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Can markets include and benefit very marginalised people? Learning from Samriddhi



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All blogs

Can projects using a systemic approach (or market systems development) achieve inclusive changes for poor and disadvantaged women and men?

Zenebe Uraguchi discusses the experience of the [Samriddhi project in Bangladesh](#), which was one of the case studies for [new research on markets and extreme marginalisation](#). Jodie Thorpe, reflects through the lens of her findings - with some interesting commonalities and disagreements!

JT: [IDS](#), [Coady International Institute](#) and [ADD International](#) explored 22 promising examples of market-based approaches and collaborated with persons with disabilities who were peer researchers in Uganda to understand the potential for markets to benefit those who are very marginalised. By this we meant those at the base of the economic pyramid, who have only very basic assets (e.g. less than 0.5 ha of land) and skills (e.g. primary education) – PLUS they face social isolation because of their disability, gender or caste, for example.

ZU: The Samriddhi project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) implemented by [HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation](#) reached close to 800,000 farmers. Most of these farmers (60 per cent) were poor and disadvantaged women and men living in remote areas. Samriddhi worked along three dimensions of the rural market system: farmer/producer knowledge (technical, business, financial); private sector development, particularly through micro and small enterprises; and linkages between market actors and local government bodies for access to services and resources (e.g. land). The project selected sub-sectors taking into account

relevance and opportunity to the target groups, as well as feasibility for the project to make meaningful contributions to address root causes that inhibited growth and inclusion. Good research and analysis, therefore, served as a filter to identify specific constraints and propose solutions.

JT: All those elements are clearly relevant to create inclusive markets, but they are not enough. For those who are very marginalised, the research identified five key entry points or “ladders” to support groups to climb the economic pyramid. We found that at least some of these were necessary in all cases to overcome the type of exclusion I have described. These are: making the most of existing skills or assets, organising collectively, coordinating with others in the market, and engaging employers and others to remove physical and attitudinal barriers. The final entry point, which we called “a leg up”, reflects that for some, social protection and livelihood development support is needed to first get a foot on the ladder before they can pursue opportunities.

ZU: Three of those key entry points were part of Samriddhi: making the most of available assets (e.g. land at roadsides), coordinating with others in the markets – through connections to local service providers, and through collective organisation with a clear vision. I would also emphasise the need, from the start, to have a clear definition of poor and disadvantaged women and men, and systematically ensuring that they were at the centre of different interventions. The project viewed poor and disadvantaged women and men as economic actors, either in their function as farmers, consumers or labourers, but also as members of communities striving for collective improvement of their livelihoods. While Samriddhi also realised that for some of the target groups, livelihood development support was needed – your fifth entry point – I would exercise caution here. The project was very careful not to create dependency or establish parallel structures. A typical example is projects supporting collective action without taking into account if farmers really see the benefits of working in groups, and if such actions will continue after the end of projects – in most cases, unfortunately, they are temporarily used as mechanisms to “deliver activities and services (e.g. training, inputs) rather than as autonomous and sustainable institutions capable of partnership with other development actors.” The support of projects, therefore, needs to be given, as much as possible, based on a vision of “who would do and pay for such support” beyond the project’s lifespan.

JT: The research also highlighted other, context-specific factors that nevertheless represented key enablers. The most important were very intangible factors like strong family and friendship bonds that give people self-esteem and confidence, as well as social or community support network, which rarely feature in typical market systems programmes. Another key area which is perhaps more aligned with market programming is minimising risk and building resilience. After all, markets mean risks, particularly if loans are taken, scarce assets invested or diversity of livelihoods is reduced. Those who are very marginalised are extremely vulnerable to risk.

ZU: Samriddhi recognised that the target groups were not homogeneous, and the degree of inclusion was also determined by social aspects (e.g. mobility of women and thus lack of access to markets, exclusion of land rights and other social-specific patterns of property and business arrangements). The project analysed how key issues of markets were influenced by prevailing social (informal) norms and values regarding roles of poor and disadvantaged women and men. For example, engaging poor and disadvantaged women and men by farmers' and their networks – either as labourers or through providing credits (in kind and cash) – essentially centred on commercial interest. This also had, as observed in many cases from the field, social underpinnings mostly stated as “supporting poor and disadvantaged women and men was also helping the whole community”.

JT: Finally, the research and particularly the fieldwork in Uganda highlighted that market inclusion is not a panacea. For marginalised people, there is a diversity to their livelihoods that are not all about markets. They invest time, for example, in building social capital in the community, caring for family members, and gathering and subsistence food production.

ZU: The experience of Samriddhi and other projects supports the fact that poor and disadvantaged women and men have different levels of vulnerability and coping strategies. It is possible to use principles of market systems development to enhance other livelihood strategies of poor and disadvantaged women and men in addition to production and selling. The problem in most project interventions and research studies is the term “market” is narrowly defined as “buying and selling”. It is true that the approach has mainly emerged from the field of private sector development and a focus on economic poverty reduction. The term market refers to “transactions” or “relations” in a very broad way, which are basic features of human daily interaction and can have various forms.

In part two of the blog post, we will present a joint analysis on what is possible to reaching very marginalised people through market systems development. This analysis will be the result of exchanges which were presented in a webinar hosted by the BEAM Exchange on 10 April 2017.

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