



WOMEN LEADERS IN CONSTRUCTION



DR. DO TU LAN

Technical Assistant, Minister of Construction

(Photo Credit: Bui Kim Son)

This portrait is part of the Vietnam Clean Energy Program’s series on ‘women champions’ in the Vietnamese construction sector, featuring women who have made strides in this male-dominated field, coming from diverse backgrounds and with different interests, but bound together by the common themes of a strong work ethic, love of country, a strong belief in themselves, a passion for their work.

Dr. Do Tu Lan: Breaking Barriers in the Construction Industry

As a young girl growing up in Hanoi, Do Tu Lan showed a knack for artistic pursuits such as drawing, photography, and paper folding. She also developed an early interest in architecture, and in particular, international building structures through photos that she saw in magazines that her father, who was working in the construction sector, brought home.

“I’m very lucky because I knew my passion, I knew my strengths. I could see my future path from an early age. The desire inside me to be an architect to rebuild my country after the war was so strong that it helped me to convince my parents to let me study architecture at Hanoi University of Architecture,” she said.

Lan immediately joined the Ministry of Construction after graduating, joining the Vietnam Institute of Urban and Rural Planning. Working in a male-dominated ministry had its challenges. “It was not an easy path getting to where I am. Among certain number of candidates to be promoted, I was often bypassed. Male candidates were always the first priority. In addition, nobody wanted a female boss,” Lan notes.

“Women shouldn’t limit (them)selves or be afraid to try different things, especially in the construction industry. Women are gifted with thinking economically, thoroughly, carefully and with attention to detail.”

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Dr. Lan with Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung

(Photo Credit: from Dr Lan's personal photo archive)



Dr. Lan and her family

(Photo Credit: from Dr Lan's personal photo archive)



Dr, Lan as a panelist at the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Summit 2012

(Photo Credit: from Dr Lan's personal photo archive)

“As a woman, you (often) have to try twice as hard as a man. Your voice is not always heard at the first time. But (I believe) women (also) have other weapons - patience, calmness, flexibility, and a special eye for detail,” she said. “I apply that to my work as a manager too. Female staff are often assigned to deal with tense situations with partners. That’s my secret and so far it has always worked”.

She improved her qualifications by gaining as much practical experience as she could by working on various building projects. She also enhanced her academic qualifications by obtaining a master’s degree in Spatial Planning for Regions in Growing Economies, a joint program offered by Dortmund University and the Asian Institute of Technology. She later went on to obtain a PhD in 2004, with her research focusing on coastal tourist urban sustainable development in Vietnam.

With a lot of patience and perseverance, Dr. Lan rose up in the ranks and was eventually promoted to be the Vice Director of Vietnam Institute for Urban and Rural Planning at the young age of 41. She was then appointed to be the Technical Assistant to the Minister of Construction in 2013.

Throughout her professional career, she has come to learn that several competencies are needed to be effective at her job: a passion to continue to learning, a good work ethic, respect for colleagues, diplomacy, and knowing how to strike a healthy balance between career and family.

As a wife and mother, Dr Lan practices what she preaches in her own home, educating her son and husband about how little changes at home can translate into big energy and cost savings.

Her advice to young women with an interest in construction and architecture? “We shouldn’t limit ourselves or be afraid to try different things, especially in the construction industry. Women are gifted with thinking economically, thoroughly, carefully and with attention to detail. Bringing those natural abilities to construction design and architecture can make a huge difference.”