



Women's Economic Empowerment and Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P)

Synthesis of a process carried out by SDC between March and May 2012
in the scope of a broader initiative in collaboration with the M4P HUB

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 (WEE) and their access to markets and services are widely recognised as being essential to economic growth and poverty reduction. Experiences however show 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 network (www.sdc-employment-income.ch) and gender equality network (www.sdc-gender-development.net), under the coordination of the M4P hub (a DFID, SIDA and SDC financed knowledge management facility; www.m4phub.org), have identified these shortcomings. They have taken the timely opportunity to revisit the topic, focusing on the growing experience of Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) projects. The multi-donor effort aims at leading dialogue and consensus building on **how to prioritise and operationalise WEE within the M4P framework**. Milestones in this process so far include a conceptual paper, an e-discussion on WEE in M4P projects¹, a public seminar², and an internal workshop³. 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. The proposed women's economic empowerment framework

The conceptual paper⁴ was commissioned by SDC on behalf of the M4P hub to provide thematic inputs and a structure for discussing WEE in M4P projects. As concluded in the paper, in general, the two approaches are compatible, but **two specific challenges for M4P concerning WEE** exist:

- How to address women's unpaid workload, and
- How to concretely ensure gender mainstreaming.

The author proposes an **analytical framework** for mainstreaming WEE in the M4P project cycle and mentions four elements defining WEE:

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

¹ The e-discussion took place between March 19 and April 10, 2012 through the private sector development discussion group of SDC's e+i network. Out of 230 members, 33 persons from 12 countries actively contributed to the discussion.

² At the seminar on May 9, 2012 in Bern around 90 practitioners and experts of private sector development and gender discussed about project experience and research findings.

³ 25 participants (SDC, M4P HUB, invited partners) were present at the workshop on May 10, 2012 in Bern.

⁴ Written by Dr. Linda Jones from the Coady International Institute, Canada, available at: [http://www.sdc-employment-income.ch/en/Home/About_e_i_network/May_9_2012_public_seminar#Background reading](http://www.sdc-employment-income.ch/en/Home/About_e_i_network/May_9_2012_public_seminar#Background%20reading)

3. Preliminary conclusions and practical tips

A lot of points were raised during the e-discussion and have been further discussed at the public seminar and the internal workshop. There is an agreement among participants that poverty is multi-dimensional and economic development programmes can make a specific contribution only. Both the gender and the M4P communities have learned from the experience exchange and agree with the proposed elements of WEE. The gender community has seen that M4P is not a panacea and that efforts are being done to integrate gender considerations. The M4P community has learned that more emphasis should be put on social aspects of markets, on gendered analysis and understanding, and on finding ways of acting upon issues related to the care economy. **It is a must and it is possible to integrate WEE aspects in an adequate manner in M4P.** This conclusion is based on observations from project implementation shared during the whole process and practical tips as well as project examples provided by experienced participants.

Empowerment of women must go beyond the economic sphere, hence **having a broad vision of empowerment is appropriate.** Some participants criticised that M4P projects tend to give non-economic aspects of poverty less focus, e.g. decision-making power in the public space or social capital.

Thanks to a project in **Georgia**, supported by SDC, 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. However, while those women could increase their economic profit, they were actually disempowered by having been excluded from participating in the market, which is an important place for social contacts in the community.

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).

In order to prevent or reduce possible negative effects of M4P projects, **applying the ‘do no harm’ approach is recommended.** Some M4P projects, while being able to increase women’s income, fail to improve women’s livelihood as a whole or even worsen their situation. Possible negative effects are time constraints and double burden, appropriation of women’s income by their husbands or local tax authorities, and expulsion of women from sectors having turned lucrative through project intervention.

Support of the poultry sector in **Tanzania** by RLDP (Rural Livelihoods Development Programme) led to a situation where poultry rearing, traditionally considered a women activity, was captured by men because of its income potential.

Market systems development **projects should integrate WEE into the project cycle from the very beginning.** Already the strategic vision of a project should include WEE. Adding gender aspects to a project after its start may be confusing and ineffective.

An in-depth and gender-specific context analysis is essential and should address all elements of a market system, i.e. the core market but also supporting functions, rules and regulations, as well as risks and opportunities. A gender analysis can help identifying different constraints for women and men and to find the potential solutions that would enable women e.g. to access assets, services and support.

A MEDA (Mennonite Economic Development Associates) project in **Afghanistan**, which trained women extensionists, found 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.

