GENDER AND POWER ANALYSIS IN THE TEA VALUE CHAIN IN SON LA PROVINCE

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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

CARE in Vietnam (CVN) is the representative of CARE International. In adopting CARE International's program approach, CVN has shifted the focus of our work from changes at the sectorial or geographical levels to that of impacts for particularly marginalized and vulnerable groups of people – our program Impact Groups. CARE recognizes that the key to achieving equitable development outcomes lies in shifting deeply rooted, structural underlying causes of poverty, which contribute to exclusion and vulnerability of particular groups in society. Two programs have been designed by CVN to date. One focuses on significant and lasting change for Remote Ethnic Minority Women - who are land poor, have the weak resilience to hazards and shocks, and in particular women; and the other focuses on Socially Marginalized People.

T-LEAF is a proposed tea value chain project which will work in seven communes of Moc Chau and Van Ho districts in Son La province. The project is currently in the design phase so a gender and power analysis is required to inform the project’s design. The project will work with ethnic minority women, their families, communities, private sector partners, and government actors to ensure that ethnic minority women benefit from sustainable tea production. The project will take a gender transformative approach to market systems development. The objective of the gender and power analysis to provide inputs and baseline information for project design.

The power and gender analysis were conducted in two selected project communes including Chieng Khoa (Van Ho district) and Moc Chau (Moc Chau District), Son La province. Under this survey, the consultant team conducted in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussion (FGDs), with different actors of the tea value chain in Son La provinces, such as male and female farmers, middlemen, retail company; input providers, processing company, collaborative group, and cooperative groups. This analysis aims to identify gender disparity and gender aspects in the tea value chain as providing inputs for project design and practical recommendations to address gender inequality and equal power between actors within the tea value chain.

1.2. The objectives

This survey was designed to identify gender disparity and aspects related to the tea value chain in Son La, with some specific objectives as follow:

- To identify gender disparity in division of labor between male and female farmers in tea production activities.
- To explore the gender difference in access to and control over the resources and decision making process with tea value chain;
• To identify key social and cultural factors including gender norms that challenge women participation in the value chain in Son La province.
• To provide practical recommendations and solutions need to be addressed during T-LEAF project design and implementation.

1.3. Methodology

CARE Gender Analysis framework and tools were used. Four areas of inquiries were reviewed include: 1) Gender division of labour along value chain; 2) Control over income, especially from tea value chain; 3) Access to services in tea value chain and 4) Governance of the value chain. All of these areas were reviewed through engagement of the research team in Focus Group Discussion and In-depth interviews with farmers in the project sites.

❖ Focus group discussion:

A total of 5 FGDs were conducted with male and female farmers who are cultivating tea in Chien Khoa commune (Van Ho district) and Moc Chau town (Moc Chau district). In which, 02 FGDs were conducted with male farmers and 03 FGDs were conducted with female farmers. The main objective of the FGDs is to collect information on gender disparity in the division of labor, access to and control over the resources as well as key social and cultural factors that challenge women’s participation in the tea value chain in Son La province. In addition, the FGDs also would like to analyze the power relationship between actors who are involving into the tea value chain.

❖ In-depth Interview:

The IDIs were conducted with some key actors of the tea value chain. A total of 10 IDIs were conducted by the consultant team. In which, one IDI was conducted with the retail company; collaborative group and cooperative group; middlemen and inputs providers (fertilizer, plant protection drugs). The IDIs focused on power relationships have been established by different actors among tea value chain. Especially, the IDIs aims to identify key social and cultural factors that challenging male and female farmers' participation in value chain.

1.4. Limitations

The survey was conducted within a short time and at two among 7 project communes only. Therefore, the collected information and data are not reflected in the comprehensive context of all project communes. In addition, the survey aims to analyze the power analysis between actors of the tea value chain. However, due to time-limited, the interviews were conducted with some representatives only. As a result, the findings of the survey may not reflect all point of view from actors of the tea value chain in Son La province.
PART 2: KEY FINDINGS

2.1. Roles and contributions of women in the tea value chain

Both men and women have been involved in tea production activities, but they are doing different tasks. The division of labor for men and women in the tea production has been based on the gender norms that women do light tasks and men do heavy or technical tasks. These gender norms has been maintained in the most households. Both men and women accept and follow these norms comfortably.

Table 1: Division of labor in tea production activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Both</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cutting the root</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plowing by machine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soil preparation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female do more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female do more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pruning</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female do more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding by hand</td>
<td>Only women do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weeding by machine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fertilizing</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female do more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying water and mixing medicine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Female do more</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spraying</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picking tea by hand</td>
<td>Only women do</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cutting tea by machine</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carrying tea to buyers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pick up grass, garbage</td>
<td>Only women</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repair machines</td>
<td></td>
<td>Only men do</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Source: Results of FGD with tea cultivation farmers in Chieng Khoa commune, Son La)

In tea production, the heavy tasks are described by both men and women as the intensive, high technical demand tasks. These works include cutting tea by
machine, plowing, carrying tea for sale, spraying pesticides, and cutting grass by machine. As a gender norms, these heavy tasks are often undertaken by men. Even for the same task like tea cutting, men will take all heavy and difficult tasks such as using the machine to cut tea, while women hold the bag and collect the tea. If picking tea is done by hands, only women do it. The spraying work is also a toxic work, therefore, men will automatically take this task.

Contrarily, the light tasks are often undertaken by women. The light tasks are described as something not technical works, not require physical strength, even these tasks may take long time. In tea production, the works are often done by women only including weeding by hand, picking tea by hand, Pick up grass, garbage.

When analyzing the works have been done by both men and women, it shows that women are taking the light tasks, but these works require to do regular and take time, such as planting, fertilizing, weeding, clearing moss and garbage (clean tea field). Women feel comfortable to implement these takes. For some tasks are not clearly distinguished as heavy or light, both men and women will do it. For example, carrying materials (fertilizer or seeds) for tea production.

