



POLICY OPTIONS TO SUPPORT WOMEN FARMERS TO BENEFIT FROM STRENGTHENED LINKAGES BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM



INTRODUCTION

This advocacy document presents policy options and introduces an implementation framework based on the findings of the report entitled “A gender assessment of Myanmar and of the Inle Lake area with a focus on the agriculture and tourism sectors”.¹ The report and the advocacy document were developed within the framework of the Swiss Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) – United Nations Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, Myanmar Project entitled “Enhancing horticulture supply and sustainable tourism to develop business linkages”.

The aim of this advocacy document is twofold. First, it provides ideas on how to further develop linkages between the three agricultural value chains - tea, ginger and avocado, and the tourism sector in the Inle Lake area, Southern Shan, and make women farmers benefit from them. Second, it introduces an implementation and monitoring framework in the following areas: indirect farmer-tourist interaction, direct farmer-tourist interaction, supply-side constraints faced by farmers, demand for local produce by tourists, communication and marketing channels, infrastructure development, other facilitators for supply-demand match, and COVID-19 policy response.

The report on which this advocacy document is based presents an analysis of the agricultural and tourism sectors in the Inle Lake area from a gender perspective and investigates how to improve women’s wellbeing through their participation in the selected value chains and tourism. Developing and strengthening linkages between the agriculture and tourism sectors would likely contribute to women’s empowerment and gender equality, as well as to economic development in the area.

GENERAL CONTEXT

Myanmar is a least developed country (LDC) with a dominant share of agriculture in its employment – mostly informal – and a slow pace of growth in manufacturing. Opium and other drugs’ production and export also play an important role in the economy and are intertwined with ethnic conflicts. Since the country began moving towards a more democratic system of governance at the end of the first decade of the 2000s, the government of Myanmar has started a series of economic reforms for modernization and opening up the country to the world. Women however have benefited little from this wave of modernization mainly because they were by and large absent from the policy- and decision-making process, the government did not consider gender equality and women’s rights as priority areas, and social norms and attitudes limited the tasks and functions that women could undertake. The situation is however improving, and a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women has been developed and is being implemented.

AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM SECTORS IN MYANMAR

Low productivity, inequality and high price volatility are among the main characteristics of the agricultural sector in Myanmar. The Myanmar Agriculture Development Strategy and Investment Plan 2018/2019 - 2022/2023 aims to expand agriculture and livestock production, increase farmers’ incomes, and enhance farmers’ access to international markets. The Plan identifies “gender inequality and insufficient women’s rights in agriculture” as a weakness of the agricultural system and includes several goals such as facilitating women farmers’ access to microfinance, their participation in cooperatives and community development activities, delivery of services and tailoring of extension services and entrepreneurship programmes to their needs. Overall, inclusion and increased women’s participation are regarded as the pre-condition for the Plan to yield results.

¹ UNCTAD, 2020. A gender assessment of Myanmar and of the Inle Lake area with a focus on the agriculture and tourism sector. Geneva

In the three agricultural value chains – namely tea, ginger and avocado – covered by this study, a gender-based division of labour is common to all townships.² Men are more involved in tasks related to the preparation of the soil or ploughing while women’s work is usually related to planting, weeding, transplanting, harvesting, threshing, postharvest and marketing. Farmers’ view of agriculture as a traditional activity rather than a business is an important obstacle to developing and modernizing the agricultural sector. This, coupled with the many supply-side constraints they face, results in farmers’ failure to meet the quality and quantity standards required by traders, processors and final consumers, including tourism outlets.

The Inle Lake area is the most popular tourist destination in Southern Shan and tourism has grown fast in the area. The 2012 Myanmar Responsible Tourism Policy provides the platform for developing tourism strategies at the national and regional levels; the Myanmar Tourism Master Plan (2013-2020) includes seven cross-cutting issues including gender. The Plan encourages community-based tourism, which provides employment opportunities for local people, contributes to preserving local cultural heritage and can be particularly beneficial to women.

BUILDING LINKAGES BETWEEN AGRICULTURE AND TOURISM SECTORS

The domestic and foreign economies are linked via tourists who, while abroad, consume agricultural goods and services either directly - for example by visiting farms, or indirectly through hotels, restaurants, and other tourism outlets. Domestic farmers and foreign tourists are also linked via agricultural exports that extend the period of consumption of domestic goods by tourists during the period preceding or following their travel.³ The same model can apply to domestic tourists coming from other states in Myanmar who visit Southern Shan.

