

# Women's Economic Empowerment in Practice:

## ADDRESSING GENDERED BARRIERS TO ACCESS AND SUCCESS

Case studies from the roundtable held November 2016



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## Introduction

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Women's economic empowerment is fundamental to sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Lack of access to economic resources and opportunities – such as jobs, financial skills, knowledge and services, property, and market information – impacts women's ability to participate and succeed in economic activities. The institutional environments in many countries further limit economic empowerment of women and girls, when weak or limited legal frameworks and government policies fail to safeguard women from violence and harassment or to support women's control of assets and productive resources. When women have limited decision-making power to make or act upon choices about their own livelihoods, they are also often prevented from participating in community decisions that can affect their livelihoods. Programming that addresses gendered barriers to access and success in economic activities are essential for women's economic empowerment and gender equality.

To share successes, challenges, and lessons learned in implementing women's economic empowerment programming, in November 2016 Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) brought together development practitioners from civil society and the public sector for a *Roundtable on Women's Economic Empowerment in Practice: Addressing Gendered Barriers to Access and Success*. The roundtable was undertaken with the financial support of the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada.

The roundtable featured case studies from AKFC, CARE Canada, Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), Oxfam Canada, Save the Children and World University Service of Canada (WUSC). An additional case study provided by Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) following the roundtable is included in this report. These cases illustrated the diverse strategies used to address gendered barriers to women's economic access and success. Small group discussions followed the case study presentations, giving participants the opportunity to explore themes, approaches and lessons.

The case studies and roundtable discussions highlighted several common barriers to women's economic empowerment. This report presents eight case studies followed by a summary of the best practices that emerged from the workshop.

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## Case Studies

### 1. Aga Khan Foundation Canada/ Aga Khan Rural Support Programme

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#### Enhancing Employability and Leadership for Youth (EELY), Pakistan



A group of electricians-in-training displaying the tools of their new trade. They will be the first women to work as electricians in their communities in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan. ©Aga Khan Foundation Canada/Danial Shah

#### Summary

- The EELY project aims to increase the employment and engagement of youth in the Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral regions of northern Pakistan. Undertaken through a partnership between Aga Khan Foundation Canada and Global Affairs Canada, the project is implemented by the Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (AKRSP).
- Presented in two parts, this case study examines strategies (i) to expand women's employment opportunities in non-traditional trades that challenge gender norms; and (ii) to introduce employment opportunities for women in a more restrictive operating area.
- AKRSP employed three strategies to introduce women to non-traditional trades: establishing women-friendly value chains, developing skills in emerging in-demand industries, and creating women-friendly spaces.
- The AKRSP experience in Diamer district demonstrates the need for long-term, flexible strategies to create an enabling environment for women in areas with more restrictive social and cultural norms. Notably, AKRSP's approach in that district – working through a third-party organization and undertaking extensive, one-on-one meetings with religious leaders and families – enabled it to secure the district's first-ever female participants in EELY activities.

## Project Description

The EELY project connects young women and men to employment and leadership opportunities and creates demand for youth in the labour market, civil society, and local governance. EELY strives for gender equality as part of all its interventions.

Under EELY, AKRSP offered a range of initiatives and trainings designed to increase the employability and income-generating potential of youth, including opportunities to increase entrepreneurial skills, trades, and professional competencies. Applying a gender lens to current and future labour market needs – and clearly defining “access” and “success” within the local context – AKRSP developed a suite of activities under EELY to prepare young women for a range of employment or income-generation opportunities, including in trades such as carpentry and electrical repair that challenged societal gender norms.

The implementation of EELY coincided with the expansion of AKRSP’s programming area to include Diamer district in Gilgit-Baltistan. In its comparative isolation from other parts of the region and low social and economic indicators, Diamer contrasts with other districts in Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral, where AKRSP has worked for over three decades. Prior to the implementation of EELY, no non-governmental organization had successfully established operations in the district.

### *Part 1. Women’s Employment in Non-traditional Trades*



A female carpenter carves the name of a coffee shop at CIQAM-Women Social Enterprise, which received machinery to improve the productivity of their carpentry product line at Village Altit, Hunza-Nagar, Gilgit-Baltistan. There are more than 80 women working at the enterprise. ©Aga Khan Foundation Canada/Danial Shah

## Gendered Barriers to Access and Success

Despite significant progress in access to education, health, and participation in community life for women in Gilgit-Baltistan, many young women still lack the personal agency and self-confidence to make key life decisions, including those related to employment and livelihoods.

Even in more progressive households, young women may have limited negotiating power over their income-generating, household and community roles, as spouses or partners, parents, in-laws, and extended family influence the types of activities in which they engage. Accordingly, for many women in the region, labour roles reflect their household roles, often limiting opportunities to child-care, sewing, handicraft production, or tending small livestock.

Within the broader labour market, the institutions intended to facilitate women's participation in male-dominated environments are often weak and unable to implement laws meant to ensure women's safety and security. This lack of a supportive environment discourages women from pursuing a wider range of employment opportunities – particularly those outside traditional income-generating roles – as they and their families fear lower pay (exploitation), harassment, or intimidation.

## **What Worked**

As a starting point, AKRSP began by clearly determining how it would define and measure “success” within local contexts and then identifying pathways from access to success. It recognized the need to adopt a flexible approach, adapting strategies or activities to respond to changes in the enabling environment or to unexpected outcomes over the course of the project.

Where AKRSP identified market needs and opportunities in non-traditional employment for women (carpentry, electrical repair, cell phone repair), it worked closely with community leaders and local institutions – such as training providers – to create an enabling environment for women to learn and apply their trades. To address certain access issues, AKRSP worked with training providers to lower entrance requirements (such as education levels) for women in non-traditional trades.

