



MPEP SEMINAR SERIES
Exploring Frontiers in Inclusive Market Development

**Integrating Women into Value Chains: Lessons
From Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Ghana**

Presentation Transcript

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Moderator:

Hi everyone. Welcome to the third MPEP seminary series. If you're grabbing breakfast come join us. We're going to get started soon. Also if you're on webinar please do say hi to all the participants. It's quite fun to have both in person and online audiences. We're excited to have our third seminary series. I'm going to turn it over to Jeane.

Female:

Good morning everybody. This morning we have Helen Loftin and Arianne Ryan from MEDA. MEDA is the Mennonite Economic Development Associates. MEDA has been working for many years and actually we gave them a grant years ago to work in Pakistan in which they did a case that we have promoted all over the place called Behind the Veil. MEDA has worked in some of the most difficult places in the world. When I see these Pakistan, Afghanistan, Haiti, Tajikistan, Libya, Northern Ghana and have developed an approach to promoting women's empowerment.

So their goal in a lot of these projects has been women's empowerment. But they have a particular model. This model include value chains but it also includes helping women upgrade within value chains, looking and using a model that I would actually relate value chain governance that addresses some of the risks and addresses access to services and so forth that would allow women to add value to their products and maybe move up the chain in terms of – functionally move up the chain. So with that I'd like to turn it over Helen and Arianne.

Female:

Thank you. All right. Well good morning. Thank you for being here. I think I speak for both Helen and I when I say we're quite excited to be out in Washington. We're not from Washington so we're enjoying the nice weather and the hot weather. We're from Canada. It's not that cold but it's a bit colder. So we are both from as Jeane very nicely introduced us from Mennonite Economic Development Associates. We're an organization that have been around for about 60 years and we've always done quite particularly economic development and now for probably about the past ten years we've really developed a model or part of our business has been to do economic development with women specifically. So that's what we'll be going through with you a little bit today. Sorry, I'll skip through these. There we go.

So very briefly what we hope to cover in the next 45 minutes is we will give sort of a quick overview of value chain. I'm assuming most of you in the room are probably quite familiar with it but just to make sure we're all starting from the same point. We'll look at why looking at gender within value chain is an important thing. We'll introduce our model as Jeane mentioned earlier, why we use the model and how it's worked well for us, how we've adapted the model because as the title of the presentation says we're looking at Afghanistan, Pakistan and Ghana in this particular

presentation. So how have we been able to apply it across these very different environments? We'll briefly look at what does economic empowerment mean for MEDA. So from what perspective are we approaching this issue? Some example from our programming, lesson learned and then how we see our programming or generally the field evolving in that value chain programming for women.

So quite briefly I'm sure a lot of you have seen some type of version of this particular graph before. When we talk about value chain we really talk about a series of actors within a subsector. Subsector could be dairy. It could be textile. It could be seedlings. Then we generally see a flow of product, goods or services flowing up the chains toward a final consumer and generally a certain flow of information flowing down from the final consumer to the value chain actors hopefully communicating demand preferences.

Horizontally we've got a lot of important inputs to the chain whether it be credit, technology, business services and so on. Then no market ever evolves within a vacuum so we always have an enabling environment that needs to be taken into consideration which really relates to often regulatory environment, political environment and cultural environment. That one is really where we go and we find the particularity of gender and how important gender and how much impact gender has within the chain.

To give you a bit of an example MEDA has started in the last couple of years to engender a value chain up front in terms at the beginning of a program and what that allows us to do is to understand where men and women are located within this chain and how their different positions and the different particularities that they have to deal with because their men and women how that impacts their ability to operate within the chain, how that particularly impacts their relationships to each other and to service providers within the chain. That has really helped us build some of our programming.

So why gender and value chain? I think as probably a lot of you know donors have really come on board with this idea that gender's really important. It should be integrated into lots of programming and not excluding economic programming. So that's a good reason but the real reason is the foundation why donors have really come onto this idea. You can look at it from different perspective. There's more and more research emerging.