“My husband mainly does heavy work (cutting tea) in production. When the tea have fruits, I keep it as a seed. My husband prepare the land and I sow seeds” (female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).
"Talking about taking care of tea, I harvested with tea cutting machine. I use that machine. To work together, my wife helped me to keep the machine. Because the machine has a long blade. My wife held a light side, and I hugged my head heavier..." - (a male farmer, Chieng Khoa commune)

"Women’s work: weeding, fertilizing, harvesting by hands, peeling moss, picking up garbage (clear tea fields); planting trees (replacing dead tea)" – Male farmers in Moc Chau town

The division of labor for men and women in tea production is strongly influenced by traditional roles of men and women. In the family and community, men are expected to play a key role in economic development while women are associated with the role of housework’s and child care. These gender norms enable men to have more opportunities and favorable conditions to access good livelihood opportunities outside of the community. Especially, in Chieng Khoa commune, where the tea has not been a main source of income yet, therefore, men only involved in some certain tasks. Women have few opportunities to seek livelihood opportunities outside due to the burden of domestic works. This also a reason why women are staying with the animal raising and tea production.

Under the lens of the value chain, women have fewer opportunities to interact and communicate directly with other actors of the tea value chain. The works done by women are often internal works, therefore, they do not have many chance to communicate with other actors and develop a relationship with these actors. Meanwhile, men are undertaking the works that are directly interacting and communicating with external factors, such as selling products, buying and transporting materials, buying and repairing machines... As a result, women have fewer opportunities and less experience than men in building relationships with other actors in the value chain, especially in the market segment.

In the family, the total time that men and women spend for income generation (including tea cultivation) is the same (about 8 hours per day), sometimes men spend a little higher than women. However, the time women spend for tea production activities is higher than men. The works done by women are things that require more time as taking care of the tea in all period. Men only involve in this work at the busy season time (picking tea) and their most of time is spent for free labors outside of the community.

In Moc Chau town, the producers have signed the production contract with the processing company (Moc Chau Tea Company). This collaborative relationship also helps to reduce working time in some specific activities for men and women, such as reducing the time for carrying tea to the processing company. This relationship also helps to strengthen the active participation of men in tea production. Especially, when the families have significant income gained from the tea production.
The use of the machine helps to reduce the women’s workload in tea production. Before women had to spend much time picking tea by hands. This also attracts more participation of men in sharing works with women. All hard works done by hands before, such as cutting the roots, picking tea, spraying, and weeding grass now have been replaced by the machine. Men and women have less pressure and tired in comparison with before. However, the machines used for tea production are default design for men use only. Therefore, men are persons who manage and use all kind of machines. The different needs and the ability of women in using these machines are not considered. Automatically, men have better knowledge and experience in using these machines while almost tasks done by women have not been replaced by machines. This removes women from getting the direct benefit from agricultural mechanization.

In addition, when tea production is expanded on a large scale and it becomes a main income source of the family, the service for production will be easier for farmers. This change has a positive impact on reducing pressures on women. The availability of tea cutting services or maintaining labor exchange in the community has helped to reduce pressure on labor source at the peaking times. Because the area of the household is quite large (some households have up to 6 hectares) and some period of production time requires a large number of laborers while family could not meet this need.

“\textit{The processing of tea cannot be done by itself but must be exchanged. Include each stage, but all jobs are exchanged among tea farmers together. For example, in the process of harvesting tea (cutting tea, collecting tea in bags, transferring tea to storage, transferring tea to consumers), it takes 8 labor. Mostly men do this: 2 people hold machines, 2 hold, 2 bring tea into storage, 2 people put tea into the bag.}”

\textit{The harvest of tea on an area of 3000m2 of a farmer takes up to 8 people, completed in 1 day. Therefore, hiring or changing labor is used by most farmers. Because I can’t do it alone. People need to exchange. Families arrange themselves to exchange with each other so that every home can exchange jobs”}

(Source: FGD with male farmers group in Moc Chau Town)

The labor exchange between farmers is the most popular mechanism used by small-scale tea production farmers and this brings some benefits for women. The exchange can be applied to all kind of works related to tea production. It is interesting that all production tasks could be exchanged based on the gender norms that heavy tasks will be exchanged by men and light tasks will be taken by women. This exchange mechanism not only helps farmers to reduce the shortage of labor, but also create the chance for job opportunities in the community. The rule of labor exchange is not too strictly so that women can participate in this exchange or they can get paid jobs if they are available.
“Women also participate in the exchange of labor with suitable task for women such as cutting grass, picking tea by hand”

“People who exchange workers are not necessarily the same men or women. The number of days/hours to do a job is not a condition for a public exchange; it is important for the employee to do all the work they have changed”.

“Labor exchange is based on working days. For example, if I work for them for 2 days, they will work for me for 2 days, whatever it is”

(Excerpts: discussion of tea farmers’ group, Chieng Khoa and Van Ho communes).

There are two types of tea production modality have been applied by small-scale farmers in Son La province. In Chieng Khoa commune, the farmers follow the self-production modality, while the farmers in Moc Chau follow the production contract signing with the processing company (Moc Chau tea company). The analysis shows that there is a significant difference in division of labor in each production modality. For self-production modality, women have more burdens of works because they are persons, who are undertaking almost tasks. Meanwhile, some heavy works done by men have been handover to the processing company under the production contracting modality. This modality also helps to reduce burdens for both male and female workers in production and attract more men to share the works.

The specialization in production under the production contracting modality also brings more benefits to both male and female farmers. As mentioned above, for those who following the modality of the production contract, some tasks done by men (e.g. spraying pesticides, collecting tea and transporting tea to consumers) are replaced by the specialized teams organized by the processing company. As a result, the production workload of men and women are reduced so that they have more time to invest in the quality of tea production or seeking other livelihood opportunities outside of the community.

