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Poverty among Indigenous Women in the Central Highlands of Vietnam: a Critical Analysis

Abstract. Poverty characterizes the lives of indigenous women in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Due to a lack of opportunities and resources, indigenous women become more socially vulnerable. We argue that there is a reciprocal relationship between collective social change and the likelihood of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands escaping poverty. The data presented in this paper was collected from our 2019 ministerial-level scientific research study on creating a poverty reduction model for indigenous women in the Central Highlands, based on a sustainable livelihood framework. Historically, change occurs when individuals are part of a collective. Our findings suggest that the motivation to escape poverty increases collective action through social work, a strategy to overcome poverty.

Keywords: Central Highlands, motivation, poverty, sustainability, Vietnamese ethnic minority women.

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Бедность среди женщин коренного населения вьетнамского плато Тэйнгуен: критический анализ

Аннотация. Бедность характеризует жизнь женщин коренных народов вьетнамского плато Тэйнгуен. Из-за нехватки возможностей и ресурсов женщины коренных народов становятся более социально уязвимыми. Авторы утверждают, что существует связь между социальным запросом на коллективизм и возможностью для женщин малочисленных народов, населяющих плато Тэйнгуен, избежать бедности. Данные, представленные в этой статье, были собраны в ходе проведенного в 2019 г. министерского научного исследования по созданию модели сокращения бедности для женщин коренного населения плато Тэйнгуен, основанной на концепции устойчивых средств к существованию. Исторические изменения происходят, когда отдельные личности становятся частью коллектива. Результаты исследования показывают, что наличие мотивации избежать бедности усиливает коллективные действия посредством социальной работы, в этом и состоит стратегия преодоления бедности.

Ключевые слова: плато Тэйнгуен, мотивация, бедность, устойчивость, женщины малочисленных народов Вьетнама.

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Introduction

Despite the UN's (United Nations, 2022) *Sustainable Development Goals* (2022) stating that gender equity is vital for peace and prosperity, the world is not on track to achieve it by 2030. Poverty is prevalent among indigenous women of Vietnam in the Central Highlands of the country. Despite having natural resources for agriculture, hydroelectricity, mining, and tourism, poverty rates in the Central Highlands are high, with the Gia-rai, E-de, Ba-nar, Co-ho, Xo-dang, H're, Mnong, and Ma indigenous groups being the most affected by poverty hindering sustainable development in the region. Limited access to non-agricultural jobs, education, social security and financial services are some of the main causes of poverty for these indigenous women. Vietnam's natural resources are abundant and could enable women to use collective action to access essential resources. A pervasive narrative in poverty reduction in Vietnam is that the ambition to escape poverty is a fundamental factor in determining whether women can sustain an escape from poverty, but this narrative fails to acknowledge the social, cultural, and other issues that impede poverty reduction. Collective action by women's groups can help overcome poverty, but such action has not yet been realized at the collective level in Vietnam.

Background and literature review

Motivation to escape poverty is never apolitical, and the narrative on poverty requires researchers to unpack some of the social, cultural, and historical contexts undergirding their assumptions about women in poverty. In her book on *Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color navigating research and the academy* Pena [2022] envisions a liberatory reimagining of research so that women, people of color, allies, and other co-conspirators come together as communities of rebellion to challenge oppressive systems and conditions. This approach allows for the development of solutions based on the experiences and perspectives of the people concerned. As a result, we can create more equitable and just outcomes for these communities.

Indigenous women experience multiple forms of oppression. In Vietnam, the term 'ethnic minority' is used interchangeably with 'indigenous'. Their experiences are shaped by the intersections of gender, sexuality, colonialism, and culture [Crenshaw 2013].

Indigenous feminisms are rooted in core elements of indigenous cultures, including a connection to land that is framed as a sacred responsibility [Stewart-Harawira 2005; Chambers and Blood 2009]. Indigenous worldviews are holistic, interconnected and interdependent [Graham 1999]. A key goal of indigenous feminism is to secure social justice and cultural relevance through the activism of indigenous women within their cultures and equity for indigenous women [Moreton-Robinson 2021] bound by the experiences of colonization, oppression, legitimizing of racism and a contemporary settler state infused with white privilege [Green 2020]. Collective grassroots actions can increase women's voice and autonomy, as well as the empowerment of other women. It honors women's distinct and diverse experiences. This is an enduring and powerful framework for expressing women's experiences [Whyte 2014]. One may be powerless if one acts alone. A collective is comprised of the many relationships within single communities and neighboring communities based on their cultural ideas of what matters [Murphy 2014]. A feminist collective allows women to contest colonial hardships and realities with a relationship of solidarity. Collective action through social work has been effective in creating sustainable change globally. When women support each other, they create opportunities for themselves and the group. Indigenous cultures believe in reciprocal responsibility, where elders mentor young women and communities motivate each other [Weaver 2009]. Mutual commitment between women enhances honor, respect, and love for each other.

