

“Beyond Production: Innovations and Opportunity in Women’s Economic Empowerment in Agricultural Market Systems”

“Innovations in Women’s Economic Empowerment” Webinar Series

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Questions & Answers

Jenn

[Women in Non-Production Roles in Agriculture: A Literature Review of Promising Practices](#)

What is the role of data and how can it improve programming for women’s economic empowerment? Are there specific types of information you think should be collected?

The need for more and better data is, unfortunately, not a new recommendation in the development or gender mainstreaming fields; however, as the authors of the literature review sought information about interventions focused on women’s economic empowerment in non-production agriculture roles, it became clear that this is an area where data is very much lacking. This is very little available data on what projects are doing as well as what impacts they are having. Few projects had available reports on gender-specific needs, gaps, and norms in non-production value chain levels, and few reported validated or rigorous information about how they measured positive economic empowerment gains (impacts and outcomes).

Of the interventions examined, only about 28% had evaluations, analyses, or external studies (i.e., academic) that examined gender equity or women’s empowerment. A lot more had some sex-disaggregated data or discussed how they worked with women, but it was reported superficially or anecdotally. Although all of the interventions assessed in the literature review were outside of production, about 58% focused primarily on producers (i.e., processing equipment for farmers, marketing for farmers, PHH for farmers). Another 5% focused on the whole value chain, including farmers but also processors and/or marketers. Most of the projects that work with women who are not producers were at the processing level.

With more data, we will have a larger evidence base that enables us to understand better the constraints women face in non-production roles as well as the barriers to entry. Such data would help implementers design more effective activities to support women who work at multiple levels of value chains as well as facilitate women’s successful and sustainable entry into new roles other than production. We need to know more about what interventions have worked (and why) as well as what haven’t worked (and why). Many interventions have focused primarily on producers and women’s groups, which means we don’t know as much as we need to about whether that is the most effective approach. When projects do not rigorously assess impact, we may know that they worked with women in certain activities and achieved short term gains but not whether women actually ended up with stronger businesses in the long term, whether they successfully linked with other market actors, whether they could work as traders or sellers long-term, whether they earned enough income to cover their household needs and invest back into their IGAs, whether they maintained control of their

earnings, whether they took on new and different roles in the community based on their economic role and how that impacted themselves and other women long-term, whether they faced resistance or negative impacts due to their increased income, and so on. Often, we find anecdotal information or evidence of such impacts on a small scale, but not enough data to demonstrate what interventions are scale-able have the potential to provide lasting and sustainable impacts.

As for the specific types of information to collect, we could have a long chat about that! Certainly, more (all!) projects should begin by collecting data on gender-specific challenges and opportunities at different levels of the value chain – what non-production roles women and men perform, what needs they have and how they are different if engaging in non-production activity, social and cultural norms that could impact participation or potential outcomes – to better understand what women need as well as ensure gender sensitive and equitable implementation. A gender lens should be incorporated into any market, value chain, and labor studies or other formative research, so that gender differences are captured when assessing livelihoods and market opportunities. This information should form the foundation of activity approaches. Projects should develop indicators that measure outcome as well as output and – as I discussed during the Q&A – design indicators that track empowerment more specifically. When possible, engaging with participants to design empowerment measures is a great opportunity to more effectively define and measure empowerment and can be analyzed in comparison with external measures. Mixed methods should always be used – quantitative and qualitative – to better understand impacts. There is helpful guidance available on this topic, and good places to start are with the gender analysis and M&E information found in [*The Intervention Guide for the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)*](#) and [*Understanding and Measuring Women's Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework, and Indicators*](#).

It seems like training is the common theme – is the most effective approach to build women's skills so they can do more activities besides production or farming?

