

# DOMAIN 4: COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP

This domain is defined as membership in economic or social groups and comfort in speaking in public.

The following indicators are used in the WEAI to measure community leadership: 1) group membership; and 2) speaking in public.

Interventions to address women's greater participation in groups and leadership in the community may include:

- Increasing women's active participation in groups and collectives
- Developing women's ability to take on leadership roles
- Facilitate literacy/numeracy training

Participation in community groups and organizations increases access to information about the newest technologies in agriculture, latest market prices, and connections that may help increase production and marketability. Groups can also provide individuals financial support or credit for agricultural investments, as well as an important form of insurance or protection against loss in the event of crop damage or failure. This section discusses activities that could increase women's participation in groups and leadership positions within these groups.

## THE PROS AND CONS OF WOMEN'S GROUPS

In some communities, single sex groups are most appropriate. In other communities, mixed groups may be more advantageous. However, even where mixed groups function well, women-only groups can provide women with safe spaces, not only for saving and accessing loans, but also for building strong solidarity around social, political, or economic issues. In a 2009 study, the World Bank found that vulnerable group members perceived that improving their self-esteem and increasing organizational skills to be the most important result of participation in groups, perhaps as or more important than the economic benefits of group action. Women's groups can be a place where women learn important leadership skills, such as overcoming fears around public speaking and being able to voice an opinion, which are skills that can be used other community arenas. Additionally, collective action in the form of women's groups can have positive effects in terms of individual economic outcomes as well as more generalized benefits. Data from northern India show that engagement in collective female empowerment programs has resulted in significant increases in female access to employment, physical mobility, and political participation. Yet, as previously discussed, women's groups tend to have less access to commercial networks and markets.

*Source: Evans and Nambiar, "Collective Action and Women's Agency," 2013*

## INTERVENTION 4.1: INCREASE WOMEN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN GROUPS AND COLLECTIVES

Linking women to established, well-connected cooperatives or other collectives enables them to access a number of benefits, including inputs and other agricultural assets, storage facilities, and market linkages. It also gives them access to trainings on a variety of relevant topics from government, development, and private sector service providers. However, women are not always able to join groups, particularly the formal ones that offer a wider array of services, due to economic or social constraints. In fact, the literature on community-based groups suggests that women's participation typically decreases as groups become more formalized, while men's participation increases ("Gender in Agricultural Markets"2009).

Cooperative membership often requires access to resources. Most female smallholder farmers are not land owners, and this can prevent them from joining formal collectives. Cooperative procedures often discriminate against married women by only allowing heads of households or land-holders to become members (Baden 2013). Group activities can also be time consuming, making it harder for women to participate (Meinzen-Dick and Zwaarteveen 1998).

Market development projects can address these gender gaps by designing activities that encourage women to join and participate actively in collectives, (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli 2009)<sup>11</sup> at the same time working with the collectives to ensure they understand the benefits of women's membership and offer services and support that respond to women's needs (Oxfam 2013; Meier zu Selhaisen 2012; Westermann, Ashby, and Pretty 2005).<sup>12</sup> They can also work with buyers to put in place incentives for cooperatives to change their practices and achieve greater representation of women as members and leaders. Finally, they can strengthen female-majority or women-only groups by connecting them to stronger networks and better markets while providing support to ensure that women maintain control and leadership.

### CASE STUDY: COOPERATIVE-LED GENDER POLICIES AND TRAININGS

In Nicaragua, there are at least 32 farmers' cooperatives that have adopted gender-equality policies. Some of these, like Prodocoop coffee cooperative, requires its members to go through gender training. The women are trained on self-esteem and the men are trained on positive masculinities. They also set aside a portion of their fair trade premium to fund these trainings and other gender equality initiatives.

*Sources: Interview with Alexa Marin, head of the PRODOCOOP gender committee, Jan 13, 2015. See also Bach, "Women in Nicaragua" 2015.*

### ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Assess and understand the barriers to women's participation. This may include the need for childcare, transportation, or escorts who are trusted by the women's family members.

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<sup>11</sup> Women need to know how they will benefit from participation in groups. A project in the Philippines, for example, tried to engage women in monitoring lake water to determine whether soil conservation techniques were reducing silting. This required a time and labor commitment the women were initially not willing to make. Once the project staff realized that women's primary interests were around health issues, they showed them how their efforts could impact the health of their families, and women's participation significantly increased.

