

ÉLAN RDC's Women's Economic Empowerment Learning Series: **Case Study 1**

Exploring empowerment outcomes for poor women participating in commercial maize production in **Haut-Katanga**





BACKGROUND

Introducing ÉLAN RDC

ÉLAN RDC is a DFID-funded market systems programme working across ten highly differentiated and geographically-dispersed provinces in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The programme uses a facilitative and incentive-driven approach to address systemic constraints and structural barriers preventing poor people from benefiting from market systems. ÉLAN RDC works across six market groupings: access to finance (branchless banking and SMEs), perennial agriculture, non-perennial agriculture, river transport, renewable energy, and

the business enabling environment. The primary objective of the programme is to increase incomes of incomes of 1.4 million poor men and women cumulatively by £138 million by 2021.

Understanding women and working-aged adolescent girls in DRC

Women and working-aged adolescent girls in DRC are some of the most marginalised in the world. Disproportionately high rates of poverty, inadequate access to basic services including education and

health care, restricted access to and/or control over economic (both financial and physical) assets and limited influence over decision-making at all levels constitute some of the barriers facing women and working-aged adolescent girls in DRC. Harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), female genital mutilation (FGM), domestic and intimate partner violence, and marital rape are widespread and further discriminate against women. Alongside weak state presence, outdated legislation, and limited access to justice, these entrenched cultural norms and practices have

impeded progress on gender equality, with the DRC ranking 176 out of 188 countries on the gender inequality index¹.

Women are concentrated in the informal sector, in predominantly low-skill, low-wage roles with very limited potential for upward mobility. In addition, women and working-aged adolescent girls tend to have multiple roles in DRC; they are often the principal income providers within a household while also undertaking unpaid and 'invisible' duties, such as caring for children and undertaking domestic tasks, resulting in women's triple burden and time poverty.

¹ UNDP (2016), 'Gender Inequality Index', <http://hdr.undp.org/en/composite/GII>

ÉLAN RDC's commitment to gender equality

Recognising poor women's particular disadvantage in accessing and benefiting from economic opportunities, ÉLAN RDC seeks to facilitate changes to gender-blind and/or discriminatory behaviours of market actors to realise sustainable results for poor and disempowered women, at scale. In addition to the programme's primary objective of poverty reduction, ÉLAN RDC aspires to contribute to women's greater economic empowerment, recognising this as a meaningful vehicle for broader social empowerment and gender equality. ÉLAN RDC aims to realise impact for poor women that goes far beyond a superficial focus on female participation and incremental income increase, instead working towards more transformative empowerment outcomes.

ÉLAN RDC's evolving approach to measuring women's economic empowerment outcomes

Recognising the limitations of income change as a proxy to understand gendered impact, and the inadequacy of sex-disaggregated data to do this², ÉLAN RDC has incorporated log-frame

indicators at output and outcome level focussed on the progression of women's roles within market systems. ÉLAN RDC defines women as having adopted a "more beneficial role within a market system", when they experience any one or more of the below changes as a result of the intervention and over a sustained period:

- ▲ Greater job security
- ▲ Formalisation of role / employment
- ▲ Improved position in value chain
- ▲ Greater sustained opportunity for training and capacity development
- ▲ Improved working conditions

This definition was revisited and revised in early 2017, to also incorporate:

- ▲ Changes to women's roles within the household

This addition was made in recognition that a) the household is not distinct from – rather part of – a given market system³, and b) the transformative potential of influencing women's roles within the traditionally 'private' sphere of the household, which is often difficult to affect through facilitative approaches.

The programme has developed a measurement approach using qualitative and quantitative SMART indicators to capture an instance in the change process, at a point in time. This

measurement approach will be refined as the programme progresses, and better understands how women's roles change and the best ways of monitoring this.

While this focus on delivering and measuring changes to women's roles within market systems is pioneering, ÉLAN RDC wanted to go further still.

