

Aus4Equality|GREAT

Study 3: Community, Socio-Cultural and Gender Assessment

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GREAT is an initiative of Aus4Equality Program managed by CowaterSogema on behalf of Australian Government.

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ACRONYMS

AWP	: Annual Work Plan
BDS	: Business Development Services
BLS	: Baseline Survey
CAPI	: Computer-Assisted Personal Interview
CIG	: Common Interest group
EM	: Ethnic minority
FGD	: Focus group discussion
GESI	: Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategy
GREAT	: Gender-Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism
IDI	: In depth interview
KII	: Key informant interview
MERL	: Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning
VBSP	: Vietnam Bank for Social Policies
WB	: World Bank
WU	: Women Union

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This community, socio-cultural and gender assessment was conducted during the inception phase of the Aus4Equality|Gender-Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism Program in Lao Cai and Son La Provinces. Fieldwork for this study was undertaken in 7 districts and 9 pilot communes identified by the two provinces of Lao Cai (one commune per target district) and Son La (two communes per target district).. The objective of this study was: 1) to perform a gender and power analysis at household and community levels in order to shed light on women's agency and power in decision making processes in order provide inputs for shaping its Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) plan, provincial engagement strategy and innovation plan; and 2) to conduct a baseline survey to obtain basic characteristics and data of the pilot communities as well as profiles of ethnic minority women with regards to livelihood activities . To achieve these objectives the study employed two study approaches: 1) consultations with the relevant stakeholders and ethnic minority households through interviews with husbands and wives and focus group discussions; and 2) qualitative questionnaire survey with information included in the MERL framework. Consultations were conducted with 491 informants, comprising of villagers and communities' leaders, using different tools. Below are the findings from the survey:

Women's engagement in income generating activities

Women in the study areas tend to engage only in agricultural activities (especially in subsistent crops) and diversification in other non-farm activities is very limited, except in some villages with established community-based tourism (CBT), where women serve as house keepers, food service providers or sell local products.

Men migrate for work opportunities more frequently than women due to socio-cultural stigmas against them traveling for work. It was observed that women rarely work as hired labor (except in hotels or restaurants in Sa Pa, where around 1,000-1,300 ethnic minority women are employed). Migration was said to be increasing in these areas but that this was restricted almost exclusively to men. There is social resistance with women migrating to other places in pursuit of work, even among Thai, the group demonstrating the most equitable gender relations.

Female producers are more isolated from market systems. Over-reliance on traders by female producers was observed in every village visited, except in the case of tea and a few fruit crops (e.g. passion fruits in Son La). Furthermore, there are no semi-processing or other post-harvest value added activities.

Tourism offers opportunities for women but only in some specific locations, such as in Sa Pa and Moc Chau districts. CBT related services are the main types of tourism activities which women are involved in (e.g. operation of homestays, performing cultural shows, selling souvenirs or serving as tour guides for trekking and visiting attractions in CBT villages). Women are also employed in hotels and other tourism services mainly in Sa Pa, and to some extent in Moc Chau. However, current employment opportunities in the tourism sector remain limited. Figures indicate that tourism is a primary source of income for only 13% of the households in the pilot communes.

Factors that enable Women's Economic Empowerment

Positive change in perception and attitude towards more gender equality and women's economic empowerment. It is particularly encouraging to observe changes in attitudes and understanding, and, most notably, in behaviours and practices towards women's engagement in economic activities. There is evidence that in some Hmong communes, where traditions favouring men over women still prevail are beginning to change, such as men engaging directly in domestic chores and sharing the household burden with female household members.

Potential to explore the role of village elders and family clan chiefs who play an important role in village management, having vast experience in agricultural production and who are well versed in local customs. These leaders who are primarily men can play a vital role in promoting equitable gender relations (i.e., transforming traditional household gender roles) in their communities. In addition, there are women in Hmong and Dao communities who are well known shamans or healers with knowledge of herbal medicine. They could be mobilised as resources persons for further exploring these indigenous knowledge.

Previous development initiatives have demonstrated successes. These initiatives could be explored, replicated and scaled for further impact.

Existing policies and programs that prioritise women's economic empowerment and market development such as the support for cooperative development, favourable credit policies via Vietnam Bank for Social Policies (VBSP), the Northern Mountainous Poverty Reduction Program phase 2 (NMGRP2), the One Commune One Product program, and other programs that could be explored for further resource mobilisation and collaboration.

Existing conditions which could enable women's economic empowerment if leveraged appropriately. There is the potential for agriculture and non-farm activities for ethnic minority women in some communities to expand their income-generating opportunities. These include favourable climatic conditions for growing specialised products, beautiful views and scenery with the potential to be developed into tourist sites, traditional products and cultural experiences that could be explored as a means for women's economic empowerment.

Factors that hinder Women's Economic Empowerment

Biases against women, gender-inequitable norms and patriarchal attitudes. These barriers were observed in all surveyed locations. For all the ethnic groups interviewed, care-giving for children and elderly family members appeared to be a critical impediment to women's engagement in economic activities. There were negative attitudes towards women, especially young women, seeking jobs far from home and in urban areas. Reasons for this include fear of them being trafficked to China and the impact that long absences may cause on families and marriages.

Limited participation of ethnic minority women, especially young women in livelihood and income generating activities. This is attributed to the long held tradition of girls in the target locations getting married at a very early age (16-18 years old). There is also a prevalence of under-aged marriage among the Hmong and Hà Nhi ethnic groups.

Limited access to capital. Official sources of credit have not been effectively disbursed or are difficult to access by smallholder farmers due to complicated application procedures, collateral requirements and lack of flexibility in payment schemes. Contributing to and exacerbated by limited access to capital, farmers have very limited sources of cash income. In Son La 36% of the surveyed households have cash yearly income in negative figures (<0). This figure in Lao Cai is 17.6%. The negative balance of household income and expenditure is a contributing reason to late payment of loans and the perpetuation of the debt cycle for many.

Lack of land ownership by ethnic minority women. In most of the ethnic groups studied, land is customarily only inherited by sons. After ethnic minority women get married, they work in their husband's family home without land ownership rights, which hinders their ability to make decisions regarding which crops to grow. Another factor worsening the status of women's land ownership is the absence of their names on the land use right certificates (LURC). While there are no statistics available on the exact figures, interviews with women and community leaders revealed that most LURCs bear only the husband's name and not both as regulated by the Land Law 2013.

Lack of technical knowledge and, production planning skills. Except in some cases of successful households, interviewed farmers and groups consulted expressed inadequate understanding on the technical procedures of the farming activities that they follow. It was also observed that farmers have been practicing improper techniques in production, limiting yields. These include the use of cattle dung without proper treatment, drying the wet cattle dung for fertiliser and leaving cattle wandering during the winter.

Weak linkages, cooperation and networking among ethnic minority women. The fact that a married woman left her natal family, and that her sisters and friends have also dispersed and become members of other families and residents of other villages, undermines social solidarity among women and their ability to maintain social ties. All of the married women interviewed in the study said they return to their parental home for visits only two or three times a year. Burdened with childcare and other housework obligations, undertaking the bulk of the agricultural labour, and in some cases experiencing limited mobility due to an inability to drive a motorbike, women are not able to establish and maintain social networks, especially outside the village, at least not in the same way that men do through livelihoods, trade and travel.

Livelihood challenges faced by the poor

Increasing threat to livelihoods from natural disasters. More than 70% of the respondents reported that their productivity had suffered from extreme weather conditions negatively impacting their crops and livestock. They also reported that they feel very unprepared to mitigate these increasing threats and that their coping capacity was very limited.

Deterioration and ineffective utilisation of natural resources. In all villages visited, except the areas under tea cultivation and established fruit crops, land is left uncovered for the whole of the dry season. Rice land is reserved for only one crop season a year and rotation with other crops is minimal. A similar situation is observed in slopping land under maize cultivation. Monocropping, which is considered to be an unsustainable approach to land cultivation and natural resource management, especially in slopping land cultivation, is the prevalent system.

Potential risk in shifting from food staples to high value crops. In the villages visited, there was a recent tendency for farmers to transition from growing food crops to cultivating higher-value crops. Though most of the surveyed households maintain production of food crops such as rice and maize for household consumption, a significant conversion from corn fields, forests and palm trees to citrus, plum and peach trees was observed. This trend was observed in all the villages visited and individuals interviewed. Although the conversion aligns with the local government agenda and farmers get some direction from local authority, they generally have little idea on which specific variety they should grow, what techniques and conditions are required for pursuing these activities, and where to sell the final products.

Tourism activities in the community are dis-organised, lack planning and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Unfair competition exists between households engaged in tourism due to lowering of prices and undertaking 'black deals' with tour guides to preferentially receive more guests, but not focussing on improvement of services. There is also very little connection between tourism and other services. No benefit sharing mechanisms exists in the

communities where tourism is taking place (Van Ho, Tan Lap, Dong Sang and Ta Van). Some communities have been negatively affected by private sector investments, with which they cannot compete. In areas linked to tourism there has been increasing investment in tourism services by Kinh-run businesses who are perceived to have greater business and marketing acumen.

Poor transportation systems and infrastructure. The road systems to the villages of Chieng Yen, Dong Sang, Lung Khin Nhin, Ta Cu, Ta Van and Y Ty are underdeveloped, making it very difficult to access these villages. This hinders the access of traders to farming communities and vice-versa of the community to outside markets, as observed in villages such as Pha Lèng, Na Kien, Seo Mi Ti (Ta Van). In some villages there are no means of transportation or processing facilities, severely limiting farmers' abilities to generate income from their products.

Lack of technical support and other services. This limitation was observed across all types of livelihoods. The majority of respondents in baseline survey questionnaires (BLS) stated that the techniques that they apply in production rely on their own experience or come from "watching neighbours". Access to market information is mainly provided by traders. In addition, farmers' rely on traders for access to seeds and other agricultural inputs, however, there is limited quality assurance and consistency in supply from traders.

Recommendations for the Program

The Program's implementation strategy requires a holistic approach that addresses two objectives: 1) women's economic empowerment; and 2) gender equality and social inclusion.

Recommendations for Women's Economic Empowerment

Women's economic empowerment strategies at the market level:

- Promote the application of innovative approaches to provide business and technical training for ethnic minority women producer groups (for example farmers' field schools, participatory tools, etc.), trialling certification and traceability with more advanced producer groups.
- Support women's cooperatives, producer and common interest groups' access to quality and affordable input supplies, technical training, business development services (BDS) and credit. This includes supporting initiatives led by women that work on collective purchasing of agricultural inputs and collective selling of products. In locations with difficult road access, the project should consider providing capital investment to ensure local communities can better collect and distribute products.
- Ensure Partners understand and carefully analyse the risks to ethnic minority women and poor women's vulnerability and exposure to market shocks and food security. Any business model/value chain adopted should aim towards a gradual shift away from subsistence to more diversified livelihoods with stable cash income-generating activities to ensure that the impact of such shocks and food security issues are minimised overtime.

Women's economic empowerment strategies at the community, household and individual level:

- Adopt the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) approach to foster transformational changes in gender relations to ensure both women and men understand, embrace and address any gender bias/behaviour (such as women's heavier workloads, impediments to women's economic decision making and lack of women's leadership etc.) to ensure women are more beneficially engaged in market systems. This may include adopting a GALS 'lens' to select relevant products or

services and to ensure that Partner activities demonstrate measures to address the constraints for ethnic minority women's meaningful engagement in market systems.

- Organise women producers into groups (producer, common interest, collective, cooperative) for higher productivity and enhanced quality, and facilitate linkages between these groupstraders and enterprises. Given men currently dominate decision-making in terms of market-oriented production, women need to be better organised and informed in order to engage with men more effectively. The Program should encourage and facilitate women joining, forming and operating production groups and cooperatives, and developing women's leadership through such groups.
- Provide training and coaching to women on household budgeting, including income and expenditure planning; diversification of livelihoods, combining livelihoods to ensure household food security with cash income generating livelihoods; and facilitate access to capital for excluded groups.
- Raise awareness about the importance of vocational and life skills through training and career development for women, especially girls, to participate in the labour market and facilitate linkages with potential employers. This includes providing support to strengthen life skills and career development for adolescent girls, clubs for young mothers and support for community-based caregiver models. In addition, professionalising the care-giving sector among ethnic minority communities can help accelerate progress in women's economic empowerment. The Program should consider investment in care infrastructure that is needed to free up women's time to engaging in income generating activities.
- Engage young, middle-aged and older men (e.g. the heads of family clans among the Hmong) in this intervention to support social norm transformation and build a critical mass within communities to drive large-scale, sustainable transformation (especially addressing the traditional practice of underage marriage among the Hmong, or the prevalence of gender-based violence that limits women's ability to engage in productive employment).

Recommendations for Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

- Plan for some longer-term interventions Change and transformation is gradual, and people need consistent and regular support over time. The Program should limit the use of once-off or short-term interventions.
- Equip women and men as facilitators with the skills to engage others within their community and inspire transformation. Especially engage in deep and on-going work with local men who co-own responsibilities of household work and childcare to support their transformation and capacity, as this will cause a flow-on effect to other men in the village.
- Encourage enterprises to employ ethnic minority personnel (both men and women) through the provision of incentives and rewards. Overtime this can establish a network of workers who can be a moral and material support base for any new personnel within a workplace.
- Ensure activity groups include some mixed forums (not male-only and female-only) to allow participants to share their views with members of the other sex. This allows people to understand each other better and can be a useful space where boys and young men and girls and young women can model respect for one another. Single-gender groups should also be convened, for example, to allow men to explore how they may engage in behaviour that perpetuates gender inequality and seek their own solutions to this.

II. BACKGROUND

Economic development and women's empowerment are at the forefront of Australia's current aid policy, intertwining issues that Australia's bilateral Aid Investment Plan for Vietnam 2015-20 is focusing on through the Aus4Equality|Gender Responsive and Equitable Agriculture and Tourism Program (Aus4Equality|GREAT). Aus4Equality|GREAT also reflects the priorities in DFAT's Vietnam Agricultural Strategy, including innovation, private sector engagement and inclusive agriculture, and DFAT's Vietnam Gender Equality Strategy which promotes women's economic empowerment and leadership. The objectives of the Aus4Equality|GREAT Program are:

- **Objective 1** – Empowering local women: Women living in local communities have increased capacity, space and choices to beneficially engage with agriculture and tourism businesses.
- **Objective 2** – Inclusive businesses partnerships: Selected private sector actors within the agriculture and tourism sectors innovate to profitably and sustainably trade with more women entrepreneurs and operate in gender sensitive ways.
- **Objective 3** – Improving sector governance and policy: Government agencies reinforce policies, and enact plans, regulations and services that enable more inclusive socio-economic development.

The overall aim of this micro-level study was to provide the Program and its partners with a thorough understanding of community contexts in which the project will be implemented, with a particular focus on creating a profile and assessment of the situation for poor and ethnic minority women.

A key objective of the study was to perform a gender and power analysis at household, community, and sector levels in order to shed light on women's agency and power in decision making processes, particularly in terms of managing household income and expenditure, production and marketing, access to livelihood opportunities and resources, and levels of mobility. This gender and power analysis was crucial for the Program in shaping its Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) plan, the theory of change, engagement strategy and innovation plan.

The study provided an assessment of the pilot communities that the Program is going to target in the first year, and a profile of the poor and ethnic minority women in these pilot communities by conducting a baseline survey. This baseline study provided the basic characteristics of the pilot communities as well as profiles of poor and ethnic minority women in these communities with regards to employment and income-generating activities. A focus of this baseline study was understanding the livelihood strategies of the target beneficiaries and providing a situational analysis to inform the design of intervention approaches. Program progress and impact will be monitored and evaluated against the baseline study.

The report is presented in five sections. The first section provides an executive summary of the report. Section 2 provides a brief introduction to the project and study. Section 3 describes the approach and methodology applied during this study. Section 4 focuses on the findings from the baseline survey on the pilot communities and the findings from gender and power analysis at individual, household, and community levels. Recommendations based on the findings are provided in the final section.

III. METHODOLOGY

This community, socio-cultural and gender assessment adopted methodologies that were outlined in the “Inception Research Plan” (See Annex IV). Fieldwork for this study was undertaken in 7 Districts and 9 pilot communes identified by the two provinces of Lao Cai (one commune per target district) and Son La (two communes per target district). The study consists of two major components: 1) consultations with the relevant stakeholders and ethnic minority households through interviews and focus group discussions; and 2) a baseline survey which is included in the MERL framework. This community level study is supplemented by additional national level gender and ethnic minority level data included in the GESI and Annual Work Plan (AWP).

The overall objective of this study was to carry out a gender and power dynamic analysis at the household, community, and sector levels. For this objective, the research questions included (i) Who are the actors that influence gender and power relations within households, livelihood activities and workplaces, and communities in the project target areas? What are the roles of different actors in these gender and power relations? (ii) How do different factors such as norms, customary laws, practices, divisions of labour, misperceptions and stereotypes, attitudes, beliefs, legislation etc. affect the position of ethnic minority women and influence gender and power relations within the household and in other spheres such as the market, workplace and community? (iii) Taking an actor-orientated ethnographic approach, what are the drivers of change in terms of gender relations and equality, what are women’s motivations, aspirations, priorities, concerns, etc.?

In order to address these questions, the study adopted an anthropologically inspired qualitative approach. A number of in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) were carried out with women and men in the villages, groups of households, and with village representatives. The aforementioned key questions were the main areas of inquiry (see Appendix IV for IDI inquiry guide and FGD inquiry guide). Data collection sessions, either IDIs or FGDs, began with a full informed consent procedure. Individuals were able to decline to participate or withdraw from the interview or the group discussions at any time.

All IDIs were carried out at the respondents’ private home or wherever the respondents felt most at ease to meet the research team (e.g. in the field). On average, each IDI lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours. FGDs were conducted either on the premises of the village common houses or the village head’s private house. On average, each FGD lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours.

For the baseline study, a questionnaire was written to develop a basic profile of the target beneficiaries, their livelihood strategies, and gender roles and power dynamics within households. Focus was placed on women’s participation in different livelihood strategies and factors that enable or prevent women from meaningful participation in income generating activities. The questionnaire also captured time allocations of both men and women with an aim to provide an accurate proxy for gender roles in household activities. The questionnaire was created as an e-form, which was operated using the computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI) approach. Prior experience with surveys in these regions suggested that 3G connection was not a problem. Using this CAPI approach improved the quality of data

collected compared to the traditional paper-based survey.¹ A copy of the questionnaire (in Vietnamese) is provided in Annex V.

In order to make sure that the findings are representative of the Project’s beneficiary households, a cluster sampling approach was used with a confidence interval of 95% and margin of error of 5.5% (which are the sampling attributes accepted in social research). Using this cluster sampling approach to draw a sample from the nine pilot communes, with estimated number of 4,800 households², resulted in a sample of 320 households in the two provinces in 24 villages of these communes. The selection of targeted households was made in advance and sent to commune authorities for arranging with the surveyed households.

When conducting the survey in practice, the survey team encountered some difficulties as many community members selected to participate in the sample went to their terraces for harvesting, despite prior arrangements being made to inform the sample households. In response to this situation, the survey team completed the interviews with available pre-selected households, then made random visits to other adjacent households for interviews. As a result, a final sample of 307 households (123 households in Son La and 184 households in Lao Cai), meaning that around five percent of the sample was not able to be included in the survey. This slightly widens the margin of error (5.7% instead of 5.5%). However, this will not undermine the main findings of the baseline study.

