GENDER ISSUES IN THE SOCIAL FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT SONG DA
- FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Consultancy report No. 6

Prepared by
Rita Gebert and
Nguyen Thi Hang

Hanoi, January 1996

Table of Contents

1 Introduction and Background 1
2 What is Gender? 2
2.1 Gender Issues in Vietnam Today 2
3 Research Methodology 3
4 District-Level Gender Situation Analysis 5
4.1 Institutional Analysis 5
4.1.1 Yen Chau 5
4.1.2 Tua Chua 5
4.2 Women and Men in Agriculture/Land Use 9
4.2.1 Yen Chau 9
1. Introduction

The Social Forestry development Project (SFDP) is implemented by the Department of Forestry within the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD), and receives German technical assistance. Employing participatory approaches, the project implements activities primarily in the social forestry and agriculture sectors in one district in each of two provinces in the important Song Da Watershed in Northwest Vietnam: Son La and Lai Chau. The two districts, Yen Chau in Son La with a population of about 52,000 and Tua Chua in Lai Chau with 34,000 people, are both distinguished by their ethnic minorities. In Yen Chau the Black Thai are the predominant ethnic minority with 57% of the population, while in Tua Chua it is the H'mong with 73%. Both districts belong to one of the poorest regions in Vietnam: the Northern Uplands, and rely to a great extent on subsistence-oriented upland agriculture. Tua Chua in particular is extremely remote, and has few viable connections to external markets.

Since the inception of its implementation phase in 1995, SFDP has had a gender specific project planning matrix. At purpose level, one of the three objectively verifiable indicators (OVIs) is that "women participate actively in developing and applying methods for sustainable natural resource management." At objective level, there is also no mistaking the integration of gender issues with an OVI such as "All community forestry development plans have identified relevant gender-specific fields of activities and support their implementation," or "Women are explicitly favoured through sustainable forest utilization." Moreover, the first major output of the project reads: "A gender-specific concept for community-based sustainable agro-forestry landuse is developed and implemented." For reasons outlined in Section below, a "gender-specific" concept may not be the correct wording in the case of SFDP. However, there is no doubt that a concept for community-based agro-forestry landuse must equally consider the needs and interests of both women and men in order to be sustainable.

In keeping with the integration of gender issues in project outputs and activities, SFDP project management commissioned a gender consultancy for the SFDP and hired a Gender Officer who could accelerate the integration of gender issues into all aspects of the SFDP. The consultancy was scheduled in two parts: the first part in May - June 1996 and the second part in October - November, 1996. During the first part of the consultancy, in addition to discussions held in Hanoi, Yen Chau District of Son La Province was visited. During the second part of the consultancy, Tua Chua District of Lai Chau Province was visited. This final report brings together the findings in both Yen Chau (Yen Chau findings have already been made available in a preliminary report) and Tua Chua, and includes some additional information from the national level. The report, however, is largely based on the presentations and discussions of the two missions in Yen Chau, Tua Chua and Hanoi. In this respect, the report provides more a qualitative rather than quantitative profile of gender issues in the two districts; it is based on information gathered through Rapid Rural Appraisal methods, and aims to provide the reader with a "gender overview," including trends and tendencies. Additional information is available at the project office in Hanoi.
While the consultants have learned and benefited greatly from extensive discussions held with project and district staff, the views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the project or its counterparts. Any mistakes of omission or commission or those of the report's main author, Rita Gebert.

2. What is Gender?

There are many misconceptions as to what the word, "gender" actually means in development terms. It is often associated with "women" and activities related to "women and development." In fact, gender like age, ethnicity, class and caste, is a social variable. It refers to the learned social differences between women and men, which are changeable over time, and which vary both geographically and culturally. Gender does not refer to the biological differences between women and men. When we talk about gender roles and tasks in the household, for example, we want to know about what both women and men in the household are doing, and what sort of rights and benefits--or lack thereof--they have in the household, community and political-legal system. Based on gender-defined roles and responsibilities, women and men have different needs, interests and concerns whether in a rural or urban environment. As research has shown, these differences also manifest themselves within a single household, and Vietnamese households are no exception. Therefore, it is always necessary for projects to take these differences into account in order to avoid gender biases in concepts, activities and policy recommendations. When we talk about "community-based," "people-centred," or "participatory" concepts, we are necessarily talking about both women and men, the better off, the poorer, the younger and the elderly.

But gender-defined roles and tasks are not "writ in stone." Just because women and girls usually fetch water does not mean men and boys cannot do this task, just because men usually take greater part in community decision-making, does not mean women have no capabilities as (public) decision makers. Just because girls have not traditionally been sent to school, does not mean they are incapable of literacy. This means that development projects should not address women as an "isolated" target group. When we talk about change and development in women's lives, we are necessarily talking about change and development in men's lives and vice versa! Perhaps the example below of Mrs. Chim, a Black Thai commune women's leader from Yen Chau District, helps to explain.

Box One: An Example of Gender: Mrs. Chim, Commune Women's Leader

Mrs. Chim, 47, is an active commune-level Women's Union Leader brimming with self-confidence. In addition to working in her upland and paddy fields, she also attends many meetings at both district and commune-level. Among others, she is in charge of a revolving credit, and a savings and credit programme in the commune. In the past few years, Mrs. Chim has also had a number of opportunities to attend trainings in Son La and even in Hanoi. Unfortunately, Mrs. Chim was widowed a couple of years ago. In addition to herself and her children, she now must also take care of her husband's old father. However, in describing her life together with her husband, it became clear that her husband had been willing to change his own roles and responsibilities in their household, in order to increase her opportunities in the Women's Union, and her chances to learn new things. She told us how he had supported her to go on trainings, and had even accompanied her to Son La. He had also been willing to help with housework, not only while she was away on trainings or for meetings, but also while she was there. In this way, with her husband's active support, Mrs. Chim had more opportunities to learn and apply new knowledge which was, and continues to be, beneficial for her, her household and the community.

2.1 Some Gender Issues in Vietnam

While in recent years there has been an increasing interest, and consequently an increasing number of studies, on various gender issues in Vietnam, the amount of information available from the ethnic minority areas is minimal. Studies and papers from such agencies as the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Programme have little to say about the ethnic minority areas of Vietnam. Researchers and consultants rarely have the opportunity to go to the ethnic minority areas to study gender issues there, and guesses and assumptions must be put forth instead of real information. Naturally, gender issues are different for each of Vietnam's approximately 50 plus ethnic minorities, most of which are located in the remoter highland and plateau areas of Vietnam. Ethnic minorities comprise approximately 14% of the total population or roughly 10 million people. Of these 10 million, over 500,000 belong to the Thai ethnic group, most of which live in the Song Da Watershed. The H'mong also have over 500,000 people living in the northern and western parts of Vietnam; of this number perhaps 200,000 live in the Song Da Watershed. Thus, both the Thai and the H'mong represent larger populations among Vietnam's ethnic groups. With this study, then, a small part of the gap in gender studies among ethnic minorities in Vietnam is being filled.
Yet another issue stands out as having little information available. That issue is one of those central to SFDP: natural resource management and environment. Just as there is almost no information on gender issues in ethnic minority areas, there is also a paucity of information on gender issues in natural resource management, whether in ethnic minority or Kinh areas of the country. In this respect, the SFDP could also play a role in filling important gaps in information in this area in Vietnam.

With regard to other gender issues in Vietnam which are also of most relevance for SFDP, such as agriculture, education, access to credit and the like, they will be integrated into the text which follows as the introductory paragraph of each substantive section. In this way, the reader will have a better chance to compare the situation at national level with that found by the consultants in the project area.

3. Research Methodology

During this consultancy in Vietnam, the work on gender issues was carried out by Dr. Rita Gebert and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Hang with the support of various SFDP-staff in Hanoi, Yen Chau, and Tua Chua. We started our work by learning what we could of gender framework conditions in Vietnam, including from the perspective of NGOs working in Son La Province. To these ends, we had meetings in Hanoi with Care Australia, ActionAid, Winrock International, and the Women and Family Research Centre. Members of the National Women's Union were met by Mrs. Hang on her own. At District-level, in addition to project staff, we have had meetings with representatives of government agencies and mass organizations, including the Forest Protection Unit, Agriculture Extension Station, District Education Office, District Women's Union, District Farmers' Association, District Youth Association and Vietnam Bank for Agriculture.

Our Yen Chau village visits in May took us to three communes: Chieng Dong, Chieng Pan and Chieng Khoi. In these three communes we were able to visit a total of seven villages. In fact, we would have liked to visit a remoter commune, and stay a longer time in the villages visited, but with the "untimely" beginning of the rainy season, our travel in the area was hampered by the rapidly muddy, impassable roads. The other aspect of visiting the area during a "shoulder peak" season for agriculture, was that both women and men, and especially women, tended to be away from their homes for long hours (including staying some days away in their upland fields). This meant that we were unable to have as good a "mix" of interviews and discussions with groups and individuals as could be hoped for. People had rather severe time constraints, and we were not keen to impose ourselves on them by requesting them to meet with us for long discussions when they were clearly busy.

In the remoter Tua Chua District we visited two communes: Xinh Phinh and Muong Bang, both of which are quite near the district centre, although the latter commune is not a target area of the project. We were able to visit six H'mong villages, and as a comparison, one Thai (White Thai) village. While we were able to speak with quite a few women and men, the end of the rice harvest was still on; this meant that in some cases it was better if we walked to people's paddy fields and spoke with them there. Particularly in Xinh Phinh Commune, fewer men were available for discussions, as they were away in a remoter part of the commune for obligatory road repair work.

Table One: Communes and Villages Visited: Yen Chau and Tua Chua

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Yen Chau District</th>
<th>Tua Chua District</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chieng Dong</td>
<td>Xinh Phinh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huon, Nhom, Then Luong (Black Thai) Keo Bo (H'mong)</td>
<td>Ta La Cao, Thon Hai, Thon Ba (all H'mong) Phi Dinh II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chieng Pan</td>
<td>Muong Bang</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sop Sang, (Black Thai), Than (Kh'mu)</td>
<td>Phieung Bung, Song Un (H'mong) Village Two (White Thai)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chieng Khoi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngoang, Turn - Me (Black Thai)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Our discussions in both districts at commune and village-level largely took the form of semi-structured interviews with key informants (male and female commune and village leaders), women's groups, and individual women and men covering a broad range of issues and emphasizing gender differences (if any), regarding these issues. We focussed very much on people's farming systems, as people's main concerns in an area where food (especially rice) shortages exist, lie in meeting their subsistence needs through a mix of (mostly) agricultural activities, including cash cropping in Yen Chau. (There is also cash cropping in Tua Chua but to a much lesser extent.) We had wanted to make more use of UNDP's visualizing, PRA methods, but the intermittent showers and muddy ground in Yen Chau effectively hindered the use of methods which involved drawing or charting on the ground. In Tua Chua, the limited number of days available in the project area, the necessity to rely on an additional Hmong-kinh translator from the District Women's Union (who also had a rather limited time available for us), led us to focus on verbal rather than visual communication.

