



Gender-Aware Programs and Women's Roles in Agricultural Value Chains in Liberia



Ministry of Gender and Development, Government of Liberia
PREM Gender and Development Group, World Bank

The success and sustainability of Liberia's economic recovery require the full engagement of all key players in the rural economy—especially women. Women comprise over half of the agriculture labor force, the sector that employs most of the population, predominantly in smallholder agriculture, and about two-thirds of the labor force in trade and commerce. They are reported to produce over half of the output in food crops. Their access to cash crops is, however, limited. Access to resources, technology, and market opportunities is generally unfavorable to women farmers. Policies and programs designed to revitalize the rural economy, including its agricultural production, processing, and marketing functions, should take into account the role of women and women's groups. This summary provides policy advice on efforts to mainstream gender awareness and effectiveness in policies, programs, and projects in agricultural value chains. For more details, see *LIBERIA—Gender-Aware Programs and Women's Roles in Agricultural Value Chains: A Policy Memorandum*.

Agricultural Value Chains Face Enormous Challenges in General, but Paying Attention to Women's Constraints is Particularly Important

Generally, agriculture-related value chains in Liberia are affected by multiple constraints that apply to both women and men. Because of their productive and reproductive roles in the household, community, and the broader economy, however, these constraints are particularly heavy for women.

The constraints women in agricultural production face affect household food and nutrition security, and their ability to sustainably generate income. Several constraints to growth in agricultural

production, particularly among women, can be highlighted and must be addressed.

- Lack of access to agricultural production inputs and technology limits farmers' ability to increase crop productivity.
- Women have less access than men to land, control over it, and land tenure security, resulting in less ability to invest in agriculture and expand beyond subsistence level.
- Lack of readily available household labor and inability to hire prevent farmers from expanding beyond subsistence level in food crops and venturing into cash crops, which are typically more demanding.
- Provision of extension services to farmers is extremely limited because of an aging, outdated, and underfunded extension system with very poor coverage and limited ability to effectively reach farmers. The prevalence of high illiteracy rates among women makes them difficult to reach through conventional communication channels.
- The availability of finance to agricultural producers is extremely limited.

Liberia's rural women make great contributions to agricultural value chains—but face major constraints that must be overcome if benefits for them are to be maximized.

A limitation that results from these constraints is insufficient access to profitable cash crops. This prevents farmers from diversifying and limits their prospects for increasing their cash income. This is in turn a result of (a) a rigid, gender-based division of labor in crop production that restrains women from specializing in and controlling food crops, and

(b) the vertically coordinated institutional system for growing many cash crops, particularly tree crops—to which women have limited access.

Given these constraints, in addition to the substantial work burden that women face due to economic and domestic responsibilities, investments to increase farm-level productivity can help increase women's overall economic contribution and maximize household welfare.

Women face significant constraints to accessing markets and to value adding opportunities. Though women are major food producers, low agriculture sector productivity overall means surpluses—critical for sustained participation in food markets—are highly unlikely. Additional constraints specific to the post-harvest period also should be noted.

- Poor marketing infrastructure—roads, storage facilities, and market structures — makes it difficult for farmers to sell their products in distant markets, to store them for long periods to take advantage of higher prices in the hungry season, or simply to retain their production for food security or as a consumption-smoothing strategy.
- Lack of information on market opportunities and price levels in various markets limits transparency, prevents competition among smallholders, and limits the degree of market integration.
- Lack of marketing support services, finance, and business training for women farmers impedes expansion and market orientation. This is increasingly important as food systems evolve and more stringent quality standards are required in value chains.
- Women farmers lack access to value-adding opportunities and technologies—processing, packaging, storage, transportation—and to market information and opportunities. Improving access will be important in relieving pressures on labor allocation in the household, and in promoting value addition and income diversification. This is important for rice and cassava,

Liberia's major crops, but opportunities need to be explored in other crop chains as well.