<sup>12</sup> Research shows that collaboration, solidarity, and conflict resolution all increase in groups where women are present (including women-only groups). Additionally, people are more likely to return benefits for benefits in women's and mixed groups. Studies also show that the capacity for self-sustaining collective action increased with women's presence and was significantly higher in groups involving women.

- Assist cooperatives in setting targets for women’s membership and leadership and developing a gender policy or strategy. Encourage them to set aside budget to implement the gender policy and strategy.
- Support committees within cooperatives to be spaces for women to become leaders and advocate to the board of directors and general assembly to adopt more gender-responsive policies, budgets, and activities. Use committees as spaces to conduct leadership training and training of trainers on gender so that they can educate and train both male and female cooperative members on the benefits of female membership and leadership, as well as other gender topics, such as shared household decision-making.
- Support outreach to potential female group members and make sure women are informed about trainings and other learning opportunities; ensure that they are held at convenient times and locations and that they provide necessary assistance for women to participate, including child or elder care and travel reimbursement.
- Identify women-led or women-only groups and focus on strengthening them, formalizing them, and connecting them to formal markets and service providers within the value chain.
- Link groups to other civil society or government services as necessary to address other social, health, and safety concerns that are often a top priority of women’s groups, such as literacy, family planning services, human rights training and GBV prevention, mitigation, and adjudication services.
- Review services offered by the group or collectives to assess whether they meet the needs of both male and female members. For example, if the cooperative set up a group-based savings and loan service, then it might see increases in female participation. Design capacity-building plans around identified gaps. Set up systems to track satisfaction with the collective.
- Put in place mechanisms that enable women to join groups and remain active members:
  - Allow non-household heads and non-landowners to be group members;
  - Time meetings to accommodate women’s schedules and workloads;
  - Build capacity of leaders to solicit women’s opinions and questions in meetings and trainings; and
  - Allow the groups to also host other activities that are of interest to women as a way to attract members.

## **INTERVENTION 4.2: DEVELOP WOMEN’S CAPABILITIES TO TAKE ON LEADERSHIP ROLES**

While implementers may want to encourage women to express their needs openly, women may be accustomed to letting men take the lead in some situations, making it difficult to elicit female participation in project activities. Even when women join groups and organizations, they are often underrepresented in the organizations’ leadership. Projects can address this by building women’s capacity to lead and be heard and by creating situations where they can put learning into practice. They can also use training and behavior change communication to build a supportive environment for women to take on and succeed in leadership roles.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Women who take on leadership roles around livelihoods can go on to challenge gender norms in the wider community, whether together or as individuals (Evans and Nambiar 2013). A series of case studies by Oxfam on the effect of group participation on women’s leadership found that participation in these cooperatives has increased members’ self-confidence and leadership skills. Further, members claim they have a greater decision-making ability as a result of new knowledge gained (Baden, 2013).

## ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES

- Incentivize cooperatives to set and report on targets for women’s leadership. This can be done through the grant agreement between the cooperative and the implementing organization or through incentives from buyers who source from the cooperative. For example, cooperatives could receive certain premiums based on the percentage of women in leadership positions.
- Support female members of cooperatives and gender committees in conducting awareness campaigns on the benefits of having women in decision-making positions. Ensure that leadership is as inclusive as possible, with diversity in social factors such as tribe, religion, and social status.
- Conduct skills and leadership training for women at different levels of the value chain: in producer/marketing groups, associations, business managers, etc. (either with men or separately, depending on what will be most effective in the targeted country). Build in follow-up visits or training to address any challenges.
- While not all women are ready to become leaders, trainings that build women’s confidence and make them feel comfortable speaking and negotiating might be useful. This training can be stand-alone or embedded in other capacity-building sessions. Enhance the skills of interested women to run for boards of directors in associations or cooperatives.

## ROLE MODELS AND MENTORS

“Networking and mentoring have also been found to be critical in motivating women entrepreneurs to lead crossover enterprises, that is, firms operating in more productive, male-dominated sectors. Campos et al. (2013) investigate the attributes of women who successfully cross over in Uganda. While human capital does not appear to be a significant determinant, access to a role model, in addition to initial capital, is a critical determinant of crossovers. Women who had male role models were between 55 and 74 percent more likely to cross over into higher-productivity sectors than women who had no such access. Fifty-four percent interacted with other business owners at least once a month, while only 39 percent of non-crossovers did. These results stress the importance of including in support programs regular productive interactions with role models and inductions into industry networks, while also providing access to finance to reduce the gap in initial capital.”