Women have a collective cultural identity based on Vietnam's history and cultural folklore, including feminist ideas expressed in law and literature, a long history of war and collective suffering, and various roles as martyrs, national treasures, and workers in war and peace [Duong 2001]. Yet, limited access to resources reduces women's agency to create or sustain collective change. Sanya [2009] found that improvements in women's social capital and normative influence fostered a capacity for collective action. Several factors contribute to collective empowerment and action, including economic ties among members, the structure of the group network, and women's participation in meetings. Feminist action collectives create networks of support where women can collectively take available resources, share them, and create spaces that support and provide choices, thus building agency [Papafilippou, Durbin and Conley 2022]

Understanding what drives women's participation in collective action is pivotal for social and economic growth. Collective feminist action is possible in Vietnam. This is because the collective cultural identity of Vietnamese women is based on the history and cultural folklore of Vietnam. This includes the expression of feminist ideas in law and literature. In this literature, there are conversations about the history of war and collective suffering, in which women are seen as martyrs, national treasures, and workers in war and peace [Duong 2001].

Central Highlands indigenous women's motivation to escape poverty

Indigenous women, including those in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, have a history of collective action, but poverty remains a barrier to working together. Unequal access to resources limits opportunities for collective action. Individual agency is shaped

by a variety of factors, including power dynamics, socioeconomic background, and belief in one's ability to escape poverty (Meier Zu Selhausen, 2016). The concept of self-efficacy is complicated and multifaceted, and it is greatly influenced by the context of gender and culture (Revollo and Portela 2019). In Vietnam, for example, women's self-efficacy may be affected by various factors, including gender roles, cultural diversity, and economic status. For example, Vietnamese women may be expected to prioritize their family and caregiving responsibilities over their personal goals and ambitions, which limits their opportunities and affects their motivation to engage in self-directed activities and their belief in their abilities [Nguyen Trang and Levkoff, 2020]. There are additional obstacles and discrimination women face based on gender, which may negatively impact their sense of self-efficacy and their ability to achieve their goals [Patel, Salahuddin and O'Brien 2008; Duong Minh Quang, Wu Ching-Ling and Hoang Mai Khanh and Hoang 2019]. Research in this area has found that self-efficacy is a powerful predictor of an individual's quality of life, motivation, and psychosocial adjustment [Dang Van Thac and Chou Ying Chyi 2019; Nguyen Thi Thuy Nga et al. 2022]. This is especially true for indigenous women in Vietnam, who may face unique challenges related to gender inequality, cultural norms, and economic disadvantage.

To promote self-efficacy among marginalized indigenous women in Vietnam, it is important for social workers to consider the cultural context and social norms that shape their experiences [Hugman, Nguyen Thi Thai Lan and Nguyen Thuy Hong 2007; Lindsey and Najafizadeh 2018]. Being born in a poor area is a disadvantage for ethnic minority women. Research has found that the causes of poverty among ethnic minority women include few non-agricultural jobs, low productivity and land per unit of work, limited education, and large community size [Cuddy, Hongmei and Paulos 2008]. Other research has shown the disadvantages that ethnic minorities face, including lack of access to education and fewer benefits from government programs and social networks, since ethnic minorities are less likely to move to a new place [Baulch et al. 2007]. Additionally, they lack access to official financial services, have less productive land, less access to the market, and lower incomes from the market [Dang 2012]. Moreover, the lack of a sustainable livelihood framework increases the probability of falling back into poverty, a setback to poverty reduction strategies [Poverty reduction in Vietnam 2011].

Individual, family, and community factors

Indigenous women in Vietnam face more disadvantages than men and Kinh women in every aspect, including access to social resources, support, and economic capital. Even with efforts to improve infrastructure and production and to close the socioeconomic gap, indigenous women encounter more psychosocial barriers in accessing, participating, and utilizing these resources [Nguyen, Tran and Van Vu, 2017].

