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**Engaging with the private sector for development:
A critical analysis of attempts to partner with business for women's
economic empowerment in Vietnam**

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requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

Development agencies have increasingly recognised the private sector as playing an important role in the progress toward achieving sustainable development. While scholars contest the private sector's role in development, development agencies and NGOs continue collaborating with the private sector to deliver social results for the poor. There have been numerous studies on the role of large companies, mostly multinational corporations, in development. However, limited literature sheds light on the engagement of donors with micro and small enterprises in development as well as their impacts on women's economic empowerment. This research aims to fill this gap by critically investigating donor-private sector partnerships implemented under an Australian aid programme in which micro and small enterprises are engaged to economically empower ethnic minority women in Vietnam.

My findings suggest that micro and small businesses are important development partners in creating economic opportunities for low-income women. Locally- and socially-embedded businesses can achieve success and sustainability through their ability to engage with ethnic minority women. They also have the potential to create economic, social, and cultural impacts. They can be inclusive, with some small businesses reaching poor ethnic minority women regardless of production scales, and they can help women improve their incomes by supporting women to cultivate and sell unique, traditional, and cultural products. However, these private sector partners face challenges that constrain their partnership with development agencies and limit the objective of empowering ethnic minority women.

My research findings challenge the instrumentalist notion of women's economic empowerment, which donors commonly deploy in partnerships with a business by focusing solely on providing training and access to productive resources for market integration. It confirms that this instrumentalist approach is insufficient to genuinely empower women. Instead, my research recommends a holistic *donor-private sector partnership framework for women's empowerment* to plug the gaps and transform the prevailing women's economic empowerment approach. This proposed framework includes two elements which emerged from the research findings: relational and collective empowerment. Relational

empowerment emphasises the importance of the relational aspects of empowerment and how changes in power relations in the surrounding environment affect women's empowerment. Collective empowerment reflects the need for collective action to influence changes in social norms and rules to recognise and improve women's positions within households and the broader community. The proposed framework also involves civil society organisations, non-government organisations, and local governments as important partners in addressing unequal structures and barriers to women and enabling transformative outcomes for women. These research findings will support development agencies to better engage with the private sector to enable ethnic minority women's empowerment.

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Abbreviations

CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
BoP	Bottom of Pyramid
DCED	The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
GREAT	Gender- Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism
MAD	Masculinities and Development
MSME	Micro Small Medium Enterprises
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PMU	Programme Management Unit
RA	Research Assistant
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
WAD	Women and Development
WID	Women in Development
WEE	Women's economic empowerment

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Introduction

I started my career as a development practitioner in 1997, beginning with a project funded by the Asian Development Bank and then working with the Danish and Australian aid development cooperation programmes in different development sectors in Vietnam. I witnessed the donor communities' changing approaches to delivering aid programmes, especially in the Australian aid programmes, where I have had 14 years of work experience since 2004. These approaches evolved and changed from a direct aid delivery model via project/programme management units established by donors or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) or managing contractors, to a budget support approach, channelling aid funds to support locally-owned programmes or sector programmes. However, in Vietnam, engaging with the private sector in development programmes has only emerged in recent years, as the government has increasingly recognised the roles of the private sector, especially in the context that funding sources from official development assistance (ODA) have been declining. This makes Vietnam an interesting place to understand donor-private sector engagement for development.

Interest in private-sector engagement in development has grown over the past decade since the Fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan in 2011 recognised business as an engine of economic growth, creating wealth, incomes, and jobs and contributing to poverty reduction (OECD, 2011). For Australian aid programmes, engaging with the private sector became an essential approach following the release of the Australian *Ministerial Statement on engaging the private sector in aid and development – Creating shared value through partnership on 31 August 2015*. According to the Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Julie Bishop, “for the first time Australia had an aid policy which clearly identified the private sector as an essential partner to achieving sustainable development outcomes” (Bishop, 2015, para.1). I was assigned to lead one of the flagship Australian aid programmes—the Gender-

Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT) programme, which pioneered partnerships with the private sector in 2017 in Vietnam.

My first-hand experience working with business owners and their staff under the GREAT programme drove my interest to know more. They are dynamic, creative, and efficient, very different from my experience working with local government officers. They did not passively rely on donor funding and were willing to co-invest in donor-funded programmes if they saw the potential for business development. However, they had no experience working in development programmes and only a vague understanding of the development concepts used by donors, such as women's economic empowerment. I started wondering whether working with the private sector could help development agencies achieve their development objectives and bring benefits to vulnerable groups.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)—the aid administration agency in Australia— expects to work with businesses to “leverage each other's assets, connections, creativity and expertise to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes” (DFAT, n.d). The GREAT programme's mutual outcomes are a) that ethnic minority women benefit from participating in the business value chains, and b) the business makes profit. However, questions remain concerning whether ethnic minority women are empowered and if they have benefited as the programme expected? What are the issues that donors need to consider engaging with the private sector in development programmes? These questions inspired me to carry out this research.

1.2. The GREAT Programme

This research uses the Australian DFAT funded “GREAT programme” as a case study of private sector engagement in development. The GREAT programme aims to promote women's economic empowerment, mostly targeting ethnic minority women, in the northwest mountainous area of Vietnam. The programme has been ongoing since November 2017, with a total budget of AU\$ 33.7 million for phase 1 (2017-21). The GREAT programme has three objectives:

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 business partnerships: Selected private sector actors within the agriculture and tourism sectors profitably and sustainably engage with more women as producers, suppliers, traders, and 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.*

(DFAT, 2016, iv)

The partnership with the private sector under the GREAT programme is expected to help ethnic minority women improve their incomes, become more confident, and have increased decision-making power through participation in agricultural and tourism value chains. The partnership provides technical training and production inputs to women and their families and supports the business in upgrading processing facilities and expanding to new markets. Businesses are expected to contribute up to 50% of the implementation costs. In some cases, non-government organisations (NGOs) and local government agencies are also involved under separate partnerships with GREAT to provide additional support to the business to achieve programme objectives.

1.3. Rationale and Scope

The private sector is increasingly recognised as playing an important role in the progress toward achieving sustainable development, and more recently, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (Kindornay & Reilly-King, 2013; Nelson, 2010; United Nations Global Compact, 2017). For example, the SDG agenda, which the United Nations endorsed, gives the private sector equal responsibility as governments, development agencies, and civil society to address development challenges:

Private business activity, investment, and innovation are major drivers of productivity, inclusive economic growth, and job creation. We acknowledge the diversity of the private sector, ranging from micro-enterprises to cooperatives to multinationals. We call upon all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges (UN, 2015, p. 29).

Businesses are expected to play an active and significant role in development beyond their conventional notion of corporate social responsibility (CSR) (Scheyvens et al., 2016). They are also expected to foster new business models to combat development issues and reduce poverty on a much broader scale than what can be achieved under direct aid interventions (Morioka et al., 2017; Wach, 2012). Many corporations have already taken the initiative to develop innovative business models that mutually benefit the poor and the business. Others have engaged with development agencies, international finance institutions, and NGOs in an attempt to solve development problems in all sectors (Di Bella et al., 2013b; Kindornay & Reilly-King, 2013; OECD, 2016b).

While some multilateral development agencies and donors have embraced the private sector as a key player in development, the role of the private sector in development has been contested by a number of scholars and NGOs (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Chamberlain & Anseeuw, 2019a; Likoko & Kini, 2017; McEwan et al., 2017; Oxfam, 2019a; Ros-Tonen et al., 2019; Sayer, 2005; Scheyvens et al., 2016). For example, an overall concern is whether "profit-motivated businesses really make a meaningful contribution to the achievement of the SDGs, or are we likely to see 'business as usual', which results in greater profits for some, and lost opportunities for many?" (Scheyvens et al., 2016, p. 372). Nevertheless, there are increasing partnerships between development agencies and the private sector to deliver development programmes for economic growth, poverty alleviation, and achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (G20, 2015; OECD, 2016b).

While there are numerous studies on the role of large companies, mostly multinational corporations, in development (Blowfield, 2012; Lashitew & van Tulder, 2017; Lucci, 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Prahalad, 2006; Prahalad & Hart, 2002), there is comparatively limited literature shedding light on micro and small inclusive businesses and their impact on women's economic empowerment. My research aims to fill this gap. Further explanation of how the research fills knowledge gaps is presented in Chapter Two.

1.4. Aims, Objectives, and Research questions

In response to the research problem above, the study's overarching aim is to investigate the donor approach to partnerships with micro and small enterprises that seek to economically empower ethnic minority women in Vietnam.

The research objectives

In order to achieve this aim, the following objectives have been determined:

1. To understand the perceptions of businesses about women's economic empowerment.
2. To identify strengths, limitations, and challenges of private sector involvement in women's economic programmes.
3. To understand if participation in agriculture and tourism production value chains empowers ethnic minority women.
4. To identify how donors can better engage with the private sector to support ethnic minority women's empowerment.

Research questions

Therefore, this research addresses the following research questions in the context of Vietnam:

- **RQ1:** What are the perceptions and understandings of businesses about women's economic empowerment?
- **RQ2:** What are the strengths, limitations, and challenges of private sector involvement in the development partnership for women's economic empowerment?
- **RQ3:** How do ethnic minority women benefit and become empowered from their engagement in agriculture and tourism production value chains?
- **RQ4:** How could donors better engage with the private sector to support ethnic women's empowerment?

1.5. Significance of the Study

My study contributes to scholarly understanding of micro and small businesses' roles in promoting inclusiveness and their impact on women's economic empowerment, especially ethnic minority women. It proposes a new theoretical framework for donor-business partnerships for women's empowerment. It also contributes to the methodological development of other scholars by proposing practical strategies for remote fieldwork, as was necessary during the global pandemic. This research methodology has been published (Nguyen et al., 2022).

The research further helps to determine how development agencies can work with the private sector to support women's empowerment, thereby improving the lives of disadvantaged groups who want to engage in business in Vietnam and other developing countries. This is significant given an increasing interest from development agencies to partner with the private sector in development programmes, such as those in Australia and New Zealand.

1.6. Chapter Outline

Chapter One has introduced the personal motivation for doing this study and the programme that the research focuses on. It has indicated a research need regarding the role of micro and small businesses in partnerships with development agencies for women's economic empowerment. The research's aims, objectives, research questions, and significance of the study are also outlined.

Chapter Two begins with a discussion of the roles of the private sector in development, and how different terms and concepts are being used in development programmes and academia. It highlights the concept of the private sector as a development agent and inclusive business, which is an active model of the private sector engagement for development. The chapter also provides the context of private sector engagement in development in Vietnam, including the roles of the private sector in development, and the status of donor-private sector partnerships in development programmes and inclusive businesses in Vietnam. The chapter

further includes discussions on a growing trend of engagement with the private sector in development programmes and concerns about the roles of the private sector in development.

Chapter Three discusses different evolving approaches to women's development, from Women in Development to Gender and Development and Masculinities and Development approaches. It examines the empowerment approach, including the conceptualisation of power and theories of empowerment. The efficiency approach to women's development is also analysed because it influenced development agencies to narrow the radical approach to women's empowerment to women's economic empowerment. The chapter then discusses the application of women's economic empowerment in development programmes, particularly in agriculture and tourism production value chains on which the research focuses. The current concerns and criticisms about this approach are also presented. The chapter concludes with an introduction of a conceptual framework to study women's empowerment in development programmes using a donor-private sector partnership approach.

Chapter Four presents the research methodology. It discusses data collection and analysis methods, the selection of a case study and its subunits, information about the research location and the three selected businesses, and the justification for why these business partnerships were selected. It outlines the research design, including Plan A and Plan B, to cope with the progress of the COVID-19 pandemic, and how the research was carried out in practice using research assistants. My positionality as an insider and outsider is also reflected upon. The chapter discusses related ethical issues and how to address these issues in the research.

Chapter Five provides the research context in Vietnam. It presents background information on Vietnam's general social, political, and economic environment for private sector development. It also discusses gender inequality and issues that ethnic minorities are facing in Vietnam. The discussion focuses on the socio-economic development status and gender norms of the three ethnic minority groups, Tay, Dao, and Hmong because these groups are involved directly in my research.

Chapter Six presents research findings to answer my first two research questions. It explores how private sector partners perceive the concept of women's economic empowerment. The GREAT's approach to women's economic empowerment is also analysed to understand the challenges the programme faces if two partners do not share the same understanding and expectations. The strengths, limitations, and challenges of the partnership with micro and small businesses in women's economic empowerment development programmes are also considered.

Chapter Seven presents research findings to answer the third research question, which examines how ethnic minority women are empowered by engaging with businesses in agriculture and tourism production value chains. The discussions are based on in-depth interviews and focus groups with men and women of the three ethnic minority groups involved in the three business cases. Women's empowerment is analysed in four dimensions: Economic, Psychological, Social, and Political empowerment.

Chapter Eight discusses the research findings from both Chapter Six and Chapter Seven in line with concepts and theories in literature on private sector engagement for development and women's empowerment presented in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. It identifies gaps in the prevailing women's economic empowerment framework applied by development agencies. It also discusses the relational and collective aspects of empowerment, the interconnection between economic empowerment and three other dimensions, and what caution should be taken in interpreting empowerment signs. I use the case of the director of a herbal cooperative to highlight the interconnectedness of the four dimensions of empowerment when women are empowered.

Chapter Nine highlights the research contributions in both theoretical and practical areas. It offers a new theoretical framework for the donor-businesses partnership approach for women's empowerment and practical recommendations for how donors could better engage with micro and small businesses to empower ethnic minority women. The chapter also includes research limitations and recommendations for future research. It concludes with my reflections on personal learning.

CHAPTER TWO. PRIVATE SECTOR ENGAGEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT

2.1. Introduction

This chapter seeks to review different perspectives on the private sector's role in development, and how related terms and concepts are being used in development programmes and academia. It also discusses theoretical models of businesses as development agents and current critiques of these models. The inclusive business model is highlighted as it is the model that the GREAT programme associates itself with. The context of the private sector development and the attempts of development partners and the government to work with the private sector in development in Vietnam are also depicted. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the motivations of both donors and the private sector, and issues around donor-private sector partnerships. Overall, it helps to advance understanding of current concerns about the engagement of the private sector in development and the donor-private sector partnership approach in development, which is the focus of the research.

2.2. Concepts of private sector involvement in development

The private sector is highly diverse in scale and type, ranging from one-person enterprises to large transnational corporations and from informal to formal organisations in a variety of economic fields. Some development agencies and scholars widely interpret the term private sector to include small-scale farmers, self-employed shoeshine workers, street vendors, hawkers, small and medium-sized enterprises, large locally-owned companies, and multinational conglomerates (DFAT, 2017; Knorrninga & Helmsing, 2008).

A diverse range of terms and concepts are used in development discourse when discussing the private sector's involvement in development (Vaes & Huyse, 2015). Di Bella et al. (2013a) make a useful distinction between three concepts based on the level of interaction of the private sector involvement in development: private sector in development, private sector development, and private sector engagements for development.

The first concept is the “private sector in development”. This refers to the effects of the private sector on development and economic growth through its regular core business operations. Effects can be positive, such as job creation, provision of goods and services and paying of taxes, or negative, such as environmental degradation and poor labour practices. This concept is similar to the concept of the private sector as “a development tool” described by Blowfield and Dolan (2014, p. 22) in which business is engaged “as usual” in economic activities to achieve economic growth, creating jobs, goods and services, but assuming little responsibility for the impact of those activities.

The second concept is “private sector development”. This refers to the activities carried out by governments or development organisations to create an enabling environment for businesses, including foreign direct investment, to flourish. The rationale for this support is the expectation that the development of the private sector will create wealth, income, and jobs and in turn, contribute to poverty reduction (Kindornay & Reilly-King, 2013; OECD, 2011; Schulpen & Gibbon, 2002). In this case, the private sector can be a target beneficiary of development programs.

The third concept is “private sector engagements for development”, which refers to a more active role of the private sector in development. Activities can either be led by a business or by development agencies. For example, development agencies engage with the private sector to develop products and services that will benefit the poor, or to improve access to value chains for local smallholders, and/or reduce the environmental impacts. For instance, International Finance Corporation (IFC) collaborated with Tetra Laval Group, a food production, processing, packaging, and distribution corporation, and a local dairy processor in Senegal to increase income for smallholder farmers by scaling up milk production and collection (Swedish FAO Committee, 2018). In another example, CARE Bangladesh worked with multinational and domestic companies to provide additional incomes for poor women through selling these companies’ products door-to-door in rural areas (Dolan et al., 2012). In addition, Oxfam and DFAT have impact investment programmes, which provide business development support to businesses to develop services that benefit the poor, or include the poor in their value chains (DFAT, 2015b; UNESCAP & iBAN, 2021).

Blowfield and Dolan (2014) continue by outlining the criteria by which a private business can be defined as “a development agent”. They define more active roles as a development agent for private sector entities than the three concepts articulated by Di Bella et al. (2013a). The private sector as a development agent requires the business to deploy its capital for development purposes, give primacy to benefits for the poor, and be conscientious and accountable for development-oriented efforts. This requires the private sector to progress beyond the traditional impacts of business as a development tool. For example, it is not sufficient to only create jobs and make products and services available as businesses should also take care of the quality of the jobs (decent work) and whether the products and services are made to meet the needs of, and are accessible to, the poor (Blowfield, 2012). Of the three concepts, the “private sector as a development agent” is thus the highest level of engagement with development.

2.3. Private sector as a development agent

There are several different ways in which businesses can act as development agents. The most influential theories of business as a development agent are the “fortune at the Bottom of Pyramid” (BoP) of Prahalad and Hart (2002), and the “shared value” of Porter and Kramer (2011). These two theories have had a strong impact on the proliferation and development of “private sector as a development agent” models, such as microfinance, inclusive business, fairtrade, making markets work for the poor (M4P), and other business initiatives that seek to reduce poverty in developing countries (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014).

The fortune at the BoP theory claims that there is much potential purchasing power within poor people who live on less than \$2 a day at the BoP, and that a business can make profits by selling products and services to the poor and, in turn, help eradicate poverty (Prahalad & Hart, 2002). This view has significantly changed how companies see the poor, from a problem and a burden, to valued customers, entrepreneurs, and partners. This requires companies to innovate in technology, products, and services to make the products “affordable”, “accessible” and “available” to the poor (Prahalad & Hart, 2002, pp. 2, 8). For example, Unilever sells brand shampoo and toothpaste in small packages, so that the poor can afford to buy them. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh is another example of this business model, which

provides microfinance services accessible to the poor, who are otherwise underserved by commercial banks due to lacking collateral. The BoP business model is claimed to bring benefits to the poor more than just by providing them access to products and services but giving “the dignity of attention and choices from the private sector that were previously reserved for the middle-class and rich” (Prahalad, 2006, p. 20).

However, whether the BoP model is considered a development agent is controversial. This model was criticised for its potential negative impacts on the environment from producing products in small packages (Dolan et al., 2012). It is also critiqued for promoting consumption of manufactured goods that might be harmful to the poor’s health, such as tobacco and drugs, using the money that might otherwise be spent on food and medical care (Dolan et al., 2012; Karnani, 2007). Alternatively, it sells them products they do not necessarily need, for example, toothpaste when traditional chewing sticks were freely available and just as effective. As such, Karnani (2007) claims that the BoP model can be exploitative if the poor are targeted as customers for the benefit of the business. In addition, business ethics and how the BoP model is accountable to the poor are not clearly discussed in the model. Karnani also argues that the BoP model does not help the poor, as merely consuming manufactured products will not help them overcome poverty. Even when the poor are contracted as “micro-entrepreneurs” to sell door-to-door BoP products, like in the case of the BoP model in rural areas in Bangladesh, only a limited number of poor people can benefit from this model (Dolan et al., 2012, p. 34).

Similar to Prahalad and Hart, Porter and Kramer (2011) also promote businesses’ role as a development agent by better connecting companies’ success with societal improvement, but their point of difference is that they create a shared value business model. According to Porter and Kramer, a shared value business model aims “to create economic value in a way that also creates value for society by addressing its needs and challenges” (p.4). Porter and Kramer believe that the shared value business model, which involves a “higher form of capitalism” (p.15), can become “the next major transformation of business thinking” (p.4). They argue that the shared value business model, which emphasises the integration of social and environmental concerns into a company’s core business strategy, should replace corporate social responsibility, which often entails voluntary activities, in the approach of the private sector engagement for development.

However, the shared value business model faces difficulties in implementation, as it conflicts with the notion of comparative advantage, which businesses use to compete with each other on the ability to produce products at lower cost (Kindornay et al., 2013; Porter, 2008). Business is often blamed for focusing only on cutting costs and increasing productivity and efficiency, ignoring social and environmental requirements to bring comparative advantages (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Sayer, 2005). As such, comparative advantage can be a pitfall that impedes businesses from becoming conscientious and accountable entities, as it encourages businesses to focus only on what they are best at producing, rather than considering the social and environmental impacts. Blowfield and Dolan (2014, p.34) call this the “Porter Paradox”. Again, similar to the BoP model, accountability can be an issue in the shared value model if there is no mechanism in place to track how business is accountable both to the poor and for their environmental impact.

Lack of accountability is thus a key issue in both the BoP and the shared value models of the private sector as a development agent. Blowfield and Dolan (2014) suggest one way through this is to develop an alternative model of business by strengthening the core principles of Porter and Kramer’s shared value business model with the three criteria outlined in section 2.2 above – deploying its own capital for development purposes, pro-poor primacy, and accountability. In this way, the business as a development agent is in line with the triple-bottom-line economic, environmental, and social sustainability principles (Goel, 2010). This means products would be selected to bring viable economic returns to investors as well as environmental and social benefits to society. This model would require changes in business regulatory frameworks and new forms of financing to create a supportive environment so that a business can get out of the “Porter paradox” trap to become a more accountable development agent or a more genuine development actor. The alternative business model, as suggested by Blowfield and Dolan, can be considered a continuation of a business model as a development agent. There is a need for further research on how this model works and can be measured in practice.

The next section will discuss an inclusive business model, which is an active model of the private sector as a development agent, that is related to this research.

2.4. Inclusive business

Inclusive business (IB) is a model of the private sector, where the private sector is considered a development agent. It is a combination of the two business theoretical models: the BoP of Prahalad and Hart (2002) and the shared value model of Porter and Kramer (2011) (Lashitew & van Tulder, 2017). IB is increasingly viewed as a promising business approach to achieving economic growth, contributing to poverty alleviation, and delivering the SDGs (G20, 2015). IB is commonly defined as a commercially viable business model that supposedly benefits people living at the base of the economic pyramid by including them in the business's value chain as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers (ADB, 2016; G20, 2015; SNV & WBCSD, 2011; UNDP, 2008, 2015). Nevertheless, IB is interpreted and elaborated differently depending on how people view inclusiveness (DCED, 2017).

Inclusiveness can be interpreted to cover economic and social dimensions (Kelly et al., 2015) or expanded to include the environmental dimension (G20, 2015; Ros-Tonen et al., 2019; SNV & WBCSD, 2011). However, the environmental dimension has been less emphasised (Likoko & Kini, 2017). The interpretation of the social dimension also varies among different practitioners. For example, some development practitioners interpret it in terms of inclusion of the poor or small-scale farmers in the business value chains for mutual benefit (Kelly et al., 2015; SNV & WBCSD, 2011). While some associate IB with the BoP business model with reference specifically to the poor (DCED, 2017; G20, 2015; UNDP, 2008), others emphasise that inclusive businesses “do not exclusively focus on the poor” but rather the bottom 40% to 60% of the population, those with low income but live above the poverty line (UNESCAP & iBAN, 2019, p. 3).

Ros-Tonen and her colleagues (2019) conceptualise and assess the inclusiveness of the smallholder value chain in four dimensions: economic, social, relational, and environmental. The social dimension refers to the well-being of smallholder farmers, recognition of their local knowledge, and alignment with their aspirations. The relational dimension refers to the aspect of strengthening smallholder farmers' autonomy, capacity, and agency in relation to a business and other relevant stakeholders. It also addresses gender inequality issues in the value chain (Ros-Tonen et al., 2019). Chamberlain and Anseeuw (2019a) assess the level of

inclusiveness based on how the commercial business and the smallholders share value creation in four dimensions: ownership, voice, risk, and rewards. ADB (2016), on the other hand, proposes the measurement of inclusive business using four criteria: 1) the number of poor people reached by the business (aiming at medium and large enterprises with the number of the poor reached; this should be at least 1000); 2) the positive effect that the business achieves for the poor (either providing good and affordable products and services if they are consumers and clients, or providing increased and stable income if they are producers, suppliers, and business partners of the IB model); 3) financial sustainability (the business is profitable); and 4) system impact and innovation (the business is innovative, replicable and addresses systemic issues). As such, understanding and operationalisation of the IB concept varies, and it is a term interpreted subjectively according to the norms and values of the people involved (DCED, 2017; Wach, 2012).

The G20 (2015) classifies IB into three categories: IB models, IB activities, and social enterprises. IB models refer to the business models which use commercial funding sources to integrate the poor into the core business operations. IB activities are business activities that include the poor as customers, suppliers, or business partners. However, these activities are not core business operations. This business model can use commercial funding or grants. Finally, social enterprises are not-for-profit business models with social objectives. They are normally on a small scale and depend on different external financial sources. According to ADB (2016), IB models are often large national companies, whereas IB activities are often implemented by multinational companies as part of their corporate social responsibility (CSR). Many businesses in Africa and Southeast Asia consider IB as CSR and as something separated from mainstream business (Ashley, 2016, June 8; Lashitew & van Tulder, 2017). It is apparent, then, that there are significant differences in the way in which IB is approached and utilised by different actors, making it difficult to see this as a coherent approach to the private sector as a development agent.

Likoko and Kini (2017) review the literature on IB's approach to development and raise awareness of the need for empirical research on IB in developing countries to test how it works in practice and to understand to what extent businesses are willing to reduce their profits to sustain the well-being of the poor. Ros-Tonen et al. (2019) also claim that there is a

significant lack of literature on the operationalisation of the inclusive value chain concept. There have been attempts to examine the impact of IB beyond its economic consequences, focusing on human rights and human dignity (Hahn, 2012), food and nutrition security (Danse et al., 2020; Mangnus, 2019; van Westen et al., 2019), and the level of impact on smallholders in agricultural value chains (Chamberlain & Anseeuw, 2019b).

Literature on micro and small IB models, as well as their impact on women's economic empowerment is limited. Studies of IB so far have focussed only on large companies which have the scope to reach at least 1,000 people living in poverty, as mentioned above (ADB, 2016), or on multinational corporations because of their resources and the scope of their effects (Blowfield, 2012; Lashitew & van Tulder, 2017; Lucci, 2012; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Prahalad, 2006; Prahalad & Hart, 2002). Micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs), which represent 90% of businesses and 50% of employment worldwide, contribute significantly to creating more jobs and poverty alleviation (Endris & Kassegn, 2022; Geremewe, 2018; Kim & Jin, 2022; Nursini, 2020; Pedraza, 2021; Sayer, 2005). This is significant in the context of developing countries like Indonesia and Vietnam, as the number of micro and small enterprises is more dominant than medium and large enterprises (Le, 2018; Nursini, 2020). For example, in Vietnam, only 1.4% of the total domestic private sector enterprises in 2017 were medium, and while only 1.3% were large enterprises¹, 97.3% were micro and small enterprises (Le, 2018). Therefore, this research aims to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on profit-seeking organisations, encompassing micro and small enterprises. It does not focus on the inclusive activities of multinational corporations or social enterprises. Thus, in the context of this research, IB is used to indicate a commercial business model that integrates small-scale farmers as producers in the value chains as a core business activity.

¹ Business classification applied in the agricultural sector according to the Government of Vietnam is Micro-enterprises: revenue ≤ VND 3 billion (equiv US \$ 0.13 million) and labourers ≤10. Small enterprises: revenue ≤ VND 50 billion (US\$ 2.16 million) and labourers ≤100. Medium enterprises: revenue ≤ VND 200 billion (US\$ 8.63 million) and labourers ≤200 (MPI, 2020a). The exchange rate is US\$ 1 = VND 23,175

Cooperatives are a common business model in rural Vietnam for small-scale farmers to, for example, collaborate in purchasing or selling products and services. The law in Vietnam defines a cooperative not as an enterprise but as a collective economic organisation. Cooperatives have legal status and autonomy to operate a business like an enterprise and be responsible for their organisation and finance as regulated in the Law on Business (MPI, 2020a). As such, in this research, cooperatives are included as micro-enterprises and as inclusive businesses.

As the study is undertaken in Vietnam, the following section will discuss the context of the private sector in Vietnam and the status of IB development in Vietnam.

2.5. Private sector in Vietnam

Private business in Vietnam was only formally recognised and developed just over three decades ago². The political and economic reform (Đổi Mới) process launched in 1986 marked a milestone for private sector development in Vietnam as it was the first time a multi-sectoral and market-oriented economy with the participation of the private sector was adopted (Hakkala & Kokko, 2007; Le, 2018; Luu & Nguyen, 2010). Subsequently, the role of the private sector was officially recognised in the amended Constitution of 1992 in Vietnam (Hakkala & Kokko, 2007; Vuong, 2014, May 27). However, the private sector only began to flourish after the Enterprise Law came into effect in 2000 (Hakkala & Kokko, 2007; Le, 2018; Luu & Nguyen, 2010). The key milestones of private sector development in Vietnam are presented in Figure 2.1, which shows that the private sector was recognised very recently as a “driving force and a key pillar of the national economy” in the direction of Vietnam’s development policies and strategies in the period 2021-2025 (Le, 2018, p.20).

² Although historically, there was a private sector in Vietnam during the French colonial period in the 19th and 20th centuries with manufacturing businesses and wealthy landlords, and in the South prior to 1975 with private farms, the private sector has only been formally recognised by the current Government of Vietnam since 1986. Therefore, this section focuses on the private sector during this period. More information on the context of the private sector’s operations will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Figure 2.1. Private Sector Development in Vietnam

1986	Introduction of Doi Moi (the Reform)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1986: Recognition of the multisector economy in the Congress VI of the Party • 1987: First-ever law on Foreign Direct Investment in Vietnam
1990	Company Law and Sole Proprietorship Law
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1990: The Company Law and Sole Proprietorship Law were promulgated • 1991: Private sector was officially adopted and encouraged by the Party in the Party Congress and was recognised as an integral sector of the economy
1999	Breakthrough Enterprise Law enacted
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1999: The breakthrough Enterprise Law was introduced, liberalising the freedom to do business
2004	Unified Enterprise Law and Investment Law
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2004: The Enterprise Law and Investment Law were revised, creating the same legal framework for private, state-owned and foreign enterprises • 2007: Vietnam joins WTO
2014	Enterprise Law further reformed
2017	Resolution 5 of the Congress XII of the Party
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2017 The private sector is officially recognised as the driving force and a key pillar of the national economy. Large-scale private sector enterprises are encouraged.

Note. Adapted from *Vietnam Private Sector Productivity and Prosperity* (p.20), by D.B. Le, 2018. Adapted with permission.

As previously discussed, Vietnamese business is dominated by micro and small enterprises, most of which are domestic. Foreign direct investment (FDI) enterprises account for only 2.7% of businesses (MPI, 2020b), mainly produce for exports and have limited integration with the local economy (Baum, 2020; Vu, 2021, February 5). According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment, cited in Vu (2021, February 5), only 15% of the local private enterprises provide inputs to FDI enterprises in Vietnam. While the private sector is increasingly recognised in Vietnam, nearly one-third of the GDP comes from the public sector (Le, 2018; Le et al., 2020). State-owned enterprises (SOEs) account for only 0.4% of the total active enterprises in Vietnam (MPI, 2020b). However, they control important sectors, like power and water supply, and dominate utility sectors, such as banking, agriculture, and telecoms (World Bank, 2020b).

They also receive government favouritism in areas such as access to land and credit, which are the two most important resources to the majority of Vietnamese businesses (Baum, 2020; Le, 2018). This has created an uneven playing field for the private sector, especially domestic enterprises (Baum, 2020; Vu, 2021, February 5). Despite receiving this preferential treatment from the government, the impacts of SOEs on employment and their contribution to GDP, are disappointing in comparison with that of private enterprises (Le, 2018). This is one of the issues in the reform agenda that the government must address to create a more competitive environment for the private sector to develop (Baum, 2020).

Now that the political economy in which the GREAT programme businesses operate has been established, the section below discusses the situation of private sector involvement in development in Vietnam according to the three concepts developed by Di Bella et al. (2013a) mentioned in section 2.2 above. However, due to the focus of the research, the discussion will centre on how Vietnamese private businesses contribute to and engage in development in Vietnam and related issues. The extent to which the inclusive businesses label is applied in Vietnam is also discussed.

2.5.1. The private sector in development in Vietnam

The government of Vietnam is increasingly recognising the contribution of private businesses to national economic growth. The Vietnamese private sector contributes 42% to GDP (Vo & Chu, 2020) and creates employment for more than 92% of the labour force (MPI, 2020b). There is empirical evidence of a link between the increase in the private sector's employment, and poverty reduction, especially the potential of multinational companies for export-oriented activities (Jaax, 2020). Private businesses contribute to women's economic empowerment through job creation and income generation, with 46% of employees being women (Le, 2018). Twenty-five per cent of enterprises in Vietnam are led or owned by female entrepreneurs, compared to only 8% in South Asia (Le, 2018).

Despite its significant contribution to economic growth and poverty reduction, the proliferation of the private sector in a relatively short time frame has raised some concerns over environmental and social issues (Bui, 2010). There is evidence that companies have

caused severe environmental and social issues, such as discharging untreated wastewater causing adverse impacts on the health and livelihoods of local people (Bass et al., 2010; Bui, 2010; Fan et al., 2020). Workers also face challenges associated with poor working conditions and underpay as implementing legislation is lacking (Nordman & Sharma, 2018; Sreedharan & Kapoor, 2018). For example, in 2015, a significant portion of factories (40%) failed to pay their workers for overtime work, while the majority of employers (62%) did not provide clear information about working conditions in their employment contracts (Nordman & Sharma, 2018). In addition, micro and small enterprises, which are the focus of this research, are accused of low labour productivity due to a lack of motivation and resources to invest in advanced technologies (Le, 2018; Luu & Nguyen, 2010; Vo & Chu, 2020). They are also accused of short-term profiteering (Luu & Nguyen, 2010).

2.5.2. Private sector engagement for development

Vietnam has a long history of receiving international aid and cooperation, and since the 1980s, it has been one of the top countries receiving development aid (Bony-Cisternes, 2019; Le et al., 2004). Prior to 1990, Vietnam primarily received ODA from socialist countries, with the exception of some non-communist nations such as Sweden and Norway. The Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, and China were among the main sources of aid to Vietnam during this period (Tho & Duong, 2013). The aid programmes under this period were mainly in the form of humanitarian assistance and supporting rehabilitation and reconstruction of the country after the war (McGillivray et al., 2012; Tho & Duong, 2013). The political and economic reform in 1986 led to an increase in foreign aid and investment from donors to support Vietnam's development (Bony-Cisternes, 2019; Le et al., 2004; Tho & Duong, 2013). Many bilateral and multilateral donors established long-term cooperation in Vietnam after the Donor Conference in Paris in 1993 (Bony-Cisternes, 2019; Curry, 1994; Le et al., 2004; Tho & Duong, 2013). In 2013, Vietnam received ODA from 51 donors, of which 28 were bilateral and 23 were multilateral donors (Tho & Duong, 2013). Leading donors from multilateral organisations include the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, and Japan, South Korea, the USA, and the Netherlands from bilateral donors (Huong Giang & Vu, 2013, October 15). ODA from these organisations was a vital financial source and a catalyst for Vietnam's economic development (Bony-Cisternes, 2019; Tho & Duong, 2013). ODA funding is used

mainly for infrastructure development, such as transportation and energy, along with poverty alleviation, health, education and technology, economic and administrative reforms (Tho & Duong, 2013).

Since Vietnam became a middle-income country in the late 2000s, major bilateral donors such as Danida, DFID, and SIDA have withdrawn or reduced their scope of development support in Vietnam. As a result, ODA has declined from 1.81% of GDP to 0.63% in 2020 (UN Women, 2021b), and the government has had to mobilise domestic resources, including resources from the private sector, to address the remaining development challenges (Gero & Willetts, 2014; MPI, 2018; UN Women, 2021b). Vietnam also lost access to concessional finance (loans and grants) from International Development Association (IDA) in July 2017 (Oxfam, 2019b). This has led the government to express interest in engaging with the private sector in the delivery of services (such as water and sanitation) which were previously dominated by the public sector (Gero & Willetts, 2014).

Concurrently, there is also a trend worldwide for donors to partner with the private sector in development programmes in the context of aid budgets decreasing (Di Bella et al., 2013b). Development actors in Vietnam, including NGOs (such as Oxfam, SNV, iDH) and donors (such as DFAT, ADB, and USAID) are increasingly engaging with the private sector for development. Partnership cooperation occurs across various sectors, such as infrastructure, water supply and sanitation, agriculture, climate change adaptation, and women's empowerment. The forms of partnerships between development agencies and the private sector in Vietnam are mainly technical assistance cooperation, public-private partnerships (PPP), impact investment, and co-funding. For example, the two flagship DFAT programmes, which are pioneering engagement with the private sector for gender equality and women's empowerment, are 1) Investing in Women, using impact investment forms, and 2) the GREAT programme, which is the focus of this study, relying on a co-funding mechanism. Meanwhile, in the service delivery sector, such as water supply and sanitation, the private sector has started to see the poor as potential customers (Gero & Willetts, 2014). However, state-level policies in Vietnam for private sector-led development, mechanisms for engagement with the private sector in government poverty reduction programmes, and delivery of services, have not yet been finalised (ADB & AFD, 2012; Gero & Willetts, 2014; MOLISA, 2018). Moreover, a

policy for the private sector to access ODA funding has also not been developed, and the Law on PPP is still under development. Thus, the approach of donor-private sector partnership to deliver development programmes is new in Vietnam.

2.5.3. Inclusive business in Vietnam

The IB concept is still relatively new to many entrepreneurs and, in general, has not been formally recognised as a business approach to development in Vietnam. However, a social enterprise, one of the inclusive business categories, was officially recognised as a business model in the revised Vietnamese Enterprise Law in 2014 (British Council et al., 2019). By 2018, the number of social enterprises formally registered with the government was only 80 (NEU & UNDP, 2018). These 80 social enterprises must reinvest 51% of their revenue for registered social and environmental purposes. Nevertheless, the British Council estimated the total number of organisations, including SMEs, cooperatives, and NGOs with a social purpose as the primary motivation of their businesses, to be 19,125 in Vietnam in 2019 (British Council et al., 2019). These businesses are development agents and potential partners in development programmes. While there are studies on the overall context of inclusive business in Vietnam (British Council et al., 2019; NEU & UNDP, 2018; UNESCAP & iBAN, 2021), there is limited research on the impact and contribution of inclusive business on women's economic empowerment, as well as donor-private sector partnerships on development in Vietnam.

The following section will discuss issues around donor-private sector partnerships, which are increasingly a common approach adopted by development agencies when engaging with the private sector in development programmes. This is also a focus of this study.

2.6. Donor-private sector partnerships for development

The last two decades have seen a growing trend toward development agencies, including donors and NGOs, engaging with the private sector in development programmes. These partnerships expect to create social impacts through the utilisation of resources and

competencies of both partners (Herlin & Pedersen, 2013). For example, donors collaborate with businesses to increase incomes for smallscale farmers by linking them into value chains. Through this approach, donors can “leverage the private sector’s resources, networks and experiences in local economic development” while businesses can take advantage of donors’ funding and technical support (Donovan & Stoian, 2023, p. 11). According to Findlay-Brooks et al. (2010), “cross-sector partnerships between development agencies, national governments and business has emerged as a key development approach and is considered as an effective way to deal with complex and intractable development problems that have defeated single-sector interventions” (p.180). For example, there are development partnerships which aim to address the SDGs, including a donor-private sector partnership approach focusing on women’s empowerment (Adie et al., 2020). The concepts of “gender lens investing” or “investing in women” have recently emerged to indicate an investment approach that incorporates gender into financial analysis and decisions to create economic benefits and a positive impact on women (Aidis et al., 2021).

In the context of declining aid budgets and increasingly complex development challenges, donors’ motivations for partnership with businesses include exploring new sources of finance, innovation, and expertise to fill in the financial gap to address the SDGs — this is estimated as be trillions of dollars each year (Findlay-Brooks et al., 2010; Kindornay & Reilly-King, 2013; Mawdsley, 2015; Nelson, 2010; United Nations Global Compact, 2017). With the recognition that business is the engine of economic growth (OECD, 2011), business is expected to lead market-led approaches, participate in policy dialogues, advocate for global standards, and pursue sustainable and inclusive business practices (Kindornay & Reilly-King, 2013; OECD, 2016a).

Meanwhile, businesses have started to recognise that they cannot ignore their social and environmental impacts under public and media pressure and the scrutiny of NGOs (Chandrasekhar, 2015; Ghosh & Rajan, 2019; Lucci, 2012; Porter, 2014, July 15; Sayer, 2005). They also recognise that they can combine business interests with development priorities (Porter, 2014, July 15). Many companies have considered development challenges as business opportunities, in line with the BoP approach of Prahalad and Hart (2002). There is also a growing realisation by corporations around the world that solving social and environmental

problems is not just about doing good, but also about bringing profits and competitive advantages to a business (Porter, 2014, July 15). For example, Walmart purchases only sustainably caught fish and is committed to reducing waste and packaging and cutting delivery routes. It claims to have saved \$200 million in costs (Porter & Kramer, 2011).

Prahalad (2006) and Porter and Kramer (2011) argue that the opportunities at the BoP and shared value can only come when all parties, including private enterprises, governments, NGOs, donors, and the poor, collaborate effectively in a shared agenda. This multi-stakeholder partnership is claimed to leverage each partner's resources, skills, and expertise and lessen risks, increasing marketability and cooperation across sectors (Nelson, 2010; OECD, 2016a; Pedersen, 2006).

Partnerships between donors and the private sector might be challenging if each partner has different motivations, interests, values, and goals. For example, while the private sector might focus on business growth, cost-saving, and securing a sustainable supply of inputs based on their short-term planning, development agencies and civil society are more interested in the well-being of marginalised people and long-term development goals (Adie et al., 2020; Di Bella et al., 2013b; Kindornay et al., 2013; Scheyvens et al., 2016). According to Herlin (2021), cross-sector partnerships should be based on shared values. Sarwar (2015, p. 25) studied how Bangladesh's leading NGO partnered with one of the largest pharmaceutical companies in Bangladesh to address the issue of micronutrient deficiency in young children, suggesting that the "synergy of incentives" is a crucial determinant of the partnership. Thus, Findlay-Brooks et al. (2010) emphasize the need to "find the right balance between mutual commitment and compatibility and the complementarity of expertise that the different sectors can bring." (p. 186). Accountability and power imbalance also affect the success of the partnership because if two partners are accountable and treat each other equally, they are more transparent (Herlin, 2021). According to OECD (2016b), donor-business partnerships are more sustainable if they link with core business operations, not as CSR activities. However, there is a need for further research on the success factors of a donor-private sector partnership, as well as the impacts of the private sector engagement for development (Di Bella et al., 2013b).

Di Bella et al. (2013b) identify areas of engagement between donors and the private sector. These include policy dialogue, grants, donations, and finance, sharing knowledge, cooperating in the technical arena, and developing capacity. These can come under the forms of public-private partnerships, advanced market commitments in which donors stimulate the market and commit funding if the product is created (for example, in the case of GAVI to produce cheap vaccines), challenge and innovation funds, and co-financing (Di Bella et al., 2013b). There is evidence that businesses have changed their mindsets and approaches toward more sustainable and inclusive models as a result of the partnership with development actors (OECD, 2016a).

The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) presents eight levels of engagement between development agencies and the private sector: information, consultation, involvement, coordination, collaboration, consolidation, integration, and empowerment (DCED, 2019a). Level one, “information”, involves minimal engagement in which donors simply share information with businesses to help them understand the problems and alternatives. The depth of engagement and the power balance will then move along the spectrum with the roles and responsibilities of businesses in the partnership increasing. The highest level of engagement is “empowerment” when the final decision-making is made by businesses. These steps are not sequential. Depending on the purpose, donors and the private sector can decide which level of engagement is required for their partnership. According to Blowfield and Dolan (2014), the private sector is called a development agent when it deploys its own capital for pro-poor activities. This does not happen at the levels of information, consultation, involvement, and coordination. The donor-private sector partnerships deployed under the GREAT programme are at the collaboration level involving informal joint planning and joint funding.

2.7. Caution regarding private sector engagement for development and debate on the roles and the impacts of inclusive business

While the need for mobilisation of finance, innovation, and expertise from the private sector to address global ideals such as the SDGs is understandable, development agencies which

attempt to engage with the private sector should be cautious about what roles the private sector should play and how this sector can be governed (Oxfam, 2019a; Scheyvens et al., 2016). Development agencies should not assume that the poor will benefit from engagement with business and integration into a market. Oxfam (2019a) argues that “poverty reduction as a result of private sector investment and activity cannot be assumed – it must be nurtured” (p. 10). The promotion of the private sector in development might lead to the privatisation of sensitive public services such as education, health, and water supply, which might exclude the poor from access to these services (Bakker, 2007; Boehler & Deusch, 2019; Oxfam, 2019a). Furthermore, not all poor people can participate in and benefit from the private-led development models. The BoP model can also exclude those who are not financially capable of being engaged as customers (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014).

The inclusive business model in agriculture is criticised for targeting commercial farmers rather than marginalised people (Utting, 2012, March 24). It can exaggerate existing inequalities as it might exclude people based on age, gender, or ethnicity (Ros-Tonen et al., 2019; Vicol et al., 2018). It might also exclude those who do not possess the resources to engage in business activities or pay for the costs of certification to get their products integrated into value chains and sold in certain markets (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Mwambi et al., 2016; Ros-Tonen et al., 2019; van Westen et al., 2019). Inclusive business is also criticised for its focus mainly on economic dimensions and not making sufficient efforts to address the barriers to development for the poor (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Utting, 2012, March 24). Chamberlain & Anseeuw (2019), Ros-Tonen et al. (2019), and van Westen et al. (2019) also noted this flaw when assessing the impact of inclusive businesses on small-scale farmers in agriculture. Ros-Tonen et al. (2019) and van Westen et al. (2019) claim that market integration and company-producer partnerships might have adverse impacts on the poor due to power imbalance. Mwambi et al. (2016) claim that business-producer partnership through contract farming helps smallholder farmers to increase income only when it has transparent terms and conditions. Furthermore, value chain integration might expose smallholders to market volatility and make them vulnerable to food insecurity due to mono-cropping commercial products (van Westen et al, 2019). As such, the pro-poor primacy criterium of Blowfield and Dolan (2014) is not met by many businesses claiming to promote development through their activities. The poor are used as instruments of development, and only those

who can conform to the business requirements can participate and benefit (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014).

The concept of business as a development tool is strongly influenced by a neoliberal discourse, which claims that the private sector plays a role in economic growth through the “trickle-down” approach. Neoliberalism has subsequently been criticised for its detrimental development effects on the environment, entrenching social inequality, and prosperity not trickling down to the poor (Murray & Overton, 2011). Business is also criticised for not having the necessary expertise and commitment to implement effective development programs (McEwan et al., 2017). It is also suggested they are only interested in issues that can be addressed within the competence of the company or in the areas that will enhance brand differentiation and competitiveness, as discussed in section 2.3 above.

Businesses are also criticised for their narrow focus on financial performance, being accountable only to shareholders and being interested in voluntary change and soft measures rather than regulation and fundamental changes in their practices (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Knorringa & Helmsing, 2008; Sayer, 2005; Scheyvens et al., 2016). According to Jeppesen (2006, p. 91), “to talk about Corporate Social and Environmental Responsibility as self-regulation and voluntary approaches is more or less equivalent to ‘business-as-usual’”. As discussed in the two influential models of business as a development agent (the BoP and the shared value models), accountability is a weak area for business as a development agent (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014). For example, there is no common framework to measure the accountability of businesses and their contribution to the SDGs (Ghosh & Rajan, 2019). Moreover, business is often based on short-term planning with high levels of flexibility, making it harder to be accountable for long-term sustainable development for communities (Scheyvens et al. 2016).

With the limitations highlighted above, the private sector should not be treated as a panacea or a “magic bullet” for development (McEwan et al., 2017, p. 47). We should recognise the possibilities, limitations, and conditions for business as a development agent (Blowfield, 2012). Expectations should be more realistic, and the approach should be more nuanced when engaging with the private sector for development (Oxfam, 2019a; Scheyvens et al.,

2016). Scheyvens et al. (2016) argue that “it is not fair or reasonable to expect businesses to take on all of these roles [maximising business profits while ensuring equitable and sustainable development] and do them well” (p. 380). This raises a critical question. In a context where governments carefully regulate activities and NGOs can advocate for social wellbeing, should the private sector focus on what they are good at making profits from “innovating and delivering market-based solutions” (Kramer, 2014, as cited in Scheyvens et al., 2016, p.375)? There is a call for development scholars and civil society to move “beyond an enemy perception of the private sector” (Knorringa & Helmsing, 2008, p. 1060) and to have a genuine understanding of the private sector’s role in development (Blowfield, 2012).

2.8. Concluding remarks

This chapter depicted different concepts of private sector involvement in development which are commonly used in development programmes. There are various levels of business engagement for development, of which “a development agent” is the highest level of engagement. This level requires a business to invest its own capital for development purposes, target the poor, and be accountable for its activities. These criteria challenge the two influential business models of business engagement for development, including inclusive business, which is the business model examined in this study. The chapter also provides the context of the private sector engagement for development in Vietnam. It explains why engaging with the private sector is critical in addressing development challenges in Vietnam. The donor-private sector partnership and the current debates around the role of the private sector and issues related to private sector engagement for development were also discussed. This background knowledge shaped the lens for the research examining the donor-private sector partnership for women’s economic empowerment under the GREAT programme. The next chapter will discuss approaches to women’s empowerment in development programmes, and develop a conceptual framework of donor-private sector partnership for women’s empowerment for this study.

CHAPTER THREE. WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

3.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses key approaches to women's development in development assistance programmes, with an emphasis on the empowerment approach. It also discusses the widely adopted term, Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE), the dominant donors' approach to women's empowerment, and the application of WEE in tourism and agriculture production value chains. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how women's empowerment is conceptualised in this research and the chosen conceptual framework.

3.2. Women, gender, and development

The 4th United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 successfully advocated for governments across the world to agree on an action plan to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment. Since then, women's development has made significant progress in supporting women to gain better social and political status and improved living conditions (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006). However, although a lot of effort has been made by governments, development agencies, and NGOs, gender inequality still exists, and women still face discrimination and violence (Koehler, 2016). Thus the Sustainable Development Goals ratified in 2015 have set a specific goal (SGD 5) for the global development agenda to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls by 2030 (UN, 2015).

In the intervening decades, three fundamental models have dominated women's development: women in development (WID), women and development (WAD), and gender and development (GAD) (Muyoyeta, 2007; Rathgeber, 1990). However, two models, WID and GAD, have been the main influencers of policy approaches and the design and implementation of women's development programmes (Moser, 1993; Muyoyeta, 2007; Razavi & Miller, 1995; Singhal, 2003). The following sections will discuss these two models and the main approaches to women's development in development assistance programmes.

In addition, I will discuss the movement in development discourse to include men and masculinities in GAD work, *Masculinities and Development*, as the relevance to the research.

3.2.1. From Women in Development to Gender And Development and Masculinities and Development

Women in Development

The WID model was developed in the 1970s and aimed to integrate women into development assistance programmes. The work of Boserup on recognising women's roles in economic development influenced WID in the 1970s (Bandarage, 1984; Muyoyeta, 2007; Razavi & Miller, 1995; Singhal, 2003). WID discourse was shaped by liberalism and the assumption that modernisation, which is associated with industrialisation, would boost economic growth in developing countries. However, WID advocates argued that modernisation mainly benefited men (Bandarage, 1984; Boserup, 1986). Furthermore, liberal feminists argued that focusing on households and the domestic realm was the fundamental underlying factor of women's economic marginalisation and social subordination (Bandarage, 1984). Within this context, the WID model aims to integrate women into development programmes and informal sectors of the economy to benefit from modernisation (Bandarage, 1984; Chao & Landaluze, 2021; Muyoyeta, 2007; Singhal, 2003). Proponents further argue that, "directing resources to women, including training and agricultural inputs, would improve food production, family welfare, and women's equity" (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006, p. 24). Therefore, WID projects generally focus on women's economic empowerment through the provision of productive resources such as microcredit and skill training programmes. Income-generating projects are often combined with welfare components which teach women about childcare, nutrition, and maternal health (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006; Rathgeber, 1990).

However, the WID model is criticised for treating women as an "untapped resource in development, ignoring their triple burden of reproductive, productive, and community work" (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006, p. 28). It also reduces inequality issues between women and men to economic inequality and women's poverty issues, ignoring the constraints that women face due to entrenched gender roles. It also separates reproductive from productive roles, which

intensifies the ongoing struggles women face to balance productive work with their domestic labour and childcare responsibilities (Maguire, 1984; Moser, 1989, 1993). It is further critiqued for “tagging women on to an existing development process”, rather than transforming a discriminatory process (Clisby, 2010, p. 28). As such, WID is accused of overburdening women and bringing limited changes to women’s status because the approach does not tackle the existing inequalities in social structures that create women’s subordination and oppression. Rather, it expects to change gender relations by integrating women into economic development activities (Bandarage, 1984; Jaquette & Staudt, 2006; Rathgeber, 1990). For example, critics claim that WID’s income-generating projects were ineffective in improving material conditions for women, and the benefits were often taken by men (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006; Rathgeber, 1990). A microcredit project which provides modest loans to poor women for livelihood-earning activities may have the unintended consequence of marginalising them if they do not have a stable earning capacity to retain membership in self-help groups (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004). The effect of this kind of project on the advancement of women is thus controversial (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Beck, 2017; Guérin et al., 2013; OECD, 2012). Some argue that women in microfinance projects may face increased debt due to the control and mismanagement of loans by their husbands (Chant, 2003).

Gender and development

In contrast to the sole attention on women, the GAD model that emerged in the late 1980s focuses on power relations between women and men (Cornwall, 1997; Jaquette & Staudt, 2006; Muyoyeta, 2007; Razavi & Miller, 1995; Singhal, 2003). Since the 1990s, gender mainstreaming has become an important part of GAD approaches (Baden & Goetz, 1997). Gender mainstreaming is understood as the process of integrating gender into all development policies and programmes to address inequality issues between women and men (Cohen et al., 2013; de Waal, 2006; Derbyshire, 2012; IFAD, 2010; Milward et al., 2015; Moser & Moser, 2010; The UN Economic and Social Council, 1997). Furthermore, GAD approaches women as “agents of change”, actively participating in development programmes to drive changes in their lives (Rathgeber, 1990, p. 494). It also emphasises the role of government in women’s emancipation, providing social services in areas such as childcare and health care

and strengthening legal systems to support women's rights in labour codes, inheritance, and land laws (Rathgeber, 1990).

However, in practice GAD is claimed to be not too different from WID (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Jaquette & Staudt, 2006). Scholars criticised that GAD still excluded men from development programmes and "gender" is sometimes used as a substitute for "women" (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Ferguson, 2010; Razavi & Miller, 1995; Singhal, 2003). Chant and Gutmann (2002) criticised a lack of interest of development workers in working with men in development programmes. In addition, GAD requires a high level of commitment to structural change and power redistribution, which seems to be a sensitive issue for both government and donors (Rathgeber, 1990). Rathgeber (1990, p. 495) claimed that "a fully articulated GAD perspective is rarely found in the projects and activities of international development agencies although examples of partial GAD approaches can be identified". This is still true today (Amaya et al., 2019, March 11; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Chao & Landaluze, 2021; Grown et al., 2016).

There is a growing recognition that "women-centred development projects" do not help to change women's positions and enhance their lives because they do not "unseat masculine privilege" (Parpart, 2015, p. 21; see also Chant & Gutmann, 2000; Cornwall, 1997; Greig et al., 2000). The UNDP recognised that "achieving gender equality is not possible without changes in men's lives as well as in women's" (Greig et al., 2000, p. 1). Critiques of the WID and GAD approach for leaving men out of development interventions raise the need to bring men back into the picture through "men-streaming" (Chant & Gutmann, 2000), and explore avenues for men and women to collaborate towards achieving gender equality and equitable societies. This led to the development of Masculinities and Development (MAD) in the late 1990s (Cornwall, 1997; Wanner & Wadham, 2015).

Masculinities and development

MAD seeks to understand men's cultural positions, their beliefs and behaviour in gender relations with women and with other men, and how these affect gender equality and women's empowerment development (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Greig et al., 2000; Levy et

al., 2000; MenEngage Alliance & UN Women, 2014; Parpart, 2015). MAD helps to avoid the generalisation imposed in WID and GAD discourses that men are always “the problem”, and women are “the oppressed” (Cornwall, 1997, p.8; see also Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Cornwall, 2000; Parpart, 2015). Instead, men are acknowledged as “potential allies to achieve gender equality and for recognition of women’s rights and empowerment in the development process” (Chao & Landaluze, 2021, p. 393). Similar to women, Levy et al. (2000, p. 87) argued that “men also experienced inequalities on the basis of gender, class, ethnicity/race, age, religion, and ability” (see also Chant & Gutmann, 2002).

Focusing on women only can make men feel left out while adding more workload and responsibilities on women (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Sweetman, 2013; Wanner & Wadham, 2015). This may have repercussions on the efforts of development projects to achieve gender equality and women’s empowerment because “men are the gatekeeper of current gender orders and are potential resisters of change” (Kaufman, 2004, p. 20). MenEngage Alliance and UN Women (2014) recommend engagement with men in gender equality and women’s empowerment at policies and development programmes, such as preventing gender-based violence and engaging men in sharing housework and supporting women’s economic empowerment programmes. Understanding how masculinities are linked to these development issues can lead to design of more effective development interventions that consider the complex and often gendered dynamics of development. However, the approach to engaging men in development programmes needs to be cautious to avoid reinforcing “male privilege” and bringing “unintended harm” to gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda (Leek, 2019, p. 224). For example, there is a risk of unintentionally reinforcing the existing power dynamics and perpetuating male dominance if a programme fails to address structural barriers and gender norms that contribute to gender inequalities and enable women to participate and benefit from the same programme initiatives.

3.2.2. Approaches to women’s development in development assistance programmes

The shifts between WID, GAD, and MAD paradigms are reflected in the changing approaches to women’s development in development assistance programmes. These approaches are mainly grouped into the following major categories: welfare, anti-poverty, efficiency, equity,

empowerment, and gender mainstreaming (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; de Waal, 2006; Mehra, 1997; Milward et al., 2015; Moser, 1989; Razavi & Miller, 1995; Taşlı, 2007; Tyler, 2002). These approaches are not mutually exclusive and are not listed in chronological order. For example, the anti-poverty approach, which aims to support women to increase income through better access to employment, income-generating opportunities, and productive resources (Moser, 1989), might have a component that overlaps with the welfare approach. This is because it is related to meeting the basic needs of the poor. In addition, welfare programmes, which aim to support women in their reproductive roles to be better mothers and housewives to maintain family welfare, can also promote economic efficiency and productivity (Rathgeber, 1995).

Depending on the context and policy priorities, donors might choose to implement different policies. Moser (1989) classifies women's needs into two categories: "practical needs" which refers to immediate, or short-term needs, such as jobs, water supply and sanitation, and "strategic needs," which refers to long-term needs in terms of addressing structural inequality for women. Her analysis of how the different approaches respond to women's practical needs or their strategic needs, provides a useful tool for analysing the effects of development programmes on women. Development agencies might choose the welfare approach because it is "politically safe" and not too complicated for delivery (Moser, 1989, p. 1809). However, the welfare approach is criticised for focusing on women's reproductive roles, overlooking their productive roles, and assuming women are passive development recipients (Chowdhry, 1995; Mehra, 1997).

The anti-poverty approach was popular amongst development agencies in the early 1970s when there was broad recognition of the negative impacts of modernisation on the poor, and development benefits did not "trickle-down" as expected (Moser, 1989). The income-generating projects initiated under this approach focused only on women's traditional work and did not change power relations between men and women (Maguire, 1984; Mehra, 1997; Moser, 1989). Moreover, these income-generating projects were generally small-scale and initiated by NGOs with limited support from the government. This approach was different from the World Bank's poverty alleviation agenda in the early 2000s and the current dominant anti-poverty approach adopted by development agencies. The World Bank's poverty

reduction strategy approach requires gender mainstreaming and poverty alleviation programmes to be embedded into low-income countries' government policies and implementation (World Bank & IMF, 2002). The current anti-poverty approach that dominates approaches to women in development is "smart economics" which is discussed further below (Winters et al., 2018; Wolfowitz, 2006; World Bank, 2006, p. 2).

The efficiency approach is claimed to have been the dominant WID approach in the post-1980s during the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which focused on increasing efficiency and productivity (Koczberski, 1998; Razavi, 2017). It assumes that women have the potential to contribute more to development in their productive roles, and that "50% of the human resources available for development were being wasted or under-utilised" (Maguire, 1984, p.14; see also Koczberski, 1998). Therefore, increasing women's participation in economics is the way to attain economic efficiency (Koczberski, 1998; Maguire, 1984; Moser, 1989; Singhal, 2003). The efficiency approach has been criticised for being exploitative to women with the emphasis on development, not on women's wellbeing, and assuming women's labour is "elastic" (Maguire, 1984; Moser, 1989, p. 1814). It is criticised as it "only meets practical gender needs [of women] at the cost of longer working hours and increased unpaid work" (Moser, 1989, p. 1814). It is also critiqued for overlooking women's economic contribution to informal economic activities, such as through their work in subsistence farming and their unpaid care work in the family. While trying to harness women's labour, the efficiency approach fails to address women's equality by encouraging men to share the burden of work with women (Koczberski, 1998; Maguire, 1984). It assumes that women's status and equity are automatically increased as a result of their economic participation (Koczberski, 1998). However, experience shows that this is not necessarily true. For example, women might be given work in a garment factory, but they have to work for long hours, under very poor working conditions, earning low wages, such as the case of the garment factories in Rana Plaza³ in Bangladesh. In this case, women's status and equity can deteriorate. Kabeer (2005, p. 24) warned that "women's access to paid work may give them a greater sense of self-reliance and greater purchasing power, but if it is

³ The collapse of the Rana Plaza in 2013, which killed 1,134 and injured thousands of people, shocked the world (ILO, 2018).

undertaken in conditions that erode their health and exploit their labour, its costs may outweigh its benefits". As such, if it is not well managed, the approach to integrate women into economic development might become exploitative as it brings benefits to some and leaves many women worse off (Maguire, 1984).

The approaches to women's development applied in development programmes are evolving but are still more or less the same as the ones mentioned above, although they may be named differently. For example, the "smart economics" approach, which is widely seen to be donors' current dominant approach to women's development, has much in common with the efficiency approach (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Gerard, 2019; Razavi, 2017). Further discussion on the smart economic approach is in section 3.4 below. The equity approach, which was popular between 1975-1985, and argued for the rights of women to have equal benefits from the development process and the elimination of discrimination between men and women (de Waal, 2006; Moser, 1989; Muyoyeta, 2007), is similar to the rights-based approach to development, which has become popular since the 2000s. However, the rights-based approach emphasises local people's participation and empowerment in recognising and claiming their rights (Gready, 2008; Nyamu-Musembi & Cornwall, 2004).

The following section will focus on women's empowerment, conceptualisation of power and theories of empowerment, which are at the centre of this study.

3.3. Women's empowerment

"Empowerment" is a term widely used in development discourse, but it is seen as a "buzzword" as it means different things to different people and can be deployed in various ways (Batliwala, 2007, p. 557; Cornwall, 2007; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; Rowlands, 1998). The term "women's empowerment" was first officially used at the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 and has become a "trendy" "catchphrase" adopted by governments and development agencies (Batliwala, 2007, p. 559). Since both the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in 2000 and its successor SDGs in 2015 set a specific goal addressing women's empowerment, empowerment has become a common goal

in women’s development programmes of governments and international development agencies.

The empowerment approach emerged from critical feminists’ writing and grass-roots organisations’ experience of women in the 1980s in the Global South arguing for alternative approaches to addressing the issues of gender and development (Batliwala, 2007; Chowdhry, 1995; Moser, 1989). It also emerged from the failure of the equity approach, which was accused of not reflecting the priorities and issues faced by women in the global south (Moser, 1989). Its objective is to empower women by redistributing power and employing a bottom-up approach to mobilise support from women and women’s organisations. The empowerment approach aims to change women’s subordination status through legal changes and women’s consciousness enhancement (Moser, 1989). Empowerment addresses both women’s practical needs through short-term strategies, and strategic needs through long-term strategies that address the unequal structures that cause women’s subordination and oppression. The empowerment approach is related to gender transformative approaches because it also targets the transformation of gender norms and inequality structure for women. However, many so-called women’s empowerment programmes are not gender transformative, as discussed in section 3.3 below. Table 3.1 is a schematic I developed based on the literature to demonstrate how key approaches to women’s development relate to each other and the types of development programmes involved.

Table 3.1. Key Approaches to Women’s Development and How They Relate to Each Other

Key Approaches	Related approaches	Related development programmes
Welfare		Family planning; nutrition programmes for children; maternal health care.
Equity	Rights-based	Top-down legislative changes, Projects to enable rights-holders to recognise and claim their rights and strengthen duty-bearers' capacity to respond.
Anti-Poverty		Microfinance, handicraft, and small income-generating programmes initiated by NGOs.

	Smart-economics	World Bank's poverty alleviation agenda in the early 2000s.
Efficiency	Smart-economics	Women's economic development programmes; Education and employment programmes for women.
Empowerment	Gender-transformation	<p>Women's empowerment through advocacy by women's organisations such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN).</p> <p>Programmes to meet concrete and practical gender needs along with strategic gender needs.</p> <p>Gender-transformation programmes which work with women and men (Masculinities and Development approach) to seek to transform existing gender relations by addressing unequal structures and social norms, and redistribution of resources and responsibilities. Women's empowerment is an important step in gender transformation programmes. There is also a need to recognise gender-diverse people in gender transformative development interventions.</p>
Gender mainstreaming		Gender issues are considered and integrated into all development policies and programmes.

