Feminization, Agricultural Transition, and rural Employment: Case studies of Champasak and Salavan Provinces, Lao PDR

Saithong Phommavong, Dexanoulath Seandouangdeth, Kabmanivanh Phouxy, Maliphone Douangphachanh, Keophouthone Hathalong, Sisavath Sengphachanh, Bounath Keopanhya

Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Laos, Vientiane, People’s Democratic Republic of Laos

The objective of this study is to investigate the shifts in agriculture and effects on different social groups in each context: evolution, extent, character, and meaning. This study applies qualitative method by various data collection tool in order to collect qualitative data such as in-depth interview, focus group discussion (men, women, mix men and women), and participation observation. The data were collected from 4 villages, two districts and two provinces.

The study found that the coffee was planted in Laos in early of 20 century. The villagers started to plant Arabica in 1992. The area of Arabica plantation is expanded from 1.5% in 1999 to 13% in 2007. There are more farmers, internal and international private companies involve in the production. There are 48 private companies involve with coffee planting, processing, marketing and exporting and three organizations involve with developing technique of plantation: - Bolaven Plateau Coffee Producers Cooperative (CPC) established in 2007, the French Development Agency (FDA), and Lao Coffee Association (LCA) (The Lao Coffee Association 2015). The Coffee plantation in Lao Ngarm and Pakson districts are Arabica (small coffee), Robusta (Medium coffee), and Excelsa Steps of Arabica Production. There are 10 processes of coffee production including 1) sow the dried coffee to be young plant, 2) plant, 3) harvest ripe coffee bean, 4) pulping, 5) fermentation a night, 6) washing, 7) sun drying, 8)hulling, 9)coffee roast, and 10) processing.

The total amount of Arabica coffee has been surpassed of other coffee such as Robusta and Excelsa. Total production of Arabica coffee for instance was 14,567.84 ton where Robusta and Excelsa were 8,965.15 and 385.00 tons respectively in 2014. The coffee products are exporting through various marketing channels by processing companies, wholesale exporters, and villagers. A big processing company, Dao Heung Group, process the coffee bean to many types of instant coffee and export to different markets including EU, USA, and Asian market. Other wholesale exporting coffee companies also export coffee bean to many countries including EU, USA and Asian countries. Villagers harvest the red bean coffee and sell them to the processing company or wholesalers and some red beans were milled before selling. The villagers who have direct contract with a specific company have to sell the coffee bean to the company. Otherwise they can sell the red bean or milled bean freely to any traders and retailers.

Coffee production in Laos is a traditional labour intensive sector and requires pool of workers. Workers are needed in all sections of coffee production from plantation to harvest. Workers are needed for the coffee production in following duties: preparing land, planting, weeding, fertilizing, nurturing, harvesting, milling, drying, roasting, packaging and transporting. The workers can be divided into 3 groups: self-employment, daily wage workers and monthly or contract wage workers. Self-employment is workers from individual family members who are working on their own farms. Daily wage workers have only verbal contract. The monthly or contract wage workers have written contract. Daily wage workers work mainly during harvest season in picking the red coffee bean. Only monthly or contract wage workers have full time work all year round. They work continuously in the farm, apart from picking the bean, they continue working in processing, packaging, weeding, fertilizing, and working in the office of the factory. At central level, government specifies in legal framework and strategy women have to share in workforce. At the local level, particularly at district level, the initiative is low. At a private company women union work is not well recognized and low motivated. The labour working in coffee farm is varied widely from 12 years old up. The majority of the workers are single. If they are married they are offering nurturing job and weeding the coffee farm so their children can help. The employers also provide in-kind help to the workers such as arrange wedding party for them. In some cases, the couple continue living with the employer after marriage and live as closed as their relatives. If workers get pregnant the employers also help the workers to pay them extra money for new born baby.
Reference


