RAPID GENDER ANALYSIS IN H’MONG AND MUONG FARMER GROUPS
UNDER MOC CHAU VEGETABLE PROJECT (ACIAR AGB/2014/035)

Background

The Rapid Gender Analysis with these two farmer groups in Moc Chau under the project ACIAR AGB/2014/035 is part of the SRA project which is to support strategic capacity development for integrating gender lens into agriculture value chain research.

The ACIAR AGB/2014/035 project team in Moc Chau has realized that they need to understand more about the farmer groups where they see the difference in the participation of men and women in the groups. In H’Mong farmer group, members are only men while in Muong group, members are both men and women. The project team would like to better understand gender relations within the groups and find out if there are any differences between the ethnicities of H’Mong and Muong.

The research questions were made very clearly from the project team. This helped a lot in designing the analysis. The questions focus on three areas of investigation which are in line with CARE’s gender analysis framework. These include: 1) Gender division of labour; 2) Control over resources and benefits and 3) People aspirations regarding vegetable production.

The research design was figured out and discussed with the project team for agreement. CARE has shared the tools based on the agreed brief research design. CARE has chosen participatory tools that are suitable to answer all the questions raised by the project team and look forward to supporting the project staff in considering the wider application of them in their work. It was planned to involve local project staff to practice the tools during the analysis in the field as part of the capacity building component. However, due to time constraints, training to local project staff could not be done and the staff could only observe the activities. This is also part of the capacity development process when the project staff could see how the tools were designed to get gender information and how to practice them in reality. Although the purpose of capacity building for staff has not been met, results of the analysis may serve as significant inputs for the project team to strengthen gender aspects of their project implementation.

Methodology

Research questions:

- Gender roles in vegetable production
  In the family who are involved in vegetable production? Does the introduction of vegetable production influence the workload sharing between males and females in the family? If yes then how? Does it reflect back on the role/position of wife and husband in the family?

- Household expenditure
  How does a family generally spend money? Who will be in charge of additional money from vegetable production? Does this additional money benefit all members in the family?
Men and women’s perceptions on vegetable production

Men and women’s perceptions about vegetable production? Is there any difference between their points of view?

**The design:**

This is a simple design since the sample is purposely indicated. The research questions are fit with CARE’s gender analysis framework so the areas of inquiry were quickly decided. Questions regarding the role of women and men in vegetable product were examined through gender division of labour. Analysis of access and control over resources was applied to find out the answers to questions regarding how families spend money, who is the decision maker and how decision-making dynamics may influence vegetable production. The last question on people’s perceptions of vegetable production was discovered through a discussion on changes and aspirations.

Field work was conducted in Hang Trung I village and Bo Nhang II village in Van Ho district on August 27-28, 2018. In each village, two focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with women and men separately. Each FGD lasted approximately 2 hours and ranged from 5-10 participants.

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<th>Hang Trung I village (Muong group)</th>
<th>Bo Nhang II village (H’Mong village)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female FGD</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
<td>8 participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male FGD</td>
<td>10 participants</td>
<td>5 participants</td>
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The FGDs in Hang Trung I village took place at the Village Culture House and those in Bo Nhang II village took place in a house of a farmer group member. Icebreaking activities were conducted as part of the FGDs to enable participants to feel comfortable and familiar with teamwork. The FGDs were conducted on the basis of the Gender Balance Tree activity as proposed in the Activity Plan.

**Findings**

**Both men and women perceived vegetable production a good opportunity to improve their income and to make changes in their production practices**

The most significant change for farmer group members is their daily income. There is no difference between women and men and between H’Mong and Muong’ group. They all shared their interests in and satisfaction with having daily income from vegetable production. This is a big change since they did not have that daily cash income for daily expenses from previous crops such as rice, maize or other fruits.

“**Nowadays, we can have money regularly for our daily expenses. Vegetable production is effective. We have money every day compared to production of orange or plum which we can only harvest after 3 or 4 years**” (Muong’s male group)

Vegetable production has brought changes in husbands’ involvement in the production as a whole in both Muong and H’Mong group. Husbands in Muong group have been spending more time in the field and less time hanging out or doing nothing since their families started vegetable production.