Recognising the importance of qualitative data for developing a richer understanding of gender-differentiated impact and individual pathways to change, ÉLAN RDC is committed to undertaking several supplementary qualitative studies on specific interventions. These qualitative enquiries form ÉLAN RDC's Women's Economic Empowerment Learning Series, which will both help the programme improve its delivery for poor women and build the currently limited evidence base on what works to economically empower women in DRC. This is the first case study in the learning series.



2 Adam Smith International (2016), 'Measuring Gendered Impact in Private Sector Development'.

3 Campbell, R. (2014) 'A Framework for Inclusive Market System Development'.



THE INTERVENTION IN CLOSE-UP: Capturing under-utilised female talent, realising productivity gains & supporting women adopt more beneficial roles

Overview of partnership and intervention

In 2014, ÉLAN RDC formed a partnership with Mbeko Shamba, a commercial farm in Fungurume, Haut-Katanga, to pilot an out-grower scheme on concession land. The intervention was designed to address constraints to farmers' productivity and value capture, while increasing the volume of maize produced for Mbeko Shamba. In 2015, convinced by the positive results of the pilot, Mbeko Shamba scaled up the scheme from 50 to 243 farmers.

Recognising the potential to realise WEE

ÉLAN RDC also sought to use the intervention to demonstrate to Mbeko Shamba the commercial case for recruiting women as contract farmers. If successful, the aim was for this to serve as proof of concept to take to other commercial farms, to realise sustainable and scalable inclusive business practice change.

The programme recognised the potential for the intervention to additionally support female farmers adopt more

beneficial roles, through formalisation of employment, sustained opportunity for capacity development, improved working conditions, and progression into cash crop industries. Although Mbeko Shamba did not actively exclude women in its earlier pilot out-grower scheme, it did not explicitly target them, and as such the number of female farmers was very low.

Mapping the potential incentives for Mbeko Shamba to adopt inclusive business practices

Nonetheless, Mbeko Shamba did have

some awareness of the potential incentives of employing women as contract farmers. The farm had previously engaged female farmers in a similar capacity, producing vegetables that were sold to Tenke Fungurume Mine. While Mbeko Shamba had been impressed by the women's performance, the out-grower model came to an end when the mine reached the end of its contract with Mbeko Shamba.

Agnès Kilume, Director of Operations at Mbeko Shamba explains the farm's original motivation for engaging women as contract farmers in their commercial production of vegetables: "[We] noticed that women were more meticulous when looking after their vegetable crops. When you put a woman in charge of some land, it was always well maintained, women were more careful with the crops, while men were less so. It's this that first prompted Walter [the farm owner] to integrate women into his own [vegetable] value chain [...] The women that we ended up recruiting were from nearby and the surrounding villages. He [the farmer owner] noticed that these women were more responsible; these women looked after their homes, more than men [...] these are women who hold the family together, they take the children to school, and everything... Why not give the work to these women who do everything to support their household?"

However, despite the promising precedent in vegetables, there was no evidence to demonstrate that women could perform comparably well as contract farmers within the maize sector. In fact, entrenched social norms both impede women's engagement in cash crops in DRC and contribute to a commonly held perception of women's lower productivity levels in agriculture more generally.

ÉLAN RDC hypothesised that Mbeko Shamba's existing business practices underutilised female talent, missing out on potential productivity gains and improved supply chain reliability, all of which translated into commercial losses.

Building the commercial case for business practices inclusive of women

However, because no localised evidence existed in relation to women's economic contribution to the maize sector in Fungurume and international evidence on women's value addition carries little weight in such contexts, it was difficult to prove that Mbeko Shamba really was missing out on this opportunity.

As such, ÉLAN RDC sought to develop tailored evidence that tested women's productivity in maize production relative to men, when provided with access to the same resources.

In 2014, ÉLAN RDC supported Mbeko Shamba to conduct small-scale comparison tests with 50 farmers, providing men and women with equally-sized plots of land, and the same access to extension services, including training in modern agricultural practices and equal access to quality inputs.