The composition of informants consulted in this study is summarised below:

Table 1. Summary of informants consulted

Son La	
Questionnaire respondents	62 men, 61 women
IDI	15 men, 14 women
FGD	4 men’s groups and 5 women’s groups (approx. 6 to 8 participants in each group)
KII – village head – creditable person	4 men
Households with successful livelihood activities	4 women, 1 men
Lao Cai	
Questionnaire respondents	107 men, 77 women
IDI	15 men, 16 women
FGD	5 men’s groups and 6 women’s groups (approx. 6 to 8 participants in each group)
Key informant interviews – village head – creditable person	8 (7 men and 1 woman)
Success households in livelihood activities	3 women, 2 men

¹ See for instance <http://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2015/06/08/survey-solution> for a discussion of CAPI as innovative survey solutions by the World Bank Group.

² This is an estimate, as there were two communes in Lao Cai where the exact total population and detailed data was not updated at the time of sampling (despite efforts made by the study team to contact the commune authorities for updated data). In fact, the figures on these communes were based on the Population and Housing Census 2009. However, this should not affect the overall findings of the sample, as the population of these communes is unlikely to have changed substantially over this period.

IV. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. Findings from the baseline survey

4.1.1. Profile of surveyed communes

In Son La province:

Dong Sang commune of Moc Chau district has 12 villages, total population of 5,223 people. The ethnic make-up of the commune includes Thai, Hmong, Kinh, Muong, Dao, Tay, Nung and Khmu ethnic groups. The commune centre is about 15 km from Moc Chau town.

Tan Lap commune, Moc Chau district has 19 villages, a total population of 10,540 people and is comprised of ethnic Thai, Hmong, Mường, Kinh, Dao, Xinh Mun, Khmu, Tày, and La Ha ethnic groups. The commune centre is about 20 km from Moc Chau town.

Chieng Yen commune of Van Ho district has 14 villages, a total population of 4,903 and is comprised of Hmong, Muong, Kinh, Thai, Dao, Xinh mun, Khmu, and Êđê ethnic groups. The commune centre is about 20 km from Van Ho town.

Van Ho commune of Van Ho district has 12 villages, a total population of 7,323 people and is comprised of Hmong, Dao, Thai, Kinh ethnic groups. The commune centre is in close proximity (about 3 km) to Van Ho town.

In Lao Cai province:

Ta Cu Ty commune, Bac Ha district has 6 villages, with a total population of 342 households and 779 People and comprised of Dao, Hmong, Tay and some other ethnic groups in smaller numbers. The commune centre is about 35 km from Bac Ha Town.

Y TY commune, Bat Xat district has 14 Villages, a total population of 916 households, 4984 people, and comprises of Dao, Hmong, Ha Nhi and some other ethnic groups. The commune centre is very remote, at a distance of 62 km from Bat Xat district township. This village is located in very close proximity to the Vietnam-China border.

Lung Khau Nhin commune, Muong Khuong district has 12 villages, with a population of 604 households and 2,911 people. The ethnic groups in the commune include Hmong, Dao, and Tu Di. The commune centre is located about 10 km from the district township. There is a periodic marketplace that takes place in this commune and is a tourist attraction in small numbers.

Ta Van commune, Sa Pa has 6 villages, with a population of 780 households and 4,044 people. The ethnic make-up of the commune includes Hmong, Dao, and Giay households, as well as Kinh and foreign individuals who are based in the village for tourism sector related purposes. The commune centre is located about 20 km from Sa Pa town. Extensive tourism based on village homestays and trekking using ethnic minority guides occurs in this commune.

Liem Phu commune of Van Ban district has 13 villages and a total population of 915 households or 4,230 people from Tay, Hmong and Dao ethnic groups. The commune centre is about 10 km from Van Ban Town.

4.1.2. Profile of responded households

Table 2: Summary of baseline surveyed respondents in Son La

District	Commune	Village	Total respondents	Male	Female	
Vân Hồ	Vân Hồ	Hang Trùng	8	5	3	
		Hua Tạt	5	5	0	
		Suối Lìn	8	6	2	
		Chiềng Yên	Bồng Hà	11	6	5
			Pha Lè	14	2	12
Mộc Châu	Tân Lập	Phụ Mẫu	15	8	7	
		Dọi	10	4	6	
		Nà Tân	12	3	9	
	Đông Sang	Tà Phênh	7	4	3	
		Áng	14	9	5	
		Nà Kiến	19	10	9	
Total			123	62	61	
Percentage				50.4	49.6	

Table 3: Summary of baseline surveyed respondents in Lao Cai

District	Commune	Village	Total	Male	Female
Muong Khuong	Lung Khau Nhin		35		
		Ma Ngan B	11	8	3
		Chu Lin Pho	13	7	6
		Sung Lin Chai	11	8	3
Bac Ha	Ta Cu Ty		37		
		Sa Mao Pho	22	14	8
		Sang Mao Pho	15	11	4
Bat Xat	Y Ty		36		
		Lao Chai	12	11	1
		Ngai Tro	12	9	3
		Sim Sam	12	12	0
Sapa	Ta Van		39		
		Ta Chai Mong	14	11	3
		Seo Mi Ty	11	3	8
		Ta Van Day	14	2	12
Van Ban	Liem Phu		37		
		Hin Ban	12	4	8
		Khoi Ngoa	11	5	6
		O	8	0	8
		Lam Sinh	6	2	4
Total			184	107	77
Percentage				58.2%	41.8%

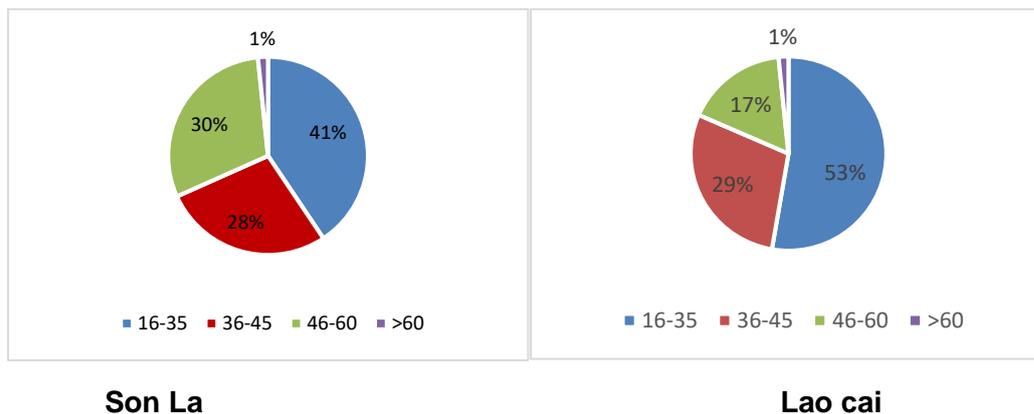
In Son La, the proportion of men and women respondents was relatively equal (50.4% and 49.6% respectively). In Lao Cai, the proportion of women respondents was significantly less than that of men (41.8% compared to 58.2% respectively). A major reason for having a larger

proportion of men participate in the questionnaire survey in Lao Cai was the unavailability of the women at home during the days on which the survey took place, and in a few cases, women were hesitant to participate due to language barriers or a lack of confidence to respond to the questions.

Age of the respondents

In terms of the age groups included in the survey, 99% of informants in both the surveyed sites were of working age (16-60 years old). Among those, more than 70% of them were aged between 16-45, which is considered the most active group in the labour force.

Figure 4.1.2a: Profile of respondents disaggregated by age

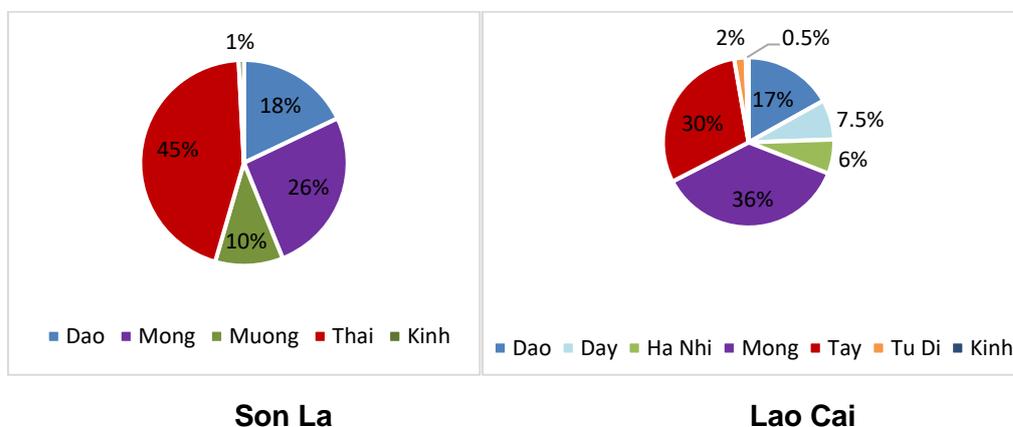


Ethnicity of Respondents

In Son La, a large proportion of respondents were from the Thai ethnic group (45%), and the second largest of Hmong ethnicity (26%). Other ethnic groups of Muong, Dao and Kinh collectively represent only 1% of informants surveyed.

In Lao Cai, the largest number of respondents were from the Hmong ethnic group (36%), followed by Tay (30%) and other groups including Dao, Day, Ha Nhi, tay, Tu Di and Kinh.

Figure 4.1.2b: profile of respondents, segregated by ethnicity



Language proficiency of respondents

In both provinces, the percentage of women who possess fluent reading and writing capacity is much less than that of men (62% vs 85% in Son La, and 46% vs 54% in Lao Cai).

Noticeably, the figure demonstrates that the language proficiency of the surveyed population in Lao Cai is much lower than that of Son La province. The differences are as much as 16% for women and 31% for men. The trend in language proficiency corresponds to the reported education levels of the surveyed population. It is noted that the number of men with lower and higher secondary school attendance is much higher than that of women. In each province, there was only one man among the respondents to attain college level education (Table 4a and figure 4.1.2).

Table 4a. level of Vietnamese language proficiency of respondents by ethnicity in Son La

Vietnamese communication skills	By ethnicity				
	Dao	Mong	Muong	Thai	Kinh
Fluently reading and writing	13	21	13	44	
Good listening but not read and write	6	7		4	
Good listening but not able to speak	2	3		7	1
Not able to communicate	1	1			

Figure 4.1.2c. Vietnamese Language proficiency of respondents by sex– Son La

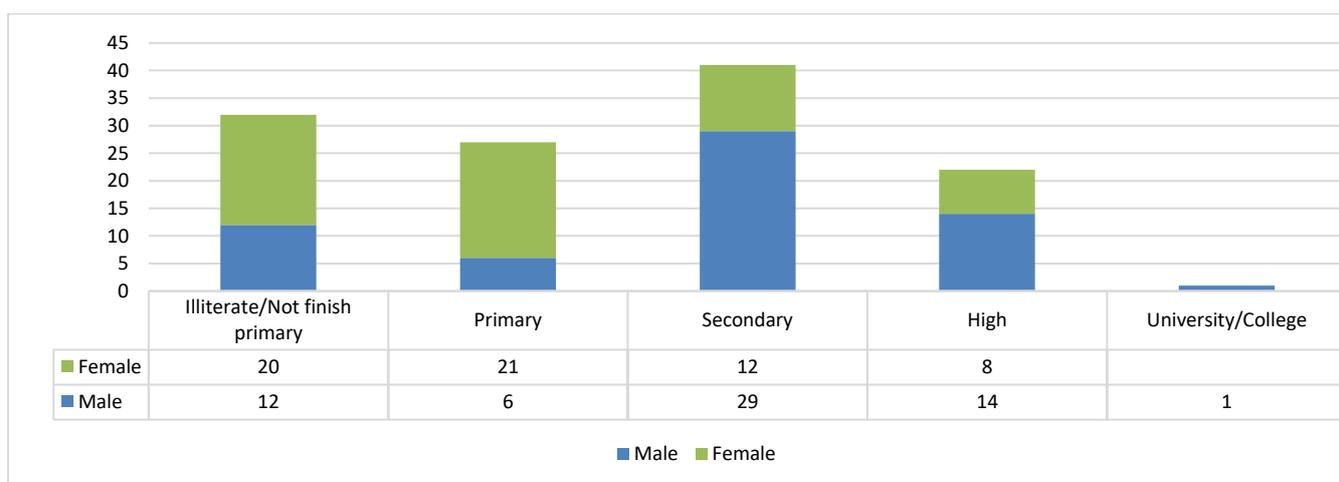
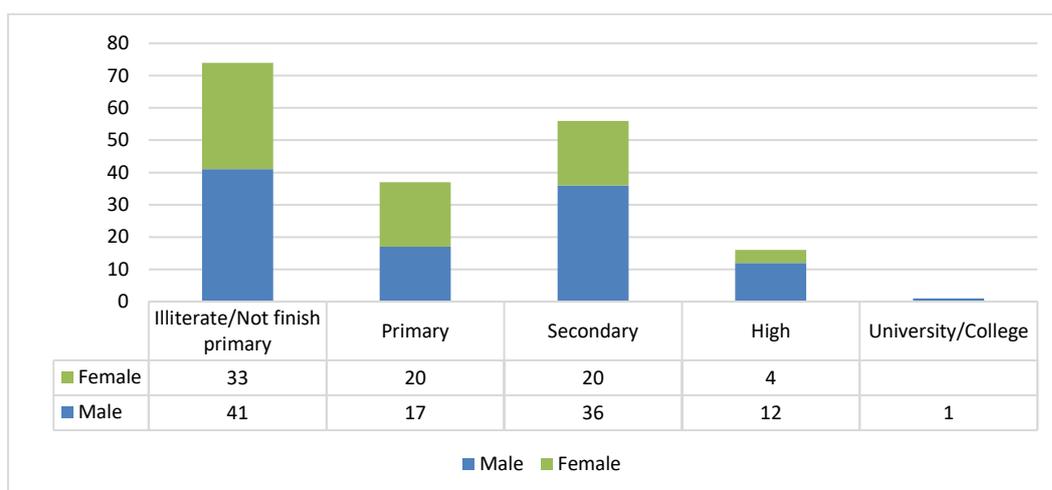


Table 4b. Level of language proficiency of respondents by ethnicity in Lao Cai

Vietnamese communication skills	Total	By Ethnicity					
		Dao	Giay	Ha Nhi	Mong	Tay	Tu Di
Fluently reading and writing	94	15	9	5	23	40	1
Good listening but not read and write	36	5	5	4	10	11	1
Good listening but not able to speak	34	7		1	21	4	1
Not able to communicate	20	4		2	13		1

Figure 4.1.2d. Language proficiency of respondents by sex – Lao Cai



4.1.3. Poverty level 3

In Son La, among the 4 selected sites, Chieng Yen commune has the highest rate of poor respondents, accounting for 62.5% of the total surveyed households. This rate is much higher than the average poverty rate in the province of 42.8%. The remaining three communes of Dong Sang, Tan Lap (Moc Chau district) and Van Ho (Van Ho district) are relatively wealthier communities compared to the provincial average with poverty rates among respondents of 18.2%, 10.3% and 19% respectively.

Table 4a. Poverty rate in surveyed communes in Son La

Commune	Among BLS respondents		Official statistic	
	Poor	Near poor	Poor	Near poor
Van Ho, Van Ho	19.0%	4.8%		
Chieng Yen, Van Ho	62.5%	15.0%		
Tan Lap, Moc Chau	10.3%	0.0%	6.8%	5.1%
Dong Sang, Moc Chau	18.2%	0.0%	16.6%	6.8%

In Lao Cai province, Liem Phu commune of Van Ban district, has relatively low poverty rate (21.46%) compared to the provincial average of 27.41%. The other 4 target communes have very high rates of poverty, ranging from 53.29% to 65.72%. In the case of Lung Khau Ninh

³ According to Decision No 59/2015/QĐ-TTg, dated 19 November 2015, poor households in rural areas are those who:

- have average income per capita/month up to 700,000 VND or
- have income per capita/month from 700,000 – 1,000,000 VND and in shortage of 03 indicators relating to access to basic social services.

Near poor households are described as having per capita/month of 700,000- 1,000,000 VND (rural) and in shortage of less than 03 indicators in relation to access to basic social services.

commune (Muong Khuong), the rate of poor and near poor surveyed households accounted for more than 97%. This figure in Y Ty commune (Bat Xat) is 83.34%.

Table 4b. Poverty rate in surveyed commune - Lao Cai

Commune	Among BLS respondents		Official statistic	
	Poor	Near poor	Poor	Near poor
Lung Khau Nhin	54.29%	42.86%	62.25%	
Ta Cu Ty	64.86%	13.51%	65.72%	
Y Ty	66.67%	16.67%	58.77%	
Ta Van	56.41%	12.82%	53.29%	
Liem Phu	10.81%	27.03%	21.46%	

In general, the poverty rates among the surveyed households are close to the official statistics. However, there are significant differences in Liem Phu, Y Ty and Lung Khau Nhin of Lao Cai province. This is possibly attributed to the fact that the sample for the survey was taken from 2-3 villages only, and therefore, might not fully represent the communes as wholes.

4.1.4. Current livelihood activities

Table 5a and 5b provide overview of main livelihood activities engaged by surveyed households in Son La and Lao Cai province.

Agriculture is the main livelihood activities for almost all the surveyed households. Accumulated figure in 9 communes reported that 98% of the surveyed households are involved in cultivation and 94% in animal husbandry. In Son La, more than 97.6% of surveyed households engage in cultivation while 92.8% of them engage in husbandry; these figures in Lao Cai are 98.38% and 95.68% respectively.

Wage labour or nonformal employed jobs is the second important livelihood activities in the targeted location. 55.3% of respondents in Son La and 47.56% in Lao Cai are involved in employed or daily wage jobs. Migration has significantly increased over the past decade. Most households have a male member who has seasonally migrated out of the village. Cross border irregular migration has been reported among the Hà Nhì in Y Tý commune (i.e., farm work in China or transporting goods cross the border), Lùng Khẩu Nhin and Tả Củ Tỷ commune, Lao Cai (i.e., farm work). Chinese currency is accepted in local stores in Y Tý. Informants commented that it is a common strategy for a couple to migrate together, while there are issues of jealousy and social stigma in terms of women migrating independently, even among the Thai and the Tay – the two ethnic groups that were found to have the least inequitable attitudes towards women in the study sites.

Table 5a. Main livelihood identified by respondents in Son La

Commune	Cultivation	Husbandry	Tourism	Employment/ Wage labour
Vân Hồ (n=21)	21	21	4	12
Chiềng Yên (n=40)	38	37		24
Tân Lập (n=29)	29	29	1	14
Đông Sang (n=33)	32	27	11	18
Total (n=123)	120	114	16	68
Percentage (%)	97.6	92.7	13.0	55.3

Table 5b. Main livelihood identified by respondents in Lao Cai

	Cultivation	Husbandry	Tourism	Employment/ wage labour	Business or self-employed
Lung Khau Ninh (n=35)	35	33		20	1
Ta Cu Ty (n=37)	37	37		17	1
Y Ty (n=36)	36	35		17	2
Ta Van (n=39)	37	36	12	15	2
Liem Phu (n=37)	37	36		19	
Total (n=185)	182	177	12	88	6
Percentage (%)	98.4	95.7	6.5	47.6	3.2

Tourism is emerging or is well established in some communities such as Ta Van in Sa Pa District of Lao Cai province. Tourism provides alternative livelihood options to agriculture for the target communities, but in most instances, is still in early stages of development. In Son La, the number of ethnic minority individuals involved in tourism is limited. Among the 9 surveyed communes only Dong Sang commune of Moc Chau district has 33% of the surveyed households engaging in tourism activities. In Lao Cai, a similar trend was observed. In Ta Van of Sa Pa district, 32.4% of the households are involved in tourism.