4. District-Level Gender Situation Analysis

4.1 Institutional Analysis

The Vietnamese national census of 1989 (quoted in Tran and Allen, 1992: 14), had shown that "government management" had a representation of 26% women. However, the presence of women in public administration in Vietnam has decreased since the advent of doi moi (economic reform). According to UNDP (1996: 21), public service reforms since 1989 resulting in staff cuts (over one million people nationwide) have disproportionately affected women, in that "approximately 63% of regular staff laid off in 1989-91 were women." Likewise, women's political representation in Vietnam has decreased since peacetime. In 1975, women held a rather high 32% of elected positions to the National Assembly, while nowadays it is barely 16% (although this is still much better than nearby Thailand). According to UNDP's Human Development Report (1995: 61) about 8% of ministerial level posts are held by women (again better than Thailand).

Two other factors affect women's representation in government services. One of these is the gender division of labour in Vietnam, whereby, for example health and education are considered "female" jobs. Therefore, when we look at the statistics for women's employment in these sectors, we see a majority of women: 66% and 64% respectively (Tran and Allen, 1992: 14). While virtually all rural women are engaged in agriculture, their representation as public service employees in this sector, as in forestry, is low (aside from being administrative support staff), not the least because women who, are primarily engaged in agriculture have lower levels of education. Another important factor relates to a gender division of labour within the public services themselves. With the exception of health and education, the only other agency to have a high representation of women is, not surprisingly, the Women's Union, and it is not part of the government civil service as such. While this ensures that women's interests are represented to a certain degree at all levels of the state, it also has the unintended effect of taking the pressure off other agencies and mass organizations to hire more women and to work harder to ensure that women's interests and needs are equally represented with men's in both their policies and their organizations. They can always think that the Women's Union is taking care of women's interests.

The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) has a special role to play in women's and gender issues in the country. According to the UNDP's gender briefing kit (1996: 15) the VWU is the "most active" mass organization in Vietnam, and has representatives from the national level down to the commune. Nationwide, the VWU has over 10 million members in all 53 provinces. According to Vietnamese law, it is necessary for the line agencies' socio-economic programmes for women to be implemented in cooperation with the VWU. While this is a good policy in theory, in practice it very much overstretches the VWU's capacities at local level, where understaffing and a lack of training are commonplace. Perhaps what could be envisioned in the long run is that the VWU staff gain skills as gender trainers, and be able to offer training and associated advisory services to the line agencies.

Unfortunately, we do not have nationwide statistics available on the representation of women at commune and district levels. According to UNDP's Human Development Report statistics (1995: 61) during the 1980s "female council members" of "municipalities or equivalent" (I assume this is district, rather than commune level), made up 22%. In terms of local level officials, however, we have no nationwide statistics on gender differences at district and commune level. We can only guess that women's representation at these levels would be rather low. again with the exceptions of Health, Education and the Women's Union.

4.1.1 Yen Chau District

While in Yen Chau District we had the opportunity to discuss gender, and other, issues with senior Staff of the various agencies as listed in Table Two below. The agencies varied in both their gender awareness and their capacities to implement activities which take gender differences among the target population into account. Of
course, Yen Chau is now in the “favoured” position of having a woman District Chairman, a woman head of the Agriculture Extension Station, and one woman seconded from the provincial forest department to work for the project in the District. There are female deputy heads at both the Education Office and the Bank. This would certainly compare favourably to lowland districts in Vietnam. However, having women in management positions is no guarantee that gendered activities will be implemented.

If a gendered approach is to be implemented, it goes without saying that the agencies’ activities must be both people-oriented and actually reach the villages. In this respect, very few of the agencies, with their limited staffing and transportation facilities, are able to work effectively at village-level, particularly in the remoter, hard to-reach villages. From Table Two we see that only the Education Office has good village coverage. Of the other agencies, only the Forest Protection Unit has as much as one staff per commune, while the Bank has one staff for two communes. Unfortunately, the staffing of the Agriculture Extension Station is particularly poor, both in number of staff and in their deployment. Most of the agencies, both hierarchically oriented and trying to compensate for their limited staff, work almost exclusively through commune and village/cooperative leaders. This means that the voices of women and men in expressing their needs, problems and ideas are rarely solicited and almost never heard. The project's work in the five target villages is an exception to this.

The mass organizations have representatives (heads and deputies) at both commune and village level, but the organizations’ effectiveness in making use of their grassroots organization is questionable. By effectiveness,” we mean here “effectively responding” to the local populations’ needs and interests. These organizations are undoubtedly more effective in passing messages from “top to bottom.” We have, for example, witnessed a meeting called by the Village Women’s Union at Huon village in Chien Dong commune. We were quite surprised to see the two women's union representatives delivering monologues, mostly in Vietnamese at this Thai village, based on what they had learned from attending a meeting with the commune leader. There was no opportunity to discuss the issues and no opportunity for the women in attendance (many of whom understand little Vietnamese) to check their understanding of the issues. It seems that such meetings are held at least once every three months, but if they are similar to the one we attended, they are unlikely to address people's real concerns in the villages.

Table Two: Yen Chau District Staffing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Agency</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
<th>Female Staff</th>
<th>Female Staff in Management*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest Protection Unit</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture Ext. Stn.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Office</td>
<td>18 + 800</td>
<td>592 (a)</td>
<td>1 (b)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Union</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farmers’ Association</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Association</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VBA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Either Head or Deputy-Head of the Agency or Unit.

(a) Of these 592 female teachers, 186 of them are Thai, 2 are Ximun and 1 is H'mong.

(b) One of 18.

While most of the agencies expressed willingness and openness regarding improving their work with women, and have even said they would like to have gender training for themselves and their staff, it was also clear that all of the agencies suffer from both limited implementation and management capacities. By limited management capacities is meant in the ability to develop and plan (independently) programmes, and then adequately oversee their implementation and monitoring, and finally being able to assess how successful they’ve been. This was especially true of the District Women’s Union with only three staff, of whom two are programme staff (and the head
is new as well). The Women's Union could otherwise be a strong partner for the project in further integrating gender issues in the project's work, and in increasing its coverage, for example, of the savings and credit programme already begun in a limited number of communes and villages. Therefore, the work with agencies in helping them to change their approaches will have to proceed in small increments, so as to avoid a situation where the agencies become too quickly overburdened and then completely lose their enthusiasm for trying something new.

4.1.2 Tua Chua District

Most of the institutional issues raised for Yen Chau District are similar to those in Tua Chua; given the remoteness of many H'mong villages, however, the coverage of government services is even "thinner" in Tua Chua than in Yen Chau. There are, however, some noteworthy differences. First, the rather favoured management situation of women in district agencies is almost completely lacking in Tua Chua. With the exception of the 'District Women's Union, it appears that no other head of agency in the District is a woman. The District Agriculture Office has one woman who is head of the cropping section. Likewise, one of the deputy heads of the District Education Office is a woman. Another notable difference between Tua Chua and Yen Chau is that some agencies, including the mass organizations are rather less active, in that not only do they have fewer staff (especially education) and programmes, they also seem to have access to less budgetary sources than Yen Chau (this may have to do with the comparative financial situation of the two Provinces, although we did not have an opportunity to assess this issue; it may also have to do with the greater distance of Tua Chua from the provincial capital, and past government spending patterns in the district).

Table Three: Tua Chua District Staffing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District Agency</th>
<th>Total Staff</th>
<th>Female Staff</th>
<th>Female Staff in Management*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Forest Protection Unit</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture**</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>8 (a)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>12 + 208</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Union</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Heads, Deputy-Heads, Heads of Section

**The Agriculture Extension Unit has 5/22 staff; of these 5.2 are female staff.

(a) 5/8 of these staff are administrative staff.

Our overall impression, although we did not have a chance to speak with as many agency heads in Tua Chua as we did in Yen Chau, was that government staff may have less access to training opportunities than their counterparts in Yen Chau, and that their level of education tends to be lower. Moreover, a smaller percentage of the Tua Chua staff are H'mong, than Yen Chau staff are Thai. To take the District Education Offices, the largest government employers, as an example: 23% of Yen Chau District's 600 female teachers are Thai, while in Tua Chua, only 2% of the district's 163 female teachers are H'mong (in total, the district has 208 teachers of whom only 8 are H'mong). While some Kinh local staff in Tua Chua are able to understand H'mong well and speak it passably (the district headquarters used to be located in Thon Hai H'mong village in Xinh Phinh Commune from 1968 to 1988), they are not easily able to communicate with the H'mong women who, with few exceptions, are unable to understand or speak Kinh (1).

Inter-agency cooperation in Tua Chua District—except for "special" priority issues—seems to be rather minor. This is unfortunate, as with such limited staffing for each agency, each would surely profit through cooperation with the other agencies. This is also true of programmes which take gender issues into consideration. If the Women's Union, for example, is able to start an adult literacy programme, that programme may benefit if the Women's Union closely cooperates with the District Education Office, as the area coverage could be expanded more easily. The
two agencies could work together to meet the goals of both more effectively.

As many of the agency heads in Tua Chua were absent during our stay there, it was not possible for us to assess the level of gender awareness among the district agencies, nor the demand for gender training. Also because of staff absences, we were unable to make a presentation of our findings in Tua Chua, and get feedback locally. Judging from various staffs description of their work, it appeared to us that gender awareness is rather low. Gender awareness seemed limited to the idea that there should be more programmes for women in such areas as literacy and improving drinking water supply. It was mentioned to us, however, that there is a severe shortage of female staff-agriculture is an example-who could contact with women in the villages. It seems that the female staff are not so willing to go to remote communes and villages, at least partly because of their own familial obligations. Otherwise, in the context of SFDP-supported activities there have been greater efforts to include women, but they have not yet been so successful.

4.2 Women and Men in Agriculture/Land Use

Agriculture remains the predominant sector in the Vietnamese economy. According to the 1989 Census, of the entire workforce in Vietnam, about 70% are engaged in agriculture, while 53% of those naming agricultural work as their primary occupation are women and girls, while 47% of those in agriculture are men and boys. In other words, the biggest contribution to agriculture in Vietnam is made by women; UNDP estimates (1996: 23) that "women carry out about 60% of the agricultural workload." Throughout the country it seems that the gender division of labour in agriculture is roughly similar. That is, women tend to do activities such as sowing, weeding and transplanting, while men are responsible for ploughing, use of any mechanized technologies, and purchasing inputs. Both share in the harvest. Despite this, however, government services in the agricultural sector, notably extension, "do not work with women," and as in other countries, "extension's gender bias largely parallels its elite bias" (Christoplos, 1996: 7).

