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Searching for more equitable impact in market systems development programmes



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All blogs

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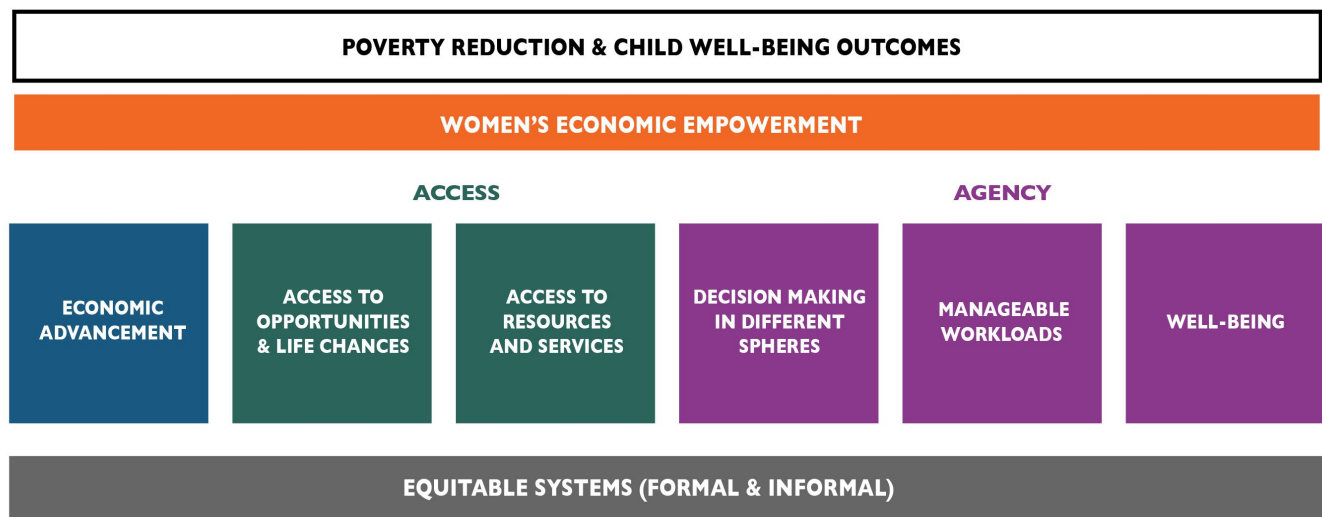
Holly Lard Krueger spoke with Ellie Wong about five practical strategies to realise holistic Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) outcomes based on World Vision's new research findings.

Key for World Vision has been equipping teams to use a gender lens as another analytical skillset to better understand market systems, while leveraging gender transformative interventions to catalyse positive changes in women's agency and community attitudes linked to WEE.

1. Strive for holistic WEE domains and intentional change pathways

According to Ellie, achieving more equitable impact starts with defining a common vision of success. In the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) funded MORINGA Indonesia programme, Ellie observed how the introduction of the WEE Framework¹ (Fig. 1) translated into tangible actions by the team.

Fig. 1: WVA Theory of Change



Working in maize, nutmeg, pilinut, and other crops, the programme had initially paid less attention to agency. The framework and specific indicators were key to helping the programme respond to this gap, by piloting **Gender Inclusive Financial Literacy Training (GIFT)** for couples; an approach that promotes women's decision-making linked to household budgets, manageable workloads, and well-being.

"Intentionality is at the heart of achieving more equitable impact. Equitable impact is about strong design-thinking and the management response to reflect this in your 'big rocks' – the team, partners, interventions and budgets."

Having a clear design process which identifies, defines and prioritises specific target groups such as poorer farmers, women, youth, or people with a disability from the outset is obvious. Yet it is unfortunately often overlooked, says Ellie.

Using World Vision's WEE Framework, when making design decisions, helps staff to prioritise information needs for early-stage research and market analysis. Ellie believes that:

"We need answers to key questions at the beginning. For example, to what extent are we going to focus on value chains and business models where women can benefit (access)? Are we going to invest in intervention pathways to directly address women's agency and social norms (equitable systems)?"