Ethnic minority women in the project areas tend to engage only in agricultural activities, while diversification into other non-farm activities is very limited, aside from small scale trading of household produce or products in markets. In some villages CBT is more developed and women serve as house keepers, food services providers or sell local products. These livelihoods fit with their 'traditional' roles as wives and mothers who are responsible for looking after the health and welfare of family members. In contrast, men were found to have more diverse choices of income generating activities. Being constrained to primarily agricultural livelihood activities, ethnic minority women can only earn cash income a few times per year after harvesting crops or selling livestock. Yet, cash income is constantly needed for agricultural production and family expenses, such as medical costs incurred by children and elderly parents, and to fulfil social obligations such as gifts and donations for weddings and funerals. When cash is needed for these expenses, women have to rely on cash earned by their husbands from hired labour or non-farm activities which offer cash on a more frequent basis. The reliance on their husbands for cash disbursements undermines women's bargaining power and decision making abilities within households. For hamlets which are prone to extreme weather events like snow, freezing cold and hail, such as Bồng

Hạ, Lâm Sinh and Mò Phú Chải, the damage to crops and livestock threatens women's only source of income.

Men are also involved in agriculture, but are more active in the non-farm sector than women. It was rarely observed that ethnic minority women worked as hired labourers (except those working in hotels or restaurants in Sa Pa). Migration was said to be increasingly popular in ethnic minority areas but is highly gendered: migration out of the project areas was almost exclusively limited to men. Social stigma regarding women migrating to other places was noted by respondents as a barrier, even among Thai – the group that was found to have the most equitable attitudes towards women in the study sites. The practice of labour exchange is prevalent, which is useful in helping villagers solve temporary labour shortages in the wake of natural disasters or at the peak of the harvest season. As many men engaged in casual jobs outside their villages, women had to take on responsibility for most of the household productive labour exchange. Within the family, ethnic minority women tend to be engaged in more customary and routine types of livelihoods such as rice and maize production and raising pigs and chickens. Livelihoods which require new techniques and higher investments such as fisheries and fruit tree production are also highly gendered, with men dominating these fields.

There are agricultural producers who were found to be isolated from market systems. An over-reliance on outside traders as intermediaries was found to exist in every village visited except for tea crops and a few types of fruit (e.g. passion fruits in Son La). Semi-processing or other post-harvest value added efforts were not observed in any of the sites studied. Without semi-processing activities, and in combination with no or very poor storage infrastructure, farmers had to sell their products immediately post-harvest. This can create a seasonal over-supply that leads to downward pressure on prices at the expense of farmers. The figures indicate that around 54% of farmers were aware of market prices, indicating that nearly half (46%) of them lack awareness and access to market information. Beside the source of information on market price mainly (85% in Son La and 58% in Lao Cai, respectively) come from the traders who buy farmers' products.

Tourism offers opportunities for ethnic minority women but only in some specific locations, such as in Sa Pa and Moc Chau districts. Various forms of engagement in tourism was observed. CBT related services were the main area of engagement for ethnic minority women (e.g. operation of homestays, performing cultural shows, producing and selling handicrafts and souvenirs or working as tour guides for trekking and visiting attractions in CBT villages). Employment in hotels and tourism were also observed mainly in Sa Pa, and to some extent in Moc Chau. However, on the whole, employment opportunities for ethnic minority women in the tourism sector remains quite limited. Figures indicate that tourism is a primary source of income for only 13% of households in the pilot communes. However, it must be recognised that it is a key supplementary source of income that contributes to livelihood diversification for many women in more longstanding tourist villages such as Ta Van, primarily as handicraft producers and traders in the informal economy.

Table 6a. Livelihoods activities of responded households in Son La

Livelihood activity	Vân Hồ (n=21)	Chiềng Yên (n=40)	Tân Lập (n=29)	Đông Sang (n=33)	Total N=123	Percentage (%)
Food crops	18	40	28	32	118	95.9
Vegetable	11	9	16	20	56	45.5
Fruit crops	14	14	22	27	77	62.6
Tea	3	21	21	2	47	38.2
Spice		1			1	0.8
Wooden tree	1	11	2	7	21	17.1
Ginger					0	0.0
Cattle	14	31	25	23	93	75.6
Pig	18	26	20	22	86	69.9
Poultry	18	19	23	23	83	67.5
Fish	1	3	1	1	6	4.9
Silkworm				1	1	0.8
Home stay				9	9	7.3
Eatery				3	3	2.4
Embroidery			1	1	2	1.6
Souvenir	1			1	2	1.6
Tour guide	1			1	2	1.6
Flower grow				2	2	1.6
Cultural performance	3			1	4	3.3
Transportation	3			1	4	3.3
Selling agro-products	2			2	4	3.3
Other	1			1	2	1.6

Table 6b. Livelihoods activities of responded households in Lao Cai

Livelihood activity	L.K.Nhin (n=35)	Ta Cu Ty (n=37)	Y Ty (n=36)	Ta Van (n=39)	Liem Phu (n=37)	Total (n=185)	Perce tage (%)
Food crops	35	37	36	37	35	180	97.3
Sugarcane/ Bamboo	2	1	2			5	2.7
Vegetables	8	12	9	9	16	54	29.2
Fruits	3	5	13	10	7	38	20.5
Tea	2	27	3		2	34	18.4
Cardamom		7	24	15	26	72	38.9
Cinnamon	1	6			17	24	13.0
Pine	4	22				26	14.1
Medical herbs		1	4		6	11	5.9
Buffalo	26	30	27	9	26	118	63.8
Cow/Horse	1	6		1	2	10	5.4
Goat		17		7	3	27	14.6
Pig	29	36	35	29	36	165	89.2
Chicken	24	34	29	25	33	145	78.4
Duck	5	1	7	5	19	37	20.0
Fish		2		1	10	13	7.0
Homestay				6		6	3.2
Catering service				6		6	3.2
Brocade weaving				7		7	3.8
Local souvenir				1		1	0.5
Tour guide				1		1	0.5
Performing arts				1		1	0.5
Transportation				3		3	1.6
Local agricultural products				3		3	1.6

4.1.5. Household income

Household economy in the targeted communes is characterised as self-sufficient economy. All the surveyed households responded that the primary purpose of their cultivation and husbandry was for self-consumption (for human and animal feed). The majority of households only sell their surplus products on the market for cash income. There is no available information for the calculation of household consumption of production or of re-investment. Therefore, it is not appropriate to use cash income figures in this survey as the only indicator to reflect the productivity or wealth of the household. Nevertheless, it does serve as a proxy for determining a household's ability to invest in production.

In the nine target communes, Chieng Yen (Van Ho, Son La) and Y Ty (Bat Xat, Lao Cai) show the lowest figures of household annual cash income, averaging VND 22.9 million and 14.6 million per year, respectively. Notably, a significant number of households reported annual cash income in negative figures (12.2% in Son La and 17.3% in Lao Cai). The two communes of Chieng Yen and Y Ty were also those with the highest number of households with negative annual cash income (27.5% and 33.3% respectively). Though the cash income figure does not fully represent the wealth or productivity of households, it gives a clear indication that those households with minimal or negative cash income will have no capacity to pay for any investments and, therefore, would likely need to borrow money from other sources for any additional expenditures that occur in their daily life and production.

Table 7a. Annual household cash income in Son La

Commune	Average (VND)	Highest (VND)	Lowest (VND)	Income =< 0
Vân Hồ (n=21)	68,700,952	260,000,000	790,000	
Chiềng Yên (n=40)	22,903,793	350,000	70,000,000	11
Tân Lập (n=29)	60,850,207	125,900,000	17,000,000	
Đông Sang (n=33)	81,100,655	334,400,000	2,300,000	4

Table 7b. Annual household cash income in Lao Cai

Commune	Average (VND)	Highest (VND)	Lowest (VND)	Income =< 0
Lung Khau Nhin (n=35)	40,261,536	164,000,000	820,000	7
Ta Cu Ty (n=37)	52,398,656	152,050,000	1,400,000	5
Y Ty (n=36)	14,461,875	71,750,000	100,000	12
Ta Van (n=39)	77,044,606	458,050,000	8,900,000	6
Liem Phu (n=37)	65,639,371	349,500,000	2,400,000	2
Total (n=185)	52,572,467	458,050,000	100,000	32

Agriculture is the most important source of income for ethnic minority groups in the two provinces. Similarly to the analysis in livelihoods options for minorities, baseline survey data shows that more than 99% of the households in Son La indicated that the most important income for their households comes from agriculture. This figure in Lao Cai is 95.3%. Ta Van (Sa Pa, Lao Cai) is the only commune that has a significant percentage of surveyed households (15.3%) reporting tourism as their major source of income. However, agriculture represents the sole income source for most households in the other eight communes.

Table 8a. Main income sources of surveyed households in Son La

Sector	Van Ho (n=21)	Chieng Yen (n=40)	Tan Lap (n=29)	Dong Sang (n=33)	Total (n=123)	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	21	39	29	33	122	99.2
Industry	1	4	2		7	5.7
Tourism	1		1	5	7	5.7
Other	1		2	3	6	4.9

Table 8b. Main income sources of surveyed households Lao Cai

Sector	L.K.Nhin (n=35)	Ta Cu Ty (n=37)	Y Ty (n=36)	Ta Van (n=39)	Liem Phu (n=37)	Total (n=185)	Percentage (%)
Agriculture	32	36	36	32	37	173	93.5
Tourism				6		6	3.2
Employment	3	1		1		5	2.7

4.1.6. Access to resources and services for livelihoods

Access to technical assistant services

For agriculture livelihoods, data from questionnaires (figure 4.1.6) demonstrate that, in both provinces, farmers primarily rely on their own experience in terms of production technique, except for a few new types of products such as lemon and tea in Son La and medical herbs and fish in Lao Cai. The percentage of households relying on their own experience is particularly high in the traditional livelihood activities such as poultry, husbandry and traditional crops (rice, maize and bananas). For some new types of livelihood activities such as tea, lemon and orange in Son La or medical herbs in Lao Cai, farmers learn about production techniques either from other households in the community or from agricultural extension very low, below 20% of the respondents. Across all locations and livelihoods undertakings, there are rarely demonstration sites available for the farmers to learn from other's experiences.

Figure 4.1.6a: Sources of technical knowledge of farmers in Son La

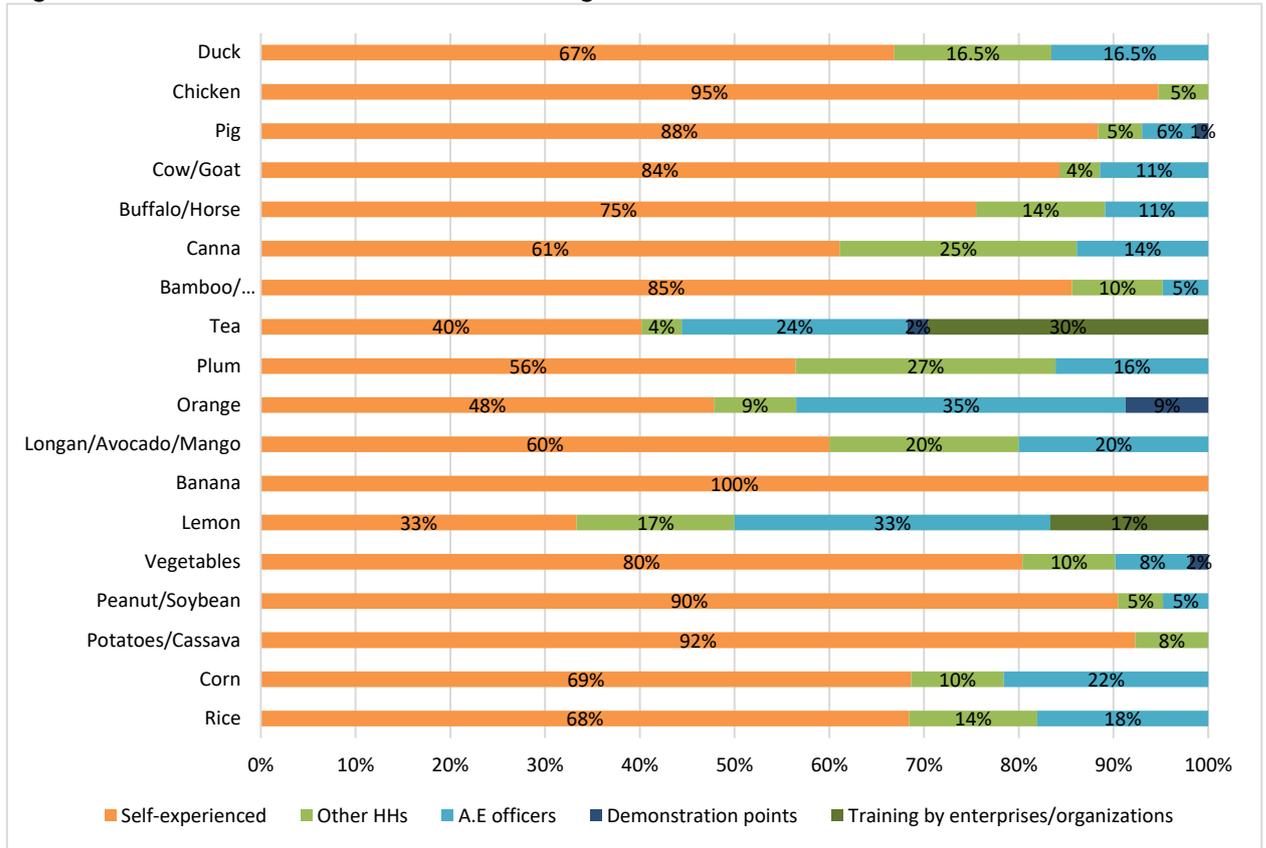
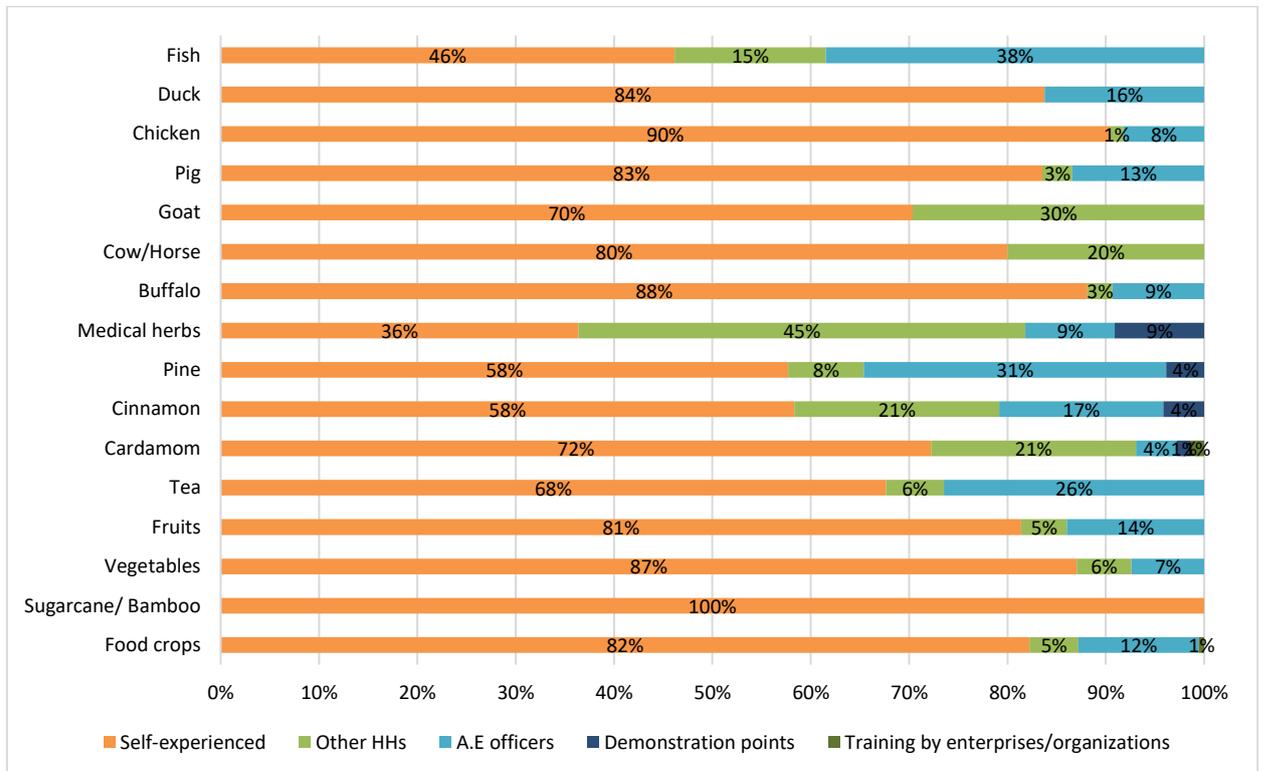


Figure 4.1.6b: Sources of technical knowledge of farmers in Lao Cai



Access to technical support for households engaged in tourism

For households involved in tourism, minimal technical support exists. The most significant training available to households is on homestay management, with 44% of the households in Son La and 42% of households in Lao Cai already providing such services. Only 37% of surveyed households in Son La and 17% in Lao Cai, respectively, received regular tourist information. Only 17% of the households in Son La received training in a foreign language, while none received such training in Lao Cai.

