

Women's economic empowerment through market systems approaches

Pre-Webinar Brief

Linda Jones, March 2016

This brief has been prepared for those who would like to read some background material before the [March 9 BEAM Exchange webinar](#) on women's economic empowerment in market systems. The complete paper (and update of the [M4P WEE Framework](#)) will be published following the webinar.

Purpose of the update

The forthcoming *A Women's Empowerment and Market Systems Framework: concepts, experiences and practical guidance* is intended as a resource for practitioners, policy makers, donors and other stakeholders. It is both an update of the Discussion Paper for a Making Markets Work for the Poor Women's Economic Empowerment Framework (the M4P WEE Framework) for those who utilize the earlier resource, and a standalone paper for others who have more recently ventured into the space. But, this paper goes further than the important work of refining concepts, sharing experiences and offering practical advice; it highlights the paradigm shift that must take place in order for market systems development to fully embed women's empowerment and to create sustainable and equitable systems change.

The original M4P WEE framework

The original document married WEE and M4P in one framework through: unpacking definitions of women's economic empowerment and identifying the elements that are compatible with sustainable economic development; presenting definitions, principles and an approach that are consistent with the basic tenets of market systems development; align women's economic empowerment methods with the facilitation role of market systems programmes; and reinforce the scalability and sustainability of M4P projects while taking women's economic empowerment into consideration. The original M4P WEE framework has been applied in programmes around the world, but an update is now due. The remainder of this introductory section explains the rationale for an updated framework on women's empowerment and market systems (WEAMS) and describes the contents of the paper.

The rationale for a refresh on WEAMS

Since the M4P WEE framework was drafted in 2011 and published early the following year, much has changed in market systems programming, women's empowerment thinking and the larger development field.

First, while the making markets work for the poor (M4P) is a well-established and highly respected approach, there has been a shift to more 'neutral' market systems terminologies, practices and tools.

Second, there has been a growing wealth of global experience and learning on WEAMS in recent years – for example, the Market Development Facility in Fiji, Timor-Leste, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Papua New Guinea, Katalyst and M4C in Bangladesh, ALCP in Georgia, Kenya Market Trust and Financial Sector Deepening Zambia.

Third, around the same time as the M4P WEE framework paper was written, other organisations that are not focused on systems approaches per se were also beginning to explore women's empowerment in a more comprehensive and holistic manner, developing their own frameworks and tools – for example, the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEIAI), UN Foundation Roadmap, and the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW).

Fourth and finally, many donors are now demanding clear targets and results for women's empowerment, associated gender budgeting and ultimately greater gender equality in the economic realm.

Contents of the WEAMS framework paper

The paper first discusses the paradigm shift that needs to take place in organisations for women's empowerment in market systems to become fully integrated into day-to-day work. It then examines and updates the conceptual aspects of the framework, supporting recommendations with recent experiences from the field. Finally, the paper offers practical guidance on implementation using a revised life cycle approach, and supporting it with tools, tips and links to other documents.

The paradigm shift

Most of us know that in order to integrate and empower women in market systems, we have to actively influence market systems change in this direction. And yet many programmes are still falling short of achieving this goal. In cases where programmes do not succeed in integrating women, they may be applying a 'gender neutral' approach and therefore ignoring considerations around gender and women's issues, or they might be adding on women's empowerment and gender activities after general market research, analysis and even intervention design have been completed. The framework (and a recent [BEAM blog](#)) discusses the various arguments that market systems programmes make to justify a less than optimal approach to women's economic empowerment.

Women's empowerment and market systems concepts

The WEAMS framework offers update definitions and concepts, providing experience and practical examples from implementers and donors:

Fitting into the broader women's empowerment dialogue

- Gender equality and women's empowerment: the framework discusses the difference between GE and WE and the implications for market systems programmes
- A three-prong approach to gender mainstreaming: the three prongs first put forward by SDC – integration, targeting and dialogue – that are implemented by such programmes as Katalyst and M4C in Bangladesh

Beyond the five non-negotiable dimensions of empowerment

- The original five dimensions of WEE:
 - i. Income and return on labour
 - ii. Access to opportunities and life chances
 - iii. Access to assets, services, supporting functions
 - iv. Decision making authority including household finances
 - v. Manageable workloads
- Access and agency: a categorisation of women's empowerment dimensions according to availability and power considerations

- Customising WEE dimensions to fit the country and programme context: one size does not fit all, and even the five non-negotiables can be adapted to fit the programme and country context
- Adding in non-economic dimensions: other non-economic dimensions of women's empowerment may be important in a given programme or context such as gender based violence, pervasive cultural attitudes or beliefs that impact women's empowerment, etc.

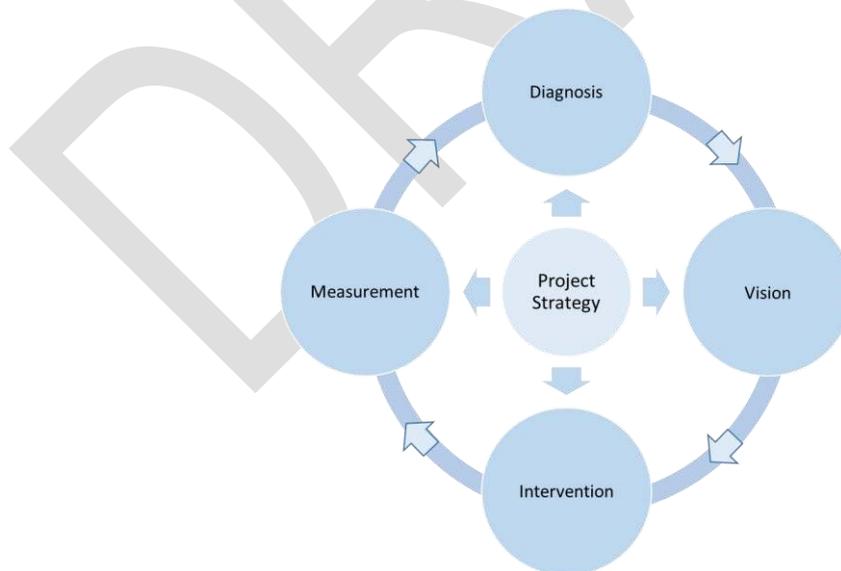
Innovations in monitoring and evaluation

- Measuring systemic change: an examination of MDF's innovation in measuring systems change not just at the market actor level but also for women in the market system
- Indexing and benchmarking of WEE dimensions: a review of Katalyst's groundbreaking index for benchmarking market systems interventions and their impact on women's empowerment.

Practical guidance for a WEAMS framework

This section of the framework document reports on challenges that have been experienced in integrating women's empowerment in market systems programmes, and then provides step-by-step guidance, recommendations and practical tools for realizing successful outcomes. Both sections utilise a project life cycle approach to deconstruct and organise challenges and opportunities, and make tools relevant to work on the ground.

The paper divides the project life cycle into five phases that match the new M4P operational guide. However, as illustrated in the diagram below, the ongoing role that project strategy plays throughout the project life cycle is emphasised by placing it centrally (with implications for the other phases). The outer circles represent the steps that focus practitioner activities as they diagnose sub-sectors, and design, implement and assess interventions.



What's new and upcoming

The WEAMS framework document closes with a look at emerging theory and practice. In the women's empowerment in market systems space, there are exciting developments and discussions to watch out for!