Source: Author, based on Batliwala (2007); Chant & Sweetman (2012); Cornwall and Edwards (2010); Derbyshire (2012); Gerard (2019); MacArthur et al. (2022); Moser (1989); Muyoyeta, 2007; Nyamu-Musembi and Cornwall (2004); and Rowlands (1998).

3.3.1. Conceptualisation of power

As power relations underpin empowerment discourse, it is useful to look at how power is understood and how these understandings influence what empowerment means to different people. In this context, the categorical conceptualisations of power by Lukes (1974) and Rowlands (1997) are influential in studies of women's empowerment.

Lukes' three-dimensional view of power analyses power in relation to conflict. The one-dimensional view of power is the type of power that a power holder has over others to get something done (Dahl, 1961). It focuses on observable behaviours and involves direct and

actual conflict. A powerful person is one who successfully makes decisions, disregarding the interests of others. Bachrach and Baratz (1962) use a two-dimensional view of power to describe the type of power exercised in both overt and covert conflict, as well as decision and non-decision-making processes. Two-dimensional power involves the power to control or coerce the other to secure acquiescence. The powerful is the one who has power in a decision-making process but is also the one who creates and reinforces social, political, and institutional barriers to prevent others from participation in decision-making. These first two views above are suggested to influence the WID discourse, in which women's empowerment initiatives are designed to address overt and covert conflict, for example, in examining the decision-making process and access to economic resources (Leder, 2016).

Lukes (1974) identified a third dimension of power: power in the context where there is latent or no conflict. According to Lukes, the third dimension of power is exercised when the powerful transform or manipulate perceptions, interests, and behaviours of the powerless in a way that benefits the powerful. Cultural and ideological norms can also make subordinate groups accept or justify their inequalities (Kabeer, 2005). Rowlands (1997, p.11) calls this "internalised oppression", meaning that people accept the status quo and perceive the values, interests, and practices that are applied to them as natural and part of their culture. The oppression means they believe that what they receive is what they are supposed to have without questioning or feeling inequality. Rowlands argues that "when control becomes internalised in this way, it is no longer necessary to assert power overtly" (Rowlands, 1997, p. 11). This explains why "practices such as beating, purdah, or eating last in the family can remain uncontested, since they align to cultural definitions of a good mother or wife" (Leder, 2016, p. 5). It also makes it harder to ask women to define women's empowerment by asking people's perspectives (Kabeer, 2016). Understanding internalised oppression or latent conflict is complex and difficult. It requires an in-depth, comprehensive socio-cultural analysis of gender relations. Thus, it is "rarely addressed in women's empowerment studies" (Leder, 2016, p.5).

The second influential conceptualisation of power was by Rowlands in 1997. She classifies power into four categories:

Power over: It is controlling power and the powerful dominates over the other.

Power to: It is generative and productive power which creates new possibilities and actions without domination.

Power with: It is a collective power when a group tries to solve problems together.

Power from within: It is internal power under the forms of self-acceptance and self-respect and, in turn, to respect and acceptance of others as equals.

(Rowlands, 1997, p.13)

According to Rowlands, the form of “power over” is politically sensitive as those who dominate fear losing control when marginalised people become empowered. In women’s empowerment programmes, this suggests women gain and men lose. The oppression and internalised oppression discussed above could be interpreted under the form of “power over”. The three remaining forms of power, “power to”, “power with”, and “power from within” are the focus of empowerment programmes because empowerment of an individual or a group is not at the expense of others (Kabeer, 2012; Rowlands, 1997). The activation of “power with” through the activities of women’s organisations at the grass-roots level was a driving force for the women’s empowerment approach in the 1980s, as mentioned by Moser (1989). Because empowerment cannot be bestowed (Friedmann, 1992; Rowlands, 1997, 1998), the process of raising “power from within” is argued as the first critical step in the empowerment process (Kabeer, 2005; Scheyvens, 2020). It is important for genuine women empowerment development programmes to invest in this step.

3.3.2. Theories of empowerment

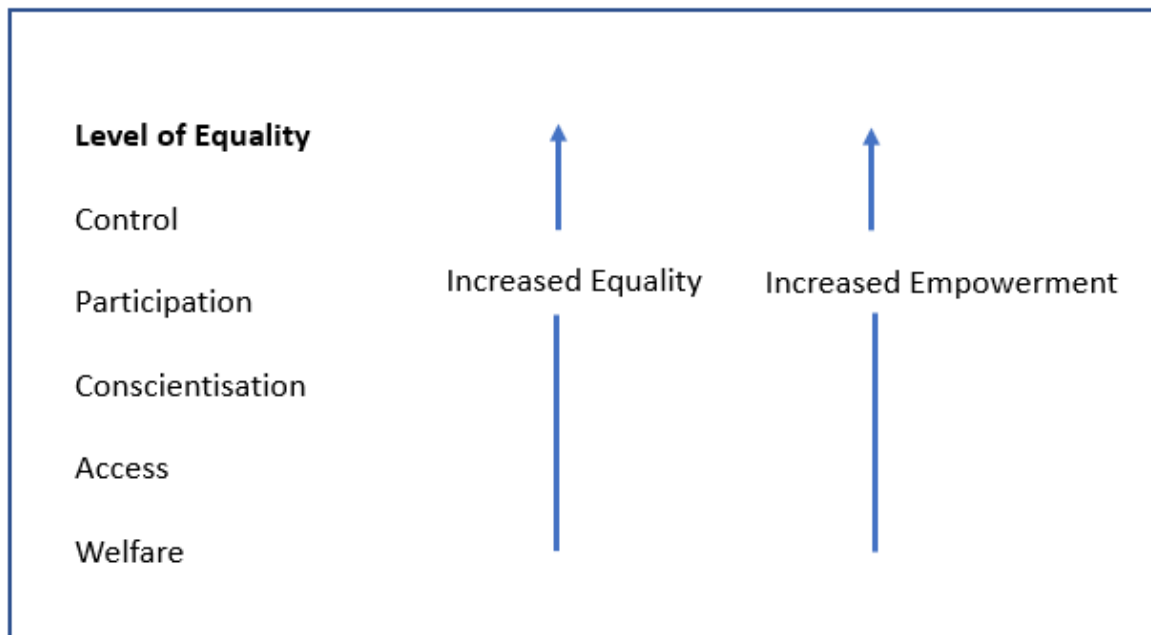
For Moser (1989), the empowerment approach seeks to empower women, not in terms of developing “power over”; that is, dominating others, but rather by “power from within”, which seeks to increase women’s consciousness and internal strength and independence. As such, women’s empowerment is defined as, “the right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over crucial materials and nonmaterial resources” (Moser, 1989, p.1815). However, Moser’s concept is limited to only empowerment at the individual level. Empowerment is also relational, meaning the ability to negotiate and influence power relations in relationships with others (Cornwall, 2016; Longwe, 1994; Rowlands, 1997; Samman & Santos, 2009; Tibi & Kittaneh, 2019). Therefore,

as discussed under the MAD approach above, women's empowerment programmes need to work with men in activities to support gender equality and women's empowerment and understand how masculinities influence these efforts.

Empowerment is also argued to be intersectional and contextual (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Kabeer, 2005; Martinez-Restrepo & Ramos-Jaimes, 2017; Moser, 1989). As such, the ability of women to make and act on strategic life choices depends on their social, cultural, economic, and political contexts (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010). It can also depend on their ethnicity, religion, class, generation, sexual preference, and education level (Martinez-Restrepo & Ramos-Jaimes, 2017). The intersection of these factors creates multi-layers of constraints for women and can "act as a brake on women's ability to choose their own paths" (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 11). For instance, a poor ethnic minority woman living in a rural area will experience different oppression and encounter different barriers that affect her ability to make her life choices than a middle-class woman in an urban area. Empowerment is also context-specific. Kabeer (2005) found that having access to employment, education, and political participation, all of which were seen as essential indicators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the SDGs, can bring both negative and positive impacts to the lives of women in different social and cultural contexts. Decision-making in the household domain in one context can be considered empowerment for women, but in another, it can be considered disempowering because it makes women overburdened (Martinez-Restrepo & Ramos-Jaimes, 2017). Understanding factors affecting empowerment will help development agencies to design appropriate interventions for women's empowerment programmes. Unfortunately, there are no quick-fix solutions for development agencies, and neither is there a "one-size-fits-all approach" to empowerment (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010, p. 13).

The empowerment framework developed by Longwe (1994) emphasises women's empowerment at an individual level but in relation to men, in which the level of gender equality is correlated with the level of empowerment. Longwe's model suggests that empowerment is a linear process which consists of five hierarchical levels. She argues that women reach the highest level of equality and empowerment when they can equally control production and distribution of benefits (see Figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1. Longwe's Women's Empowerment Framework



Note. From “Gender Awareness: The Missing Element in The Third World Development Project,” by S.H. Longwe, in S. Williams, J. Seed, and A. Mwau (Ed.), *The Oxfam Gender Training Manual* (p.292), 1994, UK and Ireland: Oxfam. Copyright 1994 by Oxfam UK and Ireland. Reprinted with permission.

The empowerment concept was further developed by Kabeer (1999, p. 437), who defines women's empowerment as “a process of change” in which women gain the ability, which was previously denied, to make strategic life choices. Kabeer's empowerment framework encompasses three interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements (Figure 3.2). In this framework, agency is exercised through resources which are the medium to attain achievements, the outcomes of the empowerment process. Power is defined in terms of “the ability to make choices” (Kabeer, 2005, p. 13) and Kabeer argues for three forms of power arising from the process of making choices: the “power to” refers to people's ability to make and act on their own life choices; the “power over” refers to the case when people exercise agency to make their life choices but put other people down; and lastly the “latent” power, the third dimension of power mentioned by Lukes (1974), when there are no forms of agency exercised but power still operates. Unlike Longwe's empowerment framework, Kabeer argues that empowerment is not a linear process as changes in one dimension can lead to changes in others, and they are all interconnected.

Figure 3.2. Kabeer's Women's Empowerment Process



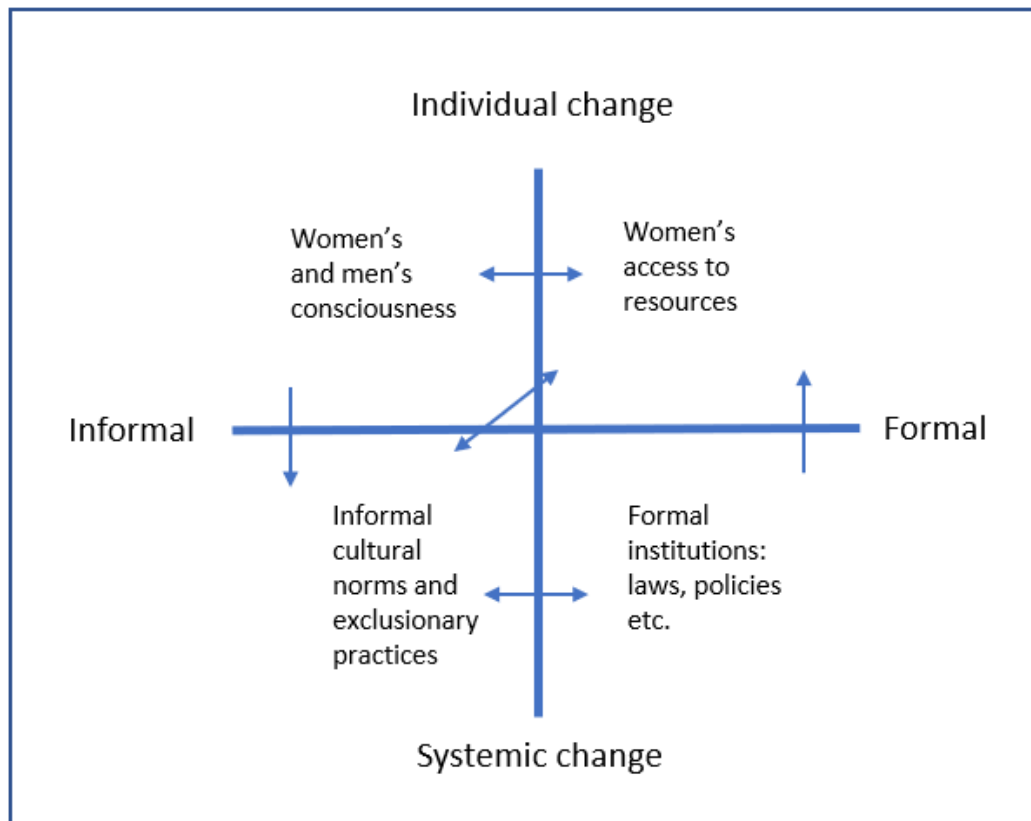
Source: Author, based on Kabeer (2005).

Overall, there is broad agreement within the discourse of empowerment that it involves, to some extent, personal development. It often begins with how women see themselves and their sense of agency, sense of self-worth and “power from within”, and how they develop a capacity to increase their self-reliance and internal strength to make choices and seek changes in their lives (Moser, 1989; Rowlands, 1997; Kabeer, 2005; Scheyvens, 2020). Like Kabeer, Scheyvens (2020) emphasises the importance of activating the “power from within” of marginalised groups so they can control their own lives. This power will help to transform marginalised groups from passive recipients to more active participants and become change agents of development programmes. Scheyvens (2020) defines empowerment as “the activation of the confidence and capabilities of previously disadvantaged or disenfranchised individuals or groups so that they can exert greater control over their lives, challenge unequal power relations, mobilise resources to meet their needs and work to achieve social justice” (p.115). As such, empowerment cannot be bestowed by others, and development agencies can only facilitate the empowerment process (Friedmann, 1992; Rowlands, 1997). Sen (1997, cited in Cornwall & Edwards, 2014) cautions against governments and development agencies viewing empowerment simply as supporting women to have access to resources and as just “another handout, something governments do for or on behalf of people” (p.9).

While changes at the individual level are important, Kabeer (2005) and Rao and Kelleher (2005) emphasise the need for change at the systemic and institutional level, as well as in the formal and informal rules and norms of the empowerment and gender equality process. The UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment identifies the systemic changes needed to address adverse social norms and discriminatory laws constraining women's economic empowerment. Change also requires recognising, reducing, and redistributing care and unpaid housework; and closing gender gaps in access to digital, financial and poverty assets (UNHLP, 2016).

Rao and Kelleher (2005) developed a comprehensive framework that identified areas of change needed to achieve gender equality and empowerment (see Figure 3.3). These include "institutional change" in informal norms, and formal regulations, policies and rules required to address "the root causes of gender inequality" (p.59). It requires women to work together to exert a collective voice, the "power with", to confront inequality in the social structure, legal systems, norms, and practices that cause women's subordination and oppression. This is what Rowlands (1997) called the collective dimension of empowerment. Rao and Kelleher challenge Kabeer's empowerment model, which assumes changes in one dimension will lead to changes in other dimensions and the assumption of many development agencies that women can be empowered through the provision of resources, skills training, and services. Having better access to resources does not automatically transform women to be economically independent and improve other areas of their lives (Esplen & Brody, 2007). The pre-existing social norms may affect the ability of women to make these changes (Buvinić & Furst-Nichols, 2014; Cornwall, 2016; Esplen & Brody, 2007).

Figure 3.3. Rao and Kelleher's Gender Change Framework



Note. From “Is There Life After Gender Mainstreaming,” by A. Rao and D.Kelleher, 2005, *Gender & Development*, 13 (2), p.60. (<https://doi.org/10.1080/13552070512331332287>). Copyright 2005 by Taylor & Francis. Reprinted with permission.

It is very common for women's development programmes that are implemented under the welfare, equity, anti-poverty, and efficiency approaches mentioned above, and even some so-called empowerment programmes, to focus only on the right-hand side of Rao and Keller's framework. These programmes either seek to change material conditions for women, by providing access to resources, or seek to facilitate changes in law and policies for gender equality. This is because the left-hand side—raising people's consciousness and changing informal norms and inequitable ideologies, cultural and religious practices—requires greater time and effort to work with women and men at the grassroots level to enable these changes. Furthermore, development agencies are generally hesitant to change women's status and promote women's rights because they consider this an interference with cultural norms and practices and too “difficult and contentious” to address (Moser, 1989; Moser, 2014, p. 10).

This is probably why development agencies choose a more instrumentalist approach to women's empowerment, as discussed in the following section.

3.4. Women's economic empowerment

The previous section showed that women's empowerment requires a holistic approach to empower women at individual and collective levels and address informal and formal norms and rules that make women disadvantaged and subordinate to men. It also discusses that empowerment is relational, intersectional, and contextual, emphasising the need to work with men in empowerment programmes. This section will discuss the most common women's economic empowerment approach taken by development agencies in the 2000s.

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) has emerged from the WID paradigm, which recognises women's roles in economic development and aims to integrate women into development assistance programmes. WEE has shifted away from the radical views of feminists in the 1980s, which took a holistic approach to empowerment, toward the more instrumentalist approach of government and development agencies, which associate empowerment with efficiency and growth. The instrumentalist approach tends to narrow "women's empowerment" to mean "economic empowerment" (Batliwala, 2007; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009).

Following the speech of World Bank President Paul Wolfowitz in 2006, which called investing in women "smart economics", the World Bank has demonstrated that its dominant approach is to treat gender equality as an agent for economic growth (Winters et al., 2018). WEE has been increasingly supported by many development agencies, both bilateral and multilateral (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Markel, 2014; Rowlands, 1998). The slogan "women's empowerment and/or gender equality as smart economics" has been repeatedly quoted in speeches of donors, and it has become a catchy phrase to acquire funding from development agencies (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009, p. 293). WEE is considered a pathway to increase efficiency and promote economic growth (Kabeer, 2017, May 25). It is also expected to have spill-over effects on other social development concerns, such as poverty reduction, better education and child health, and achievement of the

development goal on gender equality and women’s empowerment (Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; FAO, 2011; Ferguson, 2010; OECD, 2012; UN Women, 2017b; World Bank, 2006). It is also argued that promoting WEE in private sector development can have wider impacts on poverty reduction and development outcomes than private sector development programmes that do not include any gender considerations (Markel, 2014). The UNDP stated that, “empowering women is not just the right thing to do, but also is critical for meeting the MDGs and the other internationally agreed development goals” (UNDP, 2010, para.63). WEE has been incorporated into donors’ private sector engagement programmes at different levels in five common approaches, according to Markel (2014) (see Table 3.2). According to Markel (2014), at the highest level, women are targeted as the programme’s beneficiaries and WEE is the key objective. Meanwhile, the lowest level is when the programme does not include any consideration of gender and WEE. “Gender aware” and “do no harm” levels are when WEE is not a key objective, but the programme seeks to mitigate unintended adverse effects on women. However, these levels still focus on economic aspects and do not show how private sector addresses strategic gender needs to change informal norms and formal rules and work with men to empower women.

Table 3.2. WEE in Private Sector Engagement Programmes

WEE integrated into Private sector programming				
Women targeted	Gender mainstreaming	Gender aware	Do no harm	No focus on gender
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WEE is the key programme objective. - Interventions aim to enhance positive impacts on WEE. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WEE is one of the key programme objectives. - Programmes explicitly integrate WEE into all aspects of the programme cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The programme seeks to understand the differences between women and men and how gender may affect programming. - Gender concerns are integrated into some aspects of the programme cycle. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The programmes seek to minimise the risk of causing harm by monitoring unintended adverse effects of a project on women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do not articulate any approach to WEE.

Note. Adapted from *Measuring women's economic empowerment in private sector development: Guidelines for practitioners* (p. 6–7), by E. Markel, 2014. Adapted with permission.

There are many definitions of WEE that exist, but they commonly share themes around two components: women having access to skills and resources (the top right corner of Rao and Kelleher's framework) to compete in markets for economic advancement, and women having power and agency to make decisions on resources and profits, time-use and physical mobility (Golla et al., 2018; Markel, 2014). The International Centre for Research defines WEE as "the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make and act on economic decisions" (Golla et al., 2018, p. 2). However, quite often, WEE is simply used to refer to development programmes that provide women access to economic resources, productive assets, goods and services, jobs and skills to increase productivity and incomes (Cornwall, 2016; Kidder et al., 2014; OECD, 2012; World Bank, 2006) (see also discussion in section 3.3.2 above). The World Bank's Gender Action Plan in 2006, for example, aims to advance WEE by focusing on improving policy to make markets work for women and improving women's capacity and assets to compete in four key markets: land, labour, product, and finance.

WEE in agriculture and tourism production value chains are discussed next as these are the focus of the GREAT programme in Vietnam, to be examined later. The focus of the GREAT programme is to build a supplier network and facilitate a linkage between smallholder farmers and businesses. It does not work on the vertical interconnections between processors, distributors, and consumers in agriculture, or between tour operators, travel agents, and catering services in tourism value chains. The tourism production value chain explored under the GREAT programme involves the production of agricultural products, herbs and medicinal plants, which are processed into value-added products, such as essential oils and herbal bath products, and sold to tourists and domestic markets.

3.4.1. Women's economic empowerment in agriculture and tourism production value chains

Women play a significant role in the agriculture sector worldwide, contributing around 43 % of the agricultural labour force (FAO, 2011). Similarly, in the tourism sector, women make up a significant workforce, accounting for 54% of waged employment in tourism overall (UNWTO, 2019). However, in both sectors, women face gender discrimination, including lower average wages than men and less representation in management positions (Boonabaana, 2014; ILO, 2001; Maertens & Swinnen, 2009; Pritchard, 2014). The early work

by Boserup on the division of labour in agriculture shows that women's roles vary depending on region, culture, and caste (Boserup, 1986). Their roles range widely from subsistence farming on a small scale for family food supplies, to participation in intensive agriculture for commercial purposes. This work can either be unpaid labour on the family farm, hired labour in agricultural enterprises, or running their own farms. For example, in Vietnam, 63.4% of women are involved in agriculture, which is higher than the 57.5% of men involved in agriculture. Women are more likely to work on subsistence crops in smaller family farms (FAO, 2019). Likewise, in the tourism sector, women often work in gender-stereotyped jobs that are casual, seasonal, low-skilled, and poorly paid, such as in retail, hospitality, and cleaning services (Boonabaana, 2014; Sinclair, 1997).

In agriculture, women also face more constraints than men in access to productive resources such as land, financial services, extension services, and the application of new technologies (Derera, 2020; FAO, 2011; Hill, 2011; Tripathi et al., 2012). They are under-represented and often excluded from decision-making processes on programmes and services that affect their lives (Tripathi et al., 2012). In both sectors, women face discriminatory perceptions and practices in religion, culture, and social norms. For example, in some contexts, there are certain activities traditionally associated with men in agriculture that women are not typically expected to engage in, such as bee-keeping in Ethiopia (Belete & Ayele, 2020) or owning a cow in Bangladesh (Quisumbing et al., 2015). Similarly, in the tourism sector, women often face challenges as they lack support from household members and communities to work in working areas such as hotels and restaurants, due to a prevailing social stigma (GREAT, 2018a). The burden of reproductive roles also hinders women's participation in and benefit from agriculture and tourism sectors (Adam et al., 2022; Boonabaana, 2014; Coles & Mitchell, 2011; Stoian et al., 2018). In addition to productive roles, which could be paid or unpaid jobs above, women are expected to do other housework, take care of family members, such as children and the elderly, and collect fuel and water, especially in rural areas. These activities are most often not counted as economic activities in official statistics (Boserup, 1986; FAO, 2011). These constraints affect women's productivity and their contribution to the agriculture and tourism sectors.

Over recent decades the growing development of commercial production value chains in agriculture has had mixed impacts on women (FAO, 2011; Forsythe et al., 2016; Pyburn et al., 2021; Quisumbing et al., 2021; Riisgaard et al., 2010). While Dolan (2001) claimed that in the Kenyan context, export horticultural production negatively impacts women as men often take the benefits, Maertens and Swinnen (2009) argued that in Senegal, it brings direct benefits and reduces gender inequalities. This is because of the different employment types and cultural context in which women are involved. Working as a hired labourer in large-scale agro-industries might help women in Senegal have better income than working as unpaid labour in small-scale farming (Maertens & Swinnen, 2009). However, worldwide research shows that women are more likely to have autonomy and control over small-scale agriculture and men dominate and control high-value chains (Bolwig, 2012; Coles & Mitchell, 2011; Curry et al., 2019; Devi & Buechler, 2009; Dolan, 2002; Doss et al., 2021; Farnworth et al., 2012; Farnworth, 2011; Fischer & Qaim, 2012; Forsythe et al., 2016; Kent, 2018; Mayanja et al., 2022; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019; Ntakyio & Van Den Berg, 2022; Tavenner et al., 2019). Most farming contracts are signed by men, although women are the ones who do most of the work as family labourers (FAO, 2011). For instance, less than 10% of smallholder contract-farming of the French beans export sector in Kenya was signed by women (Dolan, 2001), and only one out of 59 contracts in the same sector was with a woman in Senegal (Maertens & Swinnen, 2009). Dolan argued that the preference for signing contracts with landowners, which are usually men, has excluded women and triggered gender conflict, because it enables men to control labour and payment from contracted firms (Dolan, 2001).

The tourism industry is constituted by human relations, and hence it impacts, as well as is impacted by, gender relations (Swain, 1995). As noted by several authors, there is limited research on the impact of tourism businesses on gender relations (Boonabaana, 2014; Ferguson, 2011; Movono & Dahles, 2017; Saarinen & Rogerson, 2014). Pritchard (2014) claims that tourism can either empower or disempower women. For example, it provides important income sources for women through employment and entrepreneurship, but can also “exacerbate inequalities” (Ferguson, 2011, p. 239). There is growing evidence that women working in tourism have increased their agency to have freedom of life choices and freedom from economic dependency on men (Moswete & Lacey, 2015) and gained respect from their communities (Boonabaana, 2014; Scheyvens, 2000). More importantly, successful women

have been able to challenge existing social norms that constrain their mobility and freedom to work outside their homes (Boonabaana, 2014; Scheyvens, 2000). They influenced changes in gender roles for men to share more reproductive roles in caring for children, cooking and cleaning (Movono & Dahles, 2017; Tran & Walter, 2014) or for women to take on new productive roles as tour guides, which used to be dominated by men (Tran & Walter, 2014).

There is broad recognition of the need for a holistic approach to empower rural women to address the challenges and constraints they face (Doss et al., 2012; Hill, 2011; Kidder et al., 2014; Pereznieta & Taylor, 2014; Tripathi et al., 2012). Women's economic empowerment in agriculture and tourism requires changes in policies and in discriminatory norms and practices to support women's rights and access to land, productive resources, financial services, markets, and technology as well as benefits from employment opportunities offered by corporate firms involved in high-value supply chains. It also requires women's status to be transformed, to have more voice and power in decision-making and sharing of benefits in communities and households, and for men to be transformed to share more unpaid work in the family (Gurung et al., 2015; Heilman & Meyers, 2016; Hill, 2011; MacArthur et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021; Ragasa et al., 2021; Singh & Babbar, 2022; Spark et al., 2021; Tibi & Kittaneh, 2019). As discussed in section 3.2.1 above about the need to work with men in gender equality and women's empowerment programmes, there have been a number of good initiatives to actively engage men to share unpaid work and support women's economic empowerment, such as "Men Engage Alliance" undertaken by NGOs and the United Nations (Doss et al., 2012; Hill, 2011). There are also efforts to engage small-scale farmers in producer groups, cooperatives, and self-help savings and credit groups to build collective power to increase productivity and address structural barriers (Tripathi et al., 2012).

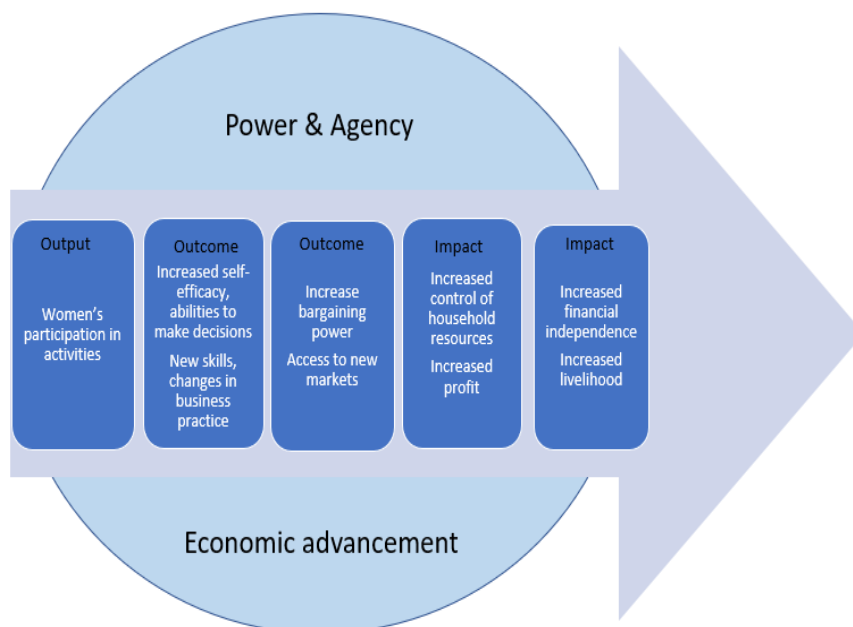
3.4.2. Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment

Many frameworks have been developed to measure women's empowerment and, in a narrower sense, women's economic empowerment. Development practitioners and scholars are currently debating approaches to defining and measuring WEE (Doss et al., 2012; Fox & Romero, 2017; Laszlo et al., 2020). WEE, by its name, purports to limit the measurement of women's empowerment to the aspects related to economic activities. Some scholars argue

that the measurement of WEE should look beyond the traditional quantitative measurement of the number of jobs, income, and the level of access to assets. It should instead include the extent to which women can actually influence the decision-making process and control their incomes (Kidder et al., 2014; Pradhan, 2003).

As WEE is commonly defined by the major realms of access to skills and resources, and the power and agency to control and manage those resources, the WEE measurement framework mainly focuses on these indicators to measure women’s economic advancement (Fox & Romero, 2017; Golla et al., 2018). Often, women’s power and agency are measured at an intra-household level only (Perezniето & Taylor, 2014). For example, the WEE measurement framework of the International Centre for Research on Women (see Figure 3.4) measures whether women have access to new skills and new markets and increased self-efficacy and bargaining power at the outcome level. They also measure whether women have increased control of household resources and financial independence at the impact level.

Figure 3.4. A Framework to Measurement WEE



Note. From *Understanding & Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework & Indicators* (p.4), by A. M. Golla, A. Malhotra, P. Nanda, and R. Mehra, 2018: ICRW. Copyright 2018 by International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW). Reprinted with permission.

The Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) is used to measure women's empowerment in agriculture, also focusing on access and agency. It expands the measurement of women's agency to both household and community levels. It also measures women's empowerment in relation to men. The WEAI quantifies women's empowerment in five domains and 10 indicators (5DE) (see Table 3.3), and considers gender parity within the household (GPI). A woman is empowered if she reaches 80% or more of the weighted indicators (Alkire et al., 2013). The WEAI, however, has recognised its limitations in terms of misinterpretation of women who choose not to engage in agriculture and the situation of women-headed households. Woman-headed households might find themselves overburdened and have limited choices, rather than feeling empowered to make decisions about agricultural activities (Leder, 2016). Moreover, the WEAI measures women's leadership by counting women's membership in a social or public group. This measurement does not reflect whether a woman is empowered, as it depends on how active she is as a member and whether the membership brings her any collective power. Another indicator that the WEAI uses to measure women's empowerment is the decision-making power over the resources and incomes within the household. However, this indicator also must be more nuanced because people might interpret it differently depending on their local contexts (Acosta et al., 2020; Alkire et al., 2013; Kawarazuka et al., 2021; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). In many cases, a "joint decision" does not actually involve a conversation among partners, or if there were conversations, men might have the final say (Acosta et al., 2020).

Table 3.3. Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index

Domain	Indicator	Weight
Production	Input in productive decisions	1/10 th
	Autonomy in production	1/10 th
Resources	Ownership of assets	1/15 th
	Purchase, sale, or transfer of assets	1/15 th
	Access to and decisions about credit	1/15 th
Income	Control over use of income	1/5 th
Leadership	Group member	1/10 th
	Speaking in public	1/10 th
Time	Workload	1/10 th
	Leisure	1/10 th

Note. From *Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index* (p.3), by S. Alkire, J. Foster, OPHI, 2012: IFPRI. Copyright 2102 by International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). Reprinted with permission.

Scheyvens (1999) recognised that empowerment is multi-dimensional, not just about economic empowerment aspects and in response developed a useful framework for assessing empowerment in four interrelated dimensions: economic, social, psychological, and political. Her framework has been widely adopted and adapted to assess women’s empowerment (Brody et al., 2015; Fox & Romero, 2017; Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Movono & Dahles, 2017; Tran & Walter, 2014). As many scholars have claimed, it is important not to assume that the attainment of economic benefits will automatically translate into broader social, psychological, and political empowerment for women (Ferguson, 2011; Scheyvens, 2000). Empowerment in one dimension may not necessarily result in positive change in another dimension (Alkire, 2008; Ferguson, 2011; Malhotra et al., 2002; Mason, 2005; Mosedale, 2005; Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Samman & Santos, 2009; Scheyvens, 2000). In some cases, it can gradually happen (Movono & Dahles, 2017), but in most cases, this will need development agencies to facilitate this (Scheyvens, 2000). Moswete and Lacey (2015) claim that women can achieve social empowerment without the achievement of economic empowerment; for instance, women involved in cultural tourism villages in Botswana reported feeling happier and enjoying social contact with local people and tourists, even

though their incomes might not have changed significantly. In some cases, improved economic dimension could have adverse impacts on women. For example, a study of women's involvement in community-based tourism in Vietnam has shown that work in tourism can over-burden women, and some still face domestic violence even with improved income (Tran & Walter, 2014). Ferguson (2011) emphasises the need to pay attention to unpaid labour and the care burden for women, and urges the provision of social reproduction services to address this issue.

Research on interactions between economic and other aspects—social or psychological or political—is still limited (Fox & Romero, 2017). In many research contexts, the assessment of women's economic empowerment only focuses on the economic aspect of empowerment; that is, women increase their income and control over production and income use (Grover, 2022; Pavlović et al., 2022). Bayissa et al. (2018) surveyed 508 women working in spice processing in Addis Ababa and found no correlation between income increase and other empowerment dimensions- decision-making power, psychological, social, political, and understanding of legal rights. They argue that the economic dimension, which they measure only by women's income, is a “double-edged sword”, p. 678. It means it can have positive and negative effects. For example, increasing income can help women have more voice in their families and increase women's autonomy under some circumstances. However, women might be overburdened in other cases because they work longer hours to increase income, and do not have time to get involved in decision-making. In addition, their husbands are not happy with them because they have less time for housework. In these cases, increasing income does not make women happier nor enable them to have more influence in family decision-making.

At the national level, the United Nations developed the Gender Empowerment Measurement (GEM) in 1995 to measure women's empowerment by aggregated secondary data in three dimensions: political participation (measured by the share of seats in parliament), economic participation (measured by the share of earned income), and professional (measured by the share of professional and technical and administrative and managerial jobs) (UNDP, 1995). However, GEM was criticised for its reliability as it is based on secondary data and for

excluding other important aspects such as women's rights, cultural and religious factors (Leder, 2016).

Measuring WEE can be very challenging. A very common issue that researchers face when they assess women's empowerment is that they use their own assumptions or stereotypes about gender roles to lead discussions. This creates biases and skews results (Martinez-Restrepo & Ramos-Jaimes, 2017; Perezniето & Taylor, 2014). In addition, to many scholars, empowerment is a process rather than an "ending point" or a "product" (Carr, 2003; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 405; Malhotra et al., 2002; Mosedale, 2005, p. 244). Others claim that empowerment is a process as well as an outcome (Buvinic, 2017; Scheyvens, 2020; Zimmerman, 1995). Zimmerman (1995, p.583) differentiates these two concepts, empowering processes refer to "how people, organisations, and communities become empowered" and empowered outcomes refer to "the consequences of those processes". Zimmerman's differentiation of these two concepts has implications for the measurement of empowerment. He suggests that "empowered outcomes refer to specific measurement operations (whether they are quantitative or qualitative in nature) that may be used to study the effects of interventions designed to empower participants" (p.585). In the assessment of the impact of a development programme, it is vital to understand the status quo before the programme's commencement. In addition, empowerment cannot be bestowed by another, as mentioned above. Thus, we need to be nuanced in understanding the extent to which a programme is able to facilitate the process of change. In addition, empowerment is intersectional and context-specific, as discussed above. Therefore, analysis and measurement of WEE, especially in those subjective domains, such as self-confidence, self-esteem, perception of satisfaction, decision-making power over economic activities and income allocation, need to take into consideration the social, cultural and political context that governs women's ability to make choices.

The instrumentalist approach taken by development agencies in women's empowerment focusing only on the economic aspect has received many criticisms from feminists and scholars. The following section will discuss criticisms of the WEE approach.

3.5. Critical reflections on Women's Economic Empowerment

As a descendant of the efficiency approach, the smart economics approach has received similar criticisms for handing over greater responsibilities to women, adding more burdens into their “double” and “triple roles”, and harnessing them to achieve development outcomes (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Esplen & Brody, 2007; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; Ferguson, 2010; Moser, 1989; Painter, 2010; Tucker & Boonabaana, 2012). It is accused of focusing on “women working for development,” rather than expecting development to be transformed to work better for women (Chant, 2003, p. 28).

WEE has also been criticised for oversimplifying women's empowerment to economic spheres, which focuses on increasing women's productivity and incomes, and turns women's empowerment into “a technical magic bullet” for poverty alleviation and rapid economic development programmes, “rather than multi-faceted social transformation process” (Batliwala, 2007, p. 561). WEE programmes which focus on providing women with access to resources and opportunities, such as skills and jobs, do not necessarily lead to women's empowerment. Existing gender bias and discriminatory practices might prevent women from participating in and benefiting fully from economic advancement (Buvinić & Furst-Nichols, 2014; Cornwall, 2016, 2018; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Esplen & Brody, 2007; Fox & Romero, 2017; Kabeer, 2012; Kidder et al., 2014). Furthermore, as empowerment is a multi-dimensional process which consists of economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions (Scheyvens, 1999), narrowing women's empowerment to only the economic dimension has crowded out attempts to empower women in other dimensions. Esplen and Brody (2007) argued that “women's empowerment is about more than financial gain; it is about enabling women to live lives of wellbeing and dignity, based on equality, rights, and justice” (p.2).

Empowerment is also relational as discussed above. Thus, focusing on women has left men out of the picture and may undermine efforts to achieve women's empowerment and equality in relation to men. It has also put women at risk of domestic violence because men fear losing control when women take on new roles or earn incomes, as discussed in the MAD

section previously (Boonabaana, 2014; Bulte & Lensink, 2019; Kidder et al., 2014; Vyas et al., 2015). Although the World Bank's 2006 gender action plan makes an effort to include quality day-care services to support women's participation in product and labour markets, it does not tackle how men share unpaid household responsibilities with women when women work and earn more outside the home. Espen and Brody (2007) argue that, "if women are to be genuinely empowered by economic opportunities, a more equal distribution of care between men and women at the household and community levels is crucial" (p.13).

It seems that WEE programmes generally focus on empowering women, following Kabeer's framework, which emphasises the interrelations of two dimensions: resources and agency (both Golla et al.'s and WEAI frameworks above). Some development agencies like the World Bank also support the development of conducive legal frameworks to support women's formal rights, the right-hand side of Rao, and Kelleher's empowerment framework. These are all important, but not sufficient to guarantee empowerment. Efforts are also required on the left-hand side of the framework to challenge informal social norms and raise consciousness and the capability of women to be self-confident and gain power from within, so that they can make choices and changes for their lives (Cornwall, 2016; Kabeer, 2005; Scheyvens, 2020). Cornwall and Edwards (2014) argue that:

Providing women with loans, business opportunities, and means to generate income may in and of itself bring about some changes in their lives, including enabling them to better manage their poverty. But to see really substantial changes, the kinds that can transform the root causes of that poverty and begin to address the deep structural basis of gender inequality, conditions need to be fostered for shifts in consciousness so that women begin to understand their situations and come together to act to bring about change that can benefit not only them, but also other women. (p.5)

Critics claim that the tendency of WEE programmes to link women's empowerment with economic growth harkens back to the efficiency approach, and becomes instrumentalist with little or no attention to social transformation and women's rights (Chant & Sweetman, 2012; Cornwall, 2018; Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009).

However, donors' approaches to women's development have changed over time to adapt to changes in socio-economic, cultural, and political contexts. As noted above, these approaches include welfare, equity, anti-poverty, efficiency, and empowerment, rights-based approach,

and so on. In my experience of 20 years as a development manager in Vietnam, I also saw that some development agencies had adapted their implementation approach to take on more critical approaches over time. They have changed from an instrumentalist approach, simply integrating women into development programmes for economic empowerment, to facilitating institutional changes in informal and formal rules and norms to support women's development. Moreover, some development organisations such as the UN and USAID have made efforts to include men in their development programmes to share the workload with women (Doss et al., 2012; Heilman & Meyers, 2016; Hill, 2011). For example, OECD has recently launched a new approach to women's economic empowerment, emphasising the need to design development policies and programmes that "work for women" (OECD, 2019, pp. 10-12). These programmes recognise and promote shared responsibilities for unpaid care work within the household, the involvement of women and women's organisations to improve ownership and "avoid backlash based on a perception of 'foreign's agenda'". The World Bank's gender strategy (2016-2023) goes beyond smart economics to include human rights, enhancing women's voice and agency (World Bank, 2015). These are all issues that have been criticised by feminists in the instrumentalist and other approaches to women's development so far. Therefore, rather than a specific approach to women's development, a continuum of approaches has evolved over time to meet development outcomes of gender equality and women's.

3.6. A conceptual framework

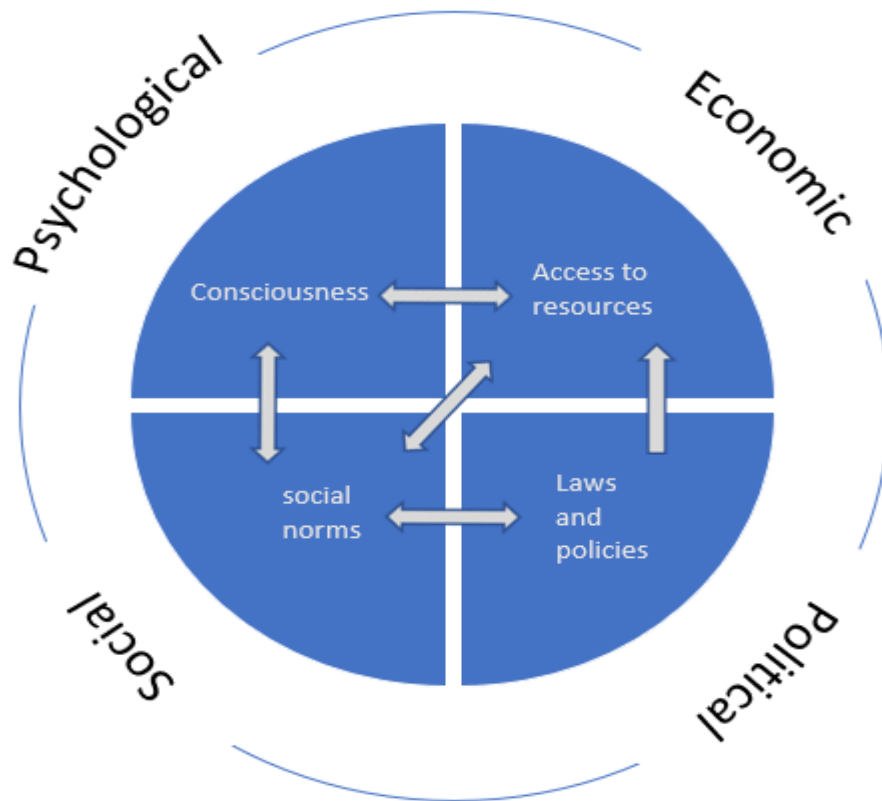
Given the issues around the instrumental WEE approach, as discussed in section 3.4 above, there is a need to broaden the concept of women's empowerment, not focusing narrowly on the economic aspect, but also on psychological, social, and political empowerment aspects. Therefore, this thesis examines whether the donor-private sector partnership for WEE empowers women under a broader conceptualisation of the empowerment lens. From the existing empowerment theories above, the concept of women's empowerment adopted in this research focuses on the process of activating women's consciousness so they can exert greater control over their lives in relation to men. As a result, they have better access to resources and represent and raise their voices about their needs and concerns in a way that

challenges inequitable structures, rules, and norms (Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Scheyvens, 1999; Scheyvens, 2020). For this reason, the conceptual framework of this study is a hybrid (Figure 3.5) that draws from two frameworks: Rao and Kelleher's gender equality framework (2005) and Scheyvens's empowerment framework (1999). This conceptual framework guided the research in two ways. Firstly, Rao and Kelleher's framework, depicted in the centre of Figure 3.5, identified areas of change that the donor-business partnership needs to facilitate to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment objectives. The areas of change include changes at individual and systemic levels and changes in informal and formal rules:

- Women increase self-esteem, confidence, consciousness, and capability. Rao et al. (2015, p. 26) suggested that changes in knowledge, skills, political consciousness, and commitment to gender equality are necessary. Additionally, men also need to change their perspective to value and support women.
- Women have access to and control productive resources and income generated from the development interventions.
- Changes in social norms and exclusionary practices against women.
- Changes in laws, policies, and regulations create a conducive environment for gender equality and women's empowerment.

Secondly, Scheyvens's empowerment framework, which is depicted in the outer cycle of Figure 3.5, established an analytical frame of women's empowerment outcomes in four dimensions: psychological, economic, political, and social. Modification of empowerment and disempowerment signs for each dimension of Scheyvens's framework is presented in Table 3.4 below.

Figure 3.5. A Conceptual Framework



Source: Author, adopted from Rao and Kelleher (2005) and Scheyvens (1999, 2020)

The psychological empowerment in this research is understood as women experiencing enhanced self-esteem, self-confidence, and a sense of dignity as they engage in business-related activities (Malhotra et al., 2002; Rowlands, 1998; Scheyvens, 1999). This is not only achieved via economic success, but also the comradarie and technical skills that women gain from their participation in training, working cooperatively with others, and other business activities which can help them be more confident. Psychological disempowerment occurs when women are not confident and do not believe in their capacity to join businesses and participate in social and community activities.

The economic empowerment dimension will look at how women economically benefit from their engagement with businesses. It also looks at other factors that impact women's participation and benefits from economic activities, including access to training and information (Huyer, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2021; Su et al., 2020) and access to and control over

productive resources to improve their economic conditions (Kabeer, 1999; Rao & Kelleher, 2005). FAO (2016) defines productive resources as assets, land, equipment, networks (social capital), agricultural services, and financial services. The lack of access to productive resources constrains women's economic empowerment (Palacios-López & López, 2015; Quaye et al., 2015; UN Women et al., 2015). Economic empowerment also includes women's influence on household production and income and expenditure decisions (Anderson et al., 2017; Doss, 2013; Kabeer, 1999; Mason, 2005). Women are economically disempowered when they are dependent on men and have limited access to resources and intra-household decision-making.

Women's social empowerment is referred to in this research as increased recognition and respect in society so that they have equal opportunities to men (Malhotra et al., 2002; Su et al., 2020). As a result, they also have better access to health care and education, reduced domestic workload and face no risk of violence due to their economic involvement. Existing social norms that discriminate against women and how they affect women's empowerment are also discussed. Social disempowerment occurs when discriminatory norms and practices against women exist and prevent them from participating in and benefitting from social and economic activities. Women are socially disempowered when they face violence and heavy workloads or are prevented from engaging, for example in women's group activities.

Women's political empowerment includes confidence to raise their voices about their needs and concerns in public discussion, their participation in decision-making bodies and the possibility of being influential (Bayissa et al., 2018; Chavarro et al., 2020; Cherayi & Jose, 2016; Malhotra et al., 2002; Scheyvens, 1999). Conversely, women are politically disempowered when men dominate community meetings and hold leadership positions, and women are actively discouraged from exercising their power.

Table 3.4. Women’s Empowerment and Disempowerment Signs in Relation to Men

Empowerment dimensions	Signs of empowerment	Signs of disempowerment
Psychological empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women experience enhanced self-esteem and confidence to undertake business-related activities. They are more active in participating and becoming agents of change. - They gain respect from their husbands and enhance their sense of dignity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women are not confident and do not believe in their capacity to join a business and participate in social and community activities.
Economic empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women increase their income and access to training, information, and productive resources. They also increase bargaining power and influence household decisions. - Men make joint decisions with women and enable them to control their income or have joint control of income. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women increase financial dependence and face barriers to access to training and productive resources. - Women have limited influence on the intra-household decision-making process and do not control their own income.
Social empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women receive recognition and respect in their society. They have enhanced access to education and health care services. - Community social norms support women’s involvement in business. - Men adopt new gender roles and share housework in terms of traditionally women’s chores, like taking care of children and the elderly, cooking, and cleaning. - Women do not face the risk of violence and are not overburdened as a result of their involvement in economic activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discriminatory norms and practices against women prevent them from participating in and benefiting from social and economic activities. - Violence against women arises from women earning income or taking on new roles. - Women are overburdened as a result of their involvement in economic activities.

Political empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women have access to and raise their voices in public discussions. - Women are present in decision-making bodies. - Men support and respect women taking decisions and making roles in a wider community and beyond. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Men dominate community meetings and hold important leadership positions.
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Source: Author, based on Bayissa et al. (2018), Chavarro et al.(2020), Cherayi & Jose (2016), Huyer (2016), Kabeer (1999, 2005), Malhotra et al. (2002), Scheyvens (1999), and Su et al. (2020).

3.7. Concluding remarks

This chapter highlighted an evolving approach to women's development applied to development programmes. It also lays out core concepts of power and empowerment and underlines associated issues when donors narrow down the radical approach to women's empowerment to merely an instrumentalist women's economic empowerment approach. The development of the conceptual framework on donor-private sector partnership for women's empowerment to guide the methodology and analysis of this study is the climax of this chapter. This framework combined Rao and Kelleher's gender equality framework to highlight the four areas of changes that are needed for the women's empowerment process and Scheyvens's empowerment framework to assess women's empowerment outcomes in four dimensions: psychological, economic, political, and social. The next chapter details the research methodology to examine if ethnic minority women in the northwest mountainous areas of Vietnam are empowered through their engagement in the agricultural and tourism value chains, as expected by the GREAT programmes.

CHAPTER FOUR. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research epistemology and the rationale for selecting qualitative case study research as the mode of inquiry. It discusses the selection of an embedded single case study and its sub-units. It also delineates the positionality and ethical issues related to the research when the researcher moves from working for a donor agency that runs a programme to researching and analysing it. This research took place during the global COVID-19 pandemic. I discuss how I adapted my research design when I could not travel to Vietnam, and provides lessons learned on how to undertake remote fieldwork using Research Assistants. The chapter also explains research methods for data collection. The chapter then concludes with a discussion on how collected data was analysed, triangulated, and managed.

An article reflecting on my experience of doing remote fieldwork using local research assistants during the pandemic was published in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* (Nguyen et al., 2022). Section 4.7 below is my contribution to the article, and it is drawn directly from the article.

4.2. Research paradigm

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Murray and Overton (2014), it is important to understand the research philosophy and the nature of research at the beginning of the research design. The set of beliefs and knowledge the researcher brings to the study will inform the research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). O'Leary (2017) and Overton and van Diermen (2014) strongly advocate for the selection of a research paradigm based on how it helps you find the answers to your research questions. My research took a social-constructionist epistemological approach; that is, “the theories of knowledge that emphasise that the world is constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretation” (O'Leary, 2017, p. 7). Creswell (2007) has the same definition of social-constructivism. The

social-constructivist approach helped me understand how a donor, the government, and the private sector perceive women's economic empowerment. It also helped me understand how women interpret their status in relation to men and how donor and private sector actors perceive businesses' strengths, limitations, and challenges in development partnerships.

Intersectionality (Chambers, 2021) was embedded in this study. It influenced methodology and the way in which data was collected and analyzed. For example, the research applied key intersectional lenses of gender and ethnicity, showing that women are not a homogenous group, and ethnic minorities are also not homogenous. The data collection and analysis of the three researched ethnic minority groups took into consideration the distinct gender norms within each ethnic sub-group.

As my research aims to find a better approach that enables donors and the private sector to work collaboratively to empower ethnic minority women, I also adopted a feminist perspective to ensure that the research was:

- committed to the empowerment of women
- working towards changing social inequality
- presenting human diversity, including marginalised voices
- recognising important differences between women and men, as well as among women themselves (according to race, class, ethnicity, religion, culture, sexual orientation, etc.)
- acknowledging the power and position of the researcher/research assistants
- lessening the distinction between researcher and researched
- accepting and searching for multiple, subjective and partial truths.

(O'Leary, 2017, p. 156)

I selected a qualitative case study approach as it is well-suited for collecting in-depth data to answer my research questions. Qualitative research involves the process of exploring and understanding how individuals or groups perceive and interpret their experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Merriam, 1998; O'Leary, 2017; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). The qualitative case study approach allows for in-depth information to be collected (Merriam, 1998; Stake,

1995). It also helps me to answer “how” and the descriptive and/or exploratory type of “what” questions of the research (Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2018). However, qualitative research is often critiqued for being subjective and biased as data are collected based on a small number of cases (O’Leary, 2017; Stake, 1995). For this reason, information and knowledge generated from qualitative research are not representative and generalisable (O’Leary, 2017). To overcome these weaknesses, I must be clear about my positionality, values, and biases regarding the research (see section 4.4), as recommended by other scholars (Aurini et al., 2016; Merriam, 1998; O’Leary, 2017; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). My research does not aim to generalise the research findings. I take an inductive approach, moving “from specific to general”, rather than the deductive approach, “from general to the particular”, to test hypotheses or theories (Merriam, 1998; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014, p. 59; Swanborn, 2010; Yin, 2018).

4.3. Research case study

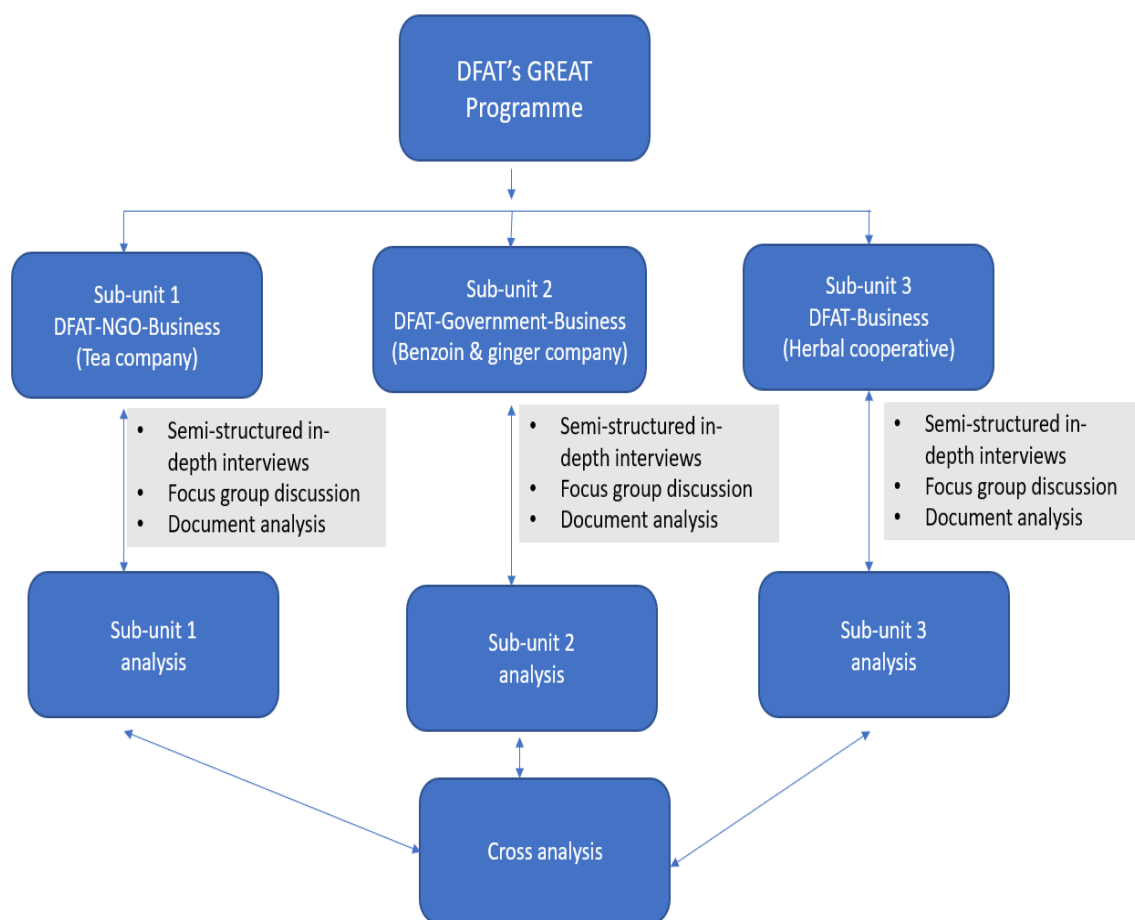
The section below provides background information and the rationale for why the GREAT programme and the three businesses were selected for the study.

4.3.1. Selection of a case study and its related sub-units

According to Yin (2018), a case study can be a single-case study or multiple-case studies. Depending on the context, a single-case study may involve more than one level of analysis or subunits; for example, a single programme that consists of several funded projects. This is called an “embedded single-case study” (Yin, 2018, p. 51). I selected the GREAT programme as an embedded single-case study. This allows me to have a deeper understanding of the research subject (Gustafsson, 2017). In this case, it helps me understand the donor-private sector partnership approach for women’s economic empowerment, which the GREAT programme is a pioneer of in Vietnam. Three sub-units were selected, representing three collaborative partnership models with enterprises implemented under the GREAT programme. These sub-units include: a partnership model between the donor, the NGO, and the business (Sub-unit 1); a partnership model between the donor, the local government, and the business (Sub-unit 2); and a partnership model between the donor and the business (a

women-led cooperative) (Sub-unit 3). As these sub-units represent diverse partnership structures, the cross-case analysis in this research will look for common themes across the three sub-units (Miles et al., 2020). How the GREAT programme and its sub-units are connected is presented in Figure 4.1 below.

Figure 4.1. The Connections Between the GREAT Programme and Its Sub-units for the Research



Source: Author

4.3.2. Research location

The GREAT programme is implemented in two mountainous provinces of Vietnam, Lao Cai and Son La, in the northwest region where there is a high proportion of ethnic minority groups

and low levels of socio-economic development. I selected Lao Cai province for this research, as explained in section 4.3.4 below.

Lao Cai is a mountainous province close to the Chinese border in the northwest of Vietnam (Map 4.1). Because of the remoteness and geographical difficulties, Lao Cai lags behind other regions in terms of socio-economic development, with the highest poverty rate in Vietnam (UNDP et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018). The poverty rate of Lao Cai in 2017 was 21.8%, which was three times higher than the national average (7.2%) (GREAT, 2018b). The poverty rates of the poor and near-poor (those vulnerable to falling back into poverty) in the targeted GREAT programme's areas were 54-66%, which were much higher than the provincial rates.

Lao Cai is also a tourist spot well-known for its beautiful landscape, including Fansipan peak, the 'Roof of Indochina', and diverse ethnic minority cultures. Lao Cai is home to 26 ethnic groups, which account for 66% of the people (GSO, 2019). Amongst the ethnic minority groups, Hmong⁴ people account for 24% of the ethnic minority population, Tay for 15%, Dao⁵ for 14%, and the remaining people belong to other ethnic minority groups (DFAT, 2016). Ethnic minority people often live dispersedly, and their livelihood depends mostly on subsistence farming of rice and maize. The agriculture sector has unique local speciality products such as medicinal plants, tea, ginger, cinnamon, cardamom, and benzoin, which provide cash incomes for local people (Trincsi et al., 2014). These products are suitable for business development linkages with small-scale farmers for high-end domestic markets and export.

The total population of Lao Cai in 2019 was 730,420, of which 49% were women (GSO, 2019). The total number of small and medium enterprises in Lao Cai is 2,056, accounting for over 90% of the total number of enterprises in the province in 2019 (Lao Cai Province, 2020). Among these, women-led enterprises account for 22% of the registered businesses (GREAT, 2018b). The border with China brings opportunities for cross-border trade in the province, along with challenges, like smuggling and trafficking (Turner, 2013). In recent years, the

⁴ Also it is also called H'mong or Mông in other documents

⁵ Also it is also called Rao, Yao, or D'ao

agriculture and tourism sectors have experienced rapid growth attracting private-sector investment. These two sectors contributed only 16% and 14% to the provincial gross regional domestic products (GRDP) in 2016, respectively, but they both have great potential as an important livelihood for local people, especially women (DFAT, 2016; GREAT, 2018b). The majority of the province's rural population work in agriculture (77%). In the GREAT programme targeted areas, this number was 82-95% (GREAT, 2018b). Women contribute 60-65% of the labour in most agricultural production, while men spend more time in non-farm opportunities and hired labour markets (GREAT, 2018b).

Map 4.1. Map of Vietnam Showing the Research Location



Note. Adapted from *Lao Cai in Vietnam*, by Wikimedia Commons, n.d. (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lao_Cai_in_Vietnam.svg). Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

4.3.3. Background information of the three businesses involved in the study

The three micro and small businesses representing three different collaborative partnership models implemented under the GREAT programme were selected from the tourism and agriculture sectors. The rationale for selecting these three businesses is discussed in section 4.3.4 below. These businesses produce speciality products of Lao Cai: tea, medicinal plants, and benzoin, which were identified by the provincial authority as having great potential to bring better incomes for local ethnic minority people, as mentioned above. Local ethnic

minority people are involved in these supply chains through a simple contract farming relationship; that is, they sign a contract to sell the products to a company. In return, the company provides training and technical support to farmers and commits to buying all the products if they meet the agreed quality requirements. Summary information on the three businesses and their partnerships with the GREAT programme is presented in Table 4.1.

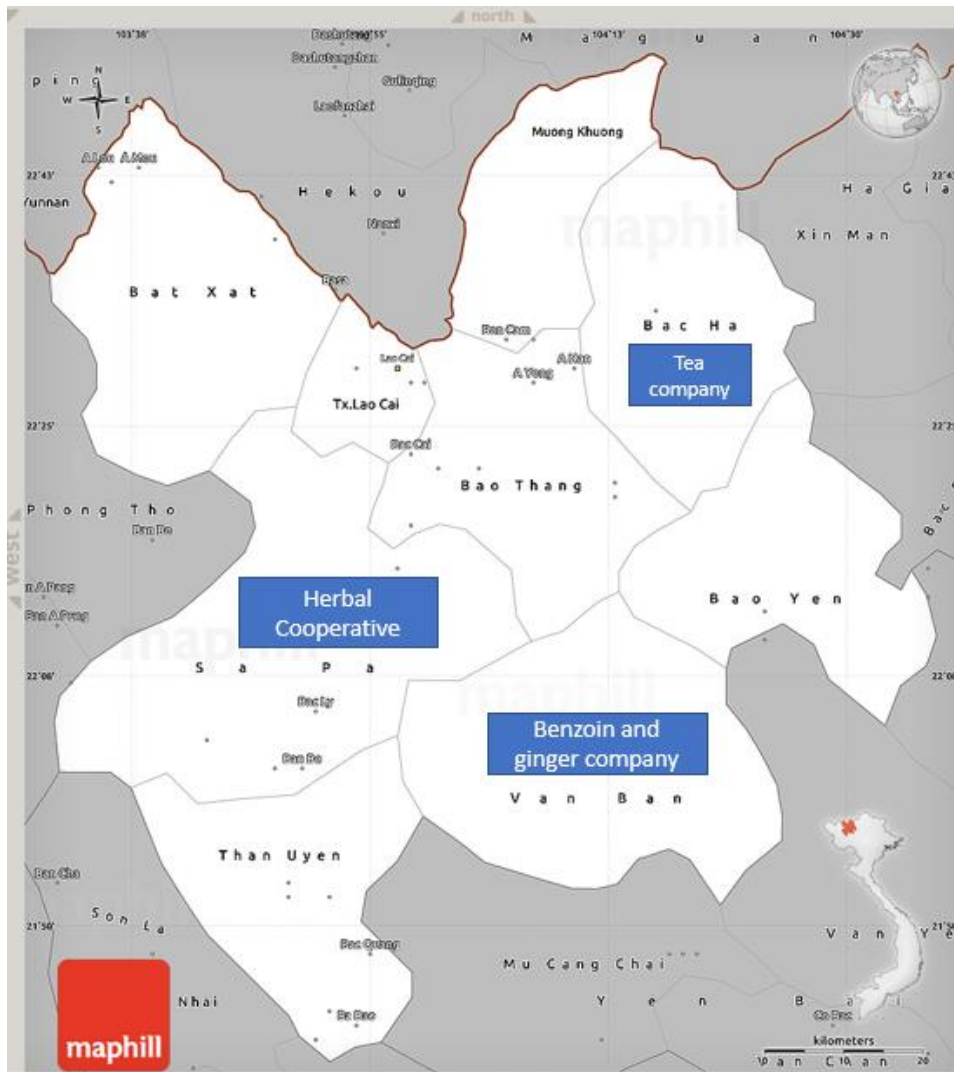
Table 4.1. Summary of the Three Businesses

Business	Type of partnership	Commodity involved	Business scale	Main ethnic minority groups involved
Tea company	Sub-unit 1: Donor-NGO-Business	Intercropping of Shan tea and organic medicinal plants for export and high-end domestic markets	Small enterprise	Tay, Hmong, Dao
Benzoin and ginger company	Sub-unit 2: Donor-Local government-Business	Benzoin and organic ginger for export	Small enterprise	Tay, Hmong, Dao
Herbal cooperative	Sub-unit 3: Donor-Business	Traditional herbal bath products and medicinal essential oils for tourists and domestic markets	Micro-enterprise	Dao Hmong

Source: Author

The location of the three selected businesses in Lao Cai province is shown in Map 4.2.

Map 4.2. Map of Lao Cai Province Showing the Location of the Three Businesses



Note. Adapted from *Gray Simple Map of Lao Cai*, by Maphill, n.d. (<http://www.maphill.com/vietnam/lao-cai/simple-maps/gray-map/>). CC BY-ND.

Business One: Tea company (a Donor-NGO-Business partnership)

The first business, a tea company, is located in Bac Ha district, which is one of the poor districts of Lao Cai province (The Office of Government of Vietnam, 2017). The district's total population in 2019 was 65,338, of which 48.7% were women (GSO, 2019). The district has 14 ethnic groups, and most of them are ethnic minorities. The Hmong ethnic group accounts for 55.5%, the Dao ethnic group for 17.3%, the Tay ethnic group for 12.1%, and the remaining people belong to other ethnic groups (Lao Cai PPC, 2019). Due to the geographic location, Bac Ha district has the advantage of rich indigenous herbal plants and Shan tea (Shan means

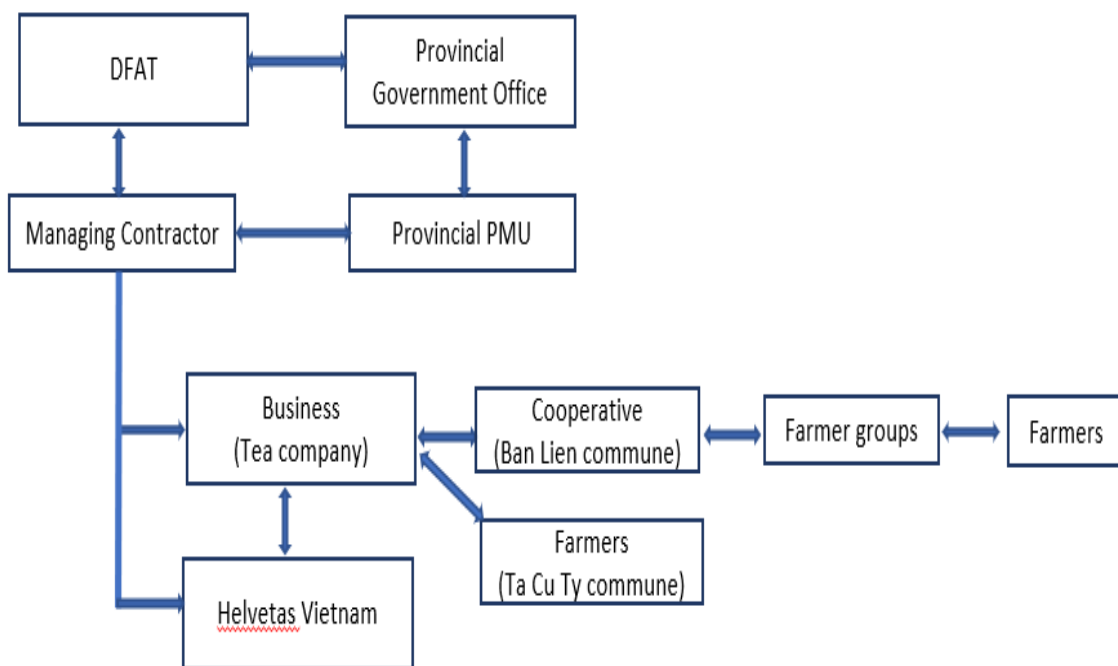
mountain), which is a white-grey coated special tea growing in a cool climate in high mountainous areas. The GREAT programme supported the development of an intercropping model of Shan tea and organic medicinal plants. It is hoped this will benefit ethnic minority women since they are the primary tea collectors, and income from tea leaf collection is the main cash income for women. They can harvest tea leaves for about 60 days, across four periods of the year (Bac Ha Ltd., 2018). The intercropping of tea with medicinal plants was also hoped to increase jobs and incomes for tea growers as medicinal plants can be harvested when the tea seasons have ended. However, at the time of my research, this intercropping method was still in the pilot phase, and the medicinal plants were only trialled at a small scale. Therefore, the research focussed only on the tea value chain.

The tea company was established in 2010 to take over an organic Shan tea area which had been developed five years previously by the provincial government. Before partnering with the GREAT programme in early 2019, the company had developed 765 ha of Shan tea in six communes of Bac Ha district, of which four communes had developed marketable tea products with 673 households growing tea. Among these 673 tea-growing households, 178 households from five farmer groups in five villages in Ban Lien commune joined an organic tea cooperative (Bac Ha Ltd., 2018). To be a member of the cooperative, farmers do not have to make any financial contribution, but they must commit to non-chemical cultivation and to keeping records for traceability. The cooperative has successfully exported its tea products to Europe and the United States. My research was carried out with the cooperative members in Ban Lien commune where the company has a long experience working with people in the community since 2010, as well as with non-members in Ta Cu Ty commune, where the company has just expanded its production areas in recent years. Farmers in Ta Cu Ty have signed production contracts with the tea company.

Two separate partnerships with the GREAT programme were signed in April 2019 to support the development of organic Shan tea production in combination with medicinal plants for the advancement of ethnic minority women. One partnership was between the GREAT programme and the tea company to increase the income and capacity of tea-growing households to produce organic tea and medicinal plants, targeting over 900 women. Women's income was expected to be improved by reducing production costs, increasing

yield, increasing the price of certified organic products, and intercropping with medicinal plants. A second partnership was between the GREAT programme and an NGO, Helvetas Vietnam⁶, to work with the tea company and the farmers to achieve the above objectives and improve the confidence and decision-making of ethnic minority women in households and communities. DFAT and the Provincial Government Office chair a Steering Committee to provide strategic guidance to the programme and oversee the programme implementation. DFAT appointed a managing contractor to manage and deliver the programme. The managing contractor is collaborating with the Provincial Programme Management Unit (PMU) to manage the programme. A partnership model for this case study is illustrated in Figure 4.2 below:

Figure 4.2. A partnership Model Between the Donor, the NGO, and the Business for WEE



Source: Author

⁶ Helvetas is a Swiss NGO operating in Vietnam

Business Two: Benzoin and ginger company (a Donor-Business-Government partnership)

The benzoin and ginger company is located in the Van Ban district. It is also one of the poor districts of Lao Cai province (The Office of Government of Vietnam, 2017). The total population in 2019 was 89,167, of which 48.9 % were women (GSO, 2019). The district has 12 ethnic groups, and most of them are ethnic minorities. The Tay ethnic group is the most populous, accounting for 50% of the district population (Lao Cai Province, 2010). The location is home to a plantation of bodhi trees (*styrax tonkinensis*) used to extract benzoin.

The benzoin and ginger company is a pioneer in benzoin extraction and trade. It has only been in the area since 2017. Before 2017, bodhi trees were planted for timber and raw material for paper processing. The company introduced the benzoin (a fragrant resin) extraction technique to people, so when the bodhi tree is seven years old, they can tap the tree to harvest the resin for five to six years before logging it for wood. The company also lends people working tools and provides first-aid supplies (one package per extraction group). According to the company, men are mainly involved in benzoin extraction, while women are involved in planting small trees and removing tree debris from the benzoin.

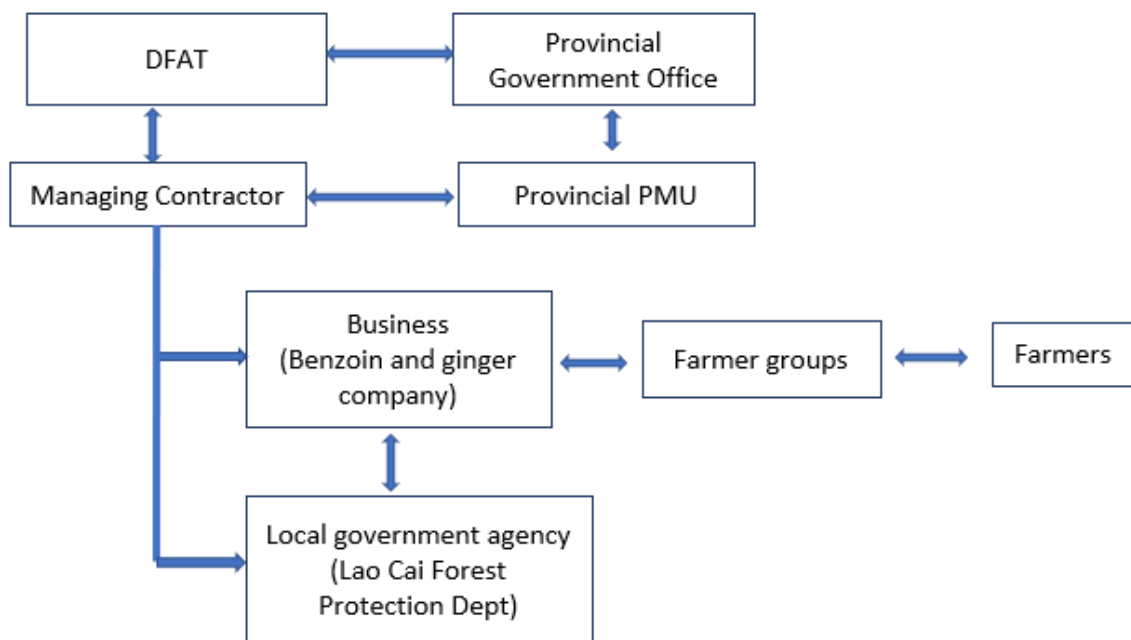
Benzoin is used in medicines, perfumes, and incense. Laos and Vietnam are the two largest producers of benzoin. There is an increasing demand for this product in European markets (France, Germany, England) and Asian markets (Myanmar). However, the company's supply is estimated to only meet 30% of the market demand (Duc Phu Ltd., 2018). Therefore, there is a potential opportunity for upscaling benzoin production in Lao Cai to improve incomes for bodhi tree growers.

GREAT has been partnering with the benzoin and ginger company and the Forest Protection Department of Lao Cai and Van Ban (a local government agency) since March 2019 to support upscaling benzoin production to 300ha. The partnership with the company is to enhance women's earnings from benzoin. Because only trees older than seven years can be tapped for benzoin extraction, the company has also introduced intercropping farming with organic ginger to provide short-term income for women in new bodhi tree plantation areas. Farmers are trained to apply sustainable ginger farming practices to meet the international organic

standards and the standards of the Union for Ethical BioTrade for export markets. The partnership with Van Ban and Lao Cai Forest Protection Department is to develop policies and planning for plantation areas. The project is expected to benefit 600 Tay, Dao, and Hmong women and help protect forests from over-exploitation of timber. A partnership model for this case study is illustrated in

Figure 4.3 below:

Figure 4.3. A Partnership Model Between the Donor, a Local Government Agency, and a Business for WEE



Source: Author

Business Three: Herbal cooperative (a donor-business partnership)

The herbal cooperative was established in 2015 in Ta Phin commune in Sa Pa district, a famous tourist spot. The commune is also one of the extremely poor communities in the Vietnamese government support programme⁷ (The Office of Government of Vietnam, 2017). The majority

⁷ The Government programme called 135 supports socio-economic development for the extremely poor, border and island communities

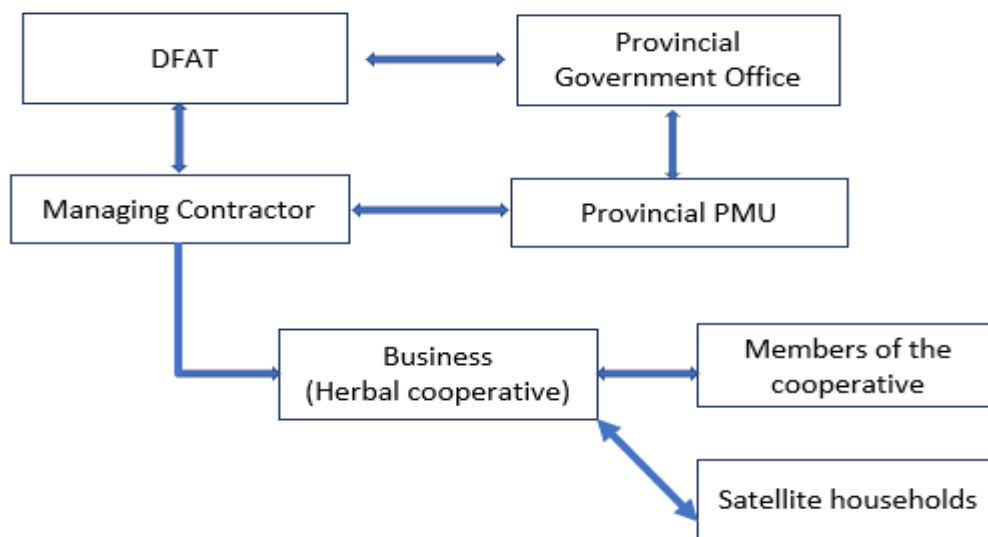
of people living in Ta Phin commune are from the ethnic minority groups Dao (Red Dao) and Hmong. The cooperative has seven founding members, of which only one is a man. Before joining the GREAT programme in June 2019, the cooperative had 120 official members, of which 117 members were women (97.5%). Members of the cooperative are all from the Red Dao ethnic minority, and they are poor or near-poor (Dao Do Cooperative, 2018). Only the seven founding members contributed money to the cooperative; the remaining 113 cooperative members did not have to make any financial contributions.

Ms Tan is the director of the herbal cooperative. She is ethnic Red Dao herself. She founded the cooperative to support women in her ethnic community and Hmong women to have jobs and stable incomes. Before joining the cooperative, Dao women worked as street vendors selling souvenirs to tourists. In recent years, the government banned street vendors from following and selling souvenirs to tourists. The cooperative provides alternative jobs and incomes for the local women. The cooperative produces traditional Red Dao ethnic herbal bath products and medicinal essential oils to sell mainly to tourists and customers in the domestic markets. It also provides services for tourists to experience traditional bath medicine. The Red Dao herbal bath products made of 73 different herbs are known for their health-boosting properties. Ms Tan inherited the knowledge from her grandma, who unfortunately passed away at the age of 102 in early 2021.

The cooperative signed a partnership with the GREAT programme in June 2019. The partnership aims to expand the current herbal bath value chain by engaging additional women (satellite members) in the supply of natural inputs, upgrading processing facilities, developing new products, and improving market access. The satellite members are different from the cooperative members. They only grow and sell the products to the cooperative, while the cooperative members are allowed to contribute ideas to the cooperative's annual implementation plan. In addition, the cooperative members elect a representative to participate in consultation with the Board of Directors to make crucial decisions. They also have shares in the cooperative, and the share value is defined annually by the business results. When the research was carried out, the cooperative had 120 members who were Red Dao and 204 satellite members who were Red Dao and Hmong.

The project is expected to have positive social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts on the target community. It supports Red Dao ethnic minority women in preserving and maintaining their indigenous knowledge of traditional medicinal herbs, improving incomes from selling raw materials, and receiving an annual profit share from the cooperative. It also contributes to the protection of biodiversity through sustainable cultivating and harvesting of herbal medicinal plants. A partnership model for this case study is illustrated in Figure 4.4 below.

Figure 4.4. A Partnership Model Between the Donor and the Business for WEE



Source: Author

4.3.4. Rationale for the selection of the case study and its sub-units

The selection of DFAT’s aid programme and the three businesses for the study was based on the following factors: Pragmatics, purposiveness, and intrinsic interest (O’Leary, 2017).

Pragmatics: It is important for researchers to consider practical aspects when selecting case studies (O’Leary, 2017). Pragmatics can involve “accessibility,” when researchers have connections that allow them to gain access to case studies (O’Leary, 2017; Stake, 1995). I took advantage of my connection as a former DFAT staff member when selecting DFAT’s aid programme. This helped me to access the research areas and the businesses. The selection of

three sub-units under the GREAT programme was also based on a practical issue. All three businesses are located in the same Lao Cai province (even though they are in different districts), rather than in two different provinces of the GREAT programme. This helped to minimise transport costs and eliminate variations caused by different factors between the two provinces. Swanborn (2010) is concerned about the “convenience” approach in selecting a case study. Therefore, he suggests combining pragmatics with other criteria. The two other selection criteria that my research follows are discussed below.

Purposiveness: There is a knowledge gap on the role of micro and small inclusive businesses, especially in women’s economic empowerment (see Chapter 2). The DFAT programme case study was selected to fill this gap. The three businesses were also selected to represent different partnership models between DFAT and enterprises, as explained above.

Intrinsic interest: A single-case study can be justified if it is unique (Merriam, 1998; O’Leary, 2017; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). DFAT was the only donor working in a partnership with micro and small businesses for women’s economic empowerment in Vietnam at the time of the research (personal communication with a Vietnamese government official from the Ministry of Planning and Investment, September 2020). Therefore, this case study is unique to my research.

The selection of these three collaborative partnership models between the donor (DFAT) and a business with additional support from different partners such as NGOs and local government agencies provides rich data for analysis. It helps me to understand how donors might better engage with businesses to support ethnic minority women’s economic empowerment. However, due to the COVID-19 situation, many programme activities were postponed or cancelled. Therefore, at the time of research, the impact of NGO’s and local government’s support activities was not revealed clearly.

4.4. Positionality and Reflexivity– Insider and Outsider

Understanding and acknowledging the position of the researcher is important as it influences the ways in which the researcher interacts with the research participants, the quality of data

collection, and interpretation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). During the research process, qualitative researchers are expected to constantly and critically self-examine their positionality concerning their relationships, power relations, and politics with research participants in the research context. LaRocco et al. (2019, p. 24) define positionality as “an inward-looking exercise in which we demand of ourselves an examination of our constructed cognitive frameworks, a consideration of the role of empathy in research, and an interpersonal (often cross-cultural) relationship in scholarship”. Sultana (2007) calls the process of constantly examining the way we think, feel and interact in our research, questioning our assumptions, and being open to change to understand and (if possible) address unequal power relations and research politics as reflexivity. Reflexivity is claimed to play an important role in qualitative research in terms of data validation and practising cultural safety, especially in cross-cultural research (Crabtree, 2019).

In this research, I am aware that I hold a special position in that I am both an insider and an outsider. Scheyvens and McLennan (2014) argue that the researcher moves along a continuum from being the insider to the outsider depending on the context and the individual. Factors like ethnicity, language, class, culture, race, gender, age, education, and religion could create positions for the researcher as an insider or outsider, or a combination of the two (Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). I am an insider in the research, as I previously worked as a Senior Programme Manager responsible for the design and implementation of the researched programme, and I was instrumental in all the decisions on the selection of the businesses for partnerships. People who are involved in the programme are familiar with my position working for a donor organisation (DFAT) and my role as a manager of the programme. While this gives me deep knowledge of the programme, this may prevent the research participants from fully sharing their stories with me. This did not become an issue because I used Research Assistants to help out with the interviews, and the farmers in the three businesses did not know me well. However, in the interviews with key informants that I undertook, I made clear my current position as an independent researcher. This message was stated in the information sheet, and research participants were reminded during the interview process. I was also clear that I would independently analyse data without being influenced by the GREAT programme.

On the other hand, I am an outsider to the programme’s beneficiaries because of my background, education, ethnicity, language, and culture. I come from a city and a majority ethnic group with a different language from that used by the ethnic minority people in my study. This positionality gives me space to explore the research issues without pre-determined bias. I do acknowledge that being an outsider also limits my understanding of the local culture. I have to seek support from local people and GREAT programme officers to overcome the difficulties.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Stewart-Withers et al. (2014) suggest that researchers make notes and write fieldwork journals or reflective diaries during the study to regularly reflect on their positionality in the field. This can help researchers constantly assess how their personal experiences and their positionality may influence their interpretation of the results. I followed this advice and kept a research journal to record my thoughts or subjective conclusions during the data collection process. This information was regularly revisited and triangulated during data analysis and discussion.

4.5. Data collection

I used multiple research methods, including semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Multiple methods allow the research to collect “a richer and stronger array of evidence than can be accomplished by any single method alone” (Yin, 2018, p. 63). Table 4.2 demonstrates the connections between the research questions, the information sources, and the related research methods for data collection.

Table 4.2. Research Methods for Data Collection

Research questions	Source	How to collect the data
What are the perceptions and understandings of businesses about WEE?	A donor, a managing contractor, business owners	- Interviews using the semi-structured in-depth method
	Programme documents	- Document analysis
What are the strengths, limitations, and challenges of private sector involvement in WEE programmes?	Business owners, a donor, and a managing contractor	- Interviews using the semi-structured in-depth method
	Programme documents	- Document analysis

Research questions	Source	How to collect the data
How do ethnic minority women benefit and become empowered from their engagement in the agriculture and tourism production value chains?	Ethnic minority husbands and wives Programme documents - baseline and mid-line data	- Interviews with the individual (husband and wife separately or together) using the semi-structured in-depth method - Focus group discussions - Document analysis
How could donors better engage with the private sector to support ethnic women's empowerment?	A donor, a managing contractor, business owners, and ethnic minority women and men. Discussion from the research findings and the literature.	- Interviews using the semi-structured in-depth method - Focus group discussions

Source: Author

As research is an “iterative process”, which requires the researcher to constantly review and adjust a design during the data collection and analysis process (Bryman, 2012; O'Leary, 2017; Yin, 2018), the following research design was reviewed and modified during the data collection process.

4.5.1. Selection of research participants

Merriam (1998, p. 8) claims that in qualitative research, the selection of research participants is “usually (but not always) non-random, purposeful, and small, as opposed to the larger, more random sampling of quantitative research”. In my research, both purposeful and random sampling techniques were used to select the research participants. Purposeful sampling is “when the researcher makes a judgment on whom to include in the sample” (Overton & van Diermen, 2014, p. 45). It is often based on the issues the researchers want to study and understand (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling was applied to select the research participants from among the donor (DFAT), a managing contractor and the business owners. To avoid bias from the programme staff selecting research participants, ethnic minority people (husbands and wives) were selected randomly by my Research Assistants from the list of beneficiaries of each partnership. The selection of the research participants

was also made in consultation with the local authorities to ensure it was feasible (for example, if the road to the selected households were accessible).

4.5.2. Semi-structured in-depth interviews

The interviews contained a mix of structured questions to gather background information on all research participants, and less structured questions to delve deeper into the issues. Participants were encouraged to use their own language in the interview. In qualitative research, it is important that the interview is structured as a conversation in order to capture the research participants' expression of their understanding, experiences, and perceptions about the researched issues (Brinkmann, 2013). It is common in social research that the researcher applies the "non-directive interview approach" developed by Rogers (1945). This approach helps eliminate the researchers' bias, have a full story, and allow the researched to elaborate their opinions in their own words. For example, in research on women's empowerment in Vietnam, Pham and Pham (2018) and Santillán et al. (2004) found that while women reported that they were consulted in the household decision-making process, it was quite often their husbands who made the final decisions. Therefore, in my research, instead of asking women whether they were consulted on the decision-making process, they were asked how the decision was made.

A list of issues to be explored was developed to guide the interviews with different groups. For the group of DFAT, a managing contractor, NGO, local government, and business owners, the main issues to cover (but not be limited to) were as follows:

- Background information about the organisations and their roles in the partnerships
- Information on the business: how many farmers (disaggregated by male and female) are engaging in their value chains; selection criteria of the farmers
- Perceptions and understanding of WEE
- Strengths, limitations, and challenges of the private sector involvement in WEE
- Policies on WEE
- How donors and the private sector could collaborate to support WEE better.

During the interviews with ethnic minority men and women (husband and wife were interviewed together or separately when appropriate), the following issues, amongst others, were covered:

- Personal background information
- Information on production activities
- The level of confidence to participate in the production value chain
- How were key decisions made in the family: who decided what, and why?
- Gender division of labour
- Access to and control over resources and benefits
- Participation in community activities and social associations
- Attitude toward domestic violence
- Gender norms and practices that undermine and create barriers to women's participation in production and community activities
- Self-assessment of their incomes before and after joining the production value chain. Explanation of the reason for their assessment
- Other benefits or costs gained from their participation in the production value chains
- Suggestions on how donors and the private sector could collaborate to support WEE better
- Current constraints and challenges.

4.5.3. Focus group discussion

Focus groups have been used in qualitative research across different disciplines (Kamberelis et al., 2018). Depending on what researchers expect from the focus groups, they will decide who are the participants of the groups and the facilitation approach to run the group discussions (Aurini et al., 2016; Flick, 2007; Kamberelis et al., 2018). In my research, five to seven ethnic minority women who are working in the same existing production groups of the businesses were selected for the group discussions. The selection of group participants was also made in consultation with the business staff or with local authorities. The intention was to combine the research group discussion with their regular production group meetings

whenever possible. This approach aimed to save women's travel time and make the process more efficient. Five focus groups were conducted in all of the three businesses. Discussion themes were picked up from the individual interviews for further elaboration or verification. For example, during individual interviews conducted in the tea company, the issue of men dominating decision-making and signing contracts with businesses was identified. This issue was then discussed in the focus group to examine its impact on women's access to information and benefits. It is important to note that the purpose of the focus group is "not to reach consensus about the issue discussed, but to have different viewpoints articulated about the issue" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 22).

4.5.4. Document analysis

According to Yin (2018), documentary analysis is used in case study research to substantiate and validate evidence from other sources. Collecting and analysing data from documents followed the same approach as in interviews (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). In my research, the following types of documents were analysed: a GREAT programme design, a partnership design for each case, six-monthly and annual reports, programme gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming guidelines, monitoring and evaluation (M&E) reports – baseline and endline surveys, and government policies, and relevant documents from businesses.

4.6. Research design under pandemic conditions

The research was designed during a time when the world was suffering from the effects of the novel coronavirus, COVID-19. International travel was interrupted, and borders were partially closed to limit travellers. There was uncertainty about when border restrictions would be lifted to allow travel to the field for data collection. There was some progress on the vaccine development with the hope that it might be available for wider application by the end of 2020 or in the first quarter of 2021. In this environment, there were two plans, Plan A (involving me doing the entire fieldwork) and Plan B (in-country research assistants would be recruited, trained, and coached to carry out the fieldwork). Data collection under Plan B was divided into two phases and progressed according to the COVID-19 situation.

Plan A

If the border restrictions were lifted in early March 2021, I would travel and conduct the fieldwork myself.

Plan B

The data collection under Plan B was divided into two phases and progressed according to the COVID-19 situation. This process would be reviewed and adjusted according to the situation.

Phase 1 (March to June 2021): Three local female research assistants (RAs) would be recruited in early March 2021 to carry out a field visit and semi-structured in-depth interviews with ethnic minority people (noting that interviews would be with both the husband and wife, where possible). The research assistants would also carry out group discussions with the female farmers. The positionality of the local research assistant would also need to be discussed and considered, as it may greatly impact the research (McLennan et al., 2014; Turner, 2010b). Deane and Stevano (2016, p. 214) argue that “neglecting the role of research assistants in influencing the process of data collection and research design leads to biased data and possibly misleading results”. Therefore, training with the research assistants would be carried out via Zoom to ensure they understand the research purpose, ethical issues, and research methodology. All interviews would be recorded with the permission of the research participants and sent to me for transcribing and analysing. The research assistants would also be required to write a research journal and share it with me daily. A daily meeting via Zoom with research assistants would also be carried out in order for me to understand the progress, discuss emerging issues, and provide appropriate advice or correction if needed. This approach aligns with the recommendation of Dean and Stevano (2016) in the research using research assistants when the researcher is not present.

Phase 2 (June – August 2021): In the circumstances that border restrictions were lifted around June 2021 to allow travelling to the field for data collection, I could travel to carry out

all the interviews with donors, DFAT's managing contractor, the provincial PMU, and the business owners.

In case the border restrictions were not lifted around June 2021 to allow me to travel, the interviews with these key informants would be done via Zoom. These key informants were already familiar with meeting via Zoom, so this communication approach should not be a problem.

4.7. Research in Practice

Plan B was enacted as the pandemic progressed—the RAs conducted the fieldwork, and I interviewed the key informants via Zalo (a commonly-used Vietnamese communication app) or Zoom. The section below discusses the process and the issues that emerged from the remote fieldwork using the RAs.

4.7.1. Recruitment of Research Assistants

Depending on the type and context of research, a researcher may choose to approach experienced or non-experienced RAs (Gift et al., 1991). Within the scope and limits of the budget for doctoral research, I selected non-experienced RAs who were students of a regional university and a local college. Except for one RA who had prior experience conducting a quantitative survey, the other two RAs had never been involved in primary data collection. A lecturer at a local university was consulted about an appropriate rate of pay for the RAs, to ensure that they were paid the equivalent of the local rate for conducting a similar survey or interview work. This arrangement was explained to prospective RAs during the recruitment stage.

The terms of reference (TOR) that clearly outline the research purpose, the scope of work, the timeframe, and the specific requirement for recruiting the research assistants are in Appendix 2. This TOR was shared with my Vietnamese networks to help with recruitment. A key criterion was that the RAs would be women who are fluent in the languages of the Tay, Hmong, and Dao ethnic minority groups. Following applications and interviews with

prospective RAs, we hired three young women university students, Dzung, Sung, and Mai, each representing one of these ethnic groups.

Some disadvantages of working with less-skilled researchers are revealed in the section below; however, it is worth noting that there can also be advantages to this. For example, the RAs were fresh to conducting research and very willing to learn and were thus not constrained by pre-determined notions of what the research approach and questions should look like. The latter is an issue which a number of other researchers have raised in terms of the biases that researchers bring to research (Bourke, 2014; Qin, 2016; Sultana, 2007).

4.7.2. Preparing the Research Assistants for field research

A clear plan was developed to train the RAs. It was crucial for them to understand the purpose of the research, methodology and ethical issues, as well as develop a relationship with the research and other RAs. I conducted eight training sessions via Zoom with the RAs, covering the following topics:

- 1 Introducing each other and the research project;
- 2 Ethics
- 3 Theoretical framework, key concepts and terminologies;
- 4 RA expectations and training on in-depth interview methods (Brinkmann, 2013; Rogers, 1945);
- 5-8 Discussion of fieldwork safety issues, continued training on in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Aurini et al., 2016; Flick, 2007; Kamberelis et al., 2018).

The RAs were thus coached on the research methods and ethics, the theoretical framework and broader aims of the research, as well as key concepts employed in the research, including gender and women's economic empowerment. In this way, the RAs could understand and convey these terms to the research participants in the appropriate language. The large number of training sessions conducted with the group of RAs enabled the team to build rapport with one another. In addition, the ratio of three RAs to one researcher helped create an environment where the RAs were more at ease with one another, and the researcher

observed that the RAs became more confident and contributed freely to discussions. The RAs could discuss with each other and raise their concerns together with the researcher. This was an important process for breaking down some of the power hierarchies that are often present in the researcher–RA relationship.

In-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussion guidelines were developed to guide the RAs on how to introduce the research, what to ask in lead questions, and what to ask in follow-up questions (Appendix 3). In qualitative research, it is crucial to building a rapport and close relationship with research participants to collect in-depth information (Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). This is also because the research participants can hold a powerful position by choosing not to participate in the research or withdrawing their participation or responses after the surveys (Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). Therefore, the RAs were trained on how to build rapport with the research participants. They were asked to spend time with local authorities and project staff to learn about local cultures and any sensitive issues they needed to be aware of before conducting fieldwork and interviews. LaRocco et al. (2019) found that this approach worked very well for them in their fieldwork in Botswana. The RAs also practised in-depth interviews with their friends or family members and gave feedback on the questions. The latter process was very helpful as it enabled me to re-write questions in a clearer manner prior to data collection commencing, and it enabled the whole team to ensure they understood the meaning of the questions and how they could be conveyed in different languages.

Selecting an appropriate tool that facilitated communication with the RAs and allowed a large amount of data (photos, recordings, and transcripts) to be shared between the research team was also important. I selected Zalo as a communication app because it could be installed on both mobile phone and computer, was familiar to the RAs, and allowed the transmission of large files. I created a research group chat box in Zalo to allow for continuous communication between all members of the team, including guidelines on how to upload the recordings to Zalo should the RAs have any technical questions during fieldwork. In order to maintain privacy and confidentiality, I set the Zalo group chat to only allow content sharing between accredited members. In addition, each RA emailed their transcripts and records directly to me.

It is worth noting that while this training for specific tasks was sufficient for carrying out semi-structured interviews and focus groups, other research methodologies, such as ethnography, that require research skills in participant observation would need substantially more training (O'Reilly, 2012; Schensul et al., 1999).

Photo 4.4.1: Interview with A Dao Family



Source: Mai Ly- a Dao RA, during fieldwork

Photo 4.4.2: A Focus Group Discussion with Tay Women



Source: Dzung Tran- aTay RA, during fieldwork

Photo 4.4.3: Interview with a Hmong Family



Source: Qua Sung- a Hmong RA (middle of the photo).

4.7.3. Support for Research Assistants during the data collection phase

Data collection took place between the 21 March and the 18 April 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, a specific Health and Safety Plan outlined potential risks and a management and mitigation strategy was developed. At the time of the study, Vietnam was faring well regarding their COVID-19 management. The research sites were far away from any of the high-risk areas, and there were no new community cases occurring in the vicinity during the research period. The RAs were advised to only travel according to the Vietnamese government procedures and were provided with face masks and hand sanitiser. In addition, due to the remoteness of the study sites, at the time of the research, most research participants reported no or minor impacts of COVID-19 on their daily lives.

During fieldwork, the RAs recorded interviews with the permission of research participants and transcribed these in Vietnamese before emailing recordings and transcripts to me for analysis. The RAs usually lodged together during fieldwork, with the costs of their lodgings and travel covered by the research budget. Reflecting on this arrangement, the RAs said this made them more confident as they could support each other when needed. They worked in a team, encouraging each other through group discussions, and joined other interviews when possible, allowing for shared experiences and learning opportunities.

The RAs remained in constant, real-time contact with me via Zalo for updates and continuous support, allowing for problems to be quickly resolved. For example, one RA was frustrated with the brief answers she received when she asked about gender relations, such as ‘men are the heads of households’. I advised the RA to ask the interviewee what it meant for a man to be the head of a family. Is all property ownership in the man’s name? Are only men allowed to represent the family in community meetings or for signing business contracts? Is everything in the family decided by men?

The RAs gained skills and knowledge through this real-time, follow-up approach. Daily Zalo check-ins were also scheduled during fieldwork. The daily check-in helped the research team reflect on progress and discuss emerging issues, enabling me to provide appropriate advice when required. Due to varied arrangements for household interviews and distances travelled,

it was hard to schedule group calls. Therefore, check-ins were mainly carried out with one or two RAs at a time, still allowing me to pick up emerging issues quickly, and gain a broader sense of preliminary findings. This helped to ensure a consistent approach across the research, enabling me to advise the RAs to continue interviews or expand the research to other locations. For example, in one case study focused on the empowerment of women tea growers, all the Hmong women interviewed in one commune stated that tea was not their main income source. As the field research is to explore how ethnic minority women benefit from their participation in a tea value chain, following discussions with the supervision team, I proposed that the RA interview more Hmong households from another community where tea is the primary income. Merriam (1998, p.23) claims that a good qualitative researcher needs to “look and listen everywhere”. For this reason, the numbers of the interviews were changed depending on what was “observed” and “listened” in the field.

To ensure consistency across the RAs’ approaches, I shared a daily note to the team via a group chatbox in Zalo. The note compiled the issues faced by the RAs that day and guidance on how they could deal with these issues. It also included lessons, interview techniques, or good tactics implemented by the RAs to build confidence and learn from each other, as indicated in Box 4.1 below.

Box 4.1. Example of a daily note sent to RAs

Pay attention to the interview environment and the people present at the interview. The interviewing environment affects how the household shares sensitive information such as income, financial management, and the tensions between the husband and wife. For instance, one research assistant interviewed the husband and wife when a brother and sister-in-law, a mother-in-law, and an aunt-in-law were present at the meeting. They were hesitant to share information. To address this, change the interview location, as Lien did, so they could more easily share their information.

The interviewees sometimes responded to the interview questions in very general terms. For example, they might answer that everything was discussed and decided by both the husband and wife; or they said whoever had free time would do the housework. In this scenario, ask follow-up questions such as how often the husband shares the housework, and who makes the final decisions. Ask them to give specific examples.

When the interviewees do not remember their incomes from previous years, break the question into more minor queries. This tactic Dzung applied seemed to work well, and other RAs can learn and use it for different cases. For example, instead of asking the annual income from tea production, ask how many times a month they harvested tea, how many months a year, and how many kilograms of tea each harvesting time, and how much it cost for one kilogram of tea.

Many responses from the interviews on day one were that women were the ones who kept money in the family. In this case, the follow-up questions would clarify if this meant women could decide on what to spend the money on. What kind of expenditure could women decide, and what sort of expenditure would they need to ask permission for from their husbands?

Source: Nguyen et al. (2022, p.6)

4.7.4. Challenges faced by remote fieldwork using Research Assistants

Despite the extensive process followed, there were unanticipated issues that arose. Below, six issues are articulated, including explanations of how these were embraced as opportunities and adapted to these challenges.

First, as argued by Turner (2010b), in-depth interviews require researchers to be skillful in prompting and driving the flow of the conversation to focus on the research topics, requiring researchers to observe the attitudes of research participants during interviews and adjust their questions accordingly (Gupta, 2014; Middleton & Cons, 2014; Turner, 2010a). Similar to Deane and Stevano's (2016) experience in Tanzania, I found that in the absence of the researcher, the RAs adopted a 'prescriptive' approach as opposed to an intuitive approach which involves clarifying emerging or unexpected themes. When I listened to the audio recordings and read the RAs' transcripts, I identified areas where the RAs should have asked follow-up questions for further information or clarification. This is understandable, as there had been insufficient time for the RAs to develop in-depth interview skills, especially considering their lack of prior research experience.

In response, I used the daily check-ins to identify the most important issues and themes for the RAs to follow up on in interviews and adapted the interview question guides when necessary. The initial guide was used as a starting point for questions, which the RAs could then expand upon by prompting interviewees according to their responses. However, similar to Deane and Stevano's (2016) structured approach, I quickly realised that the RAs required a more structured format for interview questions that covered the list of leading questions to ask, as well as follow-up questions that would ensure they had covered all important aspects of the research.

While this structured approach was helpful, it led to another challenge: many repetitive questions and answers. The RAs utilised the full list of questions verbatim without taking into account where questions were repeated in various follow-up contexts. Congruent with Turner (2010b), it is recommended that the design of comprehensive, yet non-repetitive, interview

guidelines, along with thorough training of RAs, is thus crucial for researchers conducting interviews via RAs in remote locations.

Secondly, when conducting remote fieldwork using multiple RAs, the research process and the quality of the data depend on the RAs' commitment, positionality and personalities (Anwar & Viqar, 2017; Cons, 2014; Temple & Edwards, 2002). In this case, in comparison to when the researcher is present, the RAs took increased control over the fieldwork process, selecting the research participants and deciding how interviews would be conducted, reflecting Randall et al.'s (2013, p. 763) "power of the interviewer".

The RAs managed the selection process with assistance from village leaders and project staff, making appointments with selected households. Two of the three RAs followed my instructions, frequently making contact with me to discuss which research participants they should focus on next (for example, interviewing male or female-only or interviewing both husbands and wives). These RAs also conveyed their concerns when they felt that the quality of the interviews was not rich enough. In comparison, the third RA was more independent, foregoing many of the daily check-ins in her rush to combine her studies and the fieldwork. Additionally, she omitted to discuss participant selection as she went, resulting in more male than female participants being interviewed in two of the three case studies, despite women being the primary research target. Information collected from the female focus group discussions surmounted this shortfall.

Similarly, the RAs controlled how interviews were conducted. For example, in one commune, one RA decided that instead of travelling to each household, she selected a convenient location and made appointments with the research participants to meet her there for interviews. She made this arrangement because the research participants' houses were scattered and it would take a long time for her to visit each household and return to her homestay before dark. While contrary to what I would have planned, it demonstrated innovation from the RAs regarding the agreed principle to adapt fieldwork for their own safety first. This is imperative in research contexts where RAs are young women working in remote areas and should be taken into consideration during the ethics clearance process. Note that this change was in accordance with the approach of the Human Ethics Committee at Massey

University, which has strong principles regarding the selection of participants while also allowing researchers flexibility to negotiate fieldwork situations. The change in location for the purpose of the participant and RAs safety and privacy satisfied the ethics requirements for this study.

Third, parallel with Anwar and Viqar's (2017) experience, the RAs' positionality influenced the collection of data more than anticipated. I recruited women RAs from the same ethnic minority groups as those in the case studies, assuming they would share the same language and culture. Interviews were expected to be conducted in ethnic minority languages (Tay, Dao, and Hmong) to remove language barriers preventing ethnic minority women from participating in the research. However, each of these ethnic groups has many sub-groups with slightly different languages. Tay has five sub-groups, Hmong has six sub-groups, and Dao has seven sub-groups (Vietnamese Government Portal, n.d). The Tay, Dao, and Hmong ethnic people of the three businesses were from different sub-groups, which were not always the same as those to which the RAs belonged⁸. It was only the Hmong RA who could conduct all interviews in Hmong due to limited language differences across Hmong's sub-groups. The Dao RA could understand 50-60% of the language spoken by participants from other Dao subgroups, while the Tay RA could understand only 20-30%. Therefore, the Dao and Tay RA sometimes had to seek interpretation support from local women, as indicated in Table 4.3 and Table 4.4.

The RAs were, therefore, both insiders and outsiders to the research participants (Cons, 2014). As insiders, they shared the same ethnic minority background and the same language with some of the participants, allowing the RAs to build rapport quickly with these

⁸ The Dao group involved in the herbal cooperative and the benzoin company is Dao đỏ or red Dao sub-group, while the Dao group involved in the tea company is Dao tuyền—the same sub-group of the Dao Research Assistant.

- The local name of the Tay sub-group working with the tea business is Tày đen (Black Tay), and the Tay sub-group involved in the benzoin company is Tày trắng (White Tay). They are different to the sub-group of the Tay Research Assistant.

- The Hmong sub-group engaging in the tea business is Mông Hoa (Flower Hmong). The Hmong sub-group working with the benzoin company is Mông trắng (White Hmong), and the sub-group working with the herbal cooperative on a small scale in one commune is Mông đen (Black Hmong), and in large scale in another commune is Flower Hmong, the same sub-group of the Hmong Research Assistant.

participants, as indicated when the RAs were invited to stay over, share meals or come back to visit. Simultaneously, the RAs were also outsiders, as they came from different communities, ethnic clans, education levels and, in some cases, languages (Anwar & Viqar, 2017; MacKenzie, 2016). This “outsider status” was partially overcome through support in the field from local women and project staff who were familiar with the project areas, assisted the RAs in connecting with research participants, and provided interpretations in cases where the RAs came from different sub-groups and spoke different languages to the participants. Leslie (1997, as cited in Scheyvens and Leslie, 2000, p.7), claims that it is not about the “positionality” but more with the “ability to engage with and participate in” the researched groups. As long as the researcher recognises and genuinely respects local culture, they can overcome the obstacles to cross-cultural research (Latai-Niusulu et al., 2020; Scheyvens & Leslie, 2000).

Fourth, my experience confirmed previous observations that working in cross-language research presents challenges in conveying technical terms and concepts across different languages (Bujra, 2006; Edwards, 2010; Temple & Edwards, 2002). This is even more complicated in trilingual research when concepts are translated from English to Vietnamese and Vietnamese to the respective ethnic minority languages. Equivalent terms in these respective languages are not always obvious. For example, the concept of political empowerment in women’s empowerment discourse is challenging to translate directly into Vietnamese. Initially we tried *Nâng cao quyền năng về khía cạnh chính trị*, however the RAs found this confusing. Additionally, this term was politically sensitive to the local government, which is problematic when working with ethnic minorities in a country like Vietnam. Therefore, the term “participation in critical decision-making processes” was used in place of “political empowerment”. I also helped the RAs explain other terms to interviewees by use of examples. When one research assistant could not find an equivalent term in her Dao ethnic language for the Vietnamese term *tự tin* [confidence], I suggested explaining that this term meant women were undertaking business activities or participating in and raising their voices in meetings. In addition, language barriers affected the depth of information that the households could share with the RAs. When I listened to the audio recordings that were in Kinh language (the Vietnamese majority language), I could discern that the households, and

particularly female members of those households, had some difficulties understanding the questions or could not elaborate on their answers.

Fifth, supporting previous scholarship, I found that working through different layers of subjectivity also presented a research challenge (Cons, 2014; Gupta, 2014; Middleton & Cons, 2014). When the RAs relied on local women to interpret for participants, the study was subject not only to the “triple subjectivity” of Researcher–RA–Participant (Temple & Edwards, 2002), but also a quadruple-subjectivity of Researcher–RA–Interpreter–Participant.

Similar to Bonnin’s (2010) findings, the subjectivity of the local women and project staff who supported the RAs also influenced the research process. In one case study, the RAs worked through local women assigned by the business owner. These women acted as gatekeepers, controlling access to research participants. They were not briefed by the researcher and did not fully understand the research requirements, leading to situations where they were unwilling to interpret some questions to interviewees as they thought them unnecessary. For example, in one interview, when the RA tried to ask follow-up questions regarding household financial decision-making processes, the local woman who accompanied the RA asked her not to ask in detail as she felt it was unnecessary and hard for the interviewee to understand.

The RAs’ assumptions about what information was important and who should be recruited also affected the data collected, confirming Middleton and Pradhan’s (2014) work on the role of RAs’ reflexivity in the research process. In one interview with a female head of household, the interviewee mentioned that her daughter-in-law shared the work with her and was the only family member who attended technical training courses. However, the daughter-in-law was not interviewed even though she was at the house when the RA conducted the interview. If the researcher had been present, she would have been sure to cross-check what the mother said with the daughter-in-law, perhaps on a different occasion when the mother-in-law was not present. The RAs also made subjective decisions about what to transcribe and what to leave out, occasionally choosing not to transcribe an entire record, as they thought some information was not necessary. To ensure information was accurately captured, I checked the recordings while reviewing the transcripts, enabling her to fill any gaps in the Vietnamese interviews. For interviews conducted in ethnic minority languages, I discussed sections from

the transcripts where I noted inconsistencies or omissions, and asked RAs to check the recordings if required.

Sixth, consistent with Stevano and Deane (2017), the power dynamics between RAs and participants also affected the research process and data quality. The RAs were younger than most of the people they interviewed or interacted with, presenting some challenges when they interacted with older participants. For example, when one RA met a local government chairwoman to seek support for fieldwork, the chairwoman was not happy about the project and commented that it was not 'effective'. When I asked the RA if she had queried why the chairwoman thought the programme was ineffective, the RA said she did not dare to ask as she was worried that the chairwoman would become angry and stop the fieldwork. Similarly, in household interviews with couples, the RAs were hesitant to interrupt the husband when he dominated the conversation. Similarly, the RAs lacked confidence when navigating situations when the local women assisting with interviews, who were usually older than them, interrupted conversations and influenced interviewees' responses. Fortunately, some of these issues were identified during daily check-ins, and I was able to mentor and coach the younger RAs on how to handle similar situations associated with the sensitivities of power relations.

4.8. Data analysis

Fifty-seven semi-structured in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions were conducted with the participation of 103 people (65 women and 38 men). The use of three RAs to carry out fieldwork with three ethnic minority groups ensured rapid data collection in the uncertain context of the COVID-19 outbreak. Within four weeks, the RAs conducted 48 structured in-depth interviews and five focus group discussions with 62 women and 31 men of the three ethnic minority groups (Table 4.3 and Table 4.4). The RAs also conducted two more interviews with a local government officer and a staff member of the benzoin and ginger company. I myself conducted seven interviews via Zalo and Zoom with the key informants, programme managers, government officers, Donor and NGO representatives, business owners and staff (Table 4.5). Each interview lasted 25 to 90 minutes. Depending on the availability of the research participants, in some households, husbands and wives were

interviewed together, and in some other households, husbands and wives were interviewed separately. This is to provide a mixed picture of gender relations in the research areas. When interviewing a husband and a wife together, the RAs were told to observe the behaviours of interviewees, such as who answered the questions first and whether there was any tension, conflicts or differences between the responses. They were also told to give women opportunities to answer questions.

Table 4.3. Interviews Conducted

Business	Ethnicity	No. of households	Participant Nos.		Language used in interview
			Male	Female	
Tea company	Hmong	7	7	4	Hmong
	Dao	7	3	5	Dao and Vietnamese*
	Tay	7	4	5	Tay and Vietnamese
Benzoin & ginger company	Hmong	4	2	2	Hmong
	Tay	4	4	4	Vietnamese
	Dao	6	3	5	Vietnamese
Herbal cooperative	Hmong	6	5	2	Hmong
	Dao	7	3	4	Vietnamese
Total		48	31	31	

* Vietnamese is locally known as 'Kinh'

Source: Author

Table 4.4. Focus Group Discussions (FGD)

Business	Ethnicity	FGD	No. of female participants	Language used in FGD
Tea company	Hmong	1	6	Hmong
	Dao	1	6	Dao
	Tay	1	8	Vietnamese
Benzoin & ginger company	Hmong			
	Tay	1	5	Vietnamese
	Dao			
Herbal cooperative	Hmong			
	Dao	1	6	Vietnamese
Total		5	31	

Source: Author

Table 4.5. Number of Interviews with The Key Informants

Research participants	No. of people participants	
	Male	Female
Donor (DFAT)	1	
DFAT's managing contractor	1	1
Local government	1	
NGO (Helvetas)	1	
Business owners	2	1
Business staff	1	1
Total	7	3

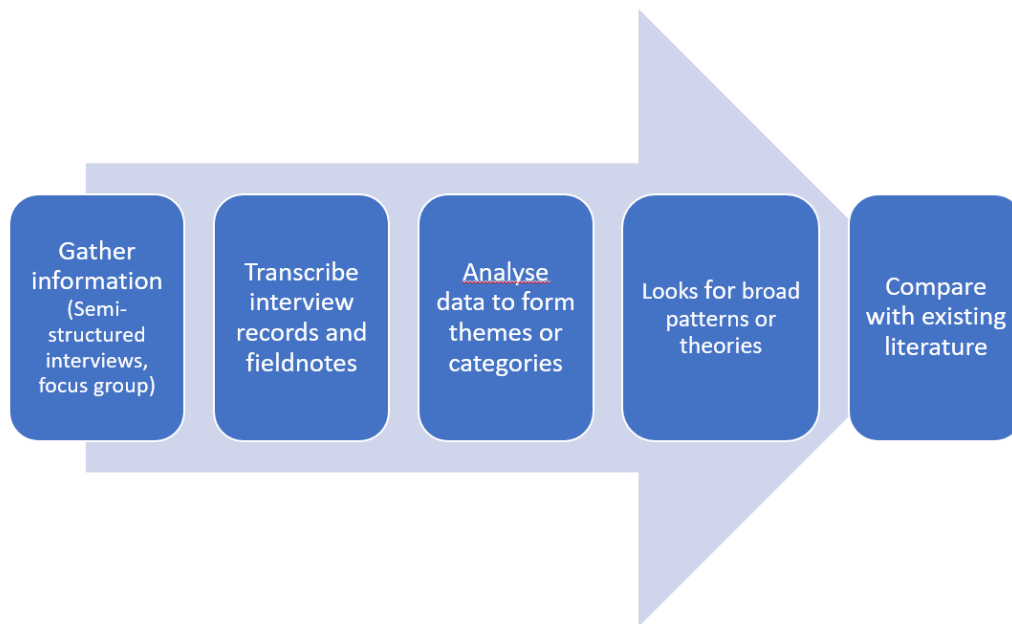
Source: Author

4.8.1. Thematic analysis

Qualitative research is typically inductive (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). It involves the process of gathering information from the research

participants, grouping it into categories or themes, generating theories, and comparing it with existing literature. Stories, direct quotes from participants' own words, or programme documents were used to support the research findings (Merriam, 1998). My research data analysis process is presented in Figure 4.5 below:

Figure 4.5. The Research Data Analysis Process



Source: Author, adapted from the Inductive Process of Qualitative Research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.64).

Data analysis can be done simultaneously while the data collection process continues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). As discussed above, I started data analysis by talking to the RAs and reviewing my field journals to pick up themes and patterns or questions that emerged during the data collection process. All of the interviews were audiotaped. The interviews were transcribed after the field trips by the RAs for those interviews they conducted and by myself for my interviews. The research analysis was done using Nvivo. Coding was based on the predetermined themes and patterns picked up from my research questions and the theoretical framework as advised by other scholars (Aurini et al., 2016; Gibbs, 2007; Stake, 1995). However, Creswell and Creswell (2018) recommend that the preliminary codebook should be a working document. Other themes and patterns of emerging themes from the interviews and from the data analysis process were

also identified during the transcription process (Stake, 1995; Stewart-Withers et al., 2014). Pseudonyms were used in coding rather than respondents' real names.

4.8.2. Triangulation

It is important that research findings are validated for their accuracy and creditability (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2018). The validity process involves multiple procedures, including triangulation using multiple sources of evidence and checking with the research participants on the accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2018). Taking a reflexive approach during the data collection process and clarifying the positionality of the researcher is also important for data validation in qualitative research, as discussed in section 4.4 above. In this research, I used different research methods for data collection and triangulation, including semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. In addition, information in my log file (research journal) was verified during the data analysis. A briefing of preliminary research findings was conducted with the RAs on 16 January 2022 to ensure the correct interpretation of the data and with the key informants and the GREAT programme (with anonymity preserved for research participants) on 24 January 2022 to gather feedback. The research findings were also triangulated with the findings in the GREAT programme's M&E reports.

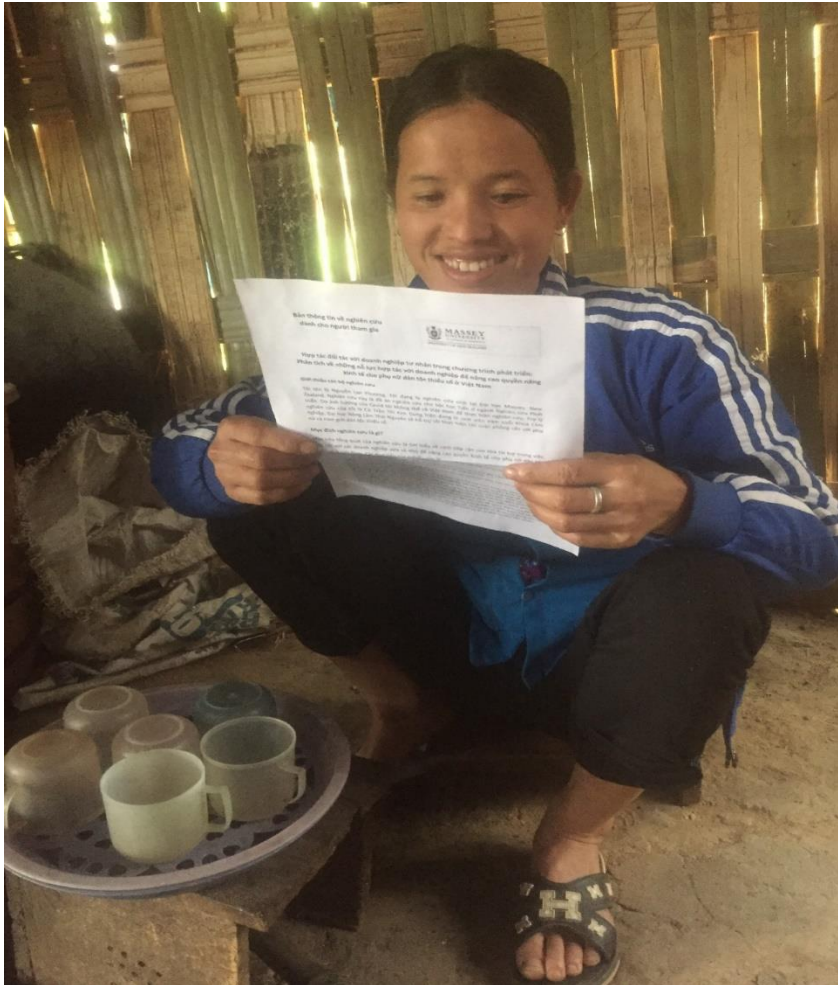
4.9. Research ethics

I am inspired by the idea that "ethical research should not only 'do no harm', but also have potential 'to do good', to involve 'empowerment'" (Madge, 1997 as cited in Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, p.160). Ethical principles were considered at all stages of my research. The research was also bound by the principle "ethics from the bottom up" (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014, p. 161). This means the research topics need to consider local needs and concerns. With this aspect in mind, my research looked for a better approach that development agencies could use to engage with the private sector to empower ethnic women. The RAs and I followed the principles of acting respectfully and sensitively in the field during the data collection and writing-up process (Banks & Scheyvens, 2014). The participants' dignity was respected, and their information was properly protected to ensure their privacy and safety in

the research process. The use of RA during the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak was discussed at an in-house ethics meeting in Development Studies and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Low-risk ethics approval was approved by the Committee on 29 October 2020 (Appendix 4). The main ethical issues considered included:

Informed consent: Research participants must fully understand the research and freely choose to participate in the research (Aurini et al., 2016; Banks & Scheyvens, 2014; Flick, 2007). The research team made sure participants understood the research, and also informed the research participants of their rights to ask questions or to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time. Participants had a right to access a summary of the research findings. In my research, informed consent was sought from all participants using the form in Appendix 5. In addition, an information sheet using plain language was developed to help research participants understand the research (Appendix 6). As only 15.9% of ethnic minorities know how to read and write in their own languages (GSO & CEMA, 2019), the information sheet and the informed consent were translated into Vietnamese and read out loud in the respective languages, including Kinh, Tay, Dao, and Hmong for the research participants. The information sheet also included the contact details of the researcher so the research participants could contact the researcher if they had any questions or concerns about the research. Banks and Scheyvens (2014) argue that “in certain circumstances, informed consent should be achieved verbally in an informal, undocumented way” (p.167). In my research, the participants were asked if they were comfortable signing a consent form. In most cases, participants gave verbal agreements, which was convenient for ethnic minority people, especially those who were illiterate.

Photo 4.4.4. A Tay Women Reading an Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form



Source: Dzung Tran, during fieldwork

Research with ethnic minority people: Scheyvens et al. (2014) emphasise the need for conducting research in a culturally appropriate manner with ethnic minority groups. Local people's voices and knowledge must be respected. In my research, the fieldwork was conducted using an approach that sought to empower ethnic minority women and men. This approach includes respecting the rights of ethnic minority people to participate in the research, to ask questions, and to access the research findings as discussed in the informed consent form. They could choose the place for the interview and select times that suited them best. The place, time, and issues such as, who should be present at the interview, were considered carefully, especially in the interviews with ethnic minority women. As there were some sensitive research questions about gender equality issues, such as household decision-making, control over money, and household tensions around involvement in business

activities, including violence, the RAs were advised to be cautious to ensure that the interviews were conducted in a way that was safe for ethnic minority women to share their stories. Scheyvens and Leslie (2000) sought to empower local women through the interview process by providing spaces for them to reflect on their life experiences and share knowledge and other experiences with them. In my research, the RAs spent time with the research participants to listen to their stories and prepared contact details of relevant local government services, such as extension services and the women's union, to share with them when necessary during the interview. In the write-up process, local people's voices and views were respected by using direct quotes (LaRocco et al., 2019).

Anonymity and confidentiality: In my research, the name of the research location of the case study was disclosed, but the names of the businesses, the individuals participating in the interviews, and the group discussions were anonymous. Pseudonyms were used. This is to protect the research participants from any negative effects (Aurini et al., 2016; Banks & Scheyvens, 2014). This was made clear to the research participants in the informed consent process.

Conflict of interest: The potential conflict of interest that I hold in this research relates to my former position as the Senior Programme Manager of the research programme and my connection with DFAT's staff. Some research participants may still perceive me as being in a donor position, checking on the progress of the programme. This may affect the quality of the information they share with me as they might feel that they can only share positive experiences. To handle this issue, I stated very clearly my position and the purpose of the research both in the informed consent form and during the interview process, as discussed in section 4.4 above.

Gatekeepers: In a political context like Vietnam, where the government seeks to control overseas researchers, especially in the ethnic minority and border areas, the local government may act as gatekeepers (Bonnin, 2010; Scott et al., 2006). In my case, even though the research was conducted by ethnic minority RAs, movement and contact with ethnic minority people in the research area were still controlled by the local government, as discussed by Scott et al. (2006). As recommended by Scott et al. (2006, p. 38), the RAs were

prepared for “a negotiated, adaptive, and flexible approach” and the need to be “sensitive to the changing research context”. The local authorities were informed about my research purpose and the type of information in the interviews with the ethnic minority people. I respected the rights of the local people if they choose not to participate in the interviews if there was a local authority present.

Both the managing contractor and the PMU could be gatekeepers as they might fear that critical comments from the programme could affect their performance in the eyes of DFAT. To avoid a situation where they recommend only “good cases” and individuals who can share positive stories for interviews, I selected businesses according to the selection criteria as mentioned in sections 4.3.1 and 4.3.4. The rationale for the selection of these businesses was also explained clearly to them. The selection of individuals for interviews and group discussions was described in section 4.5.1 above.

Handling information and data: All information, including interview records, transcripts, and notes, was kept confidential and stored safely on a protected password device and backed up to the cloud.

Use of information: Information will be used for the purpose of the research for my PhD and any associated presentations and publications, as stated in the informed consent form only.

Reciprocity: It is a common practice in the research area that a small gift is presented to thank the research participants at the community level for participating in the research. Scott et al. (2006) also recommend this practice while conducting their research in Vietnam. I followed this practice. The RAs were provided with cash to give research participants a small allowance after each interview to compensate them for their time. This aligned with the accepted rate usually offered to those participating in a similar survey or discussion. However, this did not apply to interviews with donors, NGOs, local government, and business owners.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 situation, which escalated more severely at the later stage of the research, neither the RAs nor I could come back to share the research findings with the participants as planned. Instead, a briefing session via Zoom was organised to

present the preliminary findings to the business owners, the programme management staff, and NGO and donor representatives. In addition, a brief of the final research findings will be shared with the donor once the research is completed. The GREAT programme is rolling into phase 2 in the region. Hopefully, the research findings will be applied to achieve women's empowerment objectives for ethnic minority women there. The brief will also be available to other research participants if they are interested.

I am indebted to my RAs and the respondents who participated in the research when I was not able to travel. I hope to be able to visit them to thank them face-to-face at some point at the conclusion of this study.

4.10. Concluding remarks

This chapter outlines the research methodology that guided the study. It described the research paradigm, the selection and background information of the embedded single case study and the three collaborative partnership models with businesses. It also discussed my positionality in the research as both an insider and an outsider. The chapter outlined multiple research methods, including semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis used for data collection. It further depicted how research participants were selected to avoid bias from the GREAT programme. Discussion on the data analysis process using an inductive approach and triangulation of the research findings was also included. Finally, ethical issues to ensure that the research does no harm but potentially good to the communities were considered in this chapter.

For this study, the preparation for fieldwork with Plan A and Plan B was critical to ensure the research could be conducted successfully during the pandemic. Detailed information on how the fieldwork was undertaken in practice using research assistants according to Plan B and the related issues was the highlight of this chapter. Lessons learnt from this process are valuable for other researchers who will be conducting similar research.

CHAPTER FIVE. SOCIO-ECONOMIC ISSUES, GENDER AND ETHNIC MINORITY DEVELOPMENT IN VIETNAM

5.1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the broader research context of the study. The chapter begins with a brief overview of Vietnam's social, political, and economic development status and the environment in which the private sector operates. The following sections discuss gender and ethnic minority development in Vietnam. The socio-economic information and gender norms of three ethnic minority groups, Hmong, Dao, and Tay, are highlighted because they are the target groups of my research.

5.2. Overview of social, political, and economic development status in Vietnam

Vietnam is seen as a successful development story with impressive economic growth and poverty alleviation progress (World Bank, 2018). Vietnam's economy underwent a significant transformation, shifting from a centrally planned system to a market-oriented economy after *Đổi Mới* (economic reforms) in 1986, which turned Vietnam from being among the world's poorest countries to achieving lower-middle-income status by 2010 (Baum, 2020). Vietnam is in the process of transforming its structure from agriculture to manufacturing to accomplish its objective of attaining a high-income status by 2045 (World Bank, 2020b). The average annual GDP growth rate in the 35 years since *Đổi Mới* is 6.47% (World Bank, 2020a). Moreover, the poverty rate in Vietnam has declined sharply from 54% in 1993 to just 9.8% in 2016 (Baulch et al., 2009; World Bank, 2018). However, as of 2020, the GDP per capita in Vietnam (US\$ 2,786) is still relatively low compared to other regional nations, such as Thailand (US\$ 7,189) and Singapore (US\$ 59,798) (World Bank, n.d). According to the World Bank (2020b), in order to become a high-income country by 2045, Vietnam needs to focus on productivity but pay attention to quality rather than quantity to reach this goal. One priority

area for productivity growth is creating a supportive business environment for the private sector to thrive (World Bank, 2020b).

Vietnam is a one-party state with a state-managed economy led by the communist party, the only legitimate political party in Vietnam, with roots in Marxist-Leninist thought. It is claimed that the Vietnamese economy is “a mix of capitalism and socialism” (Vuong and Pham, 2009, cited in Vuong et al., 2019, p.92; Bony-Cisternes, 2019). While advocating for innovation, accepting market mechanisms, and recognising the private sector’s role as a driving force of the economy, the state economy, including state-owned enterprises, still holds critical positions and roles in the Vietnam economy (CPV, 2020, October 31). Although the country has adopted a market-oriented economic policy, its political system is criticised for “a lack of commitment to liberal values” (Gainsborough, 2012, p. 34). The communist party has retained overall control, setting the direction and boundaries for economic and political reforms (Vuong et al., 2019). To maintain the communist party’s Marxist-Leninist ideologies, Vietnam calls its economy a “socialist-oriented market economy” in the transitional period to socialism (Vuong et al., 2019, p.101).

Vietnam’s economy has integrated into regional and global markets through bilateral and multilateral free trade agreements such as the ASEAN Free Trade Area, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific, and the Vietnam-European Union (World Bank, 2017). Economic integration has opened up opportunities as well as challenges to Vietnamese businesses, especially MSMEs. Vietnam's products must abide by international standards to integrate into global value chains and access premium markets. In addition, the integration also requires the government of Vietnam to adhere to international laws. It requires the government to reform to increase transparency and to pay attention to issues such as human rights and the environment (Vuong, 2014, May 27).