Figure 4.1.6c: Training provided to tourist households in Son La

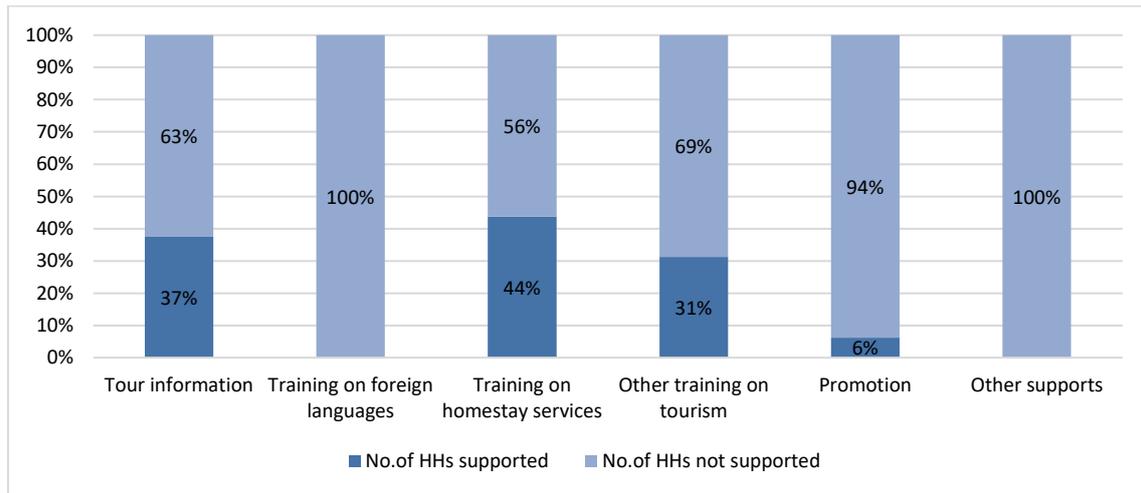
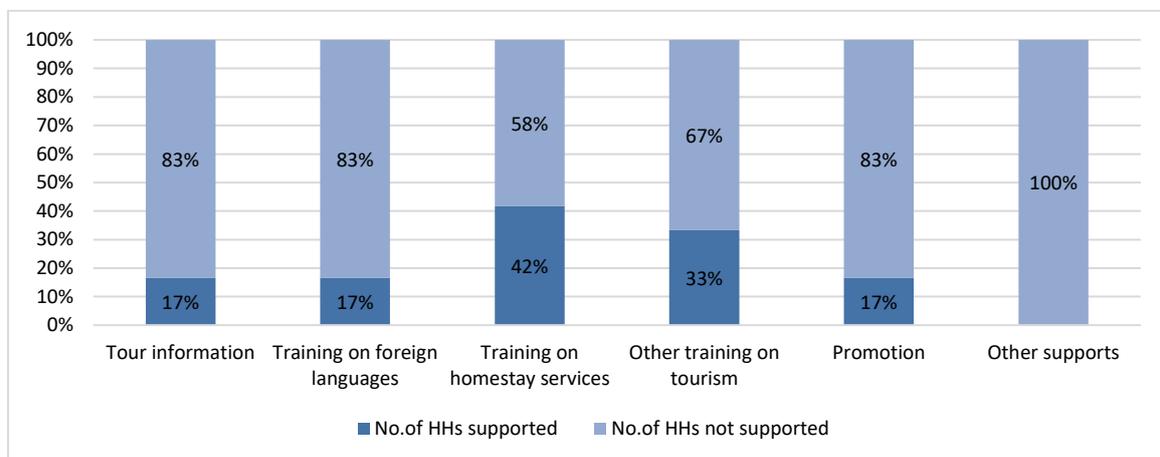


Figure 4.1.6d: Training provided to tourist households in Lao Cai



Access to credit

In the last 5 years, the majority of the surveyed households have taken loans from different sources. The rate of households with loans range from 58% of the households in Dong Sang, Son La to 86% in Ta Cu Ty of Lao Cai. In the case of Y Ty, Lao Cai, the rate of households with loans is 33%, which is much lower than in other surveyed communes.

Figure 4.1.6e: households with loans in Son La

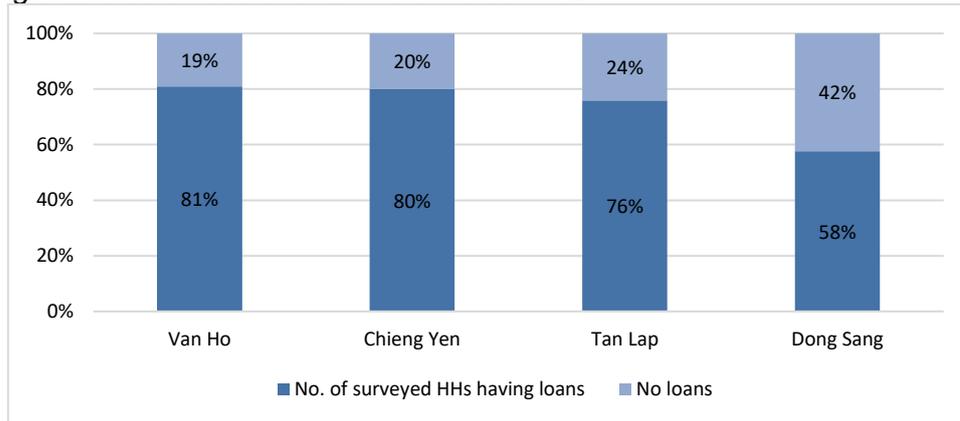
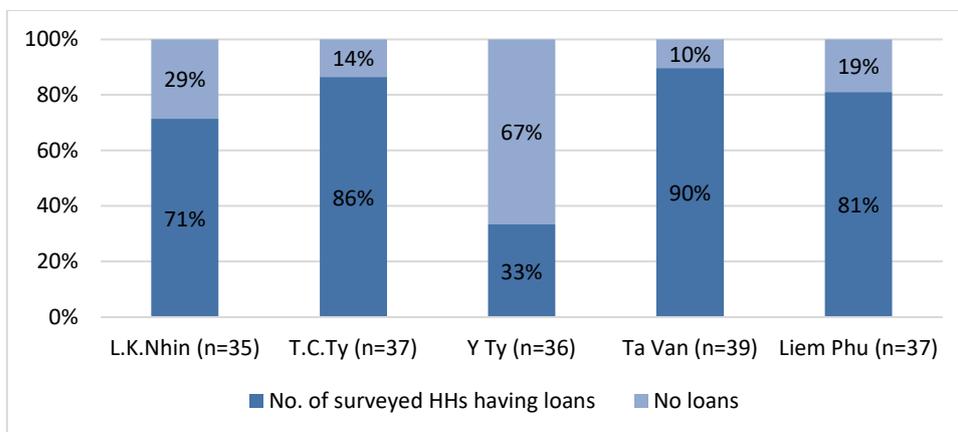


Figure 4.1.6f: households with loans in Lao Cai



Among different sources of finance, VBSP is the most accessed source, representing 45% of the surveyed households with loans in Son La and 80% in Lao Cai as presented in the Figure 4.1.6.g and Figure 4.1.6.h. There is a notable that majority of the surveyed households which have considered taking out a loan from VBSP or a commercial bank.

Figure 4.1.6g: Source of credit – Son La

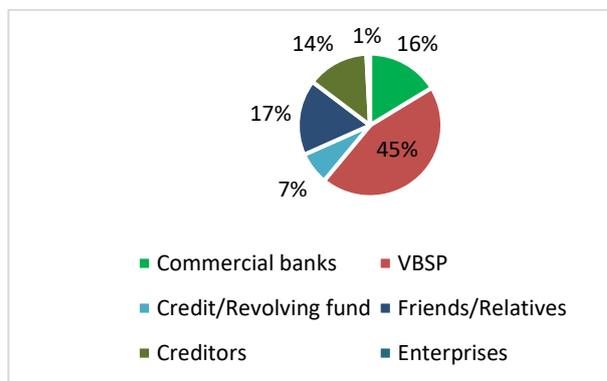
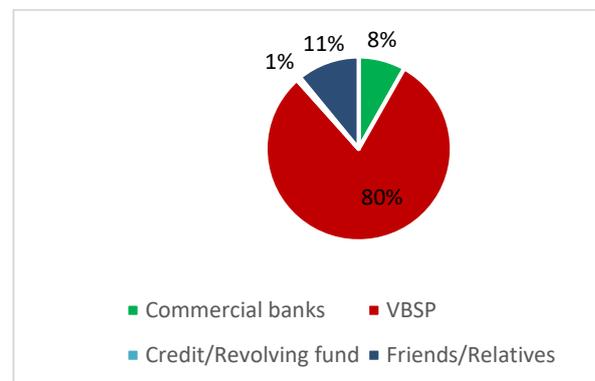


Figure 4.1.6h: Sources of Credit Lao Cai



In terms of repayment capacity, taking the most common source of credit – VBSP – there is a significantly different trend among surveyed households in the two provinces. While more than 96% of borrowers in Son La could repay the loan, more than 82% of them in Lao Cai

couldn't repay on time, as illustrated in the Figure 4.1.6i and Figure 4.1.6k below. The late repayment of debts may relate to the utility of money. The results of the household survey showed that 22/119 (18.6%) of borrowers in Lao Cai used VBSP loans for family spending (non-investment purposes), while this rate in Son La was only 15%.

Figure 4.1.6i: Loan repayment by surveyed households in Son La

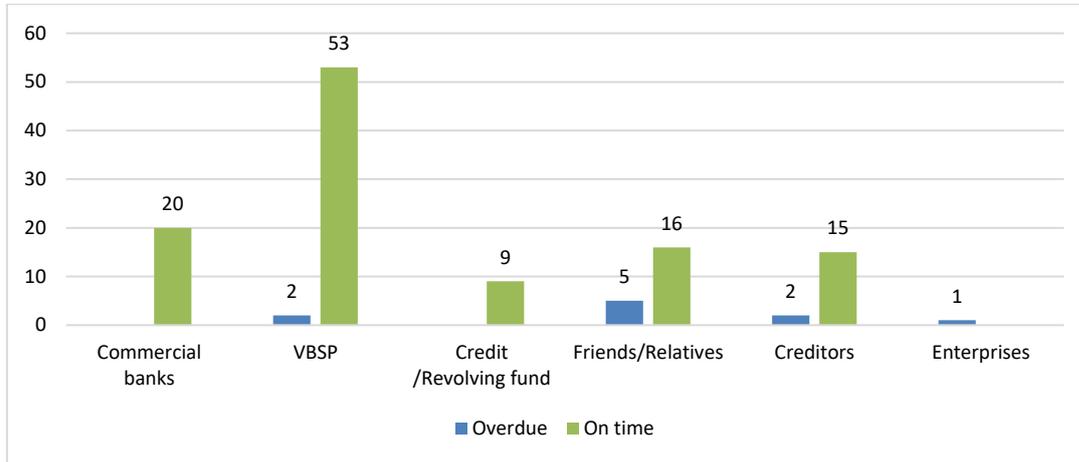
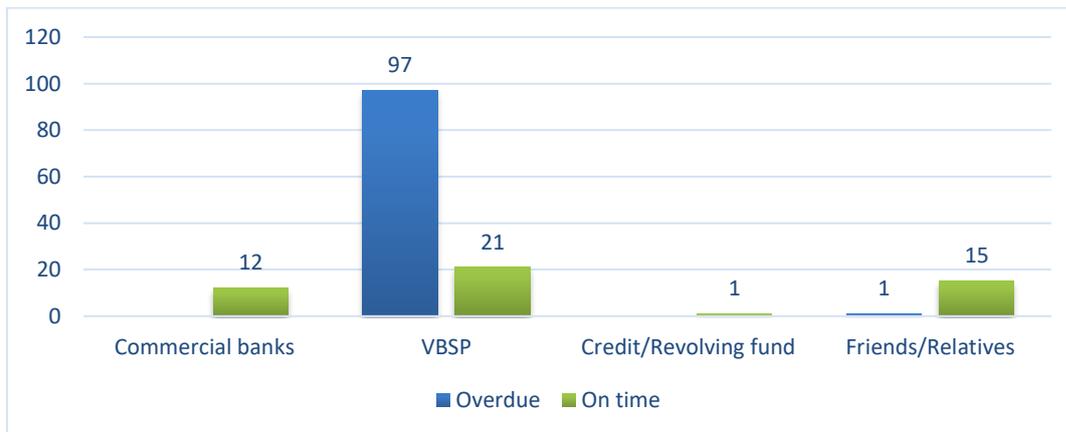


Figure 4.1.6k: Loan repayment by surveyed households in Lao Cai



4.1.7. Access to other services

Most of the essential services such as seeds, fertilizer, pesticide and animal feed, is accessible to farmers within their villages or in neighbouring hamlets. However, given the difficult geographical conditions in the surveyed communities, it can take significant time to deliver. In this survey, less than 50% of farmers could access the services within their villages, demonstrated in Figure 4.1.6l and Figure 4.1.6m.

Figure 4.1.6l: Access to different services for production in Son La

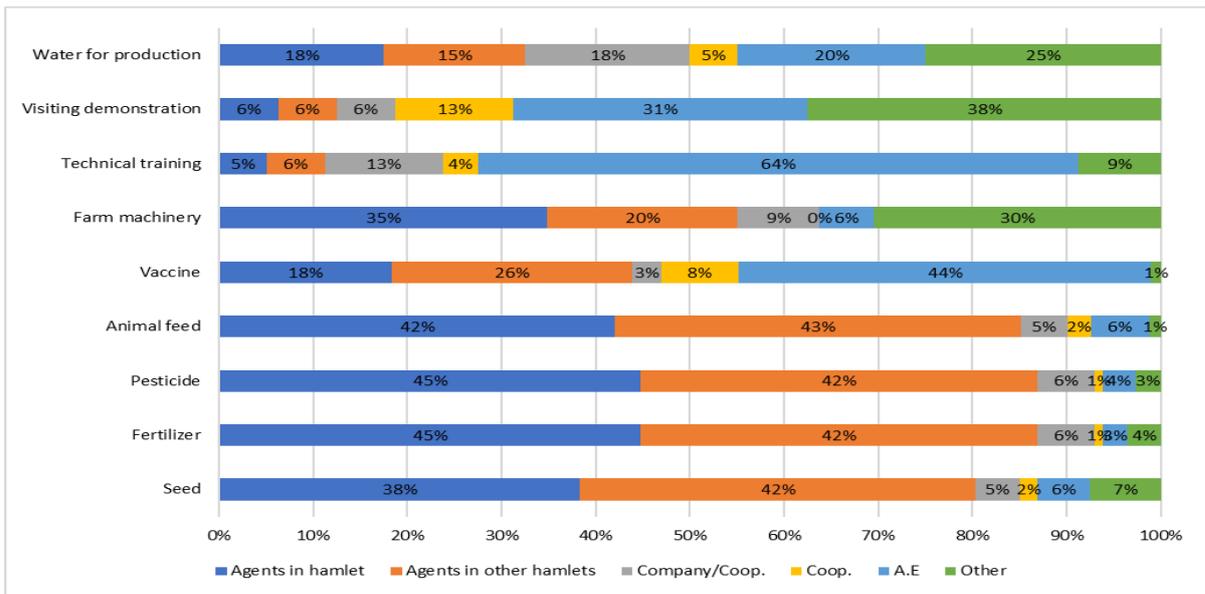
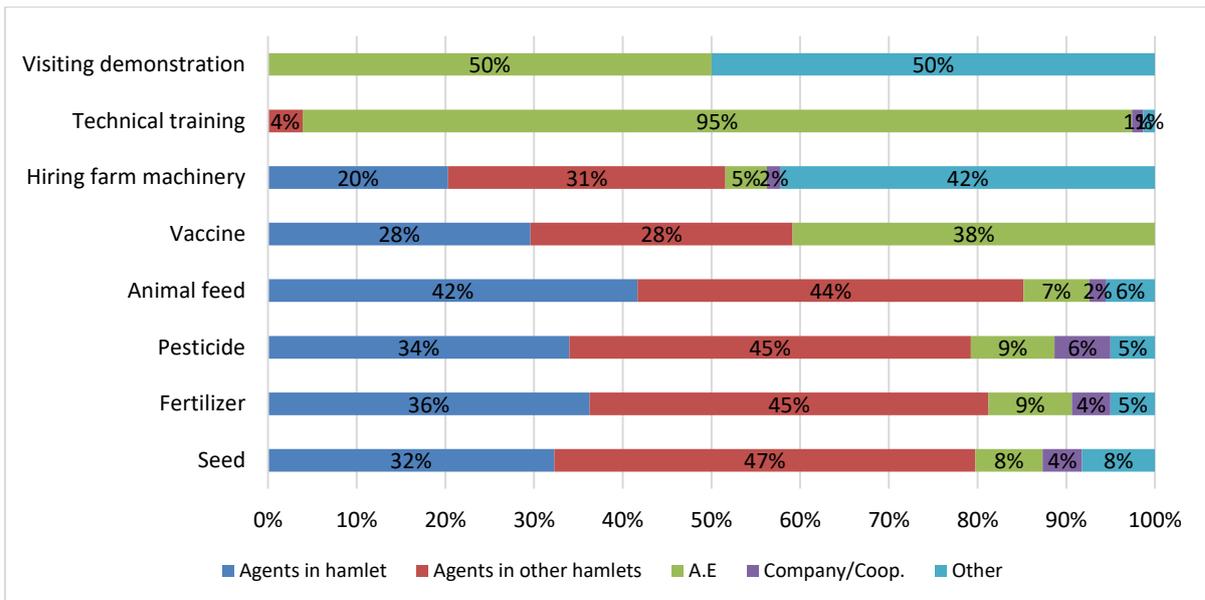


Figure 4.1.6m: access to different services for production in Lao Cai



Access to markets

Access to market information: Statistics from the household survey (Figure 4.1.7a and Figure 4.1.7b) indicate a gap in access to information for farmers, especially in terms of market trends - only 24% of respondents in Son La and 11% in Lao Cai. This limitation implies that farmers have little information for risk management and production planning. The level of access is relatively higher for information on market prices and available markets for selling and purchasing products. A general observation is that farmers in Son La have better access to different types of information, compared to those in Lao Cai.

Figure 4.1.7a: Access to market information in Son La

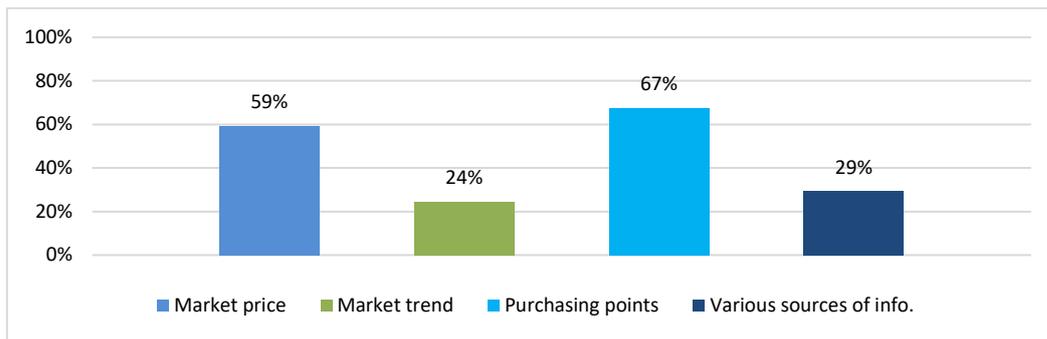
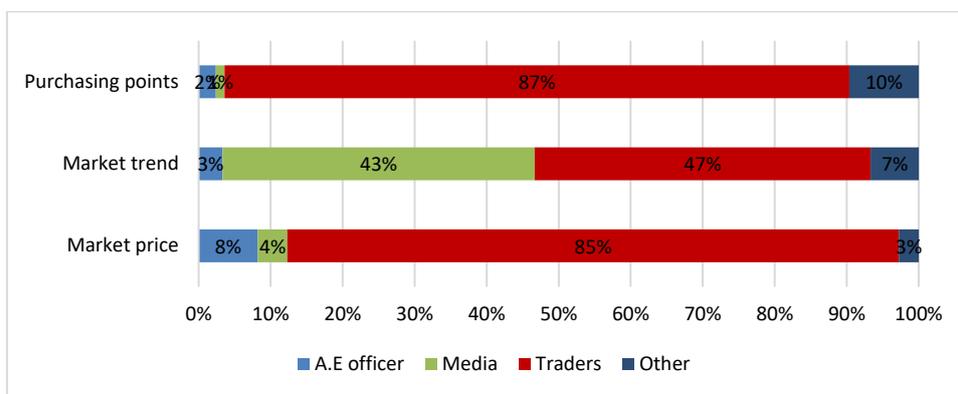


Figure 4.1.7b: Sources of market information in Son La



In terms of the sources of information, Figures 4.1.7c and Figure 4.1.7d also show that farmers primarily receive information from traders, especially on market prices and purchasing points. This indicates that they have little alternative reference for negotiating with traders on price and so accept what is offered by the traders.

