

# Gender and Agriculture

SNV Practice Brief

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This practice brief explores women and gender issues in SNV Netherlands Development Organisation's support to agricultural value chains in Africa and Asia. Across the two regions there are wide disparities in women's access to and control over productive resources, service delivery and market opportunities. Drawing on a wide variety of case studies, the Brief describes various ways in which the underlying gender constraints are identified and addressed, through an explicit focus on women's economic and social empowerment. Taken together the experiences show that substantial improvements can be realised when women's interests and capacities are taken into account and when the diverse, yet complementary, roles of female and male farmers and entrepreneurs are acknowledged. Overall, the Brief offers rich insights into the range of gender-specific strategies that can be used to encourage women's full participation in development interventions and ensure that they derive an equal share of the benefits through improved household incomes, employment opportunities and food security.



*In **Nepal** SNV supported APLFUN (an umbrella organisation of forestry user groups) to provide a package of support services specifically targeting women and members of the Dalit (untouchable) caste. The measures aimed to empower the extremely marginalised Madhesi community with access to land and rights to collect forestry products. The approach took into account cultural sensitivities with regard to women's involvement in public life, working with female role models and local male leaders to influence and encourage women's participation. Women are now able to sell green vegetables, cash crops and non-timber forest products at local markets, whereas in the past marketing was predominantly done by men.*

**By Anil Shrestha, SNV Nepal**

*Sunflower production is an important source of livelihood for smallholder farmers in Bukedea district of north east **Uganda**, an area still recovering from decades of conflict. SNV supported a local farmers' cooperative, PKWI, to redesign its extension services, which included addressing the differentiated roles and responsibilities of female and male farmers. PKWI's female chairperson has been instrumental in ensuring that the unique constraints affecting women producers are addressed. An important change was to relocate training venues from centralised learning centres to community venues to make it easier for women to attend. PKWI has actively pursued a target of 60% female participation in all its activities, including at the board, managerial and farmer trainer levels. As a result the empowered women have become important change agents and role models within the community.*

**By Michael Opio, SNV Uganda**

## ABOUT THIS BRIEF

This is the fourth publication in a series of Practice Briefs published by SNV Netherlands Development Organisation. The Brief is the result of collaboration between Asia, East and Southern Africa (ESA) and West and Central Africa (WCA) offices and is available in both English and French. You can access the series of Practice Briefs by following [this hyperlink](#).

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### Introduction

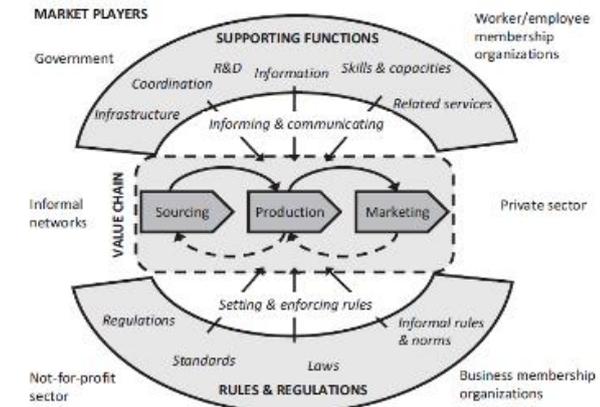
While agriculture accounts for nearly half of all employment worldwide, the full productive capacities of 1.5 billion small-scale family farmers or 'smallholders' remain untapped and they are unable to take full advantage of economic development opportunities. At the same time, around two billion people – among whom many smallholders - are affected by poverty and malnutrition. From smallholder farmers to forest dwellers and pastoralists, these individuals and their communities depend on land, water and forest resources for their livelihoods. It is for this reason that SNV works with local organisations in 36 of the poorest countries in the world to empower smallholder farmers to seize the opportunities that exist within the agricultural sector and "work and trade their way out of poverty," by improving their access to markets.

Building on a set of case studies from Africa and Asia, this Practice Brief explores a range of strategies that can empower women to take more advantage of agricultural value chains. These strategies include adapting existing extension services, strengthening women's groups, and designing inclusive financial mechanisms. The Brief starts by describing our framework for analysing gender issues in agricultural value chains and opportunities for new market linkages. This is followed by two sections examining how to enhance women's access to productive resources and to agricultural services. The next two sections focus on strategies for strengthening women-owned enterprises and expanding their access to financial resources as a basis for broader economic, social and political empowerment. We then explore how to support women's organisational and leadership skills and their contribution to the broader regulatory framework. We conclude with a recap of key issues that practitioners need to keep in mind to ensure that their development interventions are gender-sensitive and socially inclusive.

### Gender analysis and agricultural markets, services and value chains

The steady rise in global demand for food and agricultural commodities presents smallholder farmers, especially women, with opportunities to take better advantage of diversifying markets and earn a competitive price for their produce. The Springfield Centre's market system model (illustrated on the right) presents markets as complex systems in which a variety of actors, support services and value chains interact.

The model can be used by support organisations working with producer organisations and other key players in agricultural development to analyse specific commodity value chains and the broader support and market systems in which they are embedded. These analyses can also be extended to a more focused exploration of the factors that favour low-income groups, such as women or the poor. Building on the findings, gender-sensitive and contextualised strategies can be developed to enhance women's capacities to take advantage of new market opportunities created in the chain.



Source: ILD, based on a Springfield Centre Model (see the ILD "Value Chain Development for Decent Work" Guide 2009, p. 26)

### Enhancing women's access to productive resources and markets

Smallholder farmers need secure and sustainable access to productive resources such as land, water and forests in order to achieve food security and a reliable basis for their livelihoods. Women farmers often have to negotiate or even pay to access these productive resources, which are mainly owned by men or controlled by male-dominated authorities. Experience from Niger below illustrates how some successful interventions in this area have started with a thorough diagnosis of existing gender inequities at community and household level. While it is often difficult for women to express their concerns in public, holding women-only sessions helps to ensure that their voices are heard before bringing in formal stakeholders in the discussion.

Women in the Zinder region in **Niger** could not inherit land because of the way the Quran was interpreted by local religious authorities (*marabouts*) to influence customary regulations on inheritance. Women could borrow or lease land to grow crops but in many situations this led to losses because they were obliged to make payments in kind (part of their harvest). In addition, their access rights could be revoked at will by land owners. SNV Niger facilitated a process to collect testimonies from women. Based on this information, religious and customary leaders in collaboration with the district land commission and women organisations re-interpreted the relevant passage in the Quran and concluded that women can inherit a part of the family land. Women are now (re)claiming their rights with full control of the crops grown on their own land, which has contributed to improved food security and household savings.

**By Youssouf Boubar Cissé, SNV Niger**

### Creating gender sensitive agricultural support services

Women smallholder farmers are typically located at the 'base' of the agricultural economy, being mainly involved in manual labour such as collecting fruits and nuts, growing of crops and small-scale processing. Low literacy skills, inadequate access to training and market information and gender-blind policy and regulatory environments are among the constraints that block women from fully tapping available economic opportunities.

The empowerment of women and the poor requires creating an environment in which they are able to access support services to boost their productivity, enhance the quality of their products, and identify and reach profitable markets. This is a particularly difficult challenge in rural areas due to the high cost of developing the service infrastructure and inability of poor clients to pay for such services. Furthermore, the underlying social norms and traditions that define the division of labour in many societies tend to relegate women's productive activities to the household level, making them largely invisible to service institutions.

*Despite many challenges in the beginning, I now feel more confident in sharing my views with people outside my family. I am one of the executive members of APLFUN central committee and district forest coordination committee. Through the project I also have additional income from agro forestry products, which has helped to improve our family livelihood. The positive change in my life is almost impossible for a woman like me who is illiterate and from Dalit caste. **Female farmer, Nepal***



The following cases from Zambia and Benin illustrate the importance of providing a holistic extension package that combines technical training and support with the means for poor women producers to get their products to the market.

In **Zambia**, beekeeping has been a predominantly male occupation as installing and managing heavy traditional beehives requires not only climbing trees but making long journeys to the forest. SNV supported the North Western Bee Keeping Association to introduce more 'women friendly' modern top-bar hives that can be installed near the house and directly on the ground. To disseminate the new technology, the Association encouraged women to form producer groups and provided them with follow up technical and management support. In collaboration with Mpongwe Beekeeping Enterprise, a honey processing company, the Association also created a revolving fund to enable the women's groups to acquire the beehives, which at 50 US\$ per hive, are much more expensive than traditional hives (costing around 2 US\$).

**By Malani Simukoko and Claire van der Kleij, SNV Zambia**

SNV in **Benin** conducted a gender analysis of the cotton value chain and other crops produced at cotton farms that showed women had little influence over revenues, which were controlled by male landowners. Women, however, were more involved in the production of food crops and expressed interest in accessing inputs and extension services related to maize and rice. As a result the public extension services recognised women's groups as a formal client for the first time in order to facilitate targeted training. The women's groups not only increased production by more than 40% they also decided to jointly market their agricultural products. In this way they were able to build up stocks to sell when prices were higher and to process more maize and rice.

**By Abibath Idrissou, SNV Benin**

*Before I grew rice and some vegetables in the dry season on my small (100 m<sup>2</sup>) plot of land using my own seeds, with little yield. After joining the farmer field school sessions organised by SNV and CFAP, I grow different vegetables all year round by using improved seeds. I follow the new growing techniques I have learned. My daily income from vegetables is now between 4 and 12 US\$, three times what I earned before. My husband is happy to learn the technical knowledge from me when he has free time from his other work. The two of us are now taking care of our vegetables together. After harvesting, my husband helps to transport our vegetables to a market, while I sell them.*

**Female farmer, Cambodia**



### Strengthening women-owned enterprises

In addition to accessing productive resources it is essential for women to take advantage of existing and new market opportunities. SNV therefore supports local organisations to design contextualised solutions for women and the poor, so they can reach “new, more stable or more profitable markets.” The next two cases illustrate how SNV has worked with women-led enterprises in Kenya and Burkina Faso to ensure that they can remain competitive in a rapidly changing market environment.

*In **Burkina Faso**, women play an important role in collecting shea nuts and processing them into shea butter to meet the rapidly growing international demand. The Nunuma Federation, which brings together 92 women groups representing around 4000 members, established six production centres where the women could collectively process the butter. However, a mix of high production costs, poor management and unreliable supplies made it difficult for the Federation to meet delivery schedules and guarantee quality. With SNV support, the Federation conducted a strategic assessment in 2009 that concluded that the business model in use was not competitive and demonstrated the potential advantages of creating a single semi-industrial processing unit. With funding from the Agridius Foundation, the Federation established a new factory, enabling it to double production capacity to 600 metric tons while substantially cutting costs. This has greatly enhanced members’ income and provided them with an opportunity to become more involved as shareholders of the new enterprise.*

**By Lassina Konaté, SNV Burkina Faso**



*While male pastoralists in the arid and semi-arid areas of **Kenya** own most of the camel stock, women traditionally control the distribution of milk, both for household consumption and small-scale processing. This has provided women entrepreneurs with an entry point to a fast-growing market. Over the past few years, SNV Kenya has supported women in Isiolo district to set up a professionally managed cooperative society and to look for new markets, including in Nairobi. With a capacity of 5,000 litres a day at present, the cooperative now processes milk payments through mobile phone banking services, which is much more secure than the informal courier services that were previously in use. Members have also started to receive training on hygienic milk handling, helping to improve the quality of camel milk products. So far, the intervention has led to improved incomes for around 300 households, averaging about \$750 a month per household.*

**By Morgan Siloma, SNV Kenya**

### Enhancing women’s access to financial capital

Smallholder farmers need access to finance in order to invest in increased production, diversify their products and improve storage and/or processing techniques. However, many banks and micro finance institutions are unwilling or unable to provide credit to poor small holders due to the high transaction costs involved in servicing many small clients living in remote areas. For women, access to financial services may also be hindered by issues such as low literacy skills or access to property titles that can serve as collateral. However in most societies various forms of informal savings clubs for women already exist. These traditional financial systems often create a strong base on which financial innovations can be constructed.

In **Ghana** a women-managed revolving fund established with SNV support enabled thousands of shea farmers to diversify their sources of income and improve their livelihoods.

*One of the main insights gained from an SNV-facilitated analysis of the shea value chain in **Ghana** was that poor rural women involved in the collection and selling of the shea nuts were strongly disadvantaged. They were compelled to sell off their produce to intermediaries at the end of the harvest season, when prices are lowest. As there were no micro finance institutions providing credit for this group, SNV supported female shea producers to create small-scale savings and loans associations to meet the immediate financial needs of their members. This enabled the women to collectively stockpile their shea nuts and sell them when prices rose. Between 2009 and 2011, 480 women groups, with a total membership of 13,260 women and 180 men, benefitted from SNV support. Shea incomes for individual farmers increased from 326.4 US\$ to 459 US\$ per tonne in 2011 alone, while the cumulative assets are currently valued at nearly 2.5 million US\$. Moreover, female farmers have become more assertive in engaging with buyers and middlemen and they are contributing more actively to household and community decision-making processes.*

**By Eric Banye, SNV Ghana**



### **Building women's organisational and strategic skills**

Access to extension services is critical in building women's organisational and management skills, and their self-confidence. However true empowerment can only start when women not only have more income but are valued as decision-makers at the household, producer organisation and other strategic levels. By bringing together members that share the same concerns and experiences, women's groups can help introduce women to the public sphere, providing an effective entry point for information dissemination and technical support. They are also ideal for developing women's leadership skills and enhancing their capacities to negotiate prices and influence decision-making bodies.