Farmers can sell their produce to local shops/stalls or other forms of intermediaries, from where tourism enterprises can buy their agricultural produce. It is also possible to directly sell to hotels, restaurants and large buyers such as supermarkets, though it is less frequent. There is need for matching buyers’ and sellers’ expectations as well as introducing the necessary infrastructure to facilitate this match. There is also need for creating incentives for farmers to reach out to the tourism sector. Producer associations can be instrumental in this regard. Community-based tourism can also support the formulation of linkages between the agriculture and tourism sectors.

The policy framework developed in this document aims to facilitate both direct and indirect farmer-tourist interactions, increase demand for local produce, develop communication and marketing channels and further increase supply-and-demand match between the horticultural value chains and the tourism sector with a specific focus on women farmers in the Inle Lake area. In addition to developing linkages, it is equally important to address farmers’ supply-side constraints, and meet their infrastructure needs, which are more severely felt by women. This way, it would become possible to enable women farmers to better benefit from these possible sectoral linkages between the selected horticultural value chains and the tourism sector in the Inle Lake area. These supply-side constraints are briefly summarized below.

Access to extension services, especially on modern farming techniques and/or enhancing crop varieties, is a key supply-side constraint in Shan State. Most extension services (particularly provision of inputs) delivered by the government are reserved to holders of land titles, hence excluding many producers, most

² The townships covered by the analytical report are: Hopong, Kalaw, Nyaung Shwe, Pekon, Pindaya, Pinlaung and Ywangan in Southern Shan.

³ Fischer, C. 2019. Agriculture and tourism sector linkages: Global relevance and local evidence for the case of South Tyrol, *Open Agriculture*, 4: 544-553.

of whom are women. Limited availability of training programmes targeting the specific needs of farmers further contribute to the lack of dynamism in the sector. Moreover, existing extension services primarily reach men because they do not take into consideration women's time and mobility issues to enhance women's participation.

Adequate access to inputs, technology and information is critical for value chain development and women's empowerment within value chains. In the Inle Lake area, production is labour-intensive and there is little evidence of contract farming or other systems to promote scale access to technology. Gender inequality is evident in access to technology as it is mainly men who first learn how to use a new technology in a given household or community when the technology is first acquired. The issue for women farmers is also about having the financial means to buy or rent new machines and be able to compete with other farmers. Information on market prices, varieties and quality of produce is mostly accessible on an *ad hoc* basis through merchants, brokers, retailers, and truck drivers. Access to market information remains a big challenge for women farmers according to UNCTAD's surveys.⁴

Access to infrastructure such as transportation, roads, water and electricity is critical for all farmers. It is a more important issue for women than men because limited availability of basic infrastructure affects women's security concerns and unpaid work burden besides affecting their participation in paid work. Transportation and roads is an area where there is big space for improvements in the Inle Lake area. According to UNCTAD's farmer survey, women rely heavily on private transport to reach the markets, however, they consider it unreliable. Women further face challenges in terms of time and security concerns while reaching pick-up and drop-off points. Electricity services need to be developed in the area also for tourism development. Water access is a challenge in the Inle Lake area, and most farmers do not have access to irrigation technology and depend on rainwater, well/spring and river/lake water. There are projects to address the water issue but they remain marginal. According to UNCTAD's buyer survey, access to reliable sources of clean water is among the key factors for improving women's business activities.

Access to finance is critical for investment and business development as well as for reaching markets outside farmers' townships. It is also important for the survival of firms during downturns. In Shan State, borrowing is mainly dominated by informal sources such as friends or family, and informal lenders in the ward or region, and more so for women. Microfinance institutions and international development programmes are also relevant for accessing finance in the area. However, micro loans' ceiling is too small to make serious investment towards higher value-added production. International development programmes often have strict procedures for loan applications often excluding their target population.

In addition to addressing issues related to different dimensions of agriculture-tourism linkages in the Inle Lake area, the government should also ensure the full implementation of laws and commitments aimed at supporting women's empowerment in economic and social life and eliminating all kinds of discrimination. It should also incorporate a gender perspective to address the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Myanmar is expected to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic in terms of its socioeconomic effects compared to the relatively low spread of the disease in the country. Alike previous shocks, the COVID-19 pandemic is not gender neutral and the recovery measures need to incorporate a gender perspective in all areas including paid work, unpaid work, and domestic violence.