2.2. Access to and control over the resources within tea value chain

The access to and control over the resources and facilities is playing important roles in tea production activities. Having access to and control over resources not only helps farmers to maximize their production efficiency but also helps to increase the value of the product. This gender analysis examines the difference between men and women in access to and control over resources and facilities needed for tea production as well as the ability to make a decision on those resources and then provide practical recommendations to transform the gender equality in access to and control over resource and decision-making process.
The production land is a most important mean for tea cultivation farmers. In two surveyed communes, the small-scale farmers could be divided into two groups based on the land ownership. The farmers in Chieng Khoa commune are growing tea on the land owned by themselves, while farmers in Moc Chau are growing tea on the land owned by the processing company. For land area owned by households, both husband and wife have right to use this land for production activates. According to Land Law 2013, the production land use right certificate (green book) must have both names of husband and wife if this land is shared property. However, even women have name on the red book, but it does not mean that they automatically have right to make decision on using this land. Men still are the persons, who make final decision on using land for production.

“Current production land is inherited by parents to my husband and me. We both have a name on the production land right use certificates (green book). There is no dispute over the land because this land is owned by us. Because there are two names in the book, so I do not have any comment. I keep this certificate in the box and hold the key. If my husband has a reason to request for money or green book to do something, I will give it to him, if he does not have a reasonable reason, I will not give it to him”
(Source: In-depth Interview with a female farmers, in Chieng Khoa commune)

For households in Moc Chau town, they are growing tea on the land owned by the processing company. The production land area was allocated to households through the production contract signed by the processing company and the farmers. By this contract, the farmers have the right to use this land for tea production within 50 years. Women are the majority of representatives from households who signed a production contract with the processing company. The main reason is that women are the person who are in charge of tea production.

“…Women are usually contract holders, only 20% for men…”
“…The production land is the ownership of the processing company. I bought the tea and used this land for 50 years”
“I am a farmer so that there is something I don’t understand. On the field, I was contracted with the company. But when I returned home to finish reading and looked at the seal (on the contract) it was useless. The legal seal must be made by the Natural Resources and Environment Department and the Land and Housing Department”.
(source: Focus group discussion with male farmers in Moc Chau town)

However, the farmers are not assured about the land right because this land is belonging to the processing company. Even the contract said that they have right...

1 Clause 4, Article 98, Land Law 2013
to use this land for production within 50 years, but nothing guarantee that this land will be stable use.

**Fertilizers and pesticides**

The tea cultivation farmers in Chieng Khoa and Moc Chau commune are easy to access to input services for tea production. In Chieng Khoa commune, most households can buy fertilizers and pesticides from private agents or household shops at the villages. Some middlemen in the villages also sell fertilizers and pesticides to farmers. Each commune has approximately 4-5 private agents. There is no commitment or bonds between the farmers and service providers in this relationship. At the moment, there are two types of payment mechanism for using inputs service. The farmers can pay the cost right after buying fertilizer or pesticides and if they do so the price may be cheaper. In case the households do not have money to pay right after buying materials, they can pay later but the higher price will be counted. If the farmers sell tea for middlemen who providing inputs service, the costs will be reduced at the time they sell tea.

"Buying pesticides and fertilizers is easy. I don't have to wait when I want to buy it. There are 4-5 vendors in my village. There is rarely a shortage of fertilizers or pesticides in the villages because all agents have enough source".

"My family bought input materials for tea production from Ms. Hao (a private seller in the village). This is an agent near my house. I sell tea to Ms. Hao and I buy fertilizers and pesticides provided by her agent. If I could not pay money right after I buy her materials, Ms. Hao will let me pay later"

(Source: FGDs with female farmers group in Chieng Khoa commune)

The deferred payment mechanism provided by middlemen and private vendors at the villages helped farmers, especially those who have difficulty in finance, to reduce their financial pressures. However, this mechanism also makes farmers limits to select service suppliers and have to pay higher price to input service. The farmers also shared that they could not control the quality of fertilizers and pesticides because there are too many kinds of products while their knowledge and understanding of fertilizers and pesticides quality are limited. The farmers have to sell tea for middlemen and they do not have a strong influence in negotiation with them on price.

"The service price is reasonable. Other agents can increase the interest rates, but the price given by Ms. Hao is acceptable because I sell tea for her."- male farmers, Chieng Khoa commune.

"Now there are different kinds of pesticides, I don't know what is good or bad. I use what I'm used to "- female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.

For farmers who follow the production contracting modality in Moc Chau Town, the access to input service (fertilizer and pesticides) is very convenient. All input
services are provided by Moc Chau Tea Company. The farmers only inform the quantity of fertilizers and pesticides they need to the production group leader and then the processing company will provide them. The costs will be counted and reduced from income of tea. The most difference with the self-production modality in Chieng Khoa commune is that the farmers in this area do not worry about the quality of fertilizers and pesticides as well as financial burdens for buying inputs for production.

**Financial capital**

In tea production, farmers need money to buy fertilizers and pesticides. There is a higher need of finance source if the households have large area of production. However, the survey results show that farmers do not have much pressure to access financial source. For farmers who follow the self-production mechanism, the farmers can borrow money from local commercial banks (Agriculture and Rural Development Bank) with simple procedures. However, farmers do not have high pressures or worry about finance because they use the deferred payment mechanism provided by middlemen or private input vendors.

"I have to borrow money to buy fertilizers, seeds and prepare tools. The financial source for buying fertilizers is always lacking. If you invest for 3 tons of tea, you must borrow 5 million "- farmers, Chieng Khoa commune).

"I can cut tea for people, then I pay them. If you borrow for about a month, you don't have to pay interest. If over 1 month, you have to pay interest of about 1% "- female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

"Whenever he went to spray, he borrowed. When she left the stool, she borrowed." - female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune

For self-production modality, the farmers often use deferred payment mechanism provided by local agents to overcome financial shortage. The farmers could by fertilizers and pesticides from local agents in advance and then they pay back this cost when they selling tea to them. For the small loan, it does matter of who are borrowers, it will be simply convenience. The loan transaction in cash is also replaced in kind, so it doesn’t create any privilege for men and women in accessing and monitoring loan. But for the large amount of loan, women can be borrowers, but the final decision will be made by men.