Three additional strategies contributed to the project's effectiveness in addressing gendered barriers to access and success:

- Identifying and supporting the growth of “women-friendly”, profitable value-chains. In the EELY program area, these included greenwood, agriculture, and gemstones.
- In addition to non-traditional trades, focusing on emerging sectors/ industries – such as the green energy sector – to overcome some of the challenges women face in accessing or succeeding in established, male-dominated sectors.
- Develop women-only markets, as safe spaces for women to start businesses and network with other women. AKRSP has seen the women's market model replicated in many other areas outside the project.

## **Lessons Learned**

- Despite successfully providing thousands of young women with the knowledge and skills to gain employment or start their own businesses in a range of non-traditional trades or new sectors, key gendered barriers to access and success remain.
- Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions continue to be male-dominated, in terms of students and trainers/educators.
- The lack of access to finance – whether for educational purposes or to start or grow their own businesses – remains an issue for women.

- Although the project has made important inroads in supporting women's participation in non-traditional trades and professions, many young women continue to face challenges in entering male-dominated workplaces, markets, and value chains.
- Women continue to be overrepresented at the lower levels of production and processing in the value chain. Future next steps will look to establish elite value chains for women's markets and explore innovative opportunities with e-marketing strategies, to engage women in higher levels of the value chain.
- Overall youth unemployment, or underemployment, remains a serious issue in the region, elevating community concerns that women are now in direct competition with men in the workforce.

### **Practitioner Guidance**

Consider the beneficiary pathway to success by using a theory of change approach to design the project interventions:

- Context is important – consider all cultural, institutional, and market environments;
- Project flexibility is needed to respond to diverse and evolving needs of beneficiaries;
- Creating enabling environments requires building knowledge and understanding of key stakeholders, including TVET service providers, internship host organizations, and non-traditional employers willing to hire and work with women.

## *Part 2. Expanding Women's Employment Opportunities in Diamer*



Women in Diamer participate in a lesson on pre- and post-internship soft-skills in a first-ever class of young women interns. ©Aga Khan Foundation Canada

### **Gendered Barriers to Access and Success**

While Gilgit-Baltistan has some of the highest women's education indicators in Pakistan, as of 2016, most women in Diamer district have no formal education or skills training. Less than four women from a total population of 200,000 have completed middle school, and women's literacy sits at three percent. With poor access to healthcare, the district has high rates of maternal and child mortality.

In Diamer, gender roles and norms are rooted in tradition and reinforced by power dynamics that also contribute to almost no mobility for women outside the home and high levels of domestic violence. Prior to EELY, Diamer had no community institutions supporting youth or women.

### **What Worked**

The AKRSP project team recognized that to gain access to young women, they needed to build trust within the community. This meant an initial focus on activities for young men, which was considered more acceptable in this context.

AKRSP established a relationship with the Diamer Poverty Alleviation Program (DPAP), a local organization supported by the Gilgit-Baltistan government. After gaining permission from the regional government, DPAP provided an entry point for AKRSP to engage with religious and community leaders.

AKRSP adapted its EELY internship program for Diamer youth (initially young men), who did not have the same opportunities or education as youth in other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan. Activities focused on cultivating technical and leadership skills to increase employment opportunities and build confidence.

Once it had demonstrated success in enhancing employment and leadership opportunities for young men, AKRSP initiated a ground mobilization effort, going door-to-door to encourage community



members to support the participation of young women in an internship program. The team first targeted families from Diamer who were living in Gilgit, creating an initial set of role models to promote the project benefits to relatives and community members back in their home community. Working with local religious leaders, AKRSP developed key messages about the women's internship program that drew on Islamic teachings and traditions of strong women. Emerging as key champions for the project, these religious leaders played an important role in EELY's success.

Through these efforts, 91 young women from Diamer participated in the female internship program, and seven women have taken permanent roles in the Government Education Department as teachers – a first in the district.

## **Lessons Learned**

Demonstrating understanding of and sensitivity to the local context, and creating strong local champions and role models were critical to building the trust necessary for AKRSP to implement the program. In Diamer, this meant working with young men in the district prior to introducing programming for women and girls.

Social influencers can include not only community leaders (religious scholars, traditional elders, elected officials), but also individuals or groups that can bridge the local and external contexts – in this instance, families from Diamer living in Gilgit who could speak to the benefits of the internship and other activities for women and girls.

The EELY model may be more difficult to sustain in Diamer than in other parts of Gilgit-Baltistan, as employment for women continues to be limited, and skills and educational gaps persist. Women's economic empowerment is a long-term process that requires sustained investment.

## **Practitioner Guidance**

- Empowerment requires flexibility, courage and patience – it is a long-term process
- Work with a local, trusted partner/civil society organization
- Identify and build the support of local community or religious leaders, who can serve as champions
- For the initial stage, use ground mobilization (door-to-door) to build momentum for the project
- Use local language and terminology to showcase benefits

## 2. CARE Canada

### Promoting Opportunities for Women's Economic Empowerment in Rural Africa (POWER Africa), Burundi



Daphrose with CARE POWER Burundi project. ©Martin Broomfield

#### Summary

- CARE Canada used a Participatory Video (PV) evaluation method to answer the research question, 'Is Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) methodology adaptable to adolescent girls?'
- Three broad areas of inquiry were explored through the videos including:
  1. What are the enabling factors? What is working well within the project and the community?
  2. What are the participants' recommendations for the project? How would they like the project to change or evolve?
  3. What are the participants' aspirations and what are the stakeholders' dreams for the girls' futures?
- Beneficiaries' voices allowed CARE to identify the biggest barrier to economic success for the adolescent girls and the steps needed to shape a more supportive and enabling environment for them; it also helped carve out pathways for success.