Nationally, women have a double-burden in that they are responsible for over half of agricultural operations, while at the same time they also take care of "reproductive" or unpaid household tasks, such as "fetching water and fuelwood, cooking, cleaning and childcare. Gender researchers in Vietnam have concluded that one of the main impacts of doi moi on rural women is to increase their workload. With the return to the household rather than the cooperative as the productive unit, women no longer have the "fallback" position of the cooperative assigning traditionally female tasks in agriculture to males. In some areas of Vietnam, perhaps more in the South than in the North, the flight of rural male labour to urban areas, has also increased women's work in agriculture.

Another impact of economic reform and the move toward privatization in Vietnam, is related to land tenure. Households in Vietnam may now have long term land use rights bestowed on them through the issuance of land use certificates (Red Book Certificates). As land remains the single most important asset available to people in the rural areas, its allocation and commoditization are crucial issues. The process of issuing land use certificates is an ongoing one, and in remoter areas such as the Northwest, it is far from complete. While the titling practices for land use certificates do not specifically discriminate against women, the certificates are issued only in one name per household. This is normally considered the male "head of household." Originally, however, it was necessary for the VWU to struggle to have single women with dependents female-headed households--be issued with land use certificate (UNDP: 22). In terms of protecting women's interests before the law, particularly in the event of divorce or abandonment, and to ensure that they also have equal access to other benefits and services such as credit and irrigation which may rely on a land title, it is absolutely necessary that the names of both husband and wife appear on the land use certificates (see also McDonald, 1995: 22-23).

4.2.1 Yen Chau District

The Project Planning Matrix (PPM) of the SFDP has as its first output, a "Gender specific concept for community-based sustainable agroforestry land-use is developed and implemented." In Yen Chau District we looked into the issue of gender specificity in local land use, and what this term could mean in terms of practical implications for the project and the further development of project strategies to achieve this output. Our first finding was that the landuse systems of the Black Thai who predominate in Yen Chau District are household based, with women and men sharing their time and labour in virtually all agricultural operations. There are no fields where men only or women only provide their labour and then keep the produce or its proceeds on an individual basis (as one finds in some parts of Africa). For the most part, the farming system of the Black Thai is extremely complex, with household labour--women's, men's, children's and the elderly's--fully integrated within this system. Therefore, it would be virtually impossible to establish a "gender-specific" landuse system.

Having observed this, however, it is also clear that women work longer hours than others in the household (3).
Part of the reason for this is that women in the average household are responsible for both field, work and housework (which includes fetching water and firewood), with female children primarily assisting their mothers with the latter. Male children and the elderly tend to look after large livestock when it is required, while the elderly may also assist in taking care of small children of the household. Our interviews with women and men indicated that not only are women responsible for house work, they also work longer hours than men in the fields, as they are primarily (although not solely) responsible for a greater variety of agricultural activities (such as preparing paddy seed beds, transplanting paddy seedlings, weeding), including activities related to keeping small livestock (such as collecting food, and cooking it, for pigs). Men are responsible for heavier work such as house building, ploughing and land clearing (with the reduction in fallowing times, however, land clearing is no longer the heavy work it was when farming families would clear ten to fifteen year old fallows or open new fields from never-cut forest). Harvesting is pretty much an equally shared activity.

Despite the closely integrated use of labour in the household farming system, women and men within the same households also have differing interests and concerns regarding the operation of their farm, and regarding their farm's immediate environment. As an example, women are largely responsible for the care and feeding of small livestock. Therefore, they are also concerned about (and the most aware of) the animals' food requirements, and would try to ensure that the farming system is able to produce enough for the pigs; the women would also be concerned that the surrounding forest area has enough edible products for the animals. Another example relates to cotton and indigo. As the women are responsible for all steps in cotton production, from planting to harvesting, to spinning, dyeing and weaving, they are more concerned than the men are about the cotton and indigo crops (they would also know more precisely than the men about the household's requirements). Yet another obvious example is firewood. On the other hand, men are more concerned about large livestock and typically more about cash, as opposed to subsistence, crops.

As mentioned above, the level of integration of women's and men's labour in the farming system is very high (4). However, we also wanted to look at the issue of decision-making, and control of assets and the benefits of production in the household. While our visit was too short to have any detailed information on this issue, we were able to gain some impressions about it. While both women and men told us that much decision-making in the household, particularly on major issues, is joint, it would seem men have "the final say." That is, a husband and wife are likely to discuss things together, but in the event of disagreement, the husband's decision counts. Men also seem to have more say in which plots are used for which purposes, and how much seed should be planted (an exception is cotton). In terms of controlling the cash income derived from livestock and produce sales, the tendency is toward male control over larger amounts of cash, although it may be that in wealthier households, or in households where women's activities earn a relatively high regular cash income (5), there is greater female control (such as in Chien Khoi and Sop Sang). We found that the person doing the selling of produce/livestock/forest product was not really an indicator as to whether that person actually controlled the cash derived therefrom.

Of equally vital importance in Yen Chau as elsewhere in Vietnam, is the allocation of land use certificates. The SFDP has already been assisting this process in Yen Chau in some target villages. In practice, as elsewhere, only the men's names are included on the certificates. While we did not have a chance to discuss with the women what they think of this, their names should as a matter of principle be included on the Certificates. The significance of the Certificates should be carefully explained to both women and men, so that both are able to fully understand their rights and obligations that come with the Certificates. In addition to protecting property rights of women—not necessarily ensured in a patrilocal and patrilinear society—this should also contribute to an improvement in their status.

4.2.2 Tua Chua District

The traditional H'mong farming system, also a highly integrated one, is based on rice, maize, opium, livestock, the forest, and home gardens. But these pillars on which the system is based have become shaky at best, whether through the pressures of legislation or of population. The production of opium is, of course, illegal and since 1992, the Vietnamese government has taken stringent measures against the cultivation of opium poppy. H'mong villagers reported that their poppy fields were destroyed by government officials, often with the cooperation of village headmen (6). Tua Chua District still has poppy cultivation, but rather little and in remote fields far from the reach of government officers (personal communication).

But the drastic reduction in opium poppy cultivation would not be so serious if the other pillars of the H'mong farming system were strong. Unfortunately, they are not. Population pressure on the limited arable land in Tua Chua (according to the District Agriculture Office, barely 9,500 hectares are under cultivation out of the district total of 67,000 hectares) (7) forces the farming families who are not lucky enough to have paddy to reduce the fallow times of their upland fields down to practically nothing. This means that the fields' productivity is much reduced, while erosion and weed problems are much increased. This situation has had a noticeable impact on the lives of women in the upland areas of the district. They reported working harder and longer now compared with older times, but that their output is less.
Virtually all women aged 40 and above in the project area reported that they are "worse off" now compared to the past in terms of food security. The women feel themselves more vulnerable to food shortages now than in the past, particularly as they no longer have opium, and the savings in silver which it brought to their households. Interestingly, a number of older women said that in the past they were not as welldressed as nowadays, but that their food security was much better. They are referring to the poppy fields, as the poppy is cultivated in the winter season, and harvested around February. The women told us they had little time to sew their skirts and blouses in time for H'mong New Year, as they had to "take care of the opium poppy like their children." With poppy cultivation now forbidden, the women have greater free time to do more elaborate stitching after the rice harvest.

Traditionally, H'mong women were able to round out their families' nutritional requirements with various forest products such as fruits, vegetables and mushrooms. In season, bamboo shoots were collected and eaten by every family. Otherwise, women and men also could get medicinal plants from the forest. Nowadays this is hardly possible. The forest is no longer the "supermarket" that it once was many years ago. Women told us that the forest is now largely only a source of their firewood, and in some villages they complained that the distance to reach areas with suitable firewood is becoming greater with every year. With the firewood having a potential of becoming scarce—every man, woman and child in Tua Chua District relies-on firewood for a cooked meal and for warmth—villages and communes are setting stricter rules for collecting firewood. Most H'mong women make liberal use of maize cobs as additional cooking fuel.

Both women and men also reported more incidences of animal diseases and epidemics than in the past. This may well be the case, in that more families are trying to raise more small livestock, especially as a means to offset rice shortages. Remote area villagers, however, have no vaccines available for their animals (or for themselves and their children for that matter). According to lowland people, the H'mong are skilled livestock breeders and keepers, and there may be more potential in this area, provided appropriate grazing areas are available.

An additional, often overlooked, pillar in the farming system, is the home garden. A woman's home garden is an area of diversified production, depending on the woman's perceptions of what is needed for the household. While most home gardens have greens for the family, they may also contain various foods for large and small livestock, fruit trees, sugar cane, garlic, onions, chillies and other vegetables, and sometimes a little maize and cassava. We've also seen tobacco in women's gardens. The garden seems to be entirely the women's responsibility, and women are the main decision-makers as to what should be grown in it. Men show no interest in vegetable growing, whether in the home garden or inter-cropped with upland rice. However, there is one important role for the men vis-a-vis the gardens, and that is the construction of a good perimeter fence for the garden. Some women complained that hungry livestock had eaten their vegetables because their men had not constructed and/or repaired the fence.

As with the Thai farming system described in the section above, the H'mong system-still much more subsistence oriented than in Yen Chau, but with greater incidences of hiring out labour among poor families—is also highly integrated in terms of labour inputs by women and men, whether young or old. With the exception of the gardens, no plot or field has labour inputs from women only or men only. Having said this, however, H'mong women as the Thai, are also responsible for a greater number of agricultural tasks than are their men (see box below), while men are more responsible for implements and building-oriented activities. While a: first glance the H'mong farming system may seem simpler than the Thai, its complexity becomes more obvious when one starts asking about rice and maize varieties. Although they do not use all varieties every year, the H'mong have told us about having six rice varieties and four for maize; selection depending on soil and weather conditions and the previous years harvest. As we spent more of our time interviewing H'mong women in Tua Chua, we could observe that the women's knowledge of variety use and development is as detailed, if not more so in some respects, than the men's (we compared what we were learning from the women to what was reported by Littooy et al. in 1995, which was based mostly on information given by men).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box Two: The H'mong Division of Labour (8)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Men's Tasks:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land clearing, (with women, &amp; as exchange labour), ploughing, some weeding, harvesting (with women), gathering house timbers, &amp; bamboo poles for roofing, basket &amp; implement making, blacksmithing, fence construction, stall construction, livestock purchases/sales cutting/splitting larger pieces of firewood, village meetings, village/commune roadwork.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
H'mong men also admit that their women are extremely hardworking, and say that a household without a hardworking woman will be a poor one. As can be seen from the box above, Hmong women do a greater variety of tasks in agriculture than the men, and are also responsible for all aspects of housework. When we spoke with the Hmong women about their most arduous, or difficult, tasks there were two or three items which were mentioned. In some villages, a major and apparently increasing problem is with water shortages. This means that women and their daughters are forced to go farther for water, or they are forced to queue for water as local supplies reduce to a trickle in the dry season. Women also pointed out rice pounding and maize grinding as time-consuming tasks in those villages where there are no small mills. Firewood collection is also time-consuming, and the Hmong women try to collect more during the dry season to avoid having to spend hours collecting it when they are busiest with agriculture in the rainy season.