“**We do vegetable production as a daily chore, but in the past, we used to stay at home whenever we are tired or just because we did not want to. We are in the field all day these days instead of staying home of hanging out with other men**” (Muong’s male group)

The daily income has made both women and men feel more positive and satisfied. Women said
that they can work all day long and their husbands now work with them more regularly when they both wake up early and go to the vegetable field early together (H’Mong and Muong’s female groups).

**Both men and women in H’Mong and Muong group value vegetable production and want to expand the production.**

The main reason is not only the income they have been earning daily but also the perception on the vegetable production itself. It seems that men and women in both groups perceive vegetable production to be “easier” and “less physically demanding” compared to crops they previously grew on the mountainous field such as maize (one man even said because it is easier and lighter, women can do it). When considering all the technical requirements for a successful vegetable crop, it might not be necessarily “easier” but in the perceptions of farmers, it is easier and lighter because vegetable production doesn’t involve walking up to hill fields and spend the whole day (longer hours) there (for vegetables, at least the ones they are growing, they only need to go 2 hours early in the morning and another two hour in the afternoon).

When it comes to the additional incomes from vegetable production, women are in charge of safekeeping the money (together with other cash incomes in the families). In both groups, women and men reported making joint decisions on how the additional incomes from vegetable production are spent. Because the incomes from vegetable production come in relatively smaller batches (instead of a lump sum like plum or other fruit crops) and more regularly (daily), it seems that women have more room in deciding how to spend the money. They reported spending it on daily household necessities, tuition and pocket money for children, inputs for next crops, or medicines and doctor treatments when sick. These are areas where women tend to have more control over as they fall under their roles in the families.

**Vegetable production increase production time of both men and women but does not make much change in gender roles and gender relations**

The current division of labour is still based on the perception of “men’ work” and “women’s work”. Men often do tasks that are considered “heavy” and require “technical knowledge” such as preparing the soil; making support stands for the vegetables; transporting vegetables from the field to sell, etc. Meanwhile, women are responsible for tasks considered “lighter” including preparing seeds, planting seedlings, watering, applying fertilizers and pesticides, harvesting and packing vegetables, etc. It is worth noting that despite the level of chemical exposure and physical work involved, spraying pesticides is listed among those so-called “lighter” tasks done by women in both Muong and H’Mong group. Indeed, in Muong group, men and women reported that this task is done by both men and women while in H’Mong group, women are reported to take main responsibility over this.

There is some difference between Muong and H’Mong group with regard to decision making: Muong women are able to make certain decisions related to vegetable production such as which type of vegetable to plan, when to use pesticide, which type of pesticide to buy, etc., while H’Mong women cannot make such decisions. The main reason for such difference is that Muong women have been joining different activities of the project such as technical training, mentoring and most importantly, the leader of the group is a woman.

However, the power imbalance does exist to different extents in Muong group and H’Mong group. In H’Mong group, it has been made clear through the FGDs that both women and men believed men are the right people to make decisions. In Muong group, although men often make final decisions on important matters such as whether the family can expand the production area or whether they should take a loan, the decision making process seems to be more consultative in which Muong women can share their opinions and contribute inputs to the process.
“Husband knows everything, he is the head of the family, so he make decisions” (H’Mong’ female group)

“We need to discuss about the loan and need to get his agreement to expand the production area otherwise, we cannot continue” (Muong’s female group)

Current gender division of labor and decision-making dynamics might influence the quality and yield of vegetable.

When it comes to vegetable production, the income of farmers is influenced by market factors as much as by cost management, as well as crop choice, crop quality and yield. Improving farmers’ ability to access and act on market information is an inherent component of this project whereby farmers are being involved in monitoring market trends and seasonal price fluctuations, as well as in more direct connections with distributors and clients from Hanoi. However, this section of the report will focus on an analysis of how (i) cost management; (ii) crop quality and yield; and (iii) crop choice are influenced by current gender division of labour and decision-making dynamics in the families.