Figure 4.1.7c: Access to market information in Lao Cai

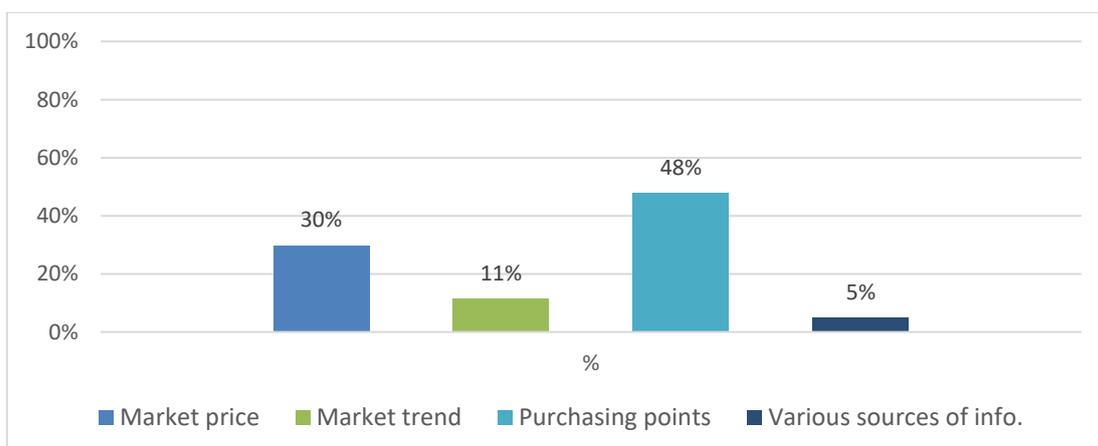
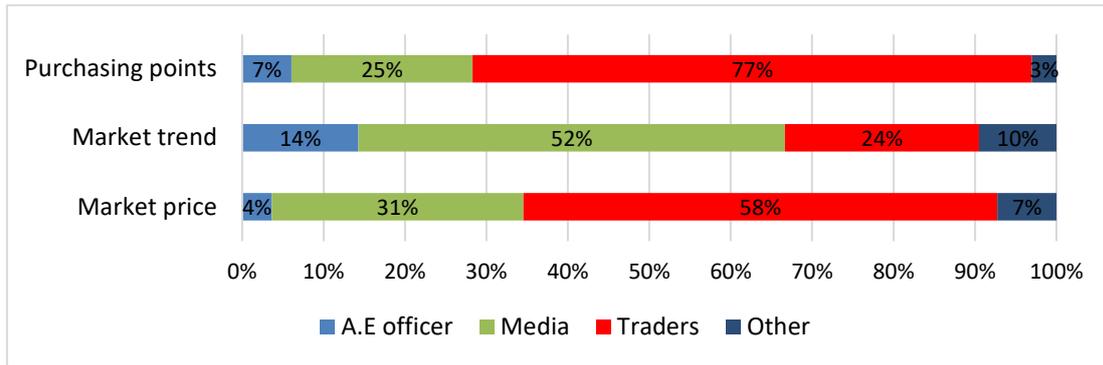


Figure 4.1.7d: Sources of market information in Lao Cai



4.1.8. Participation in informal and formal business networks

Participation of farmers and in particular, women in formal networks is very minimal. Survey data presented in Figure 4.1.8a and Figure 4.1.8b show that less than 10% of the respondents participate in the local interest group in Son La, whereas in Lao Cai interest groups mobilise 17% of respondents

Figure 4.1.8a. participation of surveyed households to different types of collaboration – Son La

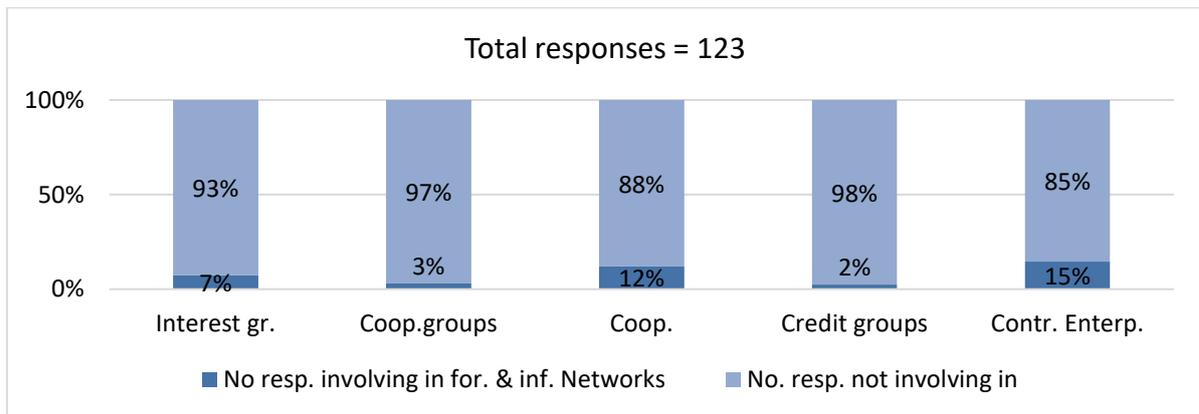
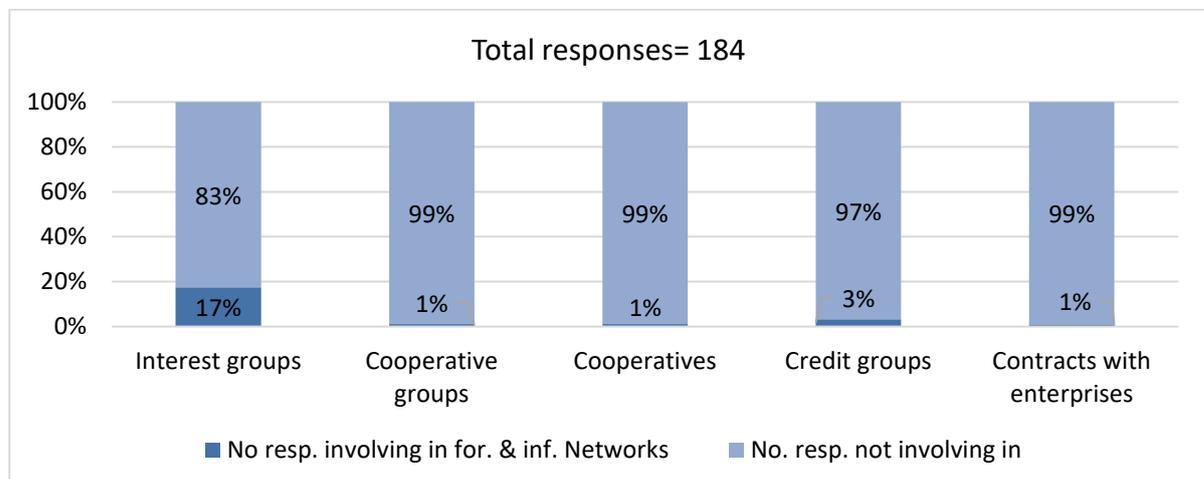


Figure 4.1.8b. Participation of surveyed households to business forms – Lao Cai



It is interesting to note that women tend to dominate in more informal business networks such as interest groups or credit groups, while men tend to dominate in cooperatives and in formal contracts with enterprises.

Figure 4.1.8c. Participation in collaboration forms by sex– Son La

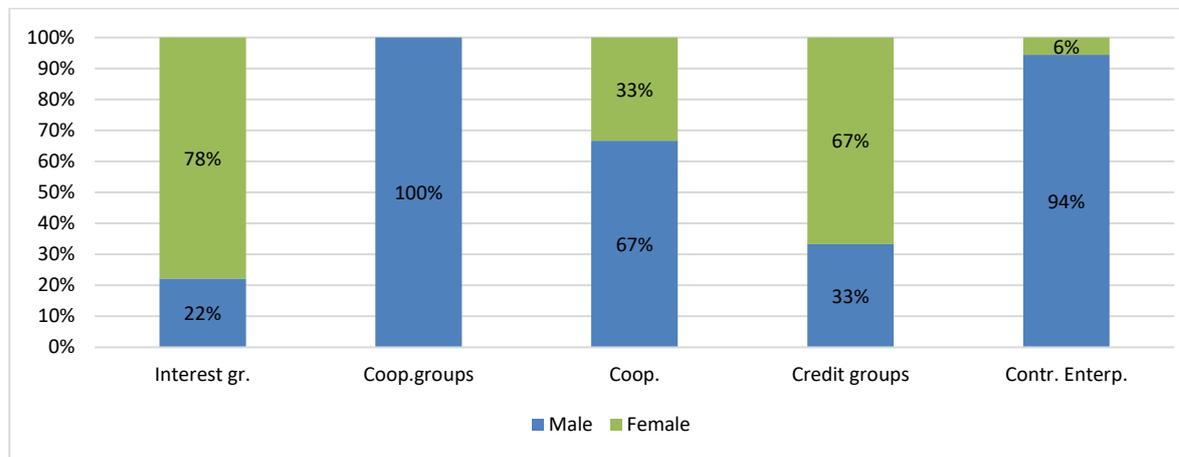
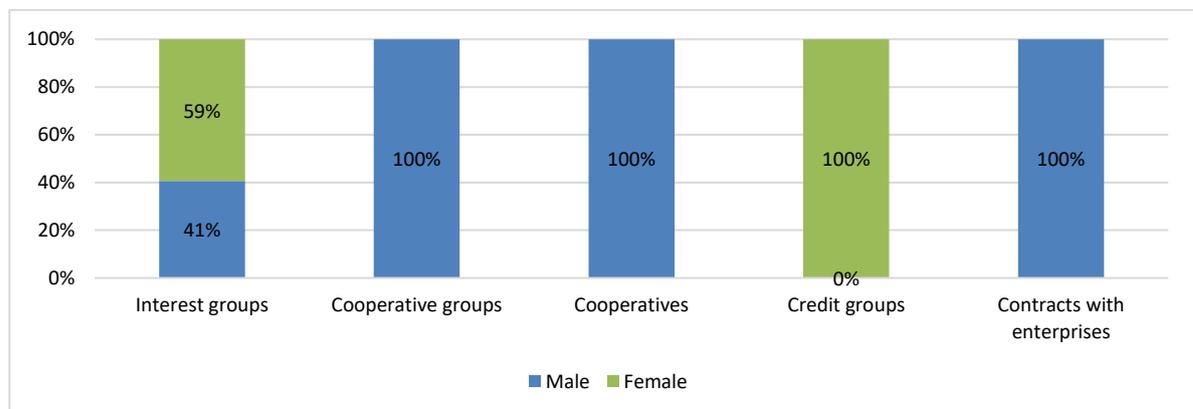


Figure 4.1.8d. Participation in the current collaboration forms by sex – Lao Cai



4.1.9. Division of labour and decision making

Decision making in livelihood activities: Figure 4.1.9 below demonstrates that in all type of livelihood activities across the two provinces, decision making is largely the domain of men. Survey questionnaires shows that only around 9-20% of women can independently make decisions on livelihood activities, while this rate for the men ranges from 41% to 67%. The exception is tourism, where women are the more dominant decision makers, representing 55%.

Figure 4.1.9a: Decision making in livelihood activities – Son La

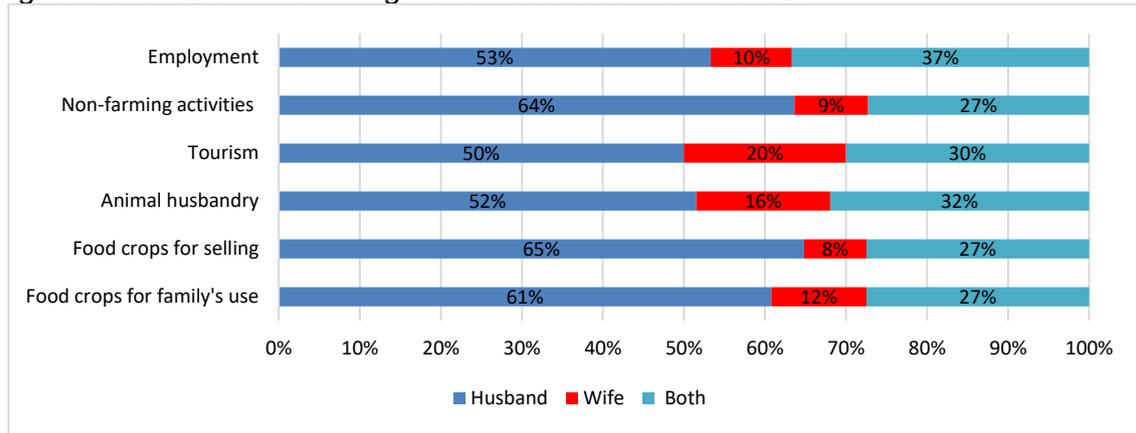
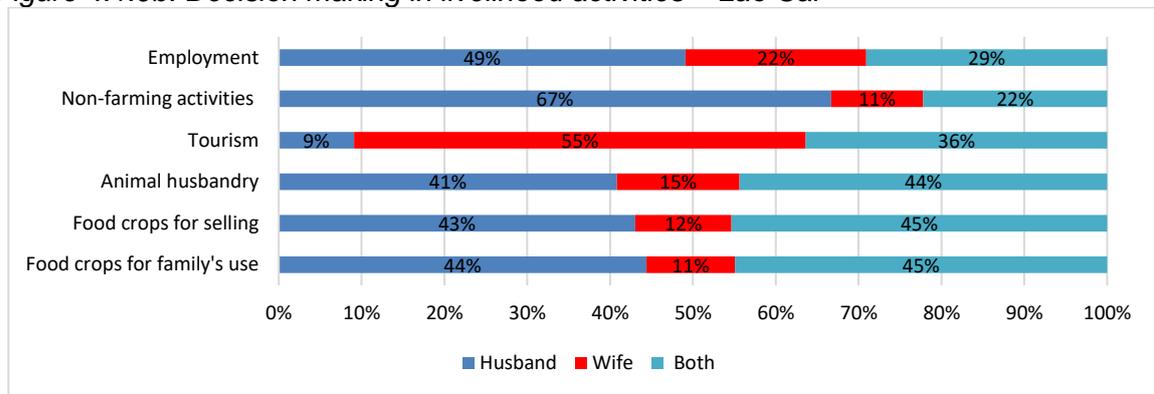


Figure 4.1.9b. Decision making in livelihood activities – Lao Cai



Concerning decision-making power over spending, women also have little say in process for family expenditure. Figures 4.1.9c and 4.1.9d show that in both provinces, for all the ethnic minority groups, women tend to have more power over the daily expenses, but less with large expenditures. Day communities demonstrate the highest percentage of women's decision-making power over large expenditures (36%), followed by the Muong (33%), while this rate in other communities is very low. It is also noticeably different in Dao communities in Son La specifically, where decision-making on family spending is often made by both husband and wife (63%-68%).

Figure 4.1.9c. Decision making on family spending – Lao Cai

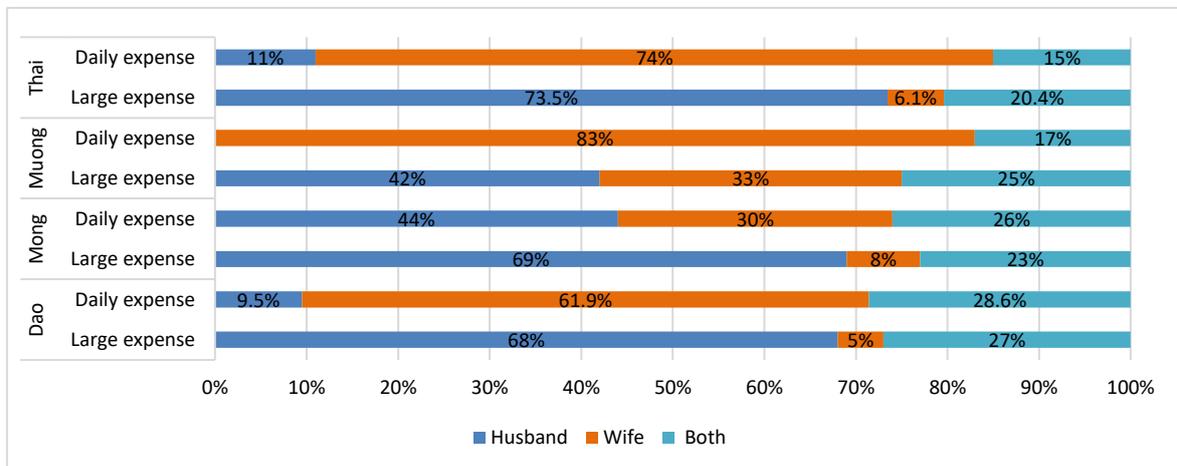
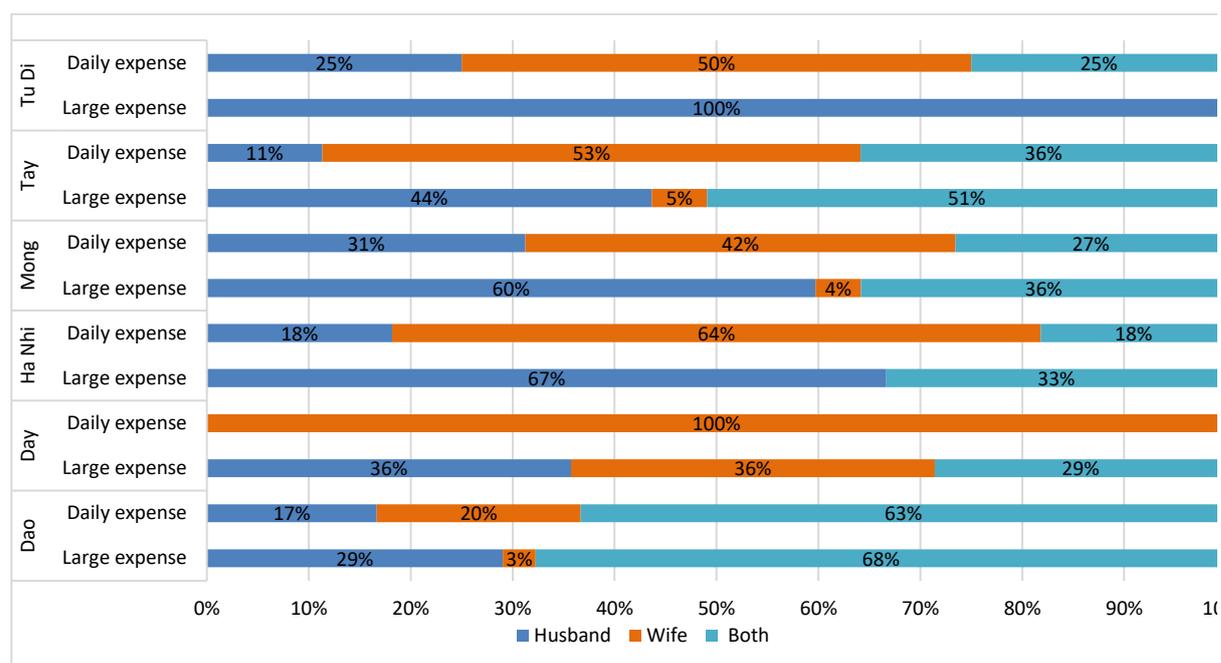


Figure 4.1.9d. Decision making on family spending – Lao Cai



4.2. Findings on gender and power relations

Information on gender and power relations was collected from in-depth interviews with husbands and wives and focus group discussions with men and with women. The findings will be partly presented in this Section 4.2 and partly in the next Section 4.3.

