

Gender in Agribusiness

A summary paper of a study on gender dynamics in cash and food crop marketing clubs in southern Malawi

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INTRODUCTION

The Wellness and Agriculture for Life Advancement (WALA) project is a five-year integrated food security program funded by USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) working to reduce food insecurity for 214,974 chronically food-insecure households within eight districts in southern Malawi. The project began in June 2009 and is implemented by a consortium of eight nongovernmental organizations led by Catholic Relief Services as the grant holder, working in collaboration with ACDI/VOCA, Africare, Chikhwawa Catholic Diocese, Emmanuel International, Project Concern International (PCI), Save the Children, Total Land Care and World Vision Malawi.

As part of this effort, WALA supports marketing clubs in producing and marketing a variety of commodities, including pigeon peas (predominantly a food crop) and bird's eye chilies (a cash crop). Marketing clubs worked with pigeon peas from the beginning of the project, and most clubs introduced chili production through an outgrower program in 2010. The study seeks to answer the following key questions: (1) How has the introduction of a cash crop (bird's eye chilies) into WALA marketing club production impacted women's and men's participation and roles in these groups? (2) What role do women and men in marketing clubs play in the control and utilization of income from sales of WALA-targeted crops? and (3) How has women's perceived self-efficacy changed through their participation in marketing clubs?

METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted by agribusiness technical partner ACDI/VOCA in Thyolo, Zomba, and Balaka districts. Researchers conducted single-gender focus group discussions with 182 individuals from four

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unique groups: participants in the WALA chili outgrower program; WALA participants who collectively marketed pigeon peas but did not participate in the chili program; WALA group members who grew pigeon peas but did not market them collectively; and a control group of non-WALA members. The non-random selection of participants may bias the findings. Each participant also completed a quantitative questionnaire. The research team collected data on marketing club membership and sales and completed a SCOR matrix with district-level field staff.

KEY FINDINGS

Participation

Both male and female respondents felt that women were more likely to participate in marketing clubs because men were occupied with other income-generating activities as well as simply sitting around drinking with friends. Women noted that “men lag behind” in joining community groups until they can see results, while men indicated that “women are early adopters who jump right into something without seeing if it is of any value.” In most cases, both spouses did not join the marketing club, believing that one person’s membership belongs to the family as a whole. One person, usually the wife, registered and participated in meetings and trainings, and shared the information with the rest of the family.

In the first season that chilies were introduced, more women joined the marketing clubs as early adopters. Significant numbers of both women and men joined for the second chili-growing season, after seeing the income earned by their neighbors who had sold chilies during the first season. Men in Balaka noted that chilies used to be considered a men’s crop, as the only buyer was the National Smallholder Farmers’ Association of Malawi and farmers had to travel long distances to sell the chilies. However, now that WALA brings the buyer closer to farmers’ homes, women are more involved.

Leadership and decision-making in marketing clubs: Focus group discussions revealed that among represented marketing clubs women held roughly 70 percent of leadership positions. In most cases, a man acted as chairperson and a woman as vice-chairperson. Men and women noted similar reasons for the lack of female chairpersons: women are shy or lack self-confidence; women will listen to a male leader, but men will



Farmers threshing their pigeon pea crop. Ashley Rytter/CRS.

not listen to a female leader; and men are used to problem-solving, while women look to men to help them solve problems. Men and women from Balaka added that women worry that their husbands will not allow them to take on all of the responsibilities demanded of a chairperson, so they prefer to refuse the position rather than risk disappointing the group.

Women are overwhelmingly more likely to be treasurers. Both men and women felt that men were dishonest and likely to take the group's money to buy alcohol. Focus group participants felt that women were more trustworthy and afraid to misuse the money.

Focus group participants noted that decision making processes within the clubs have remained the same since the introduction of the chili outgrower scheme. However, some noted that prior to chili introduction the group had few or no male members, so all leaders were originally women while now some leaders are men, but all felt that their voices were still being heard.

Role in production and sales: Men and women agreed that both sexes are involved to some degree in most aspects of chili and pigeon pea production and sales, though their perception of the degree of involvement varied. Many of these discrepancies lie in the way men and women defined tasks: in many cases men indicated that they are primarily responsible because they provide funds, while women felt themselves to be primarily responsible because they are actively involved in the task. Chili division of labor can be seen in the charts on the following page.

Figure 1. Chili Production as Perceived by Men

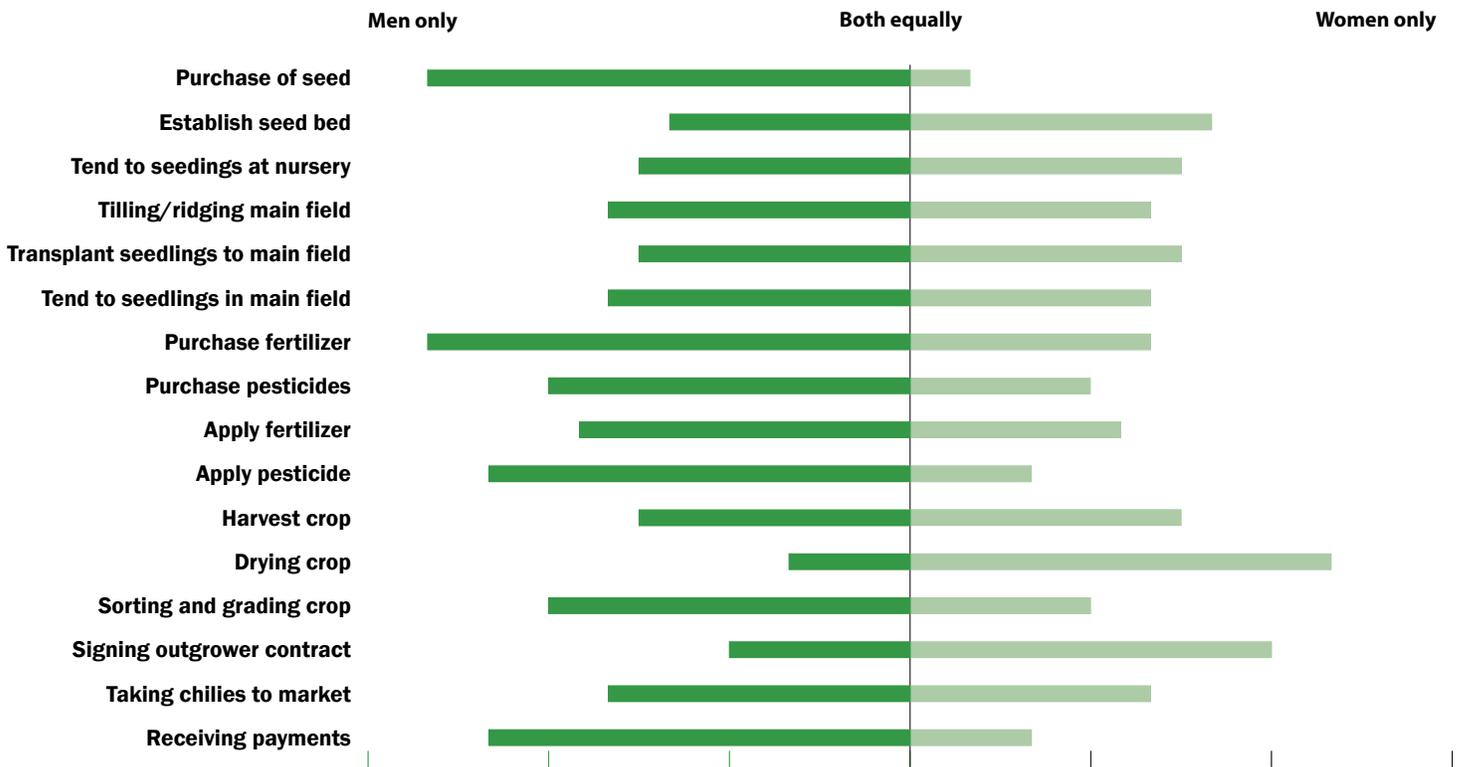


Figure 2. Chili Production as Perceived by Women



Access to Income

Respondents who collectively marketed through WALA noted that their household income had drastically increased since joining the program. Women who grew pigeon peas through WALA groups but marketed them individually also noted increased income levels. While the prices they received from pigeon pea vendors had not changed, these women were able to produce (and sell) more as a result of improved planting methods taught in the clubs. Some female non-members also noted that their production had increased because they learned improved production methods from neighbors who did participate in the WALA groups. Both of these groups also noted that their access to income has increased due Village Savings and Loans (VSLs) in their communities, which were started by the WALA project and act as a complementary initiative to the marketing clubs.

Control Over Income

Some women noted that they have a greater say in household income use since joining WALA marketing clubs simply because their household income is now so much greater that money is no longer a sensitive issue in their households. Others noted that they now play a greater role in decision making about income because, through their participation in WALA marketing clubs, they now bring in significant income, in some cases even more than their husbands.

Men and women both noted that husbands and wives sit together to decide how their household income should be used, but in general the husband has the final say as the head of the household. For large amounts of money, the couple used the training received through WALA groups to plan out the needs of the household. They prioritized farming inputs for the next growing season, followed by other household improvements such as iron roofing sheets, followed by other larger household needs, starting small businesses or depositing money in their VSL accounts.

Households used chili income predominantly for large purchases. Pigeon pea income from both collective and individual sales was used for daily needs, such as household utensils, soap, and food. Women were more likely to have full control over pigeon pea income than chili income, both because the quantity of money was much smaller and because it was used for these day-to-day household needs, about which women were more informed.

Farming as a Business (FaaB): When study participants discussed increased control over income, both men and women mentioned the importance of ACDI/VOCA's FaaB training. Participants noted that in the past they would spend money as needs arose and in the end would not be able to account for how their money had been used. Now they can plan to meet their needs and ensure that their farm income carries them

through to the next harvest. While increased production and collective marketing increased access to income, it is the increased financial competency gained through FaaB that increased participants' feeling of control over that income.

Village Savings and Loans: The VSLs begun by WALA were mentioned by all participants in conjunction with financial planning tools as having the biggest impact on their control over household income. This includes respondents in the control group, who were able to take advantage of VSLs in their communities even though they do not participate in the marketing clubs. The presence of a village-level savings mechanism, which did not previously exist in the project's areas of implementation, has allowed households to build their cash savings and allow for more purposeful decision making.

In most cases, the name on the VSL account corresponded to the WALA group member, so were held in women's names. Any unallocated income from the sale of WALA crops was put in the VSL account. Men may also deposit money from their other income-generating activities into this account. When a loan was taken or payout is received, the husband and wife sit together to decide how to use the money, and men had final decision-making power as head of the household. Women also often used the money in their VSL accounts to start small businesses, and they had full control over the use of income from that business. Women used this income to grow their businesses or to cover daily household needs (e.g., salt, matches) that they feel are too small to bother their husband about.

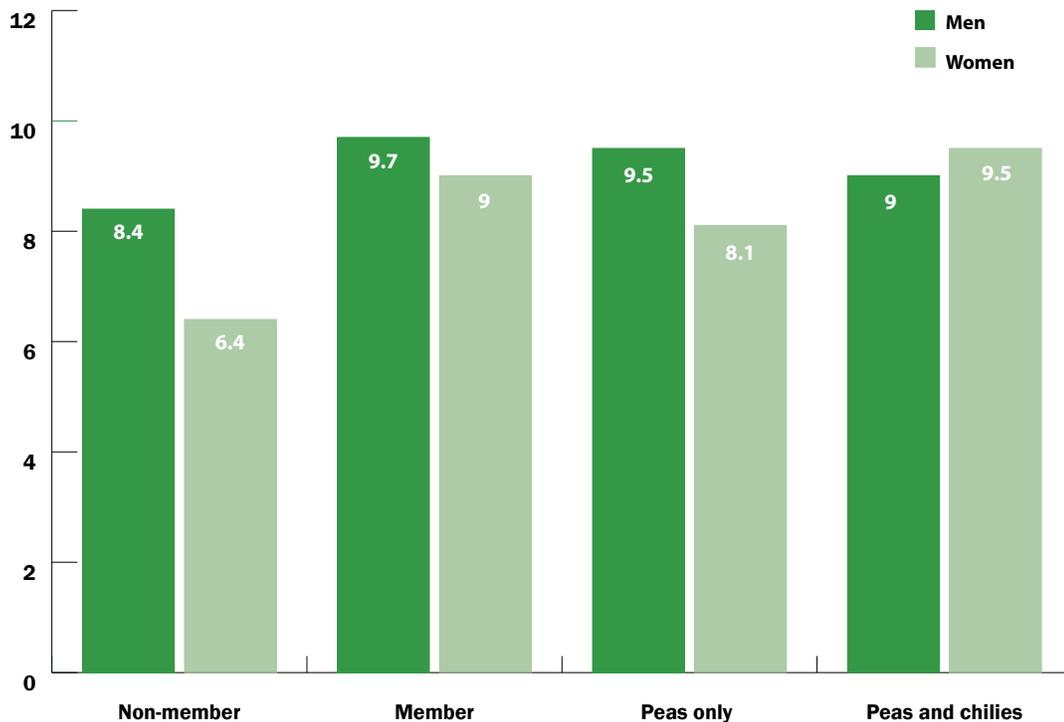
PERCEIVED SELF-EFFICACY

USAID has created an indicator to measure perceived self-efficacy (i.e., belief in one's capacity to achieve a desired goal or outcome) among women. This study uses that indicator to examine not only women's self-efficacy, but also men's self-efficacy levels and how those change as women become more empowered. The USAID self-efficacy indicator asks respondents to rate statements on a scale of -2 to 2, where more negative scores indicate lower perceived self-efficacy. Scores can range from -16 to 16. On average, male respondents demonstrated higher perceived self-efficacy than women, at 9.3 compared to 8.5. Members of WALA marketing clubs indicated greater feelings of self-efficacy than nonmembers (see chart below). Male and female members not only had higher scores than their nonmember counterparts, but women demonstrated a significant increase in their



A farmer harvests her chili crop in southern Malawi. Ashley Rytter/CRS.

Figure 3. Perceived Self-Efficacy in Marketing Groups



perceived self-efficacy, which narrowed the gap between men’s and women’s scores from 2 points to just 0.7 points. Among members, both men’s and women’s perceived self-efficacy increased regardless of whether they produced only pigeon peas or both pigeon peas and chilies. Among members who participated in both pigeon peas and chilies, women actually reported a higher level of perceived self-efficacy than men.

Given female respondents’ increased access to and control over income, it is unsurprising that the self-efficacy indicator also demonstrated an increase in women’s perceived abilities to control positive outcomes in their lives. Equally important, the indicator demonstrated that this increase in female empowerment did not result in men feeling disempowered. Women felt that the control they had over their own life outcomes had increased, and men did as well. These findings have important implications for the “do-no-harm” principle of gender programming: as women become more empowered, there is a risk that their domestic relationships may suffer, and they may even face an increased threat of domestic violence as their spouses deal with a new power dynamic. The data from this study has shown that WALA marketing club activities have empowered both men and women to the detriment of neither, making it much less likely that there will be unintended negative consequences within the household.

Women’s increased perceived self-efficacy extended beyond their control of income to feeling more secure in their positions within their households due

to their greater role in providing household income. Women from all three districts noted that, in the past, their husbands had been unfaithful, but the women now felt that their husbands would not stray due to their wives' increased income, either because they would feel embarrassed about using their wives' income to stray with other women, or because they worried that, were they caught being unfaithful, the wife would no longer share her income with the husband.



A chili producer poses with her chilies after laying them out for drying and sorting. Photo courtesy of Madiha Nawaz, ACDI/VOCA.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

1. Encourage women's participation in marketing groups from project inception.

By involving women at the earliest stages of the marketing clubs, when they only marketed pigeon peas, WALA built women's capacity, self-confidence and status within their households, so that when a new, more-profitable crop was introduced, women were not displaced.

2. Include leadership training for women and men in marketing clubs.

For groups to succeed beyond the end of external funding, they need strong, honorable, transparent leaders. Women cannot lead if they lack self-confidence and men cannot lead if they are stereotyped as being dishonest. Depending on the local context, men and women could be trained together or separately, but both should receive targeted, relevant training to address their specific weaknesses and build on their unique strengths.

3. Activities to increase income should be complemented by increasing availability of village savings structures to facilitate greater control and decision-making power over the income that is earned.

VSLs and other local savings models provide financial services at a local level that prioritize women's participation. When combined with audience-appropriate training on financial planning, VSLs ensure that the increased income earned by the household will be kept safe, making it easier for households to create long-term plans for their income.

4. Train male and female marketing club participants in financial planning and budgeting that includes a focus on the needs of women and children.

Increased ability to plan helps households budget to meet their needs throughout the year. By ensuring that both men and women participate, women will be empowered to make

good decisions and gain respect in their households, and men will be empowered to understand and meet the needs of their families, rather than being able to fall into the easy excuse of those responsibilities being “women’s work.”

5. Integrate explicit trainings on household decision-making into group training curricula. The issue of joint decision-making can be integrated into FaaB or leadership trainings, or conducted as part of a different component of a holistic program. During project planning, implementers should consult with local leaders and other actors on the ground to determine how best to introduce the issue to the community at large, as well as within the program.