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LEO BRIEF
Leveraging Economic Opportunities

PROMOTING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: BEYOND-PRODUCTION IN MARKET SYSTEMS PROGRAMS

INTRODUCTION

This brief examines how and why practitioners are achieving women's economic empowerment (WEE) outcomes through interventions that seek to promote and empower women in agricultural roles *beyond-production* (see key definitions in text box). More specifically, this brief presents a survey of promising strategies and recommendations for further investigation.

The brief is supported by the Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO) project, which seeks to enhance USAID programs, projects, and activities focused on creating inclusive market systems.¹ The topic for the brief emerged from discussions with practitioners through the SEEP Network's Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group (WEEWG) due to the gaps in documentation to-date. Its audience is inclusive market systems development programs and practitioners.

RATIONALE

Women living in poverty occupy a large and growing role in agricultural production in developing countries.² As a result, development practitioners seeking to promote WEE have traditionally focused interventions on production-related activities where scale can more easily be achieved. However, with the spread of the market systems development approach practitioners are increasingly understanding market systems more holistically and identifying less traditional entry points for women such as agricultural services, processing, marketing and retail sales. Emerging evidence suggests that roles moving *beyond-production* in agricultural sectors (termed *beyond-production activities* for the purposes of this brief, and defined in detail below) may offer women equal or better economic empowerment opportunities.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this brief is to identify and document agricultural market systems program strategies, seeking to realize WEE outcomes

KEY DEFINITIONS

Agricultural production roles: All on-farm activities related to the production of agricultural produce including land preparation, planting, weeding, input applications and harvesting.

Agricultural *beyond-production* roles: All agricultural value chain functions outside of production including but not limited to input and agricultural services, processing, marketing and retail sales.

Market systems development approach: "A market system is a dynamic space—incorporating resources, roles, relationships, rules, and results—in which public and private actors collaborate and compete for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Market systems approaches focus on catalyzing a process that will result in a market system that is competitive, inclusive, resilient, and adaptive."

Source: Markel, Erin and Lindsey Jones. *Women's Economic Empowerment: Pushing the Frontiers of Inclusive Market Development*. USAID. 2015

¹ Leveraging Economic Opportunities website: <https://www.microlinks.org/activities/leveraging-economic-opportunities-leo>. 2016.

² Doss, Cheryl et al. *Role of Women in Agriculture*. FAO. 2011

focusing on benefiting women in roles *beyond-production*. Two key questions guided the exploration process. These include:

- What strategies to engage women in agricultural roles *beyond-production* appear to be most effective in achieving positive WEE outcomes?
- Where should future work in promoting programming beyond agricultural production focus?

To respond to these questions, we combined an extensive literature review with expert interviews to produce this technical brief. It should be noted that distinguishing between production and *beyond-production* roles, and measuring how each approach uniquely benefits women, is quite new. Many of the practitioners interviewed do not yet apply strict definitions for distinguishing between *production* and *beyond-production* roles. Therefore, comparisons of results between the two approaches is not yet possible, and the results presented below are initial findings and warrant further research and assessment.

FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings from existing literature and case studies. This brief looked at both market systems programs which promote WEE by targeting women specifically and those that achieved WEE outcomes as a result of a gender mainstreaming approach.

A. PROMISING STRATEGIES TO ENGAGE WOMEN IN ROLES BEYOND AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION

The research revealed that practitioners generally employ five key strategies to engage women in beyond agricultural production roles and realize positive WEE outcomes. Note that these strategies are not necessarily mutually exclusive, yet additional investigation is still needed to determine if combined approaches can amplify impacts or not.

1. **Integrate WEE sensitization training into interventions.** The case studies and expert interviews revealed that incorporating WEE sensitization training, either at the individual or community level, into *beyond-production* agricultural interventions strengthened the impact of WEE outcomes. By embedding empowerment-related lessons within technical trainings or facilitating community awareness on gender considerations, market systems programs were able to increase the chances of success of their interventions and minimize the potential for sanctions against women who assumed new roles in their communities. The case studies presented below show that the appropriate empowerment content, target audience and timing vary significantly depending on the project and context. They also illustrate that there is no single appropriate channel (e.g., directly by the project staff or via market actors) through which to deliver the training.