The tests revealed compelling evidence of women's greater productivity levels in non-perennial agriculture, with women

producing 5,500kg maize per hectare, vs 5,100kg for men when provided with the same inputs.

In fact women benefitted disproportionately from the intervention (baseline: men's average yield = 1,970kg; women's average yield = 1,082kg), therein levelling the playing field between men and women. This served as convincing evidence for the farm to prioritise the recruitment of women as contract farmers the subsequent maize season, in 2015.





RESEARCH PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Purpose of case study

This case study is the first in ÉLAN RDC's Women's Economic Empowerment Learning Series. It aims to test the theory of change that by engaging poor women on the same terms as men as out-growers in cash crop industries:

- ▲ commercial farms can benefit from increased yield and improved supply chain reliability; and
- ▲ poor women can increase their incomes and adopt "more beneficial roles" within the market system, for example through improved job security, sustained opportunity for training and capacity development, and improved working conditions.

The research also wanted to test key assumptions, for example whether women controlled the increased income and unintended outcomes. It engaged men and women involved in the intervention to explore women's income and savings; decision-making over its usage and more broadly within the household; women's roles within the market; changes to workload and unpaid care; perceptions and attitudes towards women and women's economic engagement; mobility; and sense of esteem. ÉLAN RDC recognises economic empowerment is an abstract, subjective and non-linear process. As such, the Conclusions section of the case study tries to resist assessing whether outcomes constitute 'empowerment' according to international

definitions, instead seeking to privilege the women's own perceptions of 'positive change' and 'negative change' in their lives.

Methodology

The data presented below was captured through two Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with female and male contract farmers at Mbeko Shamba farm and one Key Informant Interview (KII) conducted with the Director of Operations, also at Mbeko Shamba farm in September 2016. Details on research design, sample characteristics and data analysis are provided in the [Annex](#).



RESEARCH FINDINGS

Summary of findings

The findings of the qualitative enquiry have been analysed, thematically organised, and are summarised below.

Women are productive and diligent out-growers in commercial maize production

Women constitute an untapped talent pool for commercial maize farms, having demonstrated equal or greater productivity levels across three concurrent agricultural seasons at Mbeko Shamba.

These findings have affirmed the intervention's theory of change and helped to demonstrate to Mbeko Shamba the commercial case for engaging women on the same terms as men. In the two subsequent agricultural seasons, this proof of concept has driven the priority recruitment of female farmers in Mbeko Shamba: in 2015, Mbeko Shamba recruited all female applicants: comprising 31.7% of total contract farmers, and in 2016, 60% of new recruits were women. As Agnès Kilume, the Director of Operations at Mbeko Shamba comments: "Last year (2015), the number of women increased [...] and the majority of women worked very, very well. In terms of the recruitment of contract farmers, there are no other criteria than productivity levels.

Since we've integrated and trained women here, I see absolutely no difference in tasks that purportedly exclude women... that the women can't do".

This evidence can now be used by ÉLAN RDC to stimulate similar gender-responsive business practice change among other actors; encouraging other out-growers to 'crowd in'.

Commercial maize production has become a critical income source for women, leading to increased incomes

Since participating in the ÉLAN-facilitated out-grower scheme at Mbeko Shamba, maize has become the principal income source for women engaged in contract farming. This has led to increased incomes of £237 for women participating in 2015. This is rarely women's sole source of income; rather, outside of the maize season, women described being involved in other, less lucrative activities, such as cultivating agricultural produce on family land and reselling oil, salt or corn purchased from other farmers. Female farmers living in male-headed households confirmed that their husbands also brought income into the household, typically through charcoal production, mining, or agricultural production.



Women commonly physically retain the income they earn at Mbeko Shamba...

Most women reported retaining the money they earn from working at Mbeko Shamba. They feel they work hard to earn the money, so are entitled to hold onto it. One woman stated: "Why would I give money to my husband? Does he come to work with me? No, I come here on my own. So it's for me to manage this money".

