



Engaging with private sector for women's economic empowerment: lessons learnt from Vietnam

Phuong Nguyen

PhD Candidate, Massey University



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Research context

- Growing donor-private sector partnerships for development

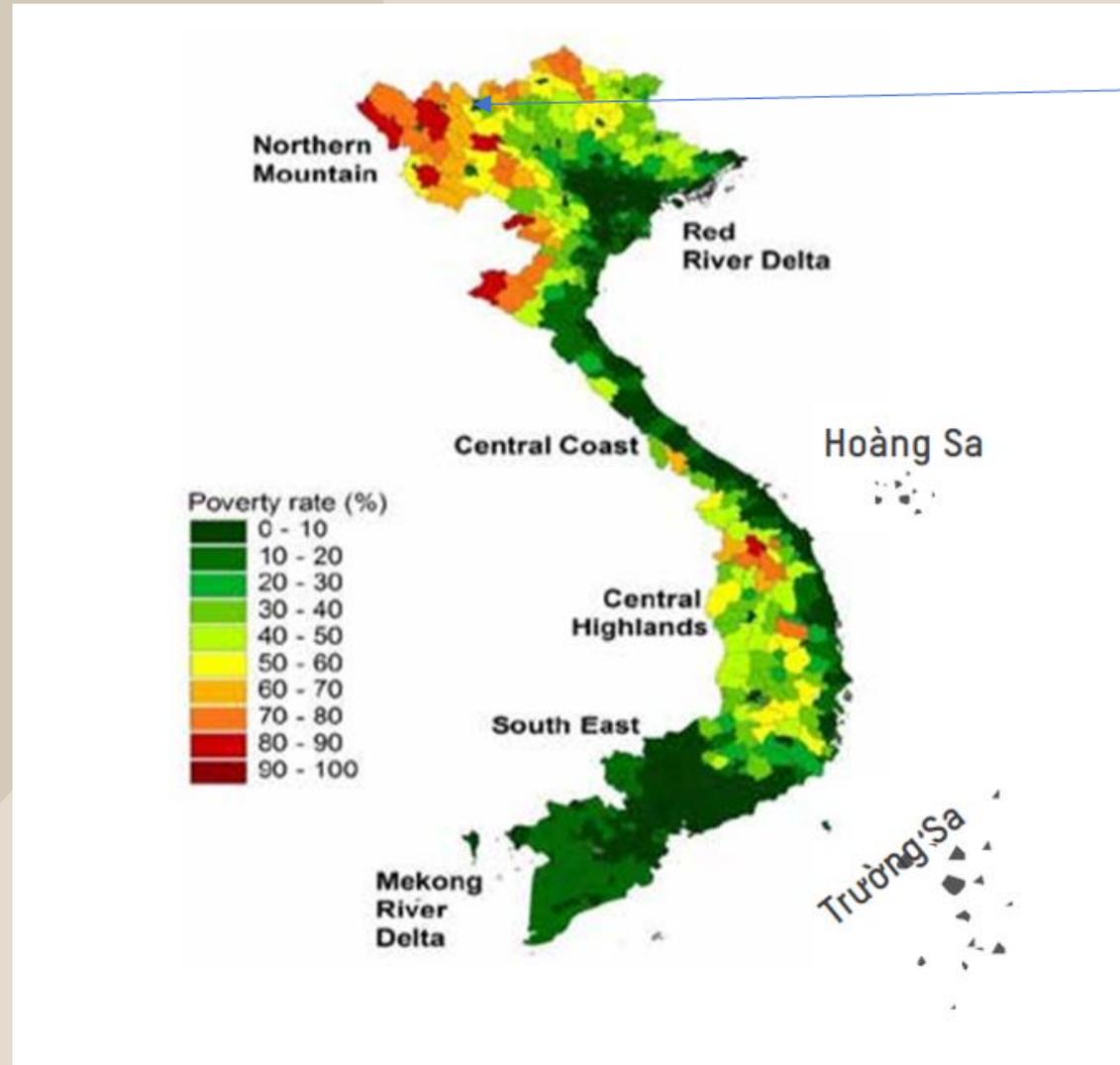
“We work with business to leverage each other's assets, connections, creativity and expertise to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

DFAT (n.d, Private sector partnerships –Why work with us?)

- The research aims to interrogate a donor-private sector partnership approach to economically empower ethnic minority women in Vietnam: strengths, limitations, and challenges.



Research location



The research location

Source: Adapted from World Bank's poverty map, 2018

Summary of the three businesses

Business	Commodity involved	Business scale	Main ethnic minority groups involved
Tea company	Traditional Shan tea	Small enterprise	Tay, Hmong, Dao
Benzoin company	Benzoin	Small enterprise	Tay, Hmong, Dao
Herbal cooperative	Traditional herbal bath products and medicinal essential oils	Micro-enterprise	Dao Hmong

Research methodology

- Qualitative methodology
- 57 structured in-depth interviews, 5 focus group discussions
- Total of 103 people participated in the study:
 - ✓ Donor, NGO and local government representatives
 - ✓ Business owners and staff
 - ✓ Men and women from the three ethnic minority groups involved in the programmes.

