

# Mainstreaming Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Market Systems Development



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Home doubles as a small grocery shop in Bangladesh (© Helvetas/G.M.B. Akash)

This guidance sheet is one of a series written to support SDC staff in ensuring that gender issues are taken into account transversally in different thematic domains – in this case, focusing on market systems development (MSD). It outlines key gender issues regarding women's economic empowerment in MSD and how these can be integrated in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation strategies and project interventions. Some existing familiarity with MSD terminology is assumed.

## Key issues

- A. What motivates women?** It is crucial for Market Systems Development (MSD) projects to adopt a gender lens during their market analysis. In particular, they need to analyse the incentives for women to be engaged in the market and how these incentives can be met – as well as the constraints that they face. The demands of unpaid care, for example, may be a constraint that must be addressed. Such considerations will affect the selection of market systems, the systemic change objectives, and the choice of partners.
- B. Are men on board?** While men are not the primary focus when mainstreaming WEE, the impact on them also has to be considered. Often women are unable to participate in market systems as their husbands are afraid that by so

doing, they will bring shame on the family and/or start questioning his role as “household head”. Wherever this is a possible perception, WEE interventions should pro-actively seek men's support; without this, there is a risk of triggering domestic violence.

- C. What is the business case for market players to change?** Market players have an essential role to contribute to WEE, e.g. by employing women, providing adequate services to women, etc. When partnering with these market players, it is important to consider their interest (“business case”) to make the necessary changes to be inclusive. WEE interventions should therefore be based on a sound business case, which is promoted by projects in a facilitative manner.

# 1. Definitions of MSD and WEE

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*“Gender equality is smart economics”* World Bank, 2011

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The **Market Systems Development (MSD)** approach aims to achieve sustainable benefits such as income and employment for poor women and men at a large scale. The approach follows the project cycle management and is based on the basic premise that the target groups do not exist in isolation, but are part of a wider system (illustrated by figure 1). Market system change entails altering the performance of supporting functions and rules in a way that ultimately improves the situation of poor women and men in the market system. Also known as Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P), the approach focuses on stimulating a change in the behaviour of market players – public and private, formal and informal – so that they are better able and motivated to perform important market functions effectively.

WEE is defined by the following elements:

- Economic advancement – increased income and return on labour
- Access to opportunities and life chances such as skills training and job openings
- Access to assets, services and support needed to advance economically
- Economic decision-making capability and voice in different spheres, including household finances
- Manageable workloads, taking into account unpaid care demands.

The term **Women’s Empowerment and Market Systems (WEAMS)** is also used, underlining the mainstreaming aspect of WEE in MSD. The reasoning for both WEE and WEAMS follow the same logic.

It is clear that WEE is only one aspect of greater gender equality. This guidance sheet focusses on this aspect because it fits best within the scope of MSD projects in the e+i domain. While men are not the primary focus when mainstreaming WEE, the impact on them also has to be considered; this applies particularly with reference to decision-making power.

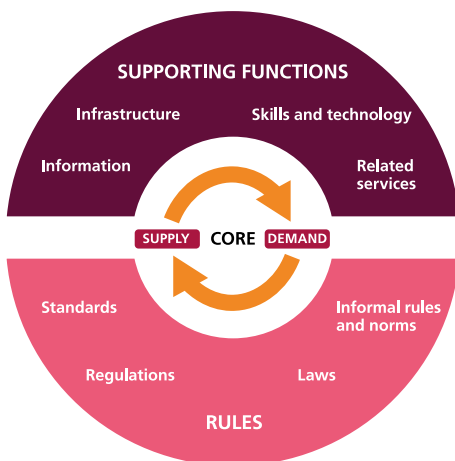


Figure 1: Market System Diagram.  
Adapted from Springfield Centre (2014)

## 2. Setting the strategic framework

The strategic framework is the basic theory of change underlying an MSD project. When projects define their strategic framework, **WEE objectives need to be integrated explicitly** from the start by considering the related key gender questions for each step and each level (see figure 2).

Based on the poverty reduction and the

growth and access objectives, projects need to **select market systems** (sectors, value chains) that have potential to produce the expected benefits for poor women. In this selection process (e.g. through a scoring matrix comparing different potential market systems), projects are advised to include criteria concerning WEE explicitly.