Perceptions of men's inferior financial management skills are central to women's decisions to physically retain income generated at Mbeko Shamba. Another woman commented: "Most men are drunkards. Sometimes I give him the money and he misuses it. That costs me dearly, because it's me who comes to work and when I ask him to help tend to the crops, he refuses. So when money is lost, it's me and the whole family that suffers".

A similar perception was articulated by another woman, who added: "For me, women are more astute than men. It's true that the man is the head of the household, but most often he's observing the woman's attitude, the way that she goes about managing. Men do nothing but drink. Because of this, I have to fight for my home to be stable. Because if I do not

take care of my home, it will fall to pieces. The wise woman builds her home, and the fool destroys it. As soon as I have money, I keep the money, and I plan how to use the money to take care of the home. Those who move the family forward are women".

...But when we look at who in the household influences how women's income is spent, it becomes more complex

All women indicated some influence over how the income generated by their work at Mbeko Shamba is used. Several women felt that this decision-making influence was in some way linked to their work at Mbeko Shamba: "Before, men were the ones working, but now that we work as well, men feel supported and our means have increased. This has led to progress in our ability to influence household decision making – we've become producers and not the consumers that we were previously. That's the case for all of us women here".

In the majority of cases, women signalled that spending decisions relating to both the household (including both goods and services) and the productive activity (such as agricultural inputs) are taken together with their husbands.

So while women report physical guardianship of income they generate, they do not feel they are able to make decisions about its use autonomously. One woman stated: "We make decisions together the two of us, but I manage the money on my own". Another described having a similar arrangement: "I discuss [financial decisions] with my husband. I show him the money, but then I keep hold of it".

A husband of one of the female farmers described how his wife's income was managed: "Managing the household is the responsibility of both the man and the woman, but it's the man who is the one really in charge. We give women instructions, and in this sense she becomes the manager. She follows the plan that we develop together. But without my approval she can't act. Women are like cashiers of the household because men are too busy with other things, and otherwise I'd spend money on useless things".

This correlates with the (very limited) secondary data available on this topic, which equally describes women as "cashiers", and reports that if women take financial decisions without male authorisation, this can result in domestic violence⁴, an issue explored later in these findings.

Women do not yield the same influence over money earnt by their husbands, who tend to make spending decisions autonomously

While some men described agreeing spending decisions or plans with their wife (or wives), more commonly men expressed making decisions about income they have earned on their own. One man explained, "The person who makes decisions in the home is the man. When I make a suggestion and my wife doesn't want to do what I'm asking, I just make the decision anyway".

Many of the men talked about providing their wives with a set portion of their income. This was often "what remained" after they had made "their spending decisions". Typically this was intended for women to engage in 'petit commerce' or for regular household purchases.

Women's income use is informed by their perceived roles as caregivers and homemakers

When women spoke of their spending priorities, they focussed on others in the household rather than themselves. Their spending decisions tended to be grounded in the perceived role of women as

caregivers and homemakers. One woman explained: "The home is a woman. A good woman is one who supports their children [...] What Mbeko Shamba has given us is much more than a contract, it makes up for our different starting position and helps us progress with our children. The first thing we need to do for our children is to educate them".

Men tended to hold similar views, one stated: "Apart from her work in the fields, my wife sells bits and bobs outside of the house to ensure the family wellbeing, notably paying school fees". Both men and women seemed to perceive education costs as an exclusively 'female' responsibility.

But women also used their income for complex entrepreneurial activities

Beyond women's more regular spending on the family, additional income earned through Mbeko Shamba tends to have been used to invest in goods that offer continuing returns, with most women buying land and building additional housing to realise rental incomes. Some women have complex income-generating strategies, as one woman explained: "With the money I earn from selling my yield to Mbeko Shamba [at 1,000 Francs Congolais / kg], I buy maize from other farmers in the district at a cost of 800 Francs Congolais / bucket [a bucket is

equivalent to 2.8kg maize] and I store it until January/February, when I then sell it during the maize crisis [outside of harvest period]. The money I earn from this, I then loan out to farmers during the crisis period, which, come harvest, they then repay me in kind by selling me a bucket of maize for 300 Francs Congolais / kg".