Cost management

Managing costs involve the calculation and purchase of inputs as well as the actual use of inputs in the fields. Either overuse or underuse of inputs could have cost implications which usually results in lower income for farmers. In the case of the H’Mong group, the actual use of inputs in the fields, such as planting seeds, applying fertilisers and pesticides, and watering are done by women, while it is the men who often attend technical trainings. While they claim to teach their wives after the trainings, this indicates a potential knowledge gap among the H’Mong women farmers, which might be addressed if technical trainings are tailored to be more accessible to them (time, location, language).

Crop quality and yield

The quality and yield of vegetable crops are influenced by every single step in the production cycle from preparation to harvest and post-harvest handling. In addition to technical knowledge, crop quality could be better ensured if adequate time and attentiveness are dedicated to these steps. In both Muong and H’Mong groups, the fact that women are still responsible for the majority of housework since their families started vegetable production could either lessen the time women have or distract them from fully focusing on the various tasks in vegetable production that they are responsible for.

As the ones mainly responsible for planting seeds and applying fertilisers and pesticides, women in both Muong and H’Mong groups possess practical knowledge of how suitable or effective these inputs and treatments are. Meanwhile, according to current decision-making dynamics in the households, it is worthy noticing that H’Mong men are the ones who make final decisions on what seeds, fertilisers, and pesticides to buy from suppliers. If women are not involved in the discussions, a lot of insights and practical experiences could potentially get lost.

Crop choice

Crop choice was repeatedly mentioned in the FGDs in both Muong and H’Mong groups as a factor that involves a lot of considerations and also significantly affects the income of farmers in each crop season. In the Muong group, both men and women reported making a joint decision on this while in the H’Mong group, it is often men who make this decision.

Vegetable crop decisions are usually made based on a number of considerations, among which the technical readiness and time availability of those in the households who will actually take care of the
vegetables are just as important as market information. Even when market trends signal a certain crop, a decision might be made against it if family labour cannot afford the time and techniques required. If the crop choice and production planning happen to be wrong and the harvest could not be sold to the cooperative, it is the women who end up selling the vegetables at the market in both groups.

**Recommendation**

*Given the findings from the field trip, the following recommendations are proposed for the on-going practices in the project:*

Considering the significant involvement of women in multiple steps of vegetable production, including highly technical steps, it is important to directly equip women with technical knowledge by designing technical trainings in a way that is accessible for women. This would require considerations of timing, location, and language preferences that work for women.

In production planning at the group level, it is recommended to involve the couple of group members to ensure that production decisions are made based on the considerations of all relevant factors and any barriers to production can be identified.

In order to ensure that crop decisions are made in line with market trends and bring profits to farmers, besides providing access to market information, it is important to make sure that women are consulted and not left behind in terms of technical knowledge and skills.

CARE will be able to provide support in designing activities and developing approaches to engaging women more effectively after a community event proposed below.

**Activities to have gender transformation outcome for better production**

The above analysis has indicated that current gender differences in division of labor and decision making have influenced the effectiveness of vegetable production. Women’s burden of housework should be minimized to increase their time availability for production and participation in vegetable group activities, which will then benefit the quality and yield. Household decisions involved both men and women’s voices will benefit the whole family. This should be achieved through gender dialogue between men and women in the families and in the community to challenge current gender norms and promote alternative perspectives on men’s and women’s role.

It is recommended to have one community event in each village on the gender transformation topic. This is a participatory event which aims to encourage people to think differently on gender roles as well as capacity and contribution of women in production. Such thinking will challenge gender norms in the community and encourage people to do differently.

The event will be developed under technical support from CARE. Project staff will be involved in the event development process as a learning step. The event will be organized by group members and are open to families of group members and other community members to strengthen the message. This might include: 1) A fun competition among families on mutual understanding and respect; 2) Fun games on women and men joint decision making on vegetable production; 3) Demonstration of men’s and women’s ability to access to market through an open drama for community women and men. All of these activities will need approximately 2 hours. The project team should suggest suitable time for villagers to gather as many as possible.
The event should be followed up with a reflection dialogue among women and men groups separately. This reflection dialogue will be facilitated by the project staff under CARE’s guidelines and mentoring. This should be done one month after the event.