#### Project Description

*POWER Africa* is a four-year program supported by The MasterCard Foundation and implemented in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Côte d'Ivoire and Burundi. The aim of *POWER* in Burundi is to increase financial inclusion and expand opportunities available to adolescent girls for greater economic and social

participation. In Burundi, the project benefits 100,000 individuals: 75,000 adolescent girls and 25,000 women. This includes i) adolescents still living with their parents, and ii) adolescent heads of households, both rural- and urban-based and in and out of school. Beneficiaries join VSLAs and receive training on financial education, life skills, and income-generating activities.

## **Gendered Barriers to Access and Success**

Adolescent girls in Burundi face a double vulnerability of age and gender. As adolescents, they often lack freedom of mobility and are at the mercy of their parents and their broader communities. Entrenched gender inequalities within local traditional norms and in law leave girls with no control over assets. A woman's assets belong to her family, and after marriage, any profit or assets stay within her family. This discourages families from investing in girls' education and economic activities.

## **What Worked**

The PV evaluation method helped identify the main barriers to success that girls were facing, and the steps needed to shape a more supportive and enabling environment for them. It also highlighted how each project context is different. The technology and dynamic nature of the participatory video process captured the attention of the adolescents, and created a very empowering process as they documented their own stories, therefore increasing their engagement in the M&E process.

The research highlighted the importance of considering all levels of CARE women's empowerment framework (relations, structures, agency), from the beginning and having a plan in place to address these factors.

Programming should also be adapted to the realities of the target group. Capturing the expression of girls' ambitions will draw out authentic interests, help shape pathways for success, and sustain their participation. Adolescent girls' have less time for training due to domestic obligations. They also have a shorter attention span, but a quick uptake on information. To maximize participation, integrate and deliver training modules at one time and ensure the program schedule is flexible. For example, hold trainings on weekends and during holidays to accommodate school and home obligations. Flexibility in shared purchases is also necessary to account for the irregular incomes of the target group.

## **Lessons Learned**

The most significant finding in the PV evaluation process was that asset seizure, by their brothers in particular, was the biggest barrier to girls' economic success. The project needed to refocus engagement with men and work with male change agents (Abatangamucho) to address this barrier. To do this, POWER leveraged other projects working with men and boys in the target areas to foster learning and exchange visits.

In addition to lack of control and security of assets, adolescent girls' ambitions were outpacing their knowledge and skills. In response to the findings of the PV evaluation, CARE ramped up the entrepreneurship and advanced business management trainings. After conducting a market linkage assessment, a linkage pilot was undertaken with 16 savings groups in Burundi; this will secure girls' assets from seizure and open up new opportunities for accessing higher amounts of capital for their businesses in the future.

## **Practitioner Guidance**

- Participatory video can be a very effective way to understand how the enabling environment affects the ambitions, hopes and aspirations of young beneficiaries and help carve out a path for success.
- The participatory video found that the VSLA methodology is very adaptable to adolescent girls. If there is support from parents and if men and boys are actively and positively engaged, girls' earnings and assets can be secured.



### 3. CARE Canada

## Promoting Opportunities for Women's Economic Empowerment in Rural Africa – POWER Africa, Côte D'Ivoire

### Summary

- *POWER Africa* is a multi-country project focused on increasing the financial inclusion and economic opportunities for the most vulnerable women, adolescent girls, men and young men in rural and peri-urban areas.
- Beneficiaries join Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs). The project provides them with financial education and links them to financial service providers.
- POWER's gender work is based on a core set of participatory awareness-raising activities called Social Analysis and Action (SAA).

### Project Description

POWER in Côte d'Ivoire aims to take 125,000 women, adolescent girls and men from financial education through business development and into group and individual financial linkage. Eighty-four percent (84%) of beneficiaries are women and adolescent girls, each of whom saves an average of CAD \$4.50 per month, at a 2.8% return rate. Beneficiary women are a diverse group, from those who have never been involved in savings or business before, to those who are running and diversifying significant micro-businesses.



POWER Côte D'Ivoire participant. ©Martin Broomfield

### Gendered Barriers to Access and Success

In Côte D'Ivoire, a strict division of labour assigns men to breadwinning and women to care giving roles. In this context, the notion of women moving into public spaces and earning significantly from independent economic activity is not well supported by the community. Women are less likely than men to own the collateral and capital needed to start, secure, and sustain a business. Women and men also tend to self-sort into business, based on current gender norms and stereotypes. This leaves men with more successful, profitable and competitive businesses than women. More men than women in the project area have links to formal financial products and services, creating greater security and opportunity.

## **What Worked**

The POWER project established a monitoring tool to measure change in gender equality. The tool is a scale with qualitative behaviour descriptions, which clearly define the gender equality changes, using outcome mapping (OCM) progress markers. Project participants and staff established these at the beginning of the project. Methods for collecting these measures stem from field tests with teams, field visits, and iterative and multiple field trips. Sessions held with teams identified, refined, and tested whether the behaviour change statements were authentic and realistic in terms of both smaller changes and transformational changes.

The project was not only staffed with sufficient numbers of gender equality and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEAL) specialists, it also brought staff together into a “dream team” – reinforcing capacity to do gender analysis and to use specific analytic tools to sort and interpret gender equality change.

Project staff trained community-based partner organizations in SAA and set up gender committees to carry a gender change agenda forward at the village level. The gender committees include chiefs, other leaders, women, men, and community influencers. This approach has ensured a broad range of stakeholders throughout the project. In turn, these stakeholders are engaged in the changes taking place in the division of labour and gender norms related to economic activity and financial inclusion. This has led to greater acceptance by community members.

## **Lessons Learned**

The investment in gender equality and MEAL specialists and flexibility with funding allowed the project to capitalize on opportunities to drive, monitor, and talk about gender change throughout the course of the project. A key success factor was to have gender equality discussions and actions with members from all parts of the village – including men.