'Additional income earned through Mbeko Shamba, tends to have been used to invest in goods that offer continuing returns, with most women buying land and building additional housing to realise rental incomes'

Beyond productivity gains, women are also benefiting from improved working conditions and time savings

Women participating in the ÉLAN facilitated out-grower scheme at Mbeko Shamba reported significant productivity gains, owing to the use of modern agricultural practices. One woman said: "In the past, when I dug furrows, I used to harvest 20 bags of 25kg, which is about 0.5 tons per hectare, but now we have 6.4 tons per hectare". Above and beyond productivity gains, women

spoke of improvements to their working conditions since becoming contract farmers at Mbeko Shamba, in particular a lessening of heavy manual labour: "When I used to do everything by hand, I found it very difficult to complete the work" one woman said, with another adding: "In the past, I got worried when the agricultural season was about to start, but now I know that Mbeko Shamba will prepare the ground [using tractors], and that I come simply to plant and cultivate the crop".

One women also noted a reduction in hours worked as a result of mechanisation: "Here we work on pulling out roots, but with mechanised labour, we are freed up from the month of November, whereas if we were to do this by hand it would take three months. From now until the end of the planting season, we can take care of other work which contributes to the wellbeing of the family".

Men recognise women's skills in commercial agriculture and are accepting of their involvement as contract farmers

Men demonstrated an awareness of women's ability to perform agricultural tasks to a high standard. One man stated: "Women have no problem working in the fields [...] the women work well, their yield is higher, and they understand things more quickly than men" while another

added: "Women do all the tasks. Even work that we think could be difficult for them, such as spraying insecticide, they get on with. Pulling out the roots is also a task undertaken by women".

For the men with wives working on the farm, the idea for their wives to work at Mbeko Shamba originally came from the women. While the men were originally hesitant around the women engaging in productive agriculture on the same terms as them, their opinion changed when they saw the economic benefit.

"At the beginning, our husbands and those close to us didn't support our involvement in Mbeko Shamba. But since the day that I brought back the first cheque to cash in at the bank, it's been him who encouraged me to go to work". Another woman commented: "The community used to say we were like slaves when we signed up to work at Mbeko Shamba. But recognising my financial situation at the time, I told myself that I needed to go in spite of the discouragement, to pull myself out of poverty. Now I've been proven right".

Among those men whose wives do not work at the farm, several said they would be supportive of their wife participating in the out-grower scheme as an individual contract farmer, with more still agreeing to them contributing to their plot as a labourer.

But men also fear women's genuine financial independence, with the potential for violent reprisals

Nonetheless, many of the same men expressed concern about women gaining too much financial independence. One man explained, "As soon as you arrive at the situation where a woman is working, and the man is not, she becomes pig-headed, she starts to look at you like you're a good for nothing and starts to take you for a 'Mario' [Congolese slang for a man controlled by his wife] and you'll end up doing the washing up!"

This sentiment was echoed by another, who said: "An independent woman is someone who wants to depend on herself. A true woman is one that depends on a man. When a woman thinks that she knows everything, she's dangerous". Implicit within the discussion was the potential for violent reprisals associated with women's subversion of expected economic and social behaviours: "When a woman becomes superior to a man, that's when the problem starts", an implication of the potential for violent reprisals.

One woman explicitly acknowledged this risk: "Women who work and earn money run the risk of exposing themselves to violence from their husband, but to get them to accept women continuing to work and earning more, these women resign

and expose themselves to this risk so that they can carry on working".

Men expressed traditional views of women and men's relative roles within the household

Men universally viewed domestic work as the responsibility of women, with men performing a disciplinary function. One man put simply: "housework is a woman's responsibility", with another adding: "There are certain activities that men undertake in the household: establishing order within the family is a man's role, and not that of a woman [...] The man is responsible for disciplining the children. Women relate, and men punish".