In the agriculture sector, however, the most obvious problem the women face is with weeding. Most older women we spoke with said that weeds had become worse with the reduction in fallows, saying that in past times it was never necessary to weed an upland rice plot more than twice and a maize plot more than once. Now it seems that some women are forced to weed upland rice three times, and maize twice. When we asked women approximately how many days they spent on weeding, some of those with upland rice plots said they feel they’re doing none-stop weeding during June and July. From interviewing a number of households, we were able to get an indication of the number of days spent on weeding relative to other operations. For upland rice, for example, the total number of labour-days with three adults (two women, one man) was given as 30 days for weeding by hand, all other operations: 12 to 13 days. Maize and the lesser sorghum crop, Job's Tears (coix lachrymal), require a labour input of around 21 days, with 9 days required for weeding by hoe. It is no wonder that the women's labour curve peaks in June - July (9).

In a subsistence-oriented farming system which relies on labour inputs from both women and men in virtually all aspects, it is true to say that women will have access to all productive resources of the household. The well-being of the household depends on both male and female labour having full access to such resources. Control, however, is another matter. Major decision-making in the Hmong household is much the domain of men. This does not mean, however, that women do not have any say in household decisions in agriculture (we have not asked much about decision-making in the socio-cultural field). Women we spoke with said that they discussed with their men about which rice and maize varieties to plant in which plots, but that men had the last say. At the same time, however, it is the women who have selected and kept seeds from the previous harvest. Therefore, the women have already decided as to the varying quantities of seed types they will likely plant in the following year. Women's sole involvement in seed selection means they are responsible for maintaining variety quality and diversity--a fact normally overlooked by extensionists.

But decision-making in the Hmong household is also a function of age and status. The young daughter-in-law who has just joined her husband's family will have basically no decision-making power in terms of crops grown or in allocating her own labour. However, her mother-in-law will have much to say in the house. She will have a say in the allocation of younger family members' labour in various agricultural and non-agricultural activities, she will be able to withdraw from some of the most tedious household and field tasks (because she allocates these tasks to daughters and daughters-in-law), she will also have a say in who her children marry. In other words, when the project is seeking women with whom to work, it will be important to consider the Hmong woman's age and status; the best initial partners for the project in terms of confidence, leadership and applying their knowledge, will be the middle-aged "mothers-in-law."

During our interviews we found that while forest degradation has a negative impact on all families, and on women in particular with their responsibilities for maintaining household nutrition and health, it has an even greater impact on poorer women. Some of the reasons for this differentiation based on gender and poverty are as follows:

- in times of extreme food need, the poorer households must search the forest for edible tubers and vegetables (apparently some 10% of households in Thon Hai Village rely on forest tubers), while a wealthy family may not have a food shortage at all;
- the poorer household has little or no money to buy medicines, while forest medicinal plants have become
very scarce; the well off family has money for medicines (and with a better nutritional status are less often sick);

- poorer women must collect firewood not only for their own household, they must also sell it in exchange for household necessities; the well off family has no need to sell firewood;
- poorer women have smaller household plots and poorer upland fields, meaning limited gardens and vegetable inter-cropping, while at the same time forest vegetables have become scarce, meaning poorer women are forced to buy vegetables; well off women have more and better quality land, meaning more garden area and inter-cropping, more of their own vegetables (sometimes enough to preserve them), and no need to search the forest for edible greens;
- the formerly common resource of roof grass (*Imperata*) has become scarcer, meaning that poorer women can no longer simply collect it for their roofs; as they rarely have access to a plot, they are forced to buy it at a cost of around 300,000 dong for the average roof or 2000 dong per bunch if in lesser quantities; the well off family is more likely to have a grass plot within the family network and they can either use the grass or sell it.

Finally, regarding land use certificates, with the lesser amount of paddy land in Tua Chua than in Yen Chau, it seems the process of issuing certificates is slower. Moreover, the certificates being issued are known as "Green" rather than "Red" book Certificates, denoting a lesser status. The only area in the district where it seems certificates were issued was in Phieng Bung, but villagers told us that the officials said they had made a mistake on the certificates, had taken them away again, and had never come back. Overall, neither women nor men seemed to be adequately informed about the landuse certificates, whether Green or Red!

A Concluding Note on Agriculture and Landuse:

The project should work toward "gendered" concepts for sustainable agroforestry landuse in the Song Da Watershed. By this is meant that the differing interests and concerns of women and men regarding landuse should always be solicited and included in concept development and in the implementation of activities. Moreover, the differing knowledge and skills of women and men should also be drawn upon to the fullest extent. Both women and men should be involved in decisions about test plots, including what to try, and they should both be involved in monitoring both the process and the results. Aside from encouraging women to become more actively involved in "public sphere" decision-making, of special concern is changes which may occur in labour use. Is a new crop, for example, going to fall more on the shoulders of the women or the men? If more labour inputs are required, what happens to the current allocations of labour of different persons in the household? Are any household members disadvantaged through the input requirements of the new crop? It is clear that no concept for agroforestry landuse will be sustainable if it includes patterns of labour which are also by and large not sustainable. It is also clear that concepts based on the perceptions, interests and activities of those responsible for less than half of agroforestry activities will be incomplete at best.

4.3 Marketing and Women's Mobility

Throughout Vietnam, women are involved in the informal sector. Statistics are hard to come by as to the actual extent of women's participation in the informal sector, but UNDP (1996: 24) estimates that "women make up 70% of the informal and household sector workforce." It is quite likely that women's participation in the informal sector could be even higher as, for many especially rural women, it is a sideline activity. While the informal sector covers a wide range of economic activities, in rural areas--with few opportunities in smallscale industry--smallscale marketing of agricultural and forest products forms a large part of it. With the implementation of *doi moi*, the informal sector has boomed in recent years, and many households with available female labour now engage in informal sector activities. While the informal sector offers the advantages of flexibility, it has no security or non-wage benefits, and is much less secure, depending on the vagaries of the market. Prevailing socio-cultural norms dictate that women's mobility in Vietnam is more circumscribed than that of men, thus giving them fewer economic opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors.

4.3.1 Yen Chau District

As we have seen from the sections on agriculture and landuse above, women and men integrate their labour in managing the household and its economic activities, while non-economic activities to maintain the household are largely in the sphere of women's and children's labour use. Based on the information we gathered from both project and district, it appears that major cash cropping is a relatively recent innovation. As with many other issues, we have found significant inter-commune and inter-village differences in women's and men's approaches to
marketing. In some of the villages we visited, particularly those somewhat farther from the main road in Chieng Dong and Chieng Pan, there seemed to us to be a passivity on the part of both women and men in marketing their produce.

In fact, the villagers' marketing for major field crops, tree crops and livestock, including fish, largely consisted of waiting for merchants/brokers to come to the village to purchase (or guarantee to purchase) their products, whether they are mangos, pigs, maize, cassava or cattle, even chickens. It seemed that women and men in these villages—Huon and Nhom are examples—were equally passive, and probably in need of training and organizing to improve their marketing skills. It seemed that the villagers had little or no influence over price; they simply waited for the buyer to tell them the price. The villages farther away from Highway No. 6 predictably receive lower prices for their products than those villages straddling the highway. We do not know whether the decreases in price are commensurate with the distances and difficulties involved in reaching the more distant villages. Certainly as long as individual families, rather than marketing groups, are responsible for marketing produce, they will have very little bargaining power. (10)

For other products in Chieng Dong which we saw during our visit, such as garden produce, including a little fruit, non-wood forest products (especially bamboo shoots), women in villages close to Highway No. 6 are more active in marketing. However, villages farther away from the marketing possibilities offered by the highway, are more subsistence-oriented. There, some exchange between families may take place in addition to home consumption. In Yen Chau town there is also a market for firewood, and one sees poorer women (to a lesser extent, men) selling shoulder loads of firewood (mostly bamboo) for 4,000 to 6,000 dong per load. In both Yen Chau town and the Chieng Dong commune centre market area, women are dominant as both buyers and sellers, but one can see that they usually sell their produce in very small quantities, and rarely with value added (tofu is an exception).

On the days we visited these markets and asked the women where they were from, it turned out that the sellers were usually from very nearby villages. At the “corner market” in Yen Chau town, the women were mostly from Vieng Lan commune, with a smaller number from Chieng Khoi. In Chieng Dong, the women came from Lung Me, Dong Tau and Chai, all of which are very close to the highway. There may be seasonal differences in this pattern of “petty marketing,” and the project staff should keep an eye on this (especially if changes occur in the local markets in terms of products and quantities sold).

We also had an opportunity to look briefly into non-agricultural income generation in the district. We found, however, that non-agricultural activities are underdeveloped in Yen Chau District. The only non-agricultural activities we came across in the villages during the two weeks we were there were as follows: sales of handloom woven cotton cloth (plain, plain but dyed, dyed and stitched), money lending, transporting goods, small machine repair, small-scale merchant/broker (especially for crops), small stores, sales of alcohol and small-scale trading to Moc Chau District. These activities, in turn, take place on a rather small scale. Cotton cloth, for example, is mostly, woven by women for home consumption, and alcohol is largely distilled (also by women) mostly for home consumption.

Of interest here are the trading activities of the women from the villages of Turn and Me in Chieng Khoi Commune. This trading business started about three years ago when a woman from Turn village went to visit relatives in Moc Chau. While she was there, she discovered that there were certain products—especially Black Thai cloths, but other things as well—her relatives and their friends were interested in having, land which she could get for a better price in Yen Chau. From that time until now, the number of women involved in this trading to Moc Chau, to Chieng On Commune and to the Lao border, has increased to about 50 women in Turn and Me villages. They normally go in small groups of 2 or 4 (“3” is bad for business, they say), and to Moc Chau, for example, they take the Black Thai head scarves (which they make themselves), mosquito nets (which they may also make) and other cloths. The Chieng Khoi women even place’ orders for various cloth stuffs with small shops in Yen Chau, and then take these goods with them to Moc Chau. The women told us that they do this trading business for some 3 months during the agricultural off season. They also told us that they time their trips to Chieng On for the immediate maize post-harvest, because they know the families will have cash then. The women said that when they go on their trading visits, the men stay at home. These women said their husbands go on trips largely to buy large livestock.

