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## Women's Economic Empowerment in M4P Projects

Synthesis of the e-discussion of SDC's e+i network from 19 March to 10 April 2012

### Introduction

The discussion on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) projects was the first e-discussion of SDC's e+i Network in 2012. The discussion was organised in collaboration with the M4P Hub.

The insights of this e-discussion will be presented at SDC's public seminar on WEE on May 9, 2012 and will contribute to respective guidelines on M4P and WEE to be elaborated by the M4P Hub.

"How can the Making Markets Work for the Poor Framework work for poor *women* and for poor *men*?" This is the underlying question of a [discussion paper for an M4P Women's economic empowerment \(WEE\) framework](#) prepared by Dr. Linda Jones on behalf of the M4P Hub.

In order to achieve WEE, through M4P or any other approach, the paper recognises the need to define economic empowerment and its main elements. The four elements of WEE proposed in the paper were used as guide during the e-discussion as well as to structure this synthesis. Besides the discussion of these four elements, some practical tips were compiled from the discussion and are presented at the end of this synthesis paper.

### Condensed synthesis

The following box presents the four elements of WEE and a very condensed synthesis of the discussion:

#### Common Elements Defining Women's Economic Empowerment

- I. Economic advancement – increased income and return on labour
- II. Access to opportunities and life chances such as skills development or job openings
- III. Access to assets, services and needed supports to advance economically

All of the above-mentioned points are seen as integral parts of any M4P project. The circumstances for women are, however, often different than for men when it comes to the ability to access opportunities, services, assets, or other support. Thus, interventions that have a similar increase in income for women and men as their objective have to be adapted in order to lead to the same benefit for women. As an example of a specific constraint faced only by women the unpaid care-work at home was often mentioned.

Hence, in order to be more effective in WEE, the analysis phase needs to specifically look into the different constraints of women and men. Further, WEE needs to be included in all stages of the project, especially also the monitoring and evaluation system, in order to be able to observe changes on a disaggregated level for women and men.

- IV. Decision-making authority in different spheres including household finances

While there was a broad agreement on the first three elements defining WEE, the fourth element was still marked by many unanswered questions. The discussion was thereby not limited to decision-making authority, but extended to the general question of an increased wellbeing of women. The questions that were discussed included the consequences of increased income on the lives and empowerment of women, the necessity to take up a more holistic view beyond pure economic aspects when talking about WEE and the appropriateness of the M4P approach as well as the rationale for and against its use to achieve this more holistic definition of WEE.

## I. Economic advancement – increased income and return on labour

A clear goal of any M4P project is to increase the income and the return on labour of men and women. Many participants made it clear, however, that women face different constraints than men to increase their income. During the discussion, participants presented various examples of projects that were successful in increasing women's income. Some of these projects were focusing exclusively or predominantly on women while others were not specifically targeting women. One example presented was Katalyst in Bangladesh where an income increase of 25% could be achieved through involving women in post-harvest activities and quality control of seed growers.

In the projects with a majority of women as beneficiaries, one way of including them is by directly targeting them as in the example of a MEDA project in Afghanistan that supported the development of women-focused horticultural market systems. Alternatively, women can predominantly be served by projects by simply targeting the poorest, which, in the case of the PrOpCom project in Nigeria, turned out to be mostly women.

One of the most commonly mentioned constraints for women to get involved in more income-generating activities was their time spent for unpaid care-work. This was exemplified in the case of a Caritas supported project in Tajikistan that found that none of the entry permissions to markets were actually designed to support smallholder women to participate in the local market but were rather directed towards people that are able to allocate 100% of their working time to the business.

## II. Access to opportunities and life chances such as skills development or job openings.

Access to opportunities in markets is one of the basic objectives of any M4P project. Again, the circumstances for women are often different than for men when it comes to the ability to access such opportunities.