While traditional women's groups in most countries primarily focused on social functions within family and community settings, encouraging their formalisation – and hence their public recognition – is often an important first step in a gender-sensitive value chain development intervention. Empowered women are potentially powerful agents for change. However, this requires tackling women's practical constraints before addressing more strategic gender issues, for example by ensuring that meetings and training sessions fit in with women's household responsibilities and social restrictions on their mobility.



*Mrs Manivone Vongvilay worked in a garment factory for many years before setting up her rice milling business in 2004. With support from SNV intervention she now works with 680 households, providing them with farm inputs and training. "Supporting farmers really benefits my business. I can get more paddy rice and the quality has improved. Building trust with farmers has become part of my business strategy. When farmers need help, they know they can come to me."*

Similar to the case from Uganda (see Page 1) the following examples from Burkina Faso and Uganda show that well-organised women's groups are also more likely to be recognised by formal structures, with their leaders gaining respect as community interlocutors.

*In **Burkina Faso** women have limited access to shea trees in protected areas, village sacred forests and family farms. This creates conflicts between women shea harvesters and male shea tree owners, traditional authorities, and environmental protection agencies. SNV facilitated the creation of a platform to initiate dialogue on the equitable sharing of natural resources, particularly shea trees in Koundougou area. The participatory and consultative approach helped to enhance women's negotiation and leadership skills, with the result that a network of five women's groups representing 300 female shea harvesters successfully negotiated with traditional chiefs for ownership rights to five community-managed parks covering ten hectares (with about 550 shea trees). The women were further granted access to protected areas by the local environmental department. This secure access has provided incentives for women to invest in reforestation and maintenance of the parks, which will increase their productivity over the medium term.*

*In **Uganda**, SNV facilitated the capacity strengthening of 13 dairy producer groups (with a majority female membership) in improved dairy and food production techniques, leadership and milk marketing skills. As a result women producers have become much more proactive in identifying and investing in other critical areas of improvement, such as biogas for domestic energy.*

**By Aurokiatou Traoré, SNV Burkina Faso and Peter Okaje Olupot, SNV Uganda**

### **Influencing the policy and legal environment**

Regulations and legislation around key issues such as labour, access to resources (for example inheritance law) and the functioning of markets are greatly influenced by prevailing norms and values regarding gender roles. Reforms at national and lower levels aimed at enhancing equity and social inclusion therefore need to address the particular challenges of gender-based discrimination. In particular, creating a receptive and responsive attitude and environment at levels where power is concentrated and fostering the empowerment of groups deprived of such is essential to effectively influence sustainable pro-poor change. However, it may be necessary to undertake targeted interventions at individual and group levels to build women's capacity to relate to and negotiate with authorities and other actors.

Business associations and multi-actor platforms provide a useful space for identifying different interests and power relations in a specific context. Through promoting dialogue and collaboration between different chain actors such platforms can serve as an intermediate step in the governance of the value chain. By ensuring that women's organisations are well represented in such dialogue processes, facilitators can help to ensure that women's concerns are taken into account when designing broader development strategies.

As the following case from Laos shows, the establishment of inclusive public-private partnerships can provide an effective channel for mainstreaming women's needs in national policy dialogue.

*In **Laos**, SNV supported new business linkages between 20 rice millers (half of whom were women) and their producer networks totalling 20,000 smallholder farmers. SNV facilitated gender inclusive technical training and strengthening of farmers' groups with special attention to promoting women in steering committees. Three progressive miller groups (of which two were women-led) subsequently organised 17 public-private dialogues with sector provincial and district departments. A direct result of the dialogue process was a review of relevant national agricultural policy, for instance relating to export quotas and provincial trading regulations.*

**By Sengthong Photisane and Daovanh Sotouky, SNV Laos PDR**



## Concluding remarks

Empowered women and empowered women's structures are important change agents. This brief has shared some successful experiences on how to integrate and mainstream gender in agriculture practices, in productive resources, service delivery and market opportunities, and policies and regulations. It shows the importance of involving different stakeholders across a specific value chain in exchanges on how to develop common strategies to address gender issues and women's inclusion. The insights gained can subsequently be used to encourage discussions on the effects of changing roles and functions that are expected from both men and women in developing business activities.