When setting expectations for transformative gender change in a project, a balance must exist between women’s authentic voices and contextualized experiences, and broad gender justice, human rights or sustainable development objectives. Change benchmarks need to allow for transformational change, as well as for experiences of no change, or experiences of gender-related harm. If a linear scale provides a benchmark, then change not originally listed on the benchmark needs to be described as extra to the criteria on the scale.

The use of outcome mapping helped to establish benchmarks of expected gender change over the life of the project and to determine what this progress would mean. Having a good framework requires assessing the different kinds of changes in relation to one another (i.e., changing power dynamics).

It is important to link environmental factors and discussions on general gender issues to the challenge of financial education, income-generating activity start up, savings, and market linkages. Showcasing this link ensures that people see the difference that addressing gender equality makes to financial activity, or that gender inequality makes to financial inactivity.

## **Practitioner Guidance**

- Take the time to understand the definitions of equality and empowerment from beneficiaries' perspectives and use these as qualitative benchmarks of gender related change
- Invest in gender equality and MEAL specialists
- Ensure men are included in activities and discussions about gender equality
- Establish gender committees at the village level that include leaders, women and men
- Train local partners and gender committee members in gender equality and monitor their progress regularly
- Integrate gender training with financial education and increase over time/plan progression
- Use outcome mapping for behaviour change

## 4. Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA)

### Pakistan ENTREPRENEURS Project



Women in the hand-embellished fabrics value chain were connected to higher value markets by Female Sales Agents. ©MEDA, USAID Pakistan ENTREPRENEURS Project

### Summary

- The overall goal of the project was to increase the incomes of 75,000 micro-entrepreneurs and small enterprise owners, the majority of whom are women.
- The project focused on four value chains: dairy, medicinal and aromatic plants, honey, and hand-embellished fabrics.
- The approach was to provide increased market access, market outreach, and product information in several ways, including through the Female Sales Agent model, and to build institutional capacity of partner organizations, producer associations, and support providers to enhance the value proposition of female micro-entrepreneurs.

### Project Description

The ENTREPRENEURS Project increased the incomes of 85,693 micro-entrepreneurs—90 percent of whom were women—through facilitating market linkages between producers and buyers with a variety of mechanisms, including using Female Sales Agents (FSAs), buyer / seller meetings and creating hubs that acted as collection and aggregation centres for products. Participants in all four value chains received product development support to bring products in line with market trends and quality control standards, as well as financial literacy training. Trainings were adapted to support low literacy



participants, by focusing on practical examples and visual aids, and included literacy and numeracy skills. The project used mobile technology to connect producers with market information.

### **Gendered Barriers to Access and Success**

An initial scoping for the project identified gaps in the supply chain. Micro-entrepreneurs, both women and men, in the program target areas generally do not have reliable links to markets and are often subject to exploitative intermediaries. Therefore, their access to market information is weak, resulting in products whose quality, price, and production are not market driven.

Women producers face additional challenges related to mobility and social acceptance of their participation in economic activity and their interaction directly with the market, whether as producers, processors, or providers of services such as transportation. They also have limited access to support service providers, such as training organizations, marketing agencies, or financial institutions, which could help them to address issues such as effective production methods, quality standards, client outreach, and financial access.

### **What Worked**

The project facilitated market linkages between producers and buyers in several ways, including setting up FSAs, who acted as intermediaries, facilitated buyer and seller meetings, arranged exposure visits, and created hubs that acted as collection or aggregation centres.

With the FSAs, the project identified and trained women with more mobility in the community. They received training in financial literacy, as well as soft skills such as negotiation and conflict resolution, to enable them to act as a liaison between home-based producers and the market. FSAs purchased products from women producers and sold to retailers, wholesalers, and other buyers in higher-value markets. As part of the transactions, the FSAs embedded product information, quality control, and information on market demands such as contemporary designs, species selection and grade of produce, yield increase tips, and packaging information into their sales services to enhance the product offering.

The use of mobile devices and SMS messaging for the dissemination of market price data proved extremely beneficial as it levelled the playing field for project stakeholders. Smart subsidies, such as distribution of beehives to honey producers, created tremendous impact on the value chain, proving the importance of feasibility studies on identifying gaps in the value chain, and how well subsidies can work if well-targeted and supported.

### **Lessons Learned**

The Female Sales Agent Model was crucial to the project success. Sales agents are often viewed as monopolistic buyers who exploit producers. MEDA's approach redefined this intermediary position to utilise their role within a value chain. FSAs not only created valuable linkages to markets, but they also became agents of growth and empowerment through the provision of embedded services and increased information flows.

The women producers, in turn, generated higher quality products and received more consistent pricing. It was important that women producers received strong product development and design services to

satisfy market demand for new products, designs and innovation. Without this, market linkages would be difficult to sustain, as the producers would not be able to continue to meet shifting market demands.

Private sector engagement was also very important both to the project activities and to the ongoing sustainability of the work. Working through key private sector partners allowed the project greater market reach. Initial scoping identified a gap in the supply chain, which helped to market the case to the private sector. Discussions also assisted in determining the most appropriate private sector partners, those with a vested interest in and benefit for the project.

### **Practitioner Guidance**

- The Female Sales Agent model is an important approach for project success, particularly where women's mobility is limited
- Private sector engagement is important both to project activities and ongoing sustainability of the work
- Gender equality should be integrated throughout business interventions and project components

## 5. Oxfam Canada

### Women's Economic Inequality and Domestic Violence: Exploring the links and empowering women



Members of the Panjhorvanga Dairy Enterprise in Northern Bangladesh, an Oxfam partner that is creating economic opportunities for women dairy producers, and that stimulates the recognition of their role in household income, thus contributing to women having stronger roles in decision making at household and community levels. ©Abir Abdullah/Oxfam

#### Summary

- A desk-based literature review, and resulting journal article in *Gender & Development*, looked at the impact of women's economic empowerment programming on the risk of domestic violence for women.
- Research focused on various programs and projects in the Global South, with an emphasis on South Asia.
- Results found that women's economic empowerment programming can contribute to raising or lowering the risk of domestic violence for women, or may have no effect at all, and depends on a number of additional factors.

