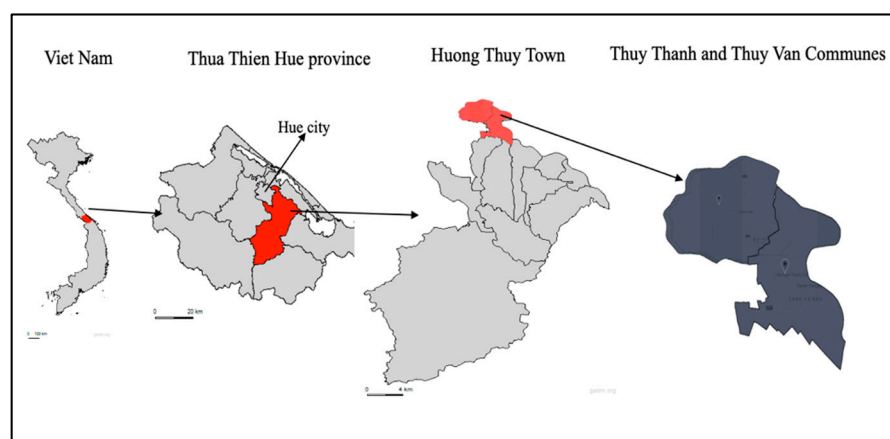


Figure 2. Mapping of study sites. (Source: Global Administrative Areas (GADM), 2018).

4.2. Methods

Important information for this study does not only build on statistical data but also on the thoughts, feelings, perspectives, stories, explanations, and expectations of interviewees, local people, or information suppliers, in order to better understand the progress of change in respect to GEIAH. Therefore, it applies a mixed methods approach combining quantitative and qualitative procedures. Quantitative data are collected through household surveys, whereas group discussions, key informant interviews, in-depth interviews, and observations provide the qualitative data.

To get both qualitative and quantitative data, we used the rapid rural appraisal tools (RRA). RRA supports sufficient communication and interaction with communities and provides tools to collect diversified data [45]. In this study, we used RRA tools consisting of semi-structured questionnaires, checklists, village walking, and observations to collect primary data during two time periods (before ALA in 2012 and the surveyed time in 2017).

To meet the research objectives, two groups from the Commune People Committee of Thuy Thanh and Thuy Van were targeted: A list of households whose acquired agricultural land exceeded 50% of their former agricultural land area (group 1), and a list of households whose agricultural land is still entirely owned (group 2). Then, we selected a new list of 50 households in group 1 and 50 households in group 2. As described in the conceptual framework, all 100 surveyed households were couple families consisting of husband and wife in order to reveal gender role changes between the couples. Lively group discussions during household surveys and in completing the study produced various views, thoughts, and stories, providing diversified information for ALAFU.

To collect primary data, 100 households were surveyed using a semi-structured questionnaire. This survey collected statistical data in respect to employment, income, working days, participation in household decision-making, unpaid care work division, and the access to social services of both wife and husband before ALAFU (2012) and after (2017), as well as reasons for the change in these terms. All the data from the household surveys were analyzed statistically, giving the average value of each index in percentage. To make sure we met both husband and wife, the heads of villages helped us to contact and make appointments with households from the list. In a second step, we held discussions with four groups: a wives' group, a husband's group, a mixed wives and husbands version of group 1,

and a mixed wives and husbands version of group (2), with each group containing eight to ten people. In these group discussions, we showed the statistical data from the household surveys to receive their confirmation or feedback, then asked participants to list reasons for the change for each gender equality dimension to rank the importance level of each reason by using a couple comparison method.

Using this ranking scale helped us get more information from explanation, perception, and the feelings of the affected people whose voice is important for this study. Based on the result of ranking, we know which reasons are important and how these reasons related to ALAFU. Thirdly, we conducted in-depth interviews with six local key informants, including the head of a women's union and head of the people's committee at two communes. Most open questions focused on their views about GEIAH and its change over time, the change of cultural issues and social norms in respect to gender issues, the benefits and constraints from ALAFU for improving the GEIAH, and their ideas about improving the GEIAH. Information from these interviews offered us alternative views about ALAFU to cross-check data, and information from the affected households, to avoid biased conclusions. Fourthly, we visited the villages multiple times, and attended village meetings and social events on the study site to observe the participation of men and women in order to better understand the situation of the GEIAH.