So we can look at the domestic, the high level and we are finding more that there is in fact correlation between competitiveness of a country and the gender gap within that country. This is the World Economic Forum that has come up with some research that shows this. As an example the

U.N. recently put out a paper that noted that about \$40 billion a year is lost in the Asia Pacific region alone because of restriction on women in the economy. That's huge and that will speak to all kinds of people across different sectors as to why this is a really important issue to address.

So we can right to the domestic level to the micro level to the household level. I think there's more research that have been done on this one in the last couple of years. So probably a lot of you have heard how there's higher returns. When women have money in their hand and they have the agency and the power to spend it generally they will reinvest it within the household. So really what we're finding here is that as women gain access to more funds, increased incomes you have better indicators in health, better indicators in education and food security and so on and so forth. So the poverty eradication factors are much greater.

Another really good reason that's actually programmatic is women are found in every value chain. Now as we travel globally, as we work in various countries a lot of people will tell you such and such value chain is a male value chain or there are no women who work in it. Now to almost no exception I would say there are always women within a value chain. Often they're hidden within it and most people don't acknowledge them but they are definitely there.

So if in your program you don't identify where they are and what their constraints are within that value chain then it will be much harder to facilitate that value chain to the highest efficiency that it can have. Right? A great example of this is in Pakistan where in the dairy sector – the dairy's considered to be a male industry but really if you look at it 80 percent of the animal care and the milking is done by women at the household level. So if you don't account for the restriction of the women and the difficulties that the women face at the milking level, that 80 percent how can you improve the dairy value chain in Pakistan? So these are the kinds of things that just make a lot of good sense.

Equity, I think this is the one where more on a human rights basis. Everybody's I think sort of agreed internationally that it was a good thing to allow equality of opportunity, equality of outcome, reducing the gap between what women and men can achieve. So really so for all of these reasons this is why MEDA at least has on the one hand fully integrated gender throughout all of our programming but beyond that we've created our department which is women's economic development where we focus specifically on women programming. We took that decision because we found that often if women are not directly targeted in a program they will fall by the wayside. So we found that by having programs that were specifically directed at them we were then able to achieve the results that we were aiming for.

So our model or one of our main models that we've been using since probably 2004, so since Behind the Veil which was funded by USAID in Pakistan what this model really sought to do is we looked at the problem of homebound women in Pakistan. So for some of you who don't know women have a lot of restriction on their mobility, on who they can interact with. But often these women are small producers within their household. But how do you link these women to viable markets if they're stuck in the home? So this was sort of the initial issue and this is where the model came from.

So really we looked at this critical mass of producers within our value chain and said, "Let's find women who can have two particularly characteristics." One was a little bit more mobility. So I would say pretty much in any society even the most restrictive one, rural Afghanistan, you will always find some women that have more mobility than others and that can be that their family's slightly more liberal. It could be because they're widows or a variety of reasons. So identifying these women and the in parallel the ones that had a bit more of an entrepreneurial spirit. So once you identified these women you effectively move them just one step up the chain into a bit of an intermediary role. So what these women can accomplish is they can reach down to the producer level because women can talk to women and then they can be the link between the producers and the markets.

So this has been quite successful for us. Each of these intermediaries we would offer them a variety of technical assistance in terms of business learning, matching grant opportunities, whatever was appropriate within the context in which we were applying the model. The women would then reach out to 10, 20. So the more entrepreneurial, 100 producers and bring the products up to the market and then reverse, make sure that the flow of market information as well as sometimes input could flow down to the producers. So we were hitting multiple bottleneck points within the value chain by creating this intermediary.

So why was this model particularly interesting, successful for us? One, I think as Jeane gave in the introduction it's the beginning of moving the women slightly up the chain. Now it's important to remember that we work at the producer level. In rural Pakistan, rural Afghanistan we're starting really from a very basic level. So each improvement is quite small but significant. So moving them up even just that one stage, really introducing that micro entrepreneur level if you want was a step in that direction.

What's really important to this model is that we work with the individual as opposed to cooperatives or groups. We do this because we want

to make sure that the business case is really sound for that entrepreneur. We want to make sure that the profit incentive is really sound within the model because that's what ensures the sustainability of the whole chain, of the whole enterprise. So making sure that the women themselves understand the benefit that they can obtain from pursuing the work that we're trying to introduce is what ensures that once we move away then they continue within the chain. We'll give you some example of what some of these profit incentives would have been in a little bit.

