Introduction

In 2015, MEDA began implementing the six-year Improving Market Opportunities for Women (IMOW) project focused on the rice and vegetable value chains in Kayin State and the vegetable value chain in Shan State. Project interventions related to sustainable agriculture, financial and market linkages, women’s economic empowerment (WEE), and the environment were implemented in partnership with local Key Facilitating Partners (KFPs) and private sector development (PSD) partners.

IMOW facilitated stronger linkages to markets for women and supported growth in micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by working in partnership with local organizations, communities, and companies that support and champion women and their economic empowerment. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC).

Sustainability

For this document, sustainability is defined as the extent to which the IMOW project results for women clients and partners are likely to continue past the end of the project. The internal mid-term evaluation study identified a few approaches and activities that are likely to produce continued impact for women producers, KFPs, and PSD partners.
Women Producers

**Savings Groups:** Savings groups was considered one of the most effective strategies that provided a forum for women to come together and discuss farming and issues including financial matters and beyond. As members, women producers could save money and pay for farm inputs. Some of the savings groups are well established and will continue to function without MEDA’s support.

**Women Sales Agent (WSA):** The second strategy is the WSA approach with a potential to produce sustainable impact. WSAs work directly with market actors and earn profit; this approach will motivate other women producers to connect directly with private sector partners.

**Good Agricultural Practices (GAP):** It is likely that women producers will continue to practice what they have learned through GAP trainings, leading to increased production and income for their families. Women producers have seen the results of adopting GAP, and now neither MEDA nor its partners need to arrange for exposure visits that they regularly conduct for lead farmers during the IMOW project implementation. Because of adopting GAP, women farmers have applied for local and international certification programs and 92 women farmers received certificates from Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Livestock and Irrigation.

Key Facilitating Partners (KFPs)

**Knowledge about value chain actors:** The most significant impact of the IMOW project for KFPs is improved knowledge and exposure of working with the value chain actors. KFPs learned about the private sector business operations and their relationships with value chain actors helped them implement future economic development projects in a more effective manner.

**Community’s trust:** Gaining community trust through the IMOW project is another important result of the IMOW project for KFPs. The project has produced positive results for many women producers that helped KFPs in winning community’s trust, which will be useful for mobilizing people for future initiatives.

**Staff capacity:** Improved staff knowledge about GAP, gender, and project implementation strategies, such as WSA and savings group, are among the other key results. KFPs might implement IMOW project knowledge and strategies in their future interventions. Finally, partnering with an international organization in an Market Systems Development project will help KFPs in winning future project proposals.
Private Sector Partners

**Farmer’s Engagement:** Private sector development (PSD) partners that received innovation grants (IGs) are likely to continue working with farmers that were connected through KFPs. The IG funds helped PSD partners improve their equipment and infrastructure that will continue to produce positive results for many years to come.

System Level Changes

It remains too early to identify systems level changes. However, there is strong evidence that women and men farmers who were not part of the project have started practicing agricultural techniques that the IMOW project was promoting (i.e., “copying in”). It is difficult to say how many farmers and villages have started copying in these practices; however, project partners indicated that farmers from neighbouring villages were becoming more interested in implementing GAP through observing women producers’ success. Thus, it’s possible that those who were trained by the project are promoting the practices independently within their communities.
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