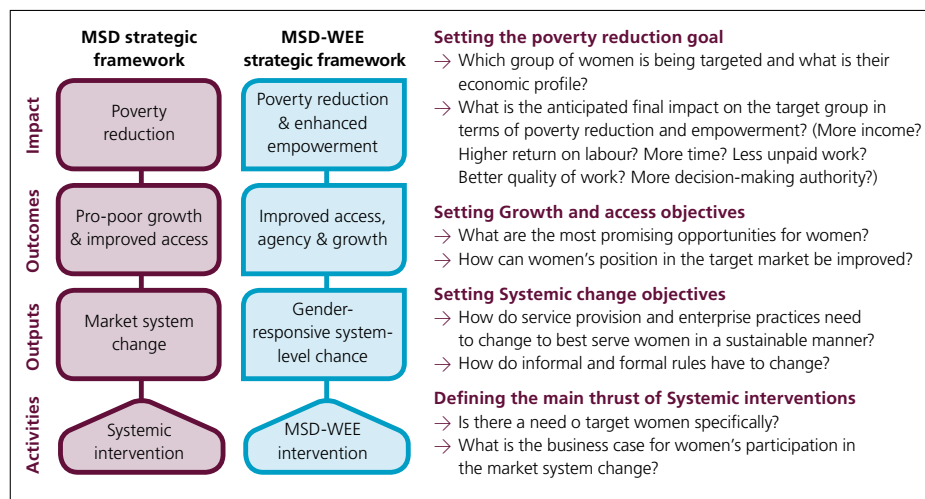


Figure 2: MSD-WEE strategic framework. Adapted from DCED (2014) and Coffey (2012).

### Value chain selection in the Samriddhi project, Bangladesh

Value chains considered in Bangladesh to be socially appropriate for women are generally those that

- are located close to, or at least not far from, home
- require particular dexterity or patience (perceived in Bangladesh to be feminine traits) and/or
- include an aspect of nurturing/care work – which relates to women's reproductive role.

Thus of the value chains supported by Samriddhi, it was decided to focus on and build the engagement of women in the following – which may be broadly divided into two types:

- those already dominated by women: cotton crafts, medicinal herbs, traditional poultry, ducks and goats;
- those in which women have some involvement, and there is potential for women and men to work together: milk production, beef-fattening, and fruit and vegetable production.

Through making the increase in women clients an explicit project focus, the project was able to make a dramatic change and by March 2013, 54% of all project beneficiaries were women.

There is a certain risk that successful women-dominated value chains are taken over by men, with women being pushed out once they become more profitable. Projects

have to be sensitive to this point and carefully analyse changes in roles of men and women in the selected value chain over the course of the project.

### 3. Market system analysis

When undertaking market systems analysis, projects need to adopt a gender lens, addressing specific questions regarding WEE. The guiding questions presented in table below follow the logic of the diagnostic process of MSD. They also fit with

the three dimensions of SDC's Gender Analytical Framework: gender division of labour and related gender roles and (practical and strategic) needs; access to and control over resources; participation and leadership.

Aspect of the market system	Guiding questions
<b>Core transaction</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ What is the male/female division of labour in the selected market system?</li> <li>→ What constraints do women face in core market system exchanges as consumers/providers?</li> <li>→ What are the primary incentives motivating women to be engaged in the market?</li> <li>→ How can these needs and incentives be met?</li> <li>→ How do women currently fit into the overall market system, what are the points of leverage that would make the market work better for them?</li> </ul>
<b>Supporting functions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ What constraints do women face in terms of access to supporting functions (services, infrastructure, and finance)?</li> <li>→ What are women's expressed needs in terms of their other roles that impact on their involvement in the market?</li> <li>→ What is the "competitive advantage" of women (business case) in relation to the analysed supporting functions?</li> </ul>
<b>Rules and Norms</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ What are women's constraints that are due to rules (formal and informal) in the specific socio-cultural context?</li> <li>→ What is the "competitive advantage" of women (business case) in relation to the analysed rules?</li> <li>→ What resistance may be expected at household, community and wider level to women's greater involvement in the market, in particular resistance caused by perceptions of men?</li> <li>→ What are the risks that women – or men – may be harmed? What is the risk for gender-based violence as a results of women's greater involvement in the market?</li> </ul>

