

Engendering benefits for all

Gender inequalities affect the ways in which value chains operate at all levels. Promoting gender justice can result in a 'quadruple win-win', benefiting women, men and enterprises throughout the chain, as well as national economies.

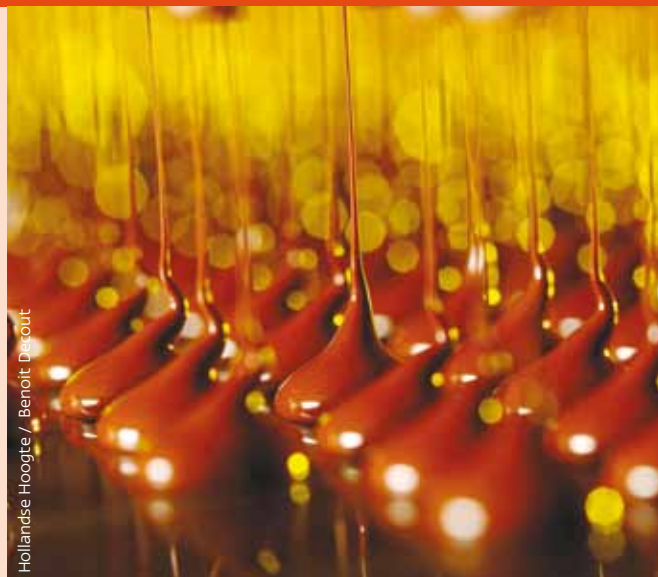
Women are important as producers and workers in most value chains, supplying national and international markets with both traditional and high-value products such as textiles, coffee and cocoa. Yet there is evidence that women are often excluded from the more profitable parts of agricultural and manufacturing chains.

Women-owned businesses face many more constraints than those run by men, and have more limited access to financial and other services. In multinational manufacturing and agricultural chains, even where enterprises are governed by ethical codes, there is often a division of labour based on gender stereotypes. Permanent and full-time work may be reserved for men, and women's work is arbitrarily assumed to be of lower value. For commodities like coffee and cocoa, women often do most of the cultivation. But because the land usually belongs to their husbands, women are not eligible to join cooperatives or receive credit, and are not targeted in technical training.

Fair trade and ethical codes of conduct generally only cover permanent workers, excluding the majority of women who are either part-time/casual workers or unpaid family workers. The Common Code for the Coffee Community (2004), for example, does mention gender equity, but does not carry this through to a commitment to gender equality in access to services or support changes at the household level.

Value chain interventions may actually increase such disparities. Recent research by the World Bank, IFPRI and others, shows that gender inequalities are a key constraint on economic growth and a major cause of poverty. Value chain interventions aim to contribute to poverty reduction by making sure that workers and small producers are the main beneficiaries of the upgrading. But most of the interventions continue to ignore gender issues. As a result, gender inequalities actually increase, which further contributes to the high gender disparities on all human development indicators.

For instance, when chain interventions introduce organic cultivation, this often increases women's labour more than that of men, but it does not necessarily increase women's



Production line in a chocolate factory.

control of income. Their incomes may even fall as women, already overworked, are unable to reduce the time they spend growing food, and so spend less time on their own economic activities. Low incomes, lack of control over incomes and gender discrimination in access to credit and training reinforce a cycle whereby women farmers are unable to invest in their crops or buy more fertile land, leading to lower yields and inefficiency in production.

Promoting women's brands

Many value chain analyses recommend setting up women's cooperatives in economic activities dominated by women. Evidence shows that these are only likely to succeed if women's property rights and training are paid due attention. Where this is done, it is possible to set up cooperatives, or specific women's brands in new or even male-dominated crops, in order to establish women as effective and competitive producers in their own right.