According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment, Vietnam has achieved remarkable progress towards the SDGs. Besides the impressive poverty alleviation progress mentioned above, Vietnam, with a population of more than 97 million people in 2020, has also performed strongly in other SDGs, such as education and safe drinking water. Vietnam is performing well on education and nonmonetary welfare indicators. For example, the literacy rate of children

aged 15 or older was 95% in 2016 (MPI, 2018). There was a high proportion of households with access to safe water (93.4%), electricity (more than 99%), and internet (54.2%) in 2016 (MPI, 2018). Vietnam has also made progress in health and gender equity. However, the development progress results are unequal between men and women, ethnic groups, and geographical areas (MPI, 2018). Children from poor families, remote areas, and ethnic minorities are the most likely to drop out of school (MPI, 2018; World Bank, 2018). Inequality is increasing with the GINI index rising from 0.420 in 2002 to 0.436 in 2015 (Vuong et al., 2019). Vietnam recognises the approach to address development challenges is to:

mobilize all stakeholders' participation in sustainable development efforts; enhance institutional set-up and policy frameworks for sustainable development; foster cooperation between the Government and the business sector, domestic organizations, and the international community in SDG implementation; issue national SDG indicators and strengthen national statistical capacity; mainstream SDGs into development policies and strategies; and strengthen the mobilization of resources, particularly from the private sector for SDG implementation.

(MPI, 2018, p. 12)

There are different approaches to measuring poverty in Vietnam. The first approach to measure poverty is to use a household's monthly per capita income. Table 5.1 below presents the poverty line for the monthly household per capita income for rural and urban areas from 2016-2020. The General Statistics Office (GSO) and the World Bank use a second approach to measure poverty based on monthly expenditure per capita. The most up-to-date calculation of the poverty rate by the GSO-World Bank (2016) was VND 969,167 per person (equivalent to US\$ 42.1) (World Bank, 2018). Since 2015 Vietnam has adopted a multidimensional approach to measuring poverty, becoming one of the first countries in the Asia-Pacific region to adopt this approach (UNDP et al., 2018). Multidimensional poverty combines the measurement of the monthly household per capita income and ten indicators of deprived access to five essential social services (healthcare, education, housing, water and sanitation, and access to information) (UNDP et al., 2018). A household is classified as "poor" if it meets one of two criteria:

- A household whose per capita income is lower than VND 700,000 per month (equivalent to US\$ 30.4) in rural areas, or lower than VND 900,000 per month (US\$ 39.1) in urban areas.
- A household whose per capita income is between VND 700,000 and VND 1,000,000 per month (US\$ 30.4- 43.5) in rural areas or between VND 900,000 and VND 1,300,000

per month (US\$ 39.1-56.5) in urban areas and is deprived in a third or more of the ten indicators of essential services.

(The Office of Government of Vietnam, 2015; UNDP et al., 2018, p. 21)

Table 5.1. The Monthly Income Poverty Line in 2016-2020

The monthly income poverty line	Poor (VND per person/month)*	Near-poor (VND per person/month)
Rural	700,000 (equivalent to US\$ 30.4)	1,000,000 (equivalent to US\$ 43.5)
Urban	900,000 (equivalent to US\$ 39.1)	1,300,000 (equivalent to US\$ 56.5)

*The exchange rate is rounded up at US\$ 1=VND 23,000 for indicative purpose

(The Office of Government of Vietnam, 2015)

However, in practice, at the local level, the assessment of poverty and classification of poor households is not only based on the level of income or expenditure as presented above (Nguyen & Rama, 2007; UNDP et al., 2018). Instead, the community gathers to assess and determine which households are classified as poor based on the household's income and the neighbours' understanding of the household's poverty status. The latter is claimed to carry far more weight (Nguyen & Rama, 2007). The poverty rate determined at the local level will then be aggregated to the district, province, and eventually to the national level. In my research, I use the GSO-World Bank poverty line to compare the poverty trend over time, the multidimensional poverty, and the local poverty rate when it is available.

My study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic; like many other countries, the pandemic has negatively affected Vietnam's economy and Vietnamese people's lives. Undoubtedly, the poor and ethnic minorities whose livelihoods are precarious or depend on tourism were severely impacted by substantial income reduction and temporarily fell into income poverty (UNDP & UN Women, 2020). UNDP & UN Women (2020) estimated that the national income poverty rate of ethnic minority groups soared from 22.1% before the pandemic to 70.3% in May 2020. The private sector, especially household businesses and

SMEs, also faced difficulties, with an 89% and 87% income decline. For that reason, many companies had to scale down and reduce their workforce (UNDP & UN Women, 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted gender equality in Vietnam. UN Women in Vietnam (2021b, p.10) claims that the COVID-19 pandemic “reverse[d] fragile gender equality gains” and increase[d] women's burdens with domestic tasks, caring, and homeschooling during lockdowns. Women-led micro, small and medium businesses were more affected compared to men-led enterprises (UNDP & UN Women, 2020). Women also suffered from domestic violence. The number of women experiencing violence and reaching out for help doubled compared to the same period before COVID-19 (UN Women, 2021).

5.3. Gender inequality in Vietnam

Gender equality in Vietnam is protected by the Constitution and promulgated in the Law on Gender Equality, the Law on Marriage and Family, and the Law on Domestic Violence. Vietnam is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Pham, 2012). Nearly 73% of women participate in the workforce, and they account for 48.3 % of the labour force in Vietnam (MPI, 2018). The government has made efforts to address gender inequality through national programmes. For instance, the National Strategy on Gender Equality for 2011-2020 aimed to reduce gender gaps in all areas, especially for rural women. As a result, gender equality has improved significantly in recent decades (ISDS, 2015). Around a quarter (26.8%) of the deputies in the National Assembly in the term 2016-2021 were female, and this increased to 30.26% in the 2021 elections for the 2021-2026 term (UN Women, 2021b). The 2016-2021 government term marks a significant milestone as, for the first time, a woman was appointed Chair of the National Assembly (one of the four most powerful leadership positions in Vietnam).

However, the progress in achieving gender equality in Vietnam is assessed as “slow and even regressive” (ISDS, 2015, p. 15). Vietnam is ranked 87 out of 153 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (World Economic Forum, 2020). It regressed from the rank of 42 in 2007 (Hausmann et al., 2007). The traditional preference for boys over girls still prevails and causes an imbalanced sex ratio at birth via gender biased abortion (UN Women, 2021b; UNFPA, 2019, December 19). According to UNFPA (2019, December 19), there were 111.5 boys born for

every 100 girls. Women are still behind men in many aspects, such as education, political leadership, salary, and property ownership (ISDS, 2015; MPI, 2018; UN Women, 2021b). Women account for only 10 to 20% of the leadership positions at the central and local levels of government and one-third (33%) of the communist party members (UN Women, 2021b). Women's education levels are significantly lower than men's (ISDS, 2015). The Vietnam Household Living Standards Surveys from 2004 to 2016 show that although the gender pay gap has decreased, women's average annual wage is still lower than men's by 15% (Vo et al., 2019). In the 2021 UN Women's report, the gender earnings gap in Vietnam is much higher for rural areas (35.2%) than urban areas (21.5%). Women also face significantly higher levels of domestic violence than men (ISDS, 2015). The national study on violence against women in 2019 found that nearly two-thirds of Vietnamese women claimed to have experienced one or more forms of domestic violence in their lifetime (whether physical, sexual, emotional, or economic) caused by their husbands (MOLISA et al., 2020a). The gender-based violence rates of the three ethnic minority groups, Hmong, Tay, and Dao, targeted under this research are also high (Dang, 2020, June 24).

Women in Vietnam face more inequalities and barriers to accessing resources, markets, and decision-making positions, which limits their ability to fully participate in and benefit from livelihood opportunities than men (World Bank, 2019). This is often due to patriarchal cultural and social norms that discriminate against women. Although the rate of jointly titled agricultural land has increased more than three times, from 11.6% to 38.3%, and residential land has increased from 15.7 to 55.6% over the period from 2004 to 2014, the ownership of land or housing is still predominantly held by men (UN Women, 2021). Male dominance in land/house ownership makes it harder for women to access formal loans due to the lack of collateral for credit. These are the challenges the GREAT programme faces in supporting women's economic empowerment in Vietnam.

Women in Vietnam are also under a lot of pressure to fulfil the role of family caregivers as daughters, mothers, and wives and, at the same time to make an equal contribution to the household income (Dalton et al., 2002; Dineen & Le, 2015; Drummond, 2006; Fahey, 1998, p. 236; Truong, 2009; UN Women, 2021a). Women work about five hours daily on unpaid care for the family and community, about two hours more than men (Actionaid, 2016). Thus, the

women involved in the GREAT programme will most likely be expected to juggle all of these domestic-related roles and earn an income outside the household. The housework burden limits ethnic minority women, especially from poor households, from participating in labour markets (CARE, 2022). In the mountainous areas where the GREAT programme operates, women spend nine hours daily on unpaid care work (Actionaid, 2016). However, this number varies significantly across ethnic groups (CARE, 2022).

The prevailing socio-cultural norms across all ethnic groups treat women as caregivers and ascribe to women “heavenly granted tasks”, a “traditional role”, or “inevitable duty” (Dalton et al., 2002, p. 11; Dineen & Le, 2015; ISDS, 2015, p. 59 & 152; Truong, 2008; UN Women, 2021b; World Bank, 2019). Women are expected “to give birth, breastfeed, teach children, care for husbands and elderly relatives, and perform a host of other unpaid heavenly mandate roles in addition to their full-time employment” (Truong, 2008, p. 19). Gender stereotypes of women’s capacity and roles persist in undermining women. Both Vietnamese men and women perceive that men have broader views and are more capable than women (ISDS, 2015). The common perception is “men are for career, women are for family” (ISDS, 2015, p. 58). This gender stereotype creates pressure for both women and men, and it hampers women’s economic participation, as they are considered “secondary earners”, and men as “primary income earners” in the family (ISDS, 2015, 2020; UN Women, 2021b, p. 18). Women own only one-third of the enterprises (31.6%) (MPI, 2018), and they account for only 26.54% of SME ownership (UN Women, 2021b). The gender division of household labour with the caregiver roles assigned to women is “traditional family values” (ISDS, 2015; Teerawichitchainan et al., 2008, pp. 22-23). Therefore, emancipating women from the burden of domestic caregiver tasks is crucial for gender equality in Vietnam (ISDS, 2015).

Women have internalised these norms and values (Dalton et al., 2002; Hoang, 2020; ISDS, 2015; Kwiatkowski, 2016; Truong, 2008; World Bank, 2019). The motto promoted by the Vietnamese Women’s Union, which is commonly used to describe a model woman, is “Giỏi việc nước, đảm việc nhà”, meaning women are expected to excel at work and be efficient in raising children and taking care of the family at home. On the one hand, the Women’s Union promotes women’s equal rights in education, politics, and economics. On the other hand, they advise women to sacrifice their own needs for their family, community, and the nation

as well as to keep their families in a state of harmonious contentment (Kwiatkowski, 2016; Schuler et al., 2006; Waibel & Glück, 2013). Women also believe they should attain lower education levels than their husbands “to maintain familial harmony” (ISDS, 2015, p. 9). More than half of women (51.8%) support domestic violence against women if women are “unfaithful” or do not “take care of children” (MOLISA et al., 2020b, p. 30). These are all the “internalised oppression” issues discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3.1.

However, gender practice is more flexible and can be adapted according to socio-economic conditions (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011; Nguyen, 2018). The gender studies conducted on groups of small-scale traders and petty traders in marketplaces within urban areas like Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city by Leshkowich (2006, 2012) and Endres and Leshkowich (2018), demonstrate how gender influences traders’ interactions with power and patriarchy, both with the marketplace and within domestic spheres. These studies reveal that women challenge and break stereotypes of themselves as businesspeople and navigate gender roles in a manner that allows them to both conform to and resist gendered norms. These studies also show the shift in intrahousehold care dynamics when women earn more income, in particular, showing how men can readjust their lives to take on more domestic and care work while their wives live and work far away from home (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011; Nguyen, 2018). Women have more voice in the family when they make financial contributions (Bélanger & Pendakis, 2009; Pham, 2008). The modernisation process in Vietnam, which is to industrialise the economy and develop the service sector based on the application of modern scientific and technological achievements, is also argued to strongly influence gender roles and attitudes (Grosse, 2015; ISDS, 2015). Under this process, Grosse (2015) claims that younger Vietnamese generations experience less restricted gender norms and a higher level of education. In addition, modernisation creates new jobs in industry and services that require different skills from agriculture. This can enable women to be more independent and educated to meet new labour force requirements (Grosse, 2015). Gender relations are also changing as family structures move toward a smaller and nuclear model. Furthermore, gender norms and practices are different in different cultures, ethnic groups, and social classes (Hoang, 2020; Hoang & Yeoh, 2011). It is suggested that “the extent of men’s participation in domestic work and the notions of masculinity associated with it vary depending on where they live and the class to which they belong” (Hoang & Yeoh, 2011, p. 720). For this reason, any effort to raise

awareness and financial status for women, in general, will not help ethnic minority women be empowered if there is no change in the social norms and the beliefs and perspectives of men in their community (Jones et al., 2015; Pham, 2012). This is also anticipated as a challenge that the GREAT programme is facing.

This thesis focuses on the GREAT programme that targets ethnic minority women because in Vietnam, ethnic minorities tend to face greater disadvantages than the majority groups. The following sections will briefly provide background information on the social and political context of ethnic minority development in Vietnam, the socio-economic development status and the gender norms of the three ethnic minority groups, which are the focus of this study.

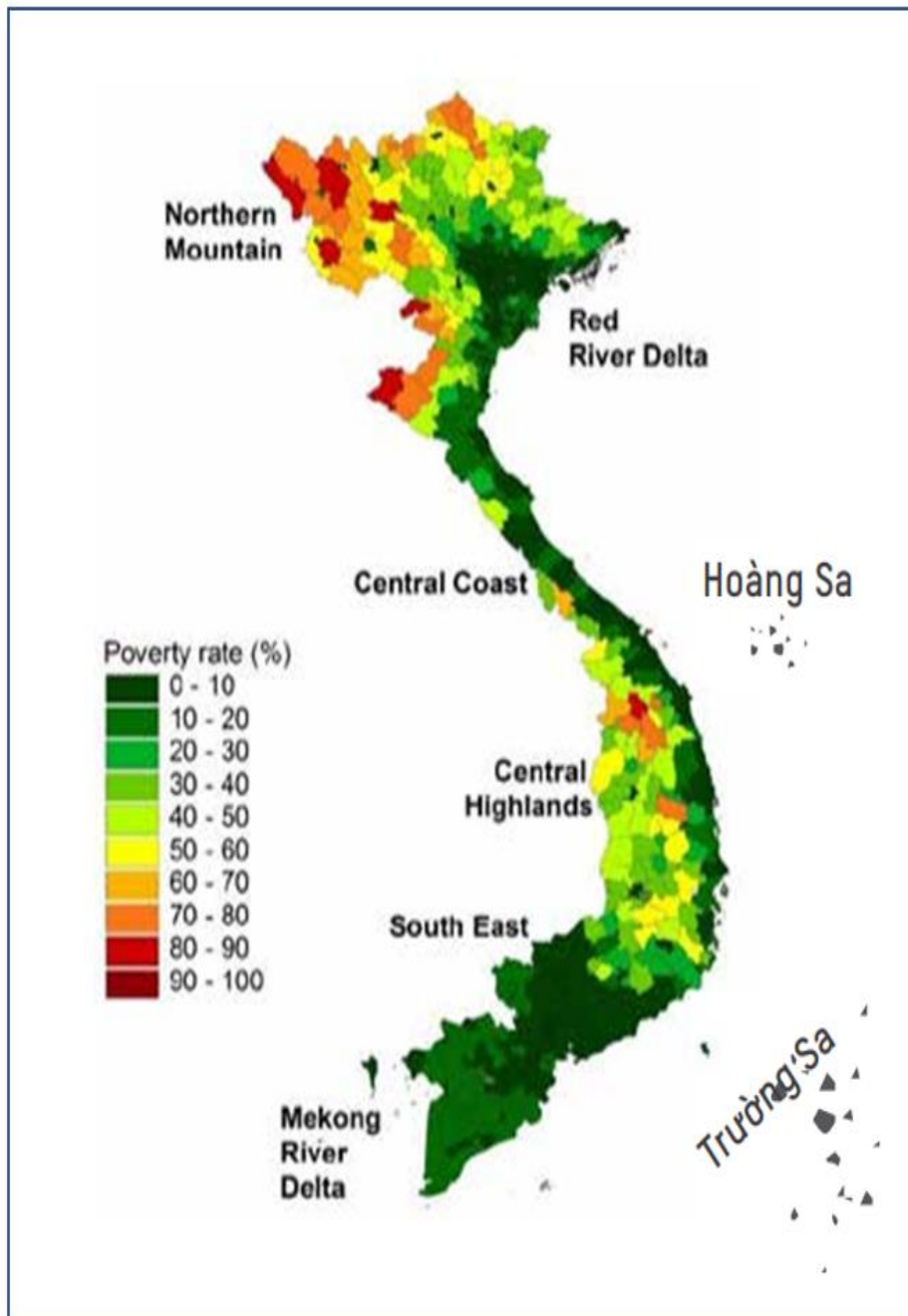
5.4. Ethnic minority development in Vietnam

Vietnam has 54 ethnic groups, of which the majority Kinh (Viet) group accounts for 85.3% (more than 82 million people), and the remaining 53 ethnic minorities groups account for 14.7% (more than 14.1 million people) of the total Vietnamese population (GSO & CEMA, 2019). Ethnic minorities have their own languages and cultural customs that differ from the majority Kinh. However, due to some similarities in social-economic conditions, the Chinese ethnic group (Hoa) is often bunched together with the Kinh as the majority group when comparing their conditions with the remaining ethnic minority groups (Dang, 2012; UN Women, 2017a; UNDP et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018). Ethnic minorities are the poorest, the most vulnerable, and face structural inequalities, which are seeing them slip further behind the majority (World Bank, 2018).

Despite Vietnam's remarkable economic growth and poverty alleviation, not all people have equally shared this success. The gap between the rich and the poor and between the ethnic minorities and the ethnic majority is increasing (Fujii, 2018; MPI, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2015; Tran, 2015; World Bank, 2018). The poverty of ethnic minorities is 44.6% , as compared with the Kinh and Hoa poverty rate of 3.1% (World Bank, 2018). In contrast to the impressive overall poverty reduction, the percentage of ethnic minorities among the poor increased steadily from 29% in 1998 (Tran, 2015) to 73% in 2016 (World Bank, 2018). Nearly 60% of ethnic minorities are located in remote and high mountainous areas, regions with the highest

level of poverty, and they account for 73% of the population in these regions (World Bank, 2018) (Map 5.1).

Map 5.1. Map of Poverty Rate by District 2014



Note. From *Climbing the Ladder: Poverty Reduction and Shared Prosperity in Vietnam*, (p.24), by World Bank, 2018. Copyright 2018 by World Bank. Reprinted with permission.

Ethnic minorities lag behind the majority groups in all measures of poverty, especially in expenditure, income, education, and access to safe water and hygienic latrines (Dang, 2012;

UN Women, 2017a; UNDP et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018). The income and spending of ethnic minorities were around half (52%) that of the majority groups in 2016 (UNDP et al., 2018). In 2016, only 70.6% of ethnic minorities had access to safe water, while 94.8% of the majority did. The gap in education and access to hygienic latrines is also significant. The percentage of ethnic minorities without qualifications was 43.78% in 2016, almost double that of the majority group (22.73%). Meanwhile, the majority proportion that had access to hygienic latrines was 75.1%, compared to only 27.2% of the ethnic minorities in 2016 (UNDP et al., 2018). Ethnic minority people also have a low representation level in the political system. The administrative organisations at the provincial and district level are also Kinh dominant, even in the regions where the Kinh group is only the minority. For example, in Lao Cai province, where this study was undertaken, the Kinh group accounts for only 36% of the population, but they hold more than 73.3% of the administrative positions (Le, 2011).

What makes ethnic minority groups in Vietnam poor?

There are many contributing factors to the disparities between ethnic minority groups and between them and the majority group. The key factors affecting a household's earning potential are physical and economic connectivity, market linkages, and labour market mobility (World Bank, 2019). In addition, there is a strong link between remoteness or geographical distance and the well-being of ethnic minorities (UNDP et al., 2018; van de Walle & Gunewardena, 2001). Increased income for non-agricultural activities, like waged employment, is reducing poverty, but this is mainly for the majority, so it adds to the widening poverty gap for minorities. (Tran, 2015; UNDP et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018, 2019). Nearly three-quarters of ethnic minority people over 15 years old (73%) work in agriculture, forestry, and fishery, and only 1.9% work in services (GSO & CEMA, 2019). If they have a wage income, it is mostly from low-skilled occupations with low salaries (UN Women, 2017a; World Bank, 2018). The lack of access to financial capital is also an issue for the poor as they often do not have collateral (for example, land user certificates) to guarantee loans (Baulch et al., 2007; World Bank, 2018, 2019).

The lack of education also affects a household's earning capacity and differentiates between the poor and the non-poor (Baulch et al., 2009; Bui et al., 2015; Dang, 2012; Tran, 2015; UNDP

et al., 2018; World Bank, 2018, 2019). Dang (2012) claims that the chance of households becoming poor decreases by 2% for every additional year of schooling attained by the household head. Similarly, Tran (2015) found that the household head with primary, lower secondary, and upper secondary education (or higher) had a level of income per capita 7%, 20%, and 53%, respectively, greater than those household heads with no education. Poor education quality based on a “Kinh-centric” approach, which is inappropriate for ethnic minorities, is accused of leading to the poor performance in education for minorities (Nguyen et al., 2017; van de Walle & Gunewardena, 2001, p. 204).

Language barriers are also a factor that hinders ethnic minorities from access to jobs and opportunities (FAO, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2017; World Bank, 2019). The government uses Vietnamese (the Kinh language) as the official language in administration management and agricultural extension training, which is a barrier for ethnic minority people, especially women, regarding access to information (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; DeJaeghere et al., 2020; FAO, 2019). The percentage of male ethnic minorities over 15 years of age who know how to read and write in Vietnamese is 86.7%, while for female ethnic minorities, it is 75.1%. This figure varies in different gender and ethnic minority groups and regions. Furthermore, the percentage of ethnic minorities who know their own written languages is very low. Although 32 out of 53 ethnic minority groups have their own scripts, only 15.9% of ethnic minority people know how to read and write their own language. This figure for the ethnic groups in the research is 20.5%, 19.1%, and 7.8% for Tay, Hmong, and Dao, respectively (GSO & CEMA, 2019) (see Table 5.2). Unsurprisingly, ethnic minority women have a lower literacy rate in their own languages (14.2%) in comparison to men (17.5%) (GSO & CEMA, 2019).

The disparities and inequality between ethnic minorities and the Kinh group are also the consequences of government policies and programmes in the past, which have negatively affected ethnic minorities (Baulch et al., 2007; Lam, 2020; Nguyen et al., 2017; World Bank, 2019). Ethnic minorities are considered “backward” and “underdeveloped” (Bélanger & Barbiéri, 2009, p. 15) and are often discriminated against by the majority Kinh (Doan, 2019). For example, the policies that encouraged the Kinh from lowland areas to migrate and resettle in the upland region and the new economic zone areas, which were traditionally inhabited by ethnic minorities, pushed many ethnic minorities into vulnerability. The purpose of the

migration program was to develop the backward areas where ethnic minorities dominated (Bélanger & Barbiéri, 2009). It was estimated that about 250,000 people migrated to these areas each year during the 1980s (Winrock International, 1996, as cited in Baulch et al., 2007). As a result, ethnic minorities lost their access to productive land and their traditional ways of life to “immigrants”. According to Luu (2010, as cited in Nguyen et al., 2017), 60% of the indigenous households in these areas claimed that they had no productive land in 2002. Ethnic minorities were also affected by another government program called “định canh, định cư” [the sedentarisation programme]. This programme was launched in 1986 to assimilate ethnic minorities to the Kinh by resettling them in fixed settlement living areas and giving up their traditional ways of cultivation (Baulch et al., 2007; Nguyen et al., 2017).

The government policies affecting ethnic minorities are often criticised for “a mismatch between what the central government thinks is needed and what the intended recipients really need” (Fujii, 2018, p. 2095; Lam, 2020). This mismatch comes from misunderstanding and the stigma the Kinh and government officers hold against ethnic minorities (UN Women, 2017a; World Bank, 2019). The government, which is dominated by the majority Kinh, has managed to impose top-down policies and intervention programmes that, according to them, support the ethnic minorities to move on from their “backward” status (Bonnin & Turner, 2012). However, these policies and programmes are accused of lacking gender, social, and cultural sensitivity to the needs of ethnic minorities (Bonnin & Turner, 2012, 2013, 2014; Turner, 2012b). The lack of government policies and practices that are sensitive to ethnic minorities also creates barriers for ethnic minority people in their efforts to overcome poverty. In addition, government programmes are criticised for “treating the ethnic minorities as a more or less homogeneous population” (Baulch et al., 2007, p. 1164; Nguyen et al., 2017). Recognising the diversity of ethnic minorities highlights the need for an alternative policy designed to meet the varying needs of different ethnic minority groups (Baulch et al., 2002).

5.5. Hmong, Dao, and Tay ethnic groups

This section focuses on three ethnic minority groups, Hmong, Dao, and Tay, involved in the three business partnerships analysed in this study. The Hmong and Dao groups are the least economically developed among ethnic minority groups with high poverty rates, while the Tay

group is economically stronger. A summary of the key characteristics of these three ethnic groups is in Table 5.2 below:

Table 5.2. Key Characteristics of the Hmong, Dao, and Tay Ethnic Groups

Key characteristics	Hmong		Dao		Tay	
Population as of 1 April 2019	1,393,547		891,151		1,845,492	
Average income per capita/month in 2015	VND 575,200 (equiv to US\$ 25)		VND 833,400 (equiv to US\$ 36.2)		VND 1,306,300 (equiv to US\$ 56.8)	
Multidimensional poverty index (MPI)	88.2%		68.5%		46.1%	
Literacy and speaking in Vietnamese people aged 15 and above	62.4% (men)	30.9% (women)	78.8% (men)	61.5% (women)	96.7% (men)	93.2% (women)
	46.6% (overall)		70.2% (overall)		94.9% (overall)	
Literacy and speaking in Vietnamese of people in the GREAT programme areas	66% (men)	21% (women)	74% (men)	47% (women)	90% (men)	88% (women)
Literary rates in their own ethnic minority language for people aged 15 and above	19.1%		7.8%		20.5%	
Female-headed household	5.84%		8.19%		17.63%	
Percentage of employed workers in the agriculture sector	97.12% (men)	98.84% (women)	91.91% (men)	96.06% (women)	78.95% (men)	82.01% (women)
	97.97% (overall)		93.96% (overall)		80.43% (overall)	
Percentage of employed workers in industry and services	2.89% (men)	1.16% (women)	8.09% (men)	3.94% (women)	21.05% (men)	17.99% (women)
	2.03% (overall)		6.04% (overall)		19.57% (overall)	

Source: Author, compiled the data from the following sources: GSO and CEMA (2019), World Bank (2019), CEMA (2016, September 20), DeJaehere et al. (2020), and UN Women (2017a).

Hmong and Dao ethnic groups

The Hmong and Dao group originally migrated to Vietnam from China three and five centuries ago (Michaud, 2007; Rousseau et al., 2019). They are both among the largest ethnic minority groups, with a population size that ranks fourth nationally for the Hmong group (1,393,547 people) and seventh for the Dao group (891,151 people) (GSO & CEMA, 2019). The Hmong people live in more remote and higher altitudes than the Dao, but these groups have similar livelihood portfolios (Rousseau et al., 2019). Traditionally, they practised swidden-based subsistence farming with cash from trading opium and timber products (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Turner & Michaud, 2008, 2009). Since the government prohibited swidden farming and opium trading and closed the forests, they became sedentarised semi-subsistence peasants and diversified their livelihoods from different sources but still mainly related to the agriculture sector, as shown in Table 5.2 (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Turner & Michaud, 2008, 2009). They grow one crop of rice or maize a year, primarily for their family consumption. A poor Hmong household is defined as one that does not grow sufficient rice for the family's consumption for a whole year (Bonnin & Turner, 2012, 2013). Both Hmong and Dao women have a great knowledge of traditional medicinal plants and know how to make handicrafts. They sell medical herbs and handicrafts to earn money for the family. Other income sources come from selling non-timber forest products like honey, cardamom, livestock, and maize alcohol (Bonnin & Turner, 2013). Hmong and Dao women in tourist areas like in Lao Cai province, the location of the study, can also earn money from being trekking tour guides (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Dinh & Santasombat, 2012; Doan, 2019; Rousseau et al., 2019).

Hmong and Dao have high multidimensional poverty index (MPI) rates at 88.2% and 68.5%, respectively (World Bank, 2019). The average monthly income per capita of Hmong and Dao groups (Table 5.2) falls into the poor and near-poor categories according to the income poverty line mentioned in section 5.2 above. Only 46.6% of Hmong people over 15 years old can read and write in Vietnamese, while for Dao people this number is slightly higher (70.2%) (CEMA, 2016, September 20). Similar to other ethnic groups, Hmong and Dao women have much lower Vietnamese literacy rates than men. Notably, Hmong women are half as likely (30.9%) to know how to read and write in Vietnamese compared to men (Table 5.2). The baseline data of the Vietnamese literacy rates of the Hmong and Dao women in the two

provinces of the GREAT programme are much lower than this. Only 21% of Hmong women and 47% of Dao women can read and write in Vietnamese while these numbers in men are 66% (Hmong) and 74% (Dao), respectively (DeJaehere et al., 2020).

Hmong and Dao groups are considered culturally resilient as they find ways to preserve their identity and maintain traditional cultures and livelihood activities (Bonnin & Turner, 2012, 2013; Po et al., 2020). Hmong people have a strong sense of identity and community (Jones et al., 2014; Luong, 2015; Turner, 2012a). The Hmong society is built on a strong kinship system (Long, 2008; Luong, 2015; Turner & Michaud, 2008). The community rules and norms strongly affect the Hmong people's behaviours and actions (Luong, 2015). Luong (2015) argues that the living conditions in remote geographical areas and their subordinated status make Hmong people feel less confident in their social interaction. They live separately from other ethnic groups and are quite “selective” in choosing their involvement with modernity and integration into the cash economy to maintain their traditional culture (Bonnin & Turner, 2012; 2013, p. 416; Jones et al., 2014, p. 12; Turner, 2012b; Turner & Michaud, 2008, p. 178; 2009). They choose to get involved in the market to earn additional income in ways that do not make them too dependent on the market (Turner, 2012b). For example, Hmong women choose to sell handicrafts and get involved in guiding treks to socialise with tourists and earn some cash for their families. However, they still prioritise their responsibilities in the home and on farms (Turner, 2012b). They contest government policies and programmes in “subtle ways” in which they still comply with these policies and programmes but quietly keep their customs and practices to maintain their autonomy (Bonnin & Turner, 2012, p. 95; 2014; Phuong & Kim, 2022; Turner, 2012b). An example is when the Hmong people resisted the government programme introducing hybrid rice and maize seeds, which is far different from their traditional farming practice (Bonnin & Turner, 2012, 2013). Turner and Michaud (2009, p. 56) argue that this resistance is “a constructed strategy” to help the Hmong people to stay away from the control and domination of the government. As such, Tugault-Lafleur and Turner (2009) recommend that any development programmes that support Hmong people carefully consider their resilient culture and options for flexibility of livelihoods, as Hmong people choose to follow what they believe is “appropriate” (Tugault-Lafleur & Turner, 2009, p. 399; Turner & Michaud, 2009, p. 45).

Tay ethnic group

The Tay ethnic group is the largest group (1,845,492 people) among the ethnic minority communities in Vietnam (GSO & CEMA, 2019). They reside mainly in the Midlands at lower altitudes compared to the Hmong and Dao that live in the north of Vietnam; they also have a tradition of swidden farming (Nguyen et al., 2004; Nguyen et al., 2020; Rambo & Tran, 2001). The Tay group has a very high rate of people who know how to read and write in Vietnamese (96.7% men and 93.2% women), nearly as high as the Kinh group (CEMA, 2016, September 20). The Vietnamese literacy rate level of Tay women in the research area in the GREAT baseline data is 88% (DeJaeghere et al., 2020). Therefore, the Tay ethnic group has more advantages in accessing government information and integrating into the markets than Hmong and Dao groups. This contributes to making the Tay ethnic group better off than the Hmong and Dao groups, with an MPI of 46.1% (World Bank, 2019). Tay people also have better access to jobs in the non-agricultural sectors than Hmong and Dao groups. The number of Tay people working in the industry and service sectors is almost double the numbers of Hmong working in these sectors, and triple the numbers of Dao people working in these sectors (Table 5.2).

Gender inequality issues in Hmong, Dao and Tay ethnic groups

The three ethnic groups in this research, Tay, Hmong, and Dao, are patriarchal cultures in which women hold subordinated positions to men (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Bui, 2008, April 23; Hoang et al., 2006; Jones et al., 2014; Lohne, 2019; Luong, 2015; Nguyen & Duong, 2022; Pham, 2012; Sweeney, 2015). Hmong, Dao, and Tay women face the same challenges as other ethnic minority women due to “double inequality: one is the conventional gender inequality, and the other is inequality of being an ethnic minority” (World Bank, 2019, p. 90). Men are assumed heads of households. Women head only 5.84% of Hmong families, and these numbers are a bit higher in the Dao (8.19%) and Tay communities (17.63%) (UN Women, 2017a). Women are also less represented in leadership positions. There was no data available for these three ethnic groups, but in general, the percentages of ethnic minority women holding leadership positions in key government management bodies like the Communist Party or People’s Councils are very low, only 6% and 7.3%, respectively, in comparison to

ethnic minority men, which are 36.1% and 39% (UN Women et al., 2021). This number is higher in communal administrative organisations (11.4%) but mainly in low-ranking administrative positions (UN Women et al., 2021). In the researched area, Lao Cai province, the number of male ethnic party members (9.946 people) is almost three-fold the number of women (3.263 people). In Vietnam, it means a low number of ethnic minority women hold leadership positions in the local government.

Women's participation in economic and social activities is hampered by their heavy load of unpaid domestic chores and agricultural work, as well as a lack of Vietnamese (Kinh language) and a lack of transportation to travel outside the village (World Bank, 2019). Hmong, Dao, and Tay women face the same difficulties as many other ethnic minority women and have less access to opportunities and resources than men (UN Women, 2017a; UN Women et al., 2021; World Bank, 2019). The patrilineal system allows men to inherit land from their parents (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Bui, 2008, April 23; Jones et al., 2014; Nguyen & Duong, 2022; Pham, 2012). The GREAT baseline data showed that men borrowed money from formal sources more than women because men often had more property ownership or could read and write (DeJaehere et al., 2020). This report also showed that a high number of Tay (81.4%), Hmong (75%), and Dao (76.3%) women had borrowed cash, in-kind, or both in the past 12 months from more than one source, from formal lenders, friends and relatives, unions, informal credit and saving groups, or NGOs. This demonstrates that while women in the research areas are economically active and integrated into financial relationships, they are reliant on informal sources because they lack access to formal credit markets.

Due to the harsh living conditions in the mountainous areas, many ethnic minority groups prefer to have sons so that they can do the "heavy work" (Pham, 2012, p. 21). Like many other ethnic minorities, gender-ascribed labour roles in Hmong, Dao, and Tay communities are quite divisive. Dao, Hmong, and Tay men are expected to be breadwinners and to take heavy work, "the big stuff", such as clearing and ploughing, building and maintaining houses, and collecting non-timber forest products. Meanwhile, women are expected to take backseats and engage in "small tasks" or "light chores" to look after the housework, planting, and animal raising and rarely participate in community meetings (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Bui, 2008, April 23; Hoang et al., 2006; Nguyen & Duong, 2022; Pham, 2012, p. 21; World Bank, 2019). Men

also participate in social activities and represent their families in community meetings (UN Women, 2017a; World Bank, 2019). More women than men work in the agriculture sector, and the share of men working in non-agricultural industries was much higher than women (UN Women, 2017a).

Photo 5.5.1. Red Dao Women Are Taking Time for Embroidering Clothes While Waiting for a Meeting



Source: Author's meeting with a group of Red Dao women (pre-PhD research)

There is limited research specifically on gender relations in Tay and Dao groups (Dinh & Santasombat, 2012; Nguyen & Duong, 2022), while there is more research on gender relations amongst Hmong. Hmong people's average marriage age is the lowest, but their fertility rate is almost double the national average (Jones et al., 2014). Hmong women are hard-working, taking care of food preparation, childcare, fuel, and water collection (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Jones et al., 2014; Sweeney, 2015). They are “responsible for both the “indoor” domestic tasks – as well as an extraordinary amount of the hardest “outdoor” work – Hmong women never

stop working, but their labours are unremunerated” (Jones et al., 2014, p. 15). Hmong women also experience a high level of gender-based violence due to their husbands' high level of alcohol consumption (Jones et al., 2014; Sweeney, 2015). However, they are not supposed to speak out about domestic violence due to community stigma. It is also difficult for them to divorce because Hmong culture believes that once women are married, they live with their husband’s families, and their bodies and spirits belong to them (Jones et al., 2014; Nguyen et al., 2011; Sweeney, 2015).

Photo 5.5.2. A Hmong Family with the RA (on the right) during the Field Trip



Source: Qua Sung, during fieldwork

Photo 5.5.3. Tay Woman Growing Tea in the Research Area



Source: Dzung Tran, during fieldwork

Nevertheless, similar to other patriarchal groups in Vietnam (see section 5.3 above), the gender division of labour is changing in young ethnic minority households. Even in some highly patrilineal groups like Hmong, Dao, and Tay groups, men share domestic work when women earn more money (Earl, 2014; World Bank, 2019). The changes in the gender division of labour are observed more in young Hmong, Dao, and Tay families due to changes in household economic status, which influence gendered negotiations and the division of labour within the family (Bonnin & Turner, 2013). Market integration and tourism development have opened up more opportunities for Hmong and Dao women in some regions to become primary breadwinners while men do more housework and care for children (Bonnin & Turner, 2013; Doan, 2019; Lohne, 2019; Po et al., 2020). During my field trip to Phu Mau commune, Son La province, in 2019, I also observed Tay ethnic men staying at home and doing housework while

the women were working in nearby factories. However, the change in traditional gender roles observed in young Hmong families challenges Hmong men's self-esteem. In some cases, this leads to tensions between Hmong families and can lead to men drinking more (Doan, 2019; Lohne, 2019).

5.6. Concluding remarks

This chapter outlined the socio-economic, political, gender and ethnic minority development context in which the GREAT programme operates. It has shown the dynamic economic development environment in Vietnam and the challenges that Vietnamese micro, small, and medium businesses face when the country is open and integrated into regional and global markets. Although Vietnam has made progress in economic growth, poverty alleviation, and achievement of SDGs, inequalities persist for ethnic minorities. Ethnic minority people still account for the majority of the poor in Vietnam and lag behind the majority in all measures of poverty. The situation is projected to worsen due to ongoing COVID-19 impacts.

Women still face gendered disadvantages in many aspects of life. The persistent gender stereotypes and norms create pressure on both women and men and limit women's economic and political participation. Ethnic minority women face more difficulties. Among the three ethnic groups included in this research, Hmong and Dao are two of the least developed ethnic groups in Vietnam, while the Tay is in the middle range based on multidimensional poverty index rankings. Hmong, Dao, and Tay women encounter gender biases and lack power in comparison with men in their patriarchal cultures. The difficult economic conditions, language barriers, especially among Hmong and Dao women, and the existing gender norms impede Hmong, Dao and Tay women's empowerment. The following two chapters assess how these issues are addressed in the donor-business partnerships under the GREAT programme and how these groups of ethnic minority women are empowered by engaging in agriculture and tourism production value chains.

Chapter Six. STRENGTHS, LIMITATIONS, AND CHALLENGES OF THE DONOR-PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIP IN THE GREAT PROGRAMME

6.1. Introduction

The purpose of Chapter Six is to explore perceptions and understandings of the private sector businesses and development agencies about women's economic empowerment (WEE) (addressing Research Question 1), and the strengths, limitations, and challenges of partnerships with the private sector in WEE programmes (addressing Research Question 2). This chapter explores the GREAT programme's approach to WEE, the level of support it provides to help each business partner achieve WEE objectives, and how these partners perceive the progress of WEE in the respective partnerships. Data and findings are drawn from interviews with key informants from the donor organisation (DFAT), the manager and the staff of the DFAT's managing contractor who delivers the GREAT programme, representatives of the three relevant businesses, and an NGO involved with the programme.

My analysis reveals that women's empowerment was understood differently by the different actors. The private sector partners had a narrow view of empowerment, seeing it primarily as earning more money, and they had little desire to bring a broader approach to empowerment into their businesses. In response, GREAT's approach to empowerment is adaptive and has changed from focusing on the donor-private sector link to bringing in NGO partners who have the desire and skills to focus more on women's empowerment. Interestingly, the stories of the herbal cooperative and the tea company, which have a solid bond with the community, and the benzoin and ginger company, which has a weak community linkage, explain why having social capital with strong connections with communities is critical for business success and for businesses' ability to enable women's empowerment.

6.2. Perceptions, understanding, and approach to WEE

As discussed in Chapter Three, “empowerment” is a buzzword in development discourse (Batliwala, 2007; Cornwall, 2007). The concept of women’s economic empowerment has been adopted widely by both bilateral and multilateral development agencies. However, each agency may interpret and understand the concept differently. My research explores the partnerships between development agencies and micro and small enterprises that aim to empower ethnic minority women. It is crucial to know how each partner perceives and understands the concept of women’s economic empowerment because it influences their approach to addressing WEE issues. This section discusses differing perceptions of WEE held by the partners in the GREAT programme, and provides information on GREAT’s approach and interventions to WEE, and how the business owners and the partnership implementer perceive the WEE progress in their respective businesses.

6.2.1. Perception and understanding of the business of WEE

The perception and understanding of WEE have evolved as the GREAT programme progressed since early 2019. In my interviews with the business owners of the three businesses, all three business owners said that they had not known what gender equality and WEE meant at the start of the programme. They often used the term gender equality interchangeably with WEE. For example, the benzoin and ginger company director had understood that the concept of WEE was simply to have a husband and wife make decisions together and share work. The directors of the tea company and the herbal cooperative developed their understanding of WEE after participating in GREAT’s training activities. At the time of the research, they perceived that WEE meant to improve women’s rights and voice in the family.

The concept of “women’s economic empowerment” was translated as “trao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ” in Vietnamese. I did not understand this concept at all. The word “trao” [handover] made me think that the programme would hand over a certificate or something like that to me when I came to the meeting. I still tell this story to other people and keep laughing at myself about it. To be honest, in the beginning, I was like, “half asleep, half awake”.

After participating in the training, I understood that women’s economic empowerment meant supporting women to have voices and jobs and develop more from what they had been taught. Women dared to stand up; they did not need to hide behind others’

backs.... Women could speak for themselves, stand up for themselves, and say what they wanted in their hearts.

(KI-herbal cooperative director)

I do not understand the concept of WEE, and I do not know how to explain it either. But, I know roughly it means improving women's rights, including financial and economic rights, and having their voices heard more within the family.

(KI- tea company director)

Before, we did not have any idea about gender equality [in our project]. We just said in general [to the farmers] that when going to grow turmeric and ginger, husband and wife [should] do it together. When we understood more about gender equality, we shared it with the people to make the life of the husband and wife in this value chain more equal. The husband and wife also see the impact when they discuss and work together.

(KI- benzoin and ginger company director)

6.2.2. The GREAT programme's approach to WEE

The GREAT programme's WEE objective, as stated on their website, is to provide women with "access to economic opportunities and [the ability] to determine their own involvement. [They are] recognised for the value of their contributions and receive equitable economic returns"

(GREAT, n.d). Their approach to WEE focuses on three levels (Figure 6.1):

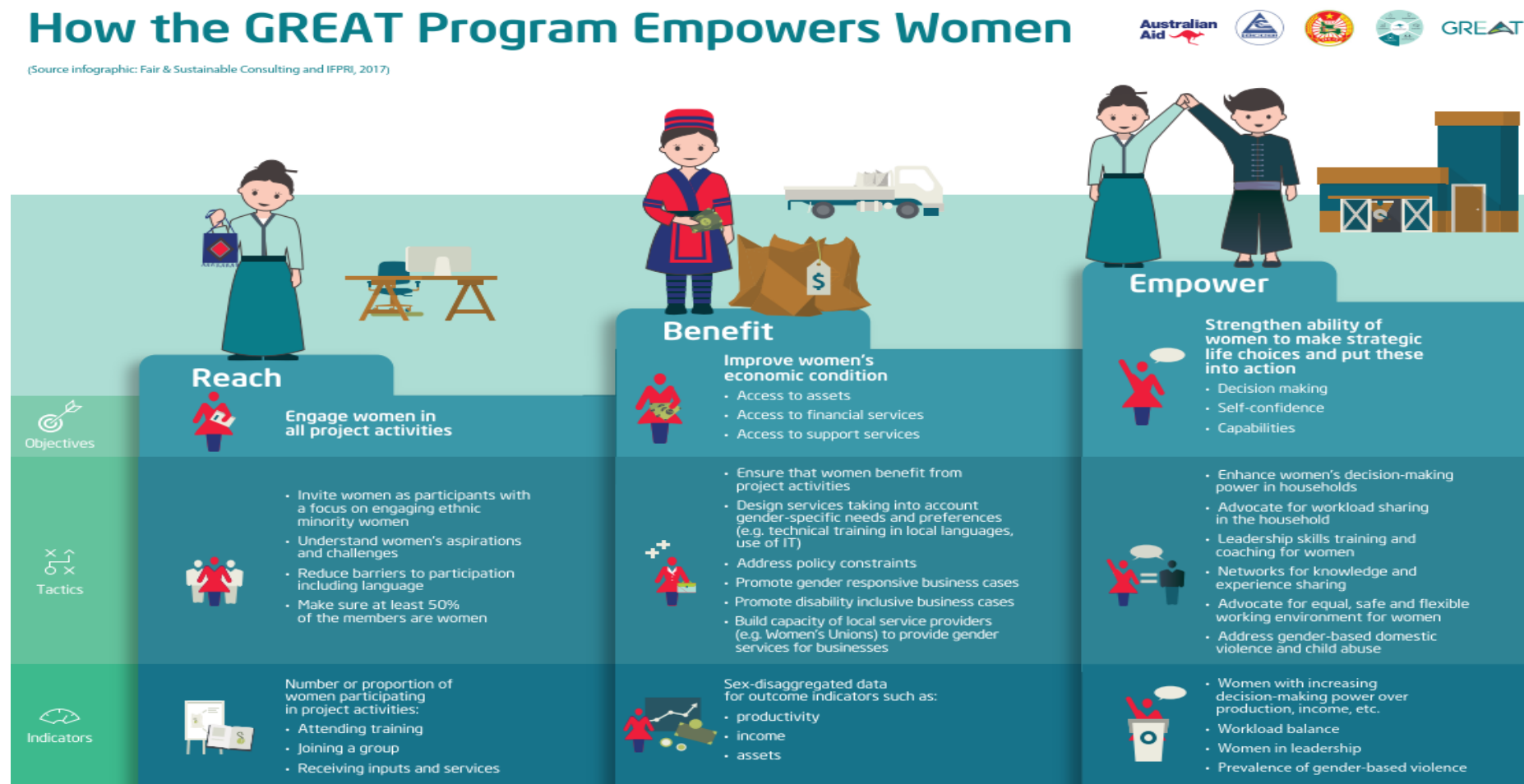
REACH: *It seeks to engage women in all project activities. In order to achieve this, the project implementers need to understand women's aspirations and challenges, as well as address barriers to women's participation.*

BENEFIT: *It aims to improve women's access to assets, financial services, and support services.*

EMPOWERMENT: *It seeks to increase women's self-confidence and decision-making power over production and income, and their capabilities in entrepreneurship, leadership, and management.*

(GREAT, n.d)

Figure 6.1. The GREAT Programme’s Approach to WEE



Note. From “How GREAT is Empowering Women,” by GREAT, n.d., (<https://equality.aus4vietnam.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/How-GREAT-is-empowering-women.pdf>). Reprinted with permission.

The DFAT officer said that the three levels of the empowerment process implied an action plan to roll out the programme step by step. However, according to the GREAT officer, the three levels were interrelated and did not necessarily happen in order. He claimed that GREAT's framework *REACH-BENEFIT-EMPOWERMENT* should not be understood as a consecutive process. This is because some aspects of *EMPOWERMENT* can happen before *BENEFIT* is realised. He argued that women have to feel confident to participate in economic activities before they actually could benefit from them. He gave an example that if women were not confident (one of the indicators of the *EMPOWERMENT* level), they would not sign a contract with the company or learn and apply the technical skills to achieve the expected yield at quality that they could sell to the company for higher incomes.

If there is no change in women's capability and confidence, there will be no benefit... So confidence must come before BENEFIT [women should be confident first to undertake business activities that benefit them].

(GREAT officer)

As influenced by the World Bank, the GREAT programme follows the theory that investing in women is "right and smart economics". They expect women's economic empowerment "will have a greater economic impact and inclusivity outcomes, clearer social and economic flow-on benefits to both households and communities" (GREAT, 2016, p. 6). As commonly applied in international development programmes (Su & Yang, 2023), the GREAT programme follows the "twin-track" approach: mainstreaming and targeting to address gender equality and social inclusion. Depending on the types of partner organisations, GREAT will determine which approach to apply. The definitions of gender and social mainstreaming and targeting used by the programme are:

Mainstreaming: *Consider the different needs of women and men and people of different socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds and people with disabilities in the design of the project and systematically integrate gender equality and social inclusion into all project activities (planning, implementation, monitoring, reporting) to enable beneficiaries to participate and benefit equally.*

Targeting: *Address gender inequalities where they are particularly challenging or where progress is slow; promote gender equality and women's empowerment as an investment priority; create opportunities for social inclusion of disadvantaged groups, including the poor and people with disabilities and prevent gender-based violence.*

(GREAT, 2019, p. 5)

The gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming approach aims to achieve the first two levels of the empowerment process above: *REACH* and *BENEFIT*. This approach applies to partnerships with agencies, such as government agencies, enterprises, and research institutes, assuming that these agencies have limited resources, expertise, and experience in addressing gender issues. It means the partnerships with businesses, such as the herbal cooperative and the benzoin and ginger company, are only expected to take the mainstreaming approach to engage women in the project activities and improve their access to assets, financial, and support services. The targeting approach is only implemented in targeted international NGOs, which are considered to have experience and expertise in gender issues to support women to achieve the *EMPOWERMENT* level. The partnership with the tea company with the support of Helvetas is expected to achieve this goal.

The GREAT manager explained that businesses were not contracted to address all the complex issues of WEE as they did with NGOs. Therefore, they could not expect a business to address the issues of social norms and workload issues and improve decision-making power for women. Thus, instead of making it compulsory, the programme only encouraged interested businesses to do more towards enabling *EMPOWERMENT*. Rather, they focused on *REACH* and *BENEFIT*. Then, depending on the capacity of the enterprises, they would decide how they address the issues. This view was echoed by the DFAT officer. This is interesting, considering that the GREAT officer quoted above said they need to have some aspects of *EMPOWERMENT* before *BENEFIT* could work.

The GREAT programme began to provide training for wider business partners and organise media campaigns about gender equality in June 2020. According to the senior programme staff, the business started to care about and engage more with gender activities as they realised “*these are not too difficult to implement*”.

6.2.3. WEE intervention activities and the perception of the WEE progress in each partnership

The levels of gender intervention activities were different in the three businesses. For the tea company, gender activities were supported by Helvetas (the NGO). They organised gender equality promotion events and training on WEE. The training content covered a wide range

of topics including household economic management and Gender Action Learning System⁹ topics, such as decision-making power and sharing the burden of work in the family (KI-Helvetas project officer). Helvetas also supported the tea company in forming production groups and encouraged both men and women to participate. In addition, they trained a core group of local people to become trainers. These people normally come from local organisations such as the women's union to ensure that when the project is completed, the local trainers could continue training other people in their community (KI-Helvetas project officer).

While the benzoin and ginger company director seemed to have a basic understanding of the WEE concept, the company's former business manager had a little more insight into the WEE concepts. She was also the former project coordinator who directly coordinated and implemented the project. She defined WEE in terms of rights and capability. According to her, women should have the right to participate in economic activities, access opportunities for self-development, and decide on family matters. However, she said that women in the project area still have limited management skills, technical experience, and knowledge. She also recognised that WEE required the involvement of both men and women. Therefore, she invited both husbands and wives to participate in the project's training activities. Nevertheless, as the company did not have a gender expert, their interventions were limited to integrating gender into the technical training courses and promoting the idea that men and women should share family decisions and housework.

We need to change the mindsets of both husbands and wives in the household economic development process. For example, in the past, the husband made decisions on production areas, borrowing money from the bank etc. The wife was not allowed to participate. Since this project is to empower women, it means that women must have a voice in the family. The husband must make decisions based on the wife's opinion.

(KI-former business manager of benzoin and ginger company)

⁹ According to Oxfam Novib, 2014, p.7: "Gender Action Learning System is a community-led empowerment methodology that uses principles of inclusion to improve the income, food, and nutrition of vulnerable people in gender-equitable ways". This methodology is promoted by INGOs, especially Oxfam, to support the community in achieving WEE objectives.

The herbal cooperative received direct support from the programme gender specialist to provide training and gender promotion events to both husbands and wives of the member and satellite households of the herbal cooperative. In my interviews with the cooperative director, she said that the cooperative members highly appreciated the training and social events, including quizzes, plays, music performances, and gender equality promotion content. Some women talked about the shift in their husbands' behaviours toward more understanding and sharing the housework. These issues are discussed in Chapter Seven.

The project's gender specialist trained and shared with us [on gender equality]. She had a lot of experience working with ethnic minorities, so she understood people here very well. They liked and praised her.

(KI-director of the herbal cooperative)

Perception about the WEE progress of each partnership

The perceptions about the WEE progress of each partnership were different in the three businesses. According to the GREAT manager, the three businesses were considered likely to achieve the *REACH* and *BENEFIT* levels and one aspect of the *EMPOWERMENT* level, which was to improve women's self-confidence in technical skills. The business owners and the staff I interviewed believed that beyond gaining technical skills, women also started to join men in making their family's key decisions on production and finance issues.

For the tea company, the GREAT officer perceived that the partnership has almost achieved the agreed indicators for the *REACH* level. This means it has already successfully engaged with all women growing tea that the project targeted in the areas. However, the WEE progress varied in different project areas. He also perceived that the *BENEFIT* and *EMPOWERMENT* levels had been achieved in Ban Lien commune, where the company had more than 14 years of operation growing organic tea and more than five years of fairtrade practices, which required the implementation of women's and children's rights. This commune has also received training and hosted gender equality promotion events organised by Helvetas. There was evidence from the interviews with the tea growers (see Chapter Seven, section 7.3.1) that the project had increased income for tea growers, built capacity for women, and changed gender awareness between men and women in the commune. He also claimed that women

participated more in the decision-making process at the household level. The director of the tea company asserted that local women were increasingly participating in the company's meetings. From his day-to-day dealing with local women, he said that women were more confident to bring tea to sell to the company and exchange information with each other; they also kept the money and had more voice in the family.

However, according to the GREAT officer, the economic benefit in other tea-growing areas, where most farmers have recently engaged with the company in the last one to three years (only some reported five-year contracts), was not as the project expected. These farmers were in the process of converting to safe and organic tea. He claimed that even though women in these communes were more confident in applying safe and organic tea farming techniques and pursuing certifications, the changes in decision-making power and sharing workload between men and women were still limited.

The Helvetas project officer did not differentiate between the long-term engaged communities and newly engaged ones when considering the variations in the progress of WEE. As the NGO supporting the business to implement WEE objectives, he claimed that they had achieved the WEE indicators:

Suppose you evaluate the beginning, the middle and the end of the project on the same groups. In that case, you will see evident changes in women's confidence in taking the initiative in work and communication. In the past, they were passive and only spoke when being asked....In the project's events and competitions, they participated fully and wanted to gain knowledge. They shared the workload with their husbands. There were no tasks that only the wife or the husband performed.

(KI-Helvetas project officer)

The director of the herbal cooperative was also keen to talk about the changes that women in her cooperative had experienced in terms of improved incomes from selling herbal medicinal plants and holding casual jobs with the cooperative. As a result, she said they were more financially independent from their husbands and had more voice in the family. In addition, she felt that men supported and shared more housework with women. These issues will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

The benzoin and ginger business recognised the limitations of progress with WEE in their partnership. They said that women's income and participation in the family's decision-making process had not been achieved as planned, because the three-year period for the project implementation was too short. In my interviews with the business staff, they claimed that some women had started to be involved in important family decisions, such as buying motorbikes for children to go to school. However, the project had only enabled about 30% of the changes they had expected (KI-the former business manager).

6.3. Strengths of the donor-private sector partnerships in WEE programmes

This section features the benefits of donor-business partnerships from the business owner's point of view and the strengths that the private sector could bring into the partnerships with donors in development programmes. It is based on interviews with the business managers, a representative of the donor organisation, a managing contractor, and a project officer of an NGO involved in the programme.

6.3.1. Perception of the benefits of donor-business partnerships

All three businesses appreciated the financial support from the donor, which allowed them to upgrade processing facilities and shoulder necessary costs incurred by farmers for items like seedlings, fertilisers, and product certifications. They also praised the programme's contribution to promoting products and building capacity for farmers and business owners. Interestingly, they mentioned the programme provided opportunities to socialise and learn from their peers.

The partnership financially supports the company in setting up production groups and covers training costs for people.

(KI- former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company)

The project provided training on gender equality, planting trees, and climate change. Not only that, the project also provides opportunities for us to go out to learn and socialise with others.

(KI-director of the herbal cooperative)

The project supports participation in trade fairs, including the global online organic market. It also helps to raise awareness, especially that of my wife; she has a lot of opportunities to travel and meet other business partners; she knows what people do.

(KI- tea company director)

The former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company spoke of the benefit of the connection with the local government that they attained from the project. This relationship was, “*what the company has been doing so far, but it has not been effective*” (KI-former business manager). This is because the GREAT programme was approved by the Vietnamese Prime Minister¹⁰, and the Provincial People Committee is part of the steering committee to provide strategic guidance and oversee the implementation of the programme. Therefore, it has a strong influence and credibility with the local government at the district and commune levels, where the business needs the most support. Under the partnership with the GREAT programme, it is easier for a business to gain trust and support from the local authorities to implement their business activities, for example, renting land to build their processing facilities and organising meetings with local people.

The partnership with the project brings many benefits. The company gains more trust from the local government and people.

(KI- former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company)

As a result, the tea company director claimed that they had successfully expanded the production and markets and gained more profits. In return, they increased the purchasing price for farmers.

Thanks to this project, we developed more markets and sold more products. In addition, farmers’ knowledge has been improved. So I could increase the purchase price a bit. During the COVID-19 period, I supported purchasing [the tea] at the price of VND 16,000-17,000 [per kg], [increased from VND 14,000-15,000].

(KI- tea company director)

¹⁰ According to Vietnamese regulation, any official development assistance programme with a budget of US\$ 2 million has to get the Prime Minister’s approval.

6.3.2. Strengths of the private sector

All those interviewed claimed that the private sector brought the following advantages to the partnerships: existing networks and experience working with targeted beneficiaries, jobs and income, technical expertise and resources, and last but not least, dynamism and innovation.

Existing network and experience working with targeted beneficiaries

The tea company and the herbal cooperative had already established businesses that were well-embedded in the community. They worked directly with local ethnic minority people. They had built a strong network and set up a workable system that helped the businesses achieve their objectives and benefit the local people. They believed that these were the strengths that development programmes could tap into to improve and expand the business to help more disadvantaged groups, such as ethnic minority women in the case of the GREAT programme.

My strength is that I have a long working experience [in the tea production area]. I work directly with farmers every day, buying and selling [tea products]. I already have a very close connection with people in the community. I have had a long experience working in agriculture.

The tea company was established on the foundation of the tea cooperative. The tea cooperative was founded in 2004 and handed over to the tea companies in 2007. The role of the cooperative is to form farmer groups, which are critical in organic farming. Village heads are also group leaders. Each group will be given a code for traceability. Our agricultural management is self-monitoring. We only have two of us (me and my wife) to manage nearly 700 hectares of this land in Ban Lien. Cross-supervision, if successful, [means that] the whole village enjoys high prices; if not, the village endures lower prices. [If] one person [fails to follow the organic procedures he/she] makes the whole village suffer. I keep telling people and the district and provincial authorities that this model has been successful for the last ten years.

(KI-tea company director)

According to the GREAT manager, a business with a strong connection with the community would help build trust among farmers and encourage them to work more professionally and collaboratively in production groups deemed crucial in commercial value chains. The tea company and the herbal cooperative have this strength, which has been an important factor

contributing to their business success and influencing their ability to engage with ethnic minority women.

The herbal cooperative director founded the cooperative to support other women in her ethnic community to gain more income from their traditional knowledge about medicinal plants. With such goodwill, the cooperative received strong support from the local women in the community. They shared the difficulties with the cooperative's owners and worked together to develop the cooperative.

The cooperative members were united and understood each other. In the early days, when the cooperative had little profit to share, they said that the business was challenging [because of shortage of capital to develop a facility]; everything was difficult. So they told us not to share the profit, but instead, the cooperative could buy some things to celebrate Tet [the new year festival] and save the money for reinvestment. Until now, I am still very grateful to these sisters for having such thoughts. It shows a stable relationship and trust in members of the cooperative. Therefore, I also want to help them so that we do not have to go back to the old days.

(KI-director of the herbal cooperative)

For the tea company, though the director and his wife are the Kinh majority ethnicity, originally from the lowland area, and they are different from the tea growers who are ethnic minorities, they have established a workshop and have lived in the tea-growing regions since 2005. They understand the local people's culture and economic situation. They celebrate festivals, weddings and the building of new houses with local people, and they have supported them when they faced challenges. They also fought for the community's rights when the local government made mistakes categorising households' wealth, as the company director explained:

Each family in Ban Lien has a household profile recording the number of members, their ages, the agricultural areas, including the location of organic farms, a map, and types of land for tea, maize, and cassava. It also contains information on poverty status, property, and value assets...This household profile is more detailed than a household registration book managed by the local government. I know clearly the community's economic situation... I also challenge the commune authority as to why this household is classified as wealthy and the other family is assessed as poor. Some days ago, I helped two households change their categorisation from "wealthy" families to the "near-poor"—[The poor and near-poor are entitled to many government support programmes and social assistance]. I go to every household to do both internal inspections [inspection of the production process is an essential step of organic farming] and sign an agreement [with the households] at the same time.

When people built houses, got married, and moved to a new house, even though I was so busy, I had to come and spend time with them for about 30 minutes to one hour. If I went to the city, I had to send a gift to them before or after the event. If there is a funeral, I also come and offer our condolences to the family. When training is run at the beginning and the end of the year, I also join them.

When the community was affected by natural disasters or illnesses, I deducted a part of the cooperative's fund to support them. For example, I supported disabled children with several million dong to travel to Hanoi hospitals for treatment. I also connected them with hospitals to reduce treatment costs for their families. That is the connection of the business with the community. We always strongly connect with the people in the community, supporting the most challenging families.

(KI-tea company director)

However, the story of the benzoin and ginger company was different. Understanding and connecting with the local communities are challenges for them. The company is not locally based. They established a network in 2017, but this network is still a work in progress. The company management board members and its key staff are all from the Kinh majority ethnic group. The director only visits the project site once or twice a month. The company management board members have difficulties understanding the local languages and cultures. They do not have much experience working with the local people, according to a former business manager.

The people are ethnic minorities whose culture and language are different from the Kinh people. We are from the Kinh. Hmong people may understand some of what we say, but we do not know what they want, whether they can hear us or not, and whether our messages reach them. Therefore, we have to hire an interpreter.

The fact is that people still do not trust the company. This is a challenge. Therefore, the level of linkage between businesses and people is not high. Even the local authority did not believe that the bodhi tree had resin and that it could help people increase their incomes. Because the company has not created any reputation in the region, the model is small and completely new, making it difficult to access and connect with the local people.

(KI-former business manager)

As a result of the lack of experience working with the communities, the connection with the community and the linkages with the farmers are weak. These issues were affecting the trust and confidence of the local people at the time of the research. Interviews with the local people (see Chapter Seven) also reflected this issue.

Jobs and incomes

As expected, all key informants that I interviewed, DFAT staff, GREAT's senior programme management officers, Helvetas Project officers, and the business staff considered that the private sector had the strength to create jobs and income opportunities, which are some of the objectives of WEE programmes.

When a project aims to create jobs and increase income for the targeted beneficiaries, we definitely have to collaborate with businesses because it requires linking to specific service and product value chains.

(KI-GREAT officer)

Businesses already have existing markets that can provide farmers with secure access to the market and therefore have more stable jobs and incomes. The former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company claimed that businesses are “*bridges to connect farmers and markets*” and explained why a funding agency should partner with the private sector in development projects:

The project has money to support people, but who will be the buyer for the products that they produce? Who will buy the products and export them? The project will not be able to do it, so they must collaborate with enterprises.

(KI- former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company)

The GREAT officer and the DFAT officer also emphasised the private sector's strength and role in connecting farmers and markets. When the output market is secured, businesses could support farmers to improve the quality to meet market requirements.

The business must be co-investors with [development] projects. They have functions to carry out market research, contract farming, and all the knowledge related to the market.

(KI-GREAT officer)

Business proactively takes the initiative to connect with markets. That is the role of enterprises. Donors, the state, and farmers cannot play that role.

(DFAT officer)

According to the GREAT officer, the local government no longer accepted ODA funding easily. Instead, they require development projects to link with businesses to ensure farmers access to markets to gain stable incomes. This condition resulted from their past experiences when farmers received support from development programmes to develop particular products but

could not sell them. For example, many benzoin and ginger farmers reported that a previous donor-funded project encouraged them to grow turmeric some years ago. However, when it came to the harvesting season, they could not sell it (interviews with farmers and the benzoin and ginger company). The DFAT officer, therefore, concluded that working with the private sector was considered to provide “*a long-lasting solution*” because it created “*sustainable markets*” for farmers.

The farmers interviewed in the research also mentioned that the greatest benefits they received from their linkages with businesses were gaining access to markets and acquiring stable incomes. This issue of benefits to farmers will be further discussed in Chapter Seven. All three businesses of the research have stable markets for their products. For example, the tea and benzoin and ginger companies have exported tea, benzoin, and organic ginger to premium markets in European markets. The herbal cooperative has sold its products nationwide to a five-star Vietnam hotel. The tea company and the herbal cooperative also provided some full-time and casual jobs for the local women.