Training is definitely a common theme and a very important activity; projects report that trainings have had great impact! However, it is difficult to rank the effectiveness of a single type of activity because usually a combination of activities is required to address constraints that are interconnected and multi-layered. It is important to note that training is usually not as effective when done in isolation. As the literature review points out, most interventions implement training in combination with other activities. There are also many different types of training, ranging from technical skills to business capacity to gender and social issues, that are implemented depending on what needs are identified. Training alone builds knowledge, skills, and awareness, but women (and men) must have the ability to apply that knowledge in order for it to be effective. This means identifying and addressing other constraints and needs, whether those have to do with access to resources, time burdens, decision-making, or other barriers and norms. For example, a project may train women in a skill such as processing, but if women lack access to the resources needed to conduct the processing—the processing technology, finance/credit to purchase the processing materials/technology—then the training may not be beneficial overall.

What are some of the gender specific benefits and risks to introducing new technologies?

The introduction of new technologies can provide many benefits to women in non-production agriculture roles, ranging from reduced time burdens; reduced “drudgery”; increased access to information; increased negotiating or bargaining power; reduced stock losses; improved product quality and safety; and social impacts such as increased decision-making, respect, and confidence.

The risks of introducing new technologies vary depending on the context and the technology, but range from increased time burdens (replacing the time spent on one activity with another); loss of livelihood opportunity for women or other vulnerable groups due to technology displacement; male takeover of newly profitable activity; lack of control over increased income generated by use of the technology; fear, cost, or other social constraints preventing uptake; backlash due to shifts in power dynamics or behavior at the household or community level.

The INGENAES Project is developing a methodology and toolkit for assisting projects in assessing gender-specific benefits and risks to technology. You can review some of the profiles they have developed at <http://ingenaes.illinois.edu/apply/technology-profiles/> and contact cmanfre@culturalpractice.com for more information.

Is it more effective to target activities primarily at women's groups?

This is a question that was raised in the literature review – most interventions in non-production agriculture roles have been targeted primarily at women's groups, so we don't have much information to compare approaches. More evidence from interventions that target different types of groups would help us know the relative gains and impacts of these groups, allowing us to learn more about the differences in impact/outcome when conducting interventions with women's versus mixed-gender groups and what factors affected those outcomes.

Can you say more about the positive economic and social results? What were the social impacts and how are they related to economic impacts?

Some projects that conducted interventions focused on economic empowerment also reported impacts such as increased confidence, shifts in decision-making power or voice at household and community levels, increased community connections or social support, increased leadership, a decrease in workloads, and an increase in bargaining power. A small number of interventions also generated shifts in both men's and women's perceptions of women's status, roles, and responsibilities.

For example, the literature review includes information about an Oxfam-implemented project in Rwanda, which showed results with regard to women's incomes and empowerment. This project provided training and mentorship on technical topics, business development, and cross-cutting issues including gender, as well as access to credit for women to develop pineapple-planting-material businesses through groups. Oxfam conducted an evaluation with a treatment and control group. The evaluation found impacts that were the direct result of project activities, such as increases in access to credit, participation in producer groups, and confidence to engage in business. However, it also determined that "there were also significant differences found in terms of characteristics less directly linked to the project activities, including attitudes towards women's rights and women's economic roles, social connections, and involvement in decision-making in the household or community."

How would you recommend tracking increases in income to see if women's empowerment is actually affected?

As discussed during the Q&A, it is important to track control and use of income. There are a number of methods for doing this, ranging from qualitative impact studies that include PRA or FGD activities on household decision-making and use of income to surveys that assess these issues. The [Women's](#)

[Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#) includes a component focused on control of income that can be reviewed and adapted, and there is guidance and links to additional resources in [The Intervention Guide for the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index \(WEAI\)](#).

It seems like LEO Project is also using WEAI indicators prepared for FtF to assess the gender assessment.

Yes! We've been working with FTF a lot on the WEAI. We have developed a guide for implementers called "The Intervention Guide for the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)." It has lots of great info and links to resources. It's available on Microlinks.

What is the full title of the report that Jenn talked about?

It's titled "[Women in Non-Production Roles in Agriculture: A Literature Review of Promising Practices](#)"

Jenn, you spoke about resilience for women. Have you looked at resilience in women who have accessed financial safety nets such as microinsurance versus those who have not?