## **Project Description**

“Women’s economic inequality and domestic violence: exploring the links and empowering women,” co-researched by Oxfam Canada, Oxfam America, Value for Women, and Prosperity Catalyst, was published in *Gender & Development* in July 2015. The desk-based research looked at projects in the Global South, with an emphasis on the South Asia region. It focused on why, and to what extent, women’s economic empowerment (WEE) programming contributes to raising or lowering the risk of domestic violence (DV) for women, and how to improve the integration of violence against women and girls considerations into WEE program design and implementation. It did not include an examination of Oxfam-supported programs specifically.

## **Gender Barriers to Access and Success**

Violence against women and girls (VAWG) – such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault – are barriers to women’s participation in women’s economic empowerment (WEE) programming and initiatives. VAWG is also a significant impediment to the success of WEE programs, if it results from women’s participation in them.

Domestic violence may specifically stem from conflict, tension, and changes at the household level that results in men feeling the need to (re)assert their authority over increasingly economically empowered women. This impact is rooted in prescribed gender roles and relations of power.

## **What Worked**

Existing studies and evaluations signal that WEE programming can both raise and lower the risk of DV for women, or may have no effect at all. The result depends on socio-cultural, household-level, and individual factors, as well as the specific components of WEE program themselves. It critical to understand the gender context – and the prevalence of VAWG – in communities where WEE interventions are implemented.

Practitioners of WEE programs can ensure they are prepared to address situations of VAWG by making space available for participants to raise issues and concerns, and providing help and information about services. WEE programs should also monitor for impacts on VAWG. While WEE programs do not need to provide VAWG services directly, teams could work with VAWG practitioners, social workers and other front line service providers to establish procedures to refer participants to the various supports available.

At the household level, the inclusion of men in trainings, particularly the male partners of female participants, can help generate buy-in for the project and prevent backlash. Community-level awareness is also necessary to promote understanding of the negative impacts of gender-based violence, as well as the positive impacts of gender equality and WEE. Initiatives such as information training, awareness campaigns, and promoting role models within communities have been successful.

## **Lessons Learned**

An initial risk assessment of VAWG, during the design and development of a project, can highlight potential concerns that may arise in the project context. Awareness among a project team of the possible risks for DV in WEE programs can help practitioners minimize negative consequences.



Women's holistic empowerment requires that practitioners address women's rights and gender justice issues in comprehensive ways, and avoid looking at these issues in silos. More communication, collaboration, and cross training between WEE and VAWG practitioners and specialists is needed. Integration of VAWG considerations requires both donors and practitioners to understand the risk, and to set up an effective monitoring framework within WEE programs.

### **Practitioner Guidance**

- Future research and program work should look at other types of VAWG (beyond DV) and incorporate research from more countries
- Avoid looking at women's rights and gender justice issues in silos
- More communication, collaboration and cross-training between women's economic empowerment and VAWG practitioners and specialists is needed
- Build the business case for supporting women's economic empowerment and addressing VAWG—including a cost analysis for investing in girls—to share with families

## 6. SAVE the Children Canada (SC)

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### Youth in Action (YiA), Egypt



This is Hanan, 16, in a YiA learning center during a learning session on budgeting within the family and for business. Asyut governorate, Egypt. ©Save the Children

### Summary

- Youth in Action (YiA) aims to improve the socio-economic status of 40,000 rural, out-of-school girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 18 in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda. This case study focuses on the program's interventions and outcomes in Egypt.
- The YiA program model applies ongoing gender sensitive and gender transformative strategies to address social, economic, physical and cognitive barriers to access and success in economic opportunities, engaging both girls and boys.
- Notable factors in the success of the program to date include: a long-term, holistic approach with flexible design and budgeting to meet evolving needs; active engagement in community partnerships and the recruitment and training of local facilitators; and periodic gender assessments that incorporate youth participatory research methodologies.

### Project Description

Undertaken in partnership with The MasterCard Foundation, YiA is a six-year program that aims to improve the socio-economic status of 40,000 rural, out-of-school girls and boys between the ages of 12 and 18 in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Ethiopia, Malawi and Uganda. YiA uses an integrated, gender sensitive approach to adolescent and youth education and livelihood development, involving three core pillars – learn, act, connect - with participation and partnerships as cross-cutting themes:

- **Youth Learn:** Youth build foundational literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and transferable life-skills relevant to the local market.
- **Youth Act:** Youth self-select a pathway to practice and apply their skills and receive a small grant to pursue their pathway. Pathways include: returning to school; vocational and apprenticeship training; or starting a small business.
- **Youth Connect:** Youth receive community-based mentorships, establish peer-to-peer support systems, and are connected to local financial service providers, government, and community organizations, as well as the private sector for sustained support in their livelihood pursuits.

This case study focused on the YiA Egypt program in rural areas of Assiut and Al Sharkia, with a target of 8,200 youth participants, 50% female. Three years into the project in Egypt, 3,202 youth have completed the program, with 57% of participants being girls.

### **Gendered Barriers to Access and Success:**

Using a gender analysis framework for adolescents and youth, SC identified the following gendered barriers:

**Social Barriers:** There is a strong productive and reproductive division of labour, with high social expectations of boys to be providers and guardians of females. Male heads-of-households tend to control economic resources and girls' mobility. Social norms of masculinity perpetuate sexual violence and discrimination against women and girls, and can encourage aggressive and dominant behaviours in boys. This contributes to limiting girls' mobility outside of the home due to safety and family concerns about reputation. Early marriage is also highly prevalent in Upper Egypt.

