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A growing knowledgebase on WEE part 2: exciting developments supported by Australia's aid programme



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All blogs

In blog two on the growing knowledgebase for women's economic empowerment in market systems, Linda Jones focuses on the Australian government's aid programming.

The Australian government's aid programming (DFAT or Australian AID) is at the forefront of leading-edge work that can contribute to systems thinking and the integration of women's economic empowerment (WEE).

DFAT's new [strategic framework](#), released in June 2014, aims to 'promote Australia's national interest by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction' through a two-way approach of private sector development and human development. This approach incorporates gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls as one of the six foundational pillars. Moreover, one of the ten [performance targets for Australia's aid programme](#) requires that 80 per cent of aid investments should address gender issues in their implementation.

A few years prior to the release of its new aid paradigm, market systems programming had already begun with DFAT support. Notably, the [Cambodia Agriculture Value Chain Program](#) (CAVAC) which launched as a market systems initiative in 2010, led by a former head of Katalyst in Bangladesh (one of the earliest and most ambitious market systems programmes). This was followed by the [Market Development Facility](#) (also headed by an ex-Katalyst manager) that began work in Fiji in 2011, and soon after in Timor-Leste and Pakistan with recent expansion to

Papua New Guinea and Sri Lanka. In addition, **AIP-PRISMA** – another ambitious agricultural development programme – got under way in Indonesia in 2014, and other new programmes are on the horizon for 2016.

The Market Development Facility (MDF) has taken on a strong leadership role in the integration of WEE approaches into its programme frameworks and interventions on the ground. They have carried out and published gender and poverty analyses for **Fiji** and **Timor-Leste** with similar initiatives in progress for Pakistan and Sri Lanka. This country experience led to the groundbreaking strategic guidance note **Women's economic empowerment: how women contribute to and benefit from growth** that significantly builds on the 2012 M4P **WEE framework discussion paper** and the practical experience of MDF across countries.

The MDF WEE strategic guidance note looks at background concepts of WEE, and then focuses on operationalisation (which makes this note especially relevant to programme designers and implementers). MDF's 'diagnostic WEE framework' is built into the programme life cycle and enables MDF to:

1. Better assess sectors and ask pertinent questions regarding the role of women in these sectors;
2. Identify opportunities to support WEE through the various 'empowerment domains' offered in the framework;
3. Measure and analyse results in a more effective manner;
4. Articulate how it contributes to WEE in a more nuanced and comprehensive way; and
5. Treat women as central economic actors even if they are working from less recognised and/or disadvantaged positions.

The 'empowerment domains' referenced are those that were first put forth in the M4P WEE framework discussion paper (update forthcoming 2016), setting the stage for rich research and analysis, intervention design, results chain development, and impact measurement:

OVERALL OBJECTIVE

Economic advancement – increased income and return on labour

IMPROVED ACCESS OUTCOMES

Access to opportunities and life chances such as business start-ups, jobs, education, training, access to markets

Access to assets, services and needed supports to advance economically

STRONGER AGENCY OUTCOMES

Decision-making authority in different spheres including household finances

Manageable workloads for women

The MDF strategic guidance note pays particular attention to working with private sector partners on the viable integration of women into market systems – an area that is commonly a challenge for market systems programmes. For example, the note describes partnership models and building the business base case for incentivising private sector partners.

DFAT has expanded on MDF's work and published a very useful operational guidance note in 2015 [Gender equality and women's economic empowerment in agriculture](#). The operational guidance note also draws on the valuable learnings of the Royal Tropical Institute (Amsterdam – KIT) and in particular its 2012 publication [Challenging chains to change: gender equity in agricultural value chain development](#). This book describes five parallel strategies for pursuing WEE outcomes in agricultural value chains, which are derived from practical experience and supported by case studies and examples.

The DFAT guidance note explains that a key purpose of the document is to support: 'DFAT activity managers to go beyond simple 'beneficiary counting' and sex disaggregated data, and to think through a more nuanced approach to how agriculture investments can bring about gender equality and women's empowerment. Typically, this requires a process of 'front-loading' gender thinking into program analysis, designs and inception phases, rather than retrospectively tacking it on (p.2).'

The guidance note achieves this goal through practical examples and step by step advice that can assist market system practitioners (regardless of sector) to build their knowledge and capacity, and to design and implement a gender inclusive market development initiative.

Drawing on these learnings, along with other experiences from Asia and Africa, I plan to publish an update of the M4P WEE framework early in 2016, adding practical guidance and mini cases, and responding to the questions that practitioners from around the world have posed as they endeavour to empower women through integration into market systems. There will be an opportunity for the BEAM community to provide feedback during a presentation of the draft framework – soon to be announced – in order to make the updated framework responsive to needs on the ground.

Read blog one on the [growing knowledge base on women's economic empowerment in market systems programming](#).

Dr Linda Jones is a globally recognised expert in the inclusive development of markets and financial systems with a particular focus on women's economic empowerment. As a consultant, Linda has advised on a wide range of bilateral, multilateral and NGO programmes, and has held senior positions at the Aga Khan

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> [BEAM Programme Index: MDF: Market Development Facility](#)

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