Table 1: Guiding questions in market systems analysis. Adapted from Coffey (2012) and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (2013)

Rigorous gender analyses may identify constraints rooted in women's non-productive roles (i.e. strategic needs, such as access to decision making, help with caring for children or the elderly or housekeeping). The demands of unpaid care work often represent one of the major constraints to women's greater engagement in markets. A recent review of this topic identified four main ways to address unpaid care in the context of WEE:

→ Adapting programme delivery to take unpaid care work into account – for example, holding meetings at times of day that are more convenient to women; providing product collection centres not far from the home; or promoting home-based industries;

→ Designing interventions to address specific constraints – such as encouraging child care centres at factories or training institutions; or promoting fuel-efficient stoves to reduce time spent in fuelwood collection;

→ Focusing on unpaid care as a specific market sector – considering services such as child care or meal provision as market systems themselves.

→ Reducing rural women's domestic workload through labour-saving technologies and practices (s. IFAD toolkit 2016). Monitoring changes in time use for domestic chores can provide important information regarding women's increased productivity and economic empowerment.

## Market system analysis in M4C

The SDC-supported project M4C (Making Markets Work for the Jamuna, Padma and Teesta Chars) in Bangladesh integrates gender concerns throughout its market research, rather than conducting gender analysis and market analysis separately. In this way the team has not only produced more project-relevant gender information, but has also gained “ownership” around promoting women’s economic empowerment. For example, in initial gender-responsive market research the team examined:

**1. Core market systems:** gender roles and responsibilities in each sub-sector,

**2. Supporting functions:** gender-based access and control over resources and services

**3. Rules:** gender-friendly policies, social/community acceptance of women in various jobs, and women’s decision-making abilities and time-use.

The M4C team found that certain agricultural sub-sectors such as chili, maize and jute are male dominated, yet women are engaged in production activities. The team identified several ways to improve the position of women and men within selected value chains by mapping out the entry

points of women, and identifying key constraints and opportunities for both men and women. They then selected gender-related activities in the chili, maize and jute sub-sectors. The team also found that women on the mainland were already working as paid labourers in the handicraft sub-sector, but not on the chars. This type of paid labour was found to be more socially acceptable (by both women and men) than agricultural work. Thus, the team looked for ways to promote skills development and market linkages through handicraft companies, creating new employment opportunities for women on the chars.



Women in Mali gather under a shady tree to sell their farm products  
(© Helvetas/Fatoumata Diabate)

## 4. Gender-responsive interventions in MSD

The gendered market system analysis will certainly reveal many constraints. Projects are not supposed to work on all constraints, but to **prioritise and focus** on those that constitute underlying causes. Projects then plan and implement interventions that are in line with the WEE strategic

framework; hence, aiming at a sustainable market system change that will produce the growth, access and agency objectives which contribute to the poverty reduction goal. From a WEE perspective, there are five **key considerations in intervention planning and implementation**:

### 4.1. Gender-sensitive (mainstreamed) and gender-specific (targeted) interventions

Depending on the identified constraints, projects decide if the intervention is gender-sensitive or gender-specific. In the first case, the expected benefits in terms of WEE are likely to be reached by implementing an intervention aiming at the tar-

get group in general. In the second case, women are targeted specifically in order to reach the objectives. These two choices should however not be considered mutually exclusive. Most projects include both types of interventions.

### Women targeted and gender mainstreamed interventions in ALCP

The SDC-supported Alliances Lesser Caucasus Programme (ALCP) in Georgia, like the M4C project, integrated gender into its market research. The team found that addressing women's economic empowerment entailed certain interventions focusing solely on women, while other interventions

only required specific activities targeting women. For example, women in Georgia have limited access to public decision-making opportunities, so the team implemented a women targeted intervention to enhance their participation in public fora. This ultimately resulted in increased muni-

cipal budgets for kindergartens which in turn provided women with more time for productive work such as looking after small livestock. All other interventions specifically target both men and women (i.e. gender is mainstreamed).