2. Work on value chains where women can benefit from gender-inclusive business models AND gender-transformative programming

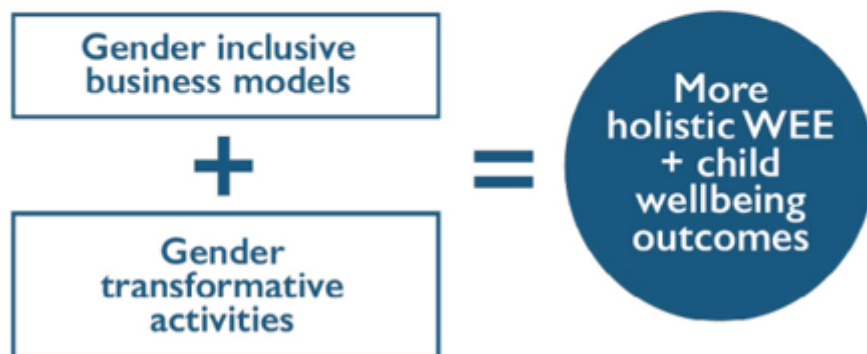
An ANCP funded Meta-Review of WVA's Economic Empowerment portfolio of 11 projects revealed that those with a WEE twin-track design were more likely to achieve more holistic WEE outcomes, including:

- > higher proportion of women participants benefiting from improved incomes and access to new opportunities and resources (economic advancement, access)
- > improved decision-making in the productive and domestic spheres (agency/decision-making)
- > increased satisfaction about time use (agency/manageable workloads)
- > improvements in attitudes towards women's economic participation (equitable systems)

These projects incorporated both gender mainstreaming (gender-inclusive business models) and targeted components (gender-transformative approaches such as GIFT², Equimondo's Mencare³ and World Vision's C-Change models).

Figure 2: World Vision's Hypothesis of Change: inclusive Market Systems Development (iMSD) & WEE

World Vision's Hypothesis of Change: inclusive Market Systems Development (iMSD) & Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)



3. Use a common set of WEE indicators

Creating consensus around a common set of WEE indicators was initially challenging but has enabled WVA to draw out insights to improve current and future programmes.

The meta-review, which was only possible because of WVA's common set of indicators, found that **gender-transformative** activities promoting equitable alternatives through participatory sessions involving questioning of attitudes, critical reflection, and dialogue with households, over time, were key in promoting agency and equitable systems. This is motivating teams change the way they design and monitor programmes. For example, from the Indonesia pilot, GIFT is now being scaled in eight other countries.

4. Commercial incentives AND social norms drive behaviour change in market systems: we need approaches that work at both levels

The importance of commercial incentives for the design of effective interventions in MSD or iMSD programmes is clear. From Ellie's perspective, programme's also need to understand how social norms drive behaviour as part of the approach to addressing the root causes of market dysfunction and promoting sustainability.

"If women are not realising their potential, we have an underperforming system. If a woman's community and family are not supportive of her new income generation activity, WEE outcomes will not be sustainable."

For example, the **Nutrition Sensitive Value Chains for Smallholder farmers** programme worked on a business model centred on the distribution of improved agri-inputs to increase incomes and productivity in Bangladesh. Despite initial reluctance from the private sector, the programme made the business case that women are not only good customers but effective service providers. Given analysis of how social norms were constraining women, a multi-pronged approach was developed to address norms and unequal relations. This has been achieved through the Mencare model and GIFT training for couples, folk songs and engaging religious leaders as allies for WEE.

5. Be specific in your approach to social norm change

Many MSD programmes focus on women's access, working on social norms **indirectly**. The assumption is that by improving access, it may be possible to improve agency. Access can contribute to agency, but in many contexts, agency can be catalysed through gender-transformative activities. Having concrete norm change goals, and practical activities like GIFT and Mencare that includes reflective sessions promoting women's voices in the family vision and budgeting goals, helps demystify agency for staff.

"If we have good evidence of the effectiveness of gender-transformative approaches in addressing social norms, why wouldn't we use every tool in our toolbox to make sure WEE outcomes are sustainable over time?"

This conversation is based on new research from World Vision Australia (WVA) highlighting how their Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) approach has realised women's access and agency outcomes and social norm change.

➤ [Check out the full conversation](#)

¹ See WV's WEE Framework & Program Quality Assurance Standards and WEE Indicators Guidance and Tools and the shorter WEE technical implementation note for field teams.

² See WV's GIFT video on the implementation in the ANCP MORINGA programme, evidence brief and shorter technical note for field teams to adapt and implement GIFT in other countries

³ Developed by Equimundo, this is a gender transformative model to train couples on issues of gender equality. Results from a randomised controlled trial in Rwanda released in 2018 reveal powerful impacts on health and violence outcomes.

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