A women-focused analysis in USAID-funded projects in **Afghanistan and Pakistan** led to successful improvements in WEE (not just regarding women's income but also regarding women's control over income earned). Upfront qualitative research helped discovering that women had greater control over certain kinds of income traditionally, e.g. from homestead activities such as poultry, horticulture, handicrafts etc. (but not from work in the fields or the orchards). WEE could therefore best be achieved through developing viable value chains involving such products.

One of the most common constraints for women to get involved in income-generating activities is their time spent for unpaid care work.

In **Tajikistan**, a Caritas project 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.

Planning of intervention needs to be done with WEE in mind. Results chains are helpful to predict the potential impact on WEE based on the findings of the context analysis. While planning, it is first of all important to give market players (and project partners) good reasons why, for instance, they should employ women or provide services to them, buy from women producers, or provide them inputs. Second, project interventions should focus on underlying constraints, not on symptoms, looking for innovative solutions to tackle specific gender-related constraints. Third, work should be done through existing market players, including for example producers' organisations, civil society organisations and governmental bodies.

Equally to intervention planning, also **monitoring and evaluation (M&E) needs to be gender specific.** 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 and 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 market development/value chains projects include **specific capacity building components to improve women's 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.

In **Bangladesh**, 'Katalyst' facilitated large seed companies to specifically train women in post harvest handling, which, among other things, contributed to an income increase of 25%.

However, while economic capacity building of women is important, they only benefit from such opportunities if society accepts that they become economically active. Therefore, **capacity building needs to go beyond economic aspects and should also target men.**

The RLDP in **Tanzania** achieved through mixed trainings that female dairy producers were accepted as leaders in the pastoral groups of Tanzania and even became role models for other women.

In the sunflower sub-sector RLDP is working with oil processing companies, e.g. the female-owned company Songela Investment, which is doing contract farming with small-scale sunflower farmers. Along with training on agronomic practices, provision of extension and quality seeds, Songela Investment promotes gender awareness and equality through trainings. As a result, women's participation in sunflower production has increased from 30% three years ago to currently 40-60%. Additionally, men's attitude towards women's stronger control over income has changed. Men and women now talk openly about the advantages they are getting from this development.

In its projects, the **ILO** introduced interventions such as 'gender training' for husbands of women entrepreneurs in order to gain their buy-in. These interventions proved to have a positive effect on WEE.

The 'Samridhi' project in **Bangladesh** has combined a livelihoods approach with an M4P approach, getting 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'.

Investing in WEE capacities of project staff is crucial, as well as making gender mainstreaming a team effort rather than a task delegated to a specific gender advisor. The project team itself should hold a combination of M4P and WEE expertise, and projects should have the means to develop the respective expertise among their staff. A gender advisor can train project staff and develop guidelines on gender mainstreaming as well as support the team in gender analyses. Pure women teams are not favoured, as mixed teams may help to see things from different angles and from a broader perspective. However, the context and the capacity to implement planned interventions have to be taken into account when choosing a team. In

certain contexts, men may operate better than women or women may have better access to female beneficiaries.

4. Outlook

This process as well as two **in-country case studies** from Georgia and Nigeria, commissioned by the M4P hub, provided inputs for the elaboration of **guidelines for incorporating WEE into M4P programmes**.⁵ The guidelines need soon to be tested in the field and validated. It is important to consider that the logical relations between the common elements of WEE are explained more clearly, i.e. that elements I to III (economic advancement of women) lead to element IV (decision-making authority, empowerment); the latter in turn requires further clarification of the possible contributions and limitations of M4P/WEE and ways to monitor, measure and report them. A more specific focus on issues and possible solutions with regard to care economy may add value.

Based on these different activities, SDC's 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. Further steps, once the guidelines are available, may include **specific tools** (especially related to understanding and addressing care economy), documentation of **case studies**, and further **learning sessions**, i.e. in the scope of an e+i f2f event in 2013. Those may become integrated tasks of the M4P hub whose continuation is currently under discussion among DFID, SIDA, SDC and possible additional partners. Last but not least, a closer look at the **DCED results measurement standard** will be necessary in order to assess how gender-aspects are dealt with and which WEE-specific indicators are recommended.

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⁵ M4P hub, coffee international (2012). M4P and Women's Economic Empowerment – Phase 2: Guidelines for incorporating WEE into M4P programmes. DFID on <http://www.m4phub.org>.