Government Interventions Need to Focus on Addressing Women's Key Constraints, and on Creating Diverse Opportunities that are Sustainable Over the Long Term

The government of Liberia recognizes the importance of gender issues in agriculture and aims to effectively address the challenges in the context of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Several current initiatives are in place to address gender issues in agriculture and rural development, but efforts need to be strengthened. Most projects do not have an explicit gender mainstreaming strategy.¹ This note proposes five principles, and recommends specific actions to support interventions in production, processing, and marketing.

The government of Liberia is gender-aware, but more needs to be put into practice to achieve results that empower women in agricultural value chains.

Five Principles to Support Interventions

1. *Interventions need to be demand-driven and engage the private sector.* As the country transitions from conflict to development, it is important to ensure that women's interests are taken into account and can be met—both in the near future and over the long term. Equally, it is crucial to strengthen the participation of private sector firms; larger farms and producers, for example, can subcontract work to women farmers. All programs must be clearly sustainable and have a workable exit strategy.
2. *Promote crop and income diversification.* To gain the ability to sustain food and nutrition

1. One important exception is the Joint Program on Food Security and Nutrition (JP-FSN).

security and raise crop incomes, it is important that rural households grow multiple crops and ensure that productivity gains in the farm are achieved. While some crops will contribute to achieving food and nutrition security, others need to be included to support women farmers' market orientation and processing capabilities for sustainable income generation.

3. Look for viable opportunities in tree crop sectors.

It is important to develop a better understanding of the barriers to access to contract farming and to identify ways to increase women's profitable participation. As a way to preserve household food security, contract farming arrangements need to include support to participating farmers for food crop production through technology packages, including seeds and chemical inputs, where appropriate.

4. Target capacity building for women through farmer-based organizations (FBOs), with potential to spill benefits over to individuals. While joint production and direct support to women's groups are crucial, knowledge transmission that allows individuals to increase their productivity needs to be encouraged. For interventions aimed at adding value through processing, business linkages with male farmers should be encouraged as a way to ensure that scale in processing is achieved and sustained.

5. Identify and promote strategies for scaling up.

The relevance of some interventions is unquestionable on economic grounds, for example, the provision of seeds and tools and the expansion of extension coverage. Practical ways need to be found for quick and sustainable scaling up. For other interventions, such as those that simultaneously cover various nodes of the value chain, an assessment needs to be done to issue recommendations on the best ways to scale up.

Specific Recommendations to Support Interventions

Support Women as Agricultural Producers. In supporting women farmers to improve their productivity and increase production levels, four areas of intervention need to be prioritized.

1. *Promoting and sustaining well-functioning seed production and distribution systems.* These must recognize the roles of women, and accommodate their weaknesses and their strengths, if there is to be a successful agriculture and food security support strategy at the current stage of agricultural development.

2. *For long-term, sustained income growth for women, it will be important to increase women's access to cash crops,* including outgrower schemes, by encouraging private sector partnerships and policy incentives, and by addressing key constraints to access and performance.

3. *Gender-aware extension is the key vehicle through which the role of women in agriculture can be transformed, with positive impacts on, access to, and performance in profitable opportunities.* Extension interventions need to focus on the following key issues.

- Consider the roles of women as economic agents who operate in productive and commercial areas, acknowledging their current and potential roles in the rural economy.
- Adjust extension packages to reflect women's specific needs and use methods of delivery that fit those needs.
- Farmer Field Schools (FFS) should continue to be the cornerstone of successful gender-aware extension delivery.
- Strengthen women's participation and representation in FBOs and make sure women farmers are increasingly represented in instructional and decision-making roles and as first-line extension agents.

- Provide sustainable knowledge dissemination through the use of farmer trainers and informal communication through peer farmers.

4. *Improving women's access to, ownership of, and control over, land will potentially contribute to greater investments in the land and increased productivity and household welfare.* Women have a disadvantage in access to, ownership of, and control over, land resources. From what is known at this point, some practical actions can be recommended. First, there is a need to better inform the rural population about current laws and new benefits added to land legislation. Second, some of the impediments to planting larger areas have to do with lack of labor in the household and limited access to technology. These indicate that efforts to reduce the burden of household chores by improving access to water and firewood, and improving access to productivity-enhancing technologies are necessary to improve women's productive use of larger plots of land.