This particular model really allowed us to reach scale as well which is always a key issue in any of our programming. So one, it's impossible as you all know to go down to every producer and ensure that they all integrate markets but by working through the sales agent then really the sales agent herself then becomes that link. As I said, some of the smaller ones might reach down to 10 or 20 producers and some of the ones that were really entrepreneurial and that really saw a benefit from it could go up to having 100 producers with them and really sort of ramp up production on that side.

Return on investment. This is both at the household, at the individual level, right, ensuring that the women were increasing their income really has significant impact upon the household but also in terms of the implementer, in terms of the donor return on investment of investing in these women is really multiple fold. This is really what we've seen over and over again, that it really pays off.

The final point, local partners is really just to highlight how we work a little bit more which is we tend to work through local partners and there's two main reasons why we do this. One is women tend to be the most protected members of a – especially in conservative societies. People are very suspicious to let you work with the women in their village or in their family. So working with local partners who know the areas, who are from the areas really allows you to much easier be able to reach the women themselves and to gain trust within the community. So that's a very big benefit there.

The second one is we put a lot of time and resources in capacity building of these partners and the reason we do this is as the projects end and we withdraw you leave behind a cadre or local partners who understand market based development and who understand how to integrate women in market based development. So we think that that's actually quite important and quite positive in terms of long lasting impact. Pass it on to Helen.

Female:

Thanks Arianne. As has been explained already we are operating and deploying this model in a number of our programs in Ghana, Afghanistan

and Pakistan. We wanted to talk about the need for adapting the model in some of these different contexts. I'll give you a few examples of the why and how, how it looks different from one place to another. So certainly when Arianne was reviewing with us the slide about value chains and the impact that the enabling environment has on your project and your goals and structure, et cetera the big one for us of course what comes to mind is gender and cultural. Just to give you a sense of why this model works so well in Pakistan in the first place is because it does more easily address the issue of mobility. Women are under the confines, if you will, of purdah which does restrict their mobility and their interaction with anybody outside of the family unit, men outside the family unit. So it allowed for interaction as we could, again, introduce women entrepreneurs into that model and have them reach down to it.

It's also worked as another sort of example of its application. In Ghana where our value chain is soy beans and women are already engaged in markets and their restrictions are a little bit different. The model has taken on first of all a structure that's more akin to what some of you may view as a lead farmer role although a sales agent and connections to markets is in there as well but also to get a sense of it we could work with this model in – it had a role in deciding upon which crop we were going to work in. There are taboos in Northern Ghana around women's engagement in some of the staple crops that the families depend upon and restrictions in terms of their even growing it, certainly harvesting it and maintaining the harvest to an extent. So that doesn't apply with soy beans. We were able to engage more easily and reach women effectively in that value chain.

Geographically I mean it looks a little bit different in the northwestern part of Pakistan where you're talking about very isolated communities and a hilly terrain and just the logistics of getting to market are different versus, for example, urban Pakistan. We had a bangles project in Hyderabad, Pakistan. So it looks a little different just in terms of the numbers engaged certainly per intermediary or sales agent and also the way in which they interact with the market. I would also make the point too that that had an impact in a couple of our current programs that are running in northwest Pakistan in terms of sales agents being family members of the women. It's not always the case that we can get women engaged. So it would be the husband or the brother of the woman who would work with her to do that intermediary role.

Economics plays is a factor in the way the model looks in different settings. Within any community you're going to have different levels of economic success and some families were just doing better than others and certainly that's the case in the communities in which we work and often that's a huge factor in who steps up to be that sales agent, who can take on that additional role. Also just underscore the point that Arianne was

making that was in the programs that we're talking about today the communities that we target they're extremely disadvantaged. When we're talking about the level of poverty and the absence of resources available for these women it's quite stark. So moving them from that subsistence level up into being market actors is considerable in terms of the effort and the time that it takes to do that.

Then the industry also impacts it as well. Arianne mentioned milk. The model that we have for milk the sales agent is actually a village milk collection agent and has relatively easy access to the women farmers in her community and her village, et cetera. Contrast that again to the bangles or even to the embellished fabrics value chains that we work in too and just the way in which the whole thing operates. In the milk there's reduced numbers of buyers for just the way it works in that country versus a woman sales agent in the embellished fabric industry could have multiple marketing channels for her should she choose to do that for her products in the embellished fabrics, et cetera. So the way it looks is different depending upon the industry.

Then the other point I'd make is sort of a more cautionary one or one that again maybe this is a lessons learned as we go along. Within any country there's going to be diverse and stark differences, one region to another even sometimes within one province or one district. Tribal differences may impact what you're doing, geographic et cetera. Just the point that any model that you deploy, any program that you're doing, any intervention is not necessarily going to look the same in any given region given the differences within one country and all the various, again, variety that exists in the country. So you just have to be adaptable. I guess maybe that's the message here.

On the model, again, Arianne spoke to this a bit earlier. We didn't come up with this graphic but we quite like it because it really speaks to how MEDA views women's economic empowerment. Indeed our programs do look to empower women without a doubt but MEDA is about economic development. So we measure and we look for those indicators that address women's economic empowerment. This one is particular effective because we do use a lot of these indicators in our monitoring and evaluation systems that we deploy.

So let me start with sort of the bottom row there, the economic advancement. Invariably in any MEDA program you're going to see metrics that track the income increases that the individual businesses, entrepreneurs, et cetera or families are enjoying. So we track that for sure. We also look at how their general livelihoods are improved. Their access to markets are indeed the avenues and the opportunities opening up for

women. On the power and agency it is very important to understand what the impact of these increased incomes have at the household level.

So how are the women spending the money? So we track asset purchases, household assets and also productive assets, how the women are spending their monies in that way. Are the kids going to school? How has their nutrition improved at the household level and the degree to which she has the say of the deployment of these increased resources? So again, just to sort of make that point too that these are some of the things that MEDA focuses in on on our women's economic programs. I'm going to pass it back to Arianne. She was the manager of what we call the P and P project and will give us some of the actual results from that program.

Female:

I think we put these slides up mostly as a follow-up to that first graph just to kind of demonstrate how that actually translated within our project. So the Pathways and Purse Strings project was actually Keeding and SEDA funded project in Pakistan. Reached about 20,000 women, was about five years and operated in four different value chains; dairy, textiles, seedlings and bangles.

So of course the very first metric that we were looking for was the income increase and that was quite successful. 147 percent on average across all four value chains for the 20,000 women. So what we consider a fairly successful project on that front. But then as Helen described so well if that doesn't translate into any kind of power of agency over that increased income then why are we working with these women so hard? So we were really looking at tracking some of these other metrics to make sure that we understood her impact on the household due to this increased income.

This project just ended early this year and in all measures it was quite successful for us. We were quite pleased with it. So we looked at things like control over income. Here we would track things like decisions over where to spend the money, decisions on purchasing assets, that kind of thing. So did she feel like she had a say in how it was spent? So significant increase there, 35 percent on baseline up to 76 percent at the end of five years. So quite a big increase.

Because what we found is that the men tended to be quite suspicious early on but as they saw their wives being fairly successful and contributing to the household income often that resulted in increase respect for her within this household which then translated in her being able to have some of these decision making impacts within the household as well. So also decision making. Here we might look at things like sending children to school, which children, marriage decisions, things like that. So big increase. 39, 67 percent.

One of the other ones we were tracking was actually community decision making. Our proxies for these tended to be two-fold. One was her voting within the community for elections and then her being able to speak up at community events or meetings or things like that. That was actually relatively high to start with but it did increase over the span of those five years. So across most of our metrics really the increase was definitely noted. So we saw that the increased income and the increase success of the woman within the household had those positive impacts kind of flow through.

Female:

I'll just sort of continue on in this vein in terms of giving some examples of some of the things we measured in our project in Afghanistan. It was called Through the Garden Gate. It reached about 2,350 women, women farmers in Parwan Province just north of Kabul. It was a horticulture value chain. Income increases on average for the women farmers who went from nothing, \$0.00 at first to \$323.00 per year.

I also mentioned too the average incomes for the intermediaries to showcase and to make the point that within the value chain you're going to have different – for sure there absolutely has to be profit incentives at every single level if it's going to sustain and everybody has to be making money but you're not going to get the same level of increased incomes. It's not going to be equitable in terms of the amounts across the board. My point is that these intermediaries with the specific entrepreneurship training and development and support given and outreach, et cetera they sometimes often see some significant income increases and in this particular case it went up to \$866.00 per year on average across these women.

Again, we measure the control over income. This has been mentioned before that indeed they purchased assets. We do track the family's eating habits. Are they eating meat? How frequently during the week do they consume meat? How many meals per day are they able to eat? This is another, again, speaks to the level of engagement that we're dealing with. Families go from having maybe one meal a day to now being able to serve two or three. This is the level that we're speaking about. Are the kids going to school? Are the girls going to school?

Also I just wanted to give you the example of how in this particular project when we spoke with the women they were particularly proud and very, very satisfied that they had gone from being recipients of charity within their village to actually being able to help others and to distribute extra food and/or monies around and that was a huge source of pride for them.

Household decision making went up to an 82 percent participation rate. Again, we're talking rural Afghanistan here. It really did have quite a profound impact. Then the other thing about this project that was very cool that we didn't expect was that we had some women who were – as they gained economic success within the village were sought out by the village CDC, the Community Development Councils which were primarily male to participate or to give advice on some decisions that needs to be made at that level. That was also identified and recognized by provincial and district levels and they were asked to participate on the councils at those levels. So some of these women went from having an influence and an impact on the lives of thousands of women across their province. So we weren't even aware this was happening until the end of the program. They told us without a doubt they would never have been approached had they not had that economic success and respect within their community.

Then the other point here on this program we had been observing anecdotally in our programs the stabilization fact that the work that we were implementing with our partners was having at the household level. So respect rises for the women as her income rises and along with that goes a reduction in some of the conflicts at the household level. We could see that influence spilling out over in the village level where the families were sort of recognized where at first in some cases they were derided to being examples and demonstrators for others who would engage in it. So this stabilization effect and we wanted to understand it a bit better. So we did a little bit of in-depth research on it.

The quote from some of the men in the communities and Through the Garden Gate project was that because the women were successful, because the entire village was gaining from the success of these gardens they as a group were protective of that to the extent that they would reject those forces or those people who would come in and challenge that the women were engaging in market activity and they were collectively rejecting that and saying, "You know what? It's a good thing. This is helping all of us." So it had that – we just wanted to understand a little bit better, again, that ripple affect that can happen for women when you engage them economically.

Lessons learned. We at the top of the charts definitely is the aspect of engaging the men of the family. We didn't at first. It was a mistake and in the Behind the Veil project we went in very specifically to work with women and get their businesses going and it was all very focused and it was all very successful but it wasn't always warmly as you can imagine received at the household level. So we came to understand that and understood the need to communicate always in advance of the project as

well as report as the project goes along and in terms of the structure of the program, the design itself.

In Afghanistan it was quite deliberate with the CDCs which invariable included ultimately the men in the household level as well to the Ghana project where we have sessions now. Some of our interventions include the trainings at the family level. They're usually polygamist families so the husband and his wives would sit down and they will be part of the trainings on such things as household financial management and nutrition and hygiene, et cetera. So we've learned. We're still learning obviously of the need for this because it's just, again, understanding the – we didn't have a clear understanding of women's role and the men's role obviously and the dynamics of the commerce, the household finances, et cetera. This is an area of growth for us, for sure.

The other one is local partners. As Arianne pointed out the merit of engaging local partners. Without a doubt it facilitates entre into the community and it's just a good thing to do in building the capacity we believe in any case. My point here is don't underestimate the level of effort that's required sometimes to boost their capacity to facilitate a program in beyond just the technical understanding value chain and including women in that. There's sort of the technical side of it but also just infrastructurally. Their finance department, what is their governance systems and it's a programming issue and certainly don't underestimate the need to invest some time there.