During primary data collection, we also collected available secondary data from reports of the Commune People's Committee, the Women's Union, and the Town People's Committee. We also analyzed a broad variety of other sources (e.g., scientific papers and daily magazines) related to our research topic.

5. Results

5.1. Characteristics of the Surveyed Households

As explained in Section 3, we selected 100 surveyed households based on the household lists supplied by the local authority. Some characteristics of the surveyed households are shown in Table 1. To see the different impacts of ALAFU between both groups, we compared characteristics of two surveyed household groups before ALAFU. Numbers are similar for the two surveyed household groups in respect to the age of household leader, household income, total agricultural land area of household, as well as income contribution from agricultural activities to the family's total income. The data also show that both household groups did not depend totally on agriculture before ALAFU. The income contribution from agriculture is just around 45% of the total household income. This could reduce the livelihood shock for them after ALAFU. However, the average age of the household leader in both groups is around 48 years, limiting flexibility to adapt to major career changes or to improve the household gender equality (HGE).

Table 1. Characteristics of the surveyed households.

Characteristics	Unit	Group 1 (N = 50)	Group 2 (N = 50)
The average age of household leader before ALAFU	Year old	48.8	47.2
Income/person/year before ALAFU *	Million Vnd	19.7	19.3
Total agricultural land area of household before ALAFU	m ²	2050	2100
Rate of income from agriculture of household before ALAFU	%	45.6	44.5

* Note: 1 USD ≈ 20,000 Vnd. (Source: Household survey, 2018–2019).

5.2. Changing Employment and Income

One of the most important factors that influence the HGE is the employment and income of wife and husband. Improving the income of women has been highlighted in many development initiatives to achieve gender equality [46]. Basically, the rural women's economic position is lower than men

because most of them participate in agricultural activities with low income. As a result, their power and position in the family are often lower than their husbands [47]. The question of ALAFU is how the employment and income of wife and husband in the affected households change and whether this change could improve GEIAH. We have listed our results in Table 2.

The change in employment and income between the wives and husbands in each group are not similar. In both groups, the income activities of the wives changed more clearly than the activities of the husband. Many wives changed from being farmers to being small businesswomen and hired laborers after ALAFU. In group 1, the percentage of wife farmers decreased from 36% to 12%, while the percentage of the wives being small businesswomen and hired laborers increased from 10% to 32% and from 12% to 20%, respectively. In group 2, the percentage of wife farmers decreased from 36% to 10%, most of them having changed to hired laborers or holding dual jobs (farmer and hired laborer). However, the income activities of the husband in both groups insignificantly changed. The percentage of the husbands in group 1 who are farmers slightly decreased from 30% to 22%, but dual job holders (both farmer and hired laborer) increased from 18% to 24%. It is interesting that while the employment of the wife in group 2 changed a lot, this did not happen with the husband's employment, even though their main job also changed. For example, in group 2, 36% of husbands are farmers, but 77.8% of them changed from cultivating rice and breeding to floriculture, which developed into a high-income activity since 2010. Another example is that 32% of husbands are hired laborers but 37.5% of them have worked around their commune instead of going far away from home (as before ALAFU).

Table 2. Changes in employment and income of wife and husband (Percentage of household).