In contrast to the Chieng Khoi women's trading activities, is the women's weaving group at Then Luong village in Chieng Dong Commune. The 24-member women's group here has been sponsored by Oxfam Quebec via the Women's Union, and has been carrying on “commercial” weaving activities for the last two to three years. The women receive orders from Oxfam about four or five times a year, with the value of the orders now at around 20 to 25 million dong each. While it may well be that the earnings of the members of the Then Luong weaving group are higher than those (for trading) of the women at Chieng Khoi, there are a number of drawbacks in their activity. First of all, they still rely on Oxfam Quebec for pricing, marketing and designs. So far, the only outlet for their products is at the Van Mieu Temple grounds in Hanoi where a regular handicrafts fair takes place.

The women at Then Luong are making products such as bags and cushion covers which, with their higher prices, have no local markets. When we talked to them about marketing their goods, they expressed doubts as to whether they could continue their activity without external support, particularly as there now seem to be another four Thai
groups selling their goods at the temple fair. While the women do have to arrange themselves for transport to Hanoi (with the Women's Union sponsorship they are able to rent a vehicle with driver at a subsidized rate), they rely on Oxfam to arrange the place for them to sell their goods at the fair. The women also must hire someone who can speak at least a little English to help them sell their goods to the largely foreign buyers who come to these fairs.

While these two cases show that the Thai women are willing and able to try new things, the Chieng Khoi trading business has been built up from the initiatives of the Chieng Khoi women themselves without any assistance from the outside. As a result they have learned about the needs of a local market, and what to supply at what price. The Then Luong women still rely on outsiders to link them to an external market they don't really understand. The Chieng Khoi case also demonstrates that the Thai women have a significant degree of mobility, if they so wish--the women travel to other villages within the commune, within the district, extremely frequently to the district town, to Chieng On commune, to the border with Laos and to Moc Chau. When asked if they go to Son La, they replied, "Rarely." Mainly because, they explained, they have neither relatives nor business opportunities there. As a contrast, however, the women of Chieng Dong seemed not to be so mobile. Women at Huon and Nhom said they did not go frequently to Yen Chau town let alone anywhere else with the exception of nearby villages (to visit their relatives), and to the commune centre.

4.3.2 Tua Chua District

Although it had seemed to us that Yen Chau was an area of "undeveloped" markets, Tua Chua is even less developed. The big difference between the two districts with respect to marketing is road access. Yen Chau is, of course, on a highway connecting it relatively easily with both Son La and Moc Chau, both fairly large population centres by northwestern standards. Tua Chua by contrast, is literally on the "road to nowhere," as the rather poorly maintained road into the district basically ends in the district. Public transport to the largest provincial centre, Dien Bien Phu, takes a whole day and is only available once a week. There are a couple of market towns, such as Tuan Giao, closer to Tua Chua than Dien Bien, but they are served with produce by villages which are much closer by than is Tua Chua. (We also had a chance to visit the main town market of Dien Bien, but the quantity and range of products available there was also rather limited.)

Despite the lack of major marketing opportunities there are noticeable gender differences in marketing among the H'mong communities in Tua Chua. These differences are, however, trend differences. That is, they are generally true in the district, but there will be differences among households depending on the structure and availability of labour, distance from the district town, and the like. Generally speaking, men are responsible for larger transactions such as the buying and selling of pigs and large livestock. Men's trips to the market, however, do not seem to be very frequent; some women said if the men go to the market it is more to meet friends and relatives rather than for a serious purpose.

Women are responsible for smaller transactions, such as selling firewood, chickens and produce, and buying salt and lamp oil, rice and vegetables, cloth and sewing supplies, such as needles, thread and dyes. When women sell a load of firewood, for example, they are most likely to use the money immediately to buy basic necessities such as salt and lamp oil, and perhaps a few vegetables. A basketload of firewood, containing about 30 kilograms, fetches about 3,000 to 4,000 dong in Tua Chua--this would be enough for about half a litre of oil and half a kilo of salt. If there is surplus cash, the women are most likely to return it to the household, where it is then controlled by the men, although this is not to say that a more senior woman in the household would not have some say in major expenditures (such as the purchase of a buffalo).

While the minor transactions may be minor in individual value, they are certainly not minor in volume. Firewood, salt and oil are bought and sold every day. Rice also forms a major part of intra-district trade, with far more rice going up into the hills than coming down. For some of the villages nearer to Tua Chua district town, the only major source of cash income which they have are women's sales of firewood. Otherwise, during times of rice shortages the highland villagers most commonly sell their pigs and chickens to buy rice, and less commonly they sell their labour. Men may go to other villages to hire out their labour, while women would normally only hire out their labour to wealthier families within the village. In the past, of course, one of the major agricultural commodities of Tua Chua district was opium. In fact, it is still bought and sold within the district, but as opium has been criminalized in recent years, such transactions are not openly discussed. (11)

Our visit to the weekly market (held every Sunday) in Tua Chua showed that the major commodities there were rice and cotton cloth. The demand for cotton cloth by the H'mong is, however, seasonal as the women all want to have their new clothes ready by H'mong New Year in January. We were surprised to learn that the cotton cloth, whether dyed or undyed, does not originate in the Thai villages within Tua Chua, coming rather from Tuan Giao and areas closer to Son La. Local Thais, including women, are cotton traders but do little weaving for sale. It was mentioned to us, however, that even in Thai villages the main source of cash income is not rice or cotton trading, but rather livestock.
Agricultural produce at the weekly market in November was meagre. With the exception of husked and unhusked paddy, all other products were only available in very small quantities. H'mong women were present at the market in very much larger numbers than the H'mong men, but this may have something to do with cloth buying, as most men had said they didn’t know enough about cloth to buy the right kinds and quantities. It was also very noticeable that the H'mong women were doing almost all the buying, with little to sell aside from the odd chicken. Sellers were mostly Thai and Safang women. The agricultural products we saw at the market were: sugar cane, leafy greens, crabapples, pomelo, oranges, limes, herbs for cooking, green beans, onion, garlic, star fruit, chickens, pigs, meat (pork, beef).

We saw virtually nothing for sale with value-added, and locally produced handicrafts amounted only to the White Thai cotton shoulder bags and a few H'mong stitched squares (12). There would be seasonal variation in produce available, but we expect that the overall amounts available would remain small. The market in Tua Chua is the product of a subsistence-oriented locality: when people-especially women with their garden produce-have a small surplus over and above the household requirements, that surplus is sold. When people have shortages in one commodity they try to sell something else to make up for them. Little is produced expressly for the market. (13)

H'mong women's mobility is limited. However, part of the limitations on their mobility relates to the location of their villages. When a walk to the market takes three or four hours one way, one does not try to go there every week! In fact, some women told us they only go to the market once or twice a year, but that they also had other people in the household who went in their stead. As far as we could ascertain, H'mong women's mobility is determined by necessity, familial obligation and time available. Therefore, unless the household needs to sell firewood to make ends meet, women's trips to the market in Tua Chua are not that frequent, although they are certainly more frequent during the agricultural off-season. This is particularly true prior to the H'mong New Year when cloth, and additional oil and salt are required for the New Year celebrations.

Inter-village trips are basically only undertaken-in connection with visits to relatives: especially parents. It seemed that inter-district travel is not undertaken at all, unless the parental village belongs to another district. But a woman's visits to her parents do not take place more than once or twice per year. Perhaps because a H'mong woman's mobility is rather limited, she also uses her few trips outside the village to gain information, for example, about new rice varieties and their performance which she cannot get from government sources. Box Three provides an example.

### Box Three: Informal Information Networks

Mrs. Sung at Song Un village in Muong Bang knows about a new, Lao variety of upland rice being tried at Phi Dinh village in Xinh Phinh Commune. She also knows already that it is very productive on a newly opened field, but on "older" fields it is better to use local varieties to maintain productivity. So far, this rice variety is not available at Song Un. Mrs. Sung knows about this variety, including evaluative information, from her last visit to her parents who live at Phi Dinh.

While formal information networks may have a limited reach, the informal networks do not. Moreover, they are networks in which women also play an important role. Unfortunately, the strengths of informal information networks are often overlooked and/or downplayed by outsiders.

Although H'mong women's mobility is circumscribed, the men's mobility did not seem to be that much greater. With one exception, we did not hear of examples of men leaving villages for urban employment. The remoteness of Tua Chua, its subsistence orientation, and the H'mong population's limitations in Kinh language ability effectively keeps the majority of the people within the district.

### 4.4 Savings and Credit for income-Generation

The issue of savings and credit, including access to credit, is an integral part of agricultural and rural development. Throughout Asia, the access to credit at normal market interest rates, especially of the poor and of women, is a major development concern. Likewise, throughout Asia the poor and women have been found almost uniformly to be discriminated against, being considered poor risks (too poor to put up collateral and too poor to repay) by formal credit institutions, or as being interested in amounts of credit which are too small to be worthwhile. As a result, special banks and banking services--notably the Grameen Bank--have been established with the needs of the poor, and especially those of poor women in mind. (14)

In Vietnam, although women are by law not denied access to credit, women's credit needs are far from met,
According to UNDP (1996: 24), "less than 10% of loans through the Vietnam Bank for Agriculture (VBA) go to women." At the same time, however, only 23% of Vietnam's households are able to get loans through the state banks. All other households requiring loans are forced to go through the informal sector, infamous for its usurious rates of interest. The main problem for women in Vietnam in securing loans is similar to that mentioned above: they lack collateral, they are often interested in only small loan amounts, and they are seen as poor risks. In recent years, with a significant amount of international donor support, the VWU has become active in the field of savings and credit. According to Mrs. Tran Thi Van Anh at the Centre for Family and Women's Studies (cited in UNDP, 1996), the VWU is not yet prepared for all of these rural finance activities as its staff are not themselves well-trained in this area. An additional point she makes, and certainly a valid one, is that the creation of a separate "women's only" credit system, will effectively keep women outside of the credit mainstream. To date, neither the VBA nor the recently established Bank for the Poor (which uses the branch network of VBA) have policies to encourage and/or support female borrowers.

4.4.1 Yen Chau District

Banking services are available in Yen Chau District, but on a rather minor scale to date, and not in any way formalized. As of 1995-96, the exception to this is the Bank of the Poor. The Yen Chau District Branch Manager told us in an interview that the Bank plans to lend close to 1 billion dong by the end of 1996. Apparently, by the time of our visit the bank had already lent around 500 million dong under the Bank for the Poor (with the statutory lending rate of 1.2% per month). Unfortunately, however, as the Bank for the Poor lends at a subsidized interest rate, the programme's sustainability is doubtful.