Most projects that reported their cases during the discussion have a capacity building component in one form or another with the objective to improve the skills of the target population. In the case of RLDP in Tanzania, female dairy producers were trained in mixed sex groups and as individual resource persons; in the case of Katalyst in Bangladesh, the project facilitated large seed companies to specifically train women in post harvest handling.

Other projects, such as the Markets for Meghri (M4M) project in Armenia, supported women to participate in local agricultural trade fairs and by that gaining access to inputs, tools and machinery.

In order to be able to access opportunities and life chances, the economic activities of women need to be accepted by the society. In the above-mentioned case, the female leaders trained by RLDP in Tanzania emerged as role models for other women. Previously, women had not been accepted as leaders in the pastoral groups of Tanzania.

## III. Access to assets, services and needed supports to advance economically

Also access to assets, services and support is seen as integral part of all M4P projects. Again, the necessity to assess the situation specifically for women was stressed by the participants.

In the mentioned M4M project in Armenia, the increased participation of women in agricultural trade fairs not only gave women access to inputs, tools and machinery but also helped them forming links to input suppliers and potential buyers.

Various projects have tackled the access to services for women. Challenges for supporting women's access to services are usually very different compared with men, as can be illustrated by the above-mentioned MEDA project in Afghanistan that trained women extensionists, sought out socially acceptable ways for women to reach markets (through male family members, elder women, traders), and helped develop village level services such as drying and storage. The challenge is to understand specifics of the women's situation and the potential solutions that would enable women to access services.

## IV. Decision-making authority in different spheres including household finances

While there was a broad agreement on the first three elements defining WEE, the fourth element was still marked by many unanswered questions. The discussion was thereby not limited to decision-making authority, but extended to the general question of an increased wellbeing of women.

*Is a higher income for women leading to empowerment, more decision-making power, and increased wellbeing?*

The consequences of a higher income of women through M4P interventions were widely debated. A common concern voiced by a number of participants was that women could either not realize the opportunities to increase their income or alternatively would be put under additional pressure due to their unpaid care-work at home that is in most cases considered the exclusive duty of women.

Positive examples, like the interventions of Katalyst in the prawn sector in Bangladesh led, both, to better yield and, hence, higher income, and to an increased decision-making authority of women farmers. Many of them used the profit for children's education, renovating houses, buying poultry/livestock or reinvesting in the prawn

cultivation. In this case, where women used to do mostly unpaid family labour, access to skills has improved their stature within the household.

While there are good examples that show that a more active engagement of the women in economic activities can lead to a better life for them, there were also critical participants. They pointed to M4P projects that while being able to increase the income of women failed to improve their livelihood as a whole or even had to the opposite effect. According to these voices, women can suffer from time poverty and stress and in the long run also from the exclusion from public spheres. Examples that illustrate this perspective show appropriation of women's income by their husbands or by local tax authorities or, in case of RLDP in the poultry sector in Tanzania, lead to a situation where poultry rearing, considered a women activity, was captured by men because of its income potential.

*Do we need to take a more holistic view beyond looking at economic aspects to achieve real empowerment?*

This question is a logical continuation of the one above based on the largely shared conclusion that more than just additional income is needed to talk about real empowerment of women. Besides the aspect of decision-making power in the household, this question includes wider spheres such as the interaction in networks and public spaces, social capital of the community or decision-making power of women in social and political questions in the wider community. From this point of view, many participants were not particularly convinced by the successes of M4P projects to empower women. It was criticised that in most M4P projects non-economic aspects of poverty are given less focus regardless of their influence in poverty alleviation.

One example was given from an SDC supported project in Georgia where the women were no longer required to take the dangerous trip to the market to sell their milk but could sell it at their farm gates. It was criticised that while the women could increase their economic profit, they were actually disempowered by excluding them from participating in the market as one important place for social contacts in the community.