In the family, women are the persons who keeping the incomes of the family. The decisions on expenditures will be discussed between men and women, but men often are persons who make final decision on this issue. In the tea production activities, women have good opportunities to control the finance source invested into tea production because they are money keepers and they are taking care of all production activities. However, it does not mean that women will have power to make final decision on this. Although men are not involved to much in production, but they are the persons who make final decision on using the finance source for tea production.
“My wife is managing all finance. The costs and incomes are recorded in the booklet to check for losses and wins, and there must be a place to store. I want to spend this money, then my wife takes it out. My wife never refused because of my legitimate offer. Without the right purpose, the wife would not give it - a male trader bought it, Chieng Khoa commune.

“My husband borrowed money and gave it to me. If my husband told me a million to buy spray, I gave it. I am just a holder” - female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.

“I am the head of household so I borrow money. My wife is a money holder. I do not keep it because I often spend money - male farmers, Chieng Khoa commune)."

For households who follow the production contract, women are the majority of persons who signed the contract with the processing company. The main reason is that women are involving directly in all production activities. Women also have names on the bank account to receive money paid by the processing company when they buying tea.

“The money gained by selling tea will be paid into the bank account. The bank account names will be the contract holders. The wife informed her husband to bring the card and keep it” - male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company

The production contract modality also helped women have more chances to access to and control over income from tea production. As contact person and contract holders, women are often contacting directly by the processing company for any issues and they have chance to communicate directly to the company about production related issue. Women also received technical support from the processing company to do their production in the most effective ways.

❖ **Machines and facilities**

Machines and facilities are also important resources for tea production activities. At present, some machines are used for tea production, for example, using the machine cutting tea, weeding grass, or spraying pesticides. However, due to financial limitations, farmers do not buy these machines. Most of them hired the machine to save the cost.

“My house uses machines for cutting the branches, picking tea and prepare the soil for production. I just bought the old machine because I didn't have enough money” - male farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.

“Men like my husband have trouble repairing the machines when they break down. We do not have money to fix. Men have to use cattle and buffalo, so they are also heavy. The pressure of work also sometimes makes my husband uncomfortable” - female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.
Men are more dominant than women in accessing machine and facilities for tea production. Because the production machines are naturally designed for men. Currently, many tasks undertaken by women are not mechanized. In practice, men have more experienced in using machines and repairing machines, so machinery-related decisions are made by men.

**Job opportunities**

The principle of equal pay has been applied to all jobs whether men or women are employed in the community. This rule created more job opportunities to women. However, there is a difference in accessing livelihood opportunities outside the community between men and women. Men have more opportunities than women in taking jobs outside the community, because men don’t bear the burden of housework like women.

> “Job exchange has been made by nature of work rather than gender. She or he will need to complete the task and they do not care how many hours. The hiring cost for one person is VND 300 thousand per day, this amount have been applied same for male or female workers”

(Source: In-depth Interview with a male farmer, Moc Chau Tea company).

The income source gained by farmers from tea cultivation is not high, because the price of tea is still low. The domestic consumption is also limited. Therefore, farmers could not rely solely on tea production only. Beside tea production, the farmers are often looking for other livelihood opportunities to increase their income. However, the job opportunities to women is lower than men. Although there is limited access to jobs, but women and men are equal in paying wages.

> “Both men and women work as hired labor. But Female is less than male because it is harder to find work. Women mainly do errands such as cleaning a shop, etc.” - male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company.

> For jobs that need to be hired as a construction job, "women find jobs more difficult because their skills are weak and health is not suitable for construction jobs" (male farmers, Moc Chau Tea Company).

> “The same jobs for men and women are paid at the same wage”- male farmers, Moc Chau Tea Company.

**Technical knowledge**

Most of farmers who following the self-production modality in Chieng Khoa are growing tea based on their own experience that they have learned by doing since many years ago. They are also learning from other households during the production. However, their technical knowledge and understanding is still limited. Especially, the knowledge and understanding of choosing the suitable pesticides or fertilizers. The farmers in this production modality did not receive any technical support from government extension workers during production.
"I don’t know about the distance between tea plants. I also do not clear which type of fertilizers and pesticides will be applied for each stage of growth (early and end of the years). I do it based on what I learned from other people”- female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.

"In general, I am confused to taking care of tea in a different period, because I am not clear the stage of growth. I used the drug which I found it was good”- male farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.

For those who following the production contract, the farmers have access to technical knowledge provided by extension workers of the processing company. The extension workers will closely work with farmers to provide them basic knowledge and understanding of how to taking care of tea and guide farmers to follow all technical standard requirements of the processing company. The same with self-production modality, the farmers under the production contract modality also did not receive any technical support from government extension workers.

“Since I have been growing tea, I have just learned from agricultural extension 1-2 times”- female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

"I met an extension worker once from 2015. They went down to the village. Since then, I have not met them again"- male farmer, Chieng Khoa commune.

“The suppliers talk less about the technique, they are mainly selling products”- female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

“Sellers don’t know about techniques too. Everything they said is to follow the instructions on the packaging”- male farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

“I also apply some knowledge from TV, but this is also a little”, female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

There are high needs and interests among male and female farmers to learn more knowledge and techniques related to taking care of tea. At present, some input service providers are combining selling fertilizers and pesticides with providing technical guidance to farmers. This kind of additional support has attracted more attention from farmers. The farmers also shared that the communication and technical training provided by Government extension workers is limited and do not meet the needs of farmers.

“Last time, there is one agent from Hanoi they come to the village to introduce new fertilizer for tea production and they tested in my field. It shows a good result. The villagers came to hear how to use it. People were listening to this introduction. They were very interested in such kind of instruction”, female head of agent, Chieng Khoa commune).