4.2.1. Gender roles and relations

Many male respondents hold particularly strong gender-inequitable and patriarchal attitudes (i.e., Dao in Hua Tạt and Vân Hồ, Dao in Phà Lèn and Chiềng Yên, and H'mong in Tả Phình and Tân Lập, Sơn La) while others were at different stages of positive transformation (e.g. some H'mong in Ma Ngán and Lùng Khẩu Nhin, Sáo Mý Tỷ and Tả Van, some Dao in Lâm Sinh and Liêm Pha, Lao Cai; and some Mường in Hang Trùng 1 and Vân Hồ, and Thái in Bồng Hạ and Chiềng Yên, Sơn La). The differences can be partly explained by the fact that many young husbands who have grown up in the context of tourism seem to be more accepting and appreciative their wives' cash earnings. These men also tend to help their wives by sharing in traditionally female-dominated household duties, such as childcare and cooking, while their wives are engaged in trekking or selling handicrafts (cf. Bonnin & Turner 2013). In some instances, the fact that women in many Hmong families leave home and earn more money than men, makes men feel that their work is devalued (Le 2015). This causes some of them to hold negative attitudes towards their wives' work. In this situation, the men's experience of economic marginalisation limits their sense of masculine success through providing for their household, a key feature of masculinity in the studied communities. In turn they seek other forms of identity and respect, namely through control and dominance over women physically, such as through the use of violence. In such contexts, men's use of violence was generally prompted by a desire to defend or demonstrate their masculinity, or as a tool for disciplining and maintaining authority.

Caregiving for children and elderly family members appears to be a critical impediment to women engaging in economic activity. Societal norms which relegate women to certain types

of roles, such as the role of housewife or caregiver, continue to be prevalent in many communities and which prevent women from engaging in other, non-traditional roles, such as paid employment. Often, such norms are internalised by women themselves.

There are negative feelings about women, especially young women, seeking jobs far from home and in urban areas. The reasons given for such attitudes include: fear of women being trafficked to China and placed into indentured labour, and familial conflict caused by long absences, including marriage breakups. However, this is not true across the board for all ethnic groups in the region. Hmong respondents from Séo Mý Tý (Tả Van, Sa Pa) and Ma Ngán (Lũng Khấu Nhin, Mường Khương) do not hold these negative attitudes towards women working as seasonal tour guides. This positive tendency maybe due to the period of time over which this has happened and the clear, observable economic benefits that women working in this professional has brought to households: e.g. renovated homes, ability to hire labour for agricultural production, homes with appliances and other modern devices, motorbikes, etc.

Further subjugating women in communities is the commonly held idea that once a woman is married she is no longer a member of her natal home but rather that of her husband's. Women often marry into communities which are far from their own and only visit their parents a few times per year. As a women's sisters and friends also get married and move away, her social network diminishes further, undermining social solidarity amongst women and their ability to maintain ties with their natal communities. All of the married women interviewed in the study reported that they return to their parental home only two or three times a year. The frequency often depends on the availability of time and the distance to be travelled. For instance, many women complain about the distance between their place of residence and their natal village which makes it difficult for them to return for a visit. Burdened with childcare responsibilities, the bulk of agricultural labour and a lack of transportation means that women are not able to establish and maintain social networks outside the village. Meanwhile, men are highly mobile and dominate public spaces, giving them greater access to agricultural knowledge and information, unlike women who are usually bound to their households or neighbourhoods (Simiyu and Foeken 2014).

4.2.2. Gender and power dynamics by ethnicity

Table 9. Summary of gender and power dynamics by ethnic groups

Hmong	Dao	Mường	Thái	Hà Nhi	Tày	Giáy
<p>Men as the pillar of the family, handling production, managing domestic as well as dealing with the outside world (given their proficiency in Kinh language as compared to Hmong women).</p> <p>-Men as decision makers, frequent attendees of village meetings (on behalf of women).</p> <p>-Land inheritance by sons only.</p>	<p>Husbands hold greater authority in household.</p> <p>-Land inheritance by sons. Daughters may receive a holding in the land only if their parents have plenty of land to go around.</p> <p>-Husband is the decision maker for household production matters.</p> <p>-More equitable division of labour observed among couples under the age of 35 in Son La.</p>	<p>Men assume control of everything, i.e., the decision makers, both the money keeper and manager, especially for investing in big things like building a house, buying a motorbike or television. Women can make decisions for spending money on little things like buying bowls, saucepans, etc.</p>	<p>Men are believed to be better managers of money.</p> <p>-There are negative feelings about women, especially young women, seeking jobs far from home in urban areas for reasons of familial conflict and marriage breakdown.</p> <p>-In Son La, men support their wives to get involved as part-time folk dancers (upon tourists' request) in the village to earn a living.</p>	<p>Men have much more power than women. E.g., if a male family or clan member is standing, other female family members are supposed to sit on the floor.</p>	<p>There are issues of jealousy and social stigma regarding women migrating for work.</p> <p>- Importance placed on having sons to inherit the family's land.</p>	<p>Patriarchal, yet, no negative attitudes towards women's participation in tourism for income generation.</p>
<p>Women lead handicraft and clothing production, planting, and animal raising.</p>	<p>-Women are less confident.</p> <p>-The wife is the money keeper.</p>	<p>Women defer to their husband to make final decisions and take pride in so doing (meaning</p>	<p>Thai women are confident in decision-making. In most cases couples discuss all</p>	<p>Women play the main role in family economy, yet, young women still</p>	<p>-Women are perceived to be submissive.</p> <p>-Women are only temporary members</p>	<p>Women are very active in cross border trading activities and other financial services.</p>

<p>- Special role of the aunt and the parents in-law.</p> <p>- Some Hmong in a number of villages of Lao Cai are not against women's participation in tourism activities.</p> <p>- In Son La women were previously not allowed to sit at the same table (or prepare food) with male family members or guests. However, this is no longer a common practice.</p>	<p>- Women make small, daily financial decisions such as buying groceries.</p> <p>- The Dao in Lào Cai are not against women participating in tourism, whereas in Son La stigma continues to be attached to women migrating for work.</p>	<p>they can rely on their husband who is sharp, active, and financially responsible).</p> <p>-Women participate in productive activities, take care of children and conduct other household duties.</p>	<p>important issues and respect each other's opinions.</p> <p>-Women now have more opportunities to voice their opinion, obtain higher educational attainment and get decent jobs in public the sector (Son La).</p> <p>- Land inheritance by sons only. Daughter in-law coming from the same hamlet gets co-ownership of the land. If the daughter in-law comes from another hamlet, she is allowed to cultivate her in-laws' fields but cannot claim any ownership to the land.</p>	<p>have no power in their family.</p> <p>The mother in-law has significant decision-making power.</p>	<p>of their parents' households, one day to be sold as wives, and as such cannot inherit or lay claim to any of their parents' resources, property, or wealth. Once married, they again become temporary members of their husband's households, where they are constantly reminded that they are outsiders being sustained by resources that do not belong to them.</p> <p>-Dominant role of parents-in-law in household decision making.</p>	
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4.3. Factors influencing women's participation in livelihoods

4.3.1. *Enabling factors*

a. **Positive change in perception and attitude towards greater gender equality and women's economic empowerment**

It is particularly encouraging to observe changes in attitudes and understanding, most notably in behaviours and practices. There is evidence that in some Hmong communities, where traditions favouring men over women still prevail, they are beginning to change such as men engaging directly in domestic chores and sharing the household burden with female household members. The main drivers behind these shifts in customary gendered divisions of labour, especially in young households, can be linked to Sa Pa's tourism boom since the early 2000s, and the recognition of women's income earning potential in tourism.

For instance, in Tà Chải Hmong village, women make handicraft products to sell to tourists in Sa Pa town. While women go to the town to sell products, or work as tour guides, their male counterparts take care of the household chores, care for the children and manage the agricultural activities.

b. **The role of village elders and family clan chiefs**

Village elders and family clan chiefs play an important role in village management and community affairs. With vast experience in agricultural production and detailed knowledge of local customs, elders are influential actors in the community. These leaders, who are typically men, could play a vital role in promoting transformational gender relations in their communities if given the proper information and support. In addition, there are women in Hmong and Dao communities who are shamans or healers with knowledge of herbal medicine and who are well respected by many in the community. Below are some examples observed during the field study of how community elders or leaders can support transformational change:

- Bản Áng (Đông Sang, Mộc Châu, Sơn La) Thai homestay women owners often seek advice from the village elders who are knowledgeable about traditional customs. Whereas the family clan chief appears to be the main source of information about development of agricultural production, access to loans and jobs for lots of Thai women in the community.
- Mr. Hoàng Văn Tiến is a person of prestige among the Mường ethnic in Hang Trùng 1 Hamlet (Vân Hồ, SL). He runs a local shop providing agricultural inputs for farmers, providing flexible payment plans (interest from 10-20% per crop cycle). It was reported that Mr Tien usually offers a more reasonable price to the local residents than the market price, or the prices offered by Kinh traders in the area.
- In Tà Chải Hmong village of Tả Van commune, Lao Cai, the Protestant priest is the most important person in the village. He encourages people to help each other and often provides medical expenses for them. The Protestants' network could be a potential channel through which women can help one another in economic activities.
- The traditional practice of cohabiting with parent-in-law appears to be a source of support in all studied ethnic groups. For instance, in Sả Mào Phố village of Tả Cù Tỷ, Lao Cai, those Tày women who do not live with their parents-in-law have to take care of their young children on their own and the local kindergarten only accepts children 3 years old and above. Even with older children, women as mothers are responsible for

collecting them from kindergarten early in the afternoon, around 3-4 pm, and therefore they do not have much time to work.

c. Previous initiatives have demonstrated success and could be replicated or scaled

Past and existing initiatives could be explored and promoted for further expansion. A few examples include:

- Trang A Chu (Hua Tat village, Van Ho commune) who provides homestay services and other services such as food from their same farm. Homestays combined with other services such as herbal bath spas, like those offered by the Dao in Lâm Sinh/Liêm Phú, Lao Cai, or a Hmong run handicraft shop in Ta Van village that runs a batik making course for tourists at the family home.
- Ngải Trồ hamlet, Y Tý commune: a Hmong village where the commune People's Committee, Border Force Division and central market are located. The village is accessible from the city. Tourism is well established in the commune with some interesting tours like trekking in Lao Than, cloud hunting in Lao Chải, and an autumn festival in Ngải Trồ. Tourism services also include homestays and local restaurants.
- In Ngải Trồ and Lao Chải 1 villages, Y Tý commune, and Tả Van commune of Sa Pa, Lao Cai, tourism is well established and serves as a driving force for change in local perceptions of women's engagement in the tourism sector, among the Ha Nhi, the Giay and the Hmong. Many male respondents do not hold negative attitudes towards women working as seasonal tour guides. Moreover, the Hmong women's choices and involvement in tourism-related activities help them meet the cash demands required by the household but also give them a sense of freedom and individual identity (Duong 2006, Ngo 2011, Bonnin and Turner 2013, Le 2015).

There are also other lessons from communities on integrated farming practices which apply ecologically sound agricultural practices and solutions to maintain soil quality. These farmers supplement crop cultivation with husbandry and maximise the use of agricultural by-products to reduce production expenses. Although this is an immediate short-term coping mechanism developed after poor returns on investment in intensive, high inputs farming practices, it demonstrates the resilience of farmers to changes in the environment and external threats and presents an opportunity for the program to support the development of integrated production systems which are sustainable and ecologically friendly.

There are existing factory jobs in the vicinity i.e. Vân Hồ, Tân Lập and Đông Sang communes, Sơn La, which are particularly attractive to locals who want to be near home to do house chores and look after their children after work. This presents an opportunity for the Program to partner with such businesses to support greater equitable integration of women into their labour forces.

d. Existing policies, programmes that prioritise women's economic empowerment and market development

- In Khoi Ngoa village, Liêm Phú commune, Văn Bàn district, Lao Cai, there were several agriculture projects, including one funded by the World Bank, which aimed to support local people in livestock breeding.
- In Tả Củ Tỷ commune, Bắc Hà district, Lao Cai, the State has a program to support seedlings for the village, focusing on pine trees and cinnamon (i.e., Sảng Mào Phố hamlet which is predominantly Tày). Some training classes for villagers was provided, focusing on livestock breeding in the commune and district centre (e.g., in Tả Củ Tỷ, Bắc Hà, and Ma Ngán B and Chu Lìn Phố villages of Lùng Khẩu Nhìn commune, Mường Khương, Lao Cai).

- The Women’s Union (WU_ of Vân Hồ district, Son La, had worked with NMPRP2 and said that the experience of NMPRP2 should be supported by the Aus4Equality|GREAT Program. The WU has suggested a number of ‘lead farmer women’ who could be potential partners for the project.

e. Existing conditions enabling women’s economic empowerment

There is the potential for women to engage in agriculture and non-farm activities for further income generation in some communities. These include favourable climatic conditions for specialised products such as cold water fish in Ta Van, Ta Cu Ty and Y Ty; tea, fruit and vegetable crops in Moc Chau, Van Ho (Son La) and Ta Cu Ty (Bac Ha); Seng Cu rice and black pig in districts of Lao Cai; native chicken breeds, cinnamon, cardamom, bamboo shoot and fruit trees in Van Ho and Moc Chau.

Locations with beautiful views and scenery are suitable for development as tourist, such as in Chieng Yen (Van Ho), Ta Cu Ty (Bac Ha) and Liem Phu (Van Ban). Local communities produce traditional products and costumes and offer cultural events and festivals, like Thai dance, Khen Mong and singing in Then and Nom script of the Dao. These traditional performances and cultural products are crucial potential for further tourism development.

Examples of specific enabling conditions include:

- Sả Mào Phố hamlet of Tả Củ Tỷ commune, Lao Cai: a Dao village located near the commune People’s Committee and it is very accessible. The commune market is close to the village, making it convenient for local women to participate in trading activities.
- In Tà Chải a Hmong village of Tả Van commune, many Hmong women participate in tourism, they do not have time for making customary clothes and that creates a livelihood activity for other women who produce and/or trade traditional garments (this finding is echoed in IDI with H’mong women in Ma Ngán B/Lùng Khẩu Nhin, Lao Cai, and Tả Phình 1/Tân Lập, Son La), but who are unable to directly engage with tourism. The Program could support such mutually supportive relationships.

f. Success stories

Story of a role model in Mường Khương: Supportive husband and in-laws behind a successful Hmong woman

Ms. Hà Thị Qua is the head of the Vietnam Women’s Union branch in the village predominated by the Hmong. She plays a key role in mobilising female villagers to participate in different economic activities. Due to her active participation in helping other women, they trust her and even said that they wanted to be like her. She confirmed that without her help her husband would not have what he has now in terms of wealth. She discusses with him the selection of seedlings and livestock. She decides to cultivate Sẻng Cù (local rice), which can be sold at higher price than regular price. She also keeps their house clean and promotes hygiene around common areas in the village. She actively participates in different stages in agricultural activities instead of waiting for decisions from her husband. She takes care of her family’s health by monitoring the quality of food before buying. This practice is not common among ethnic minority women, so she teaches other women to do the same. In addition, Qua’s family-in-law support her to do her job in the community stating: “since the state choses you, you have to be enthusiastic”. Qua’s husband shares in the

housework. He is very supportive. One time when Qua participated a training in Lao Cai city she did not have enough money to stay there for one week, so her husband travelled all the way to the city to give her money. While other women in the community experience domestic violence, Qua has never been abused by her husband. Her family and other villagers observed her contribution to the family economy and have more respect for her. She has been changing the village's attitude towards women's participation in economic activities through the example that she sets.

Story of a role model in Sa Pa: Determination and hard work led to success of a Giay woman

Ms. Chanh represents an important case study in Tả Van Giáy since she opened her homestay 5 years ago and has become a successful entrepreneur. At first, she worked as a massager in her relative's business. After several years, she had gained experience working with tourists and decided to open her homestay. It took a long time for her to persuade her parents-in-law, especially her father-in-law, to mortgage their house in order to start the business. Her husband supported her plan. She hired two women to be housekeepers in her homestay and her brother to be the receptionist, while she manages the room bookings. She was also able to help a poor, HIV-positive woman in the village when the woman delivered baby (other people were too scared to help due to persistent stigma associated with HIV). In addition, Chanh frequently undertakes charity work for poor people in the area. Key to her success has been learning English to communicate with tourists, learning from other tour guides how to manage tourists and engaging technology to support her business (online booking platforms).

4.3.2. Limiting factors

a. Biases against women, gender inequality and patriarchal attitudes.

While women do participate in tourism to generate income their top priority is their responsibility to their families at home and in their fields. Ethnic minority women making handicrafts and embroidery can be seen as income-generating activities, yet these activities are still considered traditional female work. A recent study undertaken on gender, work and tourism in Lao Cai (Le 2015) demonstrated that Hmong men derive their economic, political and cultural power and status from four sources which are: 1) their leadership in the family as breadwinners and decision-makers; 2) their roles as representatives of the family in the public sphere; 3) their capacities for judgment and reasoning; and 4) their authority over their wives and children. Some men use traditional gendered discourse about feminine and masculine work to avoid household chores and react negatively to their wives' frequent and prolonged absences from the house, if they have to travel for work. Negative reactions towards women's work lives can take various forms, ranging from mockery to confrontation, including violence (cf. Bonnin & Turner 2013).

These limiting factors were evident in all of the study sites. For all the ethnic groups interviewed, care-giving for children and elderly family members appeared to be a critical impediment to women's economic opportunity. There were negative attitudes towards women, especially young women, seeking jobs far from home in urban areas due to the threat of trafficking and the potential for familial conflict. Notably, social stigma against women working in hotels and restaurants persists, even in communes which have been

exposed to tourism activities for several years, such as in Sa Pa. Men's perceptions of masculinity are challenged by women taking up non-traditional gender roles, such as employment and can result in some men seeking alternative sources of dominance, such as through physical and emotional violence. During IDI sessions, some Thai and Hmong women in Son La revealed their experience of domestic violence perpetrated by their husbands as a result of their increased independence.

Women consulted in IDI and FGD also mentioned that, salary payments are not transparent and seems to be unjust toward ethnic minority employees in factory work. Some cases where salaries remained unpaid were observed by the researchers. Criteria for employment limiting working age to between 18 and 35 and requirements for a secondary education level attainment often prevent the participation of (middle aged) women in these factory jobs.

Anecdotes of human trafficking were also reported among Dao, H'mong women in Tả Củ Tỷ (Bắc Hà), Lũng Khấu Nhin (Mường Khương), Tả Van (Sa Pa). In Sảng Mào Phố hamlet of Tả Củ Tỷ there were some convicted traffickers who are also Dao. IDI and FGDs with Dao women in Văn Bản indicated that there are more reported cases involving traffickers coming from the same ethnic group as those trafficked.

Many male respondents hold particularly strong gender-inequitable and patriarchal attitudes towards women, even in communes which have been exposed to tourism activities for several years like Tả Van commune of Sa Pa.