Then the other point, the managing expectations. There are many stakeholders in all of our projects and all of them have their own expectations and hope for what we can do when we engage women. It's just managing those sometimes that takes, again, some deliberate thought and consistent communication, et cetera in understanding that this level of behavior change is going to take some time and what can we realistically achieve in three or four of five years. It's good to have big expectations but realistic is important as well.

On some of the implications for our value chain programming and what we're hoping by this slide and some of our thoughts as to spark some discussion after this in terms of where we see for MEDA our value chain programming as it is targeted towards women but also for the industry and some of the considerations that come into some of our program design and thoughts about future programming. So on the sales agent model it's been – yep – a stellar success for us, helped us in reaching tens of thousands of women in some very isolated and difficult settings but we're not looking more and more toward sort of the SME development, really focusing in at a higher level if you will on the value chain and leveraging that private sector development wing to see, again, can it help us – we suspect it will –

reach scale and more systemic change within those industries. It also appears to be an area of focus for donors as well. Increasingly they're looking at SME and private sector development more specifically and intently.

The enabling environment today for – I'm just smiling because I'm thinking of as we were designing some of the programs in Pakistan I was always quite thrilled that we were able to completely skirt any engagement of the government over there but really is that really going to be effective in helping build that value chain and its function, et cetera? I don't know especially when you're talking about working with women the degree to which we can avoid or should even be avoiding and trying to influence some of the policies and/or enforcement of policies in some of these countries in which we're working. So I think for MEDA it's going to be looking increasingly more engaging at that policy and government level.

Scale, it's just my point here as we've been saying all along. Poverty is such a huge problem. I think it's incumbent upon all of us to think about ways in which we can take the scarce resources and certainly in these times where donors are cutting back, et cetera it's more and more looking at that point of leverage and the ways in which we can deploy resources to the greatest effect in terms of reaching scale. My point already made on behavior change. Guess what? This takes a lot of time. When you're talking about working with women in Pakistan and Afghanistan you're hitting on some really sensitive point and Ghana as well and Libya and everywhere. It's often behaviors even at the household level that you're sometimes challenging and to effect that kind of sustained change is just going to take time. Again, this is about managing expectations as well.

The quick wins and just sustainable measures, this I just put in here because to me anyway it's more of a programming issue that, again, for us when you're awarded a project and you're designing it for sure there's going to be a need for quick wins because, again, the stakeholders sometimes back home here saying, "Oh how are the tax dollars being deployed and what kind of success rate are we having and what did you do last week?" Sincerely it's sometimes that urgent to show that we're having an impact. But it's also very true that some of these other more sustainable in my opinion measures take a little more time and effort and are often personnel dependent and human resource if you will takes time and so just balancing that. How do you deploy your resources and organize yourself and ensure that you're hitting on all of those measures?

Then the last point. Just being data. There is a lack of really good – I think we're getting better at it but there's really a lack of data. This is something you'll hear from the donors and organizations are getting better at this at how do you track the impact that targeted women's economic

development programming has on women? What are some of these ripple effects and quantify them and be consistent and credible, et cetera so that the level of rigor, et cetera is something that we as organizations have to pay greater attention to.

Just to say too on this point that again there is this increasing body of knowledge there that shows the benefit of when we educate women and when we have policies that are supportive of women the improvement it has on a nation's economy and even a global economy what's less obvious is, "Is it the case that economic growth is going to necessarily benefit women?" I mean I think all of us would say generally no, it's not a slam dunk guarantee that that's going to happen.

So what are some of the other factors that we have to consider beyond just economic engagement that are going to help support and boost the numbers of women in the economy certainly in these countries that are going to make the difference between fail and non-fail in some cases even to frankly in the U.S. and Canada. So anyway we just thought we'd throw some of those – and I'm sure you have other questions and the folks online thanks by the way for all you for tuning in. I'm sure there's a bunch of questions that you've got.

Moderator:

Thank you Helen and Arianne. I know your colleague Sarah has been engaging participants and answering questions online. There's about 80 of them.

Female:

Thanks Sarah.