The diverse practices explored in this Brief show that women's social, economic and political empowerment can be enhanced when development interventions take into account not only their specific needs and interests, but also opportunities for increased production and participation in markets. The cases demonstrate a number of prerequisites for making this happen. First, it is necessary to create space to listen to women voices. Second, local communities and external governance structures need to formally recognise women's organisations. Third, a wide variety of capacities, including basic management and organisational skills, commercialisation, negotiation and entrepreneurship and strategic (decision-making and policy influencing) competencies are needed. Fourth, it is important to apply a gender lens in all development planning, implementation and monitoring. This requires continuous documentation based on empirical data about the broader impact of women's social and economic empowerment on gender relations at the household and societal levels.

Economic empowerment can also strengthen the position of women within the household and in the community. As women typically spend most of their additional income on meeting family needs such as food, school fees and community responsibilities, their economic empowerment contributes directly to food security and poverty reduction.

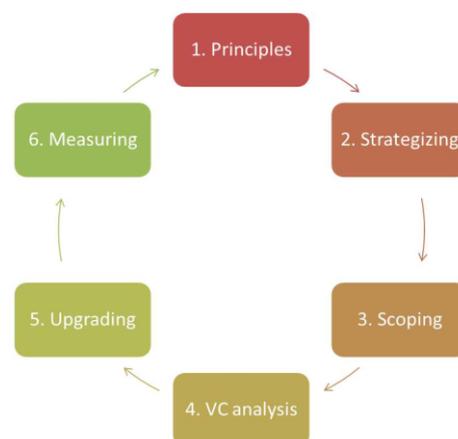
## Further reading

SNV pays particular attention to gender equity and social inclusion of marginalised groups in its agriculture practices and has developed a manual on **Gender Mainstreaming in Value Chain Development**. The manual can be downloaded at the following link: [http://www.snvworld.org/sites/www.snvworld.org/files/publications/gender\\_mainstreaming\\_in\\_vcd.pdf](http://www.snvworld.org/sites/www.snvworld.org/files/publications/gender_mainstreaming_in_vcd.pdf)



Another useful reference is the Gender in Value Chains Toolkit, produced by the Agri-ProFocus Learning Network. The toolkit is designed to motivate and help practitioners in integrating a gender perspective in agricultural value chain development by providing practical tools that can be applied at all stages of value chain interventions. The toolkit draws from existing manuals produced by members of the Agri-ProFocus Gender in Value Chains Network, including USAID, SNV, GIZ, ILO and Oxfam. The toolkit is available at:

<http://genderinvaluechains.ning.com/page/toolkit>



## List of cases

### Asia

Case 1: **Women's empowerment in Agriculture: Creating impact in the Lao rice sector** by Sengthong Phothisane and Daovanh Sotouky, SNV Lao PDR

Case 2: **Women's empowerment in public land agro forestry: Evidence from Central Terai, Nepal** by Anil Shrestha, Nepal

Case 3: **Enhancing gender relations in the vegetables value chain in Svay Rieng, Cambodia** by Ly Sereyrith

### East and Southern Africa

Case 4: **Empowering women in the oilseeds business: A case of PKWI women cooperative** by Michael A. Opio, Uganda

Case 5: **Women's participation in beekeeping in Zambia through the use of technological innovation** by Claire van der Kleij and Malani Simukoko

Case 6: **Empowering pastoral women producers and traders in the Kenya camel milk value chain: Case of Anolei Women Camel Milk Cooperative** by Morgan Meitamei Siloma, Kenya

Case 7: **Investing in women farmers to improve household food security: the case of women dairy in Kapchorwa** by Peter Okaje Olupot, Uganda

### West and Central Africa

Case 8: **Adding value to village savings groups through cooperative development** by Eric Banye, Ghana

Case 9: **Land inheritance rights in Islam** by Youssouf Boubacar Cissé, Niger

Case 10: **A women-owned shea butter company: from a social model to a market competitive model** by Lassina Konaté, Burkina Faso

Case 11: **Reduction of gender inequalities: cotton producer organisations committed to women's economic empowerment** by Abibath Hayeth Idrissou, Benin

Case 12: **Multi-actor platforms, an alternative for women's access to shea parks: case study of the shea products women's association in Houet** by Aurokiatou Traoré, Burkina Faso

You can access the document compiling all cases summaries and links to the full cases on SNV website at:

[http://www.snvworld.org/sites/www.snvworld.org/files/publications/case\\_summaries\\_f\\_or\\_gender\\_and\\_agriculture\\_practice\\_brief.pdf](http://www.snvworld.org/sites/www.snvworld.org/files/publications/case_summaries_f_or_gender_and_agriculture_practice_brief.pdf)

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