

Analyzing and Supporting Gender Responsive Value Chains

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ECHO Summary of MEAS Technical Note:
Applying Gender-Responsive Value-Chain Analysis in EAS

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Introduction

The complexity of the global food system creates a diverse group of actors ranging from smallholders to large corporations involved in the agriculture sector. Each of the many actors in an agriculture value chain has different needs, objectives, strengths and weaknesses. With women accounting for 43% of the agriculture workforce in developing countries, there is a need to ensure their ability to access and participate in agricultural markets.

Gaining a deeper understanding of value chains, with special attention to gender roles, is an important step in reducing poverty and improving livelihoods for both women and men. Drawn from the MEAS Technical Note, [Applying Gender-Responsive Value-Chain Analysis in EAS](#), this document explains the concept of a value chain, covers the factors that limit women from participating in value chains, discusses the types of upgrades that can be made in value chains and outlines steps to conducting a gender responsive value chain analysis. Recommendations are also listed for improving gender equality in value chain extension.



*Burmese women selling fruit alongside the road.
Source: Brian Flanagan.*

The value-chain concept

Value chains are linked activities and enterprises that bring a product from conception to its consumers and eventually to its disposal. Value chain analysis involves collecting information about entities (e.g., businesses, farmer groups, households or producer associations) and market connections that make up

a given value chain. The information gleaned clarifies positions and roles of actors within the chain, and is used to better coordinate chain activities and improve the flow of products to end-users. As a result, costs are reduced and product quality is improved. In turn, smallholder farmers benefit from a well-functioning value chain. A gender value chain analysis builds on the above with the goal of creating an environment in which women and men can fully participate in and benefit from market opportunities.

Factors that limit the participation of women in value chains

As wage workers, farm managers, unpaid family workers, and entrepreneurs, women and men play various roles in value chains. Different factors influence the opportunity of both men and women in value chains including physical, financial, and human assets. The benefits of value chains can vary depending on how one participates (e.g., a paid employee or an unpaid family worker). Factors such as gender dynamic and power relation in the value chain also determine who benefits and how the benefits are accessed and distributed. Some of the main factors that limit women, as well as men, from benefiting in agriculture value chains are:

Lack of access to land

It is well documented that women's control over and ownership of land is less than that of men. Both laws and customs often show preference to men owning land over women. Not having land also limits the access of women to many other resources and services, such as producer associations and contract farming opportunities only available to those with land.

Lack of access to credit

Although there has been much work to improve women's access to microcredit over the years, there are still barriers excluding them from formal credit markets and larger loans which are required to support larger scale commercial production and processing.

Social norms

In many cultures the head of the household, who is often the man, is considered the farmer and has access to contracts and agriculture extension despite women being heavily involved in farming operations.

Improved overall value-chain performance

Value chain analysis identifies actors responsible for various links in the chain and determines how their performances can be improved. The process of improving products and making them more efficiently, or moving into more skilled activities is called upgrading. There are four types of value chain upgrading. Each type provides both opportunities and constraints for women or men:

- Process upgrading - Increasing the efficiency of the production process, this results in reducing unit costs. Such upgrading can involve improved organization of the production process or better technology.
- Product upgrading - By improving the quality of a product or variety, the product's value to consumers increases.

- Functional upgrading - This is the entry into a new, higher value-added role in the value chain that moves the value chain actors and/or the overall value chain closer to the final consumer, positioning participants to receive a higher unit price for the product.
- Channel upgrading - The entry into a marketing channel that leads to a new end market in the value chain, for example, from the domestic to the export market for the same product.

As women have access to fewer resources, (e.g., labor, information, training, credit, association membership), it is more difficult for them to maintain and improve their performance in value chains. It is important, therefore, that project upgrade decisions are informed by an analysis of the value chain that accounts for the role of gender. Improvements can then include interventions that target known gender inequality concerns.

Gender and value chain analysis

The goal of gender responsive value chain analysis is to evaluate the competitiveness and performance of the chain and identify real or potential barriers and opportunities for women and men that may be shaped by custom, law, and institutional structure. There are three key steps to conducting a gender responsive value chain analysis:

- Examine and describe the different types and extent of men's and women's participation in value chain activities.
- Evaluate how both men's and women's positions in the value chain can be improved without losing competitiveness.
- Identify ways to optimize the benefits that men and women gain from their involvement in the chain.

A gender responsive value chain analysis can help direct agriculture development organizations as they develop strategies to address inequalities in agriculture value chains.

Recommendations for applying gender sensitivity to value chain extension work

Recommendations that have been taken from the literature on gender and value chains and applied in agriculture extension work include:

- Ensure that extension workers are accustomed to the various ways that men and women participate in agriculture value chains.
- Provide gender training to extension workers to improve their abilities to work with men and women farmers.
- Develop extension materials in ways that are accessible to both men and women of different educational backgrounds and inclusive of relevant content.
- Encourage the participation of women in mixed-sex producer and trade associations, including those in leadership positions.
- Offer information about opportunities for women to find credit, gain access to land, and formalize rights to land and other productive inputs.

Conclusion

Agriculture value chains can provide opportunities for both men and women in the various links of the chain but can also be a source of inequality if the proper services are not available to all involved. Development organizations working within agriculture value chains should conduct gender responsive value chain analysis to better understand the opportunities and constraints for each gender so that projects can be developed that address these issues and apply gender sensitive value chain extension services to their programming.

References

Rubin, Deborah, and Cristina Manfre. 2012. [Technical Note on Applying Gender-Responsive Value-Chain Analysis in EAS](#). Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services.

Further Readings

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