Employment Type	Groups 1 (N = 50)				Group 2 (N = 50)			
	before ALAFU (2012)		after ALAFU (2017)		before ALAFU (2012)		after ALAFU (2017)	
	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband
Civil servant	2	8	2	8	0	2	0	2
Small businessman	10	6	32	6	12	4	12	4
Worker	16	8	12	8	16	8	20	8
Hired laborer	12	30	20	32	10	32	20	32
Farmer	36	30	12	22	36	36	10	36
Dual jobs (both farmer and small businessman)	12	0	10	0	14	0	14	0
Dual jobs (both farmer and hired laborer)	12	18	12	24	12	18	22	18
The average number of working day/year (day)	226	270	270	290	220	260	264	300
The average income/day (1000 Vnd) *	101	181	170	220	100	183	170	220
Contribution to total income of household (Percentage)	28.9	62	41.5	49	27.8	60.1	34.5	50.7

* Note: 1 USD \approx 20,000 Vnd, 22,000 Vnd before ALAFU and 2017, respectively (Source: statistical data from household survey, 2018–2019).

Besides the change in employment, the average number of working days and the income per day of both husband and wife in both groups also increased after ALAFU. Of these, the working days per year of the wives in group 1 and group 2 rose from 226.2 to 315.7 days and from 220 to 310 days, respectively. Their income per day rose around 86% in group 1 and 70% in group 2 compared to before ALAFU. As a result, their contribution to the total income of the household increased from 28.9% to 41.5% in group 1 and from 27.8% to 34.5% in group 2. For the husbands, there was not much change in their employment, but the average number of working days and income per day also increased. However, their income contribution declined to around 14% in group 1 and 9.4% in group 2 compared

to before ALAFU. The data also show that the difference in income between wife and husband still exists, but significantly narrowed after ALAFU. This reveals that the economic status of the wives in both groups improved significantly compared to that of their husbands, especially for the wives in group 1. We investigated the reasons for the changes, which is reflected in Table 3.

Table 3. Reasons for changing employment and income (Percentage of household).

Reasons Lead to Changing Economic Status	Groups 1 (N = 50)			Group 2 (N = 50)			
	Wife	Husband	Important Ranking *	Wife	Husband	Important Ranking *	
Changing employment	Losing agricultural land (ALA)	50	20	2	30	10	2
	Getting cash compensation (ALA)	30	40	3	80	80	1
	Improving infrastructure and access information (urbanization)	40	30	4	56	52	3
	Increasing non-farming job opportunities (urbanization)	60	60	1	20	20	3
	Others	20	10	4	16	14	4
Changing income per day	Losing agricultural land (ALA)	20	10	3	0	0	
	Increasing non-farming job opportunities	80	70	1	80	80	2
	Others	30	20	2	20	20	1
Changing working day per year	Losing agricultural land (ALA)	20	20	2	0	0	
	Improving infrastructure access information (urbanization)	80	80	1	80	80	1
	Increasing non-farming job opportunities (urbanization)	30	30	3	20	20	2
	Others	20	10	4	20	18	3

* Note: Result from group discussion. (Source: Household survey and group discussion, 2018–2019).

We divided the reasons for change into three groups: (1) a reason associated with ALA (losing agricultural land, compensation, supporting vocational training courses); (2) a reason associated with urbanization (good infrastructure, new companies/factories opening, rise in number of residents, increasing access information, and modern culture); (3) other reasons (e.g., age, health, working skills). The interviewee could give more than one answer if their change was motivated by multiple reasons. The surveyed data in Table 3 show that the main reasons for both husband and wife changing their employment in both group 1 and group 2 are urbanization and ALA, of which urbanization is the most common and important. In the group discussion, the wives in group 1 stated, “We have more advantages than the wives in group 2 because we are not concerned about agricultural land anymore, and we have received the cash compensation for losing the land. Therefore, we could get alternative jobs more easily than them”. It is surprising that 30% of the wives and 10% of the husbands in group 2 also answer that the ALA has caused their employment change. In addition, 70% of group 2 have the same explanation for their employment change such as, “Although we still have our agricultural land, our neighbors have changed their jobs because of ALA. Their new jobs seem to be not only better than agricultural work but also suitable to our working capacity. The benefit from agricultural land contributes insignificantly to our family’s income, moreover, we believe that our agricultural land might be acquired in the near future as well. Therefore, ALA is one of the reasons for our employment change”. Most surveyed households agreed with the statement from one key person in their communes, “Urbanization has created many kinds of jobs that are not only suitable to our capacity and near our villages and homes, but also provide a good income. Besides that, an improving infrastructure offers us more conveniences to do with work.”

