Feminization in non-traditional agricultural export (NTAE) product in Bolaven plateau, Pakxong highland, Champasak province, Lao PDR

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At global scale, the debate of feminization in agricultural production is well recognized. Various studies have been conducted about ‘feminization of agriculture’ (Schutter, 2013, Alkire et.al. 2013, Deere 2005, Lastarria-Cornhiel 2006, Barrientos 2007). A face of the feminization of agriculture is represented through the increasing number of women among farmworkers. In agricultural sector nevertheless the rights of the workers are still violated in particularly developing countries. In fact, most of the wage employment is in the informal sector, national labor legislation is unable to ensure the right to a minimum wage or to protect women from discrimination (Schutter, 2013). Even though women have been promoted in agricultural work, their rights to benefit from the engagement in agricultural employment is not secured and protected. Barrientos (2007) also realized that the benefits are not vividly evidence. Women workers are actually facing much pressure of discrimination and inequality both in casual and temporary work, and are often significantly to receiving health risks, lack of employment security or social protection, and vulnerable to poverty.

Feminization in agriculture is related to gender power relation. A general debate of gender power relation is related to women empowerment. Alkire et.al. (2013) employed women’s empowerment in agriculture index (WEAI) to assess gender power relation including (1) decisions about agricultural production, (2) access to and decision-making power about productive resources, (3) control of use income, (4) leadership in the community, and (5) time allocation to measure empowerment, agency, and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector. Where others have seen these indices as empowerment criteria, this study internalizes them as gender power relation issue in household and in non-traditional agro-export (NTAE) production.

A specific debate is related to women employment in agriculture. A case study of Laos is also inserted an evident to existing study in a new crop and particularly for Lao context, where others had focused on other crops and other countries. A study highlights the significance of the different result from specific crop and country different in that ‘…the magnitude of women’s employment in…non-traditional agro-export production varies by country, depending on the specific crops developed for export...’ (Deere, 2005: 25).

This paper investigated the feminization in the context of women employment and income-generating opportunities in a non-traditional agricultural export product in Bolaven plateau, Pakxong highland, Campasak province, southern part of Laos, taking coffee as the commercial product.

Qualitative method was applied as an analytical approach for this study. Various stakeholder consultation and context mapping are the primary sources of data collection. Semi-structure interviews were large pool area of data collection, which the target population of this paper was coffee planting farmers, particularly women. Data were collected using qualitative guideline designed by the author and the research team. In total 34 interviews had been made. Thematic analysis and narrative method were used to analyze the data.
Findings show, in general female labor have less often been found in certain traditional agricultural crops, for instance livestock and grains, but been prevalent in non-traditional agricultural export such as tea and coffee (Barrientos 2007). The sector provides women a great deal of employment and income-generating opportunities. The sector absorbs low educated and unskilled labor in different processes of coffee production including plantation and processing. Women labors are considerably suitable to particularly harvesting process. Women have soft hands to handle with picking of Arabica Car Timor green coffee bean. The coffee production is an important source of income for local livelihood. Income generation by the sector helps to improve the basic human need and gradually lift up local people out of poverty. Nevertheless, this situation of feminization in non-traditional agricultural export product in case of coffee, the national labor legislation on minimum wage is not recognized for wage determination for women employment and only permanent workers enjoy minimum wage rates and other social benefits than temporary workers (Lastarria-Cornhiel, 2006).

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Reference:


