

CASE STUDY : PART I

INTEGRATING GENDER INTO MARKET SYSTEMS ANALYSIS : WOMEN FARMERS IN NORTHERN GHANA

BACKGROUND

Across Ghana's northern zone farmers working small holdings struggle to feed their families throughout the year. Reliance on production during a single rainy season, shifting patterns of rainfall, and low crop yields keep many farm families food insecure. As family needs for cash increase, many men and youth migrate to urban areas in the south seeking wage employment. They may or may not be able to return for the planting season, which often means women are increasingly bearing the burden of farming as well as caring for children and the elderly.

ANALYSIS

Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), in 2011, and with funding from the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development (DFATD) Canada, began seeking ways to help farm families improve food security. The organization's programming began with research into the northern zone's agricultural economy and how women and men are engaged in production of food and cash crops. Traditionally men carry responsibility for producing staple crops, particularly maize, millet, and rice, for both home consumption and cash income. Women provide much of the labor on the family farm and also plant beans and vegetables to supplement these staples in the family diet.

Women are rarely recognized as farmers in their own right and the fields they cultivate are frequently considered gardens for home consumption only. If women sell surplus from their production they typically do so informally in the local market.

Government extension services are over stretched, reaching only a minority of men farmers and even fewer women farmers. Input suppliers focus distribution on farmer based organizations whose membership is overwhelmingly male.

However, early interviews with women and men farmers revealed that some women were beginning to plant soybeans as a cash crop and that this relatively new crop had not yet become established as a 'man's crop.' Some work had been done by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture's Women in Agricultural Development (WIAD) to test the inclusion of soy flour in local dishes and, working with limited resources, WIAD had launched initial promotion of soybean as a nutritious addition to local diets.

QUESTIONS

MEDA recognized that to design and implement a project that would result in sustained improvement in food security, they needed to research not just the soybean market system but also to deeply understand the roles of women and men in farming and household decisions as well as at the community level. How could MEDA undertake research that fully integrated gender and market systems analysis? Identify three steps the organization could follow to ensure sound analysis that would form the basis for market-based project design, ensuring that women farmers would be better able to feed their families.

CASE STUDY : PART 2

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SUMMARY OF FINDINGS – SOYBEAN VALUE CHAIN STRENGTHS

The MEDA research team identified the following strengths, discussed below, within the soybean value chain on which the DFATD Canada-funded GROW project could build to facilitate greater inclusion of women farmers into this market system.

STRONG MARKET DEMAND FOR SOYBEANS

Feedback from a variety of value chain actors and sector specialists points to strong demand for soybeans, both for processing for the poultry sector as well as oil for human consumption. Although detailed analysis is not available to predict with certainty the growth of the poultry sector, current conditions indicate that if soybean farmers are able to increase productivity they will be in a better position to compete with soymeal that is currently imported. Additionally, the overall growth trend in consumption of soybean oil due to its nutritive qualities is a positive sign that local processors will be looking to expand production in this area.

OPPORTUNITIES TO LEVERAGE EXISTING SENSITIZATION INITIATIVES

Research revealed a number of local organizations that have strong experience carrying out sensitization activities in the Upper West Region in topics related to agriculture, gender, and environmental sustainability. Given the relevance of these areas to the DFATD Canada-funded, MEDA GROW project, and the importance of specifically addressing a variety of issues related to gender equality, being able to leverage this existing capacity would be critical to the success of the project. In addition to building on existing capacity, leveraging areas that have received previous sensitization efforts may also prove to be helpful (e.g., community leaders may be more supportive/engaged, men's control may be reduced, women's freedom or independence may be higher, etc.).

EXISTING NUCLEUS FARMER STRUCTURE

The nucleus farmer structure currently being implemented in Ghana in the soybean subsector is an attractive model, given the opportunities to create direct linkages with processors and other buyers. There are also opportunities to further develop the model to reach out to women farmers. Other projects, like the USAID-funded ADVANCE project, have had relative success in developing the structure that is now familiar to many in agriculture; adapting an existing model versus introducing an entirely new one will likely have more positive results.

INTEGRATION OF WOMEN IN VALUE CHAIN

A combined gender and value chain analysis of the soybean value chain indicates that although the sector is dominated by men, there is significant contribution of women in all levels, specifically in production and



trading. The current trading linkages most readily available to women are to the informal, low-value local markets. However, the emergent nucleus farmer structure provides an opportunity for connections to higher value linkages to processing companies. Although there are currently very few female nucleus farmers, and few male nucleus farmers that work with small scale female farmers, those that do exist are interested in expanding to work with more small scale female farmers; there are also signs that other value chain actors see the benefits of integrating more female farmers into the model.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROJECT DESIGN

To build on these strengths already existing within the soybean market system, the research team recommended that the project design focus on helping women farmers link to the high value poultry feed and urban markets via processors. This will require women farmers to adopt best practices in cultivating, managing and harvesting their crop to achieve strong yields of quality beans.

The project will build the capacity of Lead Farmers selected by groups of 20–25 women farmers. These Lead Farmers will receive training in best agronomic practice for cultivation, crop management and harvesting of soybeans. Each Lead Farmer will serve as the channel of information to the farmers in her group and as her capacity grows she will represent her group in negotiations with other market system actors.

Recognizing that men currently control access to productive resources and make most of the household decisions, the project will actively engage women and men in community-level discussions about gender roles and how household members can work together to increase equality and benefit the entire family. The goal will be to build the recognition by men and community leaders of the contribution of women in the household, as economic actors, and as community members.

The project will also need to work with other market actors, such as input suppliers, aggregators, nucleus farmers, and processors, to build their interest in women farmers as new customers and suppliers and to assist them in developing effective outreach to these women.