“The local vendors have good investment. The state extension workers don’t regularly meet with villagers. Agricultural extension workers are weak in communication”, female head of agent, Chieng Khoa commune).
Both men and women have equal opportunities to participate in the training or communication activities on tea cultivation techniques. In the family, the decision on who (husband or wife) will participate in the training or learning event will depend on topics and time availability. At present, women are major targets for all kind of learning events related to taking care of tea, because they are persons who are directly involving in this work. Both men and women also support that women should be involved more into capacity building events because they are the main persons who taking responsibility in the family.

“I learned to cut tea, weeding, my wife learned fertilizer" male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company).

“Ordinary women come to see more agricultural extension (for example, take lime, ask for pesticide spraying, etc.) - male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company.

“When I recommend my wife to training, I believe that she will convey her knowledge to me. She should know more about tea cultivation technique because she is the most suitable person than me", male farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

“Men also want to learn more techniques but still give priority to women”- male farmers, Moc Chau Tea Company

“My husband recommend me to join the training because my husband didn’t persevere to study ”- a female selling materials, Chieng Khoa commune)

A common knowledge gap among farmers is the limited knowledge to respond to climate change. Some farmers are almost ignorant and don’t know how to respond. Some farmers only listen to weather forecasts and haven’t yet learned how to respond. Some farmers have knowledge of hoarfrost phenomenon and know how to deal with this phenomenon, but due to financial constraints, they do nothing when extreme weather and climate change. Some farmers know how to avoid tea plants from salt fog by cutting tea early or later than planned. However, in order to implement, the agricultural weather forecast must be correct and timely. According to the farmers of Moc Chau Tea Company, the role of extension is only shown in the planning of tea cultivation for farmers, rarely guiding them on how to cope with climate change.

“I do not have knowledge to respond to climate change. When I had tea frost, I didn’t know how to do it. ” Female farmers, Chieng Khoa commune).

“Too much sunshine, tea plants grow poorly. Hoarfrost kills tea. I just listened to the forecast on TV without anticipating climate change before it happened. I can only harvest early to avoid the rain. I have not learned how to deal with it but only listen to radio and television - male farmers, Chieng Khoa commune).

“If there's a frost, I can't do anything and cover it up. I don't have the costs and materials to cover up. I don't have enough money to buy nets to cover up although the market is selling a lot “- male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company.

“The agricultural extension they plan for is the end of December. I listened to
Quality control

Households who following the production contract modality are informed in advance by the processing company about the price will be applied for each type of tea products. Therefore, they can be active in controlling the quality of their products before selling it to the processing company. The quality checking by the company is transparency based on criteria given by the processing company. All farmers are informed about it. This mechanism make both sides happy about the quality standards.

“When cutting tea, I knew how to sort my tea. When I handed over tea to the factory, I knew how many types of tea I had. By the end of the month I went to the factory to cross check and certify if it was appropriate. They are often matched” - male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company).

However, it is difficult to control the quality of tea produced by the farmers who following the self-production modality (in Chieng Khoa commune). The quality of tea is assessed by middlemen based on their own criteria. Sometimes farmers do not sure why their tea is underestimated by middlemen. In this relationship, the farmers could not be active in controlling their products although they have to work hard to get it. The farmers also do not have a strong power to negotiate with the middlemen about price and criteria to classify the type of products especially when there is high volume of tea selling at the same time.

“I think middle men evaluate the quality in some households and then apply for all households, so the price is lower. I take care of plants a lot and spend a lot of money on fertilizer” - male farmers, Chieng Khoa commune).

Access to and control the market

At Chieng Khoa commune, the farmers either sell their tea to Chieng Khoa Cooperative or middlemen depending on the buying price. If the farmers sell tea for middlemen, they will come to collect at the field, and if they sell for Chieng Khoa Cooperative, they have to carry tea to the factory located around 2 km far from the field. The buying price given by middlemen and Chieng Khoa Cooperative will be up and down by the market trend. The buyers have their own criteria to classify the quality of tea and then given the appropriate price to farmers.

In the business relationship with Chieng Khoa Cooperative, the farmers already received a clear introduction about the criteria to classify the quality of tea and the price for each type of tea if they sell for them. Chieng Khoa Cooperative also signs a contract with some farmers to buy tea if they want, but the current
regulations and commitment between two sides are loose. There is no strong commitment has been established by both sides. Therefore, Chieng Khoa Cooperative could not prevent farmers sell tea to middlemen and farmers will sell tea for middlemen if they give a higher price. In this relation, the farmers still weak in negotiation about the buying price. Although the price is driven by the market price, the farmers not always receive the best price.

The farmers in Chieng Khoa commune also expressed their worry about the relationship with middlemen. Currently, farmers sometimes sell tea for both non-residents and resident middlemen if the buying price given by middlemen is higher than Chieng Khoa Cooperative. However, there is a hidden competition between non-resident and resident middlemen in buying tea in this area. In order to compete with resident middlemen, the non-resident middlemen sometimes buy tea with a little high price given by the resident middlemen.

“There are not many private collectors in the commune. But there are people from other places. They came to the people's houses to weigh and told people to leave tea on side of the road and then they came to pick up. At that time, everyone sold” (male traders, Chieng Khoa commune).

“There are middlemen from outside they come to buy tea. I can't compete with them. I can not prevent farmers from selling tea to these persons. Farmers will sell tea for anyone who giving them the best price. I do not benefit anyone. I'm just a collector.” (a male trader in Chieng Khoa commune).

In practice, both non-resident and resident middlemen intend to make pressure on price to farmers in different ways. When farmers already cut tea, they must sell for them without any opportunity to negotiate on price. To overcome negative impact from price pressure, the main solution applied by farmers is to sell tea for one resident middlemen. The solution of the resident middlemen is to be flexible with the price given by non-resident middlemen.

“Buyers are very important to producers, because tea must be cut on time. If the buyer does not buy, tea leaves will easily break when processing” (female farmer, Chieng Khoa commune).