The motivation and desire to escape poverty combined with adaptability and resilience have essential significance not only to the lives of ethnic minority women in particular but also to the lives of all ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, in general. Many live in areas that, for up to 60.2 percent of 600 households surveyed, suffer from natural disasters, droughts, and floods. In addition, 85.7 percent encounter

crop failures, 11.7 percent suffer from diseases and loss of working capacity, and 4.3 percent suffer from famine for one to three months. In all, 18.7 percent of the 600 households are poor households and 13.7 percent are near-poor [Vietnam General Statistics Office 2019].

A fundamental and common cause of poverty and ineffectiveness of poverty reduction projects and programs for local women in the Central Highlands is their limited formal education and skills, which exacerbates gender and cultural inequalities and does not promote socio-economic development. Local ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands are currently focusing on reducing poverty by using purely material means, taking the government's capital, material, and land investments into account as determinants, but paying little attention to the qualifications of local employees. That leads to reliance of local people and administrators on national investment, which causes inefficiency in poverty reduction projects and programs [Fritzen 2002].

Studies have shown that microfinance programs have increased indigenous women's access to credit, enabling them to engage in small businesses and increase their income [Deshmukh-Ranadive 2002; Siraj 2017; Yeboah 2017). Women who participate in community organizations have greater benefits and the ability to recover their livelihoods after natural disasters [Ahmed, 2013). International social service organizations, non-governmental organizations, and others engaged in poverty reduction models have also shown that indigenous households and communities' internal factors, such as motivation and willingness to take risks, are crucial to their success in reducing poverty sustainably [ActionAid 2012). However, there is no clear understanding of how individual, family, and community factors are interconnected.

Methodology

Our research uses a normative approach in addressing the challenges of not only asking why indigenous women are poor, but also critically questioning why women have escaped poverty, highlighting the limited effectiveness and unsustainability of government poverty reduction programs, and suggesting that ethnic minority women need sustainable livelihood strategies aligned with their own goals to escape poverty. In this study, we examine how individual, family and community factors, particularly the motivation to escape poverty as a collective, impact the causes of poverty and the livelihood in the Central Highlands.

Survey data were collected from three provinces representing three regions of the Central Highlands: Gia Lai [North), Dak Lak [Middle), and Lam Dong [South). The three regions were chosen to represent high, middle, and low poverty rates, respectively. In each district, two towns were selected — one with the highest poverty rate and one with the lowest. A stratified random sampling technique was used to select 600 individuals from indigenous households. The samples were divided into local indigenous people and migrant indigenous people. The questionnaire was divided into three parts to collect socio-demographic information, household circumstances, and the ability of households to use resources to develop their livelihoods, including assessing the impact

of livelihood resources on household economic development and the likelihood of escaping poverty using a five-point Likert scale.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin [KMO) test and exploratory factor analysis were used to test the adequacy of the observed variables, including individual, family, and community factors, and the dependent variable, the likelihood of sustaining an escape from poverty. A logistic model was used to assess the impact of each observed variable on the likelihood of sustained escape from poverty among indigenous women in the Central Highlands.

Results

Causes of poverty among ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands of Vietnam

Aside from considering the role of the policy system and the features of the livelihood capital for ethnic minorities, which showed several “intertwined” disadvantages for them, we evaluated the factors that influence the probability of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands sustaining an escape from poverty. We used five resources from the sustainable livelihoods framework of the [Department for International Development 2000], then categorized them into three groups. The first group consists of individual factors with five observed variables, including (1) health, (2) education, (3) working capacity and skills, (4) adaptability to changes, and (5) motivation and desire to exit from poverty. The second group consists of family factors, with five observed variables, including (1) mutual support of relatives and neighbors; (2) respect for the equality between men and women; (3) loans and loan usage; (4) saving accounts, salaries, and pensions; and (5) tools, techniques, and technology used in work. The third group consists of local community factors, with six observed variables, including (1) quality of arable land, (2) water hygiene, (3) waste disposal methods, (4) payments for ecosystem services, (5) availability of forest products, and (6) infrastructure. These independent variables were then evaluated for their effects on the dependent variable, which is the probability of sustaining an escape from poverty, defined as a stable increase in income. Cronbach's alpha is above .90 for all variables, and the KMO averaged value is .945, showing that all model variables are adequate (Table 1).