And they must be consulted if a woman wants to leave the home

Despite an openness to women's engagement in commercial farming, men expressed no tolerance for women leaving the home without their prior consent. In the words of one man: "Women can go out but only with [male] authorisation. And when she wants to go out, it's only permitted when the reasons are considered worthy by her husband, for example if a family member was sick".

Beyond income increase and more beneficial roles, women have experienced greater respect and dignity

Women spoke of broader social benefits associated with their work at Mbeko Shamba. For some, these had been transformational: "It's us the women who have gained from this work. We have become respected. Before, I was poor but now the community no longer looks at me as they did before. I used to eat food without oil, but now I eat with oil; my children had difficulty finishing the school year but today they study without any issues and pass the year. I used to sleep on a bed without a mattress, now I sleep with a mattress. I was a women without value, but now they respect me in the village".

This sense of improved dignity was mirrored by another, and comes in the form of a simple gesture: "Now when a visitor arrives at my house, I'm able to offer them a fizzy drink".





CONCLUSIONS

The research revealed women's overwhelmingly positive feelings towards both their participation in the out-grower scheme and the broader changes that this has facilitated in their lives. Women earn more income, have an increased influence over its use, and demonstrate greater economic resilience outside of the harvest period. There is compelling and self-affirmed evidence of women adopting more beneficial roles in the market system, both through formalisation and increased job security, but also in the form of improved working conditions, including a reduction in heavy manual labour and reduced working hours. Beyond this, women feel more respected both within the household and the community. While this study resists affirming or denying the realisation of greater empowerment according to international definitions –

recognising instead the complexity and contextually-determined nature of this process – we can conclude that women themselves perceive the changes in their lives to have been primarily positive.

'Women earn more income, have an increased influence over its use, and demonstrate greater economic resilience outside of the harvest period'

was both implicitly and explicitly acknowledged. While the chosen method – focus group discussions – may have facilitated a drift into 'group think', in which men felt pressured to themselves conform to a particular view of masculinity, the assertions of male dominance nonetheless point to highly

entrenched social norms. These norms may hinder the intervention's potential to continue to realise more complex progress around WEE.

The challenge for ÉLAN DRC will be to determine what incentives exist for Mbeko Shamba – and other partners – to sensitise men of women's equal or greater value addition, as conduit to improving gender equality. This is no small task, and very limited evidence exists of market systems programmes – which are incentive-driven and time-confined – trying to realise this. Crucially however, the research did identify some examples of economic necessity overriding social norms and individual perceptions: men's initial resistance to their wives' participation at Mbeko Shamba soon turned into encouragement when the economic gains became clear. While this is one example, it could potentially be explored as an entry-point for building male support for women's engagement and advancement within market systems.

Programme & Policy Recommendations

- ▲ Share evidence from Mbeko Shamba on women's equal or higher productivity levels with other commercial farms to stimulate similar gender-responsive business practice change and encourage 'crowding-in'.
- ▲ Purposively acknowledge social norms – both as a potential barrier to and catalyst for – empowerment within future intervention designs.
- ▲ Explore what incentives exist for Mbeko Shamba and other private sector organisations to sensitise men on women's equal or greater value addition. Where no clear business case exists, collaborate with non-market led development initiatives, such as La Pépinière, to do so.

