

IMPROVING LIVELIHOODS OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH MANAGING FOR DEVELOPMENT RESULTS

From the African Community of Practice on Management for Development result at the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)



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SYNOPSIS

Managing for Development Results (MfDR) is a management strategy for development agencies that focuses on using information on results to improve decision-making and a framework for assessing performance, learning from experience and using resources more efficiently. As a means of improving development performance MfDR tools and processes might enable the rural poor to overcome poverty. The importance of rural women in social economic development can not be overemphasied. Improving their livelihoods constitutes a significant productive and transformative factor for the advancement the entire African region. The African Community of Practice (AfCoP) convened online discussion among its members to identify success stories and strategies for successful livelihood development for rural women in Africa; challenges and opportunities for advancing their livelihoods; and identify key human and institutional capacities needed to enhance them. This knowledge brief summarises the outputs from the discussion. One of the key messages from the discussion was the need for building capable and effective states founded on equity and strong accountability systems for equal participation of women and men in African development. Some success stories highlighted from the discussion included ; the affirmative action and capacity building for rural women in Malawi; Livelihood empowerment through access to education in Uganda and Mozambique. It was learned that, the emerging communities of practice such as AfCoP-MfDR and its national chapters present compounded opportunities for women empowerment including those in the rural areas. The brief recommends strengthening the AfCoP's partnerships in the continent for pursuing rural women`s livelihoods development.

Introduction

Under the auspices of the Africa for Results Initiative (Afrik4R), the African Community of Practice (AfCoP) on Managing for Development Results (MfDR) online discussion among community members was held to discuss how MfDR principles are been used to Improve livelihoods of rural women. The crucial role of women in development

has long been identified in the global development discourses. In particular, the role of rural women in the transformation of rural economies cannot be over emphasized. Their empowerment is central to the argument that, "poverty eradication is the foundation for global peace and security and quality of life for all...we cannot achieve sustainable development without an inclusive pro-poor growth and alleviating the suffering of rural people." It is

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central to this argument in that in many African countries, such as in Benin, more than 70 percent of the female population is rural, and carry out 60 to 80 percent of agricultural work. At national level, females constitute at least 50 percent of the population across the continent, which makes their empowerment crucial at rural and national level.

But despite these facts, ironies have remained. Across Africa, only approximately 15 percent of landholders are women and they receive less than 10 percent of credit and 7 percent of extension services. As a result, women's productivity lags behind, thereby negatively affecting their livelihoods and that of their families. With more than 70 percent of the global poor living in the rural areas, it will not be surprising that, large proportions of rural women will remain impoverished due to their continued disempowerment. Lack of access to services and infrastructures impacts negatively on the livelihoods of rural women, and this hinders their ability to provide education, health, and other opportunities to their families, thereby reinforcing the vicious the circles of poverty. About 60 percent of the world's hungry are women (United Nations 2010; 2013), as a result of their inadequate empowerment, and this causes of vast numbers of infants to be born with low birth weight in the developing world, and the children becoming easy prey to diseases (ibid).

Illiteracy is a leading cause of perpetual and structural poverty in the rural areas especially for women, limiting their capacity to access socio economic opportunities. A number of factors have contributed to this, including insufficient availability of school facilities in the rural settlements thereby creating disincentives for rural parents to send their girl children far away for schooling. Coupled with gender stereotypes and ingrained cultural beliefs about educating the girl child, it is no surprise that even at national level, adult literacy rates have remained less than 50 percent in the following African countries: Mali, 26 percent; Niger, 29

percent; Burkina Faso, 29 percent; Ethiopia, 30 percent; Guinea, 34 percent; Sierra Leone, 41 percent. In 2005, women literacy in Chad, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Mali, and Niger only ranged from 13 to 18 percent.

Against this background, and for several other factors thrown light on in the subsequent sections, AfCoP had decided to launch an online discussion on "Improving livelihoods of rural women through MfDR" as a means of sharing knowledge, spurring peer-learning, and documenting successful interventions that have helped to improve the livelihoods of rural African women. It is also aimed at sourcing ideas and innovations on what capacities are required for designing and implementing effective livelihood initiatives for rural women. More specifically, the discussion was focused on:

- Sharing innovative stories on successful rural livelihood initiatives for women;
- Identifying strategies and approaches to enhance the livelihoods of rural women;
- Documenting the challenges and opportunities for advancing rural women's livelihoods across Africa; and
- Highlighting key human and institutional capacities needed to enhance rural women's livelihoods.

The following sections present results of the discussion, summarized around the issues/ideas identified during the process.