Table 1. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value and Bartlett's test

	KMO value	.945
Bartlett's test	chi-square	3565.145
	df	120
	<i>p</i>	.000

Source: data are from the 2019 survey.

The results of testing the relevance between the independent variables and the dependent variable by the analysis of variance (ANOVA) test, given in Table 2, show that the *F* value is 141.761 with a level of significance of .000 (<0.05). This indicates that the model is adequate for the data, and the observed variables are all statistically significant. Therefore, the independent variables in the model are relevant to the dependent variable.

Table 2. ANOVA test

Model		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
1	Regression	60.728	3	20.243	141.761	.000
	Residual	85.105	596	.143		
	Total	145.833	599			

Source: data are from the 2019 survey

To see how individual, family, and community factors influence the likelihood of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands escaping poverty, we applied the multivariate regression model and obtained an interesting result (Table 3).

Table 3. Multivariate regression model: The influence of factors on the probability of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands sustaining an escape from poverty

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	.122	.066		1.843	.066		
	Individual factors	.194	.033	.369	5.956	.000	.255	3.920
	Family factors	.089	.037	.167	2.396	.017	.200	4.989
	Local community factors	.085	.031	.150	2.745	.006	.329	3.036

Source: data are from the 2019 survey.

Note: Adjusted $R^2 = 0.413$.

The results in Table 3 show that all three groups of factors (individual, family, and community) influence the likelihood of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands escaping poverty on a sustainable basis. All significance levels are below .05, and the individual factors have the greatest influence, with the highest standardized beta of .369 and a significance level below .001. In the Central Highlands, ethnic minority women prove to be highly susceptible to escaping poverty when specific factors are considered. The R^2 of .413 indicates that the three groups in the model can predict 41.3 percent of the probability that ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands will sustainably escape poverty. In this paper, we do not analyze the causes of poverty among ethnic minority women, but focus primarily on the relationship between the motivation and desire to escape poverty and the causes of their poverty.

Motivation in the Central Highlands to escape poverty

The likelihood of sustaining an escape from poverty is approached in this paper from the perspective of the motivations of individuals and as a collective community. Therefore, our objective is to consider how individual factors, including the motivation and desire of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands to escape poverty and their adaptability to unexpected life events, affect the likelihood of sustaining an escape from poverty.

After removing the individual factors (health, education, work capacity and skills, adaptability to change, and motivation and desire to escape poverty) from the three groups of factors in the multivariate regression model, we then included them in the logistic regression model to see their effect on the likelihood of sustaining an escape from poverty (Table 4).

Table 4. Regression model: The influence of individual factors on the probability of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands sustaining an escape from poverty

Independent variables		Regression coefficient B	Odds ratio $\text{Exp}(B)$
Health	Good	0.766**	2.150
	Not good (the control group)	0.000	1.000
Education	High school and continuing education (the control group)	0.000	1.000
	Elementary school to junior high school	-1.091*	0.336
	Illiterate or uneducated	0.174	0.624
Working capacity and skills	With working capacity and skills	0.549	1.732
	Without working capacity and skills (the control group)	0.000	1.000
Adaptability to changes and shocks	With the adaptability to changes and shocks	2.490***	12.058
	Without the adaptability to changes and shocks (the control group)	0.000	1.000
Motivation and desire to escape poverty	Yes	0.709*	2.032
	No (the control group)	0.000	1.000
Constant		-2.627	0.072
Nagelkerke R^2		0.587	

Source: data are from the 2019 survey

As shown in Table 4, among the five individual factor variables, the variable representing working capacity and skills is not statistically significant (significance level $>.05$), while the other variables, including health, education, adaptability to change, and motivation and desire to escape poverty, show their influence on the likelihood of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands escaping poverty. People in good health are more likely to escape poverty than those in poor health (odds ratio = 2.150). People who have completed primary or junior high school are less likely to escape poverty than those who have completed high school or are enrolled in continuing education (odds ratio = 0.336).

Adaptability to change is the most influential of the five variables. The odds ratio of 12.058 shows that women who can adapt to shocks are 12 times more likely to escape poverty permanently than women who cannot. This, together with their motivation and desire to get out of poverty, helps women to be more likely to escape poverty. Women who have the motivation and desire to escape poverty are more than twice as likely to do

so than those who do not (odds ratio = 2.032). These results reflect the “bright spots” and “internal capacity” approach the authors applied, which is also the method used in many studies of poverty reduction programs to explain why some ethnic minorities were successful in sustaining a poverty escape while others were not, even though they were all in the equivalent life context (Table 5).