Story of a struggling woman in Sa Pa

Ms. Nga, another Giáy woman with a similar background as Ms. Chanh, continues to struggle with income issues. She is working as housekeeper in a homestay owned by a Kinh couple from Hanoi. She has been working in the tourism sector for years but struggles to improve her living conditions. Just like Chanh, Nga has experience in tourism, willingness to participate in economic activities, a desire to earn money to support her family and the ability to use a personal computer and communicate fluently in Kinh language and some English. However, Nga and her husband, a Hmong man, do not have a common household budget. They separate their income and in turn pay for common needs. For example, Nga pays the water bills and the childcare expenses, while her husband pays electricity bills and the bank interest. They do not set common financial goals. Although there were some English classes offered in the commune, Nga was not able to attend. There were also some training classes for homestay services offered, in which only people already managing a homestay could partake. Therefore, Nga could not attend. Furthermore, her husband does not allow her to do any work that requires that she is away from home overnight.

b. Limited participation of ethnic minority women, especially young women, in income generating activities

Customs such as early marriage are a significant barrier to women's engagement in economic activities. There is a prevalence of under-aged marriage among the Hmong and Hà Nhì continues and the practice of bride abduction ('kéo vợ'/'bắt vợ') which forces women into marriage continues among the Hmong communities. Once married, women typically drop out of school to start having children.

There are national responses to the traditional practice of bride abduction among the Hmong, such as the Action Programs on Family Decree 02/2013/NĐ-CP and the Decree No. 32/2002, Article 2, which seek to eradicate harmful marriage and family customs such as bride abduction. However, the use of the term “*cuop*” (steal/rob) to describe this “traditional” act/custom (among the Hmong) fails to capture the complex cultural notion and social values emblematic of the ethnic group on gender, marriage and family honour, given the fact that not all bride abduction incidents are non-consensual. To frame this custom from a legal perspective, it unwittingly reinforces prevalent discriminatory discourse (among the predominant Viet majority) about ethnic minority groups, where males are perceived to be ‘violent’ and to be ‘lacking in understanding or inconsiderate.’

At the community and kinship levels, the practice of labour exchange exists in a number of the study sites. This tradition is useful in helping villagers solve labour shortages without having to hire extra labour for certain tasks. For example, this practice provides mutual assistance in the wake of natural disasters such as flash flooding and typhoons.

During an IDI with a young Giay woman in Lao Chải 1, Y Tý commune, she revealed that her mother-in-law keeps all the money and is the decision maker of the household. The daughter-in-law has to ask her mother-in-law for money even when she wants to buy clothes for herself. This case seems to indicate a vulnerable situation of young wives who do not have any access to the household resources in male-headed households, particularly when the husband’s parents make all decisions on expenditure.

In addition, elder parents-in-law may not be willing to opt for non-farming livelihood strategies – as for the upland minorities, traditional agriculture with rice and maize and livestock are still their main sources of income and sustenance – and thus may discourage the newly-weds from pursuing other livelihood opportunities (e.g. Tày in Tả Củ Tỷ, Lao Cai).

c. Limited access to capital

Official sources of credit have not been effectively disbursed or are difficult to access by the farmers due to complicated application procedures and a lack of flexibility in payment terms or collateral requirements. According to the BLS, during the last 5 years only 6.5% of the surveyed households borrowed loans from a commercial bank. Soft loans from VBSP are more accessible than those of a commercial bank, with 44% of households in Son La and 80% in Lao Cai obtaining loans from VBSP. However, the efficiency of loan utilisation varies substantially. There are significant numbers of borrowers who use the capital for family daily expenses (20% in Lao Cai and 16% in Son La). In Lao Cai, 82% of borrowers were not able to pay back the loan on time. As a consequence, they are not eligible to borrow further loans. Due to this limitation, people hesitate to invest capital in agricultural production. There is a tendency of late-paid purchasing of agro-inputs with high rates of interest after harvesting. This situation specifically happens with the households who pursue livelihood activities with high investment costs such as production of pork and maize at a commercial scale. Exacerbating such limited access to capital, farmers have very few sources of cash income. In Son La, 36% of the surveyed households have cash income in the year in negative figures (<0). This figure in Lao Cai is 176%. The negative balance of a household’s income could be the main reason for late payment of loans, perpetuating the debt cycle for many. This also implies that for any activity that requires monetary investment, they will need to borrow money from other sources.

During an FGD with a group of marginalised women (women whose husbands are drug addicts, abusive or have been sent to rehabilitation centres) concerns about challenges in

obtaining loans from official sources like banks due to stigma were raised. These women are desperately lacking in material resources as a result and are largely left behind in the struggle for state resources. Furthermore, these women have little land and thus are not deemed eligible for a role in pioneering new cash crops in which the government invests heavily to encourage production.

d. Lack of land ownership by ethnic minority women

In most of the ethnic groups found in the project areas, land is only inherited by sons. After their marriage, women work with their husband's family without land ownership. This was reported to be a barrier for women in making economic decisions, such as crop choices. Another factor worsening the status of women's ownership over land is the absence of women's names on the land use right certificates (LURC). No statistics are available on the exact figures, however, interviews with women and community leaders revealed that very few LURC bear both names of the husband and wife despite it being regulated in the Land law 2013. The absence of women's names on the LURC weakens women's voices in decision making related to land use and management, it also puts women at risk of losing access to land if there is a conflict, separation or death of the husband. There were cases where ethnic minority women expressed desire to switch to perennial crops such as fruit trees, but to first report this to their parents-in-law, who only allowed them to use the land for short-term crops. One example is from the Giay ethnic group, where the mothers-in-law were found to be the key decision makers and daughters-in-law need approval from them in any matters related to the household economy. This makes women more dependent on their husbands and parents-in-law in making economic decisions and also limits their ability to access collateral-based credit.

Furthermore, given limited land availability, some families have to cultivate rice in abandoned plots of land along the stream. Because rice uses a lot of fertilizer and chemicals in cultivation, this pollutes the water source and creates serious health issues for whole village downstream.

During group discussions in Chieng Yen, Vân Hồ, Sơn La, households mentioned that they were given land use certification (red book) for agriculture but that recently a new government order to stop cutting trees and cultivating maize was preventing them from continuing with production, impacting their ability to generate income. The Government is now trying to convert that land to back to forest land but are yet to determine a means of compensating farmers who have been kicked off this land.

e. Lack of technical knowledge and production planning skills

Except in some cases, stakeholders consulted expressed inadequate understanding of the technical farming procedures that they follow. It was also observed that farmers have been practicing improper techniques in their production. This includes the use of cattle dung without proper treatment, drying the wet cattle dung for fertiliser and leaving cattle wandering during winter. These improper techniques not only limit the yield and quality of products but also lead to serious environment pollution and health issues for farmers, especially women.

The ability to access and provide information to women over the age of 30 is much more difficult due to the fact that majority of women from ethnic minority groups in the target areas are not fluent in Vietnamese language, which is the only available medium for information and technical provision. In the baseline survey, the percentage of female

respondents who are not able to fluently read and write Vietnamese in Son La and Lao Cai are 53% and 38%, respectively.

The lack of Vietnamese language skills is also an obstruction for ethnic minority women (especially the Hmong, Dao and Hà Nhì) to participate in economic activities. Informants reported that there were some training classes on agricultural production and skills to which women were invited but many of them were illiterate or could not speak the Kinh language, so did not participate. Reasons implying that women were less confident, not as intelligent or not serious about learning were also mentioned by Kinh officials to justify why women did not participate in agriculture techniques trainings, indicating ongoing prejudices against women farmers. Nevertheless, it is clear that training methods employed do not account for farmers' literacy levels, which excludes ethnic minority groups generally, and women in particular.

One of the interviewees in Sảng Mào Phố, Tả Củ Tỷ commune, Lao Cai, said that since she was the oldest daughter, her parents did not let her to go to school and as a consequence she could not look for jobs but was expected to work for her own family. In Tả Phình 2, Tân Lập commune, Son La, there is a large number of illiterate women and only men can communicate in Kinh language, albeit basically.

In Tả Chải H'mong of Tả Van commune, many male villagers become workers on construction sites in Sa Pa and female villagers work in the tourism sector as housekeepers, handicraft sellers, and receptionists. Since the government established a new rule that requires tour guides to have certification, many local female guides have had to quit their job. This is because they are illiterate, or they cannot speak Kinh language fluently enough to attend the classes necessary to gain the certification.

f. Ethnic minority women are mainly involved in agricultural production, sell raw materials at low prices and are dependent on traders from outside

The primary consumers of agriproducts for all the interviewees is their own family, except for commodities like tea and fruit crops. They are also focused on initial production and have little knowledge of market demand and value adding. No initial processing or post-harvest value addition is conducted by this group, which means that farmers are reliant on immediate sale post-harvest and that prices are set at the mercy of traders. Despite the tea processing factory in Tan Lap commune and a cooperative in Van Ho, there were no other processing or storage units observed in the communes visited.

g. Very weak linkages, cooperation and networking among ethnic minority women

Though in Vietnam the Women's Union is a kind of default association for adult women, a large number of women in their late 20s and early 30s have no access to information about local WU activities because they do not pay WU fees. Only 24% of surveyed people in Lao Cai, and 39% in Son La participated in some form of cooperative. Notably in Son La, the number of women participating in such organisations is only one quarter of that of men. The type of collaboration is typically in shared interest groups. In the context that farm size is small, this limited collaboration capacity is a critical obstacle hindering farmers' ability to move from subsistence production to commodity production for improved income generation.

4.4. Livelihood challenges faced by the poor

a. Increasing threat from natural disasters

More than 70% of the respondents reported that their productivity had suffered from extreme weather conditions negatively impacting their crops and livestock. They also reported that they feel very unprepared to mitigate these increasing threats and that their coping capacity was limited. Farmers were also aware of the impacts of climate change. The most significant phenomena include extreme cold, extreme hot and drought. More than 70% of the respondents reported that they have experienced such harsh weather conditions. From the farmers' observations, these extreme weather phenomena have become more uncertain, created more severe impacts on their livelihoods and caused significant damage to their harvest and therefore, income.

b. Deterioration and ineffective utilisation of natural resources

Degradation of natural resources is the consequence of unsustainable production techniques and a long-time application of intensive, high input farming practices. This issue was raised by all interviewees and during group discussions, particularly in locations which used to be planted with maize and in the sloping areas such as Van Ho, Chieng Yen, Tan Lap, Dong Sang, Lung Khau Nhin and Ta Van. Currently, intensive farming practices continue to be implemented with very minimal concern for maintenance of soil quality, such as application of organic matter or contour farming.

In all visited villages, except the areas under tea and fruit crop cultivation, land is left uncovered for the whole dry season. Rice land is cultivated for only one crop season per year and rotation with other crops is minimal. A similar situation was observed in sloping land areas under maize cultivation. Monocropping, which is considered ineffective and unsustainable, especially in sloping land cultivation, is the prevalent system.

c. Potential risk in shifting from food crops to high value crop

In the villages visited, a recent tendency for farmers to shift from staple food production to higher-value crops was observed. Though most of the surveyed households maintain production of food crops such as rice and maize as a means for feeding their families, there is massive conversion from corn fields, forests and palm trees to citrus, plum and peach trees. This trend was observed in all the villages visited and identified amongst interviewees. Although the conversion is part of the local government agenda and that farmers get some direction from local authority, people have little information on which specific variety they should grow, what are the techniques and conditions required for pursuing these farming activities, and where to sell the final products. This kind of poorly informed planning may lead to the failure of people's livelihoods and explosive overproduction in the coming two to three years. Furthermore, this massive conversion also destroys symbolic and beautiful landscape of the locality (such as palm hill), which may be important tourist attractions.

d. Tourism activities in the community are dis-organised and there is a lack of planning and benefit sharing mechanisms

Competition between households engaged in tourism is fierce with price undercutting and bribing tour guides to receive preferential guest bookings are prevalent. Little attention is

being paid to improving homestay services to encourage guests. There is also very little connection between homestays and other services such as cultural performances, and no benefit sharing mechanisms. Despite not having a clear understanding of the tourism sector, most people in the community expressed that they were very keen to be involved in providing tourism services and recognised it as a viable source of income. While this expressed motivation to engage in tourism activities is positive and represents an opportunity to create jobs, the risk of poor organisation in the subsector must be managed.

Communities are often lacking the technical and business management skills necessary to manage tourism related businesses. In Moc Chau, the Thai ethnic group (White Thai) living there run various services tourism related like homestays and bike and boat hire. However, the services run by Kinh people tend to receive more clients overall. Some interviewed households explained that they do not know how to promote their services on the internet (e.g., Bản Áng 2, Đông Sang commune, Moc Chau) which is how the Kinh businesses generate a lot of their business.

a. Poor transportation system and infrastructure

The road system to the villages of Chieng Yen, Dong Sang, Lung Khin Nhin, Ta Cu, Ta Van and Y Ty is very difficult to access. This hinders the access of traders to the communities and vice-versa, of the community to the outside market as observed in villages such as Pha Lèng, Na Kien, Seo Mi Ti (Ta Van). In some villages there are no means of transportation or processing facilities, which means that farmers are beholden to traders to purchase their produce and determine prices.

b. Lack of technical support and other services.

The majority of the respondents in the baseline survey reported that the techniques that they apply in production are reliant on their own experience or observing their neighbours. For conventional crops such as rice and maize, this is true for more than 90% of farmers in Lao Cai and more than 80% in Son La. For the new products such as tea and fruit crops, farmers have received some training from the extension office, but the coverage is minimal (less than 10%). Training on husbandry has better coverage, but still has only been provided to <20% of surveyed farmers.

Although the majority of informants reported that agricultural inputs such as seed, fertilisers and pesticide are easily accessible, the quality of the inputs cannot be guaranteed and farmers have no means to verify the quality of inputs. They also have limited options in terms of where to buy inputs, as there are only a few suppliers in the commune centre. Farmers are also not given much in the way of choice of seeds that they purchase because it is all decided by the distributors.

In terms of market information, only 67% of respondents in Son La and 48% in Lao Cai know where to sell their products. Much fewer have access to information regarding market price and trends (59% and 24% in Son La and 59% and 30% in Lao Cai, respectively). Often, farmers will not hear about market prices or trends until harvest time and this information primarily comes from the traders purchasing their produce. Only 29% respondents in Son La and 5% in Lao Cai reported to have access to more than one source of information for reference. Limited access to information has led to issues of price manipulation by traders.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the issues outlined in this report, the Program's implementation strategy requires a holistic approach that addresses the challenges from two perspectives 1) Women's Economic Empowerment and 2) Gender Equality and Social Inclusion.

Below are recommendations for Program interventions based on the findings of this study.

5.1 Recommendations for women's economic empowerment

To promote women's economic empowerment the Program should consider the following strategies targeting both the market and community levels. At the market level, inclusive business models will be developed in partnership with business partners and at the community level, different approaches will be applied through partnerships with non-business partners.

Women's economic empowerment strategies at the market level:

- Introduce improved production techniques and product diversification to reduce market risks for women producers.
- Introduce improved post-harvest techniques (from basic sorting and grading to more complex processing) to enable women to generate higher incomes, particularly in agriculture.
- Promote application of innovative approaches to provide business and technical training for ethnic minority women producer groups (for example farmers field schools, participatory tools, etc.), trialling certification and traceability with more advanced groups of women.
- Support women's cooperatives, producer and common interest groups' access to quality and affordable input supply, technical training, BDS and credit. This includes supporting initiatives led by women who work on collective purchasing of agricultural inputs and collective selling of outputs. In locations with restrictive road access, the project should consider providing capital investment for infrastructure improvement to ensure that local communities can better collect and distribute products.
- Link producer groups to traders, cooperatives and companies, to improve access to markets.
- Improve access to and quality of vocational trainings with linkages to employers, while promoting information on labour market opportunities for ethnic minority women in agriculture and tourism.
- Promote women-led and co-managed businesses to expand their work with women producers and other business partners.
- Improve women's access to capital by promoting behaviour that balances short term cash needs with longer-term investment. The Program should facilitate a joint program between VBSP and other potential sources of capital providers, in order to mobilise more funds for the targeted communities through women's groups and at the same time improve the efficiency and fund disbursement of the VBSP.
- Ensure Partners understand and carefully analyse the risks to ethnic minority women and poor women's vulnerability and exposure to market shocks and food security. Any business model/value chain supported by the Program should aim gradually shift away from subsistence to more diversified livelihoods with stable cash income to ensure that the impact of such shocks and food insecurity are minimised overtime.

Women's economic empowerment strategies at the community, household and individual level:

- Adopt the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) approach to foster transformational changes in gender relations to ensure both women and men understand, embrace and address any gender bias/behaviour (such as women's heavier workloads, impediments to women's economic decision making and lack of women's leadership) to ensure women are more beneficially engaged in market systems. This may include adopting a GALS 'lens' to select relevant products or services and that Partner activities demonstrate measures to address the constraints for ethnic minority women's meaningful engagement in market systems.
- Organise women producers into groups (producer, common interest, collective, cooperatives) for higher productivity and enhanced quality, and link these groups with traders and enterprises. Given men have dominant decision-making power on market-oriented production, women need to be better organised and informed in order to compete more effectively in the market. The Program should encourage and facilitate women in joining, forming and operating production groups and cooperatives, gradually developing women's leadership through such groups.
- Strengthen linkages, cooperation and networking among women and farmers and support initiatives that enhance connections and information sharing among women farmers (e.g. websites, Facebook, social media etc.)
- Promote initiatives that improve ethnic minority women's Vietnamese language, literacy and numeracy skills.
- Provide training and coaching to women in managing the household economy, including budgeting; diversification of livelihoods, combining livelihoods to ensure household food security while generating cash income; and facilitate access to capital for vulnerable people, such as through women's savings and loans groups.
- Raise awareness about the importance of vocational and life skills training and career development for women, especially young women, to participate in the labour market and facilitate linkages with potential employers. This includes providing support to strengthen life skills and career development for adolescent girls, clubs for young mothers and support for community-based caregiver models. Furthermore, professionalising caregiving among communities can help accelerate progress in women's economic empowerment, by providing paid jobs and simultaneously freeing up women's time to engage in economic activities. The Program should consider investment in care infrastructure in support of this initiative.
- Promote women's involvement at different levels of the value chain, such as processing of agriproducts, packaging and labelling of specialised local products such as rice, chicken, ginger and vermicelli, and facilitate linkages with recognised successful models, such as Sa Pa O'chau. The Program should also support investment in post-harvest processing facilities, such as dryers and initial treatment for fruit and vegetable crops and non-timber forest products.
- Engage young, middle-aged and older men, such as the heads of family clans among the Hmong, to support social norm change and build a critical mass within communities to drive large-scale, sustainable transformation to address harmful customary practices such as underage marriage or the prevalence of gender-based violence which limits women's ability to engage in productive employment.
- Encourage enterprises to employ minority personnel (men and women) by offering incentives. A union, of sorts, could be developed amongst these employees from ethnic minority groups as a support base for one another and to support and encourage other members of their communities as they too join the workforce. These

local groups can provide moral and material support for new personnel at the workplace. By collectively demonstrating their value as employees, these support groups will gradually break down prejudicial perceptions often held by employers in the region against ethnic minority employees.

- Improve provision of technical support and other services to ethnic minority women by strengthening information channels (agriculture extension, farmers union and through the activities of common interest groups and cooperatives) and provide direct technical assistance in the form of analysis, planning and production support. In addition, the Program should promote the application of innovative approaches for the delivery of technical advice and capacity building for women farmers, such as through the use of Farmers' Field Schools and participatory tools such as village map, income expenditure tree, calendar training for local peoples.