Behind the success stories for improved livelihood for rural women

Before discussing specific stories on results-oriented and successful livelihood initiatives for rural women and inhabitants in general, we will first reflect on important arguments behind the stories we highlight in the next sections. Multi-pronged empowerment of rural women has been identified

as a key missing element in the gamut of initiatives on women's development. At best (in some cases), the needed set of interventions had been unidentified and programmed but implementation had been weak. Sustainable livelihoods empowerment is defined as a set of "various interrelated processes through which people, individually and collectively, acquire the ability to access the productive resources they require to increase their earnings, obtain the goods and services they need, and at the same time participate meaningfully in decision-making that affects their livelihoods. Empowerment thus concerns both accessing assets, having and using opportunities to increase one's earnings and to participate in shaping collective choices."¹ This definition is instructive and constitutes a benchmark against which women empowerment can be measured.

Against this backdrop, the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have been laudable but are thought to be narrow in empowering women since they limited "the empowerment approach primarily to what the public services can do to strengthen individual human capabilities—through, inter alia, health care, education and sanitation....Economic and social capabilities did not feature in the old [MDGs] agenda, despite their major role in driving poverty reduction and development."² This argument is supported by Reema Nanavaty, who maintains that, one solution to poverty, such as micro credit, is not a sustainable instrument for poverty reduction in rural areas, the multi-pronged approach is needed. Reema argues in the context of rural women empowerment initiatives advanced by the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India, which is based on the strategy of "Livelihood Finance." They promote economic activities that bring about livelihood security for the poor engaged in both farm and non-farm activities, driven by

available local skills and resources. Their livelihood package is defined by the following building blocks:

- (i) organizational and institutional development involving building collective strength and bargaining power
- (ii) (provision of credit and other financial services like insurance and pension aimed at wealth/asset creation
- (iii) (ensuring productivity improvement services, focusing on capacity building and efficiency
- (iv) market linkages, marketing services
- (v) Human development services, focusing on access to improved health, nutrition, and education services.

Stories and strategies associated with successful rural livelihood initiatives for women

Multi-pronged empowerment of rural women is the key message coming out of the discussion. This refers to a broad set of instruments, processes, and enablers that bring about positive and sustainable transformational changes in the lives of rural people. In the following sub-sections, we shall look at country and regional efforts at responding to selected rural livelihood structural and disempowerment problems.

• **Livelihood Empowerment through Access to Education**

The inadequacy of teachers in rural areas: Remoteness and lack of basic amenities have been a leading cause of many teachers' disapproval to go to rural areas for teaching. As a policy on health grounds, Uganda and Mozambique have considered to post teachers with health problems to schools near to medical facilities; while to respond to regional bottlenecks characterized by factors such as ethnic and language barriers, Mozambique ensured that recruitment and deployment of

¹ IFAD (2013, p.2).

² IFAD (2013, p.1).

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teachers be done at regional level. And due to mountainous geography and poor infrastructure, Lesotho also decentralised recruitment of teachers to the community level through school management committees (SMCs). Another strategy was to require graduates from a region's teacher training college to teach in that region. Malawi recruited untrained temporary teachers who were later trained. In Uganda, Tanzania, Lesotho, and Mozambique, teachers were provided with monetary and non-monetary incentives to attract them to remote communities, ranging from provision of hardship allowance and travel allowance, to household subsidies, special study leave, and better training opportunities. And Ghana has adopted a policy of posting newly qualified teachers in pairs for one to draw strength from the other.

Long distance to school: Mozambique has maintained reasonable school size between 100 and 200 in a number of rural settlements to increase chances of engaging with the communities. Since this strategy may however be economically inefficient in the utilisation of teacher capital, especially where dropout rates are high and this would lead to lower pupil teacher ratios, Lesotho has had to adopt a policy of making more qualified teachers in a school teach lower grades so as to lower dropout rates and to even out pupil teacher ratios across all grades. In Ethiopia, growth in rural school enrolment was partly attributed to home visits by teachers. And for communities dominated by nomads and pastoralists, constructing schools there may not be economically efficient as in the Karamoja region in Uganda; thus the authorities provided mobile educational system, teachers following children wherever they took animals to graze and classes were conducted under trees.