A vegetable shop provides a valued source of income for a mother and daughter in Bangladesh  
(© Helvetas/G.M.B. Akash)

## 4.2. Making a business case for women

It is important to make a “business case” for interventions that contribute to WEE. Market players (and programme partners) need clear incentives (these may be commercial, social or both) if they are to employ or provide services to women, buy from women producers, or provide inputs to them. As producers and consumers, women are a large potential market for buyers/service providers and this underpins the argument of many business cases.

As employees, the business case for companies to employ women include the following arguments:

- Innovation: It is a fact that diversity in teams leads to greater creativity and innovation. Within companies themselves, there is extensive evidence from business analysis models that mixed gender teams tend to be more innovative and successful than teams of a single gender.
- Skill sets: often women are particularly good at communication skills and languages, accountancy, book-keeping, attention to detail in general, and care functions. This is not to say that all women are good at the above, nor that all men perform less well in them – but that these are tendencies.
- Understanding the customer base: In many cases, it is women who take decisions over product purchase – particularly regarding products used in the home. Companies are thus in a better position to understand their customers if they include women in their staff, and are likely to come up with more effective marketing strategies and/or more appropriate products.
- Reliability and loyalty: In some cases, women are considered more reliable employees than men.

## 4.3. Considering the gender-responsiveness of partners

MSD projects select their partners based on their will (motivation) and skill (capacity) to contribute to a desired systemic change. From a WEE perspective, partners should be specifically screened at the time of selection for their awareness of gender issues, their demonstrated willingness to address them in their own organisation, and their competence in implementing a gender-responsive approach. This initial screening may even form part of the choice of sector,

as if gender-competent potential partners are available for one sector but another, this could “tip the balance” in the choice. Possible indicators for gender-responsiveness include gender composition of board/management committee, activities demonstrating ability to work effectively and equally with women, men and socially disadvantaged individuals, capacity to demonstrate sex-disaggregated data collection and M&E systems.

### Partner selection and business case in RLDP sunflower sector contract farming intervention

Under the SDC-supported Rural Livelihoods Development Programme (RLDP) in Tanzania, partners were not specifically selected with regard to their gender competences. However, it was found that the partners displayed considerable differences in this

regard. Thus for example, the RLDP team noted that some of the oil processing companies in the sunflower sector had developed a gender policy, had targets for the number of women they employed, and had a mixed gender management board. Other compa-

nies did not. Indeed, some of the companies positively sought to employ women for social reasons, and were even willing to take further steps. There was thus scope to build on existing gender awareness.



A woman contract farmer in Tanzania assesses the sunflower harvest (© Helvetas/Christian Bobst)

#### 4.4. Maintaining a facilitative role

Given that the business case for WEE is not always obvious to market actors, there is a risk that projects revert to traditional implementation just “to make things happen” or to “show that it works”. The key to success and sustainability in the long run remains, however, for projects not to take on the role

of market actors. What is often required is more intensive and longer facilitation: more frequent and intensive relations with market actors, a higher financial contribution, more research, more investment in developing a business model, more networking and consensus building.

#### 4.5. Ensuring potential for up-scaling

Scale is a defining characteristic of market systems programmes and a critical concern for generating systemic change that lasts. Achieving scale of WEE impact is challenging: market actors that respond to the business case for reaching more women

are often the exception rather than the rule and offer limited scale and/or crowding-in potential. Strategies for taking intervention results to scale need to be established from the outset for all interventions, including those supporting WEE.

## 5. Important aspects for monitoring & evaluation

In order to assess the changes happen as a result of projects’ interventions, the following aspects are key to consider in the M&E system all along the project cycle.

- Develop intervention results chains that include expected results in terms of WEE explicitly
- Ensure inclusion of indicators specific to WEE, establish sex-disaggregated baseline and set targets (see also definition of WEE under section 1).
- Indicators should also cover unintended results where such risks were identified during the analysis (e.g. risk that women will be harmed due to increased gender-based violence).
- Use gender-sensitive research methods to measure changes in terms of WEE along the results chains
- Ensure that findings on WEE are fed back into intervention design through gender-sensitive processes and staff job descriptions



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