Great question – we have not assessed microinsurance as a resilience strategy, but I would be interested in any findings or learning from projects or organizations that have.

Did you explore ways of generalizing the approach to the national level and what type of partner you need locally, nationally?

In the literature review, we did not come across reports of interventions that scaled these approaches at a national level. This is an area for further exploration and sharing!

Kamila

Can you say more about how social norms affect women's role in beyond production? How is this different or the same as social norms that affect women in production?

It is very much dependent on context but we have found there can be different social sanctions when up-scaling women in beyond production roles. For example, when moving a woman from a factory worker to a factory manager, or when moving a woman from a from a lead farmer (who is responsible for training) to a sales agent (who is responsible for purchasing and selling large quantities of agricultural product). When we move women further up the beyond production ladder there is more to gain and potential more to lose. As the positions demand increased mobility, provide a higher income and higher status there is potential for greater backlash.

We have a paper on how gender social norms influence how we empower women in market systems development that you can access for free here: <http://marketshareassociates.com/the-social-norms-factor-how-gendered-social-norms-influence-how-we-empower-women-in-market-systems-development/>

Could you shed some more light as to how you were able to achieve this functional upgrading of the women from farmers, to lead farmers to sales agent, within a M4P programme?

This took place in a few ways. First, the funding was contingent on certain quotas being achieved. For example, each lead farmer was only able to attending the training if they also brought with them one young farmer and one female farmer. Without this request all the lead farmers would have been men, and usually older men. Second, the program developed an “internship pipeline” for promising female farmers. This was intended for ambitious female farmers who showed drive but lacked the experience. These aspiring sales agents could join the organizations as interns, learn on the job from other sales agents and then be up scaled once they had proved themselves.

Would love to hear more on how to create a pipeline of women who could grow in beyond production roles.

Creating pipelines to upscale women was achieved through creating a quota systems and an “internship pipeline” detailed above. BUILD also looked for women who already showed the capacity and experience of running small ag-businesses. For example, BUILD sought out local female entrepreneurs who had good local networks and some experience of running a business to work as sales agents. The most successful female sales agents who “stood the test of time” were either single, or had supportive and often more “progressive” husbands. Achieving support from the husbands and wives of female or male sales agents was key to their long-term success and help keep sales agents retention rates high.

I totally agree that increased income does not necessarily mean that women have any say in the use of the income. What approaches have you seen work to ensure that women are involved in the decision making of this increased income?

A few approaches appear to have the high impact in ensuring women can actually control, or influence the income they earn:

- Focus on access (e.g. access to jobs), but also agency (e.g. work on increasing the confidence of women) interventions. This two pronged approach is key, but ofte overlooked
- Bring men in early on, and sell them the business case for why joint decision making leads to better outcomes in the home (e.g. increased productivity on the farm)
- Focus on early adopters e.g. household which already practice this. Bring them in and utalise them as change agents, or role models

I didn’t catch the name of the report Kamila mentioned about groundnuts. Or is it the same one Jenn referenced?

Part of the findings are from talking with programs working in ground nut production, but there is also some literature in this article: “The impact of mechanized groundnut shelling on gender dynamics in Malawi” (<http://most.mw/files/download/4d87f5c086c0f61>)

Adam

Can you say more, and give an example, of how cross-cutting services were important to women’s participation or benefit?

The support that MEDA provided to the Sales Agents was broad, and in some cases, tailored to the specific needs of the sector/group. In addition to the technical skills trainings, we provided a suite of services to our Sales Agents to get them all up to a sufficient level; these included financial literacy, financial management (ranging from Village Savings and Loans Associations, to formal loan

arrangements), record keeping, marketing and branding, gender sensitization, negotiation skills training, etc. We also worked to connect them, where appropriate, to financial institutions providing formal financial products and or coursed continued our support to make sure the women understand their rights and obligations under those agreements.

I think that any of those pieces independently would not have been as successful as the entire program was, and I think that we were grounded within a value chain also made the project more successful.

I would like to know if you have a tool that could be used to conduct a gender assessment.