5.3. Changing Allocation of Time and Responsibility Division for Unpaid Care Work

Unpaid care work (UCW) mainly includes caring for family members (especially children, the sick, and elderly), buying and making food, washing, and cleaning [48]. Such work is very important to maintain family life but is not counted in the paid work system. Unfortunately, social preconceptions often reckon that women can do this work better than men, leading to gender inequality and hindering job mobility for women [48]. In this study, we assume that ALAFU could improve this issue. To understand the situation, we investigated the allocation of time and the division of responsibility for UCW between husband and wife for both groups through household surveys and group discussions. The results show the difference in the allocation of time between wives and husbands, and the change of time allocation for each of them after ALAFU. The total time allocated to UCW for both wives and husbands in both groups was shorter than before ALAFU. The total average of reduced time for the wife and husband is 2 h and 0.6 h, respectively. The wife still has to spend over five hours per day for UCW, while the husband spends just over one hour. This difference reveals that inequality still exists after ALAFU.

In terms of time allocation, the division of responsibility for husband and wife is shown in Tables 4 and 5. It has improved a little but the wives in almost all the surveyed households in both groups still take the main responsibilities of UCW. Most of them have to take the main daily repeated UCW including buying food and clothes, preparing food, cleaning, washing, and caring for children, the sick, and the elderly. Meanwhile, most of the husbands take responsibility for building and repairing the house, which is not often required.

Table 4. Changing allocation of time for unpaid care work (Hours/day).

Allocation of Time	Group 1 (N = 50)				Group 2 (N = 50)			
	before ALAFU (2012)		after ALAFU (2017)		before ALAFU (2012)		after ALAFU (2017)	
	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband	Wife	Husband
Preparing food	2.5	0	2.2	0.1	2.6	0	2.3	0.2
Cleaning and washing	2.5	0.7	1.8	0.5	2.5	0.7	2	0.5
Caring for family members	2.2	1.4	1.2	1	2.2	1.3	1	1
Total	7.2	2.1	5.2	1.6	7.3	2	5.3	1.5

(Source: Household survey, 2018–2019).

Table 5. Changing responsibility division in unpaid care work (Percentage of household).

Who Take the Main Responsibility in	Group 1 (N = 50)						Group 2 (N = 50)					
	before ALAFU (2012)			after ALAFU (2017)			before ALAFU (2012)			after ALAFU (2017)		
	W	H	B	W	H	B	W	H	B	W	H	B
Buying food and clothes	100	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0	100	0	0
Preparing food	100	0	0	90	0	10	100	0	0	70	0	30
Cleaning and washing	100	0	0	96	0	4	100	0	0	80	0	20
Caring for children, sick and the elderly	68	0	32	50	4	46	70	10	20	50	20	30
Repairing the house and household equipment	0	80	20	0	70	30	0	86	14	0	50	50

Note: W = wife, H = husband, B = both wife and husband. (Source: Household survey, 2018–2019).

As with the changes in other areas, we investigated the reasons for changes in the allocation of time and responsibilities of UCW. The results from the two group discussions are similar (Table 6). A reduction of the women’s time for UCW associated with improved household equipment and

infrastructure, support from children, and changing employment can be seen. Of these, improving household equipment and infrastructure are ranked the most important. This is also confirmed in discussions with the husbands' group. One woman explained in our in-depth interview *"We have used a part of our cash compensation or income to buy new household equipment such as a washing machine, fridge and other things. They save time for us. Buying food and shopping is more convenient and takes less time because many food stores, street markets and supermarkets have appeared around our house. Moreover, our children have grown up we don't have to take care of them much, they can even share the housework."*

Table 6. The reasons for changing allocation of time and dividing responsibilities in unpaid care work.