Support Women's Access to, and Increased Efficiency in, Value Addition. Taking advantage of opportunities to participate in value chains through value-adding strategies is an important way to ensure that women farmers benefit from economic growth. Opportunities and benefits from value addition may be expanded by:

1. *Upgrading women's roles in value chains to include processing and marketing roles that are not currently a major strength for women in those chains.* In supporting expansion of women's roles, it is important to bear in mind the multiple constraints or limitations that prevented them from participating in the first place.

Empowering women and women's groups with both knowledge and access—to resources, information, and opportunities—is necessary for successful interventions.

Support should include access to technology post-harvesting, including storage, handling, and market linkages.

2. *Developing new products, becoming active members of new value chains, or participating in market niches for differentiated products in existing value chains.* Opportunities of this sort need to be explored. A potentially viable option lies with cassava, from which

a wide range of differentiated products can be produced, and markets for them found. Opportunities for other agricultural products need to be explored.

3. *Increasing efficiency in established interactions in the value chains, through facilitation of access to technologies, training, and markets.* Such efficiency can be gained by financing the initial stages of value addition, when affordability is a factor. Organizational and marketing capacity also may be needed that may require creating groups and training programs to address key issues. Such efforts should include facilitating linkages among farmers' groups and wholesalers and processors.

4. *Addressing issues on infrastructure, storage technology, market information and access to finance.* More specifically, there are three areas to be tackled.

- Developing marketing infrastructure and disseminating storage technology.
- Developing market information in a gender-sensitive way to allow women farmers to take full advantage of emerging and growing opportunities.
- Ensuring sustainability by providing access to finance along with (or following) the resolution of more fundamental constraints.

Support the Development of Farmer-Based Organizations. Significant efforts are being made to support women's groups in Liberia. Sustainable support requires providing the necessary technical support while promoting a business- and market-oriented culture. Efforts need to take advantage of existing structures and address gender-specific needs.

Success in Interventions will Require Well-Defined Institutional Roles, Improved Technical and Program Implementation Capacity, and Effective Coordination

These elements will be crucial in order to sustainably maximize the ability to support interventions that address gender issues in agricultural and rural development programs and policies.

Clear institutional vision, roles, and mandates. A clear vision, well-defined roles for individual institutions, and avoiding duplication of effort are important efficiency requirements. Institutional roles must be well defined for each intervention aimed at supporting women. The same clarity is also required of those responsible for generating and sharing data and disseminating information.

The Ministry of Agriculture (MOA), as the main implementing agency, plays a central role in this framework of institutions. Its duties include implementing programs on the ground and compiling and maintaining relevant sector information necessary for the overall evaluation of sector performance, including intra-sector budget allocations relevant to gender-aware benefit incidence analysis.

MOA's Planning and M&E, statistics unit, should bear primary responsibility for the design of sector surveys. A key role in data collection is played by the Liberian Institute of Statistics and Geo Information Services (LISGIS), the official government data collection agency.

The Ministry of Gender and Development (MOGD) has an important advisory and coordination role to play in the agriculture sector issues relating to women's empowerment. Given the presence of technical agriculture organizations, the question of MOGD's appropriate role in this technical realm becomes relevant. In this context, and for overall efficiency, the MOGD should not play an implementation role per se. Instead, it should focus on coordinating and advising to ensure that proposed efforts are gender-sensitive and that sufficient institutional gender analysis and programming capacity exist.

The Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs (MPEA) has a key role in the aggregation of data for monitoring the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), including for strategic activities in agriculture and rural development. MPEA also plays a key coordinating role in ensuring consistency across sector policies and programs.

Emphasis is needed on technical and implementation capacity.

Capacity building in the areas of policy, programming, and monitoring and evaluation of gender issues in agriculture and rural development initiatives is necessary to encourage the development of skills required for institutional mandates and roles. Capacity-building efforts need to focus on enhancing the implementation of programs that are currently planned, as well as on programs designed to meet PRS-specific targets. The MOGD and MOA should be the primary targets of these efforts, particularly in the areas outlined below.