5.2 Recommendations for GESI

- Provide for longer-term interventions. Transformational change is gradual, particularly when it relates to attitudes and behaviour, and people need consistent support over time. The Program should limit the use of once-off or brief interventions.
- Engage young, middle-aged and older men in the Program to support social norm change and build a critical mass within communities to drive large-scale, sustainable, transformational change, especially with regards to harmful traditional practices.
- Equip local facilitators (women and men) with the skills to engage others within their community and inspire transformation. Especially engage in deep and on-going work with men who co-own responsibilities of household work and childcare to become champions of change and encourage other men in their communities to follow their example.
- Ensure gender empowerment training is linked with financial literacy training to develop young people's capacity and sense of agency to engage in productive and gender aware livelihoods.
- Encourage enterprises to employ ethnic minority personnel (both men and women) through incentives and rewards. Overtime this can establish a network of workers who can provide moral and material support for any new personnel within a workplace and serve to dispel harmful prejudices against ethnic minority workers.
- Encourage employers and businesses to adopt arbitration mechanisms (or provide advocate representatives) to help resolve cases of unfair treatment of ethnic minority employees.
- Ensure activity groups include mixed forums (not only male-only and female-only) to allow participants to share their views with the other sex and generate mutual understanding. This allows people to learn about and understand each other better and can be a useful space where boys and young men and girls and young women can model respect for one another. Single-sex groups should also be convened, for example, to allow men to explore how they may engage in behaviour that perpetuates gender inequality and seek their own solutions to this.

V. ANNEXES:

Annex 1. References

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Annex 2. Village description

List of communities visited

District, province	Commune	Village
Van Ho, Son La	Vân Hồ	Hàng Trùng
		Hua Tật
		Suối Lìn
	Chiềng Yên	Bồng Hà
		Pha Lè
		Phụ Mẫu
Moc Chau, Son La	Tân Lập	Dọi
		Nà Tân
		Tà Phềnh
	Đông Sang	Áng
		Nà Kiến
Muong Khuong, Lao Cai	Lung Khau Nhin	Ma Ngán B
		Chu Lìn Phó
		Sung Lìn Chai
Bac Ha, Lao Cai	Ta Cu Ty	Sa Mao Phó
		Sang Mao Phó
Bat Xat, Lao Cai	Y Ty	Lao Chai
		Ngai Tro
		Sim Sam
Sapa, Lao Cai	Ta Van	Ta Chai Mong
		Seo Mi Ty
		Ta Van Day
Van Ban, Lao Cai	Liem Phu	Hin Ban
		Khôi Ngoa
		O
		Lam Sinh

Lào Cai

1. Ma Ngán B and Chu Lìn Phó villages, Lùng Khẩu Nhin commune, Mường Khương district

Ma Ngán B, a Hmong village, is located around 2km from the commune People's Committee, the central market and 15km from district People's Committee. Villagers often come to the central market to purchase plant seeds, livestock and other daily items. People's livelihoods are mainly focused on cultivation, including corn and rice. Local rice, *Sáng Cù*, is three times more expensive than other types of rice, around 15,000 VND per kg. People are still using buffaloes in cultivation because the soil is mixed with gravel that makes difficult to use agrimotors or harrow machines. Households collect buffalo dung year-round, which is later combined with chemical fertilizers to fertilize their land. The cultivation of corn here has been changed; people no longer grow hybrid corn due to its

high price and difficulty in preserving. Villagers have now shifted to local corn instead. There were some projects that supplied livestock for the village, however most of the livestock contracted diseases and died quickly. As a result, people expressed negative and untrusting attitudes toward the interviewers. Extreme weather occurs frequently in the area, especially drought, so cultivation also suffers. There are some villagers migrating to China to work on banana farms for short periods of time and gain higher incomes. However, there are a few anecdotes that some migrants were abused and died in China.

2. Tả Củ Tỷ commune of Bắc Hà district

Sả Mào Phố: this is a Tày village, located 2-3km from the commune People's Committee. Some households are located on the mountain and the road quality is extremely bad. There are some grocery shops along the main road, but seeds and fertilizers are only sold in the Bac Ha market, which is 30 km from the village. People rely on corn and rice cultivation. However, due to low quality soils, productivity is low. They have to use a lot of fertilizer, 3-4 times for each crop. Some young families want to shift from cultivation to breeding livestock or the service sectors, like providing wedding services. However, their parents do not allow the because they prefer traditional livelihoods, which is assumed to be more sustainable. The Province has a program to support seedlings for the village focusing on pine trees and cinnamon. There are a lot of villagers migrating to China to work on farms.

Sảng Mào Phố: this is a Dao village, which located near the commune People's Committee and is easily accessible. Soil in the village is sandy and drought is common, which results in less developed cultivation. Beside corn and rice, people also plant cinnamon, cardamom and green tea. There are frequent livestock diseases in the village, so breeding is not developed either. The commune market is close to the village, and is convenient for people to participate in trading activities. There are some people migrating to China to work for short period of time. Others, especially women, in some cases move to China after being beaten by their husbands.

3. Y Tỷ commune, Bát Xát district

Ngải Trồ: a Hmong village where the commune People's Committee, Border Guard Station, and central market are located. The village is accessible from the city. Tourism is well established in the commune, offering some interesting tours like trekking in Lao Than, cloud hunting in Lao Chai, and an autumn festival in Ngai Tro. Tourism services also include homestays and local restaurants. Since Y Ty is a border commune, it restricts access for foreigners and as a consequence, most tourists staying overnight in the area are domestic. Villagers mainly cultivate rice, cardamom, spices and herbs. Spices and herb have been their main source of income. However, the extreme weather like snow in recent years has caused reductions in productivity. This year, the village is also suffering from drought and there is not enough water for rice and corn cultivation. The soil contains a lot of gravel so farmers are unable to use harrow machines or agrimotors. People have to rely on buffalos to plough fields.

Lao Chải 1: is a Ha Nhi village, located 3 km from the central market and easy to access by car or motorbike. The village also suffers from extreme weather that negatively affect

plants and livestock. People mainly cultivate corn and herbs. The landscape in the village is beautiful but sanitary conditions are poor as people keep livestock like pigs and buffalos close to their house without proper drainage. There are a lot of villagers moving to China to work. However, due to low illiteracy levels, they are often exploited by Chinese employers intentionally withholding labourers' salaries on contractual grounds.

4. Tả Van commune, Sa Pa district

Tả Van Giáy 1 and 2: are Giay villages, located at the centre of the commune and around 8km from Sa Pa town. It is easy to access the villages from the town although the main road is quite damaged. The landscape is beautiful, and tourism has been well developed over decades. There are many restaurants, homestays, grocery shops and other services, like karaoke and massages. However, the most successful businesses in the villages belong to the Kinh group or western people. Giay people also actively participate in tourism but have limited resources (finance and information technology), which plays a key role in reaching guests. Around 50% of homestays are owned by local people, and the other half are distributed between the Kinh and westerners. The latter has more guests than the first group since they have more resources to invest in facilities and services. Some Giay households still undertake cultivation and livestock breeding while participating in tourism. In these households, women normally become housekeepers or receptionists in homestays and restaurants, while men are responsible for agriculture activities. Meanwhile, others have completely shifted from agriculture to service sector. Those still engaged in agriculture rely on corn and rice cultivation. However, the cold weather during winter and the lack of good quality fertilizers make cultivation less viable.

Tả Chải Hmong: a White Hmong village, located 2km away from the commune centre and 10km from the town. It shares the main damaged road with Ta Van Giay 1 and 2. The small road leading to the village is uphill and only small cars can reach the centre of the village. The main livelihood of local people is cultivation including rice, corn and cardamom. However, the productivity is low and not enough to support people's lives. Therefore, many male villagers become construction workers in Sa Pa and female villagers are working in the tourism sectors as housekeepers, handicraft sellers, and receptionists. Since the government established a new rule that requires tour guides to have certification, many female guides have had to quit their jobs. This is because they are illiterate or cannot speak Kinh language fluently enough to attend classes and gain the certification. In other words, opportunities in tourism are only accessible for people who are proficient in Kinh language and/or English or other foreign languages. In addition, the village is predominantly Protestant.

5. Liêm Phú commune, Văn Bàn district

Khối Ngọa village: The road connecting the highway and commune is extremely damaged because of heavy trucks working in mines in the area. It takes hours to drive the 30 km road from the highway to the commune. The road within the commune is much better. Khoi Ngoa, a Tay and Hmong village, is located at the end of that road, around 3-4km from the commune People's Committee. There are more than 90 households who are Tay and around more than 10 households which are Hmong. Some of the households are mixed between these two groups. The village landscape is beautiful and has the potential

to develop tourism with key attractions such as the Bay waterfall. However, cars cannot access the waterfall due to bad traffic conditions. Local people heard about an ecological tourism project to be established in the area, but no one knows when it will start. In the village, Tay households seem to have better economic status in comparison with Hmong group. The main livelihoods here are cultivation and livestock breeding. People plant rice, cinnamon, and cardamom. They also breed buffalos, chicken and pigs. The soils in the rice fields are not firm enough to use agri-motors, so people are still using buffalos to plough. Hmong people still practice slash-and-burn agriculture. There were several agriculture projects including a World Bank funded project, which aimed to support local people in livestock breeding. However, the livestock were sick even before being given to the households or were not able to adapt with local climate conditions and died soon after arriving at households. Local people rely on wood exploitation and cardamom harvesting. Cardamom harvesting has suffered difficulties due to cold weather in winter. The amount of cardamom production has reduced significantly, for instance from 30 quintals of dried fruits previously to 6kg of fresh fruits last year. Meanwhile, wood exploitation is one of the few ways for local people to earn money although it is prohibited by the Government. People from surrounding communes also come to exploit forest in Khoi Ngoa because the village is located at the end of the road. In addition, due to this road characteristic, trade is not thriving in the area. The nearest market is 15km away from the village. This causes more difficulties for people to improve their economic conditions.

Sơn La

6. Vân Hồ commune, Vân Hồ district

Hang Trùng 1 hamlet

This hamlet is located next to the People's Committee Office of Van Ho and the biggest market in this commune. Most people living here are the Muong (90%) and Thai (10%). Big local roads are available around the hamlet allowing mid-size cars to access the hamlets. The residential density of this hamlet is rather high, so the cultivated land area is reduced. It is the reason why the interviewed households engage in agriculture far from their residences. They focus mostly on cultivation rather than livestock breeding. As an interviewee said, there are only 2 households in this hamlet which continue to keep buffaloes and oxen in large quantities. Now peach tree is planted in this hamlet because it provides yields in a short period of time (2 years) and all parts of the tree including flowers, fruits, trees, branches can be sold. Furthermore, its harvest life is 15 years. Some of interviewed households want to develop their peach farms into tourist sites but they lack financial capital to do so. Presently, they open their peach farms freely to welcome travellers, receiving approximately 400 entries per year.

Suối Lìn hamlet

Although located 5km away from the People's Committee Office of Van Ho and the biggest market in this commune, this hamlet is connected to PCO by big local road. Most people living here are of the Yao (Dao Tien) ethnic group. Because the manners and customs of Yao people is not opened to strangers, this hamlet is not suitable for tourist development, interviewees and officers of the commune said. Nearly all the local people earn a livelihood by cultivating wet rice and maize. The product of wet rice farming is almost supplies enough for subsistence, while the production of maize generates income. Exhaustive cultivating year by year leads people to use a lot of chemical fertilizers in order to get the best harvest. After each crop, men in this hamlet often move to town to find

hired jobs in construction. Low levels of literacy and limited Kinh language skills makes it difficult for these workers to agree and sign contracts for employment and so are commonly taken advantage of in terms of pay. In 2016, an employer did not pay 108 million VND owed to 30 men in this hamlet but no contracts were signed and so their recourse to justice is limited.

Hua Tạt hamlet

Although located 10km from the People's Committee Office of Van Ho and the biggest market in this commune, this hamlet is connected to the central area by big local road. Most people living here are of the Hmong ethnic group. Both the natural and cultural landscape of this hamlet are very typical for upland life in Northern Vietnam. About 5 households here run homestay services which required big investments of 2 to 5 billion VND. The development of tourist activities allows remaining households to receive income from visitors. People who do not join the tourist sector make their livelihoods by cultivating wet rice and maize. The production of both wet rice and maize are almost enough to meet household demand or cattle raising. They generate income by cultivating plum trees, passion fruit and haricot. Keeping of buffaloes and oxen has decreased because there is less and less grassland available in this hamlet.

7. Chiềng Yên commune, Vân Hồ district

Bống Hạ hamlet

Bong Ha is located in a valley at the end of former Number Six road. The main road of Chieng Yen commune runs through this hamlet. The biggest market and the People's Committee Office of Chieng Yen is built next to this hamlet. Local people usually come to this market to buy cheap products that are sold by Kinh people but go to Mai Chau or Sub-area 81 markets to sell their local products. Most people living here are of the Thai ethnic group (White Thai). Access to clean water is limited and fields are drying up. In the rainy season of last year, storms caused landslides and overwhelmed large parts of the fields. So, people have to deal with not only weather changing over seasons but also decreasing land area for cultivation. Cattle and domestic fowls farming are often threatened by plague. Green tea planting, an important activity giving local people significant income, is challenged by access to traders. There was a Taiwan Tea Company which previously came and bought all tea products but has since stopped. Now income from tea is minimal.

Phu Mau 1 hamlet

Phu Mau 1 is a potential hamlet for tourist development of Chieng Yen commune because it is rich in natural resources like fresh fish springs and Tat Nang waterfall. These natural landscapes are beautiful but dangerous because they are still wild and not managed for tourism yet. Because some young traveller died at the waterfall in recent years, the number of tourists has decreased significantly. Local people are trying to protect these natural resources and develop tourist activities but do not have enough capital to build the infrastructure to expand tourism. Most people in this hamlet are of the Thai ethnic group (White Thai). They still earn a living by cultivating land. Despite the long and narrow mountain road connecting the hamlet with the centre of Chieng Yen commune, they profit by ample sources of water and benign land and are able to cultivate two staple crops. Their local products are usually brought to Twenty-Two or Seventieth market for selling. All the interviewed households plant Cao Phong oranges because productivity has been

demonstrated to be good in recent years (all products are sold out; the merchants will come to the hamlet to buy the products and local people do not have to transport their product to the market for selling).

Pha Le hamlet

Pha Le is located in the upland area next to residential areas of other hamlets, so it has a modest area of farming land. Most people living here are of the Yao group. In order to have fields to cultivate wet rice, they have to dig up springs to use the even and flat area. Some interviewed households changed the direction of springs to use the stream bed because it is even and flat. Local houses were built on the hill slope or on the edge of a chasm. Landslides have destroyed houses but people do not have enough money to hire excavators. In view of the fact that the remaining land here is impoverished due to alpine relief, local people focus mostly on livestock farming than land cultivation. Buffaloes and oxen are kept as a flock and livestock farming activities bring local people a good income. Wet rice and maize are main crops cultivated here. Excess crop is sold to grocery shops located near main road. These shops are usually run by Kinh or migrants.

8. Tân Lập commune, Mộc Châu district

Doi 1, 2 hamlets

Doi 1 hamlet is adjacent to Doi 2 hamlet but Doi 1 has more advantages in natural resources and infrastructure than Doi 2. Doi 1 is located around a big local road (a 24 seat-car or a 3tons-truck can access the road), while Doi 2 has just a small road (motorbikes only). Most people living in Doi 1 are of the Thai ethnic group (White Thai) and are indigenous to the area. Doi 2 was established as a resettlement hamlet for Black Thai ethnic communities. Due to different customs, Doi 2's people build separate recreation houses from Doi 1. Tourist activities run in Doi 1 only. People living in both hamlets still earn a livelihood by cultivation and livestock farming. In Doi 1, people have more even and flat fields than Doi 2. Farming lands of Doi 2 are often far from the residential areas and connected by dirt roads only. They have to cover the vehicle wheels with iron chains to pass the road on rainy days. All the interviewed households have switched to plant fruit trees like longan, pommello and plum because of their productivity. However, these fruit trees require a long time to yield, so they plant short-term crops like waky pumpkin, squash and passionfruit to improve their income. Thanks to a Taiwan Tea Company coming here and buying the products of tea, the interviewed households in both hamlets have stable income from tea farming. In addition, there is a tea processing factory in Doi 1 but the jobs they offer are so exhausting that many local workers have left these jobs.

Ta Phinh 2 hamlet

Ta Phinh 2 is located far from the People's Committee Office of Tan Lap and the biggest market in this commune. The highway runs through this hamlet. Most people living here are of the Hmong ethnic group. They build houses near the state road toward the hills. A large number of women are illiterate and only men can communicate in Kinh language. The researchers had to cancel 4 interviews because the interviewees could not communicate in Kinh language. Ta Phinh was established in 2000 as a resettlement hamlet, so people living there have modest farming areas. Their fields are very far from the residential area. They have to go to the fields by walking because the road is very small and dangerous. Even motorbikes cannot travel on it. Most of the farming area is

used for maize cultivation. The income from maize is generally used to buy rice for the whole year's consumption. Local people often buy seeds from a store near the hamlet. They learn about new seeds, the way to plant and fertilizers from the store only. The quality of seeds is not verified, so last year the entire hamlet had a lean maize harvest.

Nà Tân

This is a resettlement village for Thai people and is located at the centre of the commune. It is easy to access the village. Houses are built by the state and imitate Thai traditional design but using different materials. All the houses look exactly the same, from the design to the colours. Villagers moved from Muong La to Na Tan in 2003, in order to clear the land for a hydro-power station that was built. The main livelihood is green tea cultivation since people do not have sufficient land to cultivate rice. They used to plant corn, however after significant reductions in the price of corn, people shifted to fruit tree plantations, such as plums and vegetables. Due to the high density of the population and limited land, most of the households do not have gardens to plant vegetables around their houses. The nearest market is located 25km from the village and therefore, people cannot participate in trading easily.

9. Đông Sang commune, Mộc Châu district

Áng 2 hamlet

The People's Committee Office of Dong Sang commune is located in Ang 2. This hamlet has significant natural resources compared to other hamlets in this commune. Pine Forest and Ang Lake are two well-known tourist bases of Ang 2. Most people living here are of the Thai ethnic group (White Thai). They provide various services related to tourist activities like homestays and bike and boat hire. However, the services run by Kinh or migrant people have more clients than local people's services. Some interviewed households said that they do not know how to promote their services on the internet which is a source of guests for other service providers. Those who do not enter the tourist sector continue to cultivate land for income. They have switched from maize to haricot cultivation because maize requires big investments and care but brings very low income. Haricot not only requires less care but also produces yields in 2 months after planting and yields about 15 times per crop. The challenge to haricot cultivation is overcoming the lack of water resources. Farming land is often far from people's homes and so, they have to use pack-horses to bring water from their houses to the farming areas (one pack-horse can carry a maximum of 60 liters at a time). Those households who do not own pack-horses depend completely on weather.

Nà Kiến hamlet

Na Kien is located in an upland area far from the People's Committee Hall of Dong Sang commune (about 10 km). The road to this village is rather small and sloping. Most people living here are of the Hmong ethnic group. Due to far distances (about 20 km) from Seventieth market, local people often go to this market for 3 or 4 days in order to buy basic consumer goods. They mostly make their livelihoods by cultivating maize and arrowroot. Those households which have plum and peach trees will receive better income than other households. In the frost period from November to January (by lunar calendar), people cannot plant any trees. Cows are kept as a flock because it improves their ability to survive the cold. A large number of women are illiterate. Some interviewed households are burdened with large debts., even passing on debts to the next generations.