Responding to cultural bottlenecks and others: Countries have advocated customization of standard educational models for rural inclusion on the grounds that, results-oriented rural women empowerment in education can be achieved only with modification to national school system to

capture peculiar rural contexts. The Escuela Nueva in Rural Columbia and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) are among the globally celebrated initiatives for success in the application of customized models in rural areas. Established in the early 1980s, the Escuela Nueva programme has been the best known for conducting multi-grade schooling, and pupils who were unable to attend school were taught at home, and supported through student study groups. Parents worked closely with teachers, integrating the former's cultural and other concerns into the curriculum to ensure that schooling was culturally sensitive and sustainable. In a short period, this model led to the establishment of 22,000 rural schools in Columbia. In Bangladesh, the BRAC schools targeted mainly girls in rural areas, and capitalized on already successful rural development projects like credit support and healthcare programmes. The initiative started in 1985 with each school catering for 30 children within a few kilometers, and renting a room in houses to conduct classes. Teachers are picked from the communities, intensively trained for 15 days, provided with retraining at least once a month, and paid modest wages. Simple materials were used for school to enhance sustainability; no fees were paid and parents attended school meetings. The government permitted BRAC school leavers to enter the fourth grade in government schools. By 1998, about 34,000 BRAC schools were servicing not less than 1.2 million children that would otherwise have been left out of schools.

These efforts have a long term impact on rural household welfare, especially in ensuring an educated and economically and politically empowered critical mass of rural women.

- ***Livelihood Empowerment through Rural Organizational Strengthening, Enforcing Downward Accountability and Participation in Agricultural Research and Policy Discourses***

Organizational social capital is critical to accessing the much needed leverage and productive

resources for group members if individual livelihood strategies are pursued. Large parts of Africa have witnessed the development of farmers' and rural producers' organisations (FOs/RPOs) in the last four to five years. These organisations have represented farming communities at the national, regional and international levels. Africa now boasts of:

“Tens of thousands of grass-roots FOs across sub-Saharan Africa. Most play a dual role: as producers' groups or cooperatives, they provide services to their members and they represent their members' interests with other stakeholders, including agricultural policymakers, business partners, and development projects. Many grass-roots FOs set up local unions and federations that are joined to national umbrella organizations. These organizations have established four regional networks in Africa: the Eastern Africa Farmers Federation (EAFF); the Plateforme Sous-Régionale des Organisations Paysannes d'Afrique Centrale (PROPAC); the Réseau des Organisations Paysannes et de Producteurs de l'Afrique de l'Ouest (ROPPA); and the Southern African Confederation of Agricultural Unions (SACAU). They represent opportunities for the advancement of rural women across the continent.”³

In **Senegal**, great efforts have been made by the government in collaboration with the consortium of national agricultural producers' organizations and the World Bank to ensure that farmers become not only clients but active participants in the governance of agricultural and rural development services. The RPOs in Senegal are well recognized and capacitated through direct transfer of public resources to them. Accountability is promoted within these groups to ensure that they become effective and efficient in the delivery of devolved services from central agricultural ministry, with the latter left to focus on co-ordination of the national agricultural development policy. A National

Agricultural and Food Technology Research Fund has been established, accompanied by a scientific committee to screen research proposals, and a management committee with a majority of farmer representatives as members. A National Agency for Agricultural and Rural Counsel (ANCAR) has also been established, with capital participation from government, producers' organisations, and the private sector. Both the ANCAR and local RPOs determine contracts for the work of agricultural and rural counselors in the communities thereby ensuring downward accountability to local farmers.⁴

In **India**, grassroots have been empowered to participate in agriculture policy research to ensure adequate response to the service needs of “aquaculture-dependent people” in the Eastern Region. “The process started in 1996 with joint research between DFID and local farmers around low-input aquaculture, aimed at addressing immediate livelihood concerns among marginalized population groups, including women. In 2002, DFID supported scale-up efforts, working in collaboration with farmers and fishers to produce recommendations for policy change to develop better agriculture and rural services. This was done through joint DFID-grassroots research using various tools to gather people's views. This has led to policymakers agreeing to evidence-based proposed priorities for change in service programmes for aquaculture-dependent people.

- ***Community Financial Services and Promoting Urban Employment for Rural Women***

Lao People's Democratic Republic in Asia runs village banking managed by villagers, with effective women participation. This is supported by government, NGOs, and donors but funds are primarily generated from within the villages, and women play central role in the banks' management as contributors of deposits.⁵ In Cambodia, there has been sustained financial education for

³ IFAD (2013, p.7).

⁴ Prato and Longo (2012, P.13).

⁵ http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_116174/lang-en/index.htm.

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businesswomen. Series of training is provided to make them informed economic agents and ‘empowered financial decision-makers.’ Their attitudes are orientated toward savings, prudent spending, and borrowing for rational reasons.⁶ In Bangladesh, though the pay is generally small, the apparel firms in big towns are noted in Jeffrey Sacks’ End of Poverty to have been instrumental source of business capital for rural women. The firms employ thousands of them, and have been able to accumulate substantial savings to start up self-businesses.

