



May 22, 2012

Seminar Synthesis

Women's Economic Empowerment

Experience and Challenges SDC's Employment and Income Work Faces

9th May 2012, Bern, Switzerland

1. Introduction

Promoting gender equality and empowering women remain among the greatest challenges of the “Millennium Project” and a priority for all development partners. Women's economic empowerment and their access to markets and services are central to achieving MDG3 and are widely recognised as being essential to economic growth and poverty reduction. SDC's and other development agencies' experiences show however that many employment and income projects do not pay sufficient attention to the **gender-specific systemic constraints faced by poor women and men** and struggle to show robust results. SDC's e+i and gender networks with their partners, under the coordination of the M4P Hub (a DFID, SIDA and SDC financed knowledge management facility), have identified these shortcomings and taken the timely opportunity to revisit the topic, focusing on the growing experience of Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) projects. Milestones in this process so far include an [e-discussion on Women's Economic Empowerment \(WEE\) in M4P projects](#) based on a [WEE discussion paper](#). These have been followed by a public seminar on May 9, 2012 in Bern, where around 90 practitioners and experts of private sector development and gender discussed about project experience and research findings. These inputs, together with additional contributions, will eventually lead to new WEE guidelines for the M4P approach and their broader application in the field of economic development.

2. Thematic inputs

Input 1 - Welcome address

Sybille Suter, Head of SDC's Latin America Division and the e+i network

Sybille Suter welcomed the participants and recognized the importance of joining the gender and M4P communities, since most projects dealing with market systems development still lack on providing gender disaggregated data and on addressing the issue of care work. Indeed, women engaged in income generating activities (farming, processing, handicraft, trade) are often badly paid and overloaded with work. Good practices have emerged in M4P projects where more focus is put on analysing market systems with an explicit gender lens drawing on gendered baseline data and subsequent development of appropriate indicators and results measuring systems, planning to mitigate risks specific to women in that context. These advances in SDC's programming provide practical evidence of how a markets system approach can be adopted to work for poor women and men without running the risk of overburdening the set of objectives of projects.



Input 2 – Insights from the publication [“Added value - Contributions to gender equitable economic development”](#)

Annemarie Sancar, focal point gender, SDC

We hear many success stories about empowerment of women entrepreneurs, but never about the downfalls: most women still live in poverty and their discrimination is alarming in many countries. Gender equality is about macroeconomic policies and its implication at the micro level. We, as projects, may not be able to change cultural patterns of gender relations, but in recent years we have brought gender into the political debate by showing our experiences from the field. Still, many implementing agencies do not tackle care work because it is unproductive!

Sabin Bieri, Centre for Development and Environment (CDE), University of Bern

The gender equality perspective can enrich the planning of a project intervention by having a closer look at the overall market system and how it applies for women and men individually. For example the closer look to the situation of women will show the unpaid workload women have to do. Gender equality requires an intrinsic, instead of an instrumental targeting of women within an economic intervention. Not to forget that an economic empowerment of women will contribute to social empowerment; economic project interventions have to look at the social dimensions very carefully.

Input 3 - A Women’s Economic Empowerment Framework - Can M4P make markets work for poor women and for poor men?

Linda Jones, Coady International Institute

Based on a discussion paper produced for the M4P Hub (January 2012) on the framework of WEE and M4P, Linda Jones presented the common elements defining Women’s Economic Empowerment:

1. Economic advancement – increased income and return on labour
2. Access to opportunities and life chances such as skills development or job openings
3. Access to assets, services and needed support to advance economically
4. Decision-making authority in different spheres including household finances.

Those were compared with the key principles of M4P. Linda concluded that in general the principles are compatible, but highlighted two specific challenges for M4P concerning WEE. The approach does not give clear guidance on, first, how to tackle issues related to unpaid care work and, second, how to address gender mainstreaming. Linda Jones proposed an analytical framework on how to integrate WEE into an M4P intervention life cycle.

Input 4 - Synthesis of the e-discussion of SDC’s e+i network

Maja Rüegg, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation

The e-discussion on WEE and M4P that was held between 19 March and 10 April with 230 participants from all over the world underlined the findings by Linda Jones in her paper. Participants provided many useful tips on how to tackle WEE in M4P projects. One important aspect was the investment in capacities of project staff and making WEE a team effort rather than a task delegated to a specific gender advisor. Open questions remained after the e-discussion, including how to promote WEE while using the facilitator approach to market systems development.



3. Cases

Case 1 - [Nigeria: PrOpCom – Examples of WEE in a market systems development project](#)

Tiffany Urrechaga, Consultant

The Nigeria case shared the experience from a DFID-funded project, particularly its interventions in the rice sub-sector. Although WEE was not targeted from the start, the project made an effort to analyse its impact on WEE. While successful in enhancing female par boilers' income and assets, the impact on decision-making power was mixed. It was concluded that M4P programmes can include the WEE dimension, but may have to include specific additional indicators to move from income to empowerment.