The Change of Participation in	Reasons for Change	Important Ranking
Changing allocation of time	Changing employment	3
	Improving household equipment and infrastructure	1
	Support from children	2
Changing responsibility division	Changing employment	1
	Changing attitude	2

(Source: Group discussions, 2018).

Considering the change in dividing responsibility occurring in a few surveyed households, participants said the wife is absent all day so the husband has to do some of the work. In discussions with the husband group, a male participant said, *"In a few households, due to the change in the wife's employment, she is absent all day because of a new small business. She tries to do almost every UCW in the early morning or late afternoon. Therefore, the husband does some of the simple work that she does not have time for, such as making simple food for lunch. Most of us have changed our minds and are more open, but honestly, we cannot do these jobs as well as they do. So the women still undertake almost every UCW in a family."* And a female participant said, *"Although we have spent more time and labor-power for new paid work after ALAFU, all our family members have got used to the previous division of responsibility and don't want to make chaos. So, we women try to undertake the UCW as usual"*.

5.4. Changing Participation in Household Decision Making and Social Activities

The participation in household decision making or social activities of women and men is one of the dimensions that reflect the HGE issue. It normally relates to the economic position, culture, and ideology [46]. One study has shown that women's participation in household decision-making (WPHDM) positively relates to their income and occupation [49]. In this study, we assume that ALAFU leads to rising income and social change, and both of them promote the WPHDM and social activities as well. The change in the participation of both wives and husbands in the two groups is shown in Table 7.

The data shows significant improvement in the WPHDM in both groups after ALAFU and their limited participation before ALAFU. The men's participation in decision-making related to children and the elderly also increased. At present, around 50% to 80% of the surveyed households have made decisions through discussion and the agreement of both husband and wife. In other surveyed households, the decisions were mainly made by the husband. Such improvement is almost equal between the two groups. In general, the participation of the wives is still lower than that of the husbands. In particular, the women's participation strongly increased in decision-making relating to family livelihoods and family finances. The decisions relating to housing and property are still often made by the men, although the women's participation in this also increased slightly compared to before ALAFU. As for participation in social activities, such as commune/village meetings, husband and wife's family events, neighbors, and relatives (e.g., weddings, funerals, anniversaries), the women's participation improved a little, but the men often remain the family representative here. This situation

has similarly occurred in both groups. In addition, while the data were being collected, we casually visited two events at the study sites (a social event and a village meeting) and noted that over 80% of the participants were men.

Table 7. Changing the participation in decision-making and social activities (Percentage of household).

Who Have Participated in	Group 1 (N = 50)						Group 2 (N = 50)					
	before ALAFU (2012)			after ALAFU (2017)			before ALAFU (2012)			after ALAFU (2017)		
	W *	H *	B *	W *	H *	B *	W *	H *	B *	W *	H *	B *
Decision-Making relating to employment	4	60	36	4	34	62	6	54	40	4	34	62
Decision-Making related to caring for children and the elderly	52	0	48	20	0	80	50	0	50	38	2	60
Decision-Making related to family finance	0	70	30	0	28	72	0	50	50	0	28	72
Decision-Making related to housing and properties	0	80	20	0	56	44	0	76	34	0	54	46
Hamlet or village meetings	8	92	0	20	80	0	10	90	0	20	76	4
Social activities in the commune	6	84	10	20	56	24	8	80	10	24	52	24
Family events	0	60	40	8	40	52	0	92	8	8	82	10

* Note: W = wife, H = husband, B = both wife and husband. (Source: Household survey, 2018–2019).