Technical expertise and resources

The GREAT manager spoke of the technical advantages that the business brought in the partnerships: “*they understand the [market] needs and know how to bring the products into niche markets, especially traditional ones*”. For example, the herbal cooperative knew about traditional herbal and medicinal plants and the techniques to make essential oils and condensed herbal bath products. Similarly, the benzoin and ginger company has developed tools and techniques for benzoin extraction. The tea company knew how to process and add value to the tea for premium markets, which in return generated higher incomes and created better job opportunities for farmers.

Without the company, it was only a yellow tea with a low value, only tens of thousands dongs.... The company knew how to turn it from many years of being a low-yielding crop, into mid-range and high-end products that could sell for 700k-800k dongs, even a few million dongs [per kg]. Moreover, they know how to mobilise resources to help them implement strategies to enter niche markets and add value to those products. Before, people only earned about 10 million dongs [per year]. But now, although it is grown extensively, without organic fertiliser investment, they have increased income

by seven to ten times. In the future, if people correctly follow the company's technical advice, their income could be up to 200 million dong per year.

(KI-GREAT manager)

The business also had resources to “leverage” or co-invest with development partners to address development issues. In the GREAT programme, the private sector contributed 40-49% of the project funds (DFAT officer). This factor is critical given the reduction of donor funding in some countries.

Dynamism and innovation

Business is often praised for its dynamism and innovation in the market and product development. Their initiatives could change a sub-sector or form a new sub-sector of a region (DFAT officer). For instance, the benzoin and ginger company introduced benzoin extraction, which was new to both farmers and the province. The local government has just started to develop a policy and a plan to facilitate the development of this sector. The company also actively looks for new models that are more suitable for intercropping with bodhi trees.

In the near future, we will add other products if ginger is not suitable; we will have to build another model to cultivate herbal plants ideal for growing under the canopy of the bodhi trees. For example, the “khô hung” tree is now being tested in Tuyen Quang. It is a tree that can be planted under the canopy; if we bring it in, we will develop more models.

(KI-Deputy director of benzoin and ginger company)

The tea company buys old tea leaves, so people have another source of income instead of dumping them on the ground.

When farmers trim the tea [annually], they throw them [old tea leaves] on the ground. It's too much of a waste, so I bought that leaves from them. This helps people to have another source of income instead of throwing them on the ground. This also creates jobs for local people and for the workers and the company to have one more product to sell in various markets.

(KI- Director of the tea company)

The DFAT officer gave another example of how the private sector was generally innovative and dynamic. For example, the company developed an App to transfer technical and market information to farmers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The App would also connect farmers

to local experts. The content was designed to be user-friendly and appropriate for the needs and technological capabilities of the ethnic people. Farmers could also use this platform to give companies their production information. This process would help businesses achieve the standard certifications required to have their products sent to premium markets. Previously, these certificates were very paper-based, requiring people to carefully record information about the production process, such as planting area, sowing dates, applying fertiliser, and spraying. This App also solved the language barrier, an issue for the companies and farmers in training and keeping the farming records which were required by organic production standards.

6.4. Limitations and challenges

Despite the strengths noted in the previous section, partnership with the private sector involves challenges and limitations that development agencies need to consider when selecting business partners in women's economic empowerment programmes, including lack of commitment to WEE, limited expertise in gender issues, short time for partnerships to change social norms and agency, unstable farmer-business linkages in micro, small and medium businesses' value chains, and lack of gender-sensitive policies to support businesses working toward empowering ethnic minority women.

6.4.1. Lack of commitment to WEE

Not surprisingly, both business and donors said that the profit-driven goal of the private sector was one of the main challenges of the partnership with businesses in development programmes, *"as an SME, the economic purpose is the top priority"* (KI-former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company). Therefore, businesses were accused of having low motivation and incentives to address WEE issues if they did not see the benefits directly to their businesses, *"I see that the managers had not paid attention to WEE because their work nature is business, and they want to get the best profit for their businesses"* (KI-Helvetas project officer). Thus, there is a need to better *"balance"* gender equality, WEE goals, and business goals to attract the interest of businesses (Helvetas project officer) and demonstrate

a clear link between investment in WEE and gender equality and businesses' benefits (DFAT officer).

We need to prove to the private sector that if they organise production better by analysing the participation of both men and women in the production process, they can take advantage of the strengths of each gender. Then they can optimise the production process to increase profits. Or [in other words], if they analyse the gender relationship between men and women before jumping into an investment, it will lead to better results. (DFAT officer)

This is interesting because this discourse is common in development practice – that gender equality is something they should do because it will be economically beneficial (Winters et al., 2018). This is an instrumental understanding of gender equality, rather than the idea that equality should be achieved because it is morally right for human rights reasons. This issue will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

According to the DFAT officer, it would not be too challenging to persuade the business to “*make the initial investment,*” to carry out gender analysis at a superficial level to understand why men and women need to get involved in certain production process activities. However, it would take time to “*convince them to invest financial resources to change social norms, and improve agency for women*”. This perception was probably because it would be easier for the business to link some parts of women’s empowerment with productivity and efficiency. Some business owners recognised that, “*if women participate in production and decision-making process, the compliance [to the company’s production procedures] would be better*” (GREAT manager). The director of the herbal cooperative said that they shared the same objective with the project to “*support women to have a good income and life. Women made decisions, had a voice in the family, and were well-respected by their husbands*”. The benzoin and ginger company director also saw how the business benefited from gender equality. He said:

If a husband decides on something that a wife is not satisfied with, it will affect production. [Or] if a husband works far away and a wife has to wait for her husband to decide, they will miss the crop season. That's how the business benefits from gender equality. Therefore, gender equality should be integrated with [technical] training. If both husband and wife agree, productivity will also increase. One is never equal to two.
(KI-the director of the benzoin and ginger company)

6.4.2. Limited expertise in gender issues

The private sector claims to have limited expertise in terms of mainstreaming gender issues into their business activities (KI-former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company and Helvetas project officer). The DFAT officer argued that other agencies need to support businesses to address gender issues because, *“just relying on the private sector is not enough”*, and *“solving gender norms will involve different stakeholders”*. He claimed that it would be easier for businesses to achieve the *“lower dimensions”* of WEE, such as building capacity and providing access to resources. However, he said it would take longer to complete *“higher dimensions”*, such as sharing the workload, changing gender norms, or enhancing agency. Therefore, NGOs, development agencies, and the women’s union with *“the mandate and experience on WEE and gender equality”* should get involved in supporting businesses to achieve these objectives (DFAT officer).

As for Empowerment, it requires technically intensive and repeated interventions to change social norms and build confidence. We also have to understand the interactions [between men and women] in daily life. It requires the investment of time and understanding of social issues. We need tools and expertise to do the work.... Businesses have no people, no skills, no experience, in-depth knowledge, or expertise on gender.

(KI-GREAT manager)

The GREAT officer praised NGOs for having, *“a very good capacity to support gender equality. They [also] had many gender solutions, including supporting women with access to credit and input services”*. Interestingly, the director of the tea company did not agree with this view. Helvetas supported his company by providing gender training and organising production groups for people involved in the tea supply chain, as mentioned above. Helvetas also supported the company in promoting the products both in domestic and export markets. *“We provide training every month”* (Helvetas project officer). However, according to the director of the tea company, it was *“such a waste”* because excessive training courses provided to farmers would not help them. Information overload might mean that they quickly forget any knowledge they have acquired. Instead of lecturing, he suggested showing them how to do it practically. The GREAT manager agreed that the current approach to WEE of some NGOs *“took a long time, was costly, and not effective”*. She also claimed that the private sector needs new *“tools”* and *“support”* to achieve higher dimensions of WEE.

The GREAT programme also recognised the gaps in the gender expertise of the herbal cooperative and the benzoin and ginger company. In addition to the direct support from the GREAT's gender specialist, CARE was mobilised to carry out a gender audit and support the herbal cooperative to transform itself into a gender-responsive business at the time of the research. This work involved interviews with managers, employees, and contracted farmers of production groups and assessments of the working environment according to gender-responsive criteria. CARE would then recommend an implementation plan, including training to integrate WEE objectives according to the business's objectives.

Helvetas was also contracted to support the benzoin and ginger company to organise social events to raise awareness and advocate for gender equality, for example, the celebration of Vietnamese Women's Day. Helvetas was also commissioned to carry out a gender audit for the company and supported the company in implementing gender-responsive business practices. The results of this additional support were not yet available to review at the time of research.

6.4.3. Short time for the partnership to change social norms and agency

All key informants interviewed raised concerns about the short project implementation time of the partnership with the private sector in the GREAT programme. In all three cases, the partnerships have only two and a half to three years of implementation. These time frames were too short a time in which to achieve tangible WEE results (interviews with the DFAT officer, the former business manager and the director of the benzoin and ginger company, the Helvetas project officer, and the GREAT officer). This time frame is a challenge for any development programme which targets changing social norms and agency. The argument was because *"people need time to change"* (KI-the benzoin and ginger company director). The GREAT officer also argued that the *"decision-making power dynamic in the family depended on social norms. As such, it could not be changed overnight. It took a long time"*. The DFAT officer anticipated that it would need *"more than 5-10 years"* to see the changes.

6.4.4. The unstable farmer-business linkage in micro, small, and medium businesses' value chains

The DFAT officer mentioned that another challenge when partnering with micro, small, and medium businesses (MSME) was the instability of the farmer-business linkage. This instability affects the ability of businesses to create stable jobs and incomes for women. The MSME have difficulties maintaining its commitment to providing jobs and incomes for women during market crises due to its limited management and financial capacity. For example, the satellite Hmong herbal plantation households faced difficulties selling *chùa dù* to the herbal cooperative during the COVID-19 pandemic, as discussed in section 7.3.1.

The business sector's commitment to farmers and vice versa is only at the surface. If there is a crisis in the industry [or] in the market, the private sector may not be able to fulfil all its commitments, such as purchasing all the products from women, even if it wants to.

(DFAT officer)

However, the stability of the linkage also depends on the level of commitment from farmers. Businesses also face challenges when small-scale farmers break contracts with them for short-term interests. For example, the benzoin and ginger company faced difficulties because the ginger growers broke their contracts. The company had already invested in a processing workshop in the area and committed to buying ginger products at a price that both farmers and the company would agree on when they signed the contract. This price would be increased by 10% if the market price was higher than the contract and would not be reduced if the market price was lower. Although the company price was considered “reasonable” (HH11-Tay man) and the contract with the company offered a long-term and stable output, at the time of the research, some farmers have still chosen to discontinue the contract with the company because the market price was much higher than the company's price. This issue also suggests that the company do not yet have trust with the producers, as mentioned in section 6.3.2. The company has no effective mechanism in place to deal with this issue.

I was a group leader. Three out of five households did not want to work with the company anymore after paying the debts of production materials to the company. [This is] because they already had capital [and] the company's price was fixed. This year, according to the contract, if the market price is higher, the company will increase [payments by] 10%, but if it goes down, the company will remain at the same price. However, since last year, the market price has been very high. It would be VND 50,000-

60,000 [per kg] if you sold it at the market. The company only pay VND 15,000. This is the contract price with the company. If it goes up, the company will pay 10% more.
(HH8-Tay male-benzoin and ginger grower)

Another challenge that threatens the stability of the farmer-business linkage is the obligation of farmers to follow the technical requirements in commercial production value chains. In addition, organising production areas and training farmers was also a challenge because people lived remotely and far from each other (KI-former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company). Both the tea and the benzoin and ginger companies mentioned the difficulties of training local people to follow organic procedures, which require more work, for their designed certifications.

Organic farming does not cost much, but it is a lot of work. For example, they have to catch worms and manually remove weeds as they can not use chemicals or pesticides like in the past...People have a habit of using chemical products. When we implement organic ginger, we ask them to use organic products. Pesticides also have to be homemade organic products. That is also a challenge for people and a challenge for the company.

(KI-former business manager of the benzoin and ginger company)

In addition, many ethnic minority people could listen and speak a little in the Kinh language but could not read and write. This issue was also a challenge for the companies and farmers in training and keeping farming records as required by organic production standards. The problem with the language barrier is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

Although [people living in] the Ban Lien region [majority people are Tay and Hmong] are like the Kinh, they can only speak [the Kinh language], but they do not know how to read and write much. [They] only know how to sign [their names]; [they] cannot read, so [they] cannot take notes. This [their literacy] is extremely limited. That has not changed for many years because these people are old; it cannot be fixed. We can only look forward to the 9X generation onwards. When training involves a lot of words, people cannot learn because they cannot read. Therefore, you must use pictures and hold hands to show [practically and concisely demonstrate ideas], so people will understand.

(KI- tea company Director)

6.4.5. Lack of gender-sensitive policies to support businesses working toward empowering ethnic minority women

The GREAT manager said that businesses faced another challenge: the lack of preferential government policies supporting businesses working with ethnic minority women. According to the GREAT manager, it was “*extremely difficult*” to attract the local government’s attention to making gender-sensitive policies, such as land user rights certificates, gender mainstreaming in value chain development and economic development policies because it was not considered their priority. The directors of the tea company and the herbal cooperative mentioned that they had limited support from the government to access loans from the bank for business expansion (both the tea company and the herbal cooperative). Therefore, they faced a challenge in expanding their business scope to create more jobs and incomes for ethnic minority women.

The policy mechanism to support cooperatives is not favourable. Cooperatives do not have the land use right certificate (both individuals or cooperatives) to mortgage the bank for lending. We can only borrow at a household level of 50 million dong for one household. At this point, that level does not support me anymore. The most challenging thing now is capital.

I want to expand the market so women will have jobs. I want to expand to Ngu Chi Son. I want to open a hot furnace [to process medicinal plants] to create more jobs for sisters there so that they do not have to sell goods in the street anymore because there will be plenty of work for them to do in the commune. However, I could not get a loan because of the abovementioned difficulties.

(KI-director of the herbal cooperative)

6.5. Concluding remarks

The chapter consisted of two main parts. The first part explored how the private sector and the donor organisation perceive the concept of women’s economic empowerment. Significant findings highlight that the concept of WEE is donor-driven. It was understood differently by the different actors and the business owners did not understand WEE fully when they joined the partnerships. They had a narrow view of women’s economic empowerment, which was related primarily to earning more money, and had little desire to integrate a broader approach to empowerment into their businesses. In response, the donor-

private sector partnerships for women's economic empowerment in these three case studies focus primarily on supporting women to improve their income from their participation in agricultural and tourism production value chains. In order to achieve this objective, they tried to engage women in the project activities and provide them with technical training and production inputs. However, there were limited efforts to address the social norms and practices preventing women from participating in and benefiting from economic activities.

The second part of the chapter discussed the strengths, limitations, and challenges of the partnership with the private sector for women's economic empowerment. The research reveals that depending on the nature of the business, each business has its own strengths, limitations, and challenges in implementing WEE through the partnership with the donor. Business is perceived to have a strength in creating jobs and improving income through its existing market linkages that can guarantee outputs for farmers. Nevertheless, this strength is not assured when micro and small businesses face financial difficulties. Businesses are also perceived to contribute their technical skills and resources to the partnership. They are active and innovative in looking for solutions to address challenges practically and effectively. However, businesses are also mainly "profit-driven". They have limited expertise and low commitment to addressing social norms and improving women's agency. It appears, therefore, that NGOs, the women's union, and government agencies should be involved in WEE endeavours involving the private sector to provide additional support to the private sector to tackle social norms and improve policies and regulations aimed at empowering women. A longer timeframe should be considered when designing a partnership.

Last but not least, the research reveals that the locally embedded enterprises bring to the partnership a strong, established network and experience of working with the local communities. A solid bond with the community is an essential factor that contributes to the success of the business in ethnic minority areas and influences the business's ability to enable women's empowerment. This will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

CHAPTER SEVEN. ETHNIC MINORITY WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT IN AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM PRODUCTION VALUE CHAINS

7.1. Introduction

This chapter concentrates on the third research question regarding how ethnic minority women benefit and are empowered by engaging in agriculture and tourism production value chains. Following the previous chapter’s discussion of the perception of the business, the donor, and the implementing partners on the progress of women’s economic empowerment achievement in each partnership, I now explore insights into how men and women perceive the benefits of farmer-business partnerships and how these affect women's lives. I will then reflect on these benefits in relation to the four interlinked dimensions of the women's empowerment framework adopted in the research: economic, psychological, social, and political. Data will be drawn from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with related people involved in the three businesses, and triangulated with the project's own monitoring and evaluation reports.

Table 7.1 below summarises the complex impacts of the business linkages on women’s empowerment. Ratings are subjective and are used to visualise the level of empowerment in each dimension based on information collected from the field research. A narrative assessment of the women’s empowerment status of each business partner is in Appendix 7. Elaboration on the details of each empowerment dimension is presented in the following sections. This reveals that while the benzoin and ginger company had not yet benefited women, the tea company and the herbal cooperative helped women improve their incomes. As a result, they felt more confident and gained more respect from their husbands. In addition, the income they earned from the engagement with the businesses helped them pay for daily expenses and tuition fees for their children and supported their families to have better health treatment. However, there was no evidence of changes in intra-household decision-making power and political aspects.

Table 7.1. Summary Table of Women’s Empowerment in Three Business Cases

Empowerment dimensions		Tea Company			Benzoin & Ginger Company			Herbal Cooperative	
		Hmong	Dao	Tay	Hmong	Dao	Tay	Hmong	Dao
Economic empowerment	Increased income	♀♀♀	♀♀♀	♀♀♀	X	X	X	X	♀♀♀
	Access to training and information	X	X	X	X	X	♀	X	♀♀
	Access to and control over productive resources ¹¹	X	♀	X	X	♀	♀	♀	♀
	Decision-making	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	♀♀ ¹²
Psychological empowerment	Increase self-esteem and confidence to undertake business-related activities. Gain respect from husbands and enhance a sense of dignity	♀♀ ¹³	♀	♀	X	X	X	X	♀♀
Social empowerment	Receive recognition and respect in society. Have better access to education and health care, and have better opportunities to socialise and learn from each other.	♀	♀	♀	X	X	X	♀	♀
	Reduce domestic workload	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	♀♀
	Change social norms which discriminate against women	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
	Violence against women	?	?	?	?	?	?	?	?
Political empowerment	Access to and raising voice in public discussion	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	♀
	Participate in decision-making bodies	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Note. This table summarises the key changes that are observed in the GREAT programme, focusing on what changes occur under the programme’s interventions only.

♀♀♀ High level of improvement; ♀♀ Good level of improvement; ♀ Fair level of improvement; X No changes to the status quo of women; ? No information on violence against women. This sensitive issue is difficult to examine because I conducted the research remotely.

¹¹This information reflects the access to production inputs provided by the project under the pilot phase only. Men are reported as sole landowners in all ethnic minority groups.

¹² Apply to Dao cooperative members only

¹³ Apply to Hmong women in Ban Lien, where tea is the main income source for women

7.2. Perception of the benefits of the farmer-business partnerships

The research participants were asked about the main reasons for their decisions to participate in the production connections with the three businesses. Not surprisingly, almost all the participants across all three business cases said that they decided to sign a contract with the business to have better access to markets and stable output for their products. For example, the members of the herbal cooperative reported that linking with the cooperative meant that they did not need to worry about the market for their medicinal plants.

I don't have to worry about not having a place to sell the medicinal plants because now I have a linkage with the cooperative. When the harvest season comes, I cut [Chùa Dù] to sell to the cooperative.

(HH31-Dao woman-herbal grower)

Similarly, all interviewed tea growers claimed that they could sell all their tea at a stable price through linkages with the tea company.

The benefit [of the linkage with the company] is that the price of my tea is not volatile, I have an output, and when I have a product, the tea company buys it all; I do not need to find markets.

(HH3-Tay female tea grower)

Notably, reducing processing and travelling time was also highlighted as the benefit of the connection with the tea company. They did not need to travel far to sell their tea to other provinces or China anymore. Instead, they could sell tea to the company's collecting agents, usually located in or closer to their communities.

I am happier because I had to take tea to Ha Giang [province] to sell it in Coc Pai market before. Now, they come here to buy. We sell [our tea] in Hanh's house [a collecting agent of the tea company].

(HH17- Dao female tea grower)

The company buys fresh tea, so women do not need to dry and process the tea. Thus, being involved with the company helps increase work efficiency for women.

I prefer to sell fresh tea because it does not take up much time. For example, if we pick the tea today, one person will have to stay at home the following day to dry and process the tea. However, if we can sell it fresh, both of us will go to pick [tea]. (HH3- Tay female tea grower).

Before joining the company, I picked tea, dried it, and then sold it. If it rained, the tea would have deteriorated. Now, I can sell fresh tea.

(HH13- Dao female tea grower)

Interviewer: *Do you produce dried tea?*

Female: *No, I don't. It is a hard job.*

(HH18-Dao female tea grower)

The connections with the benzoin and ginger company helped farmers secure markets for their products (HH11, HH26, & HH27) (Photo 7.1 & Photo 7.2). As a result, people said they would be more confident about investing in production expansion as the companies committed to buying all products:

Before contracting with the company, people just worked fragmentedly. [They] didn't dare to make a significant investment. So they only harvested a few dozen to a maximum of 100 kilograms a year. But, since the company has committed to buying all the products and with [specific] prices, they dared to invest and expand the production.

(HH11-Tay man-benzoin and ginger farmer)

Photo 7.1. A Promotion Banner Stating the Company's Commitment to Purchase All Benzoin Products



Source: Dzung Tran, during fieldwork.

Photo 7.2. Benzoin Products



Source: Author's visit to a village benzoin collection agent in 2018 (pre-PhD research).

In all cases, the enterprises guaranteed that they would purchase all the products produced by the contracted farmers at fixed market prices at the start of the season if the farmers followed their technical requirements. They might increase the purchasing price if they receive more orders for the products (in the case of the tea company), or if the market price at the purchasing time is higher than the contracted price (in the case of an organic ginger product). Besides the benefits of having stability and guaranteed markets for the products, and the price was not “*volatile*” as mentioned above. The tea farmers and the medicinal plant growers reported that the prices paid by the contracted businesses were better than “*on the street*”. As a result, they have stable or higher incomes.

Previously, when we had not contracted with the business [the tea company], we sold [tea] at a lower price. However, after signing a contract with the company, it [tea] can be sold for a better price than selling to China.....Normally, if I sell it on the street other than to the tea company, the price will be reduced by VND 2,000 -3,000 [per kilogram]. (HH15- Hmong male tea grower).

The price of the tea was better; we could sell all the harvested tea, not making it redundant like before....The green tea was about VND 8,000, but [it] increased to VND 13,000 when affiliated [with the company].(HH18-Dao female tea grower)

Before registering with the cooperative, they only bought it [Chùa Dù] at the price of VND 2,000 per kilogram. After joining the cooperative, [we] now can sell it at VND 5,000 per kilogram.

(HH44-Hmong couple-herbal growers)

Both cooperative and satellite members can sell [Chùa Dù] at VND 5,000 [per kilogram]. Non-contracted farmers can only sell at VND 4,000.

(HH29-Dao woman-herbal grower)

However, not all farmers experienced this benefit. Satellite households of the herbal cooperative reported difficulties when they tried to sell their products to the cooperative. Also, the market access commitment does not always mean that the businesses bring economic benefits to the contracted farmers. In addition, while access to production inputs and opportunities to learn new knowledge were mentioned as other benefits and reasons for farmers to link with the business, women did not always benefit from these. This issue will be discussed in the economic empowerment section below.

7.3. Economic empowerment

As discussed in Chapter Three, the economic empowerment dimension will look at financial benefits and other factors that impact women's participation and benefits from economic activities, including access to training and information, access to and control over productive resources to improve their economic conditions, and decision-making on production and income.

7.3.1. Financial benefits from value chain participation for women

Women's financial benefits from their participation in the value chains vary amongst the three businesses and between the cooperative members and the satellite families.

Tea company

Tea is the primary cash income for women in the researched areas. All women across three ethnic groups, Tay, Hmong, and Dao, reported that tea income helped them cover

daily expenses, buy rice and maize seedlings and fertilisers, pay tuition fees for children and access health treatment.

Interviewer: *How important is the income from tea to your family?*

Female: *It is crucial, as without the tea, we do not know where to earn our income.*

(Dao female tea grower focus group discussion)

If I don't have money and tea is in the harvest season, I will pick tea. So I will have enough money to pay for my children's school fees. And if the children are sick, I will have money to buy medicine for them.

(HH3-Tay woman tea grower)

Tea can be harvested once a month, from February to October every year. Income from tea varies within households depending on the tea production areas and the geographical location of the tea fields. The estimated income that one person can earn from a day of tea picking was VND 200,000 (US\$ 8.6) to VND 480,000 (US\$ 21), and the average annual revenue from tea for the whole family was VND 3-4 million (US\$ 130-174). Some families with large tea plantation areas could earn about VND 10 million (US\$ 435). The price also depends on the types of tea and the harvesting methods. It ranges from 13,000 to 15,000 dong per kilogram for shan tea and 16,000 to 17,000 dong for organic and ancient tea. According to Hmong farmers, tea grows faster in lower and warmer areas. Income from tea is considered much higher than from rice and corn. A Tay man said:

Maize and rice are not as valuable as tea; I sold one kg of tea [fresh] and two kg of rice. If I sell dry tea, one kg of [dry] tea is equivalent to five kg rice. It [tea] is more productive but [involves] less labour. It is also a perennial tree.

(HH5-Tay male tea grower)

Herbal cooperative

The herbal cooperative also creates job and income opportunities for Dao and Hmong ethnic minority women. Since they joined the herbal cooperative, women no longer have to sell herbal plants in the markets and throw the products away if there are no customers. However, the results were more split, with the member of the cooperative showing more positive experiences and benefits from their connections with the cooperative, but the satellite members experienced some difficulties, as discussed

below. In addition, the jobs and income generation opportunities for Dao and Hmong women were also split.

The cooperative members, of which 97.5% are women of Dao ethnicity, benefit from four main activities. Firstly, they benefit from growing medicinal plants, such as *chùa dù*, *ngải cứu* and selling to the cooperative to make essential oils, soaps, and condensed healthy products. *Chùa dù* can only be harvested once a year, and the average income varies from VND300,000 (US\$ 13) to VND25 million (US\$ 1,087), depending on plantation areas. Secondly, they collect wild medicinal plants for the cooperative to produce herbal bath products. They take turns collecting and selling to the cooperative at an average of 3-4 times a year or every two to three months (HH33, HH35, and a response from Dao female herbal growers focus group discussion). They collect about 100 to 200 kilograms each time and sell it at 4,000 dongs per kilogram. Thirdly, the cooperative members can earn from full-time work (three women) or alternating casual work to provide services for tourists to experience traditional bath medicine at the cooperative at 200,000 dongs per day (equivalent to US\$ 8.7) (Photo 7.3). They take turns working in the cooperative when needed. Lastly, the cooperative gives shares to its members; thus, members benefit from their shares of the overall business results.

Photo 7.3. Packing Herbal Bath Products



Source: Mai Ly, during fieldwork.

GREAT co-funded the upgrading of a furnace for distilling essential oils. The ownership of GREAT's investment fund is divided into shares for the cooperative members. The value of the shares depends on the business results. According to the director of the cooperative, each cooperative member receives about 400-500 shares. If the business goes well, one share has a value equivalent to 30,000 dong. It means one cooperative member could get up to 12-15 million dong (equal to US\$ 521-652) a year. On the lower end, a cooperative member receives 8,000 dong for one share, so a member will get about 3.2 million dong (US\$ 139) annually.

Before joining the cooperative, Dao women were mainly subsistence maize and rice farmers for their family consumption. Some worked as hired labourers or street vendors to sell handmade embroidery products for tourists to earn cash income. For example, in the focus group discussion, all six Dao female cooperative members reported that they previously worked as street vendors. However, since joining the cooperative, they have

earned additional cash income and left these previous occupations (HH29, HH31, Dao female herbal growers focus group discussion).

Sometimes when I don't have any money, the cooperative calls me to collect medicinal plants. Each time [I] can harvest 100 to 200 kg. It is worth 600,000 to 800,000 dongs (US\$ 26-34.8).

(Mrs Liu- Dao female herbal grower)

Income from medicinal plants depends on cultivation areas. The cooperative and satellite members are given priority to sell their products and at a higher price, 1,000 dongs per kilogram of medicinal herbs more than non-contracted members. While the cash income from the cooperative is not the primary income source for women, all interviewed Dao women said that income from medicinal plants and casual jobs with the herbal cooperative helped them to pay tuition fees for children and cover daily expenses such as food, clothes, fertilisers, maize and rice seeds, and power fees (HH29, HH32, HH33, HH34).

The satellite households are of both Dao and Hmong ethnicity. This group only benefits from growing and selling *chùa dù* and *ngải cứu* to the cooperative. However, Hmong households have fewer benefits than Dao families. For example, three Hmong households in Ta Phin commune grow *chùa dù* only in small plots of land near their houses. With the price of 5,000 dongs per kilogram of *chùa dù*, their income from selling this medicinal plant to the cooperative was not significant to their families; only several hundred thousand dongs (US\$ 10-30) per year (HH43, HH44, and HH45). Therefore, men are not interested in planting and expanding production areas, and women then have more authority “to do whatever they want” with this cash crop (HH43 & HH44). This is different to the situation when the production areas and the revenues from *chùa dù* are more significant, as shown in section 7.3.4 below. While some women do not want to continue, some still choose to grow it to have independent incomes.

Female: *It was also because registration to plant chùa dù did not cost any money. So, I registered to cultivate and sell to earn some cash.*

Male: *Besides planting chùa dù like this, the Hmong and Dao women have jobs to earn their own income. So they also like it.*

Female: *So they do not have to work as a hired worker (laugh)*

Male: *it is also not hard to do....they like it.*

(HH44-Hmong couple-herbal growers)

The situation of the Hmong satellite families who have invested in much larger *chùa dù* cultivation areas (more than one hectare and with revenue from nine to twenty million dongs, equivalent to US\$ 391 to 870) was not better. They complained that due to so many people growing *chùa dù*, the capacity of the cooperative was not enough to process all the *chùa dù* from the satellite households. In addition, the sale of processed *chùa dù* essential oils was affected during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, when it came to their turn to harvest, the leaves had already fallen, and trees had died. They ended up harvesting less, and the revenue was insufficient to cover some families' costs (HH46, HH47 & HH48). Some families have already changed to other crops (HH46-Hmong man).

Last year, they only bought from the Dao people. They bought about 9-10 trucks of the products of the Dao people, then bought one from us. They even said that they would not purchase it. But we complained too much, so they [had to] buy it.
(HH47-Hmong male herbal grower)

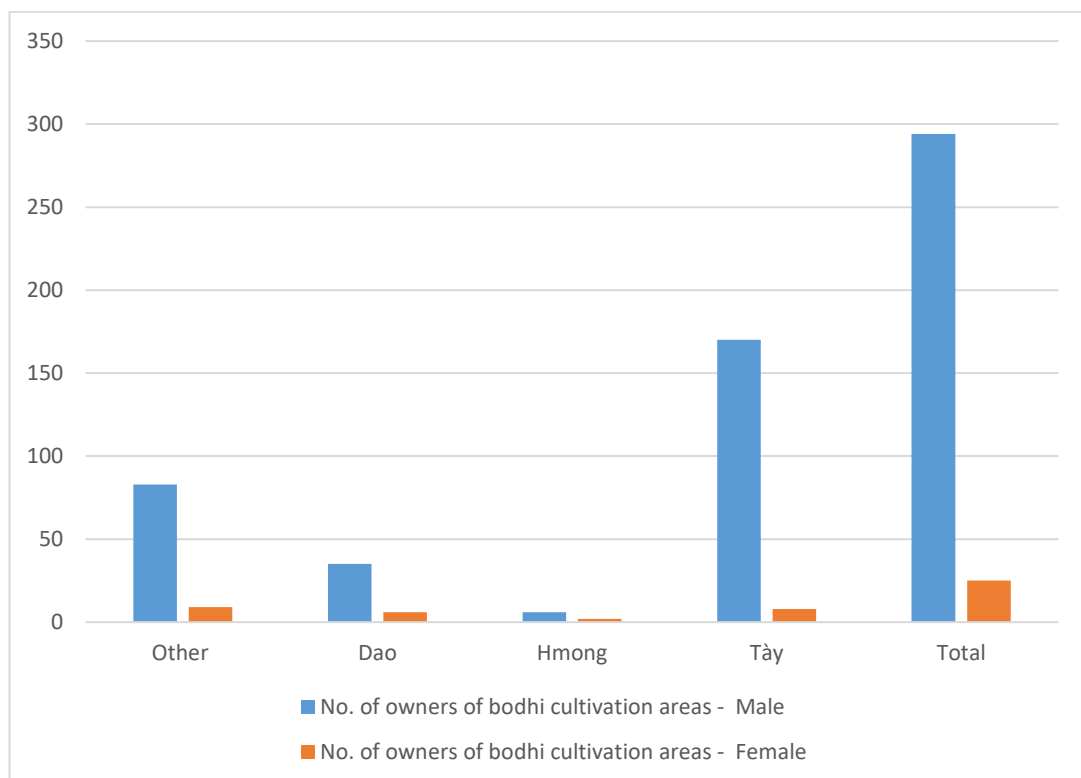
Even though it is not written down as a rule, it is possibly true that the Dao people were given more priority in selling the products to the cooperative, as claimed by the Hmong man above. This is because the herbal cooperative was established by a Dao woman, with the primary purpose being to support other Dao women in her community. However, a Dao satellite household (HH30) also reported difficulties selling their products. Mrs Liu, the person accompanying the RA to the interview and a cooperative member, explained that the issue was because the cooperative did not work directly with each satellite household. Instead, they contracted with them via the Commune People's Committee. The Commune People's Committee did not know each family's situation, so they failed to coordinate the production appropriately. This was the issue when the cooperative scaled up quickly; they did not have the capacity to manage business expansion properly.

Benzoin and ginger company

The partnership with the benzoin and ginger company, which aims to empower women through the benzoin extraction and organic ginger intercropping model, revealed some challenges. Benzoin extraction is mainly done by men and they signed most of the

contracts and dominated benzoin extraction techniques training (Figure 7.1). Women are involved in weeding when the trees are small, preparing food for men to work in extraction and collection, and cleaning the benzoin (HH23, HH25, & HH27- Dao benzoin farmers). The extraction requires two labour-intensive times a year. During February and March, workers are required to climb up to tap trees from the top for resin extraction (Photos 7.4 and 7.5). Then, in December, workers return to collect dried benzoin. Before the GREAT project, the training was offered to men only, because the company perceived that it was a male job, "*at that time, the company said that this was for men, not women*" (HH23-Dao man). However, with the GREAT project, women were encouraged to participate in the training.

Figure 7.1. The Owners of Bodhi Cultivation Areas Who Signed an Agreement With the Company



Source: Author, based on GREAT programme's data provided by the project manager.

Photos 7.4 and 7.5. Benzoin Extraction



Source: Photos provided by the GREAT Programme.

The economic benefit of benzoin extraction is controversial. The bodhi tree can be tapped for benzoin from year 7 for five to ten years, and then it can be logged for timber. With this model, farmers can have “*double benefits*”, one from the income from benzoin, which the company estimates as around 70-90 million dongs per ha (US\$ 3,043-3,913), and another income from selling the trees (KI-Deputy Director). The company and some households spoke of the double benefits of selling benzoin and timber (HH11, HH26, & HH27). However, it takes time for the company to prove the dual benefits of the model. According to a former benzoin production team leader, financial gain from benzoin extraction was not something that “*could be seen immediately*” as benzoin could only be extracted when the tree was seven years old or more (HH11-Tay man). The commune ranger said that keeping the trees for benzoin extraction was like saving money. This perception is because income from selling trees after several years of harvesting benzoin is almost double the income level people can earn when the trees are younger (KI-Deputy Director). The amount of benzoin a family in the region could produce ranges from 12 to 60 kilograms per year (HH11-Tay man). With the price of 350,000 dongs per kilogram, each family in the area could earn from 4,200,000 dongs (US\$ 183) to 21,000,000 dongs (US\$ 913). However, this work is considered “*not productive*” (KI- commune ranger) if farmers hire labourers to produce benzoin. The commune chairwoman had the same comment about the project, and she was irritated when the RAs first met her to introduce the research. The daily allowance for labour hiring is 250,000 dongs per day. Because of this, a Dao man complained that the income from benzoin was not much if he counted the cost of the labourers he had to hire and his own expense for taking care of the bodhi trees. That was why he decided not to continue to extract benzoin in 2020.

You can't just harvest benzoin right away. You have to climb up to tap the tree [for resin extraction]. I hire a worker for 250,000 dongs per day. So, for example, I tap the bodhi trees; supposedly, I need 10-20 days. [If] ten people go to work, it will cost 2,500,000 dongs [per day]. [If] I calculate the labour hiring cost and the cost I spend to take care of the trees, I get nothing.

(HH23-Dao male benzoin farmer)

Only a few Dao people in the researched areas had experience extracting and selling benzoin for the company. Except for the former benzoin group manager, who was Tay ethnic, most Tay and Hmong interviewees had not produced benzoin before. Most Tay

and Hmong people interviewed had planted their bodhi trees for 3-4 years. Therefore, the trees were not mature enough for benzoin production. This group has already been trained in the extraction techniques and the benefits of the bodhi tree plantation for the benzoin production model, but some were still not sure if they would follow the model or not:

***Interviewer:** So, have you decided to sell benzoin?*

***Female:** I don't know. The tree is still small now. [We] have to wait until it is big to know.*

(Mrs Hoang- in Tay female benzoin and ginger focus group discussion)

However, some Hmong people whose bodhi trees were ready for benzoin extraction still chose not to produce benzoin despite the training provided by the company (HH39-Hmong woman). This is because they were not confident in applying the model (RA: personal communication with the women's union in Nam Tha commune; interview with the village head-HH8).

The commune ranger indicated some challenges that people were facing in adopting this model, including the labour cost mentioned above and the long process of benzoin production from February or March to December. In addition, he highlighted the benzoin farmers' most prominent challenge: the need for money to cover other household expenses, such as paying debts and covering unexpected treatment costs for sick family members. Money shortage made the farmers log bodhi trees for wood rather than keeping the bodhi forest for benzoin extraction. The commune ranger also suggested that the benzoin production model was for wealthy households because it required significant investment for the first year. For this reason, it was not affordable for low-income families to expand production areas.

Bodhi trees [cultivation] must be for wealthy households. It is difficult for the poor to implement it because planting bodhi trees in the first year requires at least 10,000,000-15,000,000 dongs per ha [US\$ 435-652], not counting the labour cost. The potential is great....But it is a bit difficult to develop to a mass scale.

(KI-Commune ranger)

Wealthy households can leave trees for benzoin extraction. But poor families need money, and they sell trees to get a lump of cash to cover unexpected things; for example, [if] someone in the house goes to the hospital. There is also another

case that, due to the entrepreneurial mindset, rich households can negotiate with poor families so that they can buy the benzoin and then sell it to the company.

(KI-Former Business Manager)

People grow Bodhi trees until they reach the age of [benzoin] extraction [seven years old], but they lack capital. They need money to invest in other things, such as paying the bank or buying cattle, which costs about 20,000,000 to 30,000,000 dongs [US\$ 870-1,304]. The timber value is significant, so they have to log the tree to get money.

(KI-Commune ranger)

It is not clear how women benefit from the income of benzoin. Four out of five interviewed Dao women reported that they were not involved in producing and selling the product, so they did not have much information about it (HH23, HH25, HH27 & HH28).

Interviewer: *Is the income from the bodhi tree important to your family? Did you sell a lot?*

Female: *[We] sold some last year*

Interviewer: *How much [did you earn]?*

Female: *He did it, so I didn't know. I had never done it, so I didn't know.*

Interviewer: *So didn't he tell you?*

Female: *No, he didn't tell me.*

(HH28-Dao woman-benzoin farmer)

Recognising that men dominate benzoin extraction, the company is piloting an agroforestry intercropping model of growing bodhi trees for benzoin extraction and organic ginger cultivation to develop an economic model that benefits both sexes. However, the financial benefit of this intercropping model to women is still limited. Ginger cultivation is 100% managed by women (KI-former business manager) (Photo 7.6). This model is expected to provide women with short-term income in the first three years while waiting for benzoin extraction. This period is also when the crown of the bodhi tree has not yet developed large enough to block light penetration for the ginger to grow. However, ginger does not like familiar soil but prefers new ground. This limits the expansion of the intercropping model.

Because the model is new to both the company and the farmers in the area, at the time of this study, organic ginger has only been trialled, with a limited number of women

registered for growing organic ginger in the last two crops. The company is learning the appropriate technical and economic intercropping model. The ginger productivity was mixed. Most women reported high production in the first year but a drop in production in the second crop because of root diseases and drought. Some farmers reported a significant yield reduction of around 60% (MDRI, 2021). Therefore, it was impossible to assess the economic benefit of the intercropping bodhi trees and organic ginger model to women during the research.

Photo 7.6. Women Growing Organic Ginger



Source: Photo provided by the GREAT Programme.

7.3.2. Access to training and information

Most women interviewed in all three business cases had mobile phones; they called village heads or cooperative members to get information if they missed the training or

meetings. Women reported receiving training only when the training targeted them directly. Table 7.2. showed that women participated more in training in the herbal cooperative and the benzoin and ginger company. A Dao woman of the herbal cooperative explained that:

This cooperative is a women's cooperative. So, [if] there are training courses on gender equality, both men and women will go together. Other training activities are for women only.

(Mrs Liu in Dao women herbal growers focus group discussion)

The training organised by the benzoin and ginger company was more targeted, with men more likely to participate in benzoin extraction and women in ginger and bodhi intercropping techniques. Farmers appreciated this training activity.

In general, if the company did not train us, we would not know how to do it [intercropping bodhi tree and organic ginger]...The company taught us how to plant and take care of the trees.

(HH8-Tay man-benzoin and ginger farmer)

However, for the tea business, even though some men stated that they supported their wives participating in the training relating to relevant crop cultivation and techniques (HH6-Tay, HH19-Dao, HH42-Hmong), interviews with the research participants revealed that men dominated in training attendance. Among 21 tea grower households, 13 households reported that mainly men were the ones to participate in training. When males attended training, the information and knowledge were not appropriately shared with women, "*some men were drunk when they attended a meeting, some did not follow what was being said about the work and forgot to tell their wives to do it*" (HH19-Dao man-tea grower). Most interviewed women said they only participated in the training when men were busy or unavailable (HH4-Tay; HH5-Tay; HH42-Hmong; HH13-Dao; and HH18-Dao).

Interviewer: *So, who participated in the training?*

Male: *[if] I am at home, I go; my wife goes if I am not at home.*

Interviewer: *So, who participated the most in training?*

Male: *Me*

(HH42-Hmong male tea grower)

This finding of male dominance in training contradicted the information provided by the Helvetas project officer, who claimed that women accounted for 60-70% of the

participants in all their training courses under the partnership with the GREAT programme. The difference may be because the ethnic minority men and women in the interviews referred to the overall training activities they received from all different sources, including the local extension services.

Dao women tea growers seem to be more involved in training than men. They were also active in intra-household decision-making, as discussed in section 7.3.4 below. Notably, no Hmong families reported having women actively participate in the training. A Hmong man explained this issue because of the distance people had to travel to attend the training, which was not "*convenient*" for women (HH16-Hmong male tea grower). This is probably because Hmong people usually live in remote areas and are isolated from other communities (Luong, 2015; Turner, 2012a) (Photos 7.7 and 7.8).

Time poverty and the ability to communicate in the Kinh language were also barriers to women's participation in training and access to information. While some women reported that whoever had time in the families would participate in the training and meetings, men usually had more time to participate (HH22-Dao & HH2-Tay). A Tay woman indicated that taking care of children and being overloaded with housework were reasons why she participated less in training and community meetings.

Interviewer: *You said you participated in the meeting [community meetings], right?*

Female: *Yes, but my husband participated more*

Interviewer: *So what meetings did you participate in. Do you remember?*

Female: *I have a baby, so I didn't go often.*

Interviewer: *What about when you didn't have your baby? Why didn't you go to the meeting?*

Female: *I let my husband participate.*

Interviewer: *Why didn't you go?*

Female: *Because no one took care of the housework.*

(HH7-Tay female tea grower)

Table 7.2. Men/Women: Participation in Technical Training

Business	No. of HH interviews	No. of HH reported that men dominated in training			No. of HH reported that women dominated in training			Note
		Hmong	Dao	Tay	Hmong	Dao	Tay	
Tea company	21	7	2	4	0	5	3	Dao and Tay's women participated in training because men were busy or engaged in off-farm employment, or women were the main labour in the family. Hmong women did not participate in the training because of the language and mobility barriers. Time poverty* was mentioned by a Tay woman as the reason why she did not participate in the training.
Benzoin & ginger company	14	3	4	0	1	2	4	Women participated in training because their husbands were busy, or the ginger training specifically targeted women. Time poverty* was also mentioned by a Dao woman as a barrier.
Herbal Cooperative	13	3	0	-	3	7	-	Women were more targeted for the training with the herbal cooperative. For Hmong satellite families, women participated in the training if the production areas were small and the income was not significant enough for men to be interested.

*This is specifically tied to their domestic obligations, which men do not seem to assist with.

Source: Author, using data from the RA's fieldwork

Section 7.7.1 below elaborates on how women’s workload and gender labour division affected women's participation in training and community meetings. It will also discuss how the practice of male household headship impacted women’s participation in training.

Photo 7.7. A Village Road to A Hmong Household in Ta Phin Commune



Source: Qua Sung, during fieldwork

Photo 7.8. A Hmong Household in Ta Cu Ty Commune



Source: Qua Sung, during fieldwork

7.3.3. Access to and control over productive resources

This section looks at whether women have access to and control productive resources to improve their economic conditions, including production inputs, land ownership, and financial resources.

Production inputs

People reported that men and women have equal access to other family assets such as motorbikes, agricultural inputs and supporting machines, cattle and livestock. The partnerships with the GREAT programme provided production inputs for producers. The cost

would be repaid as a deduction when the farmers sold products to the businesses. Like training, women have direct access to these production inputs only if businesses directly target them. For example, some male members of the satellite households of the herbal cooperative received support for seeds and fertilisers to grow herbal plants *chùa dù* and *ngải cứu* as they were the ones who signed the contracts (see section 7.3.4 below). While women received organic ginger seeds, organic fertilisers, and pesticides for the benzoin and ginger company, the men received working tools and protection gears for benzoin extraction. Some Dao women reported they received medical plant seedlings and fertilisers for experimenting with the tea and medicinal plant intercropping model for the tea company.

Land and house ownership

Across all three ethnic minority groups involved in the three businesses, males (husbands or sons) were often reported as the sole owners of land and houses. This is because women usually moved to live with or close to their husbands' families (patrilocal) when they married (HH10, HH23, HH27, HH35) and "*the land was inherited from the husband's parents*" (Mrs Ta in Dao women herbal growers focus group discussion). A Dao man said that usually, a father showed a son the land plot he inherited and then made the ownership under his name. This activity often happened before they married (HH35-Dao male herbal growers).

However, a Dao woman in the female herbal growers' focus group discussion (Mrs Ta) reported that land and houses would still be under the husband's name if they bought these together. This claim does not seem to be aligned with the Land Law 2013 and the Family and Marriage 2014, which requires common property ownership acquired after marriage to have both husband's and wife's names. However, women's limited ability to read and write in the Kinh language (the official language of government administration) was possibly the reason why men were named solely in the document. A Dao man claimed that "*it would be easier for him to manage*" (HH34-Dao couple herbal grower).

I also want to have my wife's name [on the documents]. However, no Hmong women here went to school. So they do not know much Vietnamese, listening, speaking, reading and writing are very limited.

(HH40-Hmong men-tea grower)

Even when women were named on the land title with their husbands, “*the husband’s name was in the first line and the wife’s name in the second line*” (Mrs Liu), many women still reported that the husbands solely owned the land. It meant they did not recognise their own ownership. This is probably because women considered “*men were the heads*” (Mrs Liu), so they had more control over the land. This perception will be discussed further in section 7.7.1.

Interviewer: Whose name are the big assets under in your family, such as house and land?

Female: Him [the husband]

Interviewer: Why are these assets under his name?

Female: Because he is the head of the household.

Interviewer: What do people here understand about the head of the household?

Female: The head of the household is usually the husband.

(HH10-Tay female benzoin and ginger grower)

Financial resources

Across the three businesses and all three ethnic groups, it was widespread that women were often the family money holders. The reason given for this was that, “*women know how to manage money better as they do not gamble and drink*” (Dao female tea growers focus group discussion). However, it does not mean that women have the financial freedom to decide how money is spent.

I keep the money, but for the whole family. It's not just for me to spend. I'm the one who keeps the money, but the whole family withdraws money from me. I keep it, but I can't spend much. It's like keeping money.

(HH15- Hmong female tea grower)

She keeps the money, but whatever she wants to buy, she has to go through me.

(HH19-Dao man-tea grower)

Only one Dao man who participated in a benzoin extraction reported keeping the money. He explained the reason was:

Perhaps she thought that she would not buy anything. But, even if she would, she would ask my opinion and the family before she was allowed to buy it. This is why she thought that it would be best if she did not hold it.

(HH23-Dao man-benzoin farmer)

Moreover, many women reported that they found it hard to hold money for their families because they had to use the money wisely within a limited budget:

Many times [I] have to think so carefully about the amount of money I should use and whether I should buy these products or not. Sometimes I also have to ponder and think because I don't have a lot of income.

(HH26-Dao woman-benzoin farmer)

As men are often named as landowners, women have limited access to bank loans because of the lack of land ownership to use as collateral.

In general, everything is with the head of the household....For example, I am now the one who stands out in borrowing money from the bank. Whoever is a household's head is the owner [of land and house].

(HH8-Tay man-benzoin and ginger farmer)

7.3.4. Intrahousehold decision-making

In this research, women's economic empowerment is also understood as increasing decision-making power over production and income. My research reveals that decision-making power over production and household expenses differed across the three businesses and the groups and sub-groups of the three ethnic minorities.

Herbal cooperative

The female Dao cooperative members reported having more influence on family decisions. They could decide to join the cooperative themselves or jointly with their husbands. The success story of the cooperative director, Mrs Tan, undoubtedly inspired other Dao women in her community to decide to follow her.

Interviewer: *Why did you want to join the herbal cooperative?*

Female respondent: *I didn't know it before, but later I saw that Mrs. Tan could run the cooperative, and many people signed up. I also followed.... Mrs. Tan also said that she was very willing to let them follow if anyone wanted to follow her.*

(HH29-Dao woman-herbal cooperative)

Three out of four interviewed Dao women of the cooperative also reported they shared equal financial decisions with their husbands (HH29, HH34, HH33). However, Dao and Hmong female members of the satellite households of the herbal cooperative did not have that autonomy. A satellite household Dao man said he did not consult with his wife when signing the contract.

Interviewer: *Who decided to join the [business] link?*

Male respondent: It was my decision.

Interviewer: Did you talk to your wife or discuss it with her before deciding?

Male respondent: No, I didn't say anything

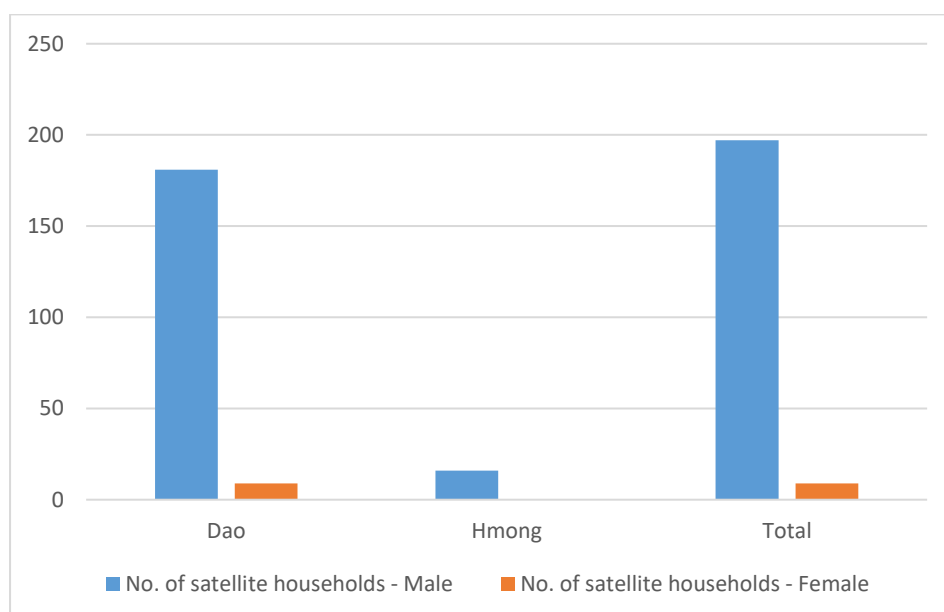
Interviewer: Then, after you signed the [business] link, did you tell your wife?

Male respondent: After signing, [I] went back to discuss it with my wife. The wife must follow her husband. She had no choice as I had already signed it.

(HH30-Dao man-herbal plants grower)

Men of satellite households seem to dominate in signing contracts and selling the products to the herbal cooperative (HH30, HH46, HH47, HH48). Women accounted for less than 5% of the people who signed the production contract with the cooperative via the Commune People's Committee (Figure 7.22). In these families, men were also dominant in financial decisions (HH30-Dao & HH45-Hmong).

Figure 7.2. The Satellite Households Contracted with the Herbal Cooperative



Source: Author, based on data provided by the GREAT Programme.

Tea company

The decision-making power dynamic in those who were involved in the tea value chain with the tea company was neutral between men and women, but it varied between different ethnic groups. However, men dominated the signing of contracts with the tea company. The

list of households that signed agreements with the tea company showed that more than 92 % of the signatories were male (Figure 7.3). This male domination of the signing process was confirmed in the interviews with participants. Mobility and language barriers were noted as the reasons for women's hesitation in signing the contract with the business. This issue will be discussed in section 7.7.2 below. Only a small number of female respondents indicated that they signed a contract with the company. In some cases, women did not know if their families had signed the contracts with the company. This ignorance was probably due to their husbands solely making decisions to sign these agreements.

Interviewer: *Who decided to link with the company?*

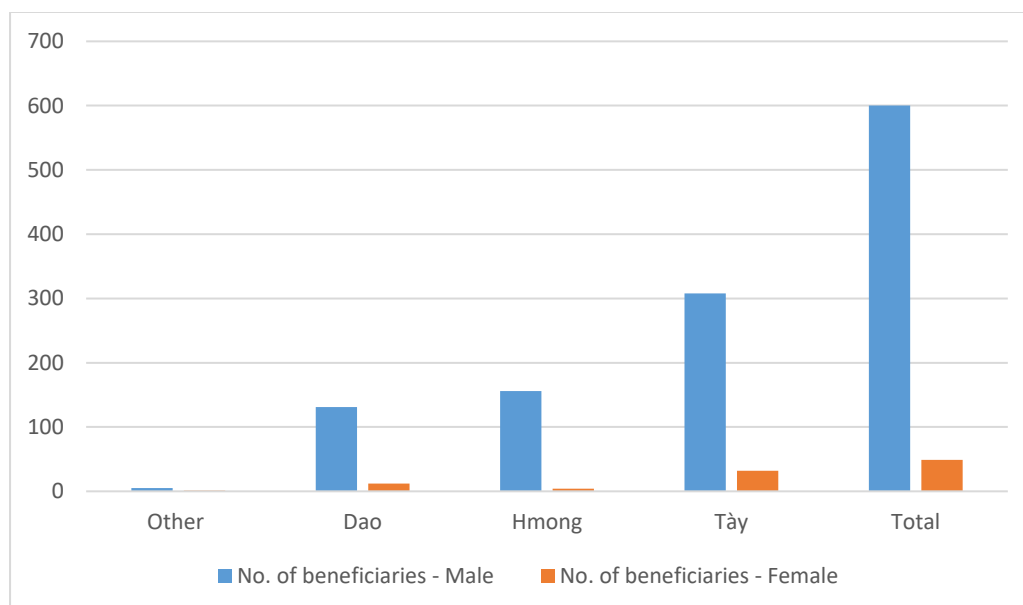
Female: *I don't know, and I don't remember either. Maybe my husband was the one to make the decision.*

Interviewer: *Didn't he tell you after the meetings?*

Female: *Sometimes he shared, sometimes he didn't.*

(HH22- Dao woman-tea grower)

Figure 7.3. The Beneficiaries who Signed Agreements with the Tea Company



Source: Author, based on the data provided by the GREAT programme.

The decision-making power dynamics are different in the three ethnic groups engaging with the tea company. However, there was no evidence that the project influenced the change in women's decision-making power in the project area. While Tay women reported that they

were consulted in their main family decisions, but men were the ones who made final decisions on major expenditures, the Hmong people said that husbands and wives discussed everything together (HH15, HH16, HH40, HH41, HH42). Hmong women reported making decisions on daily expenses but discussed with their husbands for significant spending (Hmong women focus group discussion). Significant household expenses included purchasing a vegetable chopping machine for pig feeding or selling a buffalo (HH16).

Dao women¹⁴ who were growing tea in Ta Cu Ty commune of Bac Ha district indicated that they made more decisions on household expenditure than men. A Dao woman in the focus discussion said that 50% of the women in their community were active in making production and financial decisions for their families. However, there was no evidence that Dao women were empowered to make decisions. This is because they had to "*take care of everything in the families*" (HH17, HH20, HH22). It is also because Dao men often went out and drank alcohol: "*Many men do not work; [they] drink all day, so they are not able to make decisions*" (HH22; Dao women focus group discussion). There was also a suggestion that there was no rule on whether men or women should make financial decisions, but, "*whoever was better at calculating and arranging work would be the person to decide*" (Female respondent in Dao women focus group discussion).

Benzoin and ginger company

Women who are involved in the benzoin and organic ginger value chain seem to have less influence on production and household expenses. The interviews revealed that men dominated decision-making in relation to benzoin extraction. However, even in organic ginger cultivation, where women seem to dominate, there were two cases when husbands decided and signed agreements with the company without consulting their wives (HH8 & HH9). They later put their wives' names in the contracts to align with the programme's objective, which was meant to target women (HH8).

Male respondent: *I decided the whole thing, but I put her name on the list.*

Interviewer: *I thought you [the woman] were the one who signed the contract; you would be the one to know*

¹⁴ These women are Dao tuyền sub-group, which is different to the Red Dao sub-group of those involved in the herbal cooperative and the benzoin company.

Female respondent: No. He signed it for me

Interviewer: So, how do you feel when your name is on the list, but he is the one to sign the contract?

Female respondent: What can I do? He feels it is possible to do it, and I also think that I can do it too

Interviewer: That means he is the one to decide everything, including signing the contract for you. But are you the one who does the most?

Female respondent: Yeah. I am a primary worker

Interviewer: When he signed the contract, did he discuss it with you?

Female respondent: He only talked about it when he got home.

Interviewer: He already signed the contract and talked to you when he got home, right?

Female respondent: He said that women had previously had to work as hired labourers anyway. So, now that they [the project] provided the means to work [seeds, organic fertilisers and pesticides], it would be more comfortable for the women because they would be working for themselves.

Interviewer: After that discussion, how did you feel?

Female respondent: I also felt that it would be good if I could do it.

(HH8-Tay husband and wife- benzoin& ginger grower)

Dao women involved in benzoin have less influence on production and financial decisions than men. A Dao woman said she did not participate in benzoin extraction (HH25). Many Dao women reported that their husbands made final decisions on major household expenditures (HH24, HH25, HH27, HH28). Meanwhile, most Tay women indicated they joined their husbands to discuss significant household expenses and production decisions (Tay women focus group discussion). According to a 60-year-old Tay woman, this was a substantial improvement as women were not previously allowed to discuss and participate in financial decisions (Mrs Vuong in the Tay women focus group discussion). However, there was no evidence that this improvement resulted from their participation in the production value chain with the benzoin and ginger company. However, when the RAs asked more detailed questions about the decision-making process in the family, it became apparent that Tay women mostly decided on small and daily expenses. One Tay woman explained:

Interviewer: What decisions will the head of the household make? And what will he be able to do?

Female: The big decision is for the head of the household to make. The small decision is for me to make. Because I am living in my husband's family, I only have a relationship with the head of the household. So every decision is for the head of the family.

(HH10-Tay female benzoin and ginger grower)

She offered an example, "*selling buffaloes and cows is the husband's decision, and selling pigs and chicken is my decision*". Many women claimed they discussed with men to make substantial expenditures, but they spoke of men making final decisions on important deals. A Tay woman commented that finding a woman who acted against this norm would be hard.

Only one person [woman] in 100, or one [woman] in 10,000 people, dare to do differently.

(Mrs Hoang-in Tay women benzoin and ginger focus group discussion)

7.4. Psychological empowerment

The psychological empowerment dimension looks at signs of whether women experience enhanced self-esteem, self-confidence, and a sense of dignity as they get involved in business-related activities and the camaraderie and training involved in being part of a value chain. Across the three business cases and the three ethnic minority groups, women perceived themselves as playing an equal, or even more important role than men in arranging production work in the family (HH29, HH31, HH32, HH33, HH17, HH22, HH11, HH24, HH26, HH27). Training provided as part of the business scheme linked to both psychological and economic empowerment. Women in the three business case studies indicated that they felt confident in undertaking technical activities required by the respective value chains. For example, a Dao woman of the tea value chain described:

They taught us that the technique is to weed around the tea tree. Until July, after picking tea, [we] have to cut down the tea to make it grow well. Pulling weeds around the base will make the soil looser so the roots can move more, so the tea grows better. And [we] can't spray weed remover chemicals and insecticides because if we do, they won't buy the tea.

(HH17-Dao female tea grower)

Similarly, Dao women reported that after joining the herbal cooperative, they built up more confidence. They knew how to take care of medicinal plants and had learned sustainable harvest techniques, so the trees would not die (HH29, HH31, Mrs Liu in Dao female herbal grower focus group discussion).

Language barriers, however, were a deterrent to skills development among the women, and affected women's confidence to interact with outsiders (e.g., trainers and business owners). These issues will be discussed further in section 7.7.2.

Some tea and herbal women reported that they had more respect and appreciation from men, which enhanced their sense of dignity, because they make more contributions to household finances (Hmong women tea grower focus group; MrsTa in Dao women herbal grower focus group; interviews with Mrs Tan, HH33, HH34).

We are also respected more than before.

(Female respondent in Hmong female tea focus group discussion)

Evidence from interviews also made it clear that there was growing respect from some men for their wives:

I think my wife is good, [she] knows how to make money. [She] didn't ask me for my support. Almost anything my wife could do, she does it.

(HH41-Hmong male tea grower)

I admit that my wife is excellent and hardworking because I didn't go [to the field], but my wife went by herself ...and carried the children along.

(HH42-Hmong male tea grower)

Many women linked with the tea company and the herbal cooperative reported that they were more financially independent; they earned more and did not have to worry much about their daily expenses. They did not need to ask their husbands for daily expenses and borrow money from others to cover their shortage.

In recent years, the tea company has often encouraged us to plant and take care of tea trees, so we have some income. [Thus, now...] we can cover the daily expenses ourselves and do not need to ask our husbands. When we do not have money, we pick tea for a day or two to sell and earn a million dong to use. We do not have to worry about running out of money; no need to borrow everywhere. [We] have enough money to buy fertilisers and cover medical treatment. We have enough money for children to go to school.

(Female respondent in Hmong female tea focus group discussion)

In the past, when I worked as a street vendor, if I couldn't sell anything on that day, then at night, I would have to think about what to eat. For example, if I had 100,000 dongs left in my pocket and [I] bought meat for 50,000-60,000 dongs, what would I eat tomorrow? So I have to think about what to eat each meal. But now that I have more income from here [the cooperative], I won't have to think about it anymore. After

selling medicinal plants [to the cooperative], I just buy food for my family. Next time, when they need more medicinal plants, I will buy food again. I don't need to worry much as the money from [selling] the medicinal plants will be enough for my [family] meals for a few days.

(Mrs Ta- Dao female herbal grower)

As a result, they reported that their lives were much better, and they felt happier. This shows a strong link between economic and psychological empowerment:

Interviewer: *Has your life changed since you linked with the tea company?*

Female: *I feel happier as the tea has a higher price.*

(HH18- Dao female tea grower)

Interviewer: *How do you feel since making tea?*

Female: *I feel less miserable. We did not have anything before. [Now] I have tea so I have money. If I run out of money, I go to pick tea.*

(HH1- Tay female tea grower)

Dao women of the herbal cooperative improved their self-esteem. They have money to “give to a husband when he ran out of money”, and because of this, they feel that they are “as good as their friends and equal to so many others” (HH33- Dao female herbal grower). They compared their previous lives with their lives after joining the cooperative:

I have a job, and I have money to buy things for my children. It changed a lot. [I have money to] buy salt, MSG, fertilisers for the corn plantation. In the past, [I] didn't know how to earn money. Life was very difficult. It has changed a lot now.

(HH34- Dao woman-herbal cooperative)

In the past, when [I] didn't have any income, the children could not have a regular breakfast. But now they can eat more regularly.

(Mrs Ta in Dao women herbal grower focus group discussion)

7.5. Social empowerment

The section looks at signs of women's social empowerment in relation to the GREAT programme, such as recognition and respect in society, access to health care and education, changes in social norms to support women's involvement in economic activities, and women are not overburdened and face violence due to these activities.

The three partnerships are implemented in the context of the Vietnamese government achieving remarkable progress in socio-economic development for ethnic minorities and gender equality (Chapter Five). As a result, the communities in the research areas have changed their perception and practice to give women equal opportunities to those enjoyed by men. The GREAT programme had contributed to — but can not be seen as wholly responsible for — this. The members of the herbal cooperative reported significant changes in the Dao community in recognition of women's rights and roles; thus, attitudes towards women have shifted in wider Dao society. According to them, Dao women had to stay home in the past, and men went out to earn money. Thus, women had no say in their husbands' decisions. They were also not allowed to eat and drink with their husbands when there were guests. Instead, they had to stand in the corner of the kitchen. In addition, the daughter-in-law had to sit at their feet when having meals with a father-in-law and an older brother-in-law (HH29, HH33, HH34). These practices have been changed as men and women were seen to be "equal" [*bình đẳng*] (Focus group 2- Tay women, HH11, HH23, HH33, HH34, HH29, HH35) and "what men can do, women can also do" (HH26 – Dao woman). Women no longer accept these unequal attitudes (Mrs Tan). Consequently, women have more freedom to work outside their homes to earn money (HH34). They have built up their social network, forming different business groups to support each other in a traditional herbal bath business, community tourism, or the production and sale of handicrafts. The Dao man (HH33) claimed that these changes resulted from increasing gender equality awareness amongst ethnic minority communities, not because of the project.