Yes! There are a number of great resources available. ACDI/VOCA has a Gender Audit, Assessment, & Analysis Manual & Toolkit:

<http://www.acdivoca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/ACDI-VOCA-Gende>

Related to the above question, in the different projects, how does the saying that when women earn they invest around 90% of their income into families stand?

We do know from other research that women are far more likely to invest additional income into the family or household. Anecdotally, we see from the ENTREPRENEURS project that women were using their income to send children to school, purchase durable goods for the household, better nutrition, or even to support their husband's businesses. However, we did not track the amount of spending that was occurring so we cannot say definitely what percent of the income was going back into the household.

Are there any gendered differences among agricultural entrepreneurs in terms of the size of business and the number of employees hired?

There are many differences, and I think this fact makes it difficult in design affective development interventions in agriculture. Women face a myriad of unique obstacles in agriculture that men do not face. For this reason, programming that seeks to address women in particular needs to be able to assess those obstacles within the specific context and design activities that directly address each in priority.

We have noticed from ENREPRENEURS and other projects that women tend to provide services to other women. The Sales Agent Model is a good example of this as our women Sales Agents directly support a network of other women producers. In Ghana, we've seen women who have gone on to purchase agricultural machinery (ie, threshers and tractors) rent those services out to women first.

In Africa women need your expertise in market- related information. How can they process?

Happy to help where possible! Please contact us at MEDA.org.

Puzzling between enterprise vs entrepreneurship development! which should be given training/workshop at first to those women who wants to be entrepreneur?

We had examples of women refusing, point blank to attend training unless their husbands were also trained.

I think there is a difference between entrepreneur and enterprise development. In the case of the ENTREPRENEURS project, the women who self-identified to be Sales Agents with us not only had a higher degree of mobility, but they were also more entrepreneurial. In other projects where MEDA has used the Sales Agents model, there have always been women who were naturally more entrepreneurial than others – and for ENTREPRENEURS and other projects, these are usually the women who do really well. That's not to say that individuals cannot become entrepreneurs, some of the skills of a successful entrepreneur, like recognizing market opportunities, can be learned and developed over time. Other skills, such as the drive and determination to succeed seem to come more naturally to some people over others.

Enterprise development can occur with any entrepreneur, though not all entrepreneurs want to grow their businesses. This is especially the case for women as an increase in business activity may interfere with other responsibilities and lead to issues like time poverty. We shouldn't assume that all entrepreneurs want to grow their business, however, if they do we can certainly provide them with the knowledge and skills to do so.

When you speak of sales increase, are these all in local markets? Was there an infrastructure built or already available? Or was the infrastructure established during the study?

During the ENTREPRENEURS project, all our women beneficiaries were selling to local markets: beneficiaries were selling directly to local markets or to Sales Agents, who were in turn selling to local markets.

The value chains that were selected for this project were ones in which MEDA felt there was a substantial potential for market growth, both locally and internationally, and for diversification of markets. In the Hand Embellish Fabrics sector, for example, this market was already well developed and our strategy there was focused more on getting our producers up to the quality and quantity to meet already high local demand (toward the end of the project, there was some evidence of international demand as well). In the Medicinal and Aromatic Plants sector on the other hand, this market was largely underdeveloped and informal. Here we focused more on developing the needed infrastructure and on marketing and branding. As the quality and the quantity of the products increased over the life of the project, the local demand naturally increased as well.

Adam, are there any reports that you could share on FSA model?

Unfortunately, what we have is not explicit or very detailed, but we do have a briefing in [MEDA's Vulnerable Populations publications](#).

I'd also be happy to send reports from the projects in Pakistan, just e-mail me.

In your research, have you come across childcare facilities offered to women at the rural community level or offered by corporate actors? Interesting research has been conducted by IFC related to today's webinar looking into the business benefits for companies from investing in women at all stages of the value chain: Investing in Women along Agribusiness Value Chains.

We did note that there was at least one processor who offered day care to women, however, this was not something the project looked at very closely. We have also noted in some other cases where women have started providing more women-to-women services, such as day care, meal prep, etc. It would be

interesting to see if a project could actively create that to the betterment of women's economic empowerment.