- ***Affirmative action and capacity building for rural women***

AfCoP members reported the adoption of the quota approach in Malawi in the delivery of development assistance to rural communities for women. “With funding from AfDB, Malawi is currently running a local development fund targeting 40 percent of rural women. Government hires expert NGOs to organize women into cooperatives to access the fund, and to train them in small and medium business development. One such NGO is the Community Savings and Investment Promotion (COMSIP). According to Rudolf Nkhata, COMSIP builds business capacity of women cooperatives through training in acquisition of business technology and skills. It facilitates access to market information and networks, and organizes trade fairs to showcase commodities produced by women.”⁷

Existing Opportunities for Replication of above Strategies for Rural Women Empowerment

It was noted during the discussion that initiatives for promoting rural women livelihoods are not rare in Africa and the world in general. This was reported also in the discussion on “Women Entrepreneurship Development” as part of the series of discussions covering Rural Women

⁷http://www.ilo.org/empent/Publications/WCMS_116165/lang--en/index.htm.

Livelihoods reported in this Knowledge Brief. Rather, weak implementation of existing initiatives has been noted to be the fundamental cause of narrow results for women economic advancement in general. The existence of specialized global institutions, such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), founded since 1976, could be leveraged to support rural women development initiatives, including replication of lessons across Africa. The existence of the UN Women working to enforce the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action is part of the institutional opportunities to leverage, including the existence of the UN’s labor technical arm, the International Labor Organization (ILO). The ILO launched the Women Entrepreneurship Development (ILO-WED) program in 2002, in collaboration with the general donor community to support livelihood programs for women across various regions including Africa. The UN sustainable development goals (UNSDG), has a numbers of women development related objectives that countries should pursue.

In Africa, women’s economic empowerment is a key priority of the African Development Bank, currently implementing a Gender Strategy for 2014-2018; and related initiatives have been underway within the framework of the African Women in Business Initiative (AWIB). Women economic empowerment is equally integral to regional economic communities (RECs). The African Union (AU) has the Directorate of Women, Gender, and Development; and there are related structures in the Economic Community of West Africa States (ECOWAS), the Community of East and Southern Africa (COMESA), and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCA) to support rural women livelihood initiatives.

At field level, many African governments have domesticated international initiatives related to women advancement. Most poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs) supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in Africa have had *gender and women’s*

development as a stand alone pillar or core program in them; and African countries have reported regularly to the United Nations on progress in the implementation of the MDGs. Governments have established ministries, departments and agencies to initiate, coordinate and support initiatives bearing on reducing gender disparity and advancing women.⁸ These institutions have coordinated the domestication and implementation of international initiatives such as the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) aimed at overcoming negative stereotypes and structural bottlenecks underpinning women backwardness in Africa.

In addition to these opportunities for women empowerment, there is the existence of non-governmental and women organizations such as the East African Sub-regional Support Initiative for the Advancement of Women (EASSI), and African Women in Business Initiative (AWIB). These groups could continuously engage African governments, RECs and relevant international organizations to provide sustainable support towards rural women's empowerment.

The emerging communities of practice on managing for development results (MfDR) across the developing world, including the African Community of Practice on MfDR (AfCoP-MfDR) and its field/national chapters present compounded opportunities for women empowerment including those in the rural areas. Managing for development results is about identifying means and processes through which development results and poverty reduction can be maximized, including sound development of policies, and monitoring and evaluation schemes; extending efforts to ensuring that the identified results and strategies are put into action. And gender disparity and women disempowerment remain an opportunity for results

⁸ For existing government institutions coordinating gender and women's issues across Africa, see http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRREGTOP/GENDER/Resources/gov_contacts_3.pdf.

in Africa in that any effort to reduce the disparity or bring about increased empowerment of women (with emphasis on those in the rural areas) will engender value addition to Africa's economic growth. This will bring about tremendous reduction in poverty. AfCoP-CoP and its partners have identified this source of growth and poverty reduction and have, as a result, made gender and women empowerment as a pillar in the ongoing Africa for Results (AfriK4R) initiative.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Opportunities for uplifting the livelihoods of rural women are abundant. Global, regional and national strategies towards this direction are not short in supply. The effective implementation and monitoring of these strategies has been especially lacking. Also lacking has been the sustained engagement with various stakeholders to ensuring the achievement of the objective of rural women's livelihoods enhancement. It is noted that self-empowerment is the most crucial enabler to rural women's development than supply of hand-outs of input and other supplies from outside. Women need to be self-capacitated; have the minimum capabilities necessary for ensuring that effective engagement in socio economic, political and government processes see them through to meeting their livelihood needs on a sustainable basis. This requires empowerment through self-generated productive resources which partly includes education and training; confidence building; among others. Thus, it is crucial that AfCoP and partners pay attention to the following:

- To continue with the focus on gender and women development, having it as a pillar in the current AfriK4R initiative and beyond.
- Above this is the need for effective engagement with the relevant stakeholders on rural women's livelihoods development