Table 5. Major incidents encountered by households (2014–2019)

Incidents encountered by households (2014–2019)	Frequency/Percent	Possibility of an incident	
		Yes	No
Suffer from natural disasters, droughts, and floods	Frequency (N)	361	239
	Valid percent (%)	60.2	39.8
Encounter crop failures	Frequency (N)	515	85
	Valid percent (%)	85.2	14.8
Loss of farmland	Frequency (N)	14	586
	Valid percent (%)	2.3	97.7
Suffer from diseases and loss of working capacity	Frequency (N)	70	530
	Valid percent (%)	11.7	88.3
Suffer from famine for one to three months	Frequency (N)	26	574
	Valid percent (%)	4.3	95.7

Source: data are from the 2019 survey

Therefore, the probability of ethnic minority women rising from poverty by themselves and as a collective group, without waiting for government policies and programs, is an important indicator of sustainable poverty reduction strategies in the Central Highlands today.

Drivers of motivation to escape poverty

In continuing to study what drives ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands to have such strong motivation and desire to escape poverty, while other women groups do not, although all are in the same life context and community, we found two factors in this research: religion and the “thrust” of the migrant group.

The research results show a relationship between religion and the probability of ethnic minority women escaping poverty in the Central Highlands. The percentage of religious people (Buddhists, Protestants, and Catholics) who have a stable increase in income and do not fall back into poverty (62.9 %) is higher than for nonreligious people (35 %). The significance level of .000 indicates a strong relationship between religion and the probability of ethnic minority women escaping poverty in the Central Highlands (Table 6). This can be explained if religious teachings provide motivation to worshippers to make a constant effort to pursue a better life. Thus, religions and spirituality may create practical impulses for actions in which there are economic outcomes.

Table 6. The probability of ethnic minority women escaping poverty based on religion (%)

The probability to sustain an escape from poverty	Religion		Total
	Nonreligious	Religious	
Without stable income increase or falling back into poverty	65.0	37.1	58.3
With stable income increase and not falling back into poverty	35.0	62.9	41.7
N (samples — people)	457	143	600
Phi value, Cramer $V = 0.241$, $p = 0.000$			

Source: data are from the 2019 survey.

Table 7. Factors that influence the motivation of ethnic minority women to escape poverty in the Central Highlands

	Position in the community	Extracted information from the extensive interviews and group discussions
Mrs. N	Tay ethnic minority, an agricultural official in Dak Jo Ta town, Mang Yang district, Gia Lai Province	<i>“Compared to Ba Na women, the Tay women make better efforts. Firstly, they are more knowledgeable in terms of education, and secondly, in the way of doing business, they are more knowledgeable than the Ba Na people. As for the Ba Na women, they rarely go out to communicate outside, so their access to scientific techniques is less than that of men. Even the Vietnamese language they speak is not fluent, so it is difficult for them to receive the scientific and technical studies.”</i>
Mr. Y	Ra-de ethnic minority, a cultural official in Cu M'Gar town, Cu M'Gar district, Dak Lak Province	<i>“The local Ra-de people usually misuse the financial support meant to improve their livelihoods to pay for motorbikes or solely spend on their family expenses, such as daily food and clothing. In contrast, the migrant Nung people know how to raise cattle and grow crops and then invest the money they get from that in growing pepper.”</i>
Mr. K	KoHo ethnic minority in Tan Thanh town, Lam Dong Province	<i>“Nung women are hardworking, have business acumen, know how to do business, and invest their money in their children's education.”</i>
Mrs. D, Mr. N, Mr. O, Mrs. B	KoHo ethnic minority group in Tan Van town, Lam Ha Province	<i>“Nung people are economically advanced in all aspects. Nung women can escape poverty better since they are more hardworking and better at calculations. They work from dawn to dusk, day after day, while KoHo women prefer to do things at home and in their gardens, and rarely go out to get more jobs.”</i>
Mr. O, Mr. H, Mrs. N, Mrs. E	Nung ethnic minority group in Ea M'Drón town, Cu M'Gar district, Dak Lak Province	<i>“Whenever there is a program that gives out support to poor people, preference is given to local ethnic minority people. Since the local ethnic minority people are poorer and have more children, they are categorized as poor households and always get that support. However, the migrant Nung people do not receive that; therefore, they have to try harder and save money.”</i>

Source: data are from the 2019 survey.