*Source: Cirera and Qasim, “Supporting Growth-Oriented Women Entrepreneurs,” 2014*

- Create mentoring opportunities for women who are interested in leadership development.
- Seek out civil society organizations in the country or region that provide leadership training—either for women, or both women and men—and leverage their expertise.
- Encourage women to participate in other social and political assemblies at the village level and raise their concerns.
- Most rural women have not had any exposure to successful businesswomen or female lead farmers. Giving them the opportunity to observe and engage with other women and to share challenges and successes can be helpful and inspiring. Having a support network that can provide advice and contacts can help them participate more effectively, not just in production, where we see the majority of women, but in higher levels of the value chains. Projects can link with programs like AWARD (African Women in

Research and Development) that require participants to do community outreach to other women.<sup>14</sup> Also consider male mentors.

- Take women on exposure visits to places where they see their peers playing leadership roles in order to raise their aspirations and confidence. This could include trade fairs, farm visits, and other networking events. Ensure participants have the skills and tools needed to participate effectively in these events. Exposure visits can serve several purposes: to introduce project beneficiaries to value chain stakeholders with whom they may do business and to teach best practices. For women, it can also give them a chance to observe successful women in action.
- Create opportunities for women to speak in public at conferences and fairs, or at events held for International Women’s Day or other such occasions.
- Promote success stories through presentations and use of media.

### **INTERVENTION 4.3: FACILITATE LITERACY AND NUMERACY TRAINING**

In many of the countries targeted by Feed the Future, girls leave school earlier than boys. While gender parity in primary education has become common in most regions, it is less common at the secondary level (“Boys and Girls in the Lifecycle” 2011). As a result, many women, especially older women, are at least partly illiterate and innumerate. This can present a number of challenges. Work-related challenges include being unable to read instructions, negotiate effectively, or read messages on weather or markets; personal challenges include being unable to help children with homework, identify seat numbers on buses, or read prescriptions and instructions for medications. For female farmers, lack of literacy or numeracy is especially challenging, as fertilizers and other agricultural inputs often require some ability to either read (e.g., instructions for use) or calculate (e.g., the amount of fertilizer to use). Basic numeracy can be taught in a relatively short time and can have a significant impact on a woman’s life.

While women are almost always less literate and numerate than men, rural education levels for men are also low. This is another instance where a project may need to address literacy as an overall poverty-reduction strategy, targeting both men and women, but being careful to ensure women benefit equally from the activity.

#### **ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIVITIES**

- Integrate functional literacy and/or numeracy training into market development programs, or as part of farmer training or extension service projects.

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<sup>14</sup> See [www.awardfellowships.org/](http://www.awardfellowships.org/)

- If implementers do not have experience in this area, facilitate literacy/numeracy training through a grant to a local organization with experience in this area. Identify government or donor programs providing such training and link project beneficiaries to them.

## **EVIDENCE ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN LITERACY AND ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT**

A DFID review of evaluations and research across 30 countries supports the concept that supporting literacy programs can improve skills, productivity, and income. It also claims that when literacy is integrated into skill-training programs (such as agricultural productivity), 20 to 30 percent of learners upgrade their productivity. Additional findings show that “60 to 70 percent of participants in literacy classes, particularly mothers and female caretakers, are more likely to send and keep their children in school as well as monitor their progress; 30 to 40 percent of women in literacy education develop greater confidence in helping to make family decisions and in participating in local public affairs; 20 to 30 percent of participants show increased likelihood of improving the health and nutritional practices of their families; and 30 to 40 percent of participants in literacy education develop a stronger awareness of the need to protect the environment and a willingness to take action for it” (Source: “*Adult Literacy: An Update*,” DFID 2008 ). A review of literacy programs in four African countries found that people who had participated in literacy programs had increased confidence, were greater risk takers when it came to developing their livelihoods, and felt they were less likely to be easily cheated when buying or selling in the market. The review also found that livelihood program beneficiaries were motivated to learn as they were able to see the impact of their work.

*Source: Oxenham et al., “Skills and Literacy,” 2002.*