In Moc Chau town, most of farmers follow the production contracting modality so that they do not have big challenge in term of market access. According to the production contract signed with Moc Chau teaccompany, the farmers have to sell their tea for the company. There is also a strong condition that company commit to buy all tea for farmers and the farmers have no right to sell tea to middlemen. The farmers also do not worry about the quality of tea products and criteria used to classify types of tea, because the quality will be controlled directly by the company, and the farmers received close technical support by the company during production process. The buying price given by company is fixed annually and the price is also revised according to the market trend.
"I do not sell tea to middlemen because it does not give much benefit to me. Selling to middlemen is only the short term. Even the price could be a little high about few VND thousand VND per 01 quintal, but it will not the best choice because if sold to the factory when I buy fertilizer, I get deferred payment. If I sell to the Company, when I have difficulties, they will help me."

(In-depth Interview with a male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company)

There is significant difference between men and women in access to and control over the market. It seems that men still are the majority of persons who are responsible for access to market. Women also participate in selling, but they are mainly in charge of collecting money from buyers (in case farmers sell a large amount of tea). The main reason makes women rarely participated in the tea selling because this task requires strong physical health to carry tea to the processing company, therefore, women do not want to do so. Men are often taking this task so that they have more experience than women in selling. It seems that women are limited to access to market due to their personal motivation and capacity.

2.3. Power and decision-making process within the tea value chain

In the power relationship between men and women in the family, the decisions making process is strongly influenced by the gender norms. Men are the ones who make final decisions for all important tasks. Women are also consulted and expressed their opinions during the decision-making process. In both Chieng Khoa commune and Moc Chau town, women make decisions for some issues, such as using small expenses, buying food, household chores, caring for family members, taking care of children. Meanwhile, men are the ones who make final decisions on a number of issues, for example, buying valuable assets (land, houses etc) and facilities.

"Husband is playing a pillar role in the family. All decisions will be discussed by husband and wife, but husband is the person who make final decision” - male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company.

Most of things in my family were decided by myself. My wife also discuss about it, but I will make final decision” – Male farmer in Chieng Khoa commune.

“In term of expense, men will decide large expenditures, women will make decision on small expenditures, such as buying foods or paying expense to buy things for children” – FGDs with male farmers in Moc Chau town

In the tea production, the decision-making process is usually discussed by husband and wife. However, husbands are the persons who make the final decision for all important things related to products such as expanding production, buying or hiring machines for tea production, and selling products. Women are consulted about this, but they make final decisions for less important things only, such as buying fertilizer, taking care of tea, and harvesting. Both men and women are also aware that discussion and agreement between
husband and wife in the decision-making process is an important factor to limit the conflict and warm up the family atmosphere.

“Men and women will participate in the community events depend on who will have free time. In regard to contribution, the husband and wife will discuss and make final agreement on who will join this” -male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company).

“In tea production activities, all things will be discussed between husband and wife. No one make decision itself. Even when buying fertilizer, it also need to discuss by both husband and wife- male farmer, Moc Chau Tea Company).

When analyzing the power relationship between tea farmers and other actors in the tea value chain in Son La, it shows that tea farmers have established relationships with some other actors in the value chain. In each of these relationships, the degree of interaction and ability to make influence each other is different. There survey also show that there are different power between actors of tea value chain in two surveyed areas.

In Chieng Khoa commune, where almost tea production farmers are following the self-production modality. Therefore, the actors who have closest relationship with farmers are neighbored households. The farmers have not been organized into small group yet. This relationship is established in a spirit of mutual support in tea production. This relationship is maintained regularly through learning and sharing experiences and market information. In this relationship, all farmers have equal power and they do not have dependence in each other.

In addition, there are two value chain actors who have a strong influence on self-production farmers in Chieng Khoa commune including: (1) middlemen and (2) Chieng Khoa Tea Cooperative. These are two actors that have a decisive influence on all tea planting activities. In this relationship, farmers are often strongly affected and driven by middlemen and the processing cooperative, who have the power to decide the price and buying tea for farmers. Although the price will be based on market prices, farmers do not have opportunities to negotiate the price. They have less power also because they have no choice if they do not sell tea for those actors.

The relationship with service providers has been also established by self-production farmers. The farmers have to buy machines, fertilizers, and pesticides from private agents located in the commune. Some agents also combine selling materials and buying tea for farmers. There is no binding in this relationship. Two types of payment have been applied by service providers. The farmers either do payment right after buying materials or they can select the deferred payment. The interest will be added to the price when farmers choose the deferred payment mechanism. Due to there are too many services available in the commune, so farmers have the flexibility to choose the appropriate service.
The relationship between farmers and technical suppliers, for example, government agricultural extension, is very weak. The farmers do not receive any technical support from local government extension officers. They often access technical information through technical staff assigned by the processing factory (for Moc Chau town) or self-study through books, mass media or individual experience.

In Moc Chau town, the farmers have been organized into a small group for tea production and they are working closely together under the management of Moc Chau Tea Company. Therefore, the relationship between group members is more tightly. Each group will have a close connection with a management team assigned by Moc Chau Tea Company.

The management team is the first contact person for the production group and this team is responsible for need assessment and coordination of inputs service provision to farmers on behalf of Moc Chau Tea Company. This team also be responsible to manage and monitor production activities and ensure that the farmers will follow all technical guidance requested by Moc Chau Tea Company. In this relationship, farmers must strictly adhere to all requirements of the processing company including buying fertilizers and pesticides, following technical requirements and selling products to them. The farmers enjoy some benefits from this relationship, such as having a stable market for their tea and the fixed price will be paid.

The farmers in this area also have close relationship with technical officers assigned by Moc Chau Tea Company. Under the production contract, Moc Chau Tea Company commit to provide technical support to farmers. Therefore, during production process, the farmers received value technical guide from technical officers to address all technical issues faced during production. They also ensure that farmers to follow and respect all technical requirements of the processing company.