Case Study: Community Sensitization in Bangladesh

The Strengthening Dairy Value Chains, Phase II (SDVC II) program implemented by CARE/ Bangladesh and funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation seeks to improve the average daily milk production and household income of extreme-poor families with an explicit focus on empowering women. SDVC II recognized that prevailing community perceptions on female mobility might put women at risk. Specifically, women who were encouraged as a part of their program to take on mobile input provider and artificial inseminators roles faced higher risks. As a result, SDVC II conducted community sensitization on overcoming gender norms in order to optimize its work to engage women as input providers and artificial inseminators. These community awareness campaigns delivered directly by the program staff worked to both encourage male and female acceptance of women in these roles. These campaigns proved to help mitigate risks to women and maximize benefits to them such as changing male community perceptions and attitudes to support women.

Case Study: Businesses Deliver Empowerment Training to Young Girls in Kenya

SPRING Accelerator, a multi-regional program funded by USAID, DFID and the Nike Foundation, seeks to empower and improve the lives of girls (ages 9-19) through the introduction, via market actors, of human centered designed products and services. Early on the program recognized that lower literacy rates among women and girls, the result of entrenched social norms, would significantly affect the ability of their partners to engage with and benefit this group. Consequently, the SPRING program has encouraged its enterprise partners to embed literacy and life skills training within technical modules to overcome this educational deficit and enhance the effectiveness of technical training.

- 2. Highlight women in non-traditional roles and use role models.** The experts interviewed for this brief as well as multiple studies emphasized the importance of promoting women leaders in non-traditional roles to act as role models and change agents within a market system. Programs, for example, employed female sales agent models, whereby more mobile women are promoted into intermediary roles. These women purchase products from rural producers and sell to retailers, wholesalers, etc. These agents also embed product information and other services into their sales services.³ Not only do such female sales agents act to change the market systems by ensuring rural women have better access to markets and information, but they also act as role models for the communities they serve.

Moreover, strategies promoting women in non-traditional roles seem to have multi-generational effects. Not only can it change the way a market system works currently, but it can also change the aspirations of young women to take up non-traditional gender roles themselves. This can include agricultural roles *beyond-production*. Although not related to agriculture, an example from India promoting women's political leadership shows the effects of women role models on an upcoming generation. The study shows that female leadership influences adolescent girls' career ambitions and educational completion. A survey with 8,453 adolescent girls aged 11 to 15 and their parents found that the aspirations and time in school increased among young women in communities where leadership positions for women in local politics was mandated, and these young women spent more time in school and less time on household chores.⁴ The findings suggest that programs could employ strategies to highlight women in *beyond-production* roles in their community with multi-generational effects.

Case Study: Highlighting Women in Non-Traditional Roles

MEDA operates in some of the most restrictive environments for women in the world. The Pakistan Entrepreneurs program funded by USAID was no exception, yet MEDA scaled a female sales agent model which identified and trained women in ag-entrepreneurial skills who already enjoyed greater mobility thanks to their age, marital and/or economic positions. These women linked producers to markets by buying and aggregating products for sale to large scale buyers. By working with women who already had 'permission' by their community to work outside of their homes, MEDA was able to engage these women in non-traditional roles *beyond-production* (e.g., dairy collection agents) while minimizing the risk of sanctions. During the program, the sales agent model was adapted to other agricultural and non-agricultural sectors and MEDA is now exploring how to adapt the model to other contexts where mobility may not be culturally sanctioned.

³ Snelgrove, Alex. *Integrating Homebound Women into Supply Chains*. MEDA.

http://www.growinginclusivemarkets.org/media/publications/integrating_rural_producers_into_lucrative_value_chains.pdf.

⁴ Beaman, Lori, et al. *Female Leadership Raises Aspirations and Educational Attainment for Girls: A Policy Experiment in India*. Science. 2012.

