



Vietnam: Women's involvement in Coffee Agroforestry Value Chains

Globally, in the coffee sector and smallholder agriculture in developing countries, there is a distinct gender gap in key factors that enable women's active participation in and contribution to the coffee value chain and in farm and domestic decisions, such as decisions over credit, agricultural inputs, and training opportunities and division of labor and time.

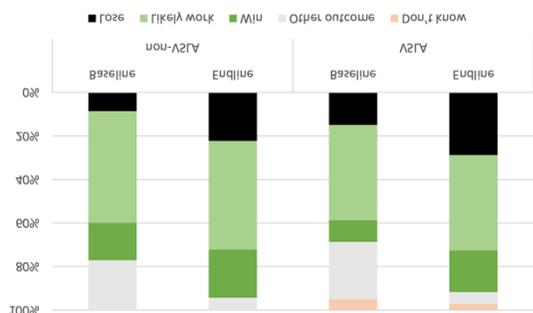
The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact membership of VSLAs and training has on finance and gender awareness to enhance women's participation in the coffee value chain. The research discussed in this working paper was conducted between April 2018 and November 2019 in Northwest Vietnam, as an add-on to the ongoing "Technologically Enhanced Agricultural Livelihoods" (TEAL) project, which started in 2017. The TEAL project is being implemented among 2,600 direct beneficiaries in Son La and Dien Bien provinces with the aim to enable ethnic minority women to establish sustainable, resilient, and profitable livelihoods in the Arabica coffee value chain.

This study assesses Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA) impacts and related training on gender equality and women's access to coffee markets in an ongoing coffee-project in northwest Vietnam. All 169 women in this survey received gender equality and finance training, with one group being members of a VSLA and taking out small loans. With Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), women related their perception of their decision-making power over a range of 18 tasks related to household and agricultural responsibilities and use of income and social activities.

Key Findings

- **Active gender and finance training translated to real changes in gender dynamics.** For more costly "larger purchases", few women in the baseline had 'full or major power' to make decisions on their own. The number of 'little or no power' decreased from over 50% to around 20% in the VSLA group, with 'some power' increasing to over 50%. The significant increase in 'some power' indicates a sharing of responsibility between men and women regarding larger purchases.

ΕΙΧΥΠΕ 2: ΡΕΖΥΙΟΙ ΟΙ ΝΕΓΟΤΙΑΖΟΝ ΟΥΣΙΟΜΕΣ ΔΕ ΒΕΛΤΕΡΩΕΡ ΡΥ ΜΟΜΕΝ ΙΝ ΔΙΕΝ ΒΙΕΝ ΑΥΟ ΖΟΥ



• **Membership of a VSLA helped women to improve their financial literacy and improve their negotiating abilities.** Negotiation to buy agricultural inputs and getting a partial advance pay and the remaining share according to market prices had improved. However, there was a decline in the number of women who negotiated coffee sales from 40% to 27% in Son La and 57% to 43% in Dien Bien. The reduction in attempts to negotiate may be due to women realizing the futility of negotiation through their increased involvement in coffee production and coffee marketing activities as they learned that coffee prices are fixed *a-priori*.

- **Husbands to women began to reconsider gender roles and shift towards equal sharing of responsibility and decision-making with their wives.** About 9/10 of the participants said they became more aware of women’s roles and time allocation. A few men stated, “doing housework on top of farm work is physically demanding” and “while housework might not generate income directly, it is important for sustaining the household as a whole.”
- **Access to finance was important to members since most respondents did not have a bank account.** The endline study showed that VSLA households borrowed on average VND49.7 million ± 3.6 million from banks and VND3.3 million ± 0.7 million from the VSLA. In Son La, the number of households with bank loans increased from 51% to 59% among the VSLA members, non-VSLA members remained at 23%. In Dien Bien, among VSLA members it remained at 65% and reduced among non-VSLA members from 31% to 26%.
- **The number of households with bank accounts increased.** In Dien Bien among VSLA members from 4% to 14% of the households, among non-VSLA members from 1% to 6%. In Son La among VSLA members from 3% to 4% and among non-VSLA members from 0% to 5% of the households.
- **VSLA loans provided for urgent needs with less complicated procedures compared to banks loans.** VSLA-households with loans from VSLA increased from 4% to 11% in Dien Bien, and from 10% to 38% in Son La.

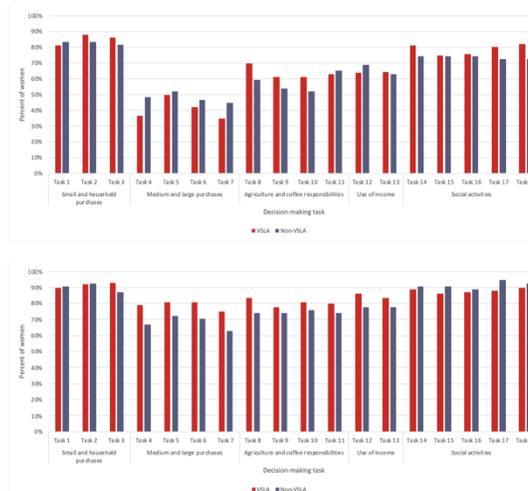


Figure 3. Percentage of women with “full,” “major” or “some” decision-making power in the VSLA vs non-VSLA groups for the a) baseline and b) endline. Source: baseline and endline surveys 2018 and 2019.

Recommendations

- **Implement gender and finance training.** Develop trainings for women as a means to increase their involvement in the household and farm economics and enable access to loans for women as a means for their inclusion in agriculture value chains.
- **Engage the whole household in gender training.** Ensure all family members are receptive to adjustments in the gender division of responsibility, labor and decision making. As time poverty and labor shortage influence decisions, the timings of trainings and new interventions needs to consider constraints to equal opportunities for participation.
- **Consider gender issues in all general development activities such as information dissemination or technical workshops.** Women preferred to receive information indirectly via their social circle rather than through direct contact with the seller as men usually do. Men had more diversity in their preferred income sources and were more likely to access formal and official information sources, such as coffee companies and extension. This difference in information access and limited knowledge in certain spheres affected women’s agency and ability to make decisions regarding those matters.