The second factor involves the “thrust” of the migrant ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands. The results show that migrant ethnic minority women may have a stronger motivation to escape poverty than local women. Moreover, migrant ethnic minority women are adaptable and resilient to life changes, shocks, and risks (Table 7).

The information in Table 7 shows the perceived differences in motivation to escape poverty between migrant and local ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands. The explanation for why migrant ethnic minority women have stronger motivation and desire to escape poverty is that they are migrants from the northern mountainous region of Vietnam, where life is so hard that there is no other way to build a better life than to migrate from their hometowns. However, they are less poor than other ethnic minorities in their hometowns because they can afford to migrate, which means that they are not the most disadvantaged members of their community. In comparison, poverty among local ethnic minorities in Gia Lai is considered extreme poverty. Therefore, they have received more support from government policies and programs than migrant ethnic minorities.

This difference becomes the impetus that drives migrant ethnic minorities to make greater efforts to escape poverty. Perhaps factors such as inequality due to less support they receive gives them more strength and determination to overcome difficulties to escape poverty. This is an important indicator of the likelihood that ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands can escape poverty.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although the Central Highlands has witnessed rapid and drastic urbanization, attracting huge investment from the government and social organizations over many years, the poverty of ethnic minority women still exists and cannot be ignored. The poverty rate of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands remains higher than the national average. Achieving sustainable poverty reduction requires promoting household economic development and reducing risks caused by natural disasters and climate change, especially in the Central Highlands, which remains one of the poorest areas in Vietnam despite its rich natural and community resources. One of the reasons is that the benefits of ethnic minority women in the labor market have not been realized. Ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands, especially local ethnic minority women, may not want to go out of their villages to gain more experience, socialize outside their region, or gain confidence in different skills or knowledge offered outside their region. Therefore, this workforce needs more attention in the formulation of development strategies and policies in accordance with the characteristics of each ethnic minority group. The current strategy of intra- and inter-regional linkages has not created local jobs or encouraged women to participate in the labor market.

The likelihood of ethnic minority women escaping poverty is strongly related to their motivation and aspirations. Therefore, this characteristic needs to be taken into account when designing programs and policies to motivate them from their internal capacity and resilience and to create sustainable collective hubs, communities of empowerment and resources that can be used as community hubs to create local

pathways out of poverty in the Central Highlands. Therefore, programs and policies should focus on strengthening relationships based on strength as well as providing additional financial support to these groups. By building community friendships, connections and alliances, change can and will happen. Being together as a group empowers individuals to work for social change.

The influence of religion/spirituality and ethnicity on the motivation and desire of ethnic minority women in the Central Highlands to escape poverty shows the important role of their religion/spirituality and culture in livelihood development. Therefore, it is necessary to promote the positive roles of religion/spirituality and ethnicity to stimulate the efforts of ethnic minority women in building sustainable livelihoods in the Central Highlands.

Reducing poverty among indigenous women in Vietnam may require developing strategies to challenge gender stereotypes, increasing access to education and economic resources, and supporting networks that empower and support women [Santillán et al. 2004]. Although ethnic minority women are expected to play a critical role in the development of the local economy and society, they are disadvantaged in the Central Highlands due to limited education, access to resources, and decision-making power. Poverty reduction efforts must address the root causes of their lack of motivation to escape poverty, including unequal opportunities and benefits, as well as social and cultural norms that prioritize men's decisions over women's [Cuddy, Hongmei and Paulos 2008]. Ultimately, a deeper understanding of the ways in which gender and cultural context shape self-efficacy can help inform social work practice and policies that promote greater equity and social justice. By recognizing the complex interplay of individual, cultural, and societal factors, we can work to create more inclusive and supportive environments that enable all individuals to reach their full potential.

Implications for social work practice include the need for local social workers to create spaces for community conversations that empower women. Social work students in Vietnam should be taught skills to advocate for and provide internal and external resources to women in order to build capacity and create opportunities for collective action to reduce poverty. In addition, future social work research should continue to unpack the factors that contribute to women's poverty, including their internal capacities and resources for organizing together to challenge societal inequities.

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