2.4. Gender needs to participate in the tea value chain

In general, women are quite satisfied with the current division of labor between men and women in tea production, as well as in doing domestic works. According to women point of view, no need to change the division of labor in tea production. However, women expressed the need to provide awareness raising for men to have better understanding of women roles and their hardships in production and household works in order to promote the sharing of men in this work.
In regard to tea production, female farmers in Chieng Khoa express the need to become members of tea production groups to learn and share experience from each other. This group may also help them to solve difficulties and problems faced during the production. In which, women Union has been mentioned by female farmers as an organization which could provide technical support to production farmers in establishing and maintaining the production groups.

“I really want to work in a tea production group because I have opportunities to exchange with each other. Everyone in the group can help each other with tea planting knowledge. If anyone knows something they can share, just let others know how to kill pests for example”

“The Women’s Union should set up small groups to help each other. Currently, there is a big group of members (100 members) so it is difficult to manage and support members. Thus, the women union should organize members into a small group, with about 15 members only."

In addition, the female farmers in this area also want to strengthen relationships with middlemen and local service providers to harmonize the benefits between each actor of the tea value chain. This relationship will help farmers not only to buy good quality of materials for their production, but also gain more benefits. It is better to have a third party who could support to establish this relationship.

“It is better that buyers and sellers can talk with each other about the buying price so that farmers have a clear understanding of the value of their product. Hopefully, there is the third party will help buyers and farmers working with each other because this bring benefits for both”

The female farmers in Chieng Khoa also wish to have production collaboration with the processing company. They hope that this collaboration will bring more income rather than working as individual households. Women also expressed that this collaboration modality will benefit both sides because they have good experience in tea production and the processing company has stable materials for processing.
The survey also shows that male farmers in Chieng Khoa commune also express the need to participate more in the tea value chain to increase the income source for the family. Currently, they have not been involved much because the income from tea production still low if compare with total income proportion. As mentioned above, men only share heavy tasks with women and the remaining time of men is spent on doing other jobs outside of the community.

“I have plan to involve more into tea production activities by selling materials for tea cultivation. The demand for pesticides is very high while there are only 3 small vendors in the commune. In my commune, there are 800 households who are involving in tea production. Previously, there was a factory that promised to provide farmers but then they didn’t see. In general, 1-2 agents are sufficient but it is better to have more choice and reasonable price. To do this, I have to go to training for 3 months”

(Source: In-depth Interview – male farmers, Chieng Khoa commune)

The survey also shows some common needs of male and female farmers in Chieng Khoa commune. Both men and women want to be provided with more knowledge and techniques related to tea cultivation, market access, and climate change response. They expected that these training and capacity building activities will help them to have enough knowledge and skills to address issues faced during tea production.

The interviews with female and male farmers in Moc Chau do not receive any information about the different needs of farmers in tea production. Both men and women in this area raise the needs and concerns about technical training support to farmers and strengthen the effectiveness of the production group. Providing capacity building on group management skills.

2.5. Key factors challenging women participation in the tea value chain

At present, the key factor has been challenging women’s participation in the tea value chain is the perception of women economic leadership among men and women. In both family and community context, men and women have the perception that men should be the breadwinners and women should be in charge of domestic works and taking care of children. Therefore, even women are involving in many tea production activities, but the final decisions are often made by men. Women themselves also did not realize their potential roles in promoting household economically. This perception also makes women reluctant to make a final decision on production expanding. Even they can make a decision, but the will give chance to men.

The burden of domestic works and gender norm on roles of women in taking caring for other members in the family is also another factor that challenges women’s participation in the tea value chain. The total daily time women spent
on domestic work is too much. The FGDs with female farmers in both communes show that women have to spend an average of 6 hours per day to do the domestic works. This burden is also strongly influenced by a gender norm that women are the appropriate persons to take care of children. In the family, men rarely share domestic works with women. The burden of domestic works is the hidden barriers to limit women from opportunities to learn and improve their knowledge and skills related to tea production or market analysis.

The current gender norms on the economic roles of men and women in family and community provide favorable conditions for men rather than women. Due to men are expected to be breadwinners, they are easy to make a decision to find other livelihood opportunities outside of the community. They migrate to the big city to looking for jobs and left all tea production works on the shoulders of women. With limited knowledge and skills, women only pay their effort on agriculture livelihood opportunities like tea cultivation. Even those, women are keeping at the norm that they could not move far away from home because they have to take care of children. Therefore, they do not have many opportunities to learn about the market and lacking opportunities to interact with other actors of a tea value chain.

Lacking capacity on market analysis and the capacity to make decisions in tea production is also hidden factors that block women’s participation in the value chain. This challenge could be seen more clearly at the self-production farmers in Chieng Khoa commune. In all types of business relationship have been established between farmers and other actors of the tea value chain, the farmers are still the most vulnerable group. The tea production completely depends on the market price while farmers do not have more choice of market. It seems that farmers do not have the power to make an influence and negotiate the price with middlemen and the processing company. Without long-term commitment between the processing company and farmers in Chieng Khoa commune may push farmers in the situation that they never get the best price because the buying price is given by the processing company will be up and down following the market price.

As mentioned above, the establishment of production groups and develop the linkage between production farmers and the processing company bring a lot of benefits to both men and women. Both male and female farmers who follow the production contract modality reduced stress and pressures because they have not been worried too much about the market. There is some share of works provided by the processing company so that women have more time to invest in promoting quality. But the challenge still remains for women in Chieng Khoa commune where the linkage between the farmers and the processing company has not been established closely. Most of the farmers have not been organized into small production groups so that they do not have collective power in negotiating with the middlemen and the processing company.
PART 3: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Conclusion

Women are currently playing an important role in the tea value chain in Son La Province. Women are taking almost of tasks in tea production. Men share some but only heavy tasks. The division of labor between men and women is based on gender norm, in which, men are expected to perform the role of breadwinners. Women perform housework and taking care of children. The current division of labor creates favorable conditions for men to access livelihood opportunities outside of the community. Meanwhile, this norm keeps women staying with housework and preventing them from livelihood opportunities outside of the community.

