



EVALUATION BRIEF

The effects of economic development on women's empowerment and gender equality goals

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Research purpose

In January 2015, World Vision Australia commissioned Dr Katharine McKinnon and her team from La Trobe University's Institute of Human Security and Social Change to investigate the gendered impacts of a successful Local Value Chain Development (LVCD) project implemented by World Vision in Eastern Indonesia.

The aim of this research was to investigate how the project contributed to achieving women's empowerment and to advancing World Vision's gender equality goals, whilst simultaneously exploring ways in which the LVCD project model could better support gender equality into the future.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Local Value Chain Development project was implemented by World Vision Indonesia with support from World Vision Australia in the Flores-Timur Province of eastern Indonesia from 2009-2012.

This pilot project was part of a larger World Vision Area Development Program that included a suite of projects focusing on nutrition, education and economic development. It aimed to improve the incomes of smallholder farmers by focusing on improving productivity, improving relationships between local farmers and other market actors, and improving access to profitable markets through collective marketing.

A 2012 project evaluation and subsequent 2014 Social Return on Investment evaluation showed that the project was remarkably successful, so much so that the approach piloted became the basis for the LVCD project model now being implemented by World Vision in more than 100 locations globally.

Methodology

The research methodology looked to get a snapshot of how some communities within the project area experienced the project. Field research was undertaken in 10 East Flores communities that had been involved in the project.

As gender outcomes were not included in the project design, gendered baseline data was not available. However, the research sought to address this challenge by collecting primary data that contrasted existing gender dynamics with participants' reflections on change.

The methodological approach prioritised qualitative data collection through group discussion in participatory workshops and in-depth, open-ended interviews with key informants. This was complemented by voting exercises during workshops to gather quantitative data.

Two workshops were held in each of the 10 research communities: one for men and one for women, with participant numbers ranging from 12-22 in each group. Interviews were conducted with 19 respondents representing a diversity of backgrounds and experiences with project activities and included an even number of women and men.

Findings from primary field research were triangulated with the findings of existing scholarship on the region, and the results of previous evaluations to provide a foundation from which conclusions and recommendations could be drawn.

After field data was analysed and findings established, a second step was undertaken to suggest a suite of gender indicators for use in LVCD projects in the future.

Key findings

THE PROJECT CREATED NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Women gained opportunities to step into leadership roles through the collective marketing groups established through the project.

The management structures of the collective marketing groups often included women, usually as treasurers, and women had opportunities to participate in group decision making. This was a new experience for many communities and participants indicated that many had been forced to shift their views on whether women had leadership capacity.

“Before the man was thinking that they [women] are not capable ... but after we realised that they have very good thinking about some things that's when we realised that they are more good with the details...”

— Male project participant

Women who took on leadership roles found it immensely rewarding and were supported by their families. More widely, many thought it was a good thing that more women were stepping into leadership roles, but some men and women were not always welcoming of the change.

THE BENEFITS OF INCREASED INCOME WERE SHARED BY WOMEN, MEN AND CHILDREN

The collective marketing program was widely recognised as making a positive contribution to participating households. In all communities where collective marketing was practised consistently, women and men reported household incomes had increased, at least during the commodity crop season.

Participants reported that the additional income earned through collective marketing was allocated primarily to education and to savings. Spending on children's education was a high priority for women and men, and both girls and boys appeared to be benefiting equally. Household savings were also a high priority for allocation of additional cash resources.

WIDER GENDER EQUALITY REMAINS A CHALLENGE

While women are able to step into new leadership roles through collective marketing, the flow on effect to wider gender equality across the community is limited. In some communities men (and some women) felt it was inappropriate for women to take strong public roles and were worried that it challenged men's rightful position of authority or that women were putting their reputations at risk.

Traditional patriarchal systems that place men in primary formal and ceremonial leadership of the community continue to exist alongside new power structures created around commodity agriculture and collective selling. In addition, it is men who continue to hold the majority of land tenure, leaving female-headed households in a potentially precarious position.

THE PROJECT CONTRIBUTED TO RISING WORKLOADS, ESPECIALLY FOR WOMEN

Women and men often work alongside each other in the fields, but there was evidence to suggest that women were more involved in commodity crop production than in the past.

These new responsibilities were being added to women's existing workloads in vegetable production, livestock care, and household and caring roles. It is not uncommon that women bear a larger share of the workload, and most women deemed it very important that they maintain responsibility for childcare and domestic work.

Importantly, in some families men were beginning to contribute more to domestic duties, acknowledging that their partners needed support if they were to make the most of the opportunities presented by collective marketing.

Recommendations

The research found that the LVCD model has good potential to make a positive impact on gender equality and women's empowerment alongside achieving economic development goals for households. It is recommended that the following key points be considered with regard to implementation of LVCD projects going forward.

1. LVCD projects should take steps to deliberately complement women's and men's other work and community commitments to maximise incomes and wellbeing.
2. Women's economic empowerment should be maximised through LVCD projects by purposefully creating opportunities for women's leadership in collective marketing management structures.
3. Complementary and ongoing development programming is needed to make the most of gender equality opportunities generated through LVCD.
4. To achieve more effective engagement with gender equality, projects should routinely incorporate gender indicators and resources should be allocated to develop a dedicated set of gender indicators.
5. Baseline studies must include gender disaggregated data that offers detailed analysis of gendered economy.
6. Gendered access to resources must be included in analysis, design and impact assessment.
7. Consideration of child wellbeing should be included in project design and assessment.
8. Promotion of village networks and community trust should be a core project component to advance women's social capital and access to resources such as credit.
9. Programming should identify and address potential unintended impacts on food security.

SUGGESTED GENDER INDICATORS FOR LVCD PROJECTS

The research indicated the LVCD project model's potential to promote women's empowerment. It also highlighted that without a deliberate gender focus, the model could potentially harm gender dynamics by shifting the share of work between women and men and increasing women's overall workload.

The research findings demonstrated that consideration of gender dynamics must be incorporated into all stages of LVCD projects, including value chain analysis, baseline data collection and the monitoring and evaluation process.

The following indicators have been suggested for future LVCD projects. The research supported a strong recommendation that resources be allocated to develop these further into a dedicated set of indicators with tested and standardised data collection methods to ensure that indicator data is robust, is able to provide reporting on impact, and can be utilised towards future programming.

1. **Monitoring changes in the gendered agricultural economy:** shifting roles and responsibilities for women and men, and corresponding changes in workload.
2. **Women's empowerment:** the level of women's autonomy in managing income, participation in decision making and leadership, and men's support for women in leadership roles.
3. **Community networks and mutual support:** social capital institutions supporting women, and men and women, working together at the community level.
4. **Program support:** the impacts of complementary programming in relation to women's empowerment with LVCD projects.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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