One successful example, from Peru, is *Cafe Femenino*, a women's coffee brand that was conceived in response to the negligible presence of women in coffee producer cooperatives despite their prominent role in production. The programme pays the women directly, significantly increasing their control over household incomes. By 2008, over 1000 women were involved in developing and producing quality coffee. The venture has boosted their confidence and increased their bargaining strength with more powerful actors in the chain, including banks and traders. This then has a spin-off effect in changing market perceptions and conditions for other women both locally and nationally.


Not all women's cooperatives have been so successful, however. Many projects have been very maternalistic, >

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attempting to shelter women from the market rather than increase their integration by changing market structures. Other women's cooperatives have proved unsustainable, either due to their lack of attention to developing women's independent entrepreneurial capacities, or because men often take over as soon as they become profitable.

This shows that a major problem of women's subordinate role in value chains lies in the entrenched gender inequalities at community and household levels. Setting up separate women's cooperatives can therefore only ever be part of a solution. In some chains a better strategy may be to address market constraints directly through policy change, and to build up women's individual abilities to engage in the market, developing their own forms of collaboration as they go along.

Addressing underlying inequalities

Value chain interventions will have limited success unless they address the underlying inequalities and discrimination that cause women's, and poor men's, lack of negotiating power and vulnerability within value chains. It is therefore increasingly argued that gender mainstreaming is needed at a number of interlinked levels, all of which directly affect the effectiveness of value chain development. 

- *Household and community*: to address gender inequalities in terms of power and access to resources, including rights to land and other assets, incomes, division of labour, violence and social constraints on women's mobility.
- *Markets*: to remove gender discrimination in access to inputs, land, employment and the ability to trade freely and participate in management of markets.
- *Policy level*: to reinforce all of the above through legislation backed by legal and regulatory systems, including for cooperatives, property, labour rights, gender-based violence, as well as improved social support through both market-based and public services, and taxation.
- *Institutional level*: to integrate gender analysis into all value chain analysis, to remove gender discrimination in access to financial services (enabling women to graduate from small savings and loans) and training, to integrate gender issues into services for both women and men, and to increase women's meaningful participation in economic decision making and planning at all levels.

It is frequently assumed that men are opposed to gender equity, but this is by no means always the case. Women's empowerment and gender equity can result in a win-win for both, as is evident from experience with the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), a participatory methodology used with 1500 coffee producers in western Uganda. The use of this methodology catalyzed a process of community-led change in which women and men developed their visions of a happy future together, by analyzing the gender opportunities and the constraints that prevent them from achieving this, and developing personal and livelihood development plans to move forward.

Women have used the GALS methodology to develop business plans and market analyses, thereby gaining respect from the men within their communities and building support

for their activities. Over 500 men have developed plans to change their behaviour in relation to issues like alcoholism, adultery, violence and sharing household work, and many of these have been implemented. Men as well as women now recognize that women do a large part of the work, and they have come to question traditional power relations, even addressing inequalities in land ownership. Transparency and relations with local government have also improved, benefiting the whole community.


The quadruple 'win-win'

The experience in Uganda shows that whole communities, including women and men, can benefit from value chain interventions that take gender equity as their starting point.

But there is more to be gained. The benefits of a gender focus to enterprises further up the chain are also considerable. Where women are empowered and organized, they are more able to produce high-quality goods and manage their livelihoods so that they are more flexible to market demand. In Uganda, Kampala coffee traders are now seeking to deal directly with the women's groups. In Kenya, flower and textile exporters report that if their women workers are happy and well trained, there is less absenteeism and they have fewer problems in recruitment. Although there will always be some conflict of interest between traders and producers, and employers and employees, ethical behaviour and developing good relationships and trust are now established parts of 'win-win' supply chain development. The challenge is to develop participatory processes, like the GALS methodology, that can be implemented by enterprises as well as development agencies, to negotiate win-win strategies that incorporate gender concerns.

The final part of the quadruple win-win is for national economies. When over half the population is not able to work efficiently because of cultural, ideological and/or political constraints, this inevitably undermines economic growth. The productivity benefits of addressing gender inequalities in value chains for major commodities like coffee, where women do most of the work, should therefore be obvious. ■

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