Case 2 - [Bangladesh: Samriddhi – Good practice in Gender Mainstreaming in a rural economic development project](#)

Archana Nath, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Bangladesh

The Bangladesh case presented Samriddhi project's strategy for mainstreaming gender as a transversal issue and targeting female entrepreneurs. The project was recognised in 2011 by SDC Bangladesh's gender platform as best initiative with regard to gender mainstreaming. One of the most important aspects highlighted was Samriddhi's gender sensitive monitoring, evaluation (M&E) and reporting system, with sex-disaggregated qualitative and quantitative data and indicators that assist the project to track women's status.

Case 3 - [South Caucasus: A concept for mainstreaming gender at portfolio level](#)

Sophia Svanadze, SDC South Caucasus

The South Caucasus case illustrated how a SDC coordination office encourages and supports gender mainstreaming across eight rural economic development projects. The three phases of the gender mainstreaming concepts entail: 1. engaging with the implementing partners and mapping gaps and assets, 2. initiating gender analysis and implementing appropriate corrections, and 3. institutionalizing and measuring how projects mainstream the "strengthening of local ownership and capacity". Sophia concluded that the M4P approach provides an appropriate framework and space for mainstreaming gender equality principles.

Case 4 - [Cambodia: Outcomes from a women's entrepreneurship education process](#)

Joni Simpson, ILO

Cambodia is one of eight countries where ILO's Women's Entrepreneurship Development (WED) programme took place. Three operational levels were presented: 1. creation of an enabling environment for WED, 2. building institutional capacity and 3. developing tools and support services for women entrepreneurs. A crucial aspect was to find champions/opinion leaders and work together towards changing attitudes.

Case 5 - [Honduras: PymeRural – Women's participation in local systemic market development](#)

Orlando Mejía, Swisscontact, Honduras

The Honduras case presented the process of integrating WEE into the beekeeping sector strategy. The project worked on women's leadership, technical capacity building and development of new services managed by women. To successfully address WEE, the presenter emphasised the importance of building capacity and awareness among project staff. Also, it was found that co-facilitators and local business organizations are suitable platforms for sustainable promotion of gender equality.



4. Conclusions

Peter Tschumi, SDC focal point e+i

The various inputs, question and answer sessions and panel discussions led to the following conclusions:

Market systems development projects should start with an **appropriate context analysis** phase which includes the analysis of different constraints of women and men. Women face different constraints than men to increasing their income; and one of the most common constraints for women to get involved in income-generating activities is their time spent for unpaid care work. It remains a challenge to find the right balance between economic and care activities, be it in market development projects, other economic development projects, or projects with more explicit social objectives. (*Options how to tackle care economy in practice were developed further in the [May 10 Workshop](#), see group work in the [minutes](#)*).

M&E systems have to be designed in a way that they can assess whether women and men are better off due to project interventions. It includes gender disaggregation in the results chain and defining different indicators and targets for women than for men. When it comes to measuring changes more accurately, the household level might be the most indicated level to observe and assess change in income, decision-making power and other aspects of wellbeing according to gender.

Good practice seems to include **specific capacity building components** to improve skills in running economic or income-generating endeavours. Obviously according to the overall M4P principles it has to be carried out through light touch facilitation, ideally driven by the market-actors themselves (including in this case also the normally very present community of service providers from civil society, i.e. case examples from Cambodia, Bangladesh or Georgia). The project staff itself should hold a combination of M4P and WEE expertise and projects should have the means to develop the respective expertise among their staff.

Empowerment of women must go beyond the economic sphere, hence having a **broad vision of empowerment** is indeed appropriate. However it needs a good balance between a broad vision and a focus on the essential to be able to put into practice measures that are significant and relevant for poor women and men. The danger exists – in many fields of development cooperation – that projects overload the set of objectives and end up being less effective in reaching any of the objectives. More mature M4P projects might, in a second phase, focus on rules, regulations and norms conducive to more gender equity in economic activities (work on the lower part of the “doughnut”, the typical M4P synoptic graph).

Accordingly, the seminar on May 9 (and the [in-depth workshop of May 10](#)) will be followed by the elaboration of **guidelines for WEE in M4P**. In parallel, the M4P Hub has commissioned two in-country case studies from Georgia and Nigeria that will feed-in this process. Based on these different activities, the e+i network, in collaboration with colleagues from the gender network and international partners, will decide whether and what kind of specific additional knowledge management measures or products will be needed in the near future.

All seminar documentation is available under the [SDC e+i shareweb](#): www.sdc-emploment-income.ch