*How to promote both gender equality and economic growth with a market development facilitation role?*

The M4P approach promotes pro-poor economic growth through 'light-touch' facilitation leading to changes in the market system, ideally driven by market actors themselves. Because many participants express that empowerment of women must go beyond the economic sphere, it was suggested that more direct and more 'heavy-handed' interventions might be needed to achieve more decision-power of women in their households and beyond. Many examples of projects that add interventions to foster changes beyond the economic aspects were presented.

One example of such additional interventions came from Bangladesh, where Samridhi project has combined a livelihoods approach with an M4P approach. Like that, the project can be closer to the people through a large network of local NGOs, which has made it easier to promote WEE. The project has also applied specific gender tools such as the 'Community Participatory Gender Analysis' or the promotion of 'Community Female Mentor'. These additional interventions of course have led to additional costs.

To minimize these kinds of transaction costs and increase scale, some projects try to work through private sector actors, such as the case presented in the box below.

#### Rural Livelihoods Development Programme, Tanzania

In the sunflower sub-sector in Tanzania, RLDP is working with oil processing companies. An interesting case is a female-owned company Songela Investment. The company does contract farming with small-scale sunflower farmers. Along with training on agronomic practices, provision of extension and quality seeds, etc., Songela Investment has also been promoting gender awareness and equality through trainings. One of the results is an increased participation of women in sunflower production from 30% three years ago to currently 40-60%. A second result is a shift in attitude of men towards women's stronger control over income. Men and women now talk openly about the advantages they are getting from this development. (Reported by Braison Salisali)

Also at the International Labour Organisation, as one participant reports, it was found that applying gender mainstreaming and technical support to existing structures that should be serving women's needs has shown impact for women and has also given stronger sustainability of investments. Nevertheless, also the positive results of the ILO case were accomplished with additional direct interventions at household level such as 'gender training' for husbands of women entrepreneurs in order to gain their buy-in. Thereby, working at the household level was seen as key.

Another project case where interventions specifically to strengthen women are added to value chain development interventions is presented in the box below.

### From Grove to Markets: Making Markets Work for Olive Farmers, occupied Palestinian territories

In the recently started "From Grove to Markets: Making Markets Work for Olive Farmers" project, the intervention plan contains both elements of general empowerment (those related to setup/structural changes) and other more specifically leading to WEE:

- Increase women participation in cooperative work by introducing new participatory rules, supporting women in holding key positions in cooperatives, training women to acquire technical knowledge that would bring added value to the olive sub-sector;
- Develop strong VCs (with export linkages and fair trade certification) for products controlled by women (such as olive based products) so that production can be scaled up in the medium-term;
- Build up marketing skills of women smallholders and encourage them to collectively market their products; and
- Opt for collective ownership and management of resources (via formulation of women cooperatives for olive based products)

(Reported by Rana Sandouka)

Some participants specifically pointed towards a trade-off between facilitating economic growth and WEE particularly regarding the potential to reach scale. In their view, market actors that respond to the business case for reaching more women are fairly exceptional and limited in scale. As a consequence, their success does often not lead to automatic or immediate crowding in. Some participants even see gender equality and economic growth as potentially contradictory objectives.

*Are M4P projects appropriate to work towards such a broad vision of empowerment?*

There was a broad recognition that structural changes are needed to reach the holistic – and by some participants criticised as idealistic – definition of women's empowerment. Thus, the question emerged whether M4P projects are the appropriate means to reach this.

As a pragmatic solution, it was proposed that selected M4P projects or interventions, by design, could set out as their primary objective to reach aspects of WEE rather than to expect that all M4P projects should meet the full set of WEE objectives.

Other participants proposed to differentiate between 'practical gender needs' and 'strategic gender needs' and pointed out that M4P projects are not designed to address the strategic gender needs but can address practical gender needs. For example, M4P projects could support women in earning more money and take decisions in an area in which they had decision making power anyway, or to improving women's performance in the roles in a selected market system that are traditionally theirs, rather than attempting to have them take up new roles.