- 3. Promote labor-saving technologies to reduce women's workload.** Literature shows that labor-saving technologies introduced by projects can reduce women's workloads. This strategy seeks to change the requirements of the role to create improved conditions for empowerment including additional 'free time.' Eventually this strategy leads to the potential to increase other aspects of women's agency such as decision-making if more time leads to their ability to gain income and partake in additional household decisions.⁵ Though typically employed by projects not using facilitative strategies, this tactic can be well aligned with the market systems approach if done through partnerships with market actors such as input and equipment suppliers.

Case Study: Groundnut Shelling Technology Frees Up Time for Women

Groundnut processing in Malawi and Tanzania is a function typically associated with a high level of drudgery and carried out by women. The traditional shelling practices also lead to high degrees of aflatoxin contamination as women douse the groundnuts with water to make manual shelling easier. In 2009, CTI introduced groundnut shelling technology to communities which dramatically reduced the time burden of groundnut processing and significantly reduced the potential for aflatoxin contamination as it eliminated the need for wetting the groundnuts. The introduction of the groundnut shelling technology, which processed groundnuts 10 times more efficiently, transformed female and male perceptions of groundnut processing; 97% of the men and women interviewed stated that the mechanization of the role would encourage men to participate in shelling.⁶ The redistribution of the work alongside with the time-savings (facilitated by the technology) created the space for empowerment due to the newly gained 'free time'. Moreover, with higher quality aflatoxin free groundnuts, women could sell into more lucrative markets, increasing their incomes.

- 4. Link women working in roles *beyond-production* to innovative services.** Women working in *beyond-production* roles in agricultural have different service needs than women working in production. Increasing access to new services for these women can promote business growth and empowerment. This strategy identifies the specific services that can help women overcome traditional barriers (e.g., high asset and mobility requirements) to thriving in *beyond-production* roles. Due to the relatively higher capital requirements of successfully operating and growing most *beyond-production* activities, interviewees specifically discussed the importance for women in these roles to access appropriate financial services. As shown in the case study below, unlocking innovative finance for young women has the potential to open up new opportunities in paid and unpaid work.

Case Study: Innovative Financial Services for Kenyan Fruit Sellers

In Kenya, micro fruit and vegetable retailers (a role dominated by girls and young women) wake up at 4:00AM each morning to travel to the wholesale market on the outskirts of Nairobi to purchase products to sell for the day. Limited mobility and a lack of finance impede these women from purchasing larger stocks. Restocking daily is time consuming and cuts into other paid and unpaid activities that these women can undertake. With the support of SPRING (introduced above), Green Credit has introduced small scale credit (via mobile money) to fruit and vegetable sellers and facilitated direct communication between these micro-retailers and the wholesale market. At the end of each day, micro-retailers send a SMS text to Green Credit with their order for the following day. Orders are delivered directly to the micro-retailers the following morning. Though it is still too early to determine the full impact of these small innovations, anecdotal evidence suggests that these women now have more time and have greater control over their own micro-enterprises.

⁵ Thorpe, Jodie, et al. *Market Systems Approaches to Enabling Women's Economic Empowerment through Unpaid Care Work*. BEAM Exchange. 2016.

⁶ Spieldoch, Alexandra. *Applying farmer-centered design to alleviate women's drudgery and reduce quality losses in groundnut*. *Proceedings: First International Congress on Postharvest Loss Prevention*. Rome, Italy. 2015.

- Promote women’s movement from production to *beyond-production* through functional upgrading.** This capacity building strategy targeted at improving the roles of women in agricultural value chains recognizes the inherently powerful nature of certain *beyond-production* roles for women. For example, extension workers, veterinarians and input suppliers can be some of the most trusted and respected people in the community. They are often perceived as knowledgeable and well-connected. Yet for many reasons (e.g., greater mobility, financial resources, education levels), these roles are typically filled by men. In recognition of this privileged and highly visible community role, many market systems programs have strategically engaged women in functional upgrading schemes so they can benefit from the increased earnings, influence and respect that is accorded to these positions. This strategy is more effective in communities with greater gender flexibility in these roles. The two following examples showcase how this strategy can be used in market systems programs with explicit or implicit WEE objectives.