We showed the above results in the group discussions to receive their confirmation and investigate the reasons for the changes. We asked people in group discussions to give reasons and then rank them according to importance. For the wives, the information in Table 8 showed three reasons for change. Those are changing employment, improved knowledge and attitude, and encouragement from their husbands. Of these, changing employment was the most important. They stated, “*Most of us have changed our job due to ALAFU and we now work independently with our husbands, therefore, we have to make decisions connected with our jobs through discussions with our husbands to get the best options. Moreover, our income and social knowledge are also making us more confident in contributing ideas that our husbands could use to make the final decision. The participation is both our right and the way we share responsibilities with our husbands. We don’t want to make decisions alone.*” The husband’s group explanation reads, “*Urbanization has changed our lives—not only our income activities but also our attitudes to HGE. We have discussed issues with our wives to reach agreement. Making household decisions together is the way we respect each other and share responsibility as well. Our family is happier since most decisions are made by both of us*”. However, in terms of the women’s participation in social activities, participants explained that the social prejudice that “*men go in public, women stay at home*” still exists despite social changes due to urbanization. Both husband and wife argue that participation in such social activities are responsibilities rather than interests, so the husband should take them on. The wives only participate in these events when their husbands are busy or the event requests the participation of both husband and wife.

Table 8. Reasons for the change in participation in household decision-making and social activities.

The Change of Participation in	Wife Group		Husband Group	
	Reason	Important Ranking	Reason	Important Ranking
Household decision-making	Changing employment	1	Changing employment	1
	Changing knowledge/attitude	2	Changing attitude	2
	Encouragement from husband	3		
Social activities	The husband is busy	1	Changing employment	1
	Changing attitude	2	The wife's participation	2

(Source: Group discussions, 2018).

5.5. Changing Access to Social Services

Access to social services such as financial credit, training courses (including vocational and educational training), and the health care service can improve working capacity and health for both women and men, leading to positive changes in their attitudes, their working capacity, and their health. At present, the opportunities to access these services are increasing. According to our household survey, 100% of interviewees answered that they can access social services more easily now than before ALAFU. However, just 50% of wives and 30% of husbands have access to or have participated in these services. Others do not want to access them because they have good economic conditions and health, or they still hesitate. Of these, most of those accessing the financial service to get a small loan from banks are wives in group 2 and most of the participants in money-saving groups are wives in group 1. In terms of health care service, the access of wives in both group 1 and group 2 increased similarly. For both these services, women have taken part more than men.

The leader of a women's union said *"Most women can take a small loan from the Vietnam Bank For Social Policies Or Vietnam Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development with low interest because of the national policy for rural women since the 2000s. However, the percentage of women who could pay a loan on time increased after ALAFU because of their good income. Moreover, having a good income, many women have joined the money-saving group. Therefore, they can save money for themselves and use it in urgent cases. ALAFU is one of the most important reasons leading to this change. The percentage of women who have participated in the periodical health check is higher. In general, the accessibility to social services for people (women included) is better."* However, our household survey shows that neither wives nor husbands have participated in vocational training courses after ALAFU. A leader of a farmer's union said. *"At present, the vocational training courses are always available and priority is given to households affected by ALAFU. However, most of the husbands and wives in the farming households are middle aged and they prefer to base their work on their experience and learning from others in communes rather than on learning from training courses. Moreover, vocational training courses seem not to suit their needs. Therefore, most of them have not participated in any vocational training courses after ALAFU, although many of them (farmers) have changed employment. The households affected by from losing land have accepted cash instead of participating in training courses supported by the ALAFU project. Yearly, only young people have participated in the vocational training courses."*

6. Discussion

Previous studies have indicated that losing agricultural land has forced affected women to participate in non-farming jobs and has improved their economic position [23,50]. This study also supports the evidence that decreasing access to agricultural land due to urbanization has improved