Finally, some participants advocated for programmes with clear objectives focusing on specific aspects of development, because, as they argue, it is becoming more common to overload programmes with mixed and competing objectives and, thus, making them less effective in reaching any of those objectives. Therefore, programmes tasked with delivering on income poverty (for men and women) should focus on this specific task.

### Practical tips for WEE projects

During the discussions, many projects, consultants and staff of SDC Head Office and Cooperation Offices shared their experiences in M4P and WEE projects. Here is a collection of practical tips.

*Include WEE into the project cycle from the beginning*

It is important to integrate WEE into the project cycle from the beginning. Besides market analysis, intervention plans, etc., already the strategic vision of a project should include WEE. Many projects experienced that to add WEE into a project once it started is confusing and often results in a loss of effectiveness and diminished project resources.

*Analysing the context, the situation of women as well as gender-specific risks and opportunities*

An in-depth context analysis is essential for M4P projects to know the market system. The situation of women in the market systems is, however, often very different from the situation of men. A context analysis has to take this into account. Context analyses should include the specific situation of women in all elements of a market system, i.e., the core market but also supporting functions and rules and regulations. Core market actors often ignore women because they are not part of the formal economy or mainly engaged in unpaid care work. Challenges in the supporting functions, access to services, can be very specific for women. Similarly, rules and regulations can discriminate against women and need therefore be taken into account.

Specifically looking at women in the research and disaggregating data by sex helps to identify gender specific constraints in the market system. A gender analysis provides more evidence that can help identify constraints for women from outside the market system. A gender analysis is also useful for anticipating the possible impact on women and later for doing an impact assessment that goes beyond measuring changes in income.

The box below presents one case where women focused analysis led to successful improvements in WEE.

### USAID-funded projects in Afghanistan and Pakistan

In projects in Afghanistan and Pakistan we did not just want to increase women's income but also women's control over income earned. The essential first step was to do upfront research (usually qualitative, listening, chatting, discussing) to discover if women had greater control over certain kinds of income traditionally. So, for example, we learned in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, if women worked in the fields or in the orchards, they were contributing to household labour and the income still went to the men and the men were the decision makers. We learned however that women were 'allowed' to keep the income from homestead activities such as poultry, horticulture, handicrafts etc. Hence, if we could develop viable value chains involving such products, then women would have traditional ownership over the product and the income. In Pakistan our first programme focused on embroidery and in Afghanistan horticulture. The resulting social and economic empowerment was staggering, and the model continues to be replicated across Pakistan affecting the lives of 10s of 1000s of women. (Reported by Linda Jones)

#### *Use M4P principles in intervention planning*

A number of participants shared experiences of planning interventions with WEE in mind.

- Use results chains to predict the potential impact on WEE based on the findings of the context analysis.
- Find business cases that contribute to WEE. Give market players (and project partners) good reasons why, for instance, they should employ or provide services to women, buy from women producers, or provide inputs to them.
- Focus on underlying constraints, not on symptoms, also when tackling WEE.
- Work through existing market players, including for example producers' organisations, civil society organisations and governmental bodies.
- Look for innovative solutions to tackle specific gender-related constraints such as childcare facilities.

#### *Adapt the M&E system so it can measure gender-specific changes*

Equally to intervention planning, also monitoring and evaluation (M&E) needs to take gender specificities into account.

- The M&E system should especially be able to assess whether women are actually better off due to the changes achieved by the project. Projects should be able to react appropriately if interventions do not reach women or affect women in ways not foreseen.
- M&E is not just about gender disaggregation or different targets; it can also mean different indicators.
- Since women's empowerment goes beyond the economic sphere and includes for example decision-making, the M&E system should be able to document changes on a household level, for example by using participatory methods.