There is a significant difference between men and women in implementing tea production activities. The tasks that men undertake are usually those that have direct relationships with other actors of the tea value chain. Meanwhile, the tasks that women are in charge of often have less opportunity to directly interact with other actors. This has created favorable conditions for men and helping men accumulate more experience than women in tea production activities. Although women undertake most of the production works, they are doing the internal works. Therefore, women have few chances to interact with other actors, especially in the market segment. As a result, this limits the participation of women in the other segments of the tea value chain. In particular, the capacity of women to make influence other actors is also limited too.

The current cooperation modality established between the processing company and the small-scale producers in the tea value chain in Son La province has created many benefits for both sides. This cooperation helps the small-scale farmers having stable markets for their tea. This also creates positive changes in division of the household works. The organization of farmers into small production group under direct management of the processing company create favorable conditions for women to actively involve in production. The specialization in tea production has helped producers, especially women to reduce stress and pressure in production and seeking markets. The commitment to consume tea from the processing company with stable purchasing price helps producers getting more benefit more from the value chain. Under this cooperation relationship, the processing company will have stable raw materials for daily production.

This survey also shows that there is a difference between men and women in access to and control over the resources for tea production. Although women are taking most production tasks, however, they have limited access to some relevant resources only. Meanwhile, men are still the persons who manage and
control over all resources. Women are consulted during making decisions, but their ability to make influence through this process is still limited.

Men are still more advantage than women in accessing machines and equipment used for tea production activities. Analysis results show that using machinery and mechanization in tea production has contributed significantly to reduce physical burdens for tea farmers. At present, most of the heavy and time-consuming works were replaced by machines. For example: cutting tea, cutting grass, prepare the soil, etc. Therefore, farmers reduce stress, fatigue and save time in production. However, the production tools and machines are default designed for men. Most machines and equipment’s are used by men. This creates favorable conditions for men to accumulate more experience in using machines and they are also the persons to make decisions on using machines for production.

The cooperation modality established between the processing company and farmers also contributes to reducing stress and market pressure, especially for the group of farmers signed the production contract in Moc Chau town. However, the market pressure still remains for tea production farmers in Chieng Khoa commune where the linkage and cooperation between the enterprises and producers have not been closely established. The production is done by individual households and this makes women encounter many difficulties and challenges. Due to there is no commitment to raw tea materials, the products are often pressed and controlled by middlemen. The production activities of farmers in this area are completely depended on the purchasing capacity of the cooperatives and middlemen.

3.2. Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Support to establish and maintain the collaborative groups of male and female farmers, helping women get more benefits from the tea value chain. When design the project, the technical support to establish and maintain collaborative groups of female and male farmers should be taken into account. The establishment of such collaborative groups should be based on existing farmer groups. At Moc Chau town, the effort should be focused on strengthening the groups and providing capacity building activities for the group members (see recommendation 2). At Chieng Khoa, the project should pay attention to both establishment and capacity building for those groups as well as strengthen the linkage between the production groups and the processing company (Van Ho Cooperative) and other actors in the market segment.

- **Recommendation 2:** Enhancing the capacity of members of women’s production groups to be able to manage and operate the production group effectively. The capacity building should be provided to both
members and leaders of the collaborative groups in seven project communes. The capacity building activities should include training courses to improve knowledge and skills on tea cultivation and market access. In addition, the attention should be paid to learning and sharing events among members of the groups to share information and solve their issues. It also could be consultation and technical support to make sure that all members of the collaborative groups have to comply with requests from the processing company (e.g. follow the regulations under Viet GAP or global GAP) in tea production. In particular, the project also should support farmers to implement the community monitoring and supervision the compliance with standards of the processing companies in cultivation and using plant protection drugs. In addition, there should be training courses on raising awareness about gender equality; climate change and disaster risks management.

 Recommendation 3: Strengthening linkage and cooperation between farmer groups and private sectors towards equal sharing benefits in the tea value chain. In the project design process, it is necessary to give high priority to activities that promote and facilitate the linkage and cooperation between producers and processing company or any private sectors who are involved in tea marketing segment. This effort should include training and technical support after training to ensure that production farmers comply with technical requirements and strictly follow all standards requested by purchasing actors. The project should also conduct communication activities to members and leaders of collaborative groups and production farmers to raise awareness of rights and benefits to develop partnership with the private sectors. At the same time, the project also should build the capacity to access to market. In addition, the multi-shareholders policy dialogues should be organized to build common understanding and promptly solve problems faced with during the cooperation.

 Recommendation 4: Support to implementation of the corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives, especially initiatives to promote gender equality in the tea value chain. The project design should include activities that strengthen linkage and partnerships between farmers and the processing companies towards sharing equal benefits. In which, there are activities to support the processing enterprises (Chieng Khoa Commune Tea Cooperative and Moc Chau Tea Company) to implement its CSR, such as conduct awareness-raising or training courses for leaders and employees on CSR; training courses gender equality in business management and enterprise operation; review the business strategy and regulations to ensure compliance with gender equality laws, etc. Support to implement initiatives to promote gender equality in tea production or business activities. Support the organization of dialogues between businesses and other actors in the value
chain to seek opportunities and initiatives to promote gender equality in tea production and trading.

- **Recommendation 5**: Support the processing enterprises to develop the branding and trademarks for tea products and seeking potential markets. The project design should pay attention to activities that support to build capacity to access potential markets and efforts to develop trademarks and branding for tea products. The training, workshops, learning and sharing events should be considered as free space to support the processing companies to develop their own knowledge and skills to access potential markets. In addition, the project also help to build policy advocacy knowledge and skills for the processing companies and help them to have capacity to make influence through the decision making process and dialogues with policymakers./.