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Meeting the Challenges of Value Chain Development

A Learning Event

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UNDERSTANDING GENDER AND CULTURE IN MARKET SYSTEMS

PRESENTERS:

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Jennefer Sebstad, USAID

Marian Boquiren, SDCAsia

Lindsey Jones, ACDI/VOCA

How can development interventions better understand socio-cultural dynamics to facilitate behavior change that result in increased income, livelihoods, and equity? Presenters Caren Grown of USAID, Marian Boquiren of SDCAsia, Lindsey Jones of ACDI/VOCA, and Jennefer Sebstad of USAID argued for the importance of considering gender and other socially constructed behaviors in promoting value chain development, and discussed examples of successful approaches in addressing socio-cultural dynamics during a session at the USAID-hosted event “Meeting the Challenges of Value Chain Development” entitled “Understanding Gender and Culture in Market Systems,” which was moderated by Ruth Campbell of ACDI/VOCA.

Explaining the dynamic nature of gender relations, Caren Grown stated, “Gender is the social construction of roles, relationships, power dynamics, entitlements, and responsibilities for both males and females. As such, the social construction of all these factors embeds our communities, markets, and institutions.” Taking into account these interdependent issues, Grown encourages practitioners to actively strive towards three objectives in value chain interventions:

1. Work towards women’s inclusion in value chain systems.

2. Seize opportunities that leverage women's unique skills and potential in every aspect of the project cycle, particularly by encouraging women in leadership positions.
3. Design programs that take into account the needs of both females and males.

Marian Boquiren and Lindsey Jones offered examples of development projects that attempt to address deep-seated cultural attitudes in order to create more inclusive and competitive value chains. Boquiren presented on SDCAsia's work around the "good enough" and "piecemeal" mentality dominant among Filipinos, which encourages incremental adoption of improved practices to facilitate upgrading in the value chain. To address behavior change more directly, SDCAsia uses the Stages of Change model to evaluate and tailor interventions based upon their readiness to change. This methodology strives to move people through the stages, rather than convince them to adopt a specific behavior. Other key factors for change are ability (both access to skills and resources as well as messaging behavior change into simple steps), incentives/motivation (personal and social), and triggers. SDCAsia's projects identify the following key points that can trigger widespread change. Helping players understand and internalize the change process promotes behavior change and prepares them to be successful contributors in the improved system. To influence social norms means creating an integrated intervention plan with the value chain players on all levels to foster sustainable and scalable change.

Jones discussed the Sunhara India project which targeted 25,000 small-scale farmers, with a particular focus on women, to address their constraints and leverage market inclusion. Although women were an integral part of agricultural operations in Uttar Pradesh, they were excluded from higher levels of the value chain, had no control over decision-making or expenditure, and were largely disregarded in community affairs. The project examined the values, practices, and structures underlying these problems to develop a two-pronged implementation strategy, which included an empowerment track and entrepreneurship track. The empowerment track mobilized the community and developed local "change-makers", both women and men, to address key social norms that were inhibiting change. The entrepreneurship track promoted credit and savings groups and coordinated these groups into larger federation associations, to build savings/equity and capacity for active participation in value chains. The project has seen results not only in increased access to finance and ownership of assets/profits but in literacy rates among women, better status in the communities and improved marriage relationships.

Jennefer Sebstad of USAID added another dimension to this discussion by highlighting overarching strategies to overcome cultural constraints. Sebstad reinforced the importance of understanding gender differences when identifying strategic intervention points and shared the gender value chain map as a tool through which practitioners can better understand system dynamics. She discussed a framework to analyze socio-cultural barriers:

1. Confront them: Can we provide incentives for behavior change through training, awareness raising, and group-based social support to reinforce and reduce the risk of these new behaviors? Can 'positive deviants' provide role models for breaking through norms of behavior that may limit the participation of women or other affected groups in value chain upgrading?



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2. Accommodate them: Can some constraints women face, for example, mobility constraints due to household responsibilities, be accommodated through 'last mile' solutions that bring inputs, services, and buyers closer to where women live - such as community-based agent networks supplying inputs or doorstep savings services?
3. By-pass them: Can new technologies (ie mobile banking, mobile cash transfer services, or cell phones in general) help men and women work around these socio-cultural constraints?

Socio cultural dynamics that limit interaction among actors in value chains makes it difficult to build relationships of trust, which, in turn, reduces incentives for value chain participation. Breaking through negative socio-cultural barriers not only can make value chains more inclusive but more competitive.

Presentations were followed by small group discussions around the questions listed below. Each group formulated three key messages or recommendations:

1. To what extent should value chain development programs address gender norms so as empower women verses focusing on making the value chain more competitive?
 - Local gender/culture experts should be included in value chain teams from the analysis stage onwards.
 - Gender equity is an essential ingredient for value chain sustainability.
 - Donors need to understand that addressing gender constraints may result in a trade-off with getting quick results.
2. How can value chain projects stay true to the principles of facilitation and local ownership while challenging socio-cultural barriers?
 - The tension can be addressed by identifying and supporting local actors who are already promoting change.
 - Involve local staff in the initial value chain analysis to ensure they understand the need to address socio-cultural barriers.
 - Donors should challenge implementers to address socio-cultural constraints, but allow them to define how they will do this.
3. How can implementers consider gender-influenced behaviors as part of value chain analysis?
 - There are a number of tools and resources available, but there needs to be a system to track and assess their use.
 - Have gender experts included on value chain analysis teams.
 - Gender analysis needs to be an ongoing process.
4. What role should value chain projects play in making private sector actors more sensitive to gender and cultural issues?
 - Projects should help private sector actors to understand the whole system, including the dynamics of the system.



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- Projects should make the business case and provide the social reasons to private sector actors of addressing gender and cultural issues.
 - Projects should help private sector actors have the incentives and ability to address gender and cultural issues, as well as the triggers to initiate change.
5. How can strategies for addressing gender constraints be applied to addressing the challenges of other marginalized groups?
- Identify socially-mobilized local actors to serve as a liaison with marginalized groups.
 - Consider mobile technologies to reach marginalized groups.
 - Promote small, incremental changes.