The MOGD should develop skills to guide overall policy dialogue, coordinate the integration of gender into agriculture and rural development programs, and ensure that gender-disaggregated Monitoring and Evaluation is adequately integrated in programs. Emphasis needs to be put on capacity

Implementing institutions must work in a coordinated fashion to avoid duplication of efforts.

at the central level to ensure effective interaction and proactivity with other relevant institutions. At the decentralized level, MOGD should ensure that County Gender Officers understand the programmatic aspects of the links between gender and agriculture.

The MOA needs strong capacity in research and extension, and in successfully designing, implementing, and monitoring gender-sensitive programs. These are needed at both central and decentralized levels. There are two areas to be targeted. First, the Planning and M&E Department should contribute to the integration of gender issues in the agriculture sector development strategy, and ensure quality gender-disaggregated data collection and analysis. As the PRS and the Liberia Food and Agriculture Policy Strategy (FAPS) already incorporate gender considerations, MOA needs to be staffed with personnel capable of pushing forward that agenda in these programs. This capacity should permit coherent development of an M&E system that includes consistent and effective collection of gender-disaggregated data over time through agricultural surveys and targeted gender analysis of gender issues in the sector. Second, the Central Agricultural Research Institute (CARI) and the Agricultural Extension Service also need to build gender-aware capacity to better identify and disseminate technologies that address gender-relevant constraints. In the process of rebuilding its research and extension capabilities, it should incorporate gender considerations, ranging from the best source of trainers and mix of trainees to the content of programs that include gender-sensitive targeting at the decentralized level.

Sustained Monitoring and Evaluation—continued data collection, analysis, and reporting—will guide programs to success.

Improved coordination and information sharing among relevant institutions. Given the multiplicity of institutions at both central and local levels—involved in all stages of program design, implementation and evaluation, data collection, and information dissemination—institutional coordination is needed, especially to ensure efficient delivery of services. It will be important that appropriate coordination mechanisms are agreed for each intervention. Among the key issues to be considered are institutional leadership roles and information-sharing mechanisms. These will avoid duplication of efforts and lead to effective delivery.

Improved Gender-Aware Data Collection is Key for Evidence-Based Policy Design, Implementation, Monitoring, and Evaluation

Creating, monitoring, and evaluating effective gender-aware policies and programs depend on data being available at different levels. Relevant data can be produced for specific projects that aim to track specific monitoring indicators. This (and all) data need to be sustainably generated consistent and congruent with the national statistical system's broader data collection activities. These systems typically generate indicators to be tracked over time and are usually representative at both sub-national or national levels.

In Liberia, there are significant gaps in the availability of gender-disaggregated data. The most relevant issues requiring measurement, and where gender-disaggregated data are missing or inadequate, include:

- Access to land and land tenure security,
- Access to formal and informal finance,
- Access to, and use of, extension services and market information,
- Access to agricultural tools and use of agricultural and agroprocessing technologies,

- Individual access to and ownership of information and communication technologies,
- Labor-force participation and participation in agricultural and nonagricultural wage labor,
- Gender division of labor between food and cash crops,
- Individual decision making in terms of crop choice, technology adoption, and cash spending,
- Time use by agricultural activity, and
- Intra-household resource allocation.

It should be highlighted that the lack of data on use of publicly provided or subsidized services constrains the ability to conduct gender-disaggregated benefit incidence analysis of agriculture sector

spending. Therefore, the efficacy and cost-efficiency of such spending cannot be accurately determined.

Most of the data needed for gender-aware sector policy can be collected in agricultural and rural surveys. Opportunities must be found to gather relevant complementary data. The institutions responsible for surveys, LISGIS, MOA, MOGD, and others, must work together to ensure relevant gender issues in data collection and subsequent analytical efforts are integrated. In addition, meaningful and comprehensive gender analysis of the rural economy requires that agricultural and rural surveys use multi-level, multi-sector, and multi-period data collection approaches.

This document was prepared by Rui Benfica, Economist, PREM Gender and Development Group, World Bank; A. Waafas Ofosu-Amaah, Senior Gender Specialist, PREM Gender and Development Group, World Bank; and Andrew Tehmeh, Senior Policy Advisor, Ministry of Gender and Development, Government of Liberia.