The VBA is the district's largest lender with full coverage of the district communes. The Manager told us that the Bank's current lending is at about 9.7 billion dong, mostly at the recently lowered "commercial" rate of 2% per month. The VBA's district target for 1996 is 14.5 billion dong for 5500 households. The VBA, however, does not stress savings mobilization nor does it seem to stress that people should finance their loans through the purpose for which they have taken the loans (15). While the branch has no policy against lending to women, most of the women we spoke to said they'd never been inside the bank. The Bank, as shown in Table Two on page seven above, does have 18 staff which includes one field staff for every two communes, but with a few exceptions, formal credit issues seem to belong more in the domain of men. Part of this relates to language capabilities; the rather complicated bank forms are in the Kinh language which means the women cannot understand adequately their content.

Overall, the "savings and credit picture" in Yen Chau District is rather confused. There are quite a number of small programmes (with different regulations and interest rates) run through the mass organizations in the district: the Women's Union, the Farmers' Association and the Youth Association. (See box below.) Some of them involve funds from the Provincial and National levels of the mass organizations (16), while the District Women's Union has received funds from the Quakers as well to support savings and credit groups. With the exception of the VBA, however, the lending activities of the other organizations has a very small radius outside of Yen Chau Town. As far as we were able to determine, the Women's Union, for example, has savings and credit groups, a small credit fund, and a revolving credit scheme in only the following areas: Yen Chau Town, Vieng Lan Commune, Chieng Khoi Commune, Chieng Pan Commune and Sap Vat Commune (that is, within about a 5 kilometre range of Yen Chau Town). The other two mass organizations described a similar situation, but with even lesser funds available to them.

**Box Four: Savings and Credit-Differences Between Yen Chau Villages**

**Chieng Dong Commune:**

**Huon:** The women have very little experience or understanding of either cash savings or credit. (According to village leaders, about 20 households (33%) have loans ranging from 500,000 to 2m. dong.)

**Nhom:** Village leaders say that about 65% of households have taken loans. Of those who took out loans, 40% of them have used the loans for making terraces for increased paddy cultivation. However, because one person has defaulted, the bank has put a halt to lending in this village.

**Chieng Khoi Commune:**

**Tum:** The women here from better off families say they're not interested in borrowing from the bank; they prefer to invest their own money rather than lose 2% per month.
4.4.2 Tua Chua District

As would be expected in a subsistence-oriented area, the volume of lending in Tua Chua's formal sector is much less than in Yen Chau. The VBA has no independent branch in the district; rather, it is a sub-branch of the branch at Tuan Giao. Unfortunately, we did not have a chance to meet the VBA staff in Tua Chua, so we could not get a clear picture of the bank's lending activities here. The impression we got from other sources, however, was that the bulk of formal lending in Tua Chua District currently goes through the Bank for the Poor. According to the Head of the District Agriculture Office, who is a member of the board for the Bank for the Poor, the targeted lending for Tua Chua in 1996 is 3.1 billion dong. We heard from the commune leader at Xinh Phinh that in his commune, about 60 households had received 91 million dong in Bank for the Poor loans with an interest rate of 1.1% per month. At Muong Bang commune, one of the commune leaders indicated that about 50 households had received loans of at least 1 million dong each via the Bank for the Poor.

If we compare the Bank for the Poor lending targets in Yen Chau and Tua Chua we see that the target for Tua Chua at 3.1 billion dong is three times higher than that in Yen Chau. When we combine that with the rather high amounts of the individual loans—normally 1 million and above, and even up to 8 million dong for purchase of milling machines and tile-making equipment—it appears that the Bank for the Poor in Tua Chua is providing banking-services to the entire population. The only other source of loans which we came across in Tua Chua was the 327 Programme; during 1996 it had released 50 million dong in interest-free loans for Tua Chua Town and Muong Bang commune.

Unlike Yen Chau District, the mass organizations do not seem active in the finance sector. The District Women's Union had not yet become active in the lending sector, but had just received a grant of 133 million dong from the Committee for Ethnic Minorities and Mountainous Areas (CEMMA). CEMMA had provided this grant to be used as a loan fund by the Women's Union, and had also provided a four-day training to Women's Union staff on simple accounting procedures and the like. The Women's Union would like an additional 137 million dong, but will have to apply for these funds from the Bank for the Poor. The next step for the Women's Union in releasing the 133 million dong was to be a training provided by the Women's Union for approximately 40 people. That is, six persons from each of six communes plus another four from the district town. The training is to result in the establishment of commune-level Loan Management Boards to oversee the disbursement and repayment of the loans, but it seems that each board will have only one female member: the commune women's union leader. From what we could understand, there are no plans to target women specially to assist them with understanding credit issues.

If the volume of formal lending in Tua Chua is rather low, the volume of lending to H'mong women is non-existent. As mentioned in the sections above, the H'mong women are little involved in the cash economy, with the exception of low-value transactions. The men are always in charge of larger transactions. Therefore, bank borrowing would also be the responsibility of men. Additionally, however, the H'mong women's Kinh language ability is much lower than that of the Thai women in Yen Chau, and there would be hardly any women in Tua Chua district at all, let alone in the villages, who would have a high enough reading ability in Kinh to be able to understand bank lending forms.

4.5. Education

Ngoang: Families have been borrowing money here in a range of 1m. dong up to 3m. dong for mulberry and fish. The 327 Project had made 100m dong available in loans (for the whole commune), while many people have borrowed money from VBA (200m dong for commune) for fish and pigs.

Chieng Pan Commune:

Sop Sang: The women here have experience with small savings and credit programmes through the Quakers and the Women's Union since 1992. As a result the women are developing good banking and accounting skills: the Commune Women's Leader has recently secured 71m. dong in loans from the VBA (under a joint liability arrangement) for the women in savings and credit groups. (The women also say they get additional benefits through their monthly savings group meetings.)

Than: There is fear expressed here of formal credit (because of collateral); at the same time, however, local moneylenders who charge much higher rates of interest (starting at 5% p.m.) seem rather active. Women here could get loans through the Quaker programme handled by the commune woman leader; these loans, although small, seem much appreciated.
National level statistics on literacy in Vietnam show a high level of literacy also for women. Even in rural areas, female literacy has been calculated at 80%, while male literacy is 90%. Throughout Vietnam, women and girls get an average of 3.5 years of schooling while men and boys get 5.8 years. As will be shown in the next two sections, however, these statistics provide a picture which is far better than that found in the ethnic minority areas of Vietnam. Another important issue for female education in Vietnam is the impact of doi moi. Most reports point to a worsening overall education situation with the removal of subsidies and the introduction of user fees, along with the retrenchment of teaching staff. Remoter areas are chronically short-staffed.

The introduction of user and other (informally imposed) fees has reduced the educational opportunities for children of the poor, and having fees also results in parents taking their children, especially female children, out of school sooner than they might otherwise do. Indirectly, doi moi has negatively affected female school enrolments disproportionately, as with the dismantling of the cooperative system and the resurgence of the informal sector, women have no longer the access to childcare facilities they once did. At the same time, their increased participation in the informal sector leads them to assign their daughters to both household and economic activities, thus taking them out of school after fewer years (see McDonald, 1995: 23-26).

4.5.1 Yen Chau District

Education, and the opportunities made available through education, is always an important issue, but in an area where ethnic minorities live, the majority language ability of men and women—in this case, Kinh—plays an extremely important role in the communications between villagers and outsiders. In all the villages visited, the Thai women’s abilities to communicate in Kinh were less than that of the men, and in the single H’mong village visited (Chien Dong Commune), it seems the women are completely unable to speak Kinh. According to the District Education Office, there are 4,285 illiterate persons (15 - 35 years old) in Yen Chau (which has a total population of around 52,000), while the District Women’s Union informed us that there are 4,000 minority women who are illiterate. While these data on illiteracy are conflicting, there is still an undoubtedly significant percentage of illiterates in the district. This, of course, has implications for government and/or project activities in the villages. Ways and means must be found, in the short term, to ensure that women’s lesser abilities in the Kinh language are overcome through, for example, trainings offered in the Thai language, more use of media in trainings, and farmer visit farmer events which may be conducted largely in Thai.

In the long term, of course, the better solution will be to ensure an increase in girls’ participation in the schooling system, particularly through to upper secondary. As may be seen in Table Four below, girls are behind boys in level of enrollment, already from primary school. Of equal significance, is the drop-off in minority enrollment levels. While they start with an enrollment level which roughly approximates their share of the district population, by the time upper secondary school is reached, only 32% of the students are from minorities. If we assume that girls are still represented at 37% of minority students (in fact, it is likely to be less than this), it means that for all of Yen Chau District during the 1995-96 school year, there were only 22 girls from the ethnic minority communities enrolled in upper secondary school.

Table four: Yen Chau Education Statistics, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Total Pupils</th>
<th>Girl Pupils</th>
<th>Boy Pupils</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary (expected enrollment, 96-97)</td>
<td>9173 (11074)</td>
<td>3857 (42%)</td>
<td>5316</td>
<td>7102 (77%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Secondary (expected enrollment, 96-97)</td>
<td>1814(2455)</td>
<td>655 (36%)</td>
<td>1159</td>
<td>909 (55%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Secondary (expected enrollment, 96-97)</td>
<td>190 (270)</td>
<td>71 (37%)</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>60 (32%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>11,177</td>
<td>4583 (41%)</td>
<td>6594</td>
<td>8071 (72%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

% are of total number of students as shown in column one.
The reasons behind the girls in Yen Chau being less represented throughout the school system are similar to the reasons found in other parts of rural Southeast Asia. These reasons are an integral part of gender roles and expectations for women and men. Particularly in cases where the productive labour of the mother is used to its maximum (as would seem to be the case in many Thai villages in Yen Chau), the parents turn to other labour available to the family to ease the burden of the mother (senior productive female). In most cases, this turns out to be a daughter who takes over her mother's household tasks, including taking care of younger siblings, cooking for both family and livestock, fetching water. At the same time, the family's expectations are that the daughter will grow up, get married and continue to work in exactly the same way as her mother had done. In this sort of scenario, particularly when the costs of education have increased, the family will conclude that a daughter's education is of less value than a son's is. One might say that the family wants to maximize their utility from a daughter's labour before she gets married, after which (with the patrilocal marriage system prevalent in the region) her labour will contribute to another's family.