Annex: Abridged research plan and methodological considerations⁵

Research questions	<p>In line with the case study objectives, the research aimed at attaining a nuanced picture of the intended and unintended outcomes associated with women's engagement at Mbeko Shamba:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▲ Who captures the benefits of increased income associated with the women's work at Mbeko Shamba? How is this determined and by whom?▲ What are these benefits? How does this affect intra-household decision-making and relations?▲ What changes have taken place in women's lives since working at Mbeko Shamba? Have their roles changed (at work and at home) if so how? How are these changes perceived by women / men? How do women feel about their work? Why?▲ How do social norms influence women's work and how does employment and increased income affect existing social norms and men's attitudes? Do women spend more time away from the home? Where? Why? What does this mean for the women? For men? For the household? How do women (and men) feel about this?<p>NOTE: These questions were not used directly, rather more subtle, indirect probes, often drawing on proxies or hypothetical scenarios, were developed and included in Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interview guides to capture responses to the above research questions. These were used in a semi-structured manner, to allow for exploration of unanticipated outcomes.</p></p>
Research methodology	The research used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to understand the individual experiences of women participating in a specific intervention facilitated by ÉLAN RDC to better understand the emerging pathways of change in response to women's employment at Mbeko Shamba. In certain instances the case study draws on quantitative data captured by the programme's Monitoring and Results Measurement (MRM) systems to complement the qualitative research undertaken.
Research methods, data collection tools, sample size and selection	<p>The case study used two research methods and associated data collection tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▲ Focus group discussions (FGDs): A total of two FGDs were undertaken with 11 female and male contract farmers separately. While participation in Mbeko Shamba's out-grower scheme was the main selection criteria (individuals had to have participated in at least one agricultural season with Mbeko Shamba over the period 2014-2016 to qualify), two male participants had wives participating in the scheme as well.▲ Key Informant Interview (KII): A KII was conducted with the Director of Operations at Mbeko Shamba to understand the market actor's perception of the gender-differentiated impact of the out-grower scheme, and to comprehend the attractiveness and viability of maintaining gender-responsive business models post-ÉLAN RDC's support. <p>The FGD participants had the following characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▲ The women were between the ages of 28 and 77, all of whom had been working as contract farmers for Mbeko Shamba between 2 and 3 agricultural seasons. The majority of women were educated only to primary level, and on average were married at 16 years of age. Within the group, three women headed the household (two were widows, and one divorced). Two of the women were married to men participating in the male focus group.▲ The second group comprised 11 men between the ages of 30 and 51. On average, the men had been working as a contract farmers for Mbeko Shamba for slightly less time than the women (1.6 years, typically between 1 and 2 agricultural seasons). Half of the male participants were educated to a level above primary, and on average were married aged 28. Within the group, all men were married, and one man had two wives. In both the female and male groups, the average family size was just over 8 people. <p>For both, the FGDs and the KII semi-structured guides were developed, using non-leading probes to facilitate conversation. The data was collected over two days in September 2016.</p>

Data analysis approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ International theories and evidence of WEE and knowledge of intervention informed the FGD and KII guides. ▲ Discussions were recorded, transcribed and translated from Swahili into French. ▲ Trends, commonalities and differences were analysed and written up.
Potential for response bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ While very few development initiatives are active in Fungurume and research/survey fatigue is not a concern, response bias is conceivable. ▲ As such, the following steps to mitigate response bias were taken: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoiding structured enquiry techniques and leading questions; - Clearly communicating to participants before the FGD that their involvement in the research and the responses given will in no way influence ÉLAN RDC's support to Mbeko Shamba or their employment at the farm; - Ensuring no clear incentive for participation was advertised prior to the FGD (a \$5 stipend for transport was paid at end of discussion).
Ethical considerations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Separate FGDs for men and women were undertaken; these were facilitated by a male and female Congolese facilitator respectively. ▲ Facilitators trained in gender-sensitive research practices. ▲ Participants were assured of their confidentiality by omitting names in the case study write-up to minimise risk of identification and/or any potential of reprisal. ▲ Informed consent was taken for the use of data, photographs or videos. ▲ Given the potential for sensitive topics to be raised in discussion, e.g. gender-based violence; we ensured that women felt they were in a safe space and that no outsiders could hear the discussion.
Methodological learning and reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▲ Transcriptions did not record the names of individual participants, meaning that it was not possible to provide greater social analysis to the responses given in this particular case study. In the subsequent studies, social characteristics will be incorporated (while retaining anonymity) to provide richer data findings, which will provide nuance, for example, on intergenerational differences.