#### *What are the necessary skills needed in a WEE project team?*

- Since people that are specialised in both gender and market development are rather scarce, it is important to maintain a well-functioning and 'symbiotic' relationship between the two groups of people in the team.
- Since the combination of M4P and WEE expertise is rare, a successful project gives priority to developing such expertise within its team.
- An interdisciplinary composition with the inclusion of social sciences besides economic specialisations is seen as crucial.
- Flexibility and assertiveness is needed by the team members to overcome individual and on the ground resistance to necessary changes that lead to WEE.

#### *How should the gender composition of an M4P-WEE team look like?*

- No participants advocate for pure women teams. Rather, the potential of mixed teams to create opportunities to see things from different angles and broader perspectives and introduce a diversity of methodologies is stressed.
- Some participants also point to the context as a determinant of the gender composition of the team. In certain contexts, men can operate better than women or women have better access to female beneficiaries. Therefore, the context and the capacity to implement planned interventions have to be taken into account.

#### *Does a dedicated gender adviser add value to the project team?*

- Most participants answered rather critically to this question, pointing out that if a team has a dedicated gender adviser, all gender related tasks would be delegated to this person and, hence, not be implemented by the project staff. Gender mainstreaming should be considered a team effort.
- The participants also pointed out that such gender advisers were often only added to a project after the start, leading to various problems in implementing gender specific analyses or activities.

- Nevertheless, some participants also shared positive examples of the addition of a gender adviser to a team where the person would train project staff and develop guidelines on gender mainstreaming as well as support the team in gender analyses.

### Thanks to all contributors

The facilitation team thanks all contributors of this e-discussion for their valuable questions and comments (in chronological order):

Athumani K. Zuberi, Rural Livelihoods Development Programme (RLDP), Tanzania	Linda Jones, The Coady International Institute, Canada	Fouzia Nasreen, Making Markets Work for the Chars (M4C), Bangladesh
Armine Petrossian, Markets for Meghri (M4M), Armenia	Tiffany Urrechaga, Growth & Employment in States (GEMS), Nigeria	Shahnewaz Karim, Katalyst, Bangladesh
Godfrey Bwana, RLDP, Tanzania	Annemarie Sancar, SDC, Switzerland	Sabin Bieri, University of Bern, Switzerland
Braison Salisali, RLDP, Tanzania	Abdur Rob, Practical Action, Bangladesh	Isabelle Dauner, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Switzerland
Alain Cuvelier, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Tanzania	Nicole Stolz, Caritas, Switzerland	Kim Titcombe, Consultant, Switzerland
Hussein Kiranga, RLDP, Tanzania	Bidowra Khan, Katalyst, Bangladesh	Rana Sanouka, SDC/SCO Gaza & Westbank
Adwiyait Kumar Roy, Samriddhi, Bangladesh	Roel Hakemulder, Consultant	Emily Miller, Consultant
Roger Oakley, M4PHub, United Kingdom	Humayun Kabir, Samriddhi, Bangladesh	Jane Carter, HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Switzerland
Joni Simpson, International Labour Organisation	Hariliva Rasoanarivo, SAHA, Madagascar	Aimée Randrianarisoa, SAHA, Madagascar
Hajavonjiniaina Rakotoarisoa, SAHA, Madagascar	Sophia Svanadze, SDC/SCO South Caucasus	Julian Walker, University College London, United Kingdom
Zenebe Bashaw Uraguchi, Samriddhi, Bangladesh	Caroline Pinder, GEMS, Nigeria	Kushtrim Mehmetaj, SDC/SCO Kosovo

### Links and contacts

If you have any questions to the discussion cycle please contact the facilitator team:

Carsten Schulz [carsten.schulz@agridea.ch](mailto:carsten.schulz@agridea.ch)

Maja Rüegg [maja.rueegg@helvetas.org](mailto:maja.rueegg@helvetas.org)

Marcus Jenal [marcus@jenal.org](mailto:marcus@jenal.org)

Website of e+i network: <http://www.sdc-employment-income.ch>

Website of e+i network PSD Discussion Group: <http://dgroups.org/sdc/privatesectordevelopment>

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