



A gender assessment of Myanmar and of the Inle Lake area with a focus on the agriculture and tourism sectors





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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents an analysis of the agriculture and tourism sectors in the Inle Lake area of Shan State in Myanmar from a gender perspective. It investigates how to improve women's wellbeing through their participation in three selected agricultural value chains (tea, avocado and ginger) and in the tourism sector. The report provides policy recommendations for building linkages between the three agricultural value chains and the tourism sector to promote gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

The study is carried out 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.” It is based on desk research, field observations and field surveys conducted by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in Hopong, Kalaw, Nyaung Shwe, Pekon, Pindaya, Pinlaung and Ywangan townships in Southern Shan 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 nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and development agencies working with women in the agriculture and tourism sectors and with farmers' associations.

Background

Myanmar is a rural country, with 70 per cent of its population living in rural areas and relying on crop, husbandry and livestock for livelihoods and incomes. Agriculture contributes to 30 per cent of GDP, 25 per cent of exports and 56 per cent of employment

have benefited little from this wave of modernization, mainly because they have been by and large absent from policy- and decision-making processes. That situation is improving, and a National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women¹ has been developed and is being implemented.

Shan State is the most diverse area of the country, with 33 recognized ethnic groups and languages. Despite these differences in ethnicity, the townships and value chains selected in this report share many similarities. In all selected townships, agriculture plays a key role in the economy and economic activities revolve around the family unit, with gendered roles embedded in that family structure.

Myanmar has a history of internal conflicts that have greatly affected Shan State. The security situation has been improving thanks to the 2015 Nationwide Ceasefire Agreement, but it is still fragile. The connection between armed groups and the drug trade fuels insecurity and limits mobility. For women, the presence of soldiers can lead to additional security concerns, including gender-based and sexual violence.

The COVID-19 pandemic

In the first months of 2020, the world experienced an outbreak of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19), with social distancing measures and border closures introduced world-wide that have caused an unprecedented disruption in economic activity. Despite the relatively limited spread of the disease in Myanmar, the country is expected to be disproportionately affected by the pandemic in socioeconomic terms.

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