Despite the prevailing somewhat negative attitudes towards girls’ education, many adult Thai women have expressed their interest to us in increasing their fluency in the Kinh language. The women are beginning to recognize that with the rapidly increasing monetization of a formerly subsistence economy, the quantity of contacts with the “outside world” is also rapidly increasing. New forms of communication in the Kinh language, notably the television, are now a big attraction in the villages. In fact, the District Education Office already has a young adult literacy programme in Yen Chau but it cannot meet the demand for adult literacy courses, nor does it have a curriculum for adults. Therefore, if adult education opportunities with a relevant curriculum were available, one could expect to see a substantial number of young, especially female, adults enrolling in such classes.

4.5.2 Tua Chua District

Both male and female children in Tua Chua have limited educational opportunities. In Xinh Phinh commune, for example, only 6 of the 12 villages have access to school classes, and in one of these villages the class is there, but without a teacher. Aside from the commune centre, the highest grade available in a village is only class two (available for the Thon Mot, Hai, Ba area), while the commune boarding school has upto Class Five. When we discussed literacy rates with the District Women’s Union, they said that roughly 80% of the district's women don't know the Kinh language at all, meaning that the rate of illiteracy would be even higher. In fact, they estimated that H'mong men in the district are probably 70% illiterate. At the District Education Office staff told us that Tua Chua District has 4,929 illiterate young people in the age range from 15 to 25. While this is more than Yen Chau has, we may assume that the number of illiterates in Tua Chua is higher than the estimate. Education staff have not had a chance to do a literacy survey. Rather, they use enrolment statistics, already counting those who have enrolled in Class One as “literate.”

The socio-culturally defined division of labour in H'mong society, with men having the public and community "face," and women largely excluded from this sphere, and with female labour used in the household from age six until death or infirmity, has a strong impact on schooling opportunities for H'mong girls. Parents see little if any reason to send their daughters to school. The only real exception we could find to this rule are families which live in the old district capital area of Thon Hai. Because of having been the seat of district government services for twenty years, H'mong families there see more reason for both their sons and daughters to get some education. Compared to other H'mong villages of Tua Chua, our impression was that the H'mong women of Thon Hai do know more Kinh language, and we found a number of women there who are conversant in it.

As shown in Table Five below, female enrolment in Tua Chua is five times less than that of males, with very few girls even having a chance to finish primary school. Moreover, the continuing remoteness of Tua Chua district precludes an intensification of contact with Kinh-dominant social and economic venues for the foreseeable future, meaning that the demand for education will be lower here than in Yen Chau. Notwithstanding Tua Chua's remoteness, there is an increasing demand for education services, especially for boys. In a number of villages we were told that the demand is greater than the number of teachers available, and that children were forced to stay at home, despite their parents wanting to send them to school. We also heard that some parents (but only those with "connections") were able to get special letters from commune leaders in order to be able to send a son to the village school.

Table Five: Tua Chua Education Statistics, 1996

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Level</th>
<th>Total Pupils</th>
<th>Girl Pupils</th>
<th>Boy Pupils</th>
<th>Minorities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>3114</td>
<td>515 (17%)</td>
<td>2699</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table Five shows enrolment rates which are extremely low for girls, but which are also rather low for boys. Unfortunately, the District Education Office does not have any statistics on school attendance by ethnic minority. One could well imagine that of the girls in attendance, a disproportionately high percentage of them would be from the Thai and Kinh ethnic groups, which form about 30% of the district's population. The statistics of Table Five stand in stark contrast to national education statistics. According to McDonald citing Desai (1995: 26), 87% of rural girls and boys in the primary school age range are currently attending primary school. For lower secondary school, it goes down to 59% of girls and 72% of boys, while for upper secondary school it drops significantly to only 13% of girls and 28% of boys in that age range. Although we do not have exact population statistics for Tua Chua, using “guessimates,” we could put the number of school age children in Tua Chua at about 10,200 or around 30% of the total population. Of this 10,200 only 3545 children are actually attending school, or 35% of the school age population. However, only 12% of school age girls in Tua Chua are actually going to all levels of school combined, while it is 58% of boys.

This is not to say, however, that there is no demand for female education in Tua Chua, and that there is no potential to encourage an increased demand for female education. The District Women's Union has, with SFDP financial assistance, begun adult female evening literacy classes in two villages in Xinh Phinh: Thon Ba and Ta La Cao. The age range of the students was apparently 15 to 40, but with the majority in the 18 to 35 age range. The District Women's Union was able to hire two women teachers at Xinh Phinh to do the teaching, and it seems the classes were well-attended (at Thon Ba, only 15 students were expected but 50 came). With additional project support, the Women's Union would like to extend the adult literacy classes to another eight villages, although there are not enough women teachers to do so. Staff of the Women's Union also said they wanted to start literacy classes open to both women and men, but we suggested that since the men would already be quite advanced in comparison to the women in terms of understanding and speaking Kinh, that there should still be women-only literacy classes.

5. Conclusion

Both Black Thai and H'mong women are active participants in the agriculture and forestry systems of their respective households and communities. Indeed, in both cases, they are responsible for a greater share of those systems than are the men. Women are responsible for maintaining their households' labour force, in maintaining the quality of their crops through seed selection, and in maintaining their small livestock. They share with their men extensive knowledge of their environment, and have been active in implementing adaptations in their respective systems. At the same time, owing to their different spheres of activities, there are some aspects of the systems about which women have more detailed knowledge, other aspects about which men have more knowledge. Despite this, however, women have not been recognized by most government services as active partners in agricultural change and development. And women of ethnic minorities are among the most marginalized populations of all. Their voices are seldom heard.

SFDP, with its mandate to work actively with both women and men and to ensure that both are part of agroforestry concept development, has a good chance to redress this gender imbalance in the partnership between government and local people. However, the words of this and other reports will not be enough. Continuous and consistent efforts in the field will be required. This means that gender awareness must permeate the entire project, from project management to field staff. Planning, implementation and monitoring of all field-level activities will need inputs from both women and men. When this happens

6. Recommendations

District and Village-Level
Training, Education and Literacy:

Provide practically oriented gender training programme for all relevant district staff, and which includes agreed-upon follow-up activities.

Roundtable and/or discussion workshops on gender issues in natural resources management and agriculture should be held eventually at Provincial level.

Support the Yen Chau District adult literacy programme, especially in ways which increase women's participation. This could be done through supporting "vocational" training (which is already included in the "standard package") for the trainees, through supporting local women to be trainers, and supporting broader area coverage (or "re-coverage"). However, keeping the project's main focus of social forestry/landuse in mind, the project should be careful to support the literacy programme in a way which is in keeping with its mandate.

In Tua Chua, given the limitations on teachers, the adult literacy programme should not be supported to expand too rapidly. Cooperation should be encouraged between the Women's Union and the District Education Office for their mutual benefit. For the time being, classes supported should be for women only (if men are also interested, they should have separate classes). Given that women are getting involved in smallscale marketing, literacy classes should also emphasize numeracy. To the extent possible, any literacy training should be followed up by giving trainees more chances to practice their language skills (so that they don't forget everything again) through increased contact with them.

As Thai women are rather shy to speak up in the company of men, and H'mong women extremely shy and/or reluctant, it would be useful if the project could arrange some of its trainings for women only (the same training could be done twice; once for a mixed group and once for a women only group). The project should also ensure that the training content is directly relevant to women's interests and needs.

In order to compensate somewhat for the local women's lesser abilities in the Kinh language, the project should help to develop more media to be used with trainings (training videos would also generate a lot of interest). As there are project staff available in Yen Chau who speak Thai, they should conduct some trainings in the Thai language, while in Tua Chua translators may have to be used.

It is extremely important that when trainings are arranged for villagers, they are arranged in a way which facilitates women's participation. This includes taking into account the time of year and time of day they have more free time, and ensuring that someone can take care of small children while the women attend training.

Trainings should not only be of a technical nature. Wherever and whenever possible they should also encourage women's decision-making and leadership skills, and at a minimum increase women's self-confidence to speak out in groups.

For Education, the project could make a long term contribution to increasing women's participation in community landuse planning through the provision of scholarships for girls from minority groups.

The Yen Chau District Education Office has requested support for the development of forest conservation media. Considering that the teachers are by far the largest network of government staff in this and other areas, it would be well worth considering this request, providing some support on a pilot basis.

Agriculture, Landuse, Land Allocation:

In supporting the land allocation process, ensure that women's names are also included on the Red Book Certificates, or Green Book as the case may be.

In Agriculture and Forestry Extension, more excursions of the farmer-visit-farmer type should be arranged with increased women's participation. The excursions should start small, that is, inter-commune and inter-district. In Tua Chua, H'mong farmers should be taken to see other H'mong villages with good forest cover (Phien Bung and Tuong Ngai in Muong Bang are examples). (This means, however, that to the extent it does not already have one, the project would have to assist in creating a "catalogue" of useful sites/persoons, including women among the latter.)

H'mong women should especially be encouraged to take part in agricultural and forestry excursions, but their men should also be in agreement.
There is a need for a more holistic approach in the extension of new varieties and/or activities, in order to highlight the advantages and disadvantages of the new technologies for women and men (i.e., if the project introduces a new maize variety, where will it be sown and when? what impact will it have on other crops the household grows? on how they keep their livestock?) Given fuelwood shortages in some areas (especially Tua Chua), more emphasis is required on fast-growing fuelwood trees (including discussions with women on where to plant them).

The project should pay more attention to women's gardens (more in Tua Chua) as an important part of the farming system, and source of family subsistence.

Besides rice and maize, the project should also look at other starch crops such as Job's Tears and tubers. Given conditions in Tua Chua, crops with low weeding requirements and which can do well in poor soil conditions would be ideal.

Because of tending difficulties of hedgerows, and a likely excessive female labour requirement, the project should, perhaps, emphasize on green manures and/or fallow intensification rather than the "classic" hedgerows.

Given the importance of livestock, there should be assistance and/or training for an improved vaccination programme.

Meetings on agriculture with H'mong villagers should be held separately for women and men for the time being. For women the meetings must be held in H'mong.

Before any new variety/agricultural technology is introduced, the project staff must discuss household labour use and availability, so that women and men have a chance to consider the opportunity costs of their labour use.

As one of the biggest bottlenecks in the H'mong farming system in Tua Chua is weeds, the project should try to work with farmers on low-cost weed suppression techniques.

**Savings & Credit, Income-Generation:**

In Yen Chau cautiously support broader coverage of a savings and credit programme, with a priority focus on women's groups, but not excluding the possibility of mixed groups. As the district residents are rather unfamiliar with both regular savings and sound financial practices, it is highly recommended that trainings be arranged on these issues. *The project would need to find an implementing agency for this activity.*

Open discussions with the Vietnamese Bank for Agriculture. While its current lending practices may leave something to be desired, it remains the largest source of credit in both districts. The project may be able to arrange with the VBA to engage in longer term lending for land improvements, tree crops and the like.