The partnerships with the GREAT programme were claimed to provide opportunities for women to socialise and learn from others through the programme training activities, or when they brought their products to sell to the business, as mentioned in section 6.3.1. In addition, the connections between farmers and the cooperative have the potential to bolster community relationships. For example, a Hmong woman mentioned that the opportunities to enjoy musical performances with other women in the community were among the reasons for her linkage with the herbal cooperative, even though the income from *chùa dù* was limited.

From time to time, they can have some [music and singing performance] on occasions like Tet [a new year festival]. [I] love it. (laugh)

(HH44- Hmong female herbal grower)

Furthermore, the tea company and the herbal cooperative supported their members' welfare and community development as part of their corporate social responsibility. The cooperative of the tea company had a fair-trade certificate to export tea to European markets. The commercial partners in these markets, especially in France, contributed to a welfare fund every year to support the cooperative members in agricultural development. However, according to the director of the tea company, this fund was used mainly to promote education and health, community work, reward advanced farmers, and support families with difficulties. Similarly, the herbal cooperative also supported its members when they were sick or their families faced hardships. In addition, at the end of the year, the cooperative rewarded those who performed well and provided gifts for everyone to celebrate Tet.

There was no evidence of changes in community social norms to support women's involvement in economic activities. Discussions of existing social norms that impede women's economic empowerment are in section 7.7.1 below. However, women did not seem to face the risk of violence when they were more involved in the linkages with business in all three businesses. Some Dao women growing tea in Ta Cu Ty commune mentioned lacking money, men's drinking and gambling and said that men not sharing the burden of work were reasons for family disputes and violence (HH19, HH20, HH21, HH22). All men interviewed said they would support their wives to participate in any projects or jobs that helped women make income "*as long as you earn money to support your family*" (HH42-Hmong man-tea grower, HH11-Tay man-benzoin & ginger grower). Similarly, men supported their wives to participate in the herbal cooperative by sharing housework, helping with harvesting and carrying products to sell to the cooperative (Mrs Tan). Another Dao woman reported that they used to quarrel when her husband came home from drinking, but they stopped fighting after joining the herbal cooperative (HH29). This suggests social empowerment through moves towards gender equality, at least in the herbal cooperative case.

Men had changed their attitudes and behaviour to support women more by doing housework since their wives joined activities and training supported by the GREAT programme, especially in the case of the herbal cooperative (Dao women focus group discussion, HH29, HH35). Many members of the herbal cooperative made statements which echoed the quote to follow:

In the past, to be honest, he didn't care much. For example, when [we] returned home from the fieldwork, he always went out. He didn't help or share anything at all. Since joining the cooperative, I forced him to go to training. He listened but didn't say anything, but since then, he has changed a lot. Sometimes, he was very tired when he came home from work, [but] after resting for a while, he helped me. For example, [if] he saw that I had not fed the pigs, he went to feed the pigs. He then prepared vegetables and cooked a meal.

(HH29-Dao woman herbal grower)

Dao men of the herbal cooperative spoke of sharing housework and encouraging their wives to participate in training and business activities (HH34, HH35). A Dao man said he felt "*joyful and happy*" to share housework with his wife (HH34). However, some argued that middle-aged and older generations were changing their attitudes more slowly (Dao female focus group discussion; interview with Mrs Tan). These changes are probably due to the project's gender equality training and promotion activities, which involved both husbands and wives. In all three businesses, the research found that both men and women reported that men shared housework with their wives when women were outside doing the fieldwork. The director of the herbal cooperative argues that men are more willing to support women when women are more financially independent.

At first, they did not understand this, but since the project provided gender equality training directly to both husband and wife, they understood and shared the work with their wives. It is also because now the wife is working and has an income, so they are not a burden for her husband.

(KI-Mrs Tan- Director of the herbal cooperative)

However, this change might not be significant enough to reduce women's workload, and women still work more extended hours doing farming and housework (HH9, HH10, HH11, HH27, HH36, HH32, HH33). This issue was because housework was still considered women's responsibility.

Some people stay at home to cook and wait for their wives. Some people just sit there waiting for women to come home and cook. Some say it is women's work, so let the woman do it.

(A Hmong woman in female tea growers focus group discussion)

Women participating in the benzoin extraction and organic ginger intercropping value chain said they got involved in everything in their families, doing fieldwork, arranging work for family members, taking care of children, and doing housework (HH10, HH24, HH25, HH27).

Everything will come to my hand. After returning from the fieldwork, I still have to cook meals and care for the children. So I am the most important. I do all the housework.
(HH10-Tay female benzoin and ginger grower)

7.6. Political empowerment

This section looks at women's access to and their confidence to raise their voices about their needs and concerns in public discussion, their participation in decision-making bodies and the possibility of being influential (Bayissa et al., 2018; Chavarro et al., 2020; Cherayi & Jose, 2016; Scheyvens, 1999).

7.6.1. Access to and raising voices in public discussion

Men generally dominated important community meetings where they discussed issues such as selecting village heads or voting for households to be classified as poor (so they could receive social assistance from government programmes). Women only participated if there were specific requirements for them to participate or when the meeting invitation mentioned their names. For example, women participated in the meetings organised by the women's union (HH29, HH32, HH42, HH46, tea Hmong women focus group).

If meetings are held in the commune [office], I am the one who attends the most. But if there is an invitation from the commune with a specific name, that person will go".
(HH42-Hmong man-tea grower)

Interviewer: *Does your wife still participate in the village women's meeting or the meeting relating to women's rights?*

Male: *Yes, she does. My wife participates in women's meetings. As for other meetings that don't require any specific attendants, I mainly go.*
(HH46-Hmong man-herbal grower)

Interviewer: *Does your wife still attend meetings for you sometimes?*

Male: *Yes. But only if the meeting is not important.... If it is about important things, it's mostly men who attend.*
(HH41-Hmong man-tea grower)

In addition to the issue of male household headship practice, the other factors indicated as the key barriers to women's participation in community meetings were lack of mobility (the inability to drive motorbikes) and the inability to speak the Kinh language (see section 7.7.2).

Furthermore, a heavy workload was also why women participated less in community meetings than men (HH7, HH29) (see section 7.5). These barriers also affect women's participation in training and will be discussed in section 7.7 below.

7.6.2. Participation in decision-making bodies and the possibility of being influential

There was no evidence of a link between women's participation in decision-making bodies and the GREAT programme. In Tay and Dao communities, people are more open to accepting women in leadership positions; for example, two out of three Tay village heads are women. Both men and women showed their appreciation of female leadership and said:

Women dare to say, dare to do, and dare to take responsibility. Women are honest and don't support nepotism.

(HH11- Tay man-benzoin and ginger farmer)

When women are community leaders, men will say this woman is also capable.

(HH26- Dao woman-benzoin and ginger farmer)

I prefer women [leaders]. Men are forgetful when they drink alcohol. When [we] asked, they forgot.

(HH10-Tay woman-benzoin and ginger farmer)

This change is because women are increasingly recognised and respected in society (section 7.5). Women can be selected as village heads based on their capability and votes by the community (HH8 & HH11).

However, the situation of Hmong women is different. Hmong men seem not to value the idea of women holding leadership positions. It is argued that women were not as strict as men, so they could not handle things well, and this would lead to disputes (HH15-Hmong man-tea grower). Some women supported such ideas, explaining that men were more flexible while women were more stubborn. They said these were the reasons why women could not be leaders or pillars of a house. The focus group discussion with Hmong women reported that women have never held important positions in the community, such as Chairperson or Party

Secretary. They only held positions in the commune women's union (Hmong female tea grower-focus group discussion; HH36-Hmong female benzoin farmer).

7.7. Factors that affect women's psychological, economic, social, and political empowerment

This section looks at factors that affect women's empowerment in all four dimensions: psychological, economic, social, and empowerment, including existing social norms, limited mobility, and language barriers.

7.7.1. Existing social norms discriminate against women

While there have been some positive changes in gender equality, some social norms and practices still exist that hamper women's access to assets and resources and their ability to make decisions and participate in training and community activities. The perception that men were "*heads of households*" [chủ hộ gia đình] emerged from all the interviews across all three businesses. It meant that men were "*the pillar*" [trụ cột] of the house and "*responsible for all important and big tasks*" (Hmong men tea growers: HH15 & HH41). This perception is explained by the fact that the three ethnic groups involved in the research are patriarchal, whereby males hold most decision-making power. Men dominate in signing contracts with the business. For example, more than 92% of the contract with the benzoin and the tea companies were signed by men. A Dao man used a metaphor of a leader of ants to demonstrate how the family followed his lead (HH23- Dao male benzoin farmer). For Hmong people, men solely decide all activities relating to the worship of ancestors, prayer, or formal customs (HH15-Hmong male tea grower). This perception affects women's access to assets and resources, training and information, and their participation in the family decision-making process (economic empowerment), as discussed in sections 7.3.2, 7.3.3, and 7.3.4. It also affects women's participation in community meetings (political empowerment) (see section 7.6).

Male: *This is from the old days. The wife is the one I bought home [paying money for the marriage]..... She is not allowed to rule in my family. Firstly, this [the norm] is*

something from the past that we couldn't give up. Secondly, our people still follow that which cannot be abandoned, respecting men.

Interviewer: *Is she allowed to represent your family at meetings and sign [the contract] with the company?*

Male: *No. [Even] if I allowed her, she would not go. If she had gone [attended the meeting] and been required to sign a contract, she would have asked if she could sign it or not. She is not allowed to sign it by herself.*

Interviewer: *She does not dare to sign? Why wouldn't she dare?*

Male: *She does not dare. Here they are all like that...*

Interviewer: *Can her name be put on all kinds of real estate and land documents? [Is she] not allowed?*

Male: *It's not that she's not allowed. But, in general, everything is under my control.*

Interviewer: *Is that her who does not want to be named [on these documents]?*

Male: *It's not that she doesn't want to. It's a practice here.*

(HH23- Dao man-benzoin farmer)

Women are only heads of households when their husbands die or divorce. In some families, when the husband died, the son was the head of the household (HH15, HH8, interview with tea company's director).

In my village, there are 64 households, none of which are headed by women. Only those whose husbands have passed away have their names [as the heads]. Most of the household heads are men.

(HH8- Tay man-benzoin and ginger farmer)

However, women and men accepted the practice of male household headship. Women often perceived their position as second in the family after their husbands (the head) or third if they lived with their parents-in-law (Tay women growing benzoin and ginger focus group discussion). They explained that men often went out while women usually stayed home, so they "*knew more than women*" (Tay female tea growers: HH1, HH5, HH7).

In general, to be honest, women of our ethnic group don't go out to interact much. They are not intelligent and afraid of this and that.

(HH23-Dao man-benzoin farmer)

Women did not perceive that men being the heads of the households was unfair: "*We didn't see it was not fair. We thought that it was the same [did not matter whether men or women were the household heads]*" (Mrs Hoang in Tay women benzoin and ginger focus group discussion). She claimed that the family still discussed important decisions with each other. It was just a matter of having one representing the family, like "*a house must have a pillar*".

However, she emphasised that men “*must be the heads, the pillars of the houses*” because “*women were always weaker than men*”. Women explained that they had to follow their husbands when they got married. They quoted a proverb to explain it, “*thuyền theo lái, gái theo chồng*” [*the boat follows the driver, the woman follows the husband*] (Tay women benzoin and ginger growers focus group discussion). According to this group: “*no matter how good you are, husbands are the heads*”. A Hmong woman had the same perception, and she explained that if women were the heads of families, it was perceived like they were “*cưỡi lên đầu chồng*” [*sitting on a husband's head*]. So that was why no one wanted to do that (HH36-Hmong woman-benzoin farmer).

This norm creates pressure on both men and women. Men are expected to be pillars and breadwinners. Their masculinity is challenged when women earn more than them. People in the community might look down on these men and say that they are “*bám váy vợ*” [*clinging to their wives' skirts*] (HH11-Tay couple-benzoin and ginger farmer) or “*đàn ông không bằng đàn bà*” [*men who are not as good as women*]. Women were expected to stay at home and take care of the family. When women worked far away from home and earned more money than their husbands who stayed home to do housework, they were suspected of unfaithfulness or promiscuity (Dao female tea growers focus group discussion). This perception led to quarrels or divorce in some families (HH10-Tay woman). The local government and the community adopted this norm. As a result, everything was channelled through the household head, including social activities (benzoin and ginger farmers: HH8-Tay, HH23-Dao).

For neighbourhood work, people also invite the head of the household. It is up to the head of the house to appoint a family member to attend.

(HH8-Tay couple-benzoin and ginger farmer)

The tea company director explained that most of the contract’s signatories with the company were men, because he usually signed the contract with the household heads, and the majority of household heads listed in household registration by the local authority were men¹⁵.

¹⁵ In Vietnam, the government manages its citizens via a household registration book called “hộ khẩu”. In each household, there will be one person, usually, the eldest man in the family or the eldest son if the father dies, to be named as a household head “chủ hộ gia đình” to represent the family. From 1 July 2021, a household registration book was no longer applied in Vietnam. However, at the time of the research, it was applied and influenced the thinking and practice of the research participants.

The GREAT list is mainly men because I took the list by commune; most of them were listed by the male head of the family according to household registration in Vietnam. It is the Vietnamese culture that values men more than women.

(KI- tea company director)

Interviewer: *So whoever is the head of the household here will be named on the land title and contract, right?*

Male: *That's right, whoever is the head of the household will manage these [land and contract]. At the meeting, the village head also asks the owner to sign. So when there is a dispute, the head of the household must be the one to manage [deal with] it.*

(HH6-Tay man-tea grower)

Social perception of the gender division of labour, what is “heavy and light” and “men’s work” and “women’s work”, also affects women’s workload and women’s participation in economic activities. A common view across the three business cases was that there was an inequitable gender division of labour: “heavy work for men and light work for women” (HH23, HH26, HH37, HH38, HH29, HH33, HH34, HH47, HH42). The definition of “heavy and light” work perceived by people was:

Light chores include planting rice, farming, and so on, and housework, which includes vegetable gardening, cooking, and washing which are women's jobs.

Heavy work is, for example, going to the forest and logging or reclaiming land. She could not handle this work, so I had to go. For instance, when it comes to making a bodhi tree's resin, she can't climb a tree, so she can't do it, or taking something too heavy to the forest, she can't go either.

(HH23-Dao male benzoin farmer)

Planting maize and cassava are women's jobs. Ploughing is a man's job because a ploughing machine or a plough and a harrow are weighty. Women can't do it.

(HH37-Hmong male benzoin farmer)

This perception of the gender labour division affects women’s access to economic and social opportunities and their workload in each business (economic and social empowerment), as it is shown below:

Benzoin and ginger company

Men were more involved in benzoin extraction as it was considered hard work, and women were more active in organic ginger production and taking care of small bodhi trees. Light work involved regular manual labour such as seeding, weeding, gardening, and housework, and heavy work required greater muscle power or application of machinery. However, men mentioned they still helped with other tasks, for example, weeding and harvesting, when they had time. Nevertheless, according to the commune ranger, heavy work like ploughing is not required regularly. Moreover, men can use machines or cows and buffaloes to do these jobs. Meanwhile, light work needs to be done daily and is usually manual. As a result, women worked longer hours in farming than men (HH9, HH10, HH11, HH27). For example, a Hmong woman said that she and her two daughters-in-law worked almost double or triple the time worked by her husband and two sons.

[If] we go for three days, my husband and the two sons go for one day. If we work for ten days, they will go for five days.

(HH36-Hmong female benzoin farmer)

Tea company

Except for one Hmong couple who complained that picking ancient shan tea was hard work as the trees were too high (HH12), most men and women interviewed suggested that tea growing and harvesting were less labour-intensive. This perception is probably due to the ancient shan tea growing in this area, which only needs some labour to clear weeds once or twice a year without fertilising or watering. Therefore, tea cultivation was considered "*light work*", and it was mainly for women (Photos 7.9 and 7.10). Men were not involved much in tea production. Instead, they worked as hired labours and traders. However, they supported women in clearing weeds or picking tea when they had time and sometimes also helped with other "*hard work*" such as ploughing in rice and cornfields.

Interviewer: *Who is the main person working on tea (weeding and picking) in your family?*

Male: *It is mostly my wife.*

Interviewer: *Does your wife work a lot?*

Male: *Yeah, this is light work. [We] should let women do it. Men, on the other hand, work harder. I am also looking for a heavier job to do.*

Interviewer: *So tea is considered the primary source of income for women here, right?*

Male: *Yes, that is right. Women are the primary workers in the tea [sector], and they do a lot. Men mainly work as hired labourers and they trade buffaloes.*

(HH42-Hmong male tea grower)

Making tea is easier. There is no need to hoe the ground; just clear weeds, cut the tree once a year and pick it up. Not as hard as the other [crops]. Tea, in general, once it is grown, is straightforward to take care of and harvest. It does not require much labour. When carried by a cart for selling, it is not as heavy as other things, such as maize.

(HH5- Tay male tea grower)

Interestingly, women agreed with men that tea growing and harvesting were not too hard and “*it should be left to women*”, but they also claimed that men were too lazy to do the work required as it was manual, detailed, and repetitive. By constructing this work as “*women’s work*”, men were free to do trading, which reduced gendered power relations as men were the ones dealing with traders while women were doing the burden of daily work, plus reproductive labour. However, the other side is that tea production becomes women’s space in a way that might enable some autonomy and collectivity for women.

They [men] even say it is women's work, so women should go and do it. They still go with us to help clear weed, but they are too lazy when it comes to picking. They say they would rather go trading than pick tea. Moreover, tea [producing] is light work; it should be left to women.

(A Hmong woman in female tea growers focus group discussion)

Photo 7.9. A Dao Woman Picking Tea in Bac Ha



Source: Mai Ly, during fieldwork.

Photo 7.10. Tay Women Weighing the Tea for Sale



Source: Dzung Tran, during fieldwork.

Herbal cooperative

Women were more involved in cultivating medicinal plants like *chùa dù* and subsistence farming crops like maize and rice. The cooperative members collected medicinal plants for herbal bath products and worked as casual workers to support the cooperative. Men were mostly involved in hired labour or higher-value crops, such as orchid plantations or trout fish cultivation. Like the tea growers, men helped women in the types of work considered burdensome or which required the application of machinery, such as ploughing and harvesting. They reported sharing more work with women to care for *chùa dù* in large cultivation areas (HH30, HH35, HH46, HH47, HH48).

In addition to the existing social norms that impede women's participation in economic activities and their access to training and community meetings, the following section discusses mobility and the related issue of language barriers. My research findings suggest that these factors impact women's empowerment in all four dimensions: psychological, economic, social, and political empowerment.

7.7.2. Mobility and language barriers

Mobility and language barriers affect women's ability to participate in training and community meetings (economic, social, and political empowerment). A Dao woman reported that because she did not know how to drive a motorbike, she did not want to go out for business meetings and contact others (HH25). Their husbands are not always willing to help:

[I] told her to drive a motorbike, but she didn't dare to do it as she was afraid of falling. This is something I allowed her to do, but she didn't dare. Many times I swore [at her]. For example, while [I was] eating and drinking, she called me to take her here and there. [I] scolded her a few times. For instance, while I was hosting a visitor, I had to take her [somewhere] and return. The guest had to wait at home until I came back to talk. It was very frustrating, but she was still afraid to drive.

(HH23-Dao man-benzoin farmer)

The language barrier, especially among Hmong and Dao women, impacts women's confidence to participate and speak up in the training and community meetings (psychological, economic, social, and political empowerment) (HH43, HH44, HH47, HH36 &

HH37). For example, Hmong women expressed that they would be confident to participate and speak in the meetings only if they used the Hmong language (HH15-Hmong female tea grower, HH39- Hmong female benzoin farmer).

As discussed in Chapter Five, the GREAT's baseline data showed that only 21% of Hmong women could read and write in Vietnamese, and 55% could speak Vietnamese compared to 66% of men able to read and write and 95% of men able to speak Vietnamese. Similarly, 47% of Dao women could read and write Vietnamese compared to 74% of men. But they could speak Vietnamese better than Hmong people, with 94% of Dao women being able to speak and 99% of men (DeJaeghere et al., 2020). However, the fieldwork of this research revealed a much lower level of Hmong and Dao women who could speak Vietnamese. Hmong people reported that only women born in the 2000s could read and write. Those born before then did not go to school (HH12&HH47). Many Hmong and Dao women said they only knew some food-related vocabulary. Many Dao women did not feel confident speaking up in training and meetings due to their limitations in speaking Vietnamese (HH27, HH28, HH29, HH32, HH33, HH34). The recordings of the interviews carried out by the RAs also reflected this difficulty.

Interviewer: *Who attended training the most [in your family]?*

Male: *Sometimes it was me, sometimes it was my father*

Interviewer: *Why didn't your wife participate even though she was the prominent worker [in tea picking and caring]?*

Male: *Because she didn't understand the Kinh language and in the meetings, people spoke the Kinh language or sometimes in Dao because most people here were Dao. So if she went, she would not understand what the meeting was about. My mother and my wife refused to go.*

Interviewer: *So your wife has never participated?*

Male: *Because of illiteracy, she didn't participate. Very miserable. Most of the Hmong people here are illiterate (especially women); only those born from the 2000s onward have been able to go to school.*

Female: *I'm illiterate, so I didn't go. I have never been to school, so I'm shy.*

Male: *If [she] goes, [she] doesn't know how to listen, so [she] won't go.*

(HH12-Hmong couple-tea growers)

Interviewer: *Are you the one who attends the training most?*

Male: *Yes. I rarely go to pick tea, but I'm the one who sells [the tea].*

Interviewer: *But you can only listen and speak; you can't write?*

Male: *That's right. I didn't go to school before. I just took a literacy class. So [I] only know how to write my name.*

Interviewer: *What about your wife?*

Male: *My wife doesn't know the Kinh language either.*

Interviewer: *She also did not go to school, right?*
Male: *No, [we] didn't go to school in the old days.*
Interviewer: *Can you still speak? Maybe you can't write. Is that right?*
Male: *I can still hear and speak a little, but I can't write.*
Interviewer: *Does your wife know as much as you do?*
Male: *No*
Interviewer: *So when you're not home, does your wife sell the tea?*
Male: *My wife didn't go because she said she was illiterate.*
(HH41-Hmong man-tea grower)

Interviewer: *If you go [to the meeting], would you dare to talk confidently with the company?*
Female: *I don't speak the Kinh language, so I don't know how to talk.*
Interviewer: *Not knowing how to speak the Kinh language is why you don't go to training?*
Female: *I still want to go, but I can't talk to them.*
Interviewer: *Do you still understand what they say?*
Female: *I don't know much.*
(HH22-Dao female growing tea)

According to the Vice-Chairwoman of the women's union in Ta Cu Ty commune, the younger generation was more confident. They were also active in social and economic activities. For example, Mrs Hong, Tay ethnicity (HH3), and Mrs Vang, Dao ethnicity (HH21), both 30 years old, held positions in government organisations, such as the women's union and commune authority. They knew how to drive a motorbike; they attended the meetings with the company and signed the contract themselves, but in consultation with their husbands. In addition, they said that they would raise their voices in community meetings if there were things that they disagreed with. The older women did not attend school, so they had limited Kinh language literacy (HH3- Tay woman). Young Dao and Hmong women were more confident to speak up in the meeting. A Hmong woman said:

From the age of my daughter-in-law [and younger], everyone knows the Kinh language. My daughter-in-law is 25, 26 years old or something. All people aged 30-40 years old and above do not know the Kinh language. Since we came here [migrated], we learnt a little bit of food vocabulary, but we don't know about other things.
(HH36-Hmong woman-benzoin farmer)

However, some Dao women growing tea in Ta Cu Ty commune reported that they participated in the critical decision-making process in the community. They also had the confidence to speak out when they were unhappy with the decisions. These women also

reported in section 7.3.4 that they made more production decisions in the family because men had drinking issues. In addition, Dao men supported their wives in participating in training and community meetings.

Interviewer: *Do you still go to the meetings to elect the village head or vote for the poor households?*

Male: *No, I don't. It's enough for one to attend, and I let my wife go.*
(HH17-Dao Man-tea grower)

Tay women also reported their confidence in raising their voices in community meetings, such as assessing low-income families or voting for village heads. A former village head of a Tay community reported that women accounted for 60-70% of participants in community meetings (HH11). For example, a group of Tay women who grow organic ginger in Nam Tha commune indicated they dared to raise their voices, asking for information, clarification, benefits, or difficulties (Focus group 2- Tay women). This is probably because Tay women speak Vietnamese without language barriers (DeJaeghere et al., 2020). It is also because their community was more open to gender equality, as noted in Chapter Five.

Mobility and language barriers are also factors affecting women's signing the contract with the business (economic empowerment).

Interviewer: *Did you discuss and agree with your wife before signing the contract with the company?*

Male respondent: *Yes. We are husband and wife, so we should discuss carefully and agree before deciding anything. Besides, my wife doesn't know how to drive. That's why I went to sign [the agreement] with the tea company.*
(HH42-Hmong male tea grower)

Interviewer: *So, who signed [the agreement] with the business?*

Female respondent: *My son signed it. I'm illiterate.*
(HH17-Dao woman-tea grower)

7.8. Concluding remarks

The purpose of the chapter was to present how ethnic minority women are economically, psychologically, socially, and politically empowered through their linkages with businesses in the agricultural and tourism production value chains. The research showed that while access to market and having better jobs and income opportunities are often outcomes of

partnerships with the private sector, women did not always benefit from them. Women's economic empowerment depends on the degree that they are involved in and benefit from the value chains. There was evidence that the tea and medicinal plants value chains provide additional cash incomes for women and support them in covering daily expenses, paying tuition fees for their children, and affording health treatment for sick family members. It also helps women to increase their self-esteem and confidence and gain respect from their husbands for their financial independence. However, it was unclear how women benefited from their involvement in the intercropping model of bodhi trees grown for benzoin extraction and organic ginger.

The research findings also highlighted barriers and constraints to women's participation and benefits from value chain linkages with businesses, including language barriers, mobility, and exclusionary practices of businesses and local authorities. The existing social norms which discriminate against women are the root causes of these constraints. These factors also affected women's psychological, social, and political empowerment. It is thus argued that WEE programmes must look beyond economic empowerment alone. Apart from the benefit of increasing incomes, there is no evidence of changes in the status quo in terms of women's access to training and information, access to productive resources and decision-making power within the family, or political empowerment of women through their engagement in agriculture and tourism production value chains. However, the case of the Dao women of the herbal cooperative is different because of the gender training provided to both husbands and wives and the collective empowerment, which will be discussed further in Chapter Eight.

The findings also showed that each ethnic group, even each sub-ethnic group, has diverse cultural and social norms, gender relations, and power dynamics. Women of each group face different barriers to economic and social opportunities. For example, Hmong women face the most language and mobility barriers to participating in training and community meetings compared to the other two groups. Therefore, women's empowerment requires a different approach for each ethnic group, and in interpreting empowerment signs, we must be cautious of cultural contexts.

The next chapter will discuss these findings in the broader context of the literature on women's empowerment and private-sector engagement for development.

CHAPTER EIGHT. DISCUSSION

8.1. Introduction

This research aims to fill a gap in the literature around how development agencies can collaborate with micro and small enterprises to better support women's empowerment. Chapter Six examined the strengths, limitations, and challenges of this approach to economically empowering ethnic minority women in Vietnam. The main findings are that the private sector has strengths in creating jobs and improving income for women by engaging them in the supply chains to have more stable access to the market. Locally embedded and indigenous micro and small businesses emerged from this study as potential partners for successful partnerships. They brought a strong, established network and experience working with local communities, especially in ethnic minority areas. However, except for the herbal cooperative, which was set up to support Dao women, other businesses were profit-driven with little desire to bring a broader approach to women's empowerment into their businesses. In addition, micro and small businesses have limited capacity and resources to cope with changes. This issue threatens the sustainability of the linkages between businesses and smallholder farmers and the effectiveness of development programmes which aims to support women through these linkages.

Chapter Seven then studied the extent to which ethnic minority women were empowered through their linkages with the micro and small businesses in the agricultural and tourism production supply chains. The research found that women did not always benefit when they or their families participated in commercial agriculture and tourism production supply chains due to existing barriers and exclusionary practices rooted in gender norms.

This chapter will discuss these findings in line with concepts raised in the literature on private sector engagement for development (Chapter Two) and women's empowerment (Chapter Three). It also reflects on the conceptual women's empowerment framework, which looks at women's empowerment holistically, not just from an economic perspective, to identify the

gaps and the areas in which donors could better engage with the private sector and other sectors for ethnic minority women's empowerment. As I acknowledge my position in this research as both an insider and an outsider (section 4.4), as an insider, I understand that the partnerships with businesses in the GREAT programme focused on supporting women to have better access to skills and productive inputs and connecting them to the value chains. They intentionally did not want to overwhelm the businesses with activities to improve women's agency. In this research, I am not evaluating the GREAT programme based on the inputs, outputs, and outcomes that the programme targets. Instead, I assess the programme's approach to understand what works and what does not work if donors want to partner with the private sector and empower women holistically.

8.2. Private sector partnership approach to women's empowerment

Development agencies come to the partnership with the private sector in development programmes with the assumption that businesses play a role in development by using their strengths to drive economic growth, increase productivity, and create jobs to help the poor (Kindornay & Reilly-King, 2013; OECD, 2011; Schulpen & Gibbon, 2002; UN, 2015). The inclusive business model is considered to benefit low-income farmers as it integrates them into its core business value chains (ADB, 2016; G20, 2015; SNV & WBCSD, 2011; UNDP, 2008). Development agencies collaborate with inclusive businesses to make products and services that benefit the poor as customers or to increase the poor's income through linkages with the businesses as producers (Dolan et al., 2012; Swedish FAO Committee, 2018). Donors also expect to tap into the private sector's financial resources through co-financing to reach the targeted beneficiaries while bringing mutual benefit to the business (Di Bella et al., 2013b; Donovan & Stoian, 2023).

As demonstrated in Chapter Five, the GREAT programme attempts to partner with businesses to use the strengths mentioned above to create economic opportunities for ethnic minority women in the programme areas (GREAT, 2016, 2021). It approaches micro and small businesses, such as the companies analysed in this thesis — a tea company, a benzoin and

organic ginger company, and a herbal cooperative — as inclusive businesses¹⁶. It expects to empower women economically by connecting them and their families, usually smallholder farmers, to the businesses' supply chains. The relationships between these three businesses and ethnic minority farmers are mainly through contract farming. They provide agricultural inputs (lending equipment or advancing seeds and fertilisers), technical training, and secure the purchase of all products. Previous research has shown that these linkages could help farmers to achieve higher incomes (Bellemare, 2012; Miyata et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2015; Olomola, 2010; Wainaina et al., 2012).

My research supports the literature on the potential positive impacts of business linkages by showing that micro and small businesses play an important role in partnership with development agencies to create economic opportunities for low-income women (Endris & Kassegn, 2022; Geremewe, 2018; Jacob & Munuswamy, 2022; Kim & Jin, 2022). According to Kim and Jin (2022) “small business leaders often build tight bonds with the communities they serve, and because of that, their civic engagement is driven by the customers and clients they see every day” (p.704). By connecting low-income ethnic minority women to the supply chains, the small and micro businesses in the research can support them to have more stable and increased incomes. They also have the resources to co-invest with the GREAT programme to upgrade processing capacity, add value, or develop new products, and expand business areas. These investments help these businesses to reach out to more ethnic minority women in the regions (section 6.3.1).

However, these relationships may not always benefit farmers. Previous research finds that linkages with businesses may not benefit farmers due to a power imbalance incurred by farmers' dependency on the services and inputs provided by the business and the issue of monopsony¹⁷ (German et al., 2020). The case of the benzoin business can be considered a monopsony because the company is the only business extracting and buying this product in the market. Benzoin farmers have no options to sell their products and negotiate for better

¹⁶ The GREAT programme adopted a definition that an “inclusive business is an entrepreneurial initiative seeking to build bridges between business and low-income populations for the benefit of both”. (GREAT, 2021, p.3).

¹⁷ Monopsony is an economic term to show a situation when there is only one buyer in a market.

prices, which, according to them, would be more reasonable to compensate for the labour costs (see section 7.3.1). My research supports this finding that power relations shape the ability of farmers to benefit, and I find that the level of engagement with local people matters. Locally embedded and indigenous businesses affect the business's success and sustainability as well as its ability to engage with ethnic minority women. The research also reveals the limitations of micro and small businesses in partnership with development agencies to empower ethnic minority women, as I explore below.

8.2.1. Engagement with locally and socially embedded, and indigenous businesses, for ethnic minority women's economic empowerment

The interviews with the business owners and ethnic minority people strongly demonstrated that the connection of the business with the local ethnic community influences the business's success and thereby benefits people in the communities. The locally-embedded enterprises such as the tea company and the herbal cooperative bring to the partnership workable business models with established networks and strong connections with the local communities thus generating social capital (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014; Rubin & Manfre, 2014). Meanwhile, my research shows that the benzoin and ginger company, which is not based locally, struggled to build a network and gain the trust of the local people (sections 6.3.2 and 6.4.4). The interviews with the benzoin and organic ginger farmers reveal that they did not benefit from their linkages with the company. In addition, the linkages between the company and the farmers were not sustainable. These issues arose because farmers lacked confidence in the new benzoin extraction and organic ginger business models the company introduced. In addition, the company lacks experience working with local people. The company director is based in the city and only visits the project site once or twice a month. They also faced many challenges in reaching out to ethnic minority people, especially women, and gaining the community's trust, due to language barriers. Therefore, they did not understand what local people wanted and whether the company's information genuinely reached the community (section 6.3.2).

The formal and informal networks and the relationships the tea company and the herbal cooperative created with the local community helped them build trust and cooperation

(Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014). As a result, these factors positively impact business performance (Indarti et al., 2021; Premaratne, 2001; Sithas & Dissanayake, 2019). The director of the tea company claimed that the strong connection with the community is “*điều kiện sống-còn*” [live or die condition] for the business. According to Steven and Vunibola (2021), a strong social connection is critical to the success and sustainability of business in indigenous communities.

The tea company has more than fifteen years of working in the area. Even though the business owners migrated from the low-land area and are from the majority Kinh ethnic group, they learned about local cultures. They share happy and challenging moments with local people and protect the local ethnic minorities when the local authorities make mistakes. They know in detail the economic situation of the local households and their tea plantation areas. In addition, the company uses a welfare fund (this is an explicit component of their Corporate Social Responsibility efforts) to support community work and families with difficulties, and it supports local people’s education (sections 6.3.2 and 7.5).

Similarly, the herbal cooperative is locally based and managed by an ethnic minority woman. She shares the same language and culture with the cooperative members. Therefore, the cooperative has the “*competitive advantage*” of being an ethnic minority business that connects with and gets support from the local community (Ram, 1994, p. 43). A reciprocal relationship that the herbal cooperative received from its members helped it overcome difficulties it faced at an early stage (section 6.3.2). With the money that the cooperative members contributed, the cooperative was able to expand its business scale. In turn, this created more opportunities for local women to increase their incomes (sections 6.3.2 and 7.3.1). This reciprocal relationship emerges from a solid social connection, which goes beyond an economic value to encompass cultural and social aspects that contribute to the businesses’ success (Pesämaa et al., 2013; Vunibola et al., 2022). This connection makes the director of the herbal cooperative want to develop and expand her business, not for her own wealth but for other women in her community who “*do not have to go back to the old days [being poor and depending on men]*” (sections 6.3.2). In this case, the locally and socially embedded indigenous businesses like the herbal cooperative are not only oriented towards making money, but they are also oriented toward serving society (Scheyvens et al., 2020). According

to Curry and Koczberski (2012), socially embedded businesses not only have the capacity to generate income and profits but also generate “other forms of value” for individuals and communities (p.379).

Having social and cultural impacts

The herbal cooperative helps Dao women to improve their income from their knowledge of traditional herbal medicinal plants. So it has not only economic but also cultural impact, helping to preserve indigenous knowledge, a form of cultural empowerment (Ningdong & Mingqing, 2018; Scheyvens & van der Watt, 2021). It also helps to promote Dao culture to tourists through the experience of on-site medicinal bath services and the purchases of concentrated herbal bath products and essential oils. Similar to the A Qi textile factory in China (Ningdong & Mingqing, 2018), which was also founded by a local ethnic minority Mosuo woman to empower local women via traditional hand-weaving, the herbal cooperative has the strength as an indigenous business to utilise cultural resources to help low-income women gain economic benefit. This is critical in women’s empowerment as Ningdong and Mingqing (2018) relate empowerment to a path that can help low-income women “participate in the development of their own community” (p.191).

Many Dao women used to work as hired labourers or street vendors selling handmade embroidery products to tourists. Since the government prohibited street vendors in tourist areas in recent years, they do not have reliable income resources (section 7.3.1). The development of the herbal cooperative provides local women with a more secure and higher income. Like the A Qi textile factory, the herbal cooperative demonstrates an effective way to help local women to benefit from tourism development which has been mainly dominated and appropriated by tour operators and the non-poor in Vietnam (Hampton et al., 2017; Truong et al., 2014). In this way, it makes tourism in the area more inclusive (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018).

Promoting inclusiveness

The tea and herbal value chains are inclusive. Shan tea and herbal plants do not require high input investment for the crops, such as investment in fertilisers, seedlings, or watering. Labour is only intensive at specific times for weeding, trimming (only once a year with the tea crop and two times a year with the *chùa dù* herbal plant), and harvesting. The businesses sign contracts with households that grow tea and herbal plants in the areas regardless of the production scale. The tea company has engaged with almost all tea growers in the area - 649 ethnic people. Some people have very small tea production harvested from ancient tea that they inherited from their ancestors. They connect with the company to have some cash income to cover their daily expenses. This situation is similar to poor Hmong and Dao families who grow small plots of *chùa dù* plants to sell to the herbal cooperative. The herbal cooperative has 120 cooperative members from poor or near-poor households, of which 97.5% are women (The Red Dao Community Cooperative, 2018), and 197 families who are not cooperative members but grow and sell herbal plants to the cooperative (satellite households). Both businesses also offer full-time positions for some women (with the tea company) and casual jobs (with the herbal cooperative).

This finding is contrary to the criticism that the poor can be excluded from commercial value chains because they do not have the resources to engage in business activities (Blowfield & Dolan, 2014; Mwambi et al., 2016; Ros-Tonen et al., 2019; Utting, 2012, March 24; van Westen et al., 2019). It shows that well-executed programmes with the right partners need not lead to the exclusion of the poor. It also challenges the current donor assumption and preferences of medium and large businesses as inclusive businesses to receive priorities and support from the government. Additionally, it argues for the recognition of micro and small businesses for their potential to create jobs and provide decent incomes for the poor (Nguyen & Beban, 2020, September 30).

As discussed in section 2.4, development practitioners and scholars interpret and apply the inclusive business concept inconsistently. Some development programmes, including GREAT, define inclusiveness in terms of the positive impact the business can create for low-income people as suppliers, distributors, retailers, or customers (G20, 2015; UNDP, 2015). However,

some donors, including ADB, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), and the Inclusive Business Action Network (iBAN), assess inclusive businesses based on the number of poor people reached by the business, scalability, and commercial return. Based on these criteria, only medium or large enterprises are likely to be recognised as inclusive businesses (de Jongh et al., 2012; UNESCAP & iBAN, 2019, 2021).

This research reveals that the herbal cooperative and the tea company have great potential to create jobs and provide small-scale ethnic minority producers in remote upland areas with better market access for their indigenous and speciality products and increase their incomes (section 7.2). This is because they have the knowledge and technical skills to develop and add value to local traditional products and connect them to niche markets (section 6.3.2). For example, shan tea products are exported to European and Chinese markets and sold in high-value domestic markets. Similarly, herbal plants are processed to make essential oils, condensed herbal health care products sold to tourists, and supplied to a five-star hotel. The specific know-how and skills to add value to products are essential in development programmes which aim to support the development of local ethnic minorities using their unique, traditional, and cultural products, such as traditional herbal and medicinal plants, benzoin, and shan tea. And this is also the benefit that the local and indigenous businesses bring to the partnership with development programmes (Loveridge & Wilson, 2017).

In summary, micro and small businesses can be essential development partners contributing to ethnic minority women's economic empowerment by sharing knowledge and resources with them and connecting them to supply chains. According to Rubin and Manfre (2014), small and local businesses are good at connecting with smallholder farmers. Locally and socially embedded businesses have their strengths in connecting with ethnic minority communities and ethnic minority women, and they can play a vital role in developing programmes targeting ethnic minority women. They can create not only economic, but social and cultural impacts. However, because the majority of these businesses are micro and small, they have some limitations constraining their partnership with development agencies to achieve ethnic minority women's empowerment.

8.2.2. Limitations and challenges of the donor-private sector partnership approach for ethnic minority women's empowerment

This study supports the claim of McEwan et al. (2017) that businesses often do not have the necessary skills to implement effective development programmes. They lack understanding, experience, and expertise in addressing issues around women's economic empowerment (sections 6.2.1 and 6.4.2). The women's economic empowerment concept is driven by the donor. The business owners of the three businesses vaguely understood the concept of women's economic empowerment when they entered the partnership. Meizen-Dick et al. (2019) found the translation of the word "empowerment" into other languages could confuse people because there were no equivalent terms. The director of the herbal cooperative expected to receive a certificate or something similar from the programme, as empowerment is translated as "*trao*" [handover] in Vietnamese. The benzoin and organic ginger company director simply understands women's empowerment as "*bình đẳng giới*" [gender equality], which to this person means husbands and wives sharing the work (section 6.2.1). While there are overlaps, the concept of women's empowerment which development agencies widely apply has a broader meaning than gender equality (ADB, 2013; Golla et al., 2018; Markel, 2014). The understandings of the business owners in this research also differed from the meaning of the term "Women's Economic Empowerment" used in the GREAT programme, which means providing women with economic opportunities, being recognised, and benefiting from their contributions (section 6.2.2).

As discussed in the literature review (section 2.7), scholars often doubt that profit-motivated businesses can really make a contribution to development (McEwan et al., 2017; Scheyvens et al., 2016). According to McEwan et al. (2017), the profit-driven focus limits or constrains the business from implementing any development role. Aligned with this view, the business manager of the benzoin and ginger company said that their "top priority" is to make profits (section 6.4.1). Except for the herbal cooperative, which purposefully targets Dao ethnic women, the tea and the benzoin and ginger companies are interested in investing in women because they comply more with the company's production instructions and therefore help to increase productivity and efficiency (section 6.4.1).

According to Jeppesen (2006), business owners influence the level of engagement of small and medium enterprises on social and environmental issues. This is the case of the herbal cooperative where the Dao woman director has a strong aspiration to help Dao women in her community to have an independent income and no need to “hide behind others’ backs”. Economic efficiency and pressure from buyers in global supply chains are also practical reasons that impact SMEs’ decisions to take up these issues (Jeppesen, 2006). For example, the tea company has to make sure women and children benefit from the tea value chains as part of their compliance with Fairtrade certification when selling their products to European markets. Aidis et al.’s study (2021) also suggests that small and growing businesses are interested in gender-sensitive practices if it helps increase business performance. Aidis et al. (2021) also indicate that only non-profit businesses consider investing in women as the right thing to do for social justice reasons.

Due to this instrumentalist approach, the businesses lack interest and commitment to addressing issues related to women’s empowerment, such as changing social norms to protect women’s rights and improve women’s agency. This is because they do not see the direct benefits from these activities to their businesses (section 6.4.1). This mindset explains why the director of the tea company considered the support provided by the NGO Helvetas to provide technical, group working, and gender training as a waste of time and money (section 6.4.2). Thus, to attract businesses, the Helvetas project officer recommended balancing women’s economic empowerment and business goals in developing partnerships with businesses. The DFAT officer also discussed the need to develop a business case to demonstrate and convince businesses of the benefits of investing in women’s empowerment (section 6.4.1).

The short time frames surrounding most donor programme funding projects also constrain partnerships with the private sector for women’s empowerment (section 6.4.3). This time frame is often based on the project cycles, which are usually three to five years, is not long enough to effectively challenge gendered norms and unequal structures, as required for women’s empowerment (Alesina et al., 2013; Guerrero et al., 2022; Huis et al., 2017; Singhanian et al., 2021; SNV, 2019). ADB (2013) claims that it is a challenge to achieve a transformation in gender relations even within a four or five-year programme or project cycle.

In addition, it is challenging to make the business accountable and committed to these long-term goals (Scheyvens et al., 2016). Moreover, micro and small business in Vietnam is often short-term profiteering (Luu & Nguyen, 2010). The differences in the purposes of the two partners challenge the partnership (Adie et al., 2020; Di Bella et al., 2013b; Kindornay et al., 2013; Scheyvens et al., 2016). However, it might not be the case for socially and locally embedded businesses, as shown in this research.

In accordance with the finding of Kim and Jin (2022) and Luu and Nguyen (2010), DFAT's programme manager claims that small and medium enterprises have limited capacity and resources to face competition and adapt to market changes. Furthermore, when the business expands too quickly to other areas, such as other communities, like in the case of the herbal cooperative (see section 7.3.1), the business will not have the capacity to manage the expansion properly. Therefore, they do not have the same level of support from the community as they have with their embedded communities. This limitation affects the sustainability of their linkages with farmers. Therefore, it challenges the effort of development agencies if they want to support low-income women by connecting them to businesses and supporting micro and small businesses expansion to connect with more low-income women. The case of the herbal cooperative is an example. They had difficulties purchasing all *chùa dù* plants from the satellite farmers and could not manage the contract properly when they expanded their business to another area and when the sale of *chùa dù* essential oils slowed during the COVID-19 pandemic (sections 6.4.4 and 7.3.1). This issue raises a need for development agencies to provide support to develop the capacity of micro and small businesses to cope with changes. As shown in this study, this support is appreciated by the business owners as it helped them to strengthen business administration and business plans, especially with the micro business like the herbal cooperative, and promote and connect to new markets.

Lastly, the poor still face the risk of being excluded from high-value chain linkages with businesses. The poor can be excluded if businesses focus only on benefits and do not make enough effort to address these barriers (Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018; Utting, 2012, March 24). For example, most tea farmers signed contracts with the tea company, but not all of them attained organic certification to sell their products to the premium European markets and

gain higher income. In addition, the language barrier is an issue for ethnic minority people, especially women, in training and keeping farming records as required by organic production standards, as discussed in section 6.4.4. German et al. (2020) claim that certification standard requirements are barriers to the poor entering value chains. Lack of financial resources is also a barrier for the poor to participate in the value chains. The benzoin model can exclude the poor because they do not have sufficient financial resources to wait until their trees reach seven years old for benzoin extraction. The benzoin extraction work also involves high costs if farmers hire additional labourers (section 7.3.1). According to German et al. (2020), the types of crops can influence the inclusiveness of the value chains. The type of crops also affects the likely benefits that women will receive. Development agencies should consider this finding when they want to target the poor through a partnership with the private sector (Utting, 2012, March 24). This issue will be discussed in section 8.3 below

8.3. Women's economic empowerment through participation in agricultural and tourism production value chains: Are women empowered?

The research findings presented in Chapter Seven revealed that women did not always benefit from participation in agricultural and tourism production value chains. Focusing on providing production inputs and training for women and connecting them with businesses might help some women improve their incomes but have limited impacts on enhancing women's agency within the family and society (Table 7.1).

My research showed that women had more autonomy over "women's crops" and when the money earned from the business was small. In contrast, men had more control over production related to "men's work", and when the production scale was large, the revenue was more significant. The summary of the three value chains and the level of control that women have over production and income are in Table 8.1 below.

In the tea and small-scale herbal plants value chains, the work is considered "women's work" because it is manual, detailed, and repetitive, and the amount of income each harvest time is insignificant (sections 7.3.1 and 7.7.1). These incomes are not high enough to attract men

because men are more interested in higher-profit products (Devi & Buechler, 2009). But they provide essential cash incomes for women as they are spread over several months of the year and support women in covering daily expenses. My research also found that men were likely to have more control over production and income when the production scale was large and the revenue was more significant. The cases of Hmong households growing *chùa dù* for the herbal cooperative and the benzoin and organic ginger crop reflect this issue. For example, in Ta Phin commune, Hmong women grow *chùa dù* in a small plot of land near the house. The income from *chùa dù* is only several hundred thousand dong (US\$ 10-30) for a crop a year. Therefore, men are not interested in planting and expanding production areas, and they let women have absolute authority to do “*whatever they want*” (section 7.3.1). In contrast, in Ngu Chi Son commune, where *chùa dù* is planted in a larger area (over 1ha), and the income is from 9-20 million dong (US\$ 391-870), men take control over the production process. This control includes deciding on expanding the production area, signing the contract, jointly taking care of the plants, and participating in training, harvesting, and selling the products to the cooperative (section 7.3.1).

In the case of benzoin, men mainly controlled the production and revenue from benzoin extraction because the work was considered “men’s work” as it required physical labour. It also provides higher income. The benzoin products provide a one-off higher income a year, from 4,200,000 dong (US\$ 183) to 21,000,000 dong (US\$ 913) (Table 8.1 and section 7.3.1). While women are usually money-holders and keep money earned from selling benzoin, men make final decisions on spending when there is a large amount of cash income involved (section 7.3.4).

Table 8.1. Summary of the Three Value Chains

Value chains	Commodity involved	Business scale	Main ethnic minority groups involved	Domination	Level of income
Tea company	Traditional Shan tea for export and high-end domestic markets	Small enterprise	Tay, Hmong, Dao	Women	VND 200,000 to 480,000 (US\$ 8.6-21) from a day of picking. The average annual revenue from VND 3-4 million (US\$ 130-174)
Benzoin company*	Benzoin for export	Small enterprise	Tay, Hmong, Dao	Men	One-off income from VND 4.2 to 21 million (US\$ 183-913)
Herbal cooperative	Traditional herbal bath products and medicinal essential oils for tourists and domestic markets	Micro-enterprise	Dao Hmong	Women dominate when production and income are small, and men dominate when these are high.	Small production and income: Annual income is several hundred thousand dong (US\$ 10-30). High production and income: Annual income is VND 9 to 20 million (US\$ 391-870).

Source: Author

* There was no data on ginger products due to the presence of root diseases, as explained in section 7.3.1.

This research finding supports previous studies that suggest that men tend to dominate, appropriate, and control production decisions and income earned when the family engage in high-value and commercialised products (Bolwig, 2012; Coles & Mitchell, 2011; Curry et al., 2019; Devi & Buechler, 2009; Dolan, 2002; Doss et al., 2021; Farnworth et al., 2012; Farnworth, 2011; Fischer & Qaim, 2012; Forsythe et al., 2016; Kent, 2018; Mayanja et al., 2022; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019; Ntakyo & Van Den Berg, 2022; Tavenner et al., 2019). For example, Oduol et al. (2017) found that men tend to dominate decisions on a high-value avocado value chain for export markets, and women had more control over low-quality avocados for local markets in Kenya. Similarly, women in Kenya conventionally manage the French bean crop for local consumption. However, men take control when the production expands in scale for export markets and becomes more profitable (Dolan, 2001).

The research findings also support the claims of other scholars that women's participation in value chains does not automatically give women more decision-making power in the family (Riisgaard et al., 2010; Rubin & Manfre, 2014). Limuwa and Synnevåg (2018) and (Loconto, 2015) found no correlation between women's participation in tea and fish value chains in Tanzania and Malawi and their control over generated incomes. These findings challenge the development agencies' approach to economically empowering women through commercialised production programmes. Besides, if not implemented properly, commercialised production might negatively impact women (Ntakyo & Van Den Berg, 2022).

Engagement in commercial value chains can empower or disempower women (Forsythe et al., 2016; Pyburn et al., 2021; Quisumbing et al., 2021; Riisgaard et al., 2010). According to Doss et al. (2021, p. 308), smallholder agriculture commercialisation can open up new opportunities for women, but it can also make women disadvantaged if they do not have control over access to markets and income. As discussed above, men appropriate and control the production and income from lucrative products. Women's engagement in commercialised production may also increase their workloads. For example, Ugandan women work longer hours to ensure high-quality organic standards in the crops that men control in terms of production and income. As a consequence, they spend less time on their own income-earning activities and experience a reduction in their total incomes (UNCTAD, 2008). Chan and Barrientos (2010) claim that engagement in certified organic products for export markets,

which are common requirements for commercialised product value chains, can generate an extra labour demand for women. This is the case with organic ginger. The additional labour work of organic farming practices causes more burden for women because they provide the primary labour (section 6.4.4). The certification process can also exclude poor women due to language barriers and the cost incurred to attain the certificate, as mentioned in section 8.2 above.

The selection of value chain products for the benefit of women also needs to be considered. Women face a lot of barriers to benefiting from high-value cash crops and in men-dominated value chains, as discussed above. Handschuch and Wollni (2015) find that women benefit more when they work together in farmer groups in traditional food crops in sub-Saharan Africa. Similarly, PNG women are more interested in and have more control over the income earned from sales of fresh food production in local markets than the much higher incomes from coffee, cocoa, and oil palm crops from export markets (Curry et al., 2019). In my research, women have more control over the income and the production of tea and small-scale herbal plants, as mentioned above. In addition, tea and herbal plants are growing naturally in the area, and they do not require much time to take care of, as most people commented. Although incomes from tea and small-scale herbal plants are modest, women can harvest several times a year (except *chùa dù* plants). These incomes can become considerable if accumulated over a year. Importantly, these are significant cash income sources for most women as they depend on subsistence farming and do not have other income sources (section 7.3.1).

As previously noted, the perception of the gendered division of labour influenced women's and men's participation in and benefits from specific work. Lessons learned from DFAT programmes are that women have limited opportunities to be empowered in "male-dominated value chains" (DFAT, 2015a, p. 10). The stereotyped gender perception impedes the development of ethnic minority women (Dang et al., 2022). But, it gives women a "sphere of autonomy" in production and revenue (Kawarazuka et al., 2021, p. 9). This is the case of the tea company in which women have more control over the production and income as picking tea is considered "women's work". In contrast, women have limited or no control over benzoin extraction as it is "men's work". However, as discussed above, men will take control

when the production area and the profits are increased. This shows the relational aspect of women's empowerment and the need to get men involved in development programmes (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Cornwall, 1997; Sweetman, 2013; Wanner & Wadham, 2015). This issue and the gendered division of labour are further discussed in the following section. The GREAT programme's approach to partnering with businesses to empower women by increasing their households' participation in commercial value chains will not work if there is no appropriate intervention to enable women to benefit from it.

8.4. Reflection on the women's empowerment framework

This section will discuss the approach to women's economic empowerment deployed in the GREAT programme and the research findings related to the existing women's empowerment theories to understand what does and does not work.

8.4.1. What are the gaps?

The GREAT programme's approach to women's economic empowerment includes three levels: Reach, Benefit, and Empowerment (section 6.2.2). The partnership between the business and the GREAT programme initially centres around engaging women (*REACH*) and improving their access to support services, such as access to seedlings, fertilisers, and technical training to participate in agricultural and tourism production value chains and increase their incomes (*BENEFIT*). The Empowerment level, which focuses on increasing women's self-confidence, leadership, and decision-making power over production and income, is then rolled out later. The GREAT's *REACH, BENEFIT, EMPOWERMENT* approach shows some gaps.

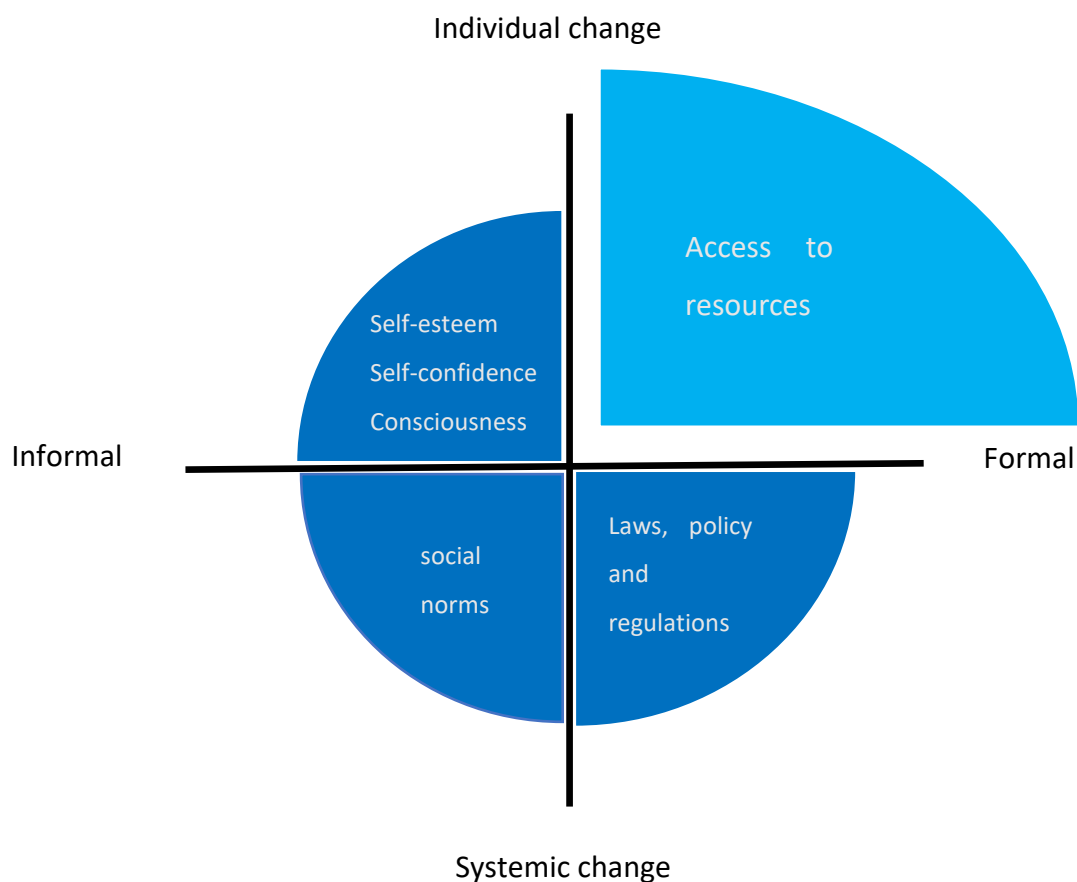
First, empowerment is not a linear process (Carr, 2003; Kabeer, 2005; Pyburn et al., 2021). Similar to many other development interventions for women's economic empowerment, the GREAT programme relies on the theory of change assumption that engaging women in commercial value chains will benefit women through having better income and, in turn, increasing their influence in the family (Golla et al., 2018; Markel, 2014). However, empirical evidence worldwide proves that increasing access to markets does not necessarily benefit

women, as discussed in section 8.3. Johnson et al. (2018, p. 5) claim that benefit and empower steps are “mutually reinforcing”. Guerrero et al. (2022, p. 49) argue that development programmes focusing only on increasing incomes through supporting women to have better access to resources or services do not help expand women’s agency unless enhancing women’s agency and empowerment is “front and centre” work. The World Bank project found limited evidence of the connection between increasing household incomes and enhancing women’s bargaining power within the household due to gender norms (Blattman et al., 2013). Similarly, World Vision Australia found that its approach to women’s economic empowerment by increasing women’s access to markets, information, and new technology did not significantly impact their decision-making ability (Krueger, 2022, March 1).

Second, the GREAT programme focuses on women’s practical and immediate needs and individual well-being, the top right corner of Rao and Kelleher’s framework (Figure 8.1). It does not meet women’s long-term strategic needs, which include addressing unequal structures and bringing transformative agency outcomes for women (Kabeer, 2012; O’Hara & Clement, 2018). These structures, both in informal- social norms and formal- laws and policies, are considered the root causes of women’s status of subordination (Moser, 1989; Rao & Kelleher, 2005). Women’s empowerment requires change at the individual and systemic levels (Kabeer, 2018; O’Hara & Clement, 2018; Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995; Rao & Kelleher, 2005; UNFPA, 2020).

There is another gap in GREAT’s approach to women’s economic empowerment. According to O’Hara and Clement (2018), the efforts to provide individual women with access to material resources or changing “visual” forms of agency, such as decision-making, are not enough to achieve women’s empowerment. They argue that the other “invisible” forms of power (power from within), which relate to psychological empowerment and raise women’s “critical consciousness” to reflect on and challenge oppressive social and political structures, are important to make social change and collective action for women’s empowerment (p. 112). Buisson et al. (2022) find a positive connection between agency, critical consciousness, and women’s “the will to change”.

Figure 8.1. The GREAT’s Approach to Women’s Economic Empowerment



Source: Author, adapted from Rao and Kelleher (2005)’s framework

Guerrero et al. (2022, p. 4) define agency as “the capacity to make choices and influence an unequal situation in a way that challenges power relations”. They argue that “women’s agency leads to empowerment when it challenges the norms and institutions that perpetuate their subordination and dependency”. As discussed in the following section, women’s political empowerment also depends on men, but the lack of critical consciousness helps explain why participation in saving groups or cooperatives may increase income for women but does not necessarily lead to political empowerment (Duguid & Weber, 2016; Kabeer, 2016). It also explains why there was no evidence that women’s engagement with business under the GREAT-Business partnership programme was politically empowered. This issue will be further discussed in section 8.4.4 below.

GREAT programme's approach reflects a common instrumentalist approach to women's economic empowerment amongst development agencies which centres around investing in women for economic growth —called by the World Bank “smart economics” (Cornwall, 2018; Esplen & Brody, 2007; Gerard, 2019; Kabeer, 2012). It has been criticised for considering women's empowerment within the economic sphere only in terms of engaging them with market forces and not in terms of addressing barriers that prevent them from benefiting (Batliwala, 2007; Buvinić & Furst-Nichols, 2014; Cornwall, 2016, 2018; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Esplen & Brody, 2007; Fox & Romero, 2017; Kabeer, 2012; Kidder et al., 2014; Rao & Kelleher, 2005). Cornwall (2018) calls this approach “empowerment lite” (p.2) and the “neoliberal empowerment” approach (p.12).

According to Esplen and Brody (2007, p. 2), “women's empowerment is about more than financial gain; it is about enabling women to live lives of wellbeing and dignity, based on equality, rights and justice”. As discussed in section 8.3 above, the intention to engage women with markets for economic benefit can empower and disempower women, making it a “double-edged sword” (Bayissa et al., 2018, p. 678). My research findings also show that not all business engagement activities benefit women due to barriers and exclusionary practices. The research reveals that the language barrier, limited mobility, and local practices of male household heads constrained ethnic minority women's access to information, productive resources and assets, and decision-making power over production and household expenses (section 7.7). Geographical remoteness constrains Hmong women from participating in training (section 7.3.2). Empowerment programmes, therefore, need to be intersectional and context-specific to support ethnic minority women to overcome their barriers and difficulties (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Kabeer, 2005; Martinez-Restrepo & Ramos-Jaimes, 2017; Moser, 1989). For example, a lack of ability to communicate in the Kinh language emerged strongly as a factor that disempowered women. The language barrier, especially among middle-aged and old Hmong and Dao women, hampers women's ability to negotiate and sign contracts with the company. It is also a barrier for women to access official loans from the bank as they cannot read and write lending documents properly (GREAT, 2022a). In addition, it affects their dignity and confidence and limits their participation in training or community meetings which are mainly conducted in the Kinh language. This finding is consistent with GREAT's baseline survey and the results of previous studies (Bonnin

& Turner, 2013; FAO, 2019; Nguyen et al., 2017; World Bank, 2019). DeJaeghere et al. (2022) argue that ethnic minority women in Vietnam, especially Hmong and Dao women, have a strong aspiration to be literate as it influences their well-being. They argue that development programmes will not achieve economic empowerment if they overlook this issue.

The research shows that taking care of children, being overloaded with housework, and doing paid work is why women participated less in training and community meetings. According to Nguyen et al. (2021), Actionaid (2016), and World Bank (2019), women, especially in the mountainous areas in Vietnam, spend a lot of time on domestic responsibilities. Therefore, development programmes disempower women if they focus only on engaging women with markets for economic development and ignoring the unpaid care burden on women (Barrientos, 1998; Esplen & Brody, 2007; Hunt & Samman, 2016; Razavi, 2009). Thus, development partnerships promoting women's engagement in economic activities need to be careful as they potentially intensify women's workload further (Kent, 2018; Meagher, 2010; Verzosa et al., 2021). The GREAT programme adopted some initiatives to raise gender equality awareness and encourage men to share the workload with women through training and social activities. These activities aimed to get men involved in development programmes to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment as recommended by masculinities and development scholars (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Cornwall, 1997; Sweetman, 2013; Wanner & Wadham, 2015). The GREAT efforts have shown some positive behavioural changes in men and women. There was evidence in the interviews with men and women of the herbal cooperative that men are more willing to share housework with their wives (section 7.5). However, the changes are more evident in young couples (section 7.5).

Gender training provided to both husbands and wives proved effective in helping change men's attitudes and encouraging them to share more housework with their wives. Movono and Dahles (2017), Tran and Walter (2014), and Singhania et al. (2021) found that men were willing to take more reproductive roles in caring for children, cooking and cleaning, while women took more productive roles. Men involved in my study are also willing to share housework when women are working in the field to earn income. However, the change is not significant enough as housework is still considered a women's responsibility. Women still worked extended hours farming and completing housework. In addition to the housework,

the Hmong women in the benzoin business case said that the hours they spent on farmwork were double or triple those spent by men.

Gender disparities come from many aspects, including power imbalances in access to productive resources, decision-making, adverse cultural norms, inequality in social structures, and discriminatory laws and policies (Christopherson et al., 2022 February 18; Coles & Mitchell, 2011; Datta & Kornberg, 2002). Therefore, my research findings reaffirm that there is no short-cut approach to women's empowerment and as Cornwall and Rivas (2015) said:

Empowerment, in short, is not something that can be rolled out like a motorway over any terrain with predictable outcomes. Its very nature is something more contingent and contextual, and ultimately far less predictable, than allowed for by development agencies' quick fix solutions (p.407).

All the barriers and exclusionary practices towards women listed above are factors relating to the inequality in power relations within the household and the interactions with the community, local authorities, and businesses. Pyburn et al. (2021) and Cornwall (2016) claim that women's empowerment requires specific interventions focusing on gender power relations. This issue leads to my next point of discussion about the relational aspect of empowerment.

