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EDUCATION

Education - the key to promoting opportunities for highland girls

Along with promoting policies *gender equality* and the companionship of social organizations, increasingly *girl child* the highlands continue to go to school. Thereby, they gradually take control of their lives, contributing to raising awareness of their families and villages.

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Writer Isabelle Müller during a visit to the boarding house of highland female students. (Photo provided by Loan Stiftung Foundation)

In many highland villages in Vietnam, where living conditions are difficult and traditional prejudices about the role of *women* and *girl child* within the family and the community that still exists, girls' educational opportunities were once narrowed by poverty and social practices. Many of them are faced with choices that seem to have been preordained by “”: leave school early, do hard labor or get married at a very young age.

In recent years, along with policies to promote gender equality, the accompaniment of social organizations has contributed to opening up new opportunities for highland girls. In particular, the educational support programs of the Loan Stiftung Foundation - founded by writer Isabelle Müller in the Federal Republic of Germany - have created positive changes step by step in expanding learning opportunities for highland girls.

For nearly 10 years, Loan Stiftung Foundation has accompanied children in difficult circumstances in many northern mountainous provinces, through scholarships,





motivation and learning capacity.

WRITER ISABELLE MÜLLER

conditions, helping them, especially girls, continue to go to school, nurture aspirations and proactively create the future.

This approach not only helps reduce the risk of dropping out of school and early marriage, but also gradually impacts family and community perceptions of girls' right to education.

Currently, I no longer see any difference between girls and boys in

In that flow of change, Sung Thi My and Truong Thi Men are two typical faces among many highland ethnic minority female students who have been changing their lives thanks to opened learning opportunities.

In many highland villages, where economic conditions are still difficult and gender stereotypes are still present, the educational path of highland girls used to be narrowed by options that seemed to have been destined for “”: leave school early, do hard labor, get married early.

However, in recent years, along with policies to promote gender equality and the companionship of social organizations, more and more highland girls have continued to go to school, opening up opportunities to change their lives. Sung Thi My and Truong Thi Men are two typical faces among many highland ethnic minority girls who are gradually changing their future thanks to access to education.

From poor villages to university lecture halls: A landmark decision

Born in Can Ho village, Lung Tam commune, Tuyen Quang province, Sung Thi My was at risk of having to drop out of school early like many of her peers. In the highland setting, the path of many girls seems to be set in stone: leaving school early to help their families with farming, looking after them, and then entering married life at a very young age.

Growing up in a large family, her parents were elderly, and her economic conditions were precarious, Sung Thi My was also faced with a choice that seemed to have been arranged. For my family, letting my daughter continue her studies at university is a financial burden beyond the means of my parents.

“Do I'm in college but my family doesn't let me go to school?”, “Do I have enough money to live in Hanoi?”, those concerns once made me hesitate. Applying for university admission at that time was just a hesitant decision, but it became the biggest turning point in life.

It was at that moment that the Loan Stiftung Foundation scholarship, founded by writer Isabelle Müller, opened another door. The conditions to receive a scholarship

the situation is really difficult. When my name appeared on the list, it was not only joy, but also the first time I felt that my efforts had been seen.

Not only lacking in material things, Sung Thi My's school journey was also influenced by silent but persistent prejudices. In my hometown, many people think that girls who are highly educated only return to work in farming and take care of their families, so investing in education is often not considered a priority. Even though I study well, many of my peers still have to leave school early or get married at a very young age, not necessarily because of lack of dreams, but because of circumstances and long-standing concepts that make dreams become fragile.

According to Ms. Isabelle Müller, many barriers for girls do not appear in the form of clear prohibitions, but exist in everyday decisions: when the family has to choose one person to go to school, boys are often given priority; Girls are expected to get married soon; or investing in girls' education is considered to not bring much long-term value.



Sung Thi My, an ethnic minority highland female student, took a photo with writer Isabelle Müller –, founder of the Loan Stiftung Foundation, an accompanying organization supporting education for disadvantaged girls.

For Sung Thi My, the Loan Stiftung Foundation scholarship not only helps me overcome immediate difficulties, but also gives me more confidence to step out of familiar patterns. Entering the university lecture hall, I understood that I not only studied for myself, but also brought with me the hope of my family and the children in the village.

After graduating from university and working in Hanoi, Sung Thi My was no longer faced with the familiar choice of working as a farmer or starting a family early, but gradually affirmed the value of knowledge for her life. me. That change also affected my own family, as my parents gradually realized: “Girls still have to go to school, not only boys can go to school”.

Truong Thi Men's journey through difficulties in Ha Giang

If Sung Thi My's journey started from silent hesitation over familiar notions about girls' high education, then Truong Thi Men also bolded the same barriers. Truong Thi



Only looking at a few acres of barren fields all year round. Since childhood, I went with my mother to the forest to pick vegetables, bamboo shoots, and collect firewood to earn money to pay for school. The village school is nearly 5km from home, in the cold winter, my limbs are numb, I still walk to class regularly.

In the countryside, many people once told Truong Thi Men's parents: "Let her quit school, if her daughter goes to high school, she will only get married". Every time I hear that, I feel sad, but my parents still silently support me, with the simple words: "I want to learn, my parents will try to worry. As for life, just let your parents carry the burden. Those words of encouragement became a source of strength for Truong Thi Men to feel secure and persevere in pursuing her learning path.

After graduating from middle school, Truong Thi Men passed the exam at National Boarding High School - High School in Ha Giang province, more than 100km from home. Three years of boarding are challenging days, full of tears, but they also forge the will.

The fate that brought Truong Thi Men to the Loan Stiftung Scholarship Fund, from the homeroom teacher's words and the images of the school's former students, lit the fire of hope in her. When he was announced to receive the Loan Stiftung scholarship, Men burst into tears, not only because of happiness but also because of the feeling that his efforts were appreciated.

The Loan Stiftung Foundation Scholarship not only helps Truong Thi Men continue her studies at Thai Nguyen University of Medicine and Pharmacy but is also a great source of spiritual encouragement. I learned to live responsibly, appreciate simple things and be grateful to those who have accompanied me.

Truong Thi Men's steps away from the village, like Sung Thi My, are a journey to continue studying further, grow up, and one day you will be able to bring knowledge back to contribute to the development of your home village.



Today's education enables highland girls to proactively plan their future and take control of their lives.

WRITER ISABELLE

Gender equality and girls' education in Vietnam: Perspective from Ms. Isabelle Müller

Vietnam has witnessed positive changes in improving educational opportunities and gender equality for girls, especially in mountainous and difficult areas.

According to Ms. Isabelle, many families and communities still maintain traditional notions of gender roles, making girls feel their position is mainly at home, engaged in agricultural labor or taking care of their families, instead of pursue education.



In Vietnam, in the past 10 years or so, I have observed very clear advances in gender equality, especially in access to education.

WRITER ISABELLE MÜLLER





priority, while girls have to stay home to take care of their younger siblings or work in the fields. Although rarely considered explicitly discriminatory, these concepts deeply influence everyday decisions. Many girls who have achieved good academic results still have to leave school or get married early, because education is not always considered a priority for them.

However, in recent years, a positive trend has emerged: many families prioritize children with the best academic results, regardless of whether they are boys or girls, opening up opportunities for girls to continue their education.

The Loan Stiftung Foundation has supported many girls with scholarships, helping them continue their higher education and change their future. Two typical cases are Sung Thi My and Truong Thi Men. Scholarships are not only financial support but also provide motivation, stability and life-changing opportunities.

Ms. Isabelle Müller said that improving skills, increasing income and improving access to information helps women become autonomous and have a voice in the family and community. When women earn an income as a result of schooling, training or livelihood projects, they have the ability to decide on issues related to education, health and nutrition for their children.

In mountainous areas, girls face many difficulties and barriers when the road from their homes to school is very far and dangerous, their families are financially difficult, they have to take on housework and work in slash-and-burn jobs with their families, and the quality of their education is uneven along with the old-fashioned notions of highland people about gender. To solve this problem, it is necessary to combine many solutions such as building schools near homes or safe boarding areas, supporting scholarships and additional costs for learning activities, teaching bilingualism to children from ethnic minorities, improving facilities, etc organize an awareness-raising campaign and adopt legal measures against child marriage.

Ms. Isabelle Müller also emphasized the role of successful role models to demonstrate that there are no barriers that prevent women from living autonomously and developing. Attendance at school and scholarships help women change their perception of their role, thereby spreading benefits to the community. Technology and information also contribute to opening up opportunities, helping girls become more confident in planning for the future.

From the two stories of Sung Thi My and Truong Thi Men, it can be seen that giving educational opportunities to girls not only helps an individual overcome poverty, but is also a sustainable way to shake gender stereotypes that have existed for generations. When girls learn, grow up and return to their homeland, change not only happens within themselves, but spreads to their families and communities, creating the foundation for sustainable gender equality in Vietnam.

Gender equality, therefore, does not lie only in policies, but is created from specific learning opportunities, from scholarship support programs and from changes in the awareness of each family in the community.



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