Agrarian transition and social differentiation with a boom crop of cassava: A case study in Son La and Dak Lak in Vietnam

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1. Introduction
2. Research questions
3. Conceptual framework
4. Methodology
5. Key findings
6. Implications for inclusive interventions to support the poor
1. Introduction

• Boom crops in Southeast Asia
• Cassava – a cash crop for the poor

• Problem 1 - Sustainability
• Problem 2 - Social differentiation

• Support for poor farmers
• Gender – a missing element in the literature
2. What this study is looking for

1) Various responses to boom crops among the households

2) Social relations with value-chain actors

3) Gender and social dimensions of technological issues of cassava production
3. Conceptual Framework

• Political ecology in agrarian change

Power dimensions of boom crops (a single victim narrative with the community/ethnic group/the poor)

• Political ecology linked with gender relations

Gender as relational power not as a variable. A useful framework for understanding farmers’ diverse agency to respond to boom crops.
4. Methods

• Son La, Dak Lak – 2 districts each, 1 commune each and 2 villages each

• In-depth interviews with 50 men and 50 women

• Thai, Xinh-Mun, Kho là (Son La)
Tay and Ede (Dak Lak)
5-1. Key findings: responses to boom crops

- **Early adopters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group A</th>
<th>Group B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversification</td>
<td>Cassava specialization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coffee, spices</td>
<td>(men and women)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group C</th>
<th>Group D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassava Dependency</td>
<td>Wage labor/migration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(men and women)</td>
<td>(men and women)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The trend in past five years

- This group cannot invest in input (labour & finance)

Key findings: responses to boom crops

- Men and women can invest in inputs such as labour and finance.
- Early adopters are those who have already diversified their crops.
- Groups A, B, C, and D represent different levels of income and dependency on cassava.
- The trend in the past five years shows a shift towards diversification in some groups.
Ms Huong, 26, Khơ mú: She tried to increase cassava production by using fallow land, having an interval by planting maize, and to ask for planting materials from neighbours.

Mr Hieu sent his two sons to Hanoi and stopped growing cassava. He thinks that due to low prices and severe soil erosion, it is the right time to stop growing cassava to make his land fallow, waiting for some financial capital available from his son’s work to reinvest in farming.

Ms H Got from Dang Kang expanded her cassava field this year in a mountain bush area located 10km away from her house.

Mr Y Thoi from Ea Sar, decided to rent his 0.5ha of cassava farm to a Kinh investor as profit from his farm was too low and he thought wage labour work was much more secure than investing in his own farm in his family situation with school-aged children who could still not work as family labourers.
5-2. Key findings: relationships with value-chain actors

- Agents, collectors and traders have different interests. Incentives for supporting farmers vary.
- Ethnic minorities trust their relatives than information from agents, factories or agricultural extension workers.
5-3. Key findings: constraints and incentives originated from gender roles and relationships

The degree of change

A lot of change

Gender relations

Farming practices

Gender roles

This should not be interpreted as gender equality or women’s empowerment

little change

1990

Time

2020

5 - 3.

A lot of change

little change

Key findings: constraints and incentives originated from gender roles and relationships
### 5-3. Key findings: gender and social constraints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Technological problems</th>
<th>Gender and social constraints and challenges</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soil erosion</td>
<td>Women have been compensating for the shortage of male labour and capital with their own labour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pest and diseases</td>
<td>Women cannot climb up to the field everyday to spray and/or monitor cassava.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Processing</td>
<td>Poor households cannot wait for drying: immediate cash for buying rice is needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information flows</td>
<td>Poor households cannot wait for drying: immediate cash for buying rice is needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6. Implications for more inclusive interventions

• Interventions: which group do you target? Group B or C? Who are likely to benefit from proposed interventions?

• Information/adoption flows: ethnic minorities have their own information sharing networks based on trust. Are you providing information to the right networks?

• Investments: risks should be small and shared by somebody whom they trust. Why some farmers don’t take a risk?

• Approaches to interventions: what are social and gender constraints and barriers to address technological issues?
Acknowledgement

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