8.4.2. The relational aspect of empowerment

As discussed in Chapter Three, empowerment is relational and contingent on relations with others (Cornwall, 2016; Huis et al., 2017; Lombardini et al., 2017; Rowlands, 1997; Samman & Santos, 2009). Galiè and Farnworth (2019, p. 14), through their empirical studies in Syria, Kenya, and Tanzania, suggest a new form of power, "power through", to reflect the "involuntary aspect of empowerment and disempowerment" because it is beyond personal control. They argue that "empowerment of an individual is not bound to that individual only but resides also in others around her and is mediated by communities and their values" (p.16). Similarly, Spark et al. (2021, p. 1150) argue that "women's autonomy rests heavily on their connectedness to others". Therefore, women can be empowered or disempowered by the power relations they are related to within the households and in the community (Adam et al., 2022; Cornwall & Rivas, 2015; Lombardini et al., 2017; Malhotra et al., 2002; McKinnon et al.,

2016; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019; Mosedale, 2005; Su et al., 2020). My research reinforces these findings, showing that women's empowerment is influenced by the power dynamics in their relationships with men, community members, local authorities and businesses.

While legal systems, laws and policies affect the relationships between men and women (Christopherson et al., 2022 February 18; Lombardini et al., 2017; Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Sen & Batiwala, 2000), these power relations are strongly influenced by social norms. (Galiè & Farnworth, 2019). Kent (2018) claims that "intra-household bargaining [the allocation of a woman's labour and income] depends on the relative power between men and women in the household...However, extra-household social norms concerning the moral obligations of men and women shape household bargaining outcomes", (p. 369). My research findings reveal that social norms not only impact power dynamics between women and men within households but also affect women's empowerment concerning their interactions with the community, local authorities and businesses. These norms constrain women from accessing resources and participating in economic, social, and political activities (section 7.7.1). According to Wellington (2022), the policy interventions addressing social norms would address gender power inequality much more effectively than supporting women's access to resources.

Women's empowerment in relation to men

In section 3.2.1 above, masculinities and development scholars argue for the need to involve men in development programmes and to identify ways for women and men to work together to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment objectives (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Greig et al., 2000; Levy et al., 2000; MenEngage Alliance & UN Women, 2014; Parpart, 2015). Spark et al. (2021), when studying women's business success in PNG, found that men play a critical role in enabling or undermining women's access to economic opportunities. With support from men, women could "reshape women's prescribed economic and domestic roles" and remove "oppressive structures and attitudes that can constrain women moving into business", which was commonly considered men's job (Spark et al., 2021, pp. 1146-1147). According to Rubin and Manfre (2014, p. 295), "women's participation in smallholder agriculture is mediated by their access to productive assets, and their often lower access to

land, credit, social networks, and information relative to men can limit their opportunities to enter higher value and competitive value chains". Cornwall and Rivas (2015) highlight the lack of relational dimensions in the empowerment framework that is commonly adopted in development programmes. These programmes, which often take an instrumentalist approach to women's economic empowerment, focusing only on improving individual women, were criticised for "placing the burden of change solely on women, rather than viewing empowerment as an integrated individual and collective transformation" (MacArthur et al., 2022, p. 5). The discussion in section 8.3 above shows how women can be disempowered in relation to men. For example, men have control over production decisions and incomes generated from the development interventions, and women face more risks of violence and a heavier workload. Their power relations with respect to men also affect women's access to training and information, and access to land. These are two critical factors contributing to economic empowerment.

Access to training and information

Access to training and information help women improve technical skills to improve production, make effective decisions, and consequently increase their incomes (Huyer, 2016). Thus, access to knowledge and information is essential for economic empowerment. Su et al. (2020) and Stromquist (2015) propose education which includes formal education, skill training, and capacity improvement, as an additional dimension of empowerment.

My research findings show higher involvement of men in training and community meetings. Women only received training or attended community meetings if they were targeted directly, or their husbands were busy. Only a few households reported that women participated in decision-making and training because their husbands engaged in off-farm employment, such as local government officers. Language barriers, mobility, domestic work burdens, and local practices of male household heads are the main blocks that constrain ethnic minority women's access to information and training, as mentioned above. These also prevent women in Africa, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Cambodia from accessing technical training and extension services (Chan & Barrientos, 2010; Verzosa et al., 2021).

The prevailing perceptions of gendered labour division emerging from my research also impact women's workload and their access to training and information. Men are culturally supposed to do "*heavy work*", while women are responsible for "*light work*". This notion of masculinity constructed around certain activities was also mentioned in previous studies (O'Hara & Clement, 2018; Pham, 2012; Spark et al., 2021; World Bank, 2019). It seems that this gender-specific work division favours women on the surface. However, it disempowers women by limiting their ability to go out and away from their homes and giving men an excuse to get out of reproductive responsibilities. Men are the ones who go out to trade and attend meetings and training. For example, Hmong men are expected to go out to trade buffaloes in the market, and they can be "*lazy*" and leave the tea picking to women (section 7.7.1). In turn, men have more opportunities to expand their social networks and have more knowledge and information (Devi & Buechler, 2009; Hoang et al., 2006; Mulema et al., 2016; Pham, 2012). Therefore, this gendered division of labour entrenches the power dynamic whereby women are more dependent on men as they rarely go out and have the chance to learn new things and meet new people, and thus they are assumed to know less than men (section 7.7.1).

Access to land

According to Ramaroson et al. (2021), unequal power relations between men and women in patriarchal societies where women are subordinated to men restrict women's access to land. My study affirms that women still face inequality in access to resources (World Bank, 2019). Across the three ethnic minority groups, Hmong, Tay, and Dao, men are reported as the sole owners of land and houses in the research areas. Research carried out by UN Women (2021b), and Nguyen et al. (2021) also found a higher level of male land ownership than females. This is because land and house ownership are passed on from fathers to sons in these three patriarchal ethnic minority societies. Women are not named in the land titles because they move to their husbands' houses after getting married or because of their limited ability to read and write in the Kinh language (section 7.3.3).

Coles and Mitchell (2011) assert that land ownership is an issue for women's participation in value chains and access to public finances, as land tenure is often used as collateral. The GREAT's baseline survey found that having limited access to land prevented Hmong women

from becoming involved in family production decisions (DeJaeghere et al., 2020). Melesse et al. (2017) claim that joint land ownership positively impacts household decisions. In addition, women have more control over household decision-making on what to produce and major household expenditures when they own and have secured land tenure (Mishra & Sam, 2016; Nguyen & Le, 2022; Ramarosan et al., 2021). However, there was no evidence in my research about how men's sole land ownership affects women's control over work and payment. Women in the tea value chain can still pick and sell the tea to the company. Nevertheless, women have limited access to loans from the bank without land and house ownership, as discussed in section 7.3.3.

The GREAT programme does not have any activities to deal with the issue of land ownership. It is not practical to expect one programme to address all constraints and barriers to women's empowerment. However, by the time the research was carried out, the programme had started piloting an inclusive value-chain financing approach to address the issue of access to loans without using land as collateral.

Women's empowerment in relation to the community

The community can affect women's empowerment. For instance, Ahmed et al. (2018) found in Bangladesh that women might not be respected by the community when they worked outside as it showed their husband's inability to support them. Similarly, women's participation in economic activities in Malawi is constrained by the social norms that restrict them in the domestic sphere to stay home and take care of the family. They are judged as being "unfaithful or promiscuous" for selling agricultural products outside their homes (Ragasa et al., 2021, p. 50). The dairy producer Engro Foods faced difficulties recruiting women as milk collectors and livestock extension workers because women are not expected to go around the communities and interact with men without accompanying family members in Pakistan (ADB, 2016). Many examples show how the community's gender-based perceptions and expectations affect women's empowerment. Therefore, women need the support of their families, husbands, and the community to be empowered (ADB, 2016; Dunsch, 2022; Galiè & Farnworth, 2019; Singhania et al., 2021). Women's empowerment

programmes should involve men and women, family members, and the community to challenge gendered social norms.

The outcomes of my research indicate that the barriers and exclusionary practices discussed above are deeply rooted in the social norms of patriarchal societies, which value men above women. My study supports other research that shows social norms that place greater value on men create pressure for both men and women (Ahmed et al., 2018; ISDS, 2020), and it could potentially disempower women. Masculinity is challenged when women are empowered and have a more independent income, and men do housework (Adam et al., 2022; Boonabaana, 2014; Ishii, 2012; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). As revealed in the research, men are humiliated and looked down on in the community for being financially dependent on their wives, “clinging to their wives’ skirts” (section 7.7.1). Likewise, men in Uganda are judged for helping with housework. They are considered to have been manipulated by their wives, and their act of helping can even be seen as a “witchcraft case”. This is because housework is considered “women’s work” (Boonabaana, 2014, p. 33). Similarly, many Ghanaian men only do housework in an enclosed environment to avoid an accusation of “being controlled by women” (Adam et al., 2022, p. 8). In the case of ethnic minorities in Vietnam, more than one-quarter of participants in the survey done by CARE International said that men did not want to do housework because they were afraid of being laughed at (CARE, 2022).

Threatening masculinity might lead to family separation (Boonabaana, 2014; Galiè & Farnworth, 2019) or, in some cases, men may end up drinking alcohol and committing domestic violence (Adam et al., 2022; Boonabaana, 2014; Bulte & Lensink, 2019; Huis et al., 2017; Kidder et al., 2014; Vyas et al., 2015). Kabeer (2016) found that working women who earned more income faced more violence than non-working women in Bangladesh. The issue of domestic violence has not been revealed in my research, but this could be because the question was not explicitly asked or because the interviewed women were not open to sharing this with the young research assistants. However, gender norms shaped expectations of women’s roles as “secondary earners” and caregivers for the housework (section 5.3). The change in traditional gender roles when women take on more economic functions and men take on more domestic chores challenges men’s self-esteem and may cause tensions in ethnic

minority households, as mentioned in section 5.5. When women take over the leadership in the family, they face social repercussions for challenging prevailing gender norms and are shamed for “sitting on a husband’s head”. In turn, women accept these norms and perceive that men are household heads, pillars, breadwinners, heirs to the ancestral land, and key decision-makers and that they (women) are in the second or third position in the family (section 7.7.1).

Women’s empowerment in relation to local authorities and businesses

My research shows that the interactions between women, local authorities, and businesses also affect women’s access to productive inputs, training, control over production, and incomes. The practice of male household headship adopted by community and village leaders affects women’s participation in training and community meetings and strengthens existing unequal power relations as everything is channelled via the male household heads (section 7.7.1). Mudege et al. (2015) and Nguyen et al. (2021) suggest that prevailing patriarchal social structures in which men are household heads and decision-makers impact women’s access to training opportunities. Because of this norm, extension officers and village leaders approach men when they recruit participants for training or disseminate information (Mudege et al., 2015). Although men eventually share information with women after the training, Mudege et al. (2015, p.303) claim that this approach “reinforces women’s subordinate status, where men become the ‘knowers’ and women the ones who depend on men’s knowledge”. In some cases, men were drunk when they attended the training, so they did not receive the information or forgot to tell their wives about the content of the training (section 7.3.2). Julia and White (2012) found in the case of oil palm expansion in Indonesia that while there were no formal regulations that men should be the head of the household, the community practised male household headship, and this was a barrier to women’s access to community land.

Similarly, the relationship between women and businesses also affects women’s empowerment. Businesses’ practices can empower or disempower women. For example, they can empower women by reducing women’s workloads and increasing work efficiency (by reducing travelling or processing time, such as in the case of the tea company) (section

7.2). They can also empower women by providing opportunities to socialise and learn from other women (social empowerment) (section 7.5). However, businesses can disempower women through exclusionary practices. For example, Munir (2022) found that the low level of female members of the mining cooperative in Rwanda was due to adverse conditions placed on women, such as requiring them to own assets and, notably, to secure the permission of their husbands to join the cooperative. Therefore, men often represent the family as official members, and women must find an unofficial way to sell their mining products to the cooperative, earning a lower income. Similarly, women's participation in an agricultural cooperative in Ethiopia is constrained by gender biases that favour men over women within households, communities, and cooperatives (Woldu & Tadesse, 2015). The requirement for land ownership as a key criterion for participation in the value chain also excludes women from being official members of value chains (Quisumbing et al., 2015; Rubin & Manfre, 2014). Businesses usually sign contracts with men because they are household heads and quite often have access to land titles (Dolan, 2001; Rubin & Manfre, 2014). There are cases of this in the tea company, the benzoin value chain, and the contract with satellite households in the herbal cooperative case. Dolan (2001) claims that women's exclusion from the contract might cause gender conflict because men control labour and income.

With a more gender-sensitive approach, businesses can remove barriers to training for women by directly targeting the training for women, selecting appropriate times and locations, and using languages more appropriate to women. In addition, they can change the approach to signing the contract with women or both husbands and wives. This approach can help women enhance their self-esteem from social recognition when they can do work that men once dominated (Mota et al., 2020). In the case of the tea company, they have already changed their practices. According to the director of the tea company:

When signing with businesses, women are very proud because they have the right to sign a contract with businesses to secure the markets for their products...Before, only the husband signed the contract. But now both husbands and wives [can sign]. Women are proud of it because they have not had it for many years [17 years].

(KI-a director of the tea company)

8.4.3. Collective empowerment

Participation in cooperatives can build social capital and provide collective power for women (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014; Nath, 2022). The GREAT programme has activities to encourage and facilitate women to work in production groups and support women to become group leaders. This approach not only helps the business to improve efficiency but also helps women to support each other, that is, to achieve collective empowerment.

The GREAT project mid-line survey showed that women involved in the tea company and the herbal cooperative have more influence on household expenses than those in the benzoin and ginger company. Only less than one-third of surveyed respondents of the benzoin and organic ginger company reported that women participated in production decisions and household expenditures (MDRI, 2021). Meanwhile, 79% of surveyed respondents (both men and women) of the tea company and 92% of the herbal cooperative reported that women participated in decisions relating to significant household expenditures (MDRI, 2021). This is probably because women involved in the tea company and the herbal cooperative (small scale) have more control over their incomes, as mentioned in section 8.3 above. Notably, this number in the herbal cooperative is much higher than the other two companies. This may be because women of the herbal cooperative are more empowered when they work collectively in the cooperative.

Even though the research assistants did not explicitly ask questions about collective empowerment, there are some suggestions that collective empowerment occurs when women work in the herbal cooperative. The herbal cooperative is led by a Dao woman (Mrs Tan) who disagrees with social norms and practices that look down on women, and she aspires to help women in her community have better positions in their families. She established this cooperative with the primary purpose of helping herself and other ethnic minority women in her community to have better jobs and incomes from their traditional medicinal knowledge. Therefore, women are the main beneficiaries of the cooperative. According to Iizuka and Costa (2022), female-led inclusive businesses prioritise working with other women. However, women's empowerment is about more than having a group leader like her; it is about women coming together and supporting each other. The herbal

cooperative is considered a “women’s cooperative”, where most of the members are women. The cooperative helps women grow in confidence and gain new skills. Unlike the tea and the benzoin companies, in which men dominantly signed contracts with these companies, women were the ones who did that with the herbal cooperative. With the gender training they received from the GREAT programme, they understand their rights to be treated equally to men and the need for men to share housework.

You must understand that our ethnic minority women are not equal [to men]. Now that the women have the training, they know that husband and wife must share these things, discuss and work together, teach children, and be responsible for each other.... Now, women understand men and women can earn money equally. In the past, Dao women had to stay at home and give birth to children for their husbands, and when the husband said, she had to listen to him Many other things.... Oh my god, in general, it is so frustrating that I can't say it all.

(KI-interview with Mrs Tan- The director of the herbal cooperative)

According to the director of the herbal cooperative, Dao women now have more voice in the family. The director of the herbal cooperative claimed that female members could discuss with their husbands what to buy since they had their own money from selling medicinal plants. Both men and women of the herbal cooperative reported that women were treated more equally in society (section 7.5). Some women of the cooperative went home and challenged the men to change:

When I returned from training, I told my husband he had to help me. If everything is done by the wife, the wife suffers for the rest of her life.

(Dao woman of the herbal cooperative in a focus group discussion)

Anecdotal evidence from my experience, as well as from the Dao Research Assistant, when asked to reflect on her working experience with the women of the herbal cooperative, confirmed that the Dao women we interacted with were very confident in the way they spoke and presented themselves to people like us, the outsiders.

8.4.4. Interconnection between economic empowerment and other psychological, social, and political dimensions

This section discusses the relationship between the economic, psychological, social, and political dimensions and the need for a holistic approach to women's empowerment programmes, not just focusing on women's economic empowerment. Previous studies have shown that empowerment in one dimension may not necessarily result in positive change in another dimension (Alkire, 2008; Bayissa et al., 2018; Ferguson, 2011; Malhotra et al., 2002; Mason, 2005; Mosedale, 2005; Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Samman & Santos, 2009; Scheyvens, 2000) (see section 3.4.2). However, there is evidence in my research to show an interconnection between economic, psychological, social, and political empowerment dimensions. The story of the director of the herbal cooperative, Mrs Tan, is an example of how the four dimensions of empowerment come together, reinforce and complement one another. She is a great role model of a successful businesswoman who had support from her husband (see Box 8.1).

Box 8.1: A Story Told By Mrs Tan, a Director of the Herbal Cooperative

One day, I happened to see Red Dao women carrying fresh herbal plants for sale at the market. They had to sell the plants at a very low price or even had to throw them away. I thought this was our traditional health care practice which was handed down from our ancestors. If I set up a business, I could help people like that. At first, I thought I would set up a family business to raise money for my two children to study. At that time, I could not even read the alphabet and my husband was in the same situation. That is why I decided to let my two children go to school to learn to read and write and know how to help their parents. I had the idea of establishing a cooperative to create more jobs for Red Dao women in the community. However, I did not know how to start. I decided to tell my husband and had his support. So we decided to roll the business out gradually and try our best according to our capacities.

The cooperative was established in 2015 with five other people (founding members). My husband and I were both founding members. There were not any development projects at that time to support us. All the founding members had to borrow money from the bank, each contributing VND\$50m [equivalent to US\$2,173]. We built a temporary house with three rooms for tourists to experience the Red Dao traditional herbal bath. Most of the cooperative members were women who were determined to try to get out of poverty. When I started, I did not know how the cooperative would develop. Eventually, honestly, it was like a dream. The cooperative had developed a brand and market. We sold the products to SunGroup's hotel [5 stars hotel chains in Vietnam] and their supermarket systems in a famous tourist area in Vietnam. By this time, I had vehicles, and comfortable houses and my children were all grown up.

When the GREAT programme came, I did not know what the programme was; I did not know how to write the project proposal either. Later, I understood that this programme aimed to support women to have a good income, and good life. Women made decisions, had a voice in the family and were well-respected by their husbands. These were also the cooperative's objectives. I understood very clearly what the programme wanted and what I needed to do. With the support of the GREAT project, through a lot of training, I realised that I was actually carrying out a social enterprise. I understood that I was doing this business to support the community. I was confident that I had overcome my difficult barriers. By this point, I was clear on how to lead women to develop. I was very grateful to the GREAT programme for their help. I had already determined what I needed to do; I already had a plan. I could affirm that I would try to give women a better future even if I continued with this programme or another. I would continue developing and expanding the business because other women were still very poor and needed my support. These women were very eager to do what they wanted, but they did not know where to start. I would never stop.

Source: Author's interview with Mrs Tan

The relationship between economic and psychological empowerment

According to the GREAT officer, women should have some level of confidence to get involved in the value chain of the business (section 6.2.2). This view aligns with the argument that empowerment is the process of activating women's self-confidence and self-esteem (power from within) and capabilities to make their life choices and seek changes in their lives (Moser, 1989; Rowlands, 1997; Kabeer, 2005; Scheyvens, 2020) (section 3.3.2). According to this process, the psychological dimension is crucial, especially for female leaders, and should be activated before other economic, social, and political empowerment dimensions can be achieved. The case of the director of the herbal cooperative, Mrs Tan, clearly reflects this process. The idea of founding the herbal cooperative came from her desire to improve income for herself and other women in her community from their traditional medicinal knowledge of her ethnic group. It came from her self-esteem and her value of the traditional medicine of the Red Dao people. She did not want to see her traditional medicinal plants wasted. She wanted to set up a business to help herself and other women in her community earn better from their traditional medicine while preserving and maintaining their culture. The ethnic women in the cooperative were also "*determined to get out of poverty*".

Both Mrs Tan and her husband were illiterate. They sent their children to school so they could help them. She "*wants to learn*" and improve herself. She could now use the computer to send emails to her business counterparts. She built up her self-efficacy through the GREAT programme, and from the business success, she is more confident and believes in her capability to lead the cooperative. From the initial period with limited investment, with only VND 50m (equivalent to US\$ 2,173) contribution from each founding member (seven people), the total revenue of the cooperative reached VND 2.1bil (US\$ 92,260) three years after the cooperative was established (Dao Do Cooperative, 2018). The cooperative has thrived and brought her a comfortable life.

However, my research shows that the relationship between economic and psychological empowerment dimensions can also work in another way. These two dimensions are interconnected and complementary. Women did not always have confidence at the start, rather, they gained confidence (psychological empowerment) through participation in

programmes. There was little evidence that women actively sought to participate in the partnership with the business because men signed most contracts with businesses (tea, benzoin, and large-scale *chùa dù* growing households). Many women joined the value chains because it did not “*cost any money*” (section 7.3.1). However, since joining the value chains, women have enjoyed access to a stable output and higher product prices. Therefore, they have better incomes and have built up their confidence. Technical training also helps women be more confident that they have adequate technical knowledge (section 7.4).

Hmong women engaging with the tea value chain and Dao women of the herbal cooperative reported that they received respect, appreciation, and support from their husbands. This is because they are more financially independent and make more financial contributions to their families. These women do not need to worry about their daily expenses. They feel happier. Their sense of dignity is enhanced as they do not need to ask their husbands for money to cover daily expenses. They even have money to share with their husbands when they run out of money. They also improve their self-esteem and feel “*equal*” and “*as good as others*” as they make more contributions to household finances (section 7.4). This finding supports the finding of previous studies that show that women enjoy increased confidence and self-esteem when they are self-reliant and gain higher income (Adams et al., 2019; Doss et al., 2021; McArdle & Thomas, 2012; Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Said-Allsopp & Tallontire, 2015; Scheyvens, 2000; Su et al., 2020; Tajeddini et al., 2017; Verzosa et al., 2021).

The relationship between economic and social empowerment

Women also receive recognition and respect in their society when they participate in economic activities and earn higher incomes (Adams et al., 2019; Boonabaana, 2014; Doss et al., 2021; Khatri-Chhetri & Chanana, 2017; Moswete & Lacey, 2015; Rodriguez, 2022; Scheyvens, 2000). For example, women’s participation in sugarcane farming in Malawi increases their economic independence and negotiating power within their households and influences the existing gendered norms that define them as only housewives to instead recognise them as “commercial farmers” (Adams et al., 2019, p. 291).

In my research, there was no obvious evidence that income from tea and small-scale herbal women helped women be more recognised and respected in society. This is probably because income from these businesses is not significant enough to make an influence. However, the case of Mrs Tan indicates the possible linkage between economic and social empowerment. She is praised as “*wise and excellent*” by people in her community for her ability to earn a higher income and lead the herbal cooperative to generate more jobs and incomes for other Dao women. This comment is the opposite of the Dao man's statement that ethnic minority women are “*not intelligent and afraid of this and that*” (section 7.7.1). This shows that the community's perception and stereotypes about women can be changed when women are confident and successful.

Moswete and Lacey (2015) and Boserup (1970) suggest that economic involvement would provide opportunities for women to expand their social networks, leading to social empowerment. My study shows that engaging with businesses gives women more opportunities to interact with others and be collectively empowered, as discussed in section 8.4.3 above. Also, working together in a cooperative can be socially empowering. In addition, women have more chances to participate in social activities (sections 6.3.1 and 7.5). For example, female tea growers exchange information with each other when they bring tea to sell to the company. These activities help women build up more social networks. In addition, the tea company and the herbal cooperative support community development and social events through their corporate social responsibility activities. My study also shows that women have better access to health care from their incomes, and their children have better access to education (section 7.3.1). This finding supports the finding of previous studies, which indicates that increasing women's incomes will lead to improving care for health, sanitation (Walker et al., 2001) and investment in children's education (Su et al., 2020; Verzosa et al., 2021; Walker et al., 2001).

The relationship between economic and political empowerment

In my research, political empowerment is understood as women's access to community meetings and management positions in local authorities. The research revealed that men usually dominated important community meetings, especially those of the Hmong

community and engaging with businesses did not help women's political empowerment. This finding is similar to that of Su et al. (2020), in their study of Hui ethnic minority women's empowerment in China, which revealed that improvement in political empowerment is not as substantial compared with other empowerment aspects for women involved in the embroiderer cooperative they studied. According to Scheyvens (2000, p.243), "it is important not to assume that if women have benefited economically from an ecotourism venture, they will have a greater voice within their communities and beyond". As discussed above, there is a need to change women's and men's critical consciousnesses to challenge inequality structures (Buisson et al., 2022; O'Hara & Clement, 2018; Rao & Kelleher, 2005).

The case of the director of the herbal cooperative, Mrs Tan, is again an example as she showed confidence in challenging the government's policies. At the beginning of the partnership with GREAT in 2018, Mrs Tan was not confident contacting the project team. Everything was done by the cooperative advisor. With success from the business, the support of the GREAT programme and her husband, and the respect she gained from the community, she became more confident. She is now confident in raising her voice to question policies and decisions that affect her and the community. For instance, under the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, she sent a petition to commune, district, and provincial authorities to ask for support for her cooperative members who were affected by the pandemic.

8.4.5. Caution in the interpretation of empowerment signs

Shared intra-household decision-making on production, access to resources, and expenditure decisions is widely adopted as an indicator of empowerment (Alkire et al., 2013; Anderson et al., 2017; Doss, 2013; Kabeer, 1999; Mason, 2005). According to Kawazaruka et al. (2021), Verzosa et al. (2021), McArdle and Thomas (2012), and Said-Allsopp and Tallontire (2015), women have more voice when they make a greater contribution to household finances. In my research, the decision-making power over household expenses differed across the three ethnic minority groups. Even in one ethnic minority group, women's influence in expenditure decisions varied between ethnic minority sub-groups and businesses in different communities. For example, the Dao group involved in the tea business (Dao tuyển) seems to have considerable autonomy and independence in tea production, control over income and

decision-making in their families, whereas the Red Dao women's group engaged with the benzoin company said that their husbands made final decisions on important decisions. However, many Red Dao women of the herbal cooperative in a different commune reported sharing equal decision-making power with their husbands. Similarly, the majority of Hmong women across different sub-groups and businesses reported that they joined with their husbands to make decisions. In contrast, Tay men of different sub-groups and businesses usually have the final say on major expenditures. Therefore, there is a need to be cautious about over generalising decision-making and other empowerment signs among different ethnic groups because empowerment is contextual (Batliwala & Dhanraj, 2004; Cornwall & Edwards, 2010; Kabeer, 2005; Martinez-Restrepo & Ramos-Jaimes, 2017; Moser, 1989). A differentiated approach to women's empowerment will need to be deployed to address specific barriers and needs of a different ethnic group.

Caution should also be exercised when interpreting the meaning of joint decisions. Previous studies found that women often frequently described decision-making as a joint effort, whereas men tended to portray themselves as the ultimate decision-makers (Acosta et al., 2020; MDRI, 2021). According to Acosta et al. (2020), a collaborative decision-making process may entail intricate negotiations in which women are informed about the decision and may not have a chance to voice their ideas, and their husbands make final decisions. In many cases across the three businesses, women reported participating in the decision-making, but their husbands had the final say on major expenditures. Santillan et al. (2004) researched to develop women's empowerment indicators specific to the Vietnamese context and found the same issues.

Similarly, my research affirms a need to take a nuanced approach to interpret intrahousehold decision-making as a sign of empowerment (Acosta et al., 2020; Alkire et al., 2013; Kawarazuka et al., 2021; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019) (section 3.4.2). The case of Dao women of the tea company in Ta Cu Ty commune clearly shows that they are not empowered to make independent decisions in tea production and take control over incomes in their families. It is more that they have no other choice, given men are more likely to drink and gamble and "*everything*" is on women's shoulders (section 7.3.4). Similarly, O'Hara and Clement (2018) found that in some circumstances, intra-household decision-making on production and

control over income is actually a symptom of women's subordinate positions and reinforcement of their traditional gender roles to do women's jobs. In the case of the Dao women above, intra-household decision-making reflects ineffective roles played by men rather than indicators of empowerment. This finding shows a limitation of the Women Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) developed by Alkire et al. (2013), which quantifies intrahousehold decision-making as one of the indicators for the empowerment index. According to Kawazaruka et al. (2021), men and women complement and depend on each other's knowledge to sustain their livelihoods. For example, Thai ethnic minority women in the northern mountainous areas of Vietnam had more knowledge about animal rearing, specifically chickens and pigs, cultivating homegrown vegetables, and vending fruit. In contrast, men know more about high-altitude crops, cattle, and buffaloes (Kawarazuka et al., 2021). McKinnon et al. (2016, p. 1386) argued that "the desire for equality and balance was not necessarily a desire for women and men to share in the same decision-making role, but to have their contributions valued and respected even within different roles".

8.5. Concluding remarks

Micro and small businesses certainly bring to development partnerships strengths in economic and productivity growth, creating jobs and improving incomes for ethnic minority women. Nevertheless, not all business benefits women. It depends on factors such as the type of products and the business's social bond with the community. It also depends on prior cultural norms and which group is targeted. The stories of the indigenous herbal cooperative and the tea company with a solid community bond compared to the benzoin and ginger company with a weak community linkage illustrate why strong community connections are critical for business success and local benefits to be maximised. Locally and socially embedded businesses can potentially create economic, social and cultural impacts. They can be inclusive, reaching out to poor ethnic minority women regardless of their production scales and helping them improve their incomes by creating value chains for unique, traditional, and cultural products from their communities. This research finding challenges current donor preferences for medium and large businesses as inclusive businesses, when inclusivity is defined based on the size of a company and its scalability. The research also challenges the criticism that the poor are often excluded from commercial value chains because they do not have the

resources to engage in business activities. My research redefines inclusive businesses in terms of the positive impacts the business can create for the poor. However, micro and small businesses have limitations and challenges. They often have a vague understanding of the women's economic empowerment concept. Due to their limited resources and capacity, they have difficulties maintaining their commitment to providing jobs and incomes for women to cope with rapid changes in the market. They also have no expertise and commitment to addressing social norms and improving women's agency. These factors challenge the partnership approach to working with businesses for women's empowerment and indicate areas where donors might need to apply more resources.

My research challenges the women's economic empowerment approach, which is commonly deployed by donors focusing solely on individual well-being by providing training and access to productive resources for market integration. This instrumentalist approach is insufficient to empower women. The research findings reinforce literature showing that women do not always benefit from their engagement in agriculture and tourism production value chains. In my research, women had more control over "women's crops" and small income, while men dominated in large-scale and higher income production and "men's work". The research highlights the gaps in the women's economic empowerment approach, which affect women's ability to access productive resources, training and information and benefit from economic activities. Women's empowerment requires changes at the individual (power from within) and collective levels (power with and power to) to remove barriers and exclusionary practices against women. It also requires changes in gendered power relations within households, the community, the local authorities, and businesses (power through). Relational empowerment is revealed strongly in the research as the area that donors need to pay attention to in their women's economic empowerment programmes as opposed to the individual approach. The power relations within the household, and with the community, local authorities, and businesses affect women's access to economic opportunities and prevent women from participating in and benefiting from economic, social, and political activities.

The next chapter will discuss a new framework to address these gaps so that donors can better engage with the private sector and other sectors to bring more transformative agency outcomes for ethnic minority women's empowerment.

CHAPTER NINE. CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1. Introduction

As indicated in Chapter One, this research set out to answer the following four research questions:

- **RQ1:** What are the perceptions and understandings of businesses about women's economic empowerment?
- **RQ2:** What are the strengths, limitations, and challenges of private sector involvement in the development partnership for women's economic empowerment?
- **RQ3:** How do ethnic minority women benefit and become empowered from their engagement in agriculture and tourism production value chains?
- **RQ4:** How could donors better engage with the private sector to support ethnic women's empowerment?

Research Questions 1 and 2 were answered in Chapter Six, and Question 3 was discussed in Chapter Seven. This final chapter highlights my research contributions both in theoretical and practical areas. It also includes reflections on the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research. Drawing from Chapters Six and Seven's findings and the discussions in Chapter Eight, this Chapter imparts the answer to Research Question 4. This is also the conclusion of the research on how donors can better engage with the private sector to support ethnic minority women's empowerment. My research recommends that donors' policy moves away from an instrumental approach, focusing on individual empowerment, to a transformative and holistic approach which empowers women both individually and especially collectively in relationship with others. It recommends that donors put gender at the core of value chain studies and have appropriate interventions to help their programmes to achieve women's empowerment outcomes. It also recommends a practical approach for

donors to overcome tensions in their partnerships with the private sector for women's empowerment. The chapter ends with my reflections on personal learning.

9.2. Contributions to knowledge

Firstly, my study contributes to the literature on methodologies for conducting research remotely. I have developed practical strategies for remote fieldwork using and empowering local research assistants. This has shown that remote fieldwork is challenging but not impossible. This is especially significant as it was done under COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. Secondly, my study adds a novel contribution to the existing knowledge on the role of micro and small businesses in promoting inclusiveness and their impact on women's economic empowerment. It showcases the role of micro and small businesses, especially locally and socially embedded businesses, in creating jobs and decent incomes for poor ethnic minority women. Thirdly, my research proposes a new theoretical framework for the donor-business partnership approach for women's empowerment (Figure 9.1 to be discussed below). This framework plugs the gaps and transforms the prevailing women's economic empowerment approach, which focuses on individual empowerment. This new framework is based on the research's conceptual framework and includes two elements, relational and collective empowerment, which emerged from the research findings as having significant impacts on women's empowerment. Relational empowerment is added to the framework to emphasise the importance of the relational aspects of empowerment and how changes in power relations in the surrounding environment affect women's empowerment. Collective empowerment reflects the need for collective action to change women's position within the household and society.

9.2.1. Contribution to research methodology

As mentioned in Chapter 4, my research methodology was published in the *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. This article discusses lessons learned in how to carry out remote fieldwork using local research assistants, presents practical strategies and recommendations, and considers the strengths of this approach for knowledge production and the empowerment of researchers in the global south. It contributes to the limited body

of literature that discusses the role of RAs in qualitative fieldwork and the potential for RAs to be empowered as a direct result of the process (Anwar & Viqar, 2017; Cons, 2014; Gupta, 2014). With planning and preparation, comprehensive training and ongoing support for Research Assistants (RAs), researchers can overcome the challenges of remote fieldwork. My approach to remote fieldwork centres on frequent communication, feedback, and building trusting team dynamics. This approach can overcome some of the power hierarchies between researchers and local RAs, and, therefore should not simply be seen as a temporary or inferior ‘Plan B’ for researchers, but should be embraced as a way of reimagining knowledge production. It is also valuable for reducing travel time, cost, and environmental impact.

Based on learnings from this research, Table 9.1 below summarises the recommendations for future researchers conducting remote qualitative data collection using RAs. This part is also my contribution to the article, and it is drawn directly from the article.

Table 9.1 Summary of Recommendations for Remote Research Using RAs

Pre-Fieldwork	
Training RAs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think carefully about the requirements of RAs during the recruitment phase and develop a clear term of reference (TOR) outlining the purpose of the research, the scope of work, the timeframe.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a thorough process for training RAs on all aspects of the research, with particular attention to research design, methodology and methods, ethical considerations, and safety issues. Conduct this process in a way that helps to build rapport between the researcher and the RAs and among the RAs themselves.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design comprehensive, yet non-repetitive, interview guidelines and work through them with the RAs to make sure they understand leading questions and types of follow-up questions for the research.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allow time for RAs to pilot questions and provide feedback to ensure the questions are sensitive to local culture and use appropriate language.
During Fieldwork	
Research Team Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build a trusting relationship between the researcher and the RAs through regular communication and creating an environment that encourages honest reflections.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treat the RAs with respect and show appreciation for their efforts. • Check on the well-being of RAs in the field (are their lodgings safe and comfortable, is transport adequate, are they ok being away from loved ones for a period of time? etc.), not just on how they are going with the data collection process. • Support teamwork amongst the RAs so they can work together and support each other during the fieldwork. This helps build their confidence, especially for young and inexperienced female RAs doing research in remote areas. • Consider ways in which you can allow RAs to have autonomy to actively shape the research to adapt to fieldwork situations e.g. involving their own safety and the safety of their participants.
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Select appropriate communication tools and establish regular communications between the researcher and the RAs to ensure a consistent approach across the research, to allow the researcher to identify concerns during the fieldwork, and to provide timely guidance to the RAs. • Provide continuous feedback on the data collection process: feedback should be both positive, to encourage less experienced RAs, and constructive, with tangible ideas on improvements.
Community Gate Keepers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spend time explaining the research purpose and the research methods to gatekeepers and interpreters in the field so they can support the research process.

Source: Nguyen et al. (2022, p. 10)

9.2.2. The role of micro and small businesses in promoting inclusive development

My research helps fill a gap in the literature on the role of micro and small businesses as inclusive businesses in development. The short article *“Inclusive business: a critique”* was published in DevPolicy Blog via Australian National University, the most renowned site for aid policy and development effectiveness discussion in the Asia Pacific region. It criticised donor approaches to support only medium and large inclusive businesses while excluding micro and small businesses, which also have great potential for creating jobs and providing better incomes for the poor. My research also outlined the limitations and challenges of these businesses in partnership with development agencies for women’s empowerment. Micro and small businesses are more likely than larger ones to be locally and socially embedded. Locally

and socially embedded businesses have strengths in creating not only jobs and improving incomes for poor ethnic minority women but also making social and cultural impacts.

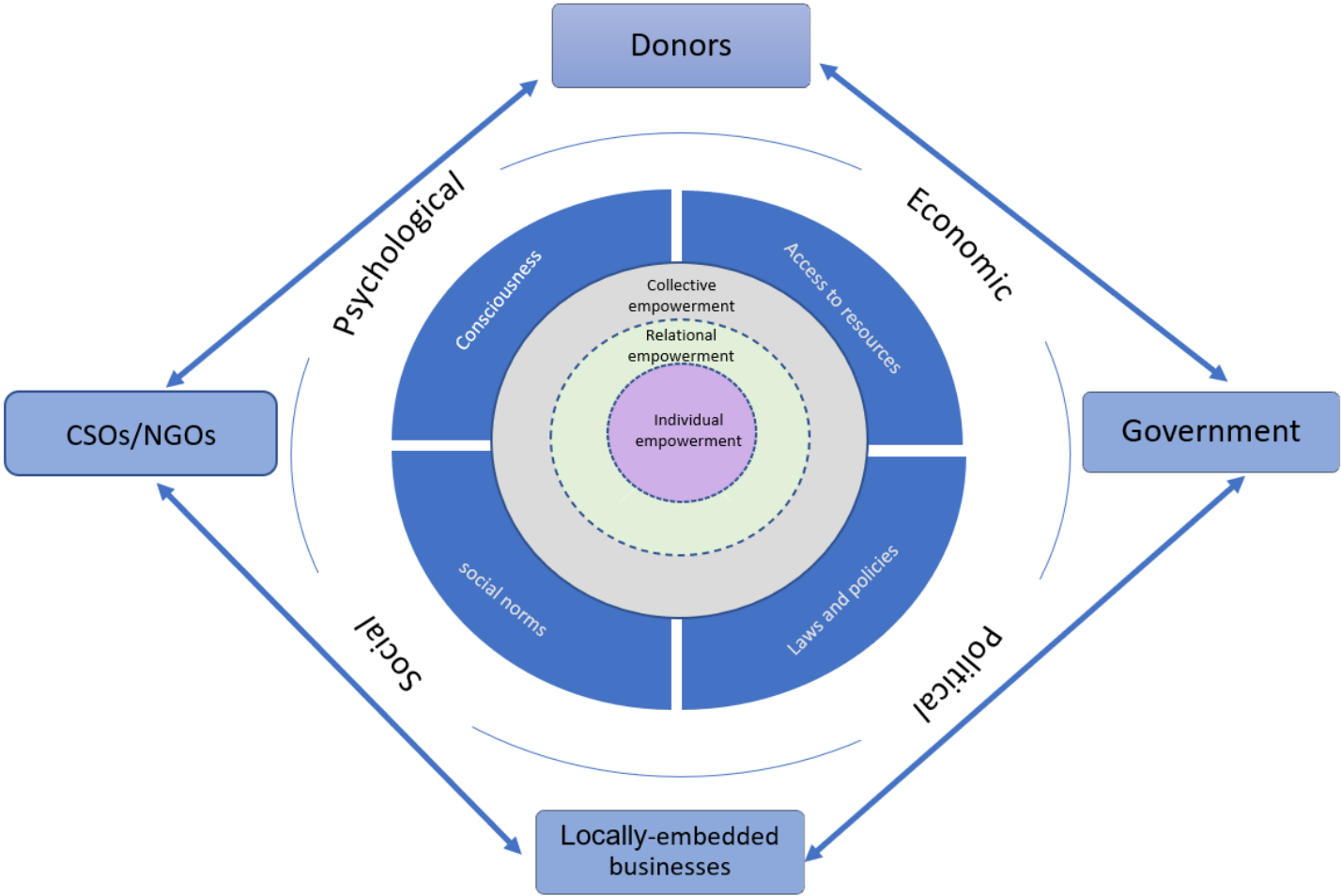
9.2.3. Rethinking the donor-business partnership approach for women's empowerment

The concept of women's empowerment adopted in this research is the process of activating women's self-confidence, capabilities, and consciousness so they can exert greater control over their lives, have better access to and control over resources, and raise their voices about their needs and concerns in a way that challenges inequitable structures, rules, and norms (Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Scheyvens, 1999; Scheyvens, 2020) (section 3.6). My proposed conceptual framework for the donor-business partnership approach for women's empowerment in Chapter Three, section 3.6, looks at the areas of change at the individual and the structural level (informal and formal rules) that are required for partnerships to facilitate and achieve gender equality and women's empowerment (Rao and Kelleher's framework) and assesses women's empowerment in four dimensions: psychological, economic, political, and social (Scheyvens's framework). However, this framework does not emphasise the importance of the relational aspect of empowerment. It does not show how changes in power relations within the household, and with the community, local authorities, and businesses affect women's empowerment. It also does not show collective empowerment as part of the process of women's empowerment. Therefore, a new theoretical framework is needed to reflect these relationships.

My further research in the literature following my fieldwork and my realisation of the need for a more holistic empowerment framework in WEE Programmes found the women's empowerment framework by Lombardini et al.'s (2017) three levels of change empowerment framework and Huis et al.'s (2017) three-dimensional women's empowerment helpful in addressing these issues. The new framework I propose (Figure 9.1) uses the conceptual framework I developed at the outset of the study and adds relational and collective empowerment adapted from Lombardini et al.'s (2017) and Huis et al.'s (2017) empowerment frameworks.

The new framework consists of four holistic areas of change for both women's and men's consciousness, women's access to resources, changes in social norms and laws and policies required for women's psychological, economic, social, and political empowerment at an individual, relational, and collective empowerment level. The interactions between these three levels will depend on specific contexts. For example, in some contexts, changes at the relational level can lead to changes at the individual and collective levels, but sometimes it is the collective that enables the relational and individual changes. The dotted lines between the three levels reflect this flexibility.

Figure 9.1. Donor-Business Partnership Approach to Women's Empowerment



Source: Author, drawing from Lombardini et al. (2017), Huis et al. (2017), Rao & Kelleher (2005), and Scheyvens (1999).

Individual empowerment

As empowerment cannot be bestowed (Friedmann, 1992; Mosedale, 2005; Rowlands, 1997, 1998), empowerment has to come from women themselves (power from within). Therefore, women must be “the prime movers” (Elias et al., 2021, p. 332). This refers to women experiencing enhanced self-confidence, self-esteem, and dignity (psychological empowerment) and having better access to resources, skills, and knowledge to participate in a value chain linkage with businesses to earn stable incomes (economic empowerment) (Rao & Kelleher, 2005; Lombardini et al., 2017; Scheyvens, 2020). The change process can start with how women feel self-esteem and self-worth, like the case of the director of the herbal cooperative, and how they want to make the change to improve their situations (power from within). They are proactive in looking for opportunities and taking action to help themselves and other women (power to and power with). My research shows that economic and psychological empowerment are interlinked and complementary (section 8.4.4). Therefore, development agencies can collaborate with businesses to facilitate change by supporting women with better access to productive inputs, training, and secured markets for better incomes. However, this process will not happen if women do not want to participate. They still need to be prime movers.

Another change that should occur at the personal or individual level is that women and men increase their critical consciousness to challenge inequality structures and improve their access to community meetings (political empowerment) (O’Hara & Clement, 2018; Rao & Kelleher, 2005). Women can also increase their confidence and capability to participate in and hold leadership positions, and ideally, be supported by men in such endeavours.

Development agencies can facilitate empowering processes by “clearing obstacles” and creating a conducive environment for empowerment (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 405; Mosedale, 2005; Scheyvens, 2000). For example, to enhance women’s political empowerment, development programmes can provide training and support to build confidence for women to participate and raise their voices in community meetings (Movono & Dahles, 2017; Tran & Walter, 2014). They also raise awareness, provide training for men to

support women (this aligns with MAD approaches), and support changing laws and regulations for women's participation in decision-making bodies.

Relational empowerment

Relational empowerment refers to changes in “the relationships and power relations within the woman's surrounding network” to change power through, power with, and power to (Lombardini et al. 2017, p.6). Leena Camadoo, a global advisor women's economic justice of Oxfam GB, suggests that changes must occur through the involvement of various stakeholders:

Too often “women's empowerment” is framed as a “women's issue”. When in fact, we need to see a holistic change where other actors also change their behaviours to remove the barriers which women face. We also need to see all actors taking accountability for the ways in which they impact women's livelihoods.

According to Tibi and Kittaneh (2019), relational empowerment includes changes in power relations within the household between husbands and wives, in the community between women and local authorities, and in markets between women and businesses. The changes in power relations with men can help women increase bargaining power and influence household decisions, have better access to resources, training, and community meetings and reduce the workload. It can also help to reduce the risk of domestic violence. Therefore, men should be involved from the beginning of women's empowerment programmes to make these changes consistent with MAD approaches (Chant & Gutmann, 2002; Greig et al., 2000; Levy et al., 2000; MenEngage Alliance & UN Women, 2014; Parpart, 2015). Family and community perceptions of gender roles also influence women's participation in economic and political activities (ADB, 2016; Dunsch, 2022; Galiè & Farnworth, 2019; Yen & Thang, 2022). ADB (2016) suggests working with families and communities to discuss stereotypes and the benefits of engaging women to remove inappropriate gender-based perceptions constraining women's economic and political participation. Similarly, a project to engage women in sugarcane value chains in Malawi raised awareness in the community to recognise women's abilities and contributions to commercial farming (Adams et al., 2019). There is evidence that educating boys and girls about gender equality in school is effective in changing gender-biased attitudes and stereotypes (Brinkman et al., 2011; Keleher & Franklin, 2008). Relational change

can also happen in women's interactions with businesses and local authorities. As discussed in section 8.4.2 above, business and local authorities also need to take a more gender-sensitive approach in supporting women to have better access to productive inputs, training, information, and knowledge. Businesses may themselves remove the barriers that constrain women, or may require the support of development programmes. Local authorities can work to ensure that women have full access to these services, as discussed above. The activities to raise awareness and change behaviours of businesses and local authorities also need to be carried out in tandem with the programme activities to deliver productive inputs and training directly to women.

Collective empowerment

This level is added to the women's empowerment framework to reflect the collective aspect of empowerment. Rowlands (1998), Kabeer (2012), and O'Hara and Clement (2018) argue that empowerment should be both at the individual and collective level, a collective action (power with) to influence changes in social norms and policies and laws (structural change). As discussed in section 8.4.3, collective empowerment will improve women's position within the family and society. Huis et al. (2017, p. 6) refer to this level of change as "societal empowerment", meaning women's roles and positions are recognised and respected in society (social empowerment).

Collective change can be achieved when many women in the community are empowered or work together through formal organisations or government structures such as women's unions, microfinance groups, cooperatives, or informal social networks to drive change (Diprose et al., 2020). According to Rubin and Manfre (2014) and Jones et al. (2012), participation in associations and groups can help advocate for changes in gender norms and reduce gender inequalities. Participation in value chains can also help women to do so through horizontal network linkages, production groups, and cooperative activities (Rubin & ManFre, 2014). However, as women are already double burdened with productive and reproductive labour, the organisation of women into associations and groups, if not appropriately organised, can give women a "triple burden" and leave them more

disadvantaged with organisational labour burden unless there is also progress in men taking up other housework (Elias & Arora-Jonsson, 2017; Lyon et al., 2016).

In my research context, female members of the herbal cooperative are collectively empowered (section 8.4.3). Women are more confident and have better access to training, productive inputs, and income. In addition, gender equality activities and training, which target both cooperative members (97.5% are women) and their husbands, help men understand and support their wives (section 7.5). The other reason that women in the herbal cooperative enjoy more benefits is probably that agricultural cooperatives or farmer production groups can create enabling environments for women to have a collective voice and bargaining power to access productive inputs and better outputs (Ahnach & Rachidi, 2021; Arhin, 2022; Business Fights Poverty Global Summit, 2021; FAO, 2016; Gurung et al., 2015; Hunt & Samman, 2016; Mulema et al., 2016; Nath, 2022; Woldu & Tadesse, 2015). Female cooperative members can share experiences and support each other (power with), can make other women realise their potential, and can overcome the constraints that their peers are similarly facing (power within) (Kakati & Kakoty, 2022; Meinzen-Dick et al., 2014; Pyburn et al., 2021; Said-Allsopp & Tallontire, 2015; Setyaka, 2022).

Munir (2022, p. 9) found that participation in a cooperative helped women expand their “legal consciousness” and understanding of rights and legal knowledge through the training programme. Similarly, Setyaka (2022) claims that cooperatives, especially women’s cooperatives, could raise women’s political interests and advocate for policy changes on gender equality, justice, and social inclusion through informal and formal education programmes. Participating in cooperatives helps women to have more opportunities to network and access social, political, and economic information and enhance bargaining power at both household and community levels (Nath, 2022). According to Carr et al. (1996), “organising women [into women’s groups] for economic empowerment can lead to trust, reciprocity, and solidarity among women, which, in turn, often translates into joint or collective action for common objectives by women” (p.216).

Involvement of other stakeholders in a donor-business partnership for women's empowerment

The research findings revealed the gaps in the donor-private sector partnership in addressing barriers that prevent women from benefiting from economic development interventions. Therefore, there is a need to bring in additional partners to address these gaps. The new proposed framework includes the involvement and participation of governments, civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs in the donor-business partnership for women's economic empowerment (Figure 9.1). This framework concurs with the recommendations of Prahalad's multi-stakeholder partnership framework for economic development and social transformation (Prahalad, 2006).

A multi-stakeholder partnership could take advantage of each group's strength (Nelson, 2010; OECD, 2016a; Pedersen, 2006). These parties must collaborate effectively on a shared agenda (Business Fights Poverty Global Summit, 2021; Porter & Kramer, 2011; Prahalad, 2006). As discussed in section 8.2, businesses bring to the partnership know-how and skills on production and market connection potential for the products that can help women increase their incomes. They can also co-fund activities with donors. Meanwhile, donors have funds and connections with the government to provide a conducive environment for business development in terms of policies and administrative procedures as appraised by the business staff in section 6.3.1. Funding from donors covers activities such as cost-sharing for facilities upgrading, networking, capacity building, and experience sharing. The government's participation is helpful for advocating necessary changes in laws and regulations required for gender equality and women's empowerment, such as issues related to land and property ownership policies and other discriminatory laws. In the Vietnamese context, the government's participation at the beginning of the partnership is a must because of the aid management structure in the country. While the primary objective of business is to make profits, NGOs and CSOs can bring social justice and sustainability agendas to the fore. NGOs and CSOs have practical experience and skills to support gender-inclusive practices and empowerment processes (ADB, 2016; Scheyvens, 2000; Zakuan & Hassan, 2016).

9.3. Contribution to policy: How could donors better engage with the private sector to support women's empowerment?

The holistic women's empowerment framework recommended above has significant implications for the development of an intervention approach in donor-private partnership programmes. It calls for changes in the current donors' instrumentalist approach to women's economic empowerment, moving to a more transformative approach that addresses underlying barriers that block women from being empowered in psychological, economic, social, and political dimensions at an individual, collective, and relational level. It also calls for multiple stakeholders to be involved in women's empowerment programmes. The private sector partnership approach to development should not be thought of solely as a partnership between donor and business partner, but should also involve local government, NGOs and other community partners, such as women's unions.

As discussed in section 8.3, women can be empowered or disempowered when participating in commercial value chains. Therefore, if not appropriately designed, development programmes may make women more disadvantaged. Quisumbing et al. (2015) gave an example of a project in Mozambique, which delivered cows to the household heads to support smallholder farmers to increase their incomes by connecting to a dairy value chain. However, instead of helping women, it made them more burdened with taking care of the cows while men, usually the household head, controlled the income and had the ownership of the cow. According to Kabeer and Subrahmanian (1996), gender-blind programmes can unintentionally harm or disadvantage women. So, development programmes which aim to empower women by engaging them in commercial value chains need to place gender "at the core rather than periphery" of value chain studies (Ihalainen et al., 2020, p. 1) and have specific interventions focusing on women's empowerment outcomes (Pyburn et al., 2021). This means that, in the case of the GREAT programme, gender equality and women's empowerment issues should be targeted directly, rather than simply having them incorporated into the programme activities (section 6.2.2).

My research findings revealed some tensions that development agencies should consider when they want to engage with the private sector to support women's empowerment. The first issue is that women are likely to have more control over low-income crops. But as soon as the amount of money involved increases, men assert dominance. The question for the donors is how they can support women to overcome the barrier of men claiming their power and benefit from high-value commercialised value chains. This objective can be achieved if donors consider the relational aspect of empowerment (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015). Development interventions should involve both men and women, bringing transformative changes in critical consciousness, attitudes, behaviours, and power relations (Gurung et al., 2015; Heilman & Meyers, 2016; Hill, 2011; MacArthur et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2021; Ragasa et al., 2021; Singh & Babbar, 2022; Spark et al., 2021).

The second issue donors should take into account when they engage with businesses in development programmes is that businesses are generally profit-oriented. Donors need to bring on board businesses that place a large emphasis on reciprocity, wider community goals, and women's empowerment. Findlay-Brooks et al. (2010, p. 186) highlight that the key principle of partnerships is, "to find the right balance between mutual commitment and compatibility and the complementarity of expertise that the different sectors can bring". Davies (2011) and Sarwar (2015, p. 25) claim that the critical determinant for effective partnership is to have "mutually reinforcing incentives". The mutual benefits, in this case, would be to increase efficiency, diversify suppliers, enhance the reputation of businesses, and increase access to markets, income, and agency for women (Tibi & Kittaneh, 2019).

Micro and small locally and socially embedded businesses, including indigenous businesses, seem to have the required features above, as discussed in section 8.2. They are claimed to be "more likely than large companies to be involved in improving their communities" (Kim & Jin, 2022, p. 704). However, they have limited resources to expand their scope to reach more poor people and cope with rapidly changing markets (Jeppesen, 2006; Kim & Jin, 2022). Therefore, as also discussed in section 8.2, the partnership with micro and small businesses in women's empowerment programmes needs to include a component to develop the capacity of these businesses. This involves not only tapping into the resources and leveraging funding of the business as donors would expect in a partnership with the private sector (DFAT,

n.d; Di Bella et al., 2013b; Donovan & Stoian, 2023). Development management capacity for micro and small businesses is vital for the sustainability of development programmes which aim to partner with the private sector to support low-income women. It also requires supporting policies from the government (section 6.4.5).

The third issue is that a holistic approach to women's empowerment will require a longer timeframe than the usual project cycle of three to five years. The scope of work may be beyond the capacity of a single programme (Buvinić & Furst-Nichols, 2014). Therefore, the donor-private sector partnership should be realistic about what can be achieved within the project and programme time frame and the roles of the business in achieving gender equality and delivering women's empowerment programmes.

As discussed in section 8.2, challenging gender norms and inequality structures takes time and requires extra effort from all partners (Business Fights Poverty Global Summit, 2021). The patriarchal system has been embedded into society and has influenced gender power relations. Changing the system is difficult but possible (Mayanja et al., 2022; Zakuan & Hassan, 2016). According to Hoang and Yeoh (2011), gender practice is flexible and can be adapted according to socio-economic conditions. Gender practices may also be altered and adapted by the younger generations (section 5.3). Similarly, Adam et al. (2022, p.8) found that "the pre-existing gender roles are not stable. They can alter if the status of women changes". Development programmes can target changes in social norms which constrain women's participation in commercial production, such as changes in perception about gender roles and asset ownership. For example, Oxfam GB supported women in Ethiopia to participate in bee-keeping for the honey value chain, which used to be dominated by men, to improve their household income (Belete & Ayele, 2020). Similarly, CARE facilitated joint ownership of a dairy cow, which was usually owned by men in Bangladesh (Quisumbing et al., 2015).

Lastly, any activities initiated by development interventions need to avoid placing additional burdens on women. Changes in gender roles and asset ownership, as proposed above, might create an additional workload for women (Quisumbing et al., 2015). Likewise, organising women in groups or associations for collective actions and empowerment can also add an organisational burden to women's existing workload, as discussed above. The proposal for

the involvement of both men and women in development programmes makes sense in terms of addressing these issues. For example, the herbal cooperative targets both men and women in gender training and observes the positive change in men's attitudes. However, time poverty may prevent both husbands and wives from participating in the training, as experienced in the project to empower women in agricultural value chains in Malawi: "It is often not feasible to have a man and a woman within a household both attending a training—only one attends so that the other one can work" (Ragasa et al., 2021, p. 49). Therefore, development interventions should be creative to integrate gender content and find appropriate communication channels to send messages to both men and women. Ragasa et al. (2021, p. 49) suggest that "having shorter and more practical training, selecting convenient time and location of the training, and providing childcare services" could help to increase both men's and women's participation.

9.4. Limitations and recommendations for future research

There are some limitations that would be useful for future research to explore. Firstly, all three donor-business partnerships studied have only been implemented for just over two years. As discussed above, this time frame is too short for the programme to achieve significant gender transformation. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused delays to the programme activities and affected business operations. Thus, the long-term implications of the donor-private sector partnership on women's empowerment have yet to be seen. I suggest future longitudinal research to explore this issue. Secondly, my research only discussed how the business and donor partnerships might benefit women who are the producers. Future research could also examine how women are empowered when they are full-time or part-time employees. Thirdly, the discussion of gender relations of gender-diverse people was not included within the scope of this study. This presents an opportunity for future investigation. Fourthly, the remote fieldwork, with support from the RAs, also presented some challenges concerning the range and depth of information collected. I did not specifically ask the research assistants to collect data on collective empowerment, especially in women-led businesses. I think it could have been useful to do so as it emerged from my research that women's collective empowerment and women-led cooperatives were more empowering, such as the case of the herbal cooperative. This could be an avenue for future

research. Finally, similar to other qualitative research, my research was context-specific and should not be generalised. However, the research findings reveal some common issues in women's challenges and barriers in patriarchal societies and the limitations of the donor's instrumental approach to women's economic empowerment. Therefore, the proposed holistic framework and policy implications for the donor-business partnership for women's empowerment can still be applied broadly in other contexts.

9.5. Personal learning

It has been an enormous learning journey for me as I moved from the position of working for a donor agency (DFAT) in Vietnam that embraces the women's economic empowerment approach, to researching and analysing it. Before undertaking this research, I believed that investing in women was smart economics and women would benefit from the increased income resulting from their families' connection to the market. As a programme manager, I was under pressure to track whether the programme achieved its target within the time frame and focused on the number of jobs that the programme generated, the number of women that the programme reached, and the level of funding leveraged from the private sector. I was reluctant to integrate broader gender issues into the partnerships with the businesses because I was afraid that would scare the businesses away and slow down the programme's progress. However, this research has made me realise that focusing narrowly on connecting women to commercialised production value chains does not always empower women. I understand that I was naïve to accept the programme's assumptions that:

“Women will have the time, the interest, and the family support needed to engage with the new approaches;

Ethnic minority women's general lack of basic education will not be a fundamental barrier to their engagement in markets; and

Men are willing to take on new roles, or a greater share of joint responsibilities in the home, to support women's economic participation.”

(GREAT document design, p.vi)

These assumptions are all critical requirements for women to be empowered. However, it cannot be assumed that these conditions will happen without significant efforts from all

partners involved in the programme. Men and families need to get involved in the programme to support women. Thus, time and resources must be invested in raising their awareness and altering social perceptions of the roles of men and women, so that men can take on more housework and support women's economic participation without being humiliated by the community. The language barrier caused by a lack of basic education is a major challenge for women, preventing them from engaging with business and the community. This issue must be taken seriously as it significantly affects women's well-being, confidence, and ability to engage in markets.

It is encouraging to see movement from multinational corporations, such as Mars, a leading chocolate corporation, which is making progress in tackling gender inequality in their cocoa supply chains. According to Inge Jacobs, Global Senior Manager Human Rights and Income, Cocoa for Mars Wrigley (a philanthropic foundation of Mars), "supporting women's economic empowerment is not enough to unlock their full potential. A transformational approach that pursues gender equality and addresses the root causes of inequalities, including gender norms, is needed for lasting change." (Business Fights Poverty Global Summit, 2021, p. 1). Similarly, the GREAT programme phase 2 has acknowledged the importance of the "non-economic dimension" and the need to recognise and address the structural barriers for women's empowerment (GREAT, 2022b, p. 2). It gives me hope that there will be a continual shift from an instrumental approach towards a more transformational approach to women's empowerment both from donors and the private sector. With greater involvement of NGOs/CSOs and others who can advocate for the poor and disadvantaged, it is more likely companies will be held to account. Oxfam (2023, p.31) recommends not using the term "Women's Economic Empowerment" because it "risks putting the onus on women to change themselves in order to fit into the existing economic system". Instead, they recommend using the term "Women's Economic Justice" to "recognise the right of women to participate in, and benefit from, the economy....Governments, the private sector, civil society and individuals therefore have a responsibility to address the structural barriers which deny women economic justice". I hope my thesis will contribute to both the theoretical and the policy part of the transformational process to achieve economic justice for women.

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Appendices



APPENDIX 1: STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION FORM

DRC 16



STATEMENT OF CONTRIBUTION DOCTORATE WITH PUBLICATIONS/MANUSCRIPTS

We, the candidate and the candidate's Primary Supervisor, certify that all co-authors have consented to their work being included in the thesis and they have accepted the candidate's contribution as indicated below in the *Statement of Originality*.

Name of candidate:	Lan Phuong Thi Nguyen
Name/title of Primary Supervisor:	Professor Regina Scheyvens
In which chapter is the manuscript /published work:	Sections 4.7 & 9.2.1
<p>Please select one of the following three options:</p> <p><input checked="" type="radio"/> The manuscript/published work is published or in press</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Please provide the full reference of the Research Output: Section 4.7 (Chapter 4) and Section 9.2.1 (Chapter 9) have been published as a journal paper: Nguyen, P., Scheyvens, R., Beban, A., & Gardyne, S. (2022). From a distance: The 'new normal' for researchers and research assistants engaged in remote fieldwork. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>, 21. https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069221089108. <p><input type="radio"/> The manuscript is currently under review for publication – please indicate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The name of the journal: The percentage of the manuscript/published work that was contributed by the candidate: Describe the contribution that the candidate has made to the manuscript/published work: <p><input type="radio"/> It is intended that the manuscript will be published, but it has not yet been submitted to a journal</p>	
Candidate's Signature:	 <small>Digitally signed by Phuong Nguyen DN: cn=Phuong Nguyen, o=Massey University email=phuongn@massey.ac.nz Date: 2023.06.15 09:56:27 +1200</small>
Date:	15-Jun-2023
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APPENDIX 2: TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR RESEARCH ASSISTANTS

Research topic: Engaging with the private sector for development: A critical analysis of attempts to partner with businesses for women's economic empowerment in Vietnam.

1. Background:

A PhD student at Massey University is looking for three female Research Assistants to assist with data collection on the research project to interrogate the donor approach in partnership with a local government and small and medium enterprises to economically empower ethnic minority women in Vietnam. The project will address the following key research questions:

- What are the perceptions and understandings of different partners about women's economic empowerment?
- How do ethnic minority women benefit from their participation in the agriculture and tourism value chains?
- What are the strengths, limitations, and challenges of private sector involvement in women's economic empowerment programmes?
- How could donors better engage with the private sector to support ethnic women's empowerment?

This research will be carried out in three case studies which represent three different partnership models that DFAT is using to collaborate with enterprises for the local ethnic minority women's economic empowerment under the Gender-Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT) in Bac Ha, Sa Pa, and Van Ban district, Lao Cai province.

2. Scope of work:

The research assistants are expected to carry out the following tasks (these tasks will be adjusted according to the COVID-19 situation):

- Carry out semi-structured in-depth interviews with ethnic minorities (husbands and wives) –estimated ten couples for each partnership model. A list of issues to cover (but not be limited by) in the interview with ethnic minority men and women (husband and wife will be interviewed separately where possible) are as follows:
 - Personal background information
 - Information on production activities
 - The level of confidence to participate in the production value chain
 - How are key decisions made in the family? Who decides what? And why?

- Gender division of labour
- Access to and control over resources and benefits
- Participation in community activities and social associations
- Attitude toward domestic violence
- Gender norms and practices that undermine and create barriers for women's participation in production and community activities
- Self-assessment of their incomes before and after joining the production value chain. Explanation of the reason for their assessment
- Other benefits or costs gained from their participation in the production value chains
- Suggestions on how donors and the private sector can collaborate to better support WEE
- Current constraints and challenges.

➤ Carry out focus group discussions on the above research topics.

Note: The research assistants will be trained and coached by the PhD researcher on the research methods and ethics. The research assistants are expected to write a research journal and share it with the PhD Researcher daily. The research assistants are also expected to have a daily Zoom or Zalo meeting with the PhD Researcher to report on the progress and discuss emerging issues and receive further guidance if needed. All interviews will be recorded with the permission of the research participants and send the PhD Researcher for transcribing and analysing.