How did you investigate and measure control over income within the household? Do you have any recommendations for monitoring this?

Unfortunately, the project did not measure use or control over income within the household. The information that we received was largely anecdotal.

How did you measure increases in women's decision-making power as a result of increased incomes?

Again, the goal of this project was not women's empowerment, so the project did not actively measure women's decision making power in the household other than to receive feedback anecdotally.

Which community structures were in place to steer the growth in women access to markets and hence increase in household income? If yes which one worked well?

At the beginning of the project, I would say there were very few community structures in place that supported women's access to markets. This was one of the main goals of the project and the Sales Agent Model. By the of the project, many of the Sales Agents had established themselves as formal business and set up local community centers that supplied material inputs, education, and training to women as well as served as the conduit for market information and access.

A question for Adam – he mentioned how women self-selected often out of economic necessity. Has the project found that once women were economically better off they then reduced their mobility again (observed purdah more stringently)? I've come across this in Pakistan and wonder if they have too and how they handled it...

This is an interesting observation and one that we did see on ENTREPRENEURS so I cannot say if the women voluntarily reduce mobility. There were one or two instances where individual men or communities objected to women's participation in the project after they started and reduce mobility on the part of the women.

In Liberia, what I have noticed is that once mechanization is introduced in situations where it will increase incomes for women, men take over.

For the ENTREPRENEURS project, in addition to selecting sectors that showed potential growth, we also selected sectors where women were already dominant (ie, sectors perceived as women's roles, like hand embroidery), or where there was little threat from competition with men, such as in Honey and Medicinal and Aromatic Plants.

On MEDA's Greater Rural Opportunities for Women (GROW) project in northern Ghana, we specifically selected soy as it was not seen as a cash crop and therefore not a "men's crop." As the success of our women has increased over the years, men have started taking up soy planting, however, at this point, the success of the project has firmly established women as the main producers of soy in northern Ghana.

Adam, did you engage men in the process as increasing income doesn't always equate to having increased decision making which your project seems to have achieved. What was it in your project that was the catalyst?

Before the ENTREPRENEURS project entered any community, we met with local officials and other influential men to describe the objectives of the project and how we proposed working with women. We therefore had community buy-in in every community we worked in. I think this, in addition to the approach being culturally sensitive, meant that we were not directly pushing the envelope on women's empowerment nor were we placing any undue risk on our women participants. We did do gender sensitization with men within our communities on an on-going basis, though I'm not sure that you can point to this as being the primary stimulus to change. In this case, I really think it was the direct benefit that the men saw to women participating in the program that loosened some of those restriction – and once loosened, I think the women pushed on the envelop themselves. Interestingly, the greatest opposition to our project came from older women within the communities who objected to the changes taking place.

In MEDA's GROW project, we've taken that methodology one step further and created Gender Male Activities (GMAs). These are men within our target communities that we've identified and have volunteer to go through additional gender training and to act as advocates for greater gender equity. Last year with their help, we published a pictorial on how men and assist with household chores. Interestingly enough, marital harmony is one of the major changes at the household level that women and men continuous mention to us when monitoring the project's activities!

Has any of your work/research looked into collectives such as women's groups or cooperatives?

MEDA's approach is more focused on private sector development so we tend to advocate more for the development private businesses rather than cooperatives. Organizing a women's group can be helpful as a starting point or entre into a community. We have had some really good success with Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs), however, as their enterprises grow, we encourage our women to seek formal financial services.

Why was there such a big discrepancy between the increase in sales (96% I think) and the increase in income (19%)? Thanks!!

First of all, these figures are averaged across the four value chains, which ranged from 7% to as much as 26%. These figures are also based on percentages not actual monetary figures; so while the **number** of sales increased significantly the actual value per sale varied greatly between service and product, even within the same value chain. This is also income at the household level, not individual women, so would represent more net revenue rather than gross revenue.

Additional Resources

[Women in Non-Production Roles in Agriculture: A Literature Review of Promising Practices](#)