women's economic position in the affected households. Indeed, the factors of the ALAFU including the ALA, the cash compensation for acquired land, the improved infrastructure, and the high demand for non-farming jobs due to urbanization have incited women to move from the agricultural sector to the non-farming sector, from cultivation to breeding, from single jobs to dual jobs. As a result, their income and economic position in the family has improved significantly. It means that ALAFU has offered opportunities instead of difficulties in improving the affected women's economic position. This positive impact of ALAFU coincides with progress in socio-economic development in many rural areas in Vietnam. Since the 2000s, many rural areas have become peri-urban, and non-farming jobs have been attracting rural people, while the income from cultivating agricultural land is very low [23,51]. This has led to a male laborers' migration from rural to urban areas, and the feminization of agriculture [38]. Then, only a small group of rural women convinced their families to move on from the non-farming sector. These households allowed other people to cultivate their agricultural land for free, or even left the agricultural land uncultivated to focus totally on non-farming jobs [52]. One study has concluded that access to agricultural land is one of the causes that has limited the non-farming job opportunities of most rural women [23]. This explains why, after ALAFU, the women's economic position improved in group 1 (whose agricultural land was acquired) and is better than group 2 (whose agricultural land was kept).

However, other previous studies have revealed that the rural people affected by ALA, especially the affected rural women, have to face unemployment, and depend more on their husbands or male members in the family after ALA [7,53,54]. Increasing access to agricultural land for women has been recognized as a way of narrowing the gender gap, and this view has been applied in many development projects [17]. It has been urgently promoted in many developing countries where the percentage of rural women participating in agriculture is still higher than men [41]. Although our research findings are different, they do not disclaim rural women's efforts to increase their access to the land. However, it supports the evidence that, in order to improve the rural women's economic position, changing from traditional cultivation on agricultural land to non-farming employment could be also one of the better options, but it should be a long-term strategy based on the actual rate of socio-economic development. The affected people (women included) in our study have some prerequisite conditions for successfully changing employment. The ALA has occurred near their communes since the 2000s. Meanwhile, the benefit from agricultural land is low (rice land) and their agricultural area is small, so they have had time to prepare and improve their capacity, and have gradually switched their income activities to the non-farming sector.

The evidence shows that before ALAFU, their family's income due to agricultural activities was just around 40% of the total family's income, and not only most men, but also some women started take non-farming work as a full-time or part-time job. Moreover, the focus of ALA in our study site is on the Hue city expansion, where the infrastructure in and around their communes has improved. Thus, the travelling distances from their communes to Hue city, other cities, and industrial zones are shorter and more convenient, making non-farming jobs available in or nearby their communes. So, the ALA seems to be not only the last step to encourage affected women to escape agriculture, but also increases their finances through the cash compensation for losing the land use right, although the compensation is still inadequate. Consequently, ALAFU has positively impacted women's economic position. However, in the cases of remote rural areas where urbanization and industrialization are still far away, the livelihoods of rural people (women included) are still based totally on agricultural land, and the benefit from agricultural land is high. Thus, increasing access to agricultural land for women still needs to be promoted as, if ALA occurs, it will bring financial hardship and unemployment.

This study reveals the interesting point that 10% of wives in both groups still continue to work in agriculture with their husbands, and their income has improved because most of them have changed from rice to flower cultivation. The new agricultural strategy, although requiring more skill, has succeeded because the women have carefully learned the cultivation technique from each other, and their output is meeting the high demand from urban residents. This reveals that increasing access

to agricultural land for women should go together with improving the women's work skills and finding solutions to increase the benefits from the land. Otherwise, access to land is not very significant for enhancing household gender equality.

Improving the economic position and employment of women in the context of urbanization could improve other dimensions of household gender equality. A higher income has also positively affected the access to financial services by women because they are then able to repay a loan on time or even make small savings. This impact is very significant for the progress of GEIAH. Some studies have concluded that occupation and income positively affect WPHDM [49]. Moreover, traditional gender ideology, which could be counteracted by urbanization, also strongly controls the WPHDM [46]. This means that when both women's employment and gender ideology improve, the WPHDM also increases. Such impacts also show in our research. Although most of the interviewees believe that this change is related to ALAFU, it has also been identified in many studies as the indispensable result of developmental progress in Vietnam [55–57]. Moreover, though the income contribution of the wives in group 2 is lower than in group 1, the WPHDM improvement in both groups is similar. This indicates that women's income does not seem to be an important factor influencing the WPHDM, which was found in some previous studies [48,58]. In addition, although women have made household decisions together with their husbands, most men still make the final decisions on most household issues, especially those related to housing and valuable property. This situation is very common in Vietnam in both urban and rural areas [57].