Women and men, especially in Yen Chau District, are interested in trying new/improved income-generating activities. However, as the marketing possibilities are extremely limited at present, it is recommended that the project try to support women and men improve on their existing activities/skills, including support for marketing group organization, rather than attempting to support completely new activities. This would be relevant for Tua Chua as well, but more emphasis there should be given to subsistence, while keeping an eye on market potentials (such as the locally produced paper).

**Miscellaneous:**

There should be trials on more fuel-efficient stoves in both districts.

If support is given for water supplies, it would be extremely important to discuss with women and men about constructing and maintaining the water supply systems (we had the negative example in Xinh Phinh of a broken down, never-maintained, UNICEF-funded water supply system).

**Local Resource Persons:**

The Districts have local persons--both women and men--who have special skills in agriculture and forestry. Such persons should be recruited as "paid volunteers" to help the project from time to time with meetings/trainings/study visits and the like when it concerns the subject area of the person. (This would mean the project should have a roster of local resource persons in the Districts.)

In Tua Chua, with so few women able to speak Kinh, it is strongly recommended that some local H'mong women be employed as part-time translators to ensure that women are reached as well.
The Project

All project staff, including senior management, should have gender training. Gender issues are the responsibility of all staff.

The project's Operational Plan should be explicitly gendered as a reminder to staff to include gender issues in all, especially field, activities.

The TORs for all Short-Term Experts should mention gender issues. That is, if persons come for various technical issues, they should also consider gender issues to ensure the highest level of integration of gender issues into all SFDP major activities.

The project's district-level monthly planning meetings should have the support of the Gender Officer as on-the-job training for gendered planning and follow-up of project-supported activities.

Selected References

Christoplos, Ian (1996).

"Poverty, Pluralism and Extension Practice." Gatekeeper Series. No. 64. IIED. London.

Dang Tung Hoa (1994).

"Die Rolle der Frau ethnischer Minderheiten bei der Waldnutzung in der sozialen Forstwirtschaft in Nordwest-Vietnam." Report available in German only. (Report available with SFDP.)

Littooy, Siep et al. (1995).

"Natural Resources Management of H'mong Communities in Tua Chua District, Lai Chau Province." Consultancy Report No. 1 for SFDP.

McDonald, Margaret (1995).


Tran Thi Que and Suki Allen (1992).


Gender Briefing Kit. Hanoi.


van de Walle, Dominique (1996).

Annex One:

Consultant’s Schedule

18 - 23 May: Arrival in Hanoi from United States, briefing meetings in project, meetings with NGO representatives.

24 May - 8 June: Departure to, stay at, return from, Yen Chau District to Hanoi.

25 - 27 May: Discussions with District Agency/Mass Organization staff, Yen Chau Town market "mini-survey."

28 - 30 May: Visit to Chieng Dong Commune.

31 May: Visit to Chieng Pan Commune.

   Discussions with District Farmers' Association

1 June: Visit to Chieng Done Commune (Keo Bo).

1 - 2 June: Rita and Hang conduct S.W.O.L. analysis based on findings to date.

2 June: Visit to ActionAid in Mai Son to discuss their savings & credit programme.

3 June: Visit to Chieng Pan Commune (Than).

   Discussions with Project Coordinator. Continuation of SWOL analysis.

4 - 5 June: Visit to Chieng Khoi Commune.

6 June: Discussions with Mrs. Thoong. Further discussions with District Women's Union.

   Visit Chieng Dong Market, re-visit Yen Chau Market.

7 June: Preparation for District-Level Presentation of Findings and Presentation.

9 - 12 June: In Hanoi to prepare presentation for project, make presentation, debriefing meeting, draw up list of activities for Mrs. Hang's follow-up until October, meeting with GFA local representative, departure for United States.

Part Two of Mission:

17 - 20 October: Arrive in Hanoi from United States, initial briefings with project staff in Hanoi.

21 - 22 October: Travel upto Tua Chua District. Briefings with Project District Coordinator.

23 October - 1 November in Tua Chua:

23 October: Meetings with local agency staff: Women’s Union, Education, Agriculture.

24 - 26 October: Visits to villages in Xinh Phinh Commune.

   (and various evening meetings and discussions with staff, including from Forest Protection Unit, in Tua Chua)

27 October: Visit to Sunday Market in Tua Chua District Town.

28 October: Visit to Thon Ba village in Xinh Phinh Commune.

29 - 31 October: Visits to villages in Muong Bang Commune.
1 - 2 November: Travel back to Hanoi via Dien Bien.

3 November: Rest Day

4 - 9 November in Hanoi

4-7 November: Prepare for presentation of findings and recommendations. Discussions with various SFDP staff.

8 November: Presentation of findings and recommendations.

9 November: Final discussions with Gender Officer on Planning activities for the next months.

10 November: Depart Hanoi for Vientiane, Laos

Annex Two (20):

Village Visit Reporting Format

1 a. Commune Visited:…………………………………….

1 b. Village Visited:……………………………………..

2. Date and Duration of Visit:……………………………………………………………………….

3. Who Went from SFDP:……………………………………………………………………….

4. Additional Persons (if any) who went:………………………………………………………….

5. Purpose of Village Visit: (Relation to any previous visit(s)):………………………………

6. Who Met in the Village (position, if any):……………………………………………………

7. General Topics Discussed:……………………………………………………………………….

8. Summary of Visit Results:……………………………………………………………………….

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
9. Planned/Agreed Follow-Up of this Visit: (when planned for and who should do what by when: villagers and SFDP.)

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

10. Additional Remarks or Observations:

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

11. PRA Tools Used During Village Visit (if any): (Attach A4 copies, if possible)

........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................
........................................................................................................................................

PRA Tool Use Report: (one report per tool)

(Attachment for Village Visit Report)

Name of Tool:
........................................................................................................................................

Where (Village/Co-op) Used:
........................................................................................................................................

With Which Persons:
........................................................................................................................................

Drawn/Made by:
........................................................................................................................................

Facilitated by:
........................................................................................................................................

Process of Tool Use: (successfully used? did people participate well? Any differences in women's/men's participation? how many women/men participated? any differences of opinion among people?)
........................................................................................................................................
1. The Women's Union informed us that among the 12 Commune and Town Women's Union leaders, seven of them cannot understand Kinh.

2. This problem of the female staff also relates to the gender division of labour within the household. According to a number of gender studies which have been carried out in Vietnam, men contribute almost nothing to household work, including childcare. Therefore, even a female staff who is in principle willing to stay away from home for a few days on a field trip, may be prevented by her husband's unwillingness to a: let her leave the home for a number of days, and b: to undertake to do the household tasks in her absence.

3. If one asks families who works "harder," the answer is invariable "men." However, if one asks who works "longer," the answer is invariably "women." This has to do with people's interpretation of "harder," which is normally taken to mean "heavier;" all activities requiring greater strength (are literally "heavier") are done by the men, and therefore they say they work "harder."

4. Hiring out of labour is virtually unheard of in Yen Chau District, although it is apparently more common in neighbouring Mai Son District (the H'mong villagers of Keo Bo which is in Chieng Dong Commune, but right at the district border with Mai Son, do hire out their labour in nearby Mai Son villages).

5. At Chieng Pan Commune we were told that the women's participation in savings and credit groups had increased their status in their households through their income-earning activities, and they had now greater control over the household cash flow than formerly.

6. In some villages where conditions had allowed opium to be a major source of cash/barter for the villagers, village headmen who had cooperated with government officials in destroying poppy fields later had their houses burned down as retaliation. Phieng Bung is an example of this.

7. According to the figures provided to us in October 1996 from the District Agriculture Office, maize took up about 50% of the area under crops, upland rice around 27%, paddy around 12%, and all other crops (such as cassava, beans, Soya beans, tea) around 11%. It was admitted that the margin of error could be high.

8. The division of labour as depicted in Box Two is generally true; it does not mean that there are no exceptions from the list. Based on our interviews, it seems the H'mong are rather pragmatic in their division of labour. Men
and women can do many of each other’s tasks as the household requires: this is especially true in the event of a spouse's illness or woman's confinement after childbirth.

9. The importance of combining both women's and men's perspectives is highlighted with the differences in the H'mong seasonal labour curves. According to Littooy's report (1995) labour peaks occur in March - April (land preparation/ploughing) and September - October (harvest). Women describe their work as peaking in June to August (weeding) with a smaller peak in October (harvest).

10. In Case where families borrow against the harvest from the merchant who will later buy their harvest, they have even less bargaining power.

11. There are still a number of opium addicts within the district. Those who can easily reach the Phi Dinh area of Xinh Phinh Commune, break rocks for sale (for road building) on a daily basis; those who are diligent are able to earn enough to maintain a moderate habit.

12. During our visit to Phieng Bung, we found out that the H'mong women also make paper from a type of forest vine. While most of this paper is made for their local use (it is used to decorate home shrines), surplus is also sold in the market. This paper has, in fact, an international market and I have heard of a German import-export businessman interested in buying this type of paper from H'mong villages in neighbouring Laos.

13. One crop produced primarily for the market is beans. In Xinh Phinh commune, many families in the Thon Hai, Thon Ba area produce beans. They are sold on a brokerage arrangement, whereby a few local villagers buy up the bean harvest from others in the village, and then sell this harvest to merchants. Black sticky rice is another market crop, but it can only be grown in areas with good soils (Phieng Bung). Otherwise, villages with lac-host trees, sell shellac and there are also some honey sales in the district. It should be noted that men are much more involved than women in the sales of these “market-oriented” crops/products.

14. Although I do not have the study available, there has been an attempt in Vietnam to replicate the Grameen Bank experience. An evaluation of this attempt is to be found in Helen Todd's (1996) Cloning Grameen Bank: Replicating a Poverty Reduction Model in India, Nepal and Vietnam, available through IT Publications in London.

15. In many cases villagers have told us that they borrowed money for livestock purchase (the main purpose given for the loans), but repaid or planned to repay the loan from the proceeds of maize sales.

16. Sometimes these funds are to "revolve" from district to district. For example, the District Youth Association received 35m. dong as a loan fund for two years. After the two years the fund must be repaid to the Province, so that it can distribute this fund to another district.

17. This has implications for project work which seeks to increase a woman's productivity. It may well be that the woman's productivity is increased, but at the expense of her daughter's education!

18. Despite the large number of teachers in the district, the villages are not well-endowed with school classes. Many of the villages have 'class one or two, but already starting with class three, children have to walk to the commune centre. The commune itself is unlikely to have more than class four.

19. The District Education Office also provides adult literacy classes with its own teachers. It seems there are now 405 students taking these classes, of whom about 25% are women. So far, the Women's Union and the Education Office have not cooperated in offering adult literacy classes.

20. This annex provided on special request from project staff