⁴ Three surveys were administered by UNCTAD in Hopong, Kalaw, Nyaung Shwe, Pekon, Pindaya, Pinlaung and Ywangan townships in the last quarter of 2019. The surveys were carried out with (i) female farmers in the selected agricultural value chains; (ii) buyers and employers in the tourism sector; and (iii) local and international NGOs and development agencies working with women in the agriculture and tourism sectors and with farmers' associations.

Policy options to support women farmers to benefit from strengthened linkages between agriculture and tourism



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Indirect farmer-tourist interaction

- Pilot contract farming projects could be developed between women farmers in each value chain and hotels and restaurants in the region while providing the necessary inputs and training for quality assurance. Producer organizations and cooperatives could be instrumental in this process in helping women farmers gain competitive advantage by pooling resources and selling in larger quantities to tourism companies.
- Local governments could provide free or subsidized stalls, childcare services and transportation facilities to ease women farmers' access to local markets.
- Tourism companies such as large hotels, resorts and tour operators could incorporate new local products and services into their tourism service packages to support women farmers in the three horticultural value chains. Examples of such local products and services are given in the policy implementation table. Such events and initiatives could be introduced as tourism companies' social responsibility projects on rural development and women's economic empowerment.



Direct farmer-tourist interaction

- Government could encourage tourism companies such as hotels, resorts and tour operators to introduce supplementary services enabling direct farmer-tourist interaction. Government could support women farmers to start on-farm tourism facilities, develop high value-added products (e.g. special blended tea, ginger oil, avocado cream) and services (e.g. recreational, educational and cultural services) to be sold to visiting tourists. Examples of possible actions and activities to these ends are given in the policy implementation table.
- Government could increase the number of cultural festivals in the region and provide women farmers with subsidized or free stalls to sell their produce in temporary markets and farmer markets.



Supply-side constraints faced by farmers

- Government could fully implement and monitor laws and policies on gender equality. Specific measures that could be taken are presented in the policy implementation table.
- Investments are needed in the education system to both improve educational attainment and close the gender gap in adult literacy and numeracy skills. Training programmes could be tailored to the needs of farmer groups. These trainings need to be conducted on a regular basis, accompanied by follow-up activities, and should take into account women's mobility and time constraints. Gender sensitization training could be combined with technical training programmes and extension services.
- Capacity building and farmer support programmes could be developed to address issues related to access to inputs, technology and information.
- The procedures to apply for a credit through banks, micro finance institutions and international development programmes could be simplified and positive discrimination for women could be practiced.

Policy options to support women farmers to benefit from strengthened linkages between agriculture and tourism



Demand for local produce by tourists

- Nation-wide campaigns such as “Eat local” or “Buy local” could be developed to promote local cuisine and local sourcing.
- Local governments could develop a programme that provides financial (e.g. tax discounts) and/or non-financial incentives (e.g. free advertising) to tourism companies (i.e. guesthouses, hotels, resorts, restaurants, tour operators) that source locally. They can establish desks in local markets to advertise the programme.
- Government could introduce labelling programmes such as “locally made by women of Inle Lake” which identifies local products produced by women farmers, and “sourcing locally from women farmers” which positively distinguish tourism companies that source locally and buy mainly from women farmers.
- In addition to labelling which could become a tool of advertisement, government with the support of international development programmes could provide financial incentives to tourism companies which source locally and mainly from women farmers.



Communication and marketing channels

- Producer associations and women’s self-help groups could play a role in facilitating women farmers’ access to information in the Inle Lake area through reliable means of information, such as online platforms, trade portals, websites, social media, mobile applications and local newspapers in partnership with government agencies and local governments. Access to existing similar tools such as the Greenway Agri-Livestock mobile app could be expanded. However, central and local governments should first invest in infrastructure for Internet accessibility to increase the share of the population with access to such platforms.
- Access to mobile phones needs to be expanded so that female traders can take advantage of applications such as mobile money which provides a solution for insufficient access to formal credit.
- Government agencies, in partnership with local governments and associations, could work to increase the number of women self-help groups and their reach given the many benefits they provide to women farmers in terms of technical training, market information and getting better prices.
- Government authorities could liaise with large hotels and resorts in the Inle Lake area to help them develop farmer programmes. In such programmes, hotel managers and an extension officer funded by the hotel could work directly with women farmers in the three horticultural value chains to improve production, quality and marketing of their produce in return for guaranteed supply of fresh produce at competitive prices. This is not likely to

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