3. Time: 6-8 weeks intermittently during March-August 2021

4. Requirements

- The three female university students of H'mong, Dao, and Tay ethnic groups preferably from Lao Cai province, and not from the same communities of the three case studies areas
- Speak fluently H'mong, Dao, and Tay language and understand cultural practices
- Proficiency in Microsoft Words
- Be responsible and willing to learn attitude.
- Willing to carry out the field trip independently.

5. Allowance: Cost for allowance, accommodation, and travel will be negotiated later based on the experience of the research assistants and the location of each person.

6. Contact detail: For further information, please contact Mrs Lan Phuong:

Email: L.P.Nguyen@massey.ac.nz

Zalo: +84 915 933 917

Mô tả công việc của trợ lý nghiên cứu

Đề tài

Hợp tác đối tác với doanh nghiệp tư nhân trong chương trình phát triển: Phân tích về những nỗ lực hợp tác với doanh nghiệp để nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam

1. Thông tin cơ bản

Nghiên cứu sinh tiến sĩ tại Đại học Massey đang tìm kiếm **ba nữ trợ lý Nghiên cứu** để hỗ trợ thu thập số liệu về dự án nghiên cứu về cách tiếp cận của nhà tài trợ hợp tác với chính quyền địa phương và các doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ để nâng cao quyền kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam. Các câu hỏi nghiên cứu chính của đề tài là:

- Nhận thức và hiểu biết của các đối tác về nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ như thế nào?
- Phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số được hưởng lợi như thế nào từ việc tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị nông nghiệp và du lịch?
- Thế mạnh, hạn chế và thách thức của sự tham gia của khu vực tư nhân trong các chương trình nâng cao quyền kinh tế của phụ nữ là gì?
- Làm thế nào các nhà tài trợ có thể hợp tác tốt hơn với khu vực tư nhân để hỗ trợ nâng cao quyền cho phụ nữ dân tộc?

Nghiên cứu sẽ được tiến hành ở ba dự án đại diện cho ba mô hình hợp tác khác nhau mà DFAT đang thực hiện để hợp tác với các doanh nghiệp để nâng cao quyền kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số địa phương theo Chương trình Nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ trong nông nghiệp và du lịch (GREAT) tại Bắc Hà, Sa Pa và huyện Văn Bàn, tỉnh Lào Cai.

2. Phạm vi công việc

Các trợ lý nghiên cứu dự kiến sẽ thực hiện các nhiệm vụ sau (các nhiệm vụ này sẽ được điều chỉnh tùy theo tình hình COVID-19):

- Thực hiện các cuộc phỏng vấn sâu với các hộ dân tộc thiểu số (chồng và vợ) - ước tính 10 - 15 hộ cho mỗi mô hình hợp tác. Phỏng vấn được tiến hành với phụ nữ hoặc nam giới của hộ gia đình sản xuất riêng (phụ nữ của hộ này, nam giới của hộ khác), hoặc phỏng vấn với cả vợ và chồng nếu điều kiện cho phép. Phỏng vấn được thực hiện bằng tiếng dân tộc. Thông tin cần thu thập (có thể mở rộng) trong cuộc phỏng vấn như sau:

- ✓ Thông tin cá nhân cơ bản
- ✓ Thông tin về hoạt động sản xuất
- ✓ Mức độ tự tin tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị sản xuất
- ✓ Các quyết định quan trọng được đưa ra trong gia đình như thế nào? Ai quyết định cái gì? Và tại sao?
- ✓ Phân chia lao động theo giới
- ✓ Tiếp cận và kiểm soát các nguồn lực và lợi ích trong gia đình

- ✓ Tham gia vào các hoạt động cộng đồng và các hội đoàn thể trong xã hội
- ✓ Thái độ đối với bạo lực gia đình
- ✓ Các chuẩn mực, tập tục và thực hành về giới làm suy yếu và tạo ra các rào cản cho sự tham gia của phụ nữ vào các hoạt động sản xuất và hoạt động cộng đồng
- ✓ Tự đánh giá thu nhập của mình trước và sau khi tham gia chuỗi giá trị sản xuất. Giải thích lý do đánh giá của họ.
- ✓ Các lợi ích hoặc chi phí khác thu được từ việc tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị sản xuất
- ✓ Các đề xuất về cách các nhà tài trợ và khu vực tư nhân có thể hợp tác để hỗ trợ tốt hơn nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ.
- ✓ Những hạn chế và thách thức hiện tại đối với việc phụ nữ tham gia vào hoạt động kinh tế liên kết sản xuất với doanh nghiệp.
- ✓ Sự tự tin khi tham gia vào các tổ chức chính quyền hay các hội nhóm nghề nghiệp để nêu lên tiếng nói và quan điểm của họ để bảo vệ và đấu tranh cho các quyền lợi của họ?

- Thực hiện thảo luận nhóm tập trung về các chủ đề nghiên cứu trên.

Lưu ý: Các trợ lý nghiên cứu sẽ được tập huấn hướng dẫn về các phương pháp nghiên cứu và vấn đề đạo đức trong việc thực hiện nghiên cứu. Các trợ lý nghiên cứu sẽ được yêu cầu **viết nhật ký về quy trình thu thập số liệu** và chia sẻ nó với chủ đề tài nghiên cứu hàng ngày. Các trợ lý nghiên cứu cũng dự kiến sẽ họp qua Zoom hoặc Zalo hàng ngày để báo cáo về tiến độ và thảo luận về các vấn đề gặp phải trong quá trình thu thập số liệu và nhận được hướng dẫn thêm nếu cần thiết. Tất cả các cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được **ghi âm** lại, **sao chép ra dưới dạng văn bản Word** với sự cho phép của những người tham gia phỏng vấn và gửi cho chủ đề tài nghiên cứu để phân tích. **Hình ảnh ghi lại** trong quá trình đi phỏng vấn và họp nhóm cũng được gửi cho chủ đề tài nghiên cứu với sự đồng ý của người được chụp.

3. Thời gian: Thời gian thu thập số liệu không liên tục trong khoảng từ tháng 3-tháng 8 năm 2021. Dự kiến khoảng 3 tuần/1 trợ lý nghiên cứu.

4. Yêu cầu: Trợ lý nghiên cứu (lý tưởng):

- Ba nữ sinh viên thuộc các dân tộc H'mông, Dao và Tày và không phải từ cùng một cộng đồng với dân tộc của ba mô hình nghiên cứu tại Văn Bàn, Sa Pa (xã Tả Phìn), Bắc Hà.
- Chưa từng tham gia hoạt động nghiên cứu của GREAT
- Nói thành thạo tiếng H'mong, Dao, và tiếng Tày và am hiểu văn hóa các dân tộc này
- Thành thạo Microsoft Words
- Có trách nhiệm và sẵn sàng học hỏi.
- Sẵn sàng thực hiện chuyển đi thực địa và phỏng vấn các hộ dân một cách độc lập.

5. Thù lao: Chi phí ăn ở, đi lại và tiền công sẽ được thảo luận dựa trên kinh nghiệm và địa bàn của từng trợ lý nghiên cứu.

6. Mọi thắc mắc thông tin thêm về nghiên cứu xin vui lòng liên hệ với cô Nguyễn Thi Lan Phương:

Email: L.P.Nguyen@massey.ac.nz

Zalo: +84 915 933 917

APPENDIX 3: INTERVIEW GUIDES

Interview guides for the RAs to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews

Research participants:

- Husband and wife (or wife only or husband only) participating in the value chains after the project commencing – 4-6 HHs for each ethnic group.
- Women-headed households (widowed, divorced, or not married) participating in the value chains– 1HH for each ethnic group.

(Note: Preferable to select HHs that production activity is a new or improved economic function for women to participate)

Key Principles

- The interviews will be conducted in the respective ethnic minority language where possible.
- Build rapport with interviewees. Turn the interview into a conversation and prompt the flow of discussion on the topic. Note that it is not a survey for yes/no questions. Instead, try to find the stories behind it.
- Aim for the quality, in-depth stories, not the quantities (the number of interviews)
- Ask about concrete things they might experience. For example, how does your husband react to you when you earn more money? Or can you tell me the time when you feel confident?
- It wouldn't matter if you don't do the table (3&4) with every interviewee, but it is important for you to discuss the different aspects of empowerment (psychological, economic, social, and political).
- Depending on the context, some households will be interviewed with both husband and wife (when interviewing both husbands and wives, you observe the behaviours – who answer first, any tension, any conflict or differences between the responses of husband and wife), some households interview only husbands or only wives.

Preparation for the interview

- Understand local culture (discuss with the local women union first before going to the HHs)

- Prepare small gifts
- Prepare contact details of relevant local government services such as extension services, where and whom women can seek support in case of domestic violence to share with them when necessary during the interview.

Interview process

- Introduce yourself: who you are, where is your living, what you are studying, talk about things you are observing that are similar or different between your areas and their areas, etc. to create a friendly atmosphere for an in-depth interview.
- Introduce the research and the purpose of your visit: You can show my photo and introduce me and explain why I can't travel to do the research. My professional background with DFAT, and how I always wondered, during visits to their project, etc. whether the women were fully benefiting from the programme and if the partners were working really well to achieve this. This is why I've made this the subject of my PhD research at Massey University.
- Read the Participant Information Sheet in the ethnic minority language (Tay/Dao/Hmong) and provide the interviewees with a hard copy in Vietnamese.
- Explain the Informed Consent Form and ask if the interviewees are happy to sign the form or to give verbal agreement.
- Ask the interviewees to select a time and place they feel most comfortable for the interview.
- Observe and take note of all participants presented at the interview.

Discussion issues

The following main issues (but not be limited by) will be covered. Start the questions like tell us about when and why you started producing then prompt for how long, how much, and how their participation has changed over time. No need to go through the order of the discussion content below. Go with the flow of the conversation and then prompts the discussion contents.

- Print out the following table and fill in the information at the end of the interview (except the note on the starting interview time). Personal background information (name, sex, age, ethnicity, educational background, location, interview time and date)

Table 1: Key HH's information

Name	
Sex	
Age	
Education	

Ethnicity	
Interview date	
Interview time	Start time: _____ Endtime: _____
Location	
Consent given	
Who are at the interview	
Observations	

- Information on production activities:
 - Tell us about your production. For example, how big is your field?
 - How long have you been producing the product?
 - How long have you participated in the value chain with X/Y/Z company?
 - Who is involved the most with the activities?
 - Could you tell us how your life changed after joining the linkage with X/Y/Z company? (If interview with women only) OR Could you tell us how your life changed after your family/your wife joined the linkage with X/Y/Z company? (If an interview with both men and women or men only). Depending on the responses, prompt the discussion to focus on the four empowerment dimensions below, but not necessarily in the same order).

- 1. **Psychological empowerment aspect** (to assess if women experience enhanced self-esteem and satisfaction about their lives)
 - Note: Clarify if production activity is a new economic function that women participate in. If growing/producing a particular product has always been a part of the women’s work, then ask about the changes before and after joining the production value chain.

Table 2: Psychological empowerment

Interview guides to ask women	Interview guides to ask men
How do women perceive themselves in their position in the family? Has this changed since being involved in the partnership?	How do men perceive the position of their wives in the family? Has this changed since being involved in the partnership?
How confident are women in participating in the production value chain? Tell me the time when you feel confident to make decisions about the production activities.	How do they understand and support their wives in undertaking business-related activities?
Have you noticed any changes in your and your spouse's attitudes and behaviours since being involved in the partnership with X/Y/Z company? Can you give an example of how these things have changed...	

2. Economic empowerment:

- Tell us about any new skills and knowledge you (women) learned from your engagement with X/Y/Z company.
- If you compare your family's income before and after joining the business ...? how did your house income change? Increase more or less or not increase at all? Can you explain why you judged that?
- How are key decisions made in the family? Describe the decision-making process. Who makes the final decision? Table 3 below is to guide the discussion only (you don't need to complete the table for every HH if there is not enough time)
 - M or F: indicates that Men or Women made the decision solely
 - Mf: indicates that it's mostly men but partly women
 - Fm: indicates that it's mostly women but partly men
 - MF: indicates MF equally or jointly made decisions

Table 3: Key economic decisions

Decisions	Men	Women
what to produce		
what and where inputs to purchase?		
Who attends the training?		
Borrowing money?		
Participation in the partnership?		
Where and when to sell the products?		
Spending money*		

**Prompt discussion around how the money is managed in the family? Who keeps the money?*

- Have you noticed any changes in women's rights to access (the right to use) and control over assets (vehicles, mobile phones, tools etc.) and resources (land, houses, training etc.) and to get involved in the household's decision on production and finance before and after joining the production value chain?
- What do you think when men share the housework in the family?
- Are there any household tensions around the issues of household decision-making, control over money, and division of labour?
- What do the men think when women are participating in the value chain activities or taking new economic functions to earn money and men are helping the wives with housework, taking care of children etc.?
- How the community perceives the position of women if women are earning more money and men are doing more housework? (Note that these questions are related to Social empowerment but raise them here to make the connections).
- How is the gender division of labour in your family? Any changes before and after joining the production value chain. Table 4 below is to guide the discussion only: (you don't need to complete the table for every HH if there is not enough time – do it with 1 or 2 HHs only to have a sense of gender division of labour in the area)
 - vvv indicates that frequency is high
 - vv indicates that frequency is medium
 - v indicates that frequency is low

Table 4: Labour division analysis

Items	Men	Women
Production activities: - land preparation - sowing - irrigating - weeding - harvesting - semi-processing - transporting - selling		
Social reproduction: - doing housework - taking care of children - collecting water and fuel		
Community engagement: - Community meetings		

3. Social empowerment:

- Are there any gender norms and practices that undermine and create barriers to women’s participation in production and community activities? What do women can or can’t do? What do women think about these norms?
 - For example, can women move freely around the village and participate in community meetings and spiritual ceremonies? Any changes before and after joining the production value chain.
- Are women leading or joining women or social networks for community activities (helping other women, doing charity, chairing the school committees etc.)? Again compare changes before and after joining the value chain.
- Do women have better access to education and health care services as a result of the changes in the community to value and appreciate the role of women more?

4. Political empowerment (participation in the key decision-making process)

- Are women confident to participate in community meetings and other events when decisions are made? Tell us some examples.
- Do women hold leadership positions? How does the community perceive female leaders?
- Tell us the time when women were confident to raise their voices in the meetings to question decisions relating to their needs and concerns made at the community level forum or beyond.
 - a. How do the men support women’s participation in community activities?
- Tell us the time when women desired to know more about policies, land, laws and exercise legal rights as the signal of their political empowerment.

5. Other benefits or costs gained from their participation in the production value chains

6. Current constraints and challenges for women's participation in production linkage with the business?
7. What is the impact of COVID-19 on the household's business activities relating to the production value chain? What support did you receive from the company/cooperative?
8. Suggestions on how donors and the private sector can collaborate to better support WEE.

Hướng dẫn trợ lý nghiên cứu phỏng vấn sâu với hộ gia đình

Đối tượng nghiên cứu

- Phỏng vấn vợ và chồng (hoặc phỏng vấn riêng vợ hoặc chồng) tham gia vào liên kết sản xuất sau khi dự án bắt đầu – phỏng vấn mỗi nhóm dân tộc 4-6 hộ
- Hộ do phụ nữ làm chủ hộ (góa bụa, ly hôn hoặc không kết hôn) tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị sau khi dự án bắt đầu: phỏng vấn mỗi nhóm dân tộc – 1 hộ

(Lưu ý: Lý tưởng nhất là chọn các hộ mà nhờ có dự án phụ nữ mới tham gia vào hoạt động sản xuất liên kết với doanh nghiệp)

Những nguyên tắc cơ bản

- Các cuộc phỏng vấn sẽ được thực hiện bằng ngôn ngữ dân tộc thiểu số tương ứng
- Xây dựng mối quan hệ với những người được phỏng vấn. Biến cuộc phỏng vấn thành một cuộc trò chuyện và thúc đẩy luồng thảo luận về chủ đề này. Lưu ý rằng đây không phải là một cuộc khảo sát cho các câu hỏi có / không. Hãy tìm hiểu những câu chuyện đằng sau nó.
- Hãy nhắm đến chất lượng của cuộc phỏng vấn sâu, những câu chuyện, chứ không phải số lượng các cuộc phỏng vấn
- Hỏi về những điều cụ thể mà họ có thể trải qua. Ví dụ, chồng bạn phản ứng với bạn như thế nào khi bạn kiếm được nhiều tiền hơn? Hoặc bạn có thể cho tôi biết thời gian mà bạn cảm thấy tự tin?
- Sẽ không thành vấn đề nếu bạn không thực hiện Bảng (3&4) dưới đây với tất cả các hộ được phỏng vấn nhưng điều quan trọng là bạn phải thảo luận về các khía cạnh khác nhau của nâng cao quyền năng (tâm lý, kinh tế, xã hội và chính trị) với tất cả các hộ.
- Tùy thuộc vào bối cảnh, một số hộ gia đình sẽ được phỏng vấn cả vợ và chồng (khi phỏng vấn cả vợ và chồng, bạn quan sát các hành vi - ai trả lời trước, có bất kỳ căng thẳng nào, bất kỳ mâu thuẫn hoặc khác biệt nào giữa câu trả lời của vợ và chồng), một số hộ chỉ phỏng vấn chồng hoặc chỉ vợ.

Chuẩn bị cho phỏng vấn

- Tìm hiểu về văn hóa địa phương (thảo luận trước với hội phụ nữ địa phương trước khi đến hộ gia đình)
- Chuẩn bị món quà nhỏ
- Chuẩn bị chi tiết liên lạc của các dịch vụ liên quan của chính quyền địa phương như dịch vụ khuyến nông, địa chỉ nơi phụ nữ có thể tìm kiếm sự giúp đỡ trong trường hợp bị bạo hành vv để chia sẻ với họ khi cần thiết trong cuộc phỏng vấn.

Chu trình phỏng vấn

- Giới thiệu bản thân: bạn là ai, bạn đang sống ở đâu, bạn đang học gì, nói về những điều bạn đang quan sát thấy giống hoặc khác nhau giữa khu vực của bạn và khu vực của họ, v.v. Mục đích để tạo không khí thân thiện cho cuộc phỏng vấn sâu.
- Giới thiệu nghiên cứu và mục đích chuyến thăm của bạn: Bạn có thể cho xem ảnh của tôi và giới thiệu về tôi: và tại sao tôi không thể tự mình thực hiện nghiên cứu. Thêm vào đó là thông tin về chuyên môn của tôi trước đây làm việc với DFAT, và tôi luôn tự hỏi, trong các chuyến

thăm dự án của họ, v.v., liệu những người phụ nữ được hưởng lợi như thế nào từ chương trình và các đối tác hợp tác với nhau như thế nào để phụ nữ được hưởng lợi từ chương trình nhiều nhất... đó là lý do tại sao tôi chọn chủ đề này làm đề tài nghiên cứu tiến sĩ của tôi tại Đại học Massey.

- Đọc Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu dành cho người tham gia bằng tiếng dân tộc thiểu số (Tày/Dao/Hmong) và cung cấp cho người được phỏng vấn một bản in bằng tiếng Việt.
- Giải thích Mẫu xác nhận của bên tham gia và hỏi liệu những người được phỏng vấn có đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn và ký vào bản đồng ý hay đồng ý bằng lời nói hay không.
- Hỏi người được phỏng vấn chọn thời gian và địa điểm mà họ cảm thấy thoải mái nhất cho cuộc phỏng vấn.
- Ghi lại tất cả những người tham gia có mặt tại buổi phỏng vấn.

Các vấn đề thảo luận

- Các vấn đề chính sau đây (nhưng không giới hạn) sẽ được đề cập. Nên đặt câu hỏi dưới dạng câu như: Cho chúng tôi biết về thời điểm và lý do bạn bắt đầu sản xuất.... sau đó gợi ý dẫn dắt thảo luận với những câu hỏi như sản xuất trong thời gian bao lâu, qui mô, việc sản xuất của họ đã thay đổi như thế nào theo thời gian. Không cần phải hoàn tất tất cả nội dung phỏng vấn theo các thứ tự ở bên dưới. Nên thảo luận theo mạch cuộc trò chuyện và sau đó nhắc gợi ý nội dung thảo luận vào những chủ đề cần phỏng vấn.
- In bảng sau và điền thông tin vào cuối buổi phỏng vấn (trừ phần ghi chú về thời gian bắt đầu phỏng vấn). Thông tin lý lịch cá nhân (tên, giới tính, tuổi, dân tộc, trình độ học vấn, địa điểm, ngày và giờ phỏng vấn)

Bảng 1: Các thông tin chính của người được phỏng vấn

Tên	
Giới tính	
Tuổi	
Trình độ giáo dục	
Dân tộc	
Ngày phỏng vấn	
Thời gian phỏng vấn	Bắt đầu: Kết thúc:
Địa điểm	
Đồng ý phỏng vấn (ký hay đồng ý bằng lời)	
Những người có mặt ở buổi phỏng vấn	
Quan sát	

- Thông tin về hoạt động sản xuất:
 - o Cho chúng tôi biết về qui mô sản xuất của gia đình. VD, diện tích sản xuất lớn như thế nào?
 - o Gia đình ta đã sản xuất/trồng sản phẩm ? được bao lâu rồi?
 - o Gia đình đã tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị với công ty X / Y / Z được bao lâu?
 - o Ai tham gia chính trong các hoạt động?

o Cô/chị có thể cho chúng tôi biết cuộc sống của cô/chị đã thay đổi như thế nào sau khi tham gia liên kết với công ty X / Y / Z? (Nếu chỉ phỏng vấn với phụ nữ)

HOẶC

Cô/chú/anh/chị có thể cho chúng tôi biết cuộc sống của cô/chú/anh/chị thay đổi như thế nào sau khi gia đình/vợ bạn tham gia liên kết với công ty X/Y/Z? (Nếu phỏng vấn cả nam và nữ hoặc chỉ nam).

Tùy thuộc vào câu trả lời, hãy nhắc cuộc thảo luận tập trung vào bốn khía cạnh trao quyền dưới đây, nhưng không cần thiết theo cùng một thứ tự).

1. Khía cạnh nâng cao quyền năng về mặt tâm lý (để đánh giá xem phụ nữ có nâng cao lòng tự tôn và sự hài lòng về cuộc sống của họ hay không)

📌 Lưu ý: Làm rõ hoạt động sản xuất có phải là một chức năng kinh tế mới để phụ nữ tham gia hay không. Nếu việc trồng / sản xuất một sản phẩm cụ thể luôn là công việc của phụ nữ thì hãy hỏi về những thay đổi trước và sau khi tham gia chuỗi giá trị sản xuất.

Bảng 2: Nâng cao quyền năng về mặt tâm lý

Hướng dẫn phỏng vấn phụ nữ	Hướng dẫn phỏng vấn nam giới
<p>Phụ nữ tự nhận thức về vị trí của mình trong gia đình như thế nào?</p> <p>Điều này có thay đổi kể từ khi tham gia vào liên kết với doanh nghiệp không?</p>	<p>Đàn ông nhìn nhận như thế nào về vị trí của vợ trong gia đình? Điều này có thay đổi kể từ khi tham gia vào liên kết với doanh nghiệp không?</p>
<p>Phụ nữ tự tin tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị sản xuất như thế nào?</p> <p>Hãy cho tôi biết thời điểm mà cô/chị cảm thấy tự tin để đưa ra quyết định đối với các hoạt động sản xuất?</p>	<p>Đàn ông đã hiểu và ủng hộ vợ mình trong việc thực hiện các hoạt động liên quan đến sản xuất này như thế nào?</p>
<p>Bạn có nhận thấy bất kỳ thay đổi nào trong thái độ và hành vi của vợ chồng bạn kể từ khi tham gia vào liên kết với doanh nghiệp X / Y / Z không? Bạn có thể cho một ví dụ về cách những thứ này đã thay đổi...</p>	

2. Nâng cao quyền năng về kinh tế

- Hãy cho chúng tôi biết về bất kỳ kỹ năng và kiến thức mới nào mà phụ nữ đã học được từ khi gắn bó với công ty X / Y / Z?
- Bạn so sánh thu nhập của mình trước và sau khi tham gia chuỗi giá trị sản xuất đã thay đổi như thế nào? (tăng nhiều/ tăng ít /không tăng chút nào). Giải thích lý do đánh giá của bạn?
- Các quyết định quan trọng được thực hiện trong gia đình như thế nào? Mô tả quá trình ra quyết định. Ai là người đưa ra quyết định cuối cùng? Bảng 3 dưới đây chỉ nhằm hướng dẫn thảo luận (không cần hoàn thành bảng cho mọi hộ nếu không có đủ thời gian)

📌 M hoặc F: chỉ ra rằng Đàn ông hoặc Phụ nữ đưa ra quyết định duy nhất

- ✚ Mf: cho biết chủ yếu là nam nhưng một phần là nữ
- ✚ Fm: cho biết chủ yếu là phụ nữ nhưng một phần là nam giới
- ✚ MF: cho biết MF bình đẳng hoặc cùng đưa ra quyết định

Bảng 3: Những quyết định kinh tế quan trọng

Quyết định	Đàn ông	Phụ nữ
Sản xuất cái gì?		
Phải mua những vật tư con giống gì và mua ở đâu?		
Ai tham gia tập huấn		
Vay mượn tiền ở đâu?		
Tham gia liên kết với công ty/HTX?		
Khi nào và bán sản phẩm ở đâu?		
Chi tiêu tiền như thế nào?*		

* Gợi ý thảo luận về cách quản lý tiền trong gia đình? Ai giữ tiền?

- Bạn có nhận thấy bất kỳ thay đổi nào về quyền của phụ nữ trước và sau khi tham gia liên kết với doanh nghiệp X/Y/Z
 - Quyền tiếp cận (quyền sử dụng) và kiểm soát tài sản (xe cộ, điện thoại di động, công cụ sản xuất, v.v.) và tài nguyên (đất đai, nhà cửa, tập huấn, v.v.)
 - Quyền tham gia vào các quyết định của gia đình về sản xuất và tài chính
- Bạn nghĩ gì khi đàn ông chia sẻ công việc nội trợ trong gia đình?
- Có bất kỳ căng thẳng nào của hộ gia đình xung quanh các vấn đề về quyền ra quyết định của hộ gia đình, kiểm soát tiền bạc, phân công lao động không?
- Nam giới nghĩ gì khi phụ nữ tham gia vào các hoạt động của chuỗi giá trị, hoặc thực hiện chức năng kinh tế mới để kiếm tiền và nam giới giúp vợ việc nhà, chăm sóc con cái, v.v.?
- Cộng đồng nhìn nhận vị trí của phụ nữ như thế nào nếu phụ nữ kiếm được nhiều tiền hơn và nam giới làm nhiều việc nhà hơn.
- Sự phân công lao động theo giới trong gia đình bạn như thế nào? Mọi thay đổi trước và sau khi tham gia liên kết sản xuất với doanh nghiệp X/Y/Z. Bảng 4 dưới đây chỉ để hướng dẫn thảo luận: (không cần hoàn thành bảng cho mọi hộ nếu không có đủ thời gian – Chỉ cần hỏi 1 hoặc 2 hộ để nắm được sự phân chia lao động về giới tại địa phương)

√√√ tần số cao

√√ tần số là trung bình

√ tần số thấp

Bảng 4: Phân công lao động

Danh mục	Đàn ông	Phụ nữ
Hoạt động sản xuất: - Chuẩn bị đất - gieo hạt - tưới tiêu - làm cỏ - thu hoạch - sơ chế		

- vận chuyển - bán sản phẩm		
Chăm sóc gia đình: - làm việc nhà - chăm sóc trẻ em - lấy nước và củi đun		
Hoạt động cộng đồng: - Tham gia họp thôn bản		

3. Nâng cao quyền năng về mặt xã hội

- Có bất kỳ phong tục tập quán nào hạn chế sự tham gia của phụ nữ vào sản xuất và các hoạt động cộng đồng không? Phụ nữ được hoặc không được làm những gì? VD: Phụ nữ có được phép tự do đi lại trong làng và tham gia các buổi họp cộng đồng và các nghi lễ tâm linh không? Phụ nữ nghĩ gì về những phong tục này? Những gì thay đổi trước và sau khi tham gia hợp tác liên kết với doanh nghiệp.
- Phụ nữ có tham gia vào lãnh đạo hoặc các tổ chức hoạt động cộng đồng (giúp đỡ phụ nữ khác, làm từ thiện, Hội trưởng hội phụ huynh, v.v.) không? Một lần nữa so sánh những thay đổi trước và sau khi tham gia hợp tác liên kết với doanh nghiệp?
- Phụ nữ có được tiếp cận tốt hơn với các dịch vụ giáo dục và chăm sóc sức khỏe do những thay đổi trong cộng đồng đã coi trọng và đánh giá cao hơn vai trò của phụ nữ không?

4. Nâng cao quyền năng về mặt chính trị (tham gia vào quá trình ra các quyết định quan trọng của địa phương)

- Phụ nữ có tự tin tham gia các cuộc họp cộng đồng và các sự kiện mà ở đó các quyết định quan trọng có liên quan đến đời sống của họ được đưa ra hay không? Hãy cho chúng tôi biết một số ví dụ?
- Cho chúng tôi biết ví dụ khi mà phụ nữ tự tin lên tiếng trong các cuộc họp để chất vấn các quyết định liên quan đến nhu cầu và mối quan tâm của họ được đưa ra tại cộng đồng hoặc cấp cao hơn
 - Nam giới ủng hộ sự tham gia của phụ nữ vào các hoạt động cộng đồng như thế nào?
- Phụ nữ bày tỏ mong muốn biết thêm về chính sách, đất đai, luật pháp và các quyền lợi hợp pháp của họ như thế nào?

5. Các lợi ích hoặc chi phí khác thu được từ việc tham gia vào hợp tác liên kết với doanh nghiệp?

6. Những hạn chế và thách thức hiện tại đối với việc phụ nữ tham gia vào hoạt động kinh tế liên kết sản xuất với doanh nghiệp là gì?

7. Tác động của COVID-19 đến các hoạt động kinh doanh của hộ gia đình liên quan đến chuỗi giá trị sản xuất là gì? Bạn đã nhận được hỗ trợ gì từ công ty/hợp tác xã?

8. Đề xuất về cách các nhà tài trợ và doanh nghiệp có thể hợp tác để hỗ trợ nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ tốt hơn?

Guidelines for RAs to conduct focus group discussion

Participants: 5-7 ethnic minority women who are working in the same existing production groups

(Note: Select those women who have not participated in individual household interviews. Preferable to select women that production activity is a new or improved economic function)

Preparation:

Refreshments for the group discussion and gifts for each participant. Stationery for group discussion. Each focus group will be conducted by two RAs to support each other.

Time and location: Try to align with their regular production group meeting and the meeting is expected to take 90-100 minutes. If not, the meeting can be held in the communal meeting area.

Purpose: Elaborate or verify information picked up from individual interviews

Process:

1. Introduce yourself: who you are, where is your living, what you are studying
2. Introduce the research and the purpose of your visit: Explain that you are trying to help me to so my research. You can show my photo and introduce me: and explain why I can't travel to do the research. Plus, about my professional background with DFAT, and how I always wondered, during visits to their project, etc., whether the women were fully benefiting from the programme and if the partners were working really well to achieve this... that's why I've made this the subject of my PhD research at Massey University.
3. Read the Participant Information Sheet in the ethnic minority language (Tay/Dao/Hmong) and provide the interviewees with a hard copy in Vietnamese.
4. Explain the Informed Consent Form for a focus group discussion and ask if the interviewees are happy to sign the form or to give verbal agreement.
5. Observe and take note of participants:

Print out the following table and fill in the information at the end of the interview (except the note on the starting interview time).

Interview date					
Interview time		Start time:		End time:	
Location					
Observations					
No	Name	Age	Education	Ethnicity	Consent given

Discussion issues:

Note: As a researcher, especially doing semi-structured in-depth interviews, you should only need a few questions for the entire session, followed by some prompts, e.g. if there are issues they don't bring up on their own

- What are the **three main benefits** women gain from their participation in the production value chains? (ask them time to talk about this in smaller groups of 2-3 people for 15 minutes, then ask them to report back and see if there's agreement). Discuss changes before/after joining the production value change. If any of the following points are not raised by the group/s, probe further (specifically about them):
 - Self-esteem: how they feel about themselves as a woman/personal confidence
 - Confidence, specifically in undertaking business-related activities
 - Satisfaction about their lives
 - Access to and control over resources: Have you noticed any changes in women's rights to access to (the right to use) and control over assets (vehicles, mobile phones, tools etc.) and resources (land, houses, participation in training etc.) before and after joining the production value chain?
 - Influence over household income and expenditure: Who decides what, and who makes the final decisions? What to produce, what inputs to purchase, where to sell the products, and spending money? Who is keeping saving accounts?
- Ask them to discuss in a small group of 2-3 people for 15 minutes and then share with the larger group
 - Sharing housework: Do men share more housework and allow women to have more time to participate in community activities, and are women not overburdened as a result of their involvement in economic activities?
 - Are there any household tensions arising from women earning income or taking on new roles? What do the men think when women are participating in the value chain activities or taking new economic functions to earn money and men are helping the wives with housework, taking care of children etc?
 - How does the community perceive the position of women if women are earning more money and men are doing more housework?
 - How confident are women to participate in decision-making bodies or work-related organisations to raise their voices about their needs and concerns?
- Other benefits or costs gained from their participation in the production value chains.
- Is income from X/Y/Z a main income source? How did people's income change before and after joining the business?
- What are the gender norms and practices that undermine and create barriers to women's participation in production, community activities or holding leadership positions? What do women can or can't do?

- Are women leading or joining women or social networks for community activities (helping other women, doing charity, chairing the school committees etc.)? Again compare changes before and after joining the value chain.
- Do women have better access to education and health care services as a result of the changes in the community to value and appreciate the role of women more?
- What is the impact of COVID-19 on the household's business activities relating to the production value chain? What support did you receive from the company/cooperative?
- Current constraints and challenges for women's participation in production linkage with the business?
- Suggestions on how donors and the private sector can collaborate to better support WEE.

Hướng dẫn trợ lý nghiên cứu tiến hành thảo luận nhóm

Thành phần tham gia: Thảo luận nhóm nữ dân tộc riêng, mỗi nhóm gồm 5-7 người từ những hộ gia đình tham gia cùng nhóm sản xuất liên kết với doanh nghiệp.

(Lưu ý: Thành viên tham gia thảo luận nhóm chưa tham gia vào phỏng vấn sâu và được lựa chọn từ danh sách người hưởng lợi của dự án. Lý tưởng nhất là chọn các hộ mà nhờ có dự án phụ nữ mới tham gia vào hoạt động sản xuất liên kết với doanh nghiệp).

Chuẩn bị: bánh kẹo, hoa quả và quà cho mỗi thành viên tham gia. Giấy khổ A0 và bút viết để ghi lại nội dung thảo luận. Mỗi thảo luận nhóm có 2 bạn cùng với người phụ nữ xã tham gia, một bạn điều hành đặt câu hỏi thảo luận, một bạn giúp ghi chép và hậu cần.

Thời gian và địa điểm: Cố gắng kết hợp thảo luận nhóm với thời gian và địa điểm cuộc họp thường kỳ của nhóm sản xuất. Thời gian họp khoảng 90-100 phút. Nếu không thì tổ chức họp ở chỗ mà dân bản hay hội họp.

Mục đích của họp nhóm: Để xác nhận và làm rõ hơn những thông tin thu thập được từ các cuộc phỏng vấn với các hộ gia đình

Chu trình:

1. Giới thiệu bản thân: bạn là ai, bạn sống ở đâu, bạn đang làm gì
2. Giới thiệu về nghiên cứu và mục đích của chuyến đi nghiên cứu. Bạn có thể giải thích là bạn đang giúp tôi làm nghiên cứu. Bạn có thể cho xem ảnh của tôi và giới thiệu về tôi: và tại sao tôi không thể tự mình thực hiện nghiên cứu. Thêm vào đó là thông tin về chuyên môn của tôi trước đây làm việc với DFAT, và tôi luôn tự hỏi, trong các chuyến thăm dự án của họ, v.v., liệu những người phụ nữ được hưởng lợi như thế nào từ chương trình và các đối tác hợp tác với nhau như thế nào để phụ nữ được hưởng lợi từ chương trình nhiều nhất... đó là lý do tại sao tôi chọn chủ đề này làm đề tài nghiên cứu tiến sĩ của tôi tại Đại học Massey.
3. Đọc Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu dành cho người tham gia bằng tiếng dân tộc thiểu số (Tày/Dao/Hmong) và cung cấp cho người được phỏng vấn một bản in bằng tiếng Việt.
4. Giải thích Mẫu xác nhận của bên tham gia thảo luận nhóm và hỏi liệu những người được phỏng vấn có đồng ý tham gia phỏng vấn hay không? Họ muốn ký vào bản đồng ý hay đồng ý bằng lời nói?
5. Ghi lại tên và thông tin của những người tham dự thảo luận. In bảng sau và điền thông tin vào cuối buổi phỏng vấn (trừ phần ghi chú về thời gian bắt đầu phỏng vấn).

Ngày phỏng vấn					
Thời gian phỏng vấn		Thời gian bắt đầu:		Thời gian kết thúc:	
Địa điểm					
Quan sát					
STT	Tên	Tuổi	Trình độ giáo dục	Dân tộc	Đồng ý phỏng vấn (ký hay đồng ý bằng lời)

Các vấn đề thảo luận:

Lưu ý: Là cán bộ nghiên cứu, đặc biệt là đối với phỏng vấn bán cấu trúc hoặc phỏng vấn mở, bạn chỉ cần hỏi một vài câu hỏi và bám theo nội dung thảo luận để gợi ý những vấn đề mà người thảo luận không tự nêu ra.

Chia nhóm 2-3 người thảo luận trong 15 phút sau đó chia sẻ với tất cả mọi người

- Hãy nêu **Ba lợi ích chính** của việc phụ nữ tham gia vào liên kết sản xuất với doanh nghiệp X/Y/Z?. Thảo luận về sự thay đổi trước và sau khi tham gia vào liên kết với doanh nghiệp. Nếu trong thảo luận nhóm các thành viên chưa đưa ra nội dung dưới đây thì các bạn có thể gợi ý cho họ để họ thảo luận:
 - Lòng tự tôn: phụ nữ cảm thấy như thế nào về bản thân họ/sự tự tin cá nhân
 - Sự tự tin khi tham gia các hoạt động kinh tế
 - Sự hài lòng của họ về cuộc sống
 - Quyền tiếp cận (quyền sử dụng) và kiểm soát tài sản (xe cộ, điện thoại di động, công cụ sản xuất, v.v.) và tài nguyên (đất đai, nhà cửa, tập huấn, v.v.) trước và sau khi tham gia liên kết với doanh nghiệp thì có thay đổi gì?
 - Mức độ ảnh hưởng của họ trong việc ra những quyết định quan trọng về thu nhập và chi tiêu trong gia đình: Ai quyết định cái gì và ai là người ra quyết định cuối cùng? Ai quyết định về việc sản xuất cái gì? Mua vật tư nguyên liệu đầu vào ở đâu? Khi nào bán sản phẩm? Bán ở đâu? Và bán cho ai? Chi tiêu thế nào? Ai giữ sổ tiết kiệm? Quyết định mở rộng sản xuất? Quyết định vay vốn.

- Thảo luận nhóm nhỏ 2-3 người trong 20 phút và chia sẻ với mọi người trong nhóm lớn về:
 - Chia sẻ công việc gia đình: Người đàn ông có chia sẻ công việc nội trợ, chăm sóc gia đình để phụ nữ có thời gian tham gia các hoạt động cộng đồng và phát triển kinh tế mà không bị quá vất vả không?
 - Sự căng thẳng trong các gia đình có gia tăng hay không khi phụ nữ tham gia các hoạt động kinh tế và đảm đương những vai trò trách nhiệm mới trong xã hội? Cụ thể, nam giới nghĩ gì khi phụ nữ tham gia vào các hoạt động phát triển kinh tế tăng thu nhập và nam giới giúp vợ việc nhà, chăm sóc con cái, v.v.?
 - Cộng đồng nhìn nhận vị trí của phụ nữ như thế nào khi phụ nữ kiếm được nhiều tiền hơn và nam giới làm nhiều việc nhà hơn?
 - Phụ nữ tự tin như thế nào khi tham gia vào các tổ chức chính quyền hay các hội nhóm nghề nghiệp để nêu lên tiếng nói và quan điểm của họ để bảo vệ và đấu tranh cho các quyền lợi của họ?
- Những lợi ích liên quan đến việc tham gia liên kết với doanh nghiệp là gì? Các hộ có được tập huấn về kỹ thuật, có 1 số hộ được tạm ứng giống, phân bón, vay vốn, tập huấn về bình đẳng giới hay không? Các bác thấy những hỗ trợ ấy có hữu ích không?
- Thu nhập từ X/Y/Z có phải là thu nhập chính của đa số các hộ ở đây không? Thu nhập chính của các hộ ở đây từ những nguồn nào? Thu nhập từ chè quan trọng như thế nào đối với các hộ gia đình ở đây? Thu nhập từ bán chè và được liệu (nếu có) liên kết với doanh nghiệp thay đổi như thế nào từ khi liên kết với doanh nghiệp. Tăng nhiều, tăng ít, hay không tăng. VD nếu người ta chia sẻ là giá chè có cao hơn thì hỏi là thu nhập từ chè qua mỗi năm có dư dả hơn không? Có dư dả để gửi tiết kiệm, tái đầu tư sản xuất, mua sắm đồ dùng, chi tiêu trong gia đình. Các bác thử lấy ví dụ về những đồ dùng, chi tiêu mà các bác có được từ thu nhập từ cây chè? Đầu tư cho con cháu học hành, hay chăm sóc sức khỏe y tế từ thu nhập của cây chè có tốt hơn không những năm gần đây?
- Có bất kỳ phong tục tập quán nào hạn chế sự tham gia của phụ nữ vào sản xuất và các hoạt động cộng đồng không? Phụ nữ được hoặc không được làm những gì? Có những định kiến về giới ở địa phương như thế nào về vai trò của phụ nữ và nam giới? VD đàn ông phải là chủ hộ và là người kiếm tiền chính trong gia đình, phụ nữ lo việc nội trợ, chăm sóc gia đình con cái.
- Phụ nữ có tham gia vào lãnh đạo hoặc các tổ chức hoạt động cộng đồng (VD như giúp đỡ phụ nữ khác, làm từ thiện, tham gia làm Hội trưởng hội phụ huynh, v.v.) không? Phụ nữ hay tham gia những hội nhóm gì? Cộng đồng nhìn nhận như thế nào nếu lãnh đạo là nữ giới? Một lần nữa so sánh những thay đổi trước và sau khi tham gia hợp tác liên kết với doanh nghiệp?
- Phụ nữ có được tiếp cận tốt hơn với các dịch vụ giáo dục và chăm sóc sức khỏe do những thay đổi trong cộng đồng đã coi trọng và đánh giá cao hơn vai trò của phụ nữ không?

- Tác động của COVID-19 đến các hoạt động kinh doanh của hộ gia đình liên quan đến chuỗi giá trị sản xuất là gì? Bạn đã nhận được hỗ trợ gì từ công ty/hợp tác xã?
- Những hạn chế và thách thức hiện tại đối với việc phụ nữ tham gia vào hoạt động kinh tế liên kết sản xuất với doanh nghiệp là gì?
- Đề xuất về cách các nhà tài trợ và doanh nghiệp có thể hợp tác để hỗ trợ nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ tốt hơn?

Interview guides with the business owners

- Company profiles: When was it established? Scope of business? No. of staff?
- No. of farmers (disaggregated by male and female) are engaging in their existing value chains.
- When did they sign a partnership agreement with GREAT?
- What are their roles in the partnerships? Their responsibilities? Their inputs contribution?
- What do they understand about the purpose of the partnership?
- Expectations? Result chains?
- What activities have been implemented to date under the partnership?
- What partnership's result to date? No. of farmers linkage in the value chain? No. of women beneficiaries?
- Selection criteria of the farmers?
- Do the company sign the contract with individual HHs? With whom? Men or women?
- What was in agreement with the farmers?
- What are gender equality promotion activities?
- Their perceptions and understandings of WEE
- Company's policies on WEE
- What have they done to achieve the WEE objective?
- How does the company invite the HHs to the meeting?
- What do they think about the access of different ethnic groups? Is any different approach applied to each ethnic group?
- What is their self-assessment of the progress to date in terms of WEE?
- Their strengths, limitations, and challenges involved in WEE
- Awareness of the laws, policies, and regulations to enable women to benefit from the economic empowerment activities
- How donors and the private sector can collaborate to better support WEE.
- Question on the revenue and effect of COVID-19 on the companies?

Additional questions for Bac Ha tea

- Male dominant in the list of beneficiaries- Why? Why did the company sign the contract with men/HHs only?

Additional questions for Benzoin and ginger company

- Bodhi tree intercropping with organic ginger?

Additional questions for Herbal Cooperative

- What was in agreement with the satellite farmers in Ngu Chi Son?
- Why most of the satellite HHs are men? Men sell products, and men hold the money?

Interview with DFAT, GREAT, Helvetas

- When did GREAT sign a partnership agreement with each partner?
- What are their roles in the partnerships? Their responsibilities? Their inputs contribution?
- Roles of Helvetas on Duc Phu and Bac Ha?
- The value-added the GREAT/DFAT program brings to each case?
- What do they understand about the purpose of each partnership?
- Their expectation for each case. Result chains in each partnership
- What activities have been implemented to date under the partnership?
- What partnership's result to date? No. of farmers linkage in the value chain? No. of women beneficiaries? For each case
- What have they done to achieve the WEE objective in each case?
- Who delivers gender equality training for Dao Do?
- Their perceptions and understandings of WEE
- Policies on WEE
- What do they think about the access of different ethnic groups? Is any different approach applied to each ethnic group?
- What is their self-assessment of the progress to date in terms of WEE?
- What do they think about the strengths, limitations, and challenges of the private sector engagement in WEE
- How can donors and the private sector collaborate to better support WEE?
- Activities to influence changes in laws and policy, and regulations to enable women to benefit from economic empowerment activities?
- Support to companies during COVID-19?

APPENDIX 4: ETHICS APPROVAL



Date: 29 October 2020

Dear Lan Phuong Nguyen

Re: Ethics Notification - 4000023579 - **Engaging with the private sector for development: A critical analysis of attempts to partner with business for women's economic empowerment in Vietnam**

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our system which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please contact a Research Ethics Administrator.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice-Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz."

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

APPENDIX 5: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM - INDIVIDUAL



Engaging with the private sector for development: A critical analysis of attempts to partner with business for women's economic empowerment in Vietnam

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study, and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I agree/do not agree to photographs being taken. I understand they will be used for the stated research and its publications.
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
4. I would/would not like a summary of research findings sent to me on completion of the research. Please provide your contact details – address/email or mobile number – if you would like a summary of the research sent to you:

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Note: Ethnic minority people can choose to give verbal agreement. Name and Date of the agreement will be recorded.

**FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT
CONSENT FORM**



**Engaging with the private sector for development:
A critical analysis of attempts to partner with business for women’s
economic empowerment in Vietnam**

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study, and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I understand that I have an obligation to respect the privacy of the other members of the group by not disclosing any personal information that they share during our discussion.
2. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.

Note: There are limits on confidentiality as there are no formal sanctions on other group participants from disclosing your involvement, identity or what you say to others in the focus group. There are risks in taking part in focus group research and taking part assumes that you are willing to assume those risks.

3. I agree to participate in the focus group under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.
4. I would/would not like a summary of research findings sent to me on completion of the research. Please provide your contact details – address/email or mobile number – if you would like a summary of the research sent to you:

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ [print full name]_____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Note: Ethnic minority people can choose to give verbal agreement. Name and Date of the agreement will be recorded.

Mẫu xác nhận của người tham gia



Hợp tác đối tác với doanh nghiệp tư nhân trong chương trình phát triển: Phân tích về những nỗ lực hợp tác với doanh nghiệp để nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam

Tôi đã đọc, hoặc đã được đọc cho tôi nghe bằng ngôn ngữ mẹ đẻ của tôi hoặc bằng tiếng Việt, và tôi hiểu Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu được đính kèm trong Phụ lục I. Tôi đã được giải thích chi tiết về nghiên cứu, mọi thắc mắc tôi đã được giải đáp giúp tôi hài lòng và tôi hiểu rằng tôi có thể hỏi thêm câu hỏi bất kỳ lúc nào. Tôi đã có đủ thời gian để cân nhắc xem có nên tham gia vào nghiên cứu này hay không và tôi hiểu rằng việc tham gia là tự nguyện và tôi có thể rút khỏi nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào.

1. Tôi đồng ý/không đồng ý để cuộc phỏng vấn được ghi âm.
2. Tôi đồng ý/không đồng ý cho chụp ảnh. Tôi hiểu là ảnh chụp sẽ được sử dụng cho nghiên cứu và các tài liệu xuất bản có liên quan.
3. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu với các điều kiện nêu trong Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu.
4. Tôi muốn/không muốn nhận báo cáo tóm tắt về kết quả nghiên cứu. Trong trường hợp quý vị muốn nhận được báo cáo tóm tắt, đề nghị cung cấp địa chỉ liên lạc chi tiết, số điện thoại, email
.....

Tuyên bố của người tham gia:

Tôi _____ [Họ tên đầy đủ] _____ đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Kí tên: _____ Ngày: _____

Lưu ý: Dân tộc thiểu số có thể chọn thỏa thuận bằng lời nói. Tên và ngày thỏa thuận sẽ được ghi lại.

Mẫu xác nhận của bên tham gia thảo luận nhóm



Hợp tác đối tác với doanh nghiệp tư nhân trong chương trình phát triển: Phân tích về những nỗ lực hợp tác với doanh nghiệp để nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam

Tôi đã đọc, hoặc đã được đọc cho tôi nghe bằng ngôn ngữ mẹ đẻ của tôi hoặc bằng tiếng Việt, và tôi hiểu Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu được đính kèm trong Phụ lục 1. Tôi đã được giải thích chi tiết về nghiên cứu, mọi thắc mắc tôi đã được giải đáp giúp tôi hài lòng và tôi hiểu rằng tôi có thể hỏi thêm câu hỏi bất kỳ lúc nào. Tôi đã có đủ thời gian để cân nhắc xem có nên tham gia vào nghiên cứu này hay không và tôi hiểu rằng việc tham gia là tự nguyện và tôi có thể rút khỏi nghiên cứu bất cứ lúc nào.

1. Tôi hiểu là tôi có nghĩa vụ tôn trọng quyền riêng tư của các thành viên tham gia thảo luận nhóm bằng cách không chia sẻ bất cứ thông tin cá nhân nào mà họ chia sẻ trong quá trình thảo luận.
2. Tôi hiểu là tất cả các thông tin tôi chia sẻ sẽ được giữ kín trong phạm vi pháp luật cho phép, và tên của tất cả những người liên quan trong nghiên cứu sẽ được giữ kín.
Lưu ý: Việc giữ kín thông tin có một số hạn chế vì nghiên cứu không áp dụng biện pháp phạt chính thức nào trong trường hợp thành viên nhóm tiết lộ thông tin mà bạn chia sẻ trong thảo luận nhóm với người khác. Vì thế có những rủi ro nhất định khi tham gia vào thảo luận nhóm và việc quyết định tham gia vào thảo luận nhóm có nghĩa là bạn chấp nhận những rủi ro trên.
3. Tôi đồng ý tham gia vào thảo luận nhóm tập trung với các điều kiện nêu trong Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu trong Phụ lục 1.
4. Tôi muốn/không muốn nhận báo cáo tóm tắt về kết quả nghiên cứu. Trong trường hợp quý vị muốn nhận được báo cáo tóm tắt, đề nghị cung cấp địa chỉ liên lạc chi tiết, số điện thoại, email

Tuyên bố của người tham gia:

Tôi _____ [Họ tên đầy đủ] _____ đồng ý tham gia vào nghiên cứu này.

Kí tên: _____ Ngày: _____

Lưu ý: Dân tộc thiểu số có thể chọn thỏa thuận bằng lời nói. Tên và ngày thỏa thuận sẽ được ghi lại.

APPENDIX 6: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet



Engaging with the private sector for development: A critical analysis of attempts to partner with business for women's economic empowerment in Vietnam

Researcher Introduction

My name is Nguyen Lan Phuong. I am a PhD student at Massey University, New Zealand. This research is being undertaken in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy in Development Studies degree.

My research assistant, Ms[Mai/Sung/Dzung], will assist me in conducting interviews with ethnic minority women and men.

What is the purpose of the study?

The overarching aim of the study is to interrogate the donor approach to working with small and medium enterprises to economically empower ethnic minority women in Vietnam. The project objectives are:

- To understand the perceptions of different partners about women's economic empowerment.
- To identify strengths, limitations, and challenges of private sector involvement in women's economic programs.
- To understand if participation in the agriculture and tourism value chains empowers ethnic minority women.
- To identify how donors can better engage with the private sector to support ethnic women's empowerment.

This research will be carried in through three businesses, which represent three different partnership models that DFAT is using to collaborate with enterprises to achieve local ethnic minority women's economic empowerment. This cases studies come under the Gender-Responsive Equitable Agriculture and Tourism (GREAT) program in Bac Ha, Sa Pa, and Van Ban districts, Lao Cai province. I will use qualitative research comprising in-depth interviews and group interviews with the donors, NGOs, government representatives, business owners, and ethnic minority women and men to gain a deep understanding of their perspectives regarding the roles of the private sector in development and their strengths, limitations, and challenges for women's economic empowerment. Information will be used for the purpose of the research for my PhD and any associated presentations and publications.

Data management

All information, including interview records, transcripts, and notes, will be kept confidential and stored safely in a lockable cabinet or suitcase. Electronic copies of this data will be saved on a protected password device and backed up to the cloud.

Access to research findings

The research participants will be given a chance to provide feedback on the preliminary research findings via follow-up workshops. A policy brief or a report of the final research findings will be shared with the donor and the Programme Management Unit (PMU).

Participant's right

Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you have the right to:

- decline to participate, or withdraw from the research at any time
- choose suitable times and places for the interviews
- ask any questions about the study at any time or decline to answer any specific questions
- provide information on the understanding that the discussion will be anonymous and your name will not be used without your permission. Pseudonyms will be used instead to protect your privacy.

- ask the researcher to turn off the recorder at any time.

Project Contacts

If you have any questions about this research, please contact:

1. Ms Nguyen Lan Phuong
Phone (Zalo): +84 915 933 917 or +64 21 090 36880
Email: pnguyen1@massey.ac.nz

2. Prof Regina Scheyvens
Phone: +646 35605799 or +64 21 2179481
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Massey University Human Ethics Committee Approval Statement

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director – Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

Bản thông tin về nghiên cứu dành cho người tham



Hợp tác đối tác với doanh nghiệp tư nhân trong chương trình phát triển: Phân tích về những nỗ lực hợp tác với doanh nghiệp để nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam

Giới thiệu cán bộ nghiên cứu

Tôi tên là Nguyễn Lan Phương. Tôi đang là nghiên cứu sinh tại Đại học Massey, New Zealand. Nghiên cứu này là đề án nghiên cứu cho bậc học Tiến sĩ ngành Nghiên cứu Phát triển. Do ảnh hưởng của COVID-19 tôi không thể về Việt Nam để thực hiện nghiên cứu.

Trợ lý nghiên cứu của tôi là Cô sẽ hỗ trợ tôi thực hiện các cuộc phỏng vấn với phụ nữ và nam giới dân tộc thiểu số.

Mục đích nghiên cứu là gì?

Mục tiêu tổng quát của nghiên cứu là tìm hiểu về cách tiếp cận của nhà tài trợ trong việc hợp tác với các doanh nghiệp vừa và nhỏ để nâng cao quyền kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số ở Việt Nam. Các mục tiêu của nghiên cứu là:

- Tìm hiểu về nhận thức của các đối tác về nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ như thế nào?
- Xác định thế mạnh, hạn chế và thách thức của sự tham gia của khu vực tư nhân trong các chương trình nâng cao quyền kinh tế của phụ nữ
- Tìm hiểu xem việc tham gia vào chuỗi giá trị nông nghiệp và du lịch mang lại lợi ích cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số như thế nào
- Xác định cách các nhà tài trợ có thể hợp tác tốt hơn với khu vực tư nhân để hỗ trợ nâng cao quyền cho phụ nữ dân tộc.

Nghiên cứu sẽ được tiến hành ở ba dự án đại diện cho ba mô hình hợp tác khác nhau mà DFAT đang thực hiện để hợp tác với các doanh nghiệp để nâng cao quyền kinh tế cho phụ nữ dân tộc thiểu số địa phương theo Chương trình Nâng cao quyền năng kinh tế cho phụ nữ trong nông nghiệp và du lịch (GREAT) tại Bắc Hà, Sa Pa và huyện Văn Bàn, tỉnh Lào Cai. Nghiên cứu được tiến hành theo phương pháp nghiên cứu định tính bao gồm phỏng vấn sâu và thảo luận nhóm với các nhà tài trợ, các tổ chức phi chính phủ, đại diện chính phủ, chủ doanh nghiệp, phụ nữ và nam giới dân tộc thiểu số để hiểu sâu về quan điểm của họ về vai trò của khu vực tư nhân trong các dự án phát triển và những điểm mạnh, hạn chế và thách thức của họ đối với việc trao quyền kinh tế của phụ nữ. Thông tin sẽ được sử dụng cho mục đích nghiên cứu Tiến sĩ của tôi và bất kỳ bài thuyết trình và ấn phẩm tài liệu liên quan.

Quản lý dữ liệu

Tất cả các thông tin bao gồm băng ghi âm phỏng vấn, ghi chép nội dung phỏng vấn, và các ghi chú sẽ được bảo mật và cất giữ an toàn trong tủ hoặc va li có khóa. Các bản sao điện tử của dữ liệu này sẽ được lưu trên thiết bị có mật khẩu được bảo vệ và được sao lưu lên điện toán đám mây.

Tiếp cận các kết quả nghiên cứu

Những người tham gia nghiên cứu sẽ có cơ hội phản hồi về các kết quả nghiên cứu sơ bộ thông qua các hội thảo được tổ chức sau khi kết thúc phỏng vấn. Một bản tóm tắt chính sách hoặc báo cáo kết quả nghiên cứu cuối cùng sẽ được chia sẻ với nhà tài trợ và Ban Quản lý Chương trình (PMU).

Quyền của người tham gia

Tham gia vào nghiên cứu này là hoàn toàn tự nguyện và bạn có quyền:

- từ chối tham gia hoặc rút khỏi nghiên cứu bất kỳ lúc nào
- chọn thời gian và địa điểm thích hợp cho các cuộc phỏng vấn
- hỏi bất kỳ câu hỏi nào về nghiên cứu bất kỳ lúc nào hoặc từ chối trả lời bất kỳ câu hỏi cụ thể nào
- cung cấp thông tin dựa trên hiểu biết rằng cuộc thảo luận sẽ được ẩn danh và tên của bạn sẽ không được sử dụng nếu không có sự cho phép của bạn. Các bút danh sẽ được sử dụng để bảo vệ sự riêng tư của bạn.
- yêu cầu nhà nghiên cứu tắt máy ghi âm bất kỳ lúc nào.

Thông tin liên lạc

Nếu có bất cứ thắc mắc gì về nghiên cứu, xin vui lòng liên hệ với:

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Tuyên bố phê duyệt của Ủy Ban Đạo Đức Con người Đại học Massey

Nghiên cứu này đã được đánh giá là có rủi ro thấp. Do đó, nó không qua quy trình phê duyệt đầy đủ của Ủy ban Đạo đức Con người của trường Đại học. (Các) nhà nghiên cứu có tên trong tài liệu này chịu trách nhiệm về việc thực hiện nghiên cứu này.

Nếu bạn có bất kỳ thắc mắc nào về việc tiến hành nghiên cứu này mà bạn muốn trao đổi với ai đó không phải (các) nhà nghiên cứu, vui lòng liên hệ với Giáo sư Craig Johnson, Giám đốc - Đạo đức, điện thoại +646 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz .

APPENDIX 7: A SUMMARY TABLE SHOWS WOMEN’S EMPOWERMENT STATUS IN THE THREE BUSINESSES

Tea Company

Empowerment dimensions	Sign of empowerment	Sign of disempowerment (if any)
Psychological empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women increased their confidence in tea cultivating and picking techniques. They enhanced their self-esteem as they were more financially independent and gained more respect from their husbands. - Men support and give women the freedom to do any job. They value and respect their wives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No information
Economic empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women can sell tea at a higher price and earn a stable income. They also do not need to travel far to sell the tea. Income from tea is much higher than from rice and corn and requires less labour. - Income earned from tea help women pay education fees and medical treatment for family members when they are sick. -The company buys fresh tea that helps women reduce processing time and increase work efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training courses and community meetings were not “convenient” for women: distance and language barriers for Hmong and Dao women. - The language barrier also makes women feel less confident interacting with the business: signing contracts, selling the products and speaking up in meetings. The language barrier also prevents women from keeping farming records to meet the requirement of organic standards. - The company signed the contract with men (more than 92%). - Men are solely named as land and house owners. Although most women reported that they were consulted in household production and financial decisions, men were the ones to make final decisions. - Tay and Hmong women have limited financial freedom to decide how money is spent. They can decide on small and daily expenses. Any big

		expenses have to discuss with the husbands, and men usually make the final decisions.
Social empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women have opportunities to socialise and learn from others through engaging activities and interaction with the business and the GREAT programme. - The company supports their members when facing hardships, rewards high achievers, and contributes to community work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Women accept the norm that men are “pillars” and the breadwinners and do important and big tasks (Tay and Hmong). They “know more than women,” so it’s ok for men to be heads of households (Tay female tea growers). The company and village leaders approach the family via household heads, who are usually men. This practice accidentally constrains women's access to information. - Women are expected to stay home to work on tea production and do the housework. - Most men indicated sharing housework when women are out to pick tea. But some men still consider it as women’s responsibility. Taking care of children and doing other housework hinder women's participation. - Dao women mentioned men’s drinking, gambling, and not sharing work burdens as the reasons for disputes and violence. This is also why Dao women have to be more active than men, as everything is on their shoulders.
Political empowerment	There is no evidence that the partnership impacts women’s political empowerment.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hmong and Tay's men dominate in community meetings. Local authorities often approach people via a family head. This approach affects women’s access to training and meetings. It also affects women’s access to opportunities. - Hmong men and women do not value the idea of women holding leadership positions. - Dao men claim that they support women participating in meetings and holding government positions. This is why more Dao women are active in participating in community meetings. However, this may not be their choice as they have to take care of “everything” as mentioned above.

Herbal Cooperative

Empowerment dimensions	Sign of empowerment	Sign of disempowerment (if any)
Psychological empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For the cooperative members and some of the satellite Dao women, women experienced enhanced confidence and financial independence and felt that they had more say in the family's affairs and greater respect from their husbands. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No information
Economic empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dao women cooperative members made decisions to join the cooperative. They also dominated in training and other cooperative activities. - 120 cooperative members (97.5% women) have stable incomes from growing and selling medicinal plants, harvesting natural herbal bath plants, full-time jobs (3 people) and casual work, and from the shares of the cooperative of overall business results. They also gained new technical skills in cultivating and harvesting medicinal plants. In addition, they have more bargaining power in the family. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hmong satellite households: income from growing and selling medicinal plants to the cooperative is not stable (maybe because of COVID-19 and the poor coordination of the local authority). -Men are more dominant (95%) in large-scale chùà dù farming in satellite households (both Dao and Hmong people). - Men are pillars of the houses, so land and houses are under men's names.
Social empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The cooperative members receive support when they are sick or facing difficulties. The cooperative also gives them gifts for the New Year celebration. - The community shows respect for the cooperative director, Mrs Tan. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No information

	<p>- It is unclear whether women are overburdened due to their engagement with the cooperative. However, some female cooperative members said their husbands felt “joy and happiness” about sharing the work and supporting them to participate in the cooperative (carrying products to the cooperative).</p> <p>- There is also no evidence of a reduction in violence. However, a Dao woman reported that they used to quarrel in the past when her husband came home from drinking, but they stopped it since they joined the cooperative.</p>	
Political empowerment	There is no evidence that the partnership impacts women’s political empowerment.	Men still dominate in community meetings, especially Hmong people. Language barrier

Benzoin and Ginger Company

Empowerment dimensions	Sign of empowerment	Sign of disempowerment (if any)
Psychological empowerment	There was no evidence of psychological empowerment.	Women perceived they were in the second or third position in the family (after their husbands and parents-in-law), but they played the most important role in the family.
Economic empowerment	- Women dominate in ginger production (92%). They also receive support from seeds and fertilisers from the project.	<p>- Some ginger production contracts were signed and decided by men, but women were named in the contract to meet the project's objective.</p> <p>-Men dominate in benzoin extraction, from making decisions to signing contracts, and exploiting and selling the products (92%).</p> <p>-The potential double benefits from benzoin extraction as a company advertised are controversial if the labour cost is calculated. Bodhi tree cultivation for benzoin extraction requires significant investment, so it is difficult for the poor to invest.</p> <p>- The agroforestry intercropping model of the bodhi tree and organic ginger cultivation is at the piloting stage with mixed results. The ginger has good productivity in the first year but is low in the second year due to diseases and drought.</p> <p>-The linkages are not strong as some farmers didn't want to work with the company anymore because the market price was higher than the contract fixed price. This issue threatens the sustainability of the linkage.</p> <p>- Most women join with their husbands to make financial decisions. However, men will make the final decisions. Men also dominate production and economic decisions as women usually move to live with their husbands' families after getting married, so they do not have ownership of houses and land. Therefore, it makes it more difficult for women to access bank loans.</p>

<p>Social empowerment</p>	<p>There was no evidence of social empowerment.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The community recognises men as the head of the household. Everything is channelled via the household's head. - Men are expected to be pillars and breadwinners. The community looks down on men when women earn more money than men. Women also may endure rumours from the community for not being faithful when they work far away from home. - Women work longer hours in farming than men due to the perception of gender labour division: men are in charge of heavy work, and women are in charge of light work. Women have also internalised this perception and accepted that it was normal for them to do more housework than men "because we are women".
<p>Political empowerment</p>	<p>There is no evidence that the partnership impacts women's political empowerment. However, Tay and Dao's women hold leadership positions as heads of villages, farmers, women, and youth unions. The community perceives that men and women are equal.</p>	<p>Dao and Hmong participate less in training and community meetings due to the language barrier, especially among Hmong women. This is also the reason why no Hmong women hold leadership positions.</p>