Case Studies: Women Assume New Roles in Agriculture

PROFIT+, a Feed the Future Program in Zambia implemented by ACDI/VOCA, proactively recruited women to participate in their community agro-dealer (CAD) initiative. Although the goal of the program was female market participation rather than empowerment, PROFIT+ found that not only did women perform better than men as CADs, “but women articulated how owning a shop and having access to improved agricultural knowledge increased their status in the community.”⁷ In contrast to PROFIT+, the SDVC II program, mentioned above, purposefully engaged women as community AgVets (i.e., input suppliers and artificial inseminators). SDVC II had a clear WEE agenda and intentionally sought to engage women as AgVets to support their empowerment and create role models for other women and men. SDVC II found that these women service providers were accepted in their new roles and were respected by the community for their technical competence.⁸

B. KEY CONSIDERATIONS MOVING FORWARD

1. Measure and track how *beyond-production* programs affect poor women

Production level activities are more likely to be dominated by poor women, so targeting these activities will, by definition, reach poor women. When working with women in *beyond-production* roles, it is often less clear if programs are reaching poor women, given that *beyond-production* activities are often done by less vulnerable and sometimes non-poor women. Yet working with non-poor women in *beyond-production* roles may benefit poorer women as role models or service providers (e.g., the sales agent model). Therefore, programs should track whether women in these roles are poor or not and how these strategies affect poor women in production and *beyond-production* roles as a result of the program.

2. Develop program strategies based on levels of economic empowerment

Preliminary evidence shows that women in *beyond-production* roles often have different social status (i.e. higher status jobs such as wholesalers or traders) and at times are more empowered or have more decision-making power within their industries than women in production roles⁹. Program strategies to promote empowerment will vary significantly if programs are targeting women who are already more

⁷ Akamandisa, Vincent, et al. *Learning for Gender Integration and Women’s Empowerment: The Feed the Future PROFIT+ Project, Zambia*. ACDI VOCA. 2016

⁸ Markel, Erin, et al. *Policy Brief: The Social Norms Factor: How gendered social norms influence how we empower women in market systems development*. BEAM Exchange. 2016.

⁹ Miller, Emily and Erin Markel. *Examining Gendered Social Norms for Programme Design: A Case Study on the Sierra Leone Opportunities for Business Action (SOBA)*. BEAM Exchange. 2016.

economically empowered. Programs will need to carefully segment their market research, and incorporate an in-depth understanding on the levels of economic empowerment of the various sub-groups of women they are targeting into their market research. This in-depth research should inform appropriate strategies.

3. Understand differing social norms faced by women in *beyond-production* roles

Recent research shows that the strength of social norms and how women experience them vary by sub-groups of women and their work (e.g., farming, trading, wholesaling).¹⁰ The type of work a woman is engaged with can strongly determine how she experiences social norms in her context. Initial evidence points towards programs understanding the difference between how social norms affect production and *beyond-production* roles, and what the risks are to these women in terms of social sanctions as they change roles and levels of economic empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Practitioners are employing a range of strategies to promote women's economic empowerment in *beyond-production* roles, many of which have yielded positive benefits for women including increased income and decision-making. While the emerging evidence is encouraging, the number of programs which measure the impact of WEE outcomes in *beyond-production* interventions is small. It is additionally difficult to draw correlations between specific *beyond-production* interventions and discrete WEE outcomes. Thus, programs need to invest in rigorous monitoring and evaluation to further explore this relationship and better understand both the socio-economic roles of beneficiaries and the different benefits of supporting women in production and *beyond-production* roles.

KEY RESOURCES

Akamandisa, Vincent, et al. *Learning for Gender Integration and Women's Empowerment: The Feed the Future PROFIT+ Project, Zambia*. ACDI VOCA. 2016.

Markel, Erin, Emilie Gettliffe, Linda Jones, Emily Miller and Laura Kim. *The Social Norms Factor: How Gendered Social Norms Influence How We Empower Women in Market Systems Development*. BEAM Exchange. 2016.

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¹⁰ Ibid.