Findings

- Strengthens:
 - Micro and small businesses are important in creating economic opportunities for low-income women – Inclusive business
 - The level of engagement with local people matters:
 - Locally embedded and indigenous businesses affect the success and sustainability and, consequently, the ability of the business to engage with ethnic minority women.

“My strength is that I have a long working experience [in the tea production area]. I am a person who works directly with farmers every day, buying and selling [tea products]... We always strongly connect with the people in the community, supporting the most challenging families.

(KI-Tea company director)

“The cooperative members were united and understood each other. In the early days, when the cooperative had little profit to share, they said that the business was challenging [shortage of capital to develop a facility]; everything was difficult. So they told us not to share the profit ... save the money for reinvestment. Until now, I am still very grateful to these sisters for having such thoughts. It shows a stable relationship and trust in members of the cooperative. Therefore, I also want to help them so that we do not have to go back to the old days.

(KI-director of the herbal cooperative)

“The people are ethnic minorities whose culture and language are different from the Kinh people. We are from the Kinh. Hmong people may understand some of what we say, but we do not know what they want, whether they can hear us or not, and whether our messages reach them. Therefore, we have to hire an interpreter. The fact is that people still do not trust the company. This is a challenge. Therefore, the linkage between businesses and people is not high.”

(KI-former business manager of benzoin company)

- Limitations and challenges:

- Limited capacity and resources to cope with changes
- Profit-oriented – instrumentalist approach to gender and WE
 - Lack of interest and commitment to addressing wider WE issues.

“As an SME, the economic purpose is the top priority”

(KI-former business manager of the benzoin company)

- Short time frames for effectively challenging gendered norms and inequality structures required for WE

- Women's engagement in value chains does not always financially benefit and empower women
 - Types of products [materially of the crop], production scale, and level of revenue matter.
 - Women - "women's crops", such as tea and herbal, but when revenue gets bigger – men dominate
 - Men are more control over the production and income of products such as benzoin – "men's work"

“In recent years, the tea company has often encouraged us to plant and take care of tea trees, so we have some income. We can cover the daily expenses ourselves and do not need to ask our husbands. When we do not have money, we pick tea for a day or two to sell and earn a million dong to use. We do not have to worry about running out of money; no need to borrow everywhere. [We] have enough money to buy fertilisers and cover medical treatment. We have enough money for children to go to school.”

(Female respondent in Hmong female tea focus group discussion)

“Like in the past when I worked as a street vendor, if I couldn't sell anything on that day, then at night, I would have to think, what to eat tonight. For example, if I had 100,000 dongs left in my pocket and [I] bought meat for 50,000-60,000 dongs, what would I eat tomorrow? So I have to think about what to eat each meal. But now that I have more income from here [the cooperative], I won't have to think about it anymore. After selling medicinal plants [to the cooperative], I just buy food for my family if I want to eat anything. Next time, when they need more medicinal plants, I will buy food again. I don't need to worry much as the money from [selling] the medicinal plants will be enough for my [family] meals for a few days.

(Mrs Ta- Dao female herbal grower)

Interviewer: Is the income from the bodhi tree important to your family? Did you sell a lot?

Female: [We] sold some last year

Interviewer: How much [did you earn]?

Female: He did it, so I did not know. I had never done it, so I did not know.

Interviewer: So didn't he tell you?

Female: No, he didn't tell me.

(Dao woman-benzoin farmer)

Interviewer: Who did decide to join the [business] link?

Male respondent: It was my decision.

Interviewer: Did you talk to your wife or discuss it with her before deciding?

Male respondent: No, I did not say anything

Interviewer: Then, after you signed the [business] link, did you tell your wife?

Male respondent: After signing, [I] went back to discuss it with my wife. The wife must follow her husband. She had no choice as I had already signed it.

(Dao man-herbal plants grower)

- Barriers and social norms.
- Power relations within the household, the community, local authorities, and businesses affect women's empowerment
- Holistic approach to WEE- Involve NGOs, civil society, and local government to address barriers and structural issues - norms

Potential tensions

- Businesses are generally profit-oriented, so how do select a good partner for development programmes
- Micro and small locally-embedded businesses are potential partners, but they have limited resources to cope with rapidly changing markets
- Power relations within the household, the community, local authorities, and businesses affect women's empowerment
- Holistic approach to WE requires a longer timeframe, and the scope may be beyond the capacity of a single programme.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Select businesses with a large emphasis on reciprocity and wider community goals and women's empowerment
- Development capacity for micro and small businesses is necessary for sustainability
- Address barriers and norms. Taking a relational empowerment approach rather than an individual empowerment approach
- Be realistic about what can be achieved within the project and programme timeframe.



thank you

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