**Physical Barriers:** There is a lack of adolescent-friendly spaces within the community. Secondary education, vocational training centres, and formal employment opportunities are not always present and/or accessible to girls and boys.

**Cognitive Barriers:** Girls and boys have reported low self-confidence levels, with girls hesitating to voice questions or opinions and to make their own education and livelihood decisions. Girls and boys alike lack exposure and knowledge of entrepreneurship, technical and financial/management skills. There are many social sanctions on sexual and reproductive health (SRH) education, and married adolescent girls are especially isolated from SRH services and family planning information.

**Economic Barriers:** The lack of land and access to business start-up resources has created a major barrier for girls and boys' livelihood endeavours. Boys, while still limited, do have access to land leasing and plot-sharing schemes. There are no opportunities for girls and boys to access formal financial services, as none exists in intervention sites, and those in urban areas have high minimum capital requirements.

### **What Worked**

To address these gender barriers, the YiA program model applies ongoing gender sensitive and gender transformative strategies:

- SC Egypt recruited an equal number of female and male locally based facilitators and worked to provide ongoing training on gender sensitive and -transformative approaches, such as inclusive facilitation techniques, individual gender bias analysis, and strategies to champion gender equality.

- Home visits for recruitment and monitoring have been fundamental to ensure ongoing participation of youth, specifically girls. The facilitators' positive community reputations and assurance of girls' safety are the major influences on families' acceptance of the YiA program and granting permission for their daughters to attend.
- SC established gender-safe learning centres in central locations near girls' homes and included proper, separate sanitation and hygiene necessities for girls and boys. Developed in *partnership with community organizations*, and with community leaders hired as supervisors, these learning centres have become reputable and trusted adolescent-friendly spaces.
- Gender-separated trainings with gender-combined activities have transformed and empowered girls and boys. Initially, training sessions were separated by gender and scheduled based on times that best suited girls and boys' household responsibilities. As the program became valued in the community, gender-combined community activities became acceptable.
- Gender-sensitive and youth-friendly curriculum encourages youth to explore their environment and learn about themselves, families, community, and employment opportunities, while building essential life skills, financial literacy, entrepreneurship and market analytical skills. The curriculum uses *participatory, practice-based, and experiential methodologies* adapted to the local market including storytelling, games, role-play, youth-led market visits, and presentations by female and male business owners, community leaders and YiA youth graduates.
- SRH sessions, in which female and male health care professionals visit gender-separated trainings to provide health service information, answer health-related questions, and address common misconceptions provide an opportunity for open dialogue and information which youth, specifically married adolescent girls, could otherwise not access.
- Youth-led cash transfers and procurement systems enable youth to receive a small cash grant to pursue a self-selected business and procure start-up goods with assistance and safeguarding from facilitators, business mentors, and family members. *Peer business networks and business mentorships* were established to mobilize youth's village and home-based activities and link them to local markets.
- PhotoVoice is a youth participatory research tool to understand and incorporate girls and boys' perspectives of the opportunities, limitations and needs in education and livelihood development. YiA adopted this tool as a *youth-led advocacy* strategy for girls and boys to share their life-stories with local communities and governments.

## Lessons Learned

Reaching the most deprived adolescents and youth requires a long-term, holistic approach with flexible design and budgeting to meet the evolving needs and gender dynamics of girls and boys. Understanding the context is critical for program success and requires periodic gender assessments, with youth participatory research methodologies, which should be incorporated into a comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning program framework.

## Practitioner Guidance

- Establish flexible design and budgeting mechanisms to meet the evolving needs of girls and boys and specific gender dynamics

- Conduct gender assessments at the onset and periodically throughout the project cycle/program
- Design a comprehensive gender sensitive recruitment strategy, such as home visits, to ensure families' acceptance of girls' participation, with ongoing monitoring to address issues of drop-out or disengagement
- Create both separate and combined program spaces for boys and girls, where appropriate, to ensure girls' participation and safety
- Establish community partnerships to ensure sustained safe spaces for adolescent girls and boys and community support
- Develop a platform for youth participation and youth-led advocacy, such as: youth participatory research, peer-to-peer networking, involvement of project graduates, youth advisory councils, and youth-led procurement to promote youth leadership and voice
- Ensure gender balance in the recruitment of local staff/facilitators and provide ongoing gender sensitive training to champion gender equality
- Design contextualized gender sensitive and youth-friendly training methodologies that are practice-based and participatory/experiential in nature
- Ensure gender sensitive, youth participatory research methods are incorporated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks



## 7. Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO)

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### Securing Economic Rights for Informal Women Workers



WIEGO delegation with street vendor, home-based workers and waste picker representatives at the International Labour Conference 2014 on *Facilitating the Transitions from the Informal to the Formal Economy*. ©WIEGO

### Summary

- WIEGO is a global network focused on securing livelihoods for the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy. *Securing Economic Rights for Informal Women Workers* was a project implemented by the WIEGO Network aimed at strengthening the voice, visibility, and validity of informal workers on both policy and practical levels.
- The project priority was to help remove institutional, regulatory, and policy barriers to informal workers' livelihoods and to promote inclusive policies for the working poor.
- Advocating for changes to policy and legal frameworks was a crucial component to ensuring the right to organization and representation – a key enabling right for all working poor in the informal economy.

### Project Description

The project, supported by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs from 2012 to 2015, carried out activities in 39 countries across Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and Latin America. The direct beneficiaries of the project were women informal workers and their organizations across the informal economy. Specific occupational groups included street vendors, waste pickers, home-based workers, and domestic workers. Indirect beneficiaries included key relevant stakeholders such as government officials, policymakers, membership-based organizations, academics, local authorities, NGOs, development agencies, and the media.