The positive effect of ALAFU does not occur within other areas of GEIAH as our hypothesis shows. Following an improvement in income and the WPHDM, participation in social activities and the UPW burden of women remain almost unchanged. Women in both groups still take the main responsibility for the UPW and their time allocated to the UPW is still more than twice that of the men. This shows that the gender prejudice in the division of UPW has not yet been broken despite the modern lives resulting from urbanization, rising income and employment, and escaping agriculture. Women still continue to undertake the responsibility of supplying the family with food, caring for family members, cleaning, and washing. They still do not want or have an opportunity to participate in community activities which could make them more confident generally in their lives. The gender ideologies reflected in the sayings "men in public life, women at home", "men build the house, women make the home", and "men only do the big things, women should do the small things" are rooted deeply in rural people's thinking.

Many studies have also mentioned this as a challenge to GEIAH progress [48,57]. Although women are busier with their new paid work, they still take responsibility for the UPW as before ALAFU. Taking on both paid and unpaid work could put women in an overworked situation and lead to stress or vulnerability [58], even though their access to health care has increased. Unfortunately, ALAFU has led to such negative impacts on HGE, but the support policy for the affected households of ALAFU projects has failed to integrate any gender solutions so far. Moreover, increasing participation in vocational training courses for women, which could increase their work skills, did not occur as was expected through the support policy, which developed the ALA projects to support affected people (women included) through courses supporting employment recovery. Unfortunately, they have converted these courses to cash, and financially support affected people, and this way seems to be the best for both sides at present. However, because of lack of sufficient training, most of the new jobs with higher income that affected people have taken are temporary jobs. These jobs contain many potential risks as they do not come with a work contract or unemployment insurance [59]. Therefore, the change in women's employment may be better in terms of income but could not be sustainable unless their capacity is also improved through training courses.

7. Conclusions and Recommendation

This paper studies the impacts of ALAFU on GEIAH by comparing gender issues between women and men in group 1 and group 2 before and after ALAFU. Besides reducing access to agricultural land

and the existing unreasonable issues of compensation and support, ALAFU projects have improved the infrastructure, created non-farming job opportunities and have begun to change the gender ideology. In this context, women's economic position in affected communes has improved and their employment has switched to non-agricultural activities, which has created a higher income for them. As a result, their income contribution and their savings have increased. The WPHDM has also increased, but its quality is still limited. The improved income does not have much influence. Other dimensions such as the division of UCW, access to training courses, and participation in social activities have insignificantly improved. As a result, the ALAFU has contributed to the improvement of GEIAH, although women still have to face the potential risks of temporary jobs without security, and continue to undertake the UCW burden.

Based on these findings, this paper recommends the ALAFU be a long-term plan prepared carefully not only to further economic development but also to create more gender equality in the affected communes. Besides improving the cash compensation mechanism, as was recommended in previous studies, projects to improve the affected people's working skills before they change to the non-farming sector should be implemented through vocational training courses or career consultation. To attract the participation of affected people (women included), the topic, content, and method should be based on their needs, on consultations with employers and the labor market. The support policy of ALAFU projects should integrate gender issues by estimating the gender impacts based on the gender situation in each affected area, in order to offer training courses to change gender preconceptions or to help affected households understand more about gender impacts and share UCW with women. This study also recommends agricultural land usage conversion if benefits of agricultural land access are small and without significance to the livelihoods of rural people. This should be considered as a solution to improve GEIAH. The conversion needs to be carefully prepared, should be based on the real situation in each rural area, and could include the transition from traditional agriculture (rice cultivation) to modern agriculture (such as organic cultivation or high-tech agriculture), or from agricultural land to industrial or urban land.

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