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How to move beyond crude gender targets to genuine empowerment



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All blogs

All MSD programmes recognise the necessity to mainstream gender in their activities. However, too often the collection and analysis of gender-disaggregated data does not lead to informed strategies for effective economic empowerment for women. Here are three rules for genuine gender mainstreaming.

At a recent review of an agriculture-based market systems project, the presenter described how 40 per cent of the population involved in one of their selected value chains was women. Since the programme had an overall goal to ensure women were 15 per cent of all beneficiaries, they expected to easily meet their gender target through working in this market system.

My question was, is this meaningful? With better advance knowledge and analysis, could the programme have set a more ambitious target in relation to women's economic empowerment?

In my experience, the sector-wide assessments which inform programme design still often lack adequate gender-disaggregated data and analysis. In setting gender targets, programmes almost habitually focus on simple metrics such as levels of women's participation, rather than the economic empowerment factors that create real impact. The number of women participating in a market is only one aspect of impact. Real economic empowerment requires a more nuanced metric, and it is difficult to set such targets without better gender-sensitive research on those markets.

To me, it would be obvious that targets for women's involvement and benefits require objective gender-sensitive studies. But I have found that even when such studies are conducted, their recommendations for gender mainstreaming may not be effectively reflected in work plans. Too frequently MSD programmes select markets without looking closely into gender dynamics, and later do not have sufficient information or time when they move towards designing WEE interventions.

In the case of the particular project mentioned above, I asked the presenter why their gender targets were not based on empowerment factors in the selected market system? It was

explained that partnering businesses are usually reluctant to commit to meaningful gender targets - especially because they do not necessarily see any commercial interest in gender mainstreaming.

I feel it is our job as development agents to cultivate business interest in women's economic empowerment. We can tangibly help by properly assessing the market systems of value chains of interest, collecting and analysing gender disaggregated data. Where this reveals that 40 per cent of a target market are women, the business case for mainstreaming gender becomes quite solid - a no-brainer even! But numbers may not always be sufficiently representative for a business case to mainstream gender in a particular value chain activity.

The issue of the lack of robust business cases for mainstreaming gender in many value-chains also came up at a recent gender working group meeting. In this case, I was struck by the lack of communication between implementation, monitoring and evaluation and gender teams. Each seemed to do their work independently and not collaborate. It would be better if M&E or sector teams attended gender working group meetings, so that integrating gendered assessments into workplans becomes the responsibility of all - not an after-thought.

Every so often, gender is only addressed after workplans have already been drafted and are ready for action, so there is hardly room for significant modifications. As a result, projects may adopt separate gender-based interventions, with reluctant private sector partners who have a lot on their plates that they have signed up for.

So here are **a few very simple rules for meaningful gender mainstreaming MSD activities:**

➤ **Collect gender disaggregated data sooner rather than later**

Gender needs to stop being an add-on component. Data should be collected in the timely manner that other sector analyses or assessments are, and shared in a meaningful way across teams. This ensures that gaps in capturing real market scenarios are reduced and opportunities to make adequate systemic change are identified in time in order to roll out interventions.

Guidance is measuring gendered impact already available, as described in [Sonia Jordan and Mollie Liesner's blog](#)

➤ **Information must be turned into knowledge and informed strategy**

Crude gender targets (e.g. 10 per cent inclusion) for economic empowerment will not produce tangible results. Thorough gender-disaggregated studies are needed that consider how the root causes of market system failure are influenced by gender. The results should inform strategies to determine what the targets for gender will be, and reflected in the log-frames with proper indicators for M&E.

➤ **Integrated participation in mainstreaming gender in MSD**

Gender mainstreaming is literally "everybody's job" not only that of the gender team. Thus, the M&E programme team and management must all take responsibility for inclusively identifying, designing and planning gender integration into MSD activities and must actively participate rather than delegating it to an isolated gender team to do. This requires the kind of paradigm-shift explained in [Linda Jones' blog](#).

Making the business case for mainstreaming gender is no harder in principle than convincing private sector partners to adopt systemic change practices that benefit people living in poverty generally. There are proven ways to do so, be it cost-sharing or risk sharing or tailored

technical support. Before we can convince others, we need to be sure of the rationale and be convinced ourselves that we can make gender mainstreaming work in any market system.

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