## **Gendered Barriers to Access and Success**

Three main factors contribute to women informal workers' disadvantaged and vulnerable circumstances. As women, they face discriminatory gender norms and relationships and biased family law, which add constraints on their time, physical mobility, and bargaining power (at home and in the marketplace). This also limits women's ability to own or inherit property and exposes them to gender-based violence in the home, in the workplace, and on the commute in between. As informal workers, they face bias in the legal, policy, and regulatory environment that stigmatizes and penalizes them. As members of poor communities or residents of informal settlements, they face bias in the allocation of public space, public services, and property rights that leave them without secure tenure and basic infrastructure services.

## **What Worked**

The project invested in strengthening the organizing and leadership capacity of women informal workers to foster economic self-reliance and increase women's participation in politics, governance, and management. The project was successful in empowering thousands of women to become effective and informed leaders. The overall impact was monitored and evaluated through regular reporting against indicators, including post-project research and publication of three case studies.

In general, project partners and other workers' groups who participated in activities reported increased empowerment, strengthened organizations (structures and administration), leadership and negotiation skills, and improvements in policy, infrastructure, and access to social programs.

## **Lessons Learned**

- Advocacy is an effective organizing tool. Increasingly, informal workers are coming together to demand laws and policies that protect and enable their livelihoods. To do so effectively, they need support to build their internal capacity for policy analysis, advocacy, and negotiation.
- Strategic partnerships with multiple stakeholders are necessary. Despite the focus and dedicated work of informal workers, the different networks would not have achieved their successes without the support of partnerships.
- Movement building and organizing is a long-term process. Despite different contexts, informal worker groups need in-depth and ongoing support as opposed to one-time trainings or activities.
- Supportive legal frameworks do not immediately create better working conditions and rights. On-going advocacy and organizing is necessary to ensure legal frameworks are adopted and implemented.

## **Practitioners Guidance**

Women informal workers need to be empowered to influence policymakers, negotiate systemic change, and leverage assets and services. In order to do so, they need the following three enabling conditions:

- Voice: Mobilize into membership-based organizations and representative collective voice in policymaking and rule-setting institutions

- Visibility: Improved labour force data and other economic statistics and credible research
- Validity: legal identity and official recognition as economic agents who contribute to the economy

## 8. World University Service of Canada (WUSC)

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### Women's Economic Empowerment through Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET)



WUSC's ASSET project in Sri Lanka. ©WUSC/ Lorenzo Moscia

#### Summary

- WUSC has been supporting women's economic empowerment in Sri Lanka through TVET programming since 1989. The programs have aimed to improve the skills and socio-economic conditions of project participants with quality, employment-oriented vocational training.
- Target beneficiaries are poor, unemployed, and underemployed women and youth across the country.
- WUSC developed a holistic employment skills training cycle for TVET projects.

#### Project Description

Two TVET projects provide the focus for this case study: *Project for Rehabilitation through Education and Training* (PRET), which identified sectors for training and then placed trainees in jobs; and the *Advancing Specialized Skills for Economic Transformation* (ASSET) project, which engages with the private sector to locate existing (but unfilled) jobs and provides targeted training to address labour shortages.

## **Gendered Barriers to Access and Success**

Women face personal barriers, familial barriers, community barriers, and concerns over their safety and security in Sri Lanka. Women often experience harassment and discrimination, such as sexism and gender stereotyping in the workplace, within the community, and at the household level.

Vocational occupations are neither well understood nor readily accepted by much of Sri Lankan society. Many of the higher remunerated trades are viewed as non-traditional for women. Despite the economic potential, technical and vocational trades are generally viewed as only suitable for women and men with poor academic ability. Although the TVET sector provides certification from entry level to a university degree, many parents would rather see their sons and daughters go to university in pursuit of a secure government job or a profession than have them enter a trade school.

## **What Worked**

Role modeling helps with retention, especially in non-traditional sectors. Role modeling demonstrates women's effectiveness in these non-traditional sectors, resulting in increased female participation and retention.

Formalized certification improves employment options. Upon graduation from TVET programs, WUSC and its partners support students to write the national exams.<sup>1</sup> These are standardized and provide recognized certification in vocational qualifications. The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certificate is a short-course program that offers credit for skills learned on the job.

In PRET, WUSC conducted labour market surveys, skills and on-the-job training to help place women in gender sensitive work environments. Employment rates were high, and employers were eager to partner with the project as they would benefit from a short duration of subsidized labour from student participants while providing practical on-the-job training. Many trainees transitioned from these placements to employment in the same workplace. Overall, trainees acquired confidence, knowledge, and marketable skills. About 68 percent of participants found employment – 75 percent of male trainees versus 54 percent of female trainees.

It was important for the project to be adaptable. The team found that not all women wanted to work in non-traditional sectors. As such, the focus shifted to “lucrative sectors” that had not reached market saturation.

## **Lessons Learned**

Access to financing continues to be a significant barrier for participants. Credit institutions do not see TVET trainees as good financial risks. WUSC's project provides scholarships/sponsorships to women and marginalized individuals, including persons with disabilities and ex-combatants. WUSC noted that scholarships/sponsorship should be restructured to provide ASSET participants the full amount upfront and gradually decrease it over time, to introduce the idea of loans for trainings incrementally.

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<sup>1</sup> The Government of Sri Lanka administers the exams; WUSC supports students to complete them, but some areas (especially during the war) were underserved and not all students had access to exams.



The supply approach to TVET programming in PRET (i.e., graduating trainees in high demand sectors, then identifying employment opportunities) resulted in high employment rates. Women entered the job market with the technical and soft skills, including self-confidence, to secure and succeed in employment.

The demand approach to TVET programming in ASSET (i.e., working with private sector to identify unfilled jobs and then train youth for those positions) has resulted in even higher employment rates for men, but, unfortunately, employers have been reluctant to hire women. Before training, women may lack both technical skills and self-confidence to promote themselves as the best candidate for the position. To address this, pre-course training for female participants ensures they are interested in the selected trade, boosts self-esteem, discusses gender equality, and enhances transferable soft skills.

### **Practitioners Guidance**

- Use the right terminology to rebrand trades and TVET
- Professionalize the TVET sector to enhance status and recognition
- Social marketing and communications campaigns need to raise awareness of the opportunities in the trades and technology sectors and encourage women to get involved
- Conduct a strong assessment of who the influencers are to target interventions
- Changing perceptions is a long-term investment
- Showcase female role models to promote program successes for women
- Professionalize TVET programs to increase employability
- Seek government buy-in to integrate gender equality at the national policy level
- Integrate approaches, to focus on ensuring access to employment while also building technical and soft skills simultaneously

## In Summary: Best Practices

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Overarching themes emerging from the case studies and roundtable discussions included the need for comprehensive gender analyses, the importance of long-term flexibility and fostering both an enabling environment and individual agency. This section organizes these themes around project design considerations, enabling environments, and individual agency.

### Design Considerations:

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**Comprehensive Gender analyses:** Understanding the context of a project area helps determine a realistic starting point to define and measure empowerment and to identify pathways to success. A gender analysis completed prior to project design helps map out structural and power-related obstacles in the enabling environment, identifies critical interventions and partnerships, and determines key training needs for teams and participants. Incorporated into a theory of change framework, the results can inform the project design, identify risks and opportunities, and develop effective monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools. Through a gender analysis, organizations can identify potential risks of violence against women and girls or other forms of resistance and backlash early, allowing for inclusion of responsive mitigation strategies within programming.

**Consult women and girls:** To develop an effective pathway to successful women's economic empowerment interventions, organizations first need to understand how women and girls define empowerment and use these learnings as benchmarks for success. Ongoing collaboration across M&E, policy and programming, and gender specialist teams – and direct engagement with beneficiaries – allows for the sharing of best practices and program designs that reflect the needs, experiences, and aspirations of beneficiaries.

**Program for flexibility:** Empowerment is a long-term process that involves deconstructing and reforming engrained social, economic, physical and internalized barriers. Flexibility in projects ensures that organizations can review and adapt strategies, activities, and budget allocations to meet the changing needs of the project and its beneficiaries.

### Enabling Environment:

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**Address barriers in structures and power relations:** Where local and national leaders do not enforce laws and mechanisms to protect women from harassment and violence, it is necessary to work with other organizations and the government to integrate and implement gender equality at various policy levels, including the workplace.

The mobility of women and girls outside their homes is often restricted for cultural and security reasons, due in part to concerns from families, communities, and the women themselves. Risks to reputation, fear of harassment and violence, a lack of role models within a community or labour market, and the additional burden of household and reproductive roles also limit how and when women can participate in economic activities or training. All these elements need to be considered when designing an intervention to ensure that women can engage meaningfully and exercise their agency in a supportive environment.

**Utilize stakeholders' perspectives when addressing barriers:** Discriminatory gender norms, enforced at the household, community, and societal levels, underpin barriers to successful women's economic empowerment programming. Engaging local stakeholders through local 'points of reference' – such as

religion, tradition, other community members (role models), or business – fosters understanding of the mutual benefits the project brings, builds support for women’s economic empowerment programming and helps prevent backlash and resistance. This also works effectively for encouraging women to pursue employment or entrepreneurship in non-traditional sectors and trades.

#### Agency – Confidence and Skills:

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***Incorporate opportunities to promote agency:*** Work with women and girls to define and pursue their aspirations and maximize their agency and abilities. Women and girls, especially when entering spaces traditionally occupied by men, often lack self-confidence, in addition to technical information, knowledge and skills in business. A focus on confidence building and soft skills, such as bargaining and household-level negotiation, is a necessary complement to technical vocational education and training (TVET) and employment opportunities. Bridging opportunities, such as internships and on-the-job training, also provide women the ability to effectively apply these skills within a workplace environment.

## Key Takeaways

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### Design Considerations

- ◆ Perform a gender analysis to inform project design
- ◆ Use a theory of change approach to project design, based on a beneficiary's pathway to success
- ◆ Take time to understand equality and empowerment from beneficiaries' perspectives, and use these as benchmarks
- ◆ Establish flexible design mechanisms to meet the evolving needs of beneficiaries
- ◆ Incorporate participatory research, monitoring and evaluation methods
- ◆ Avoid separating women's economic empowerment from issues of women's rights and gender justice

### Enabling Environment

- ◆ Deliver pre- and post-gender training for service providers, employers, internship hosts and other key stakeholders
- ◆ Create safe spaces for women's economic activity – such as women-only markets – and develop market linkage mechanisms
- ◆ Use a common frame of reference – local language, business terminology, religious stories – to make the case for investing in women and girls
- ◆ Utilize on-the-ground mobilization recruitment and retention strategies, such as home visits
- ◆ Work with local, trusted partners/civil society organizations and community influencers as
- ◆ Work with local influencers to become gender equality champions
- ◆ Use strategic subsidies to positively impact the value chain for women
- ◆ Use technology to connect female producers with market information

### Individual Agency

- ◆ Establish platforms and networks to promote young women's leadership and voice
- ◆ Consider both separate and combined learning spaces for boys and girls to ensure participation and safety
- ◆ Recruit a gender-balance of local staff/facilitators and provide ongoing gender training to champion gender equality
- ◆ Professionalize TVET programs women use to enhance status and recognition and increase employability
- ◆ Showcase female role-models in different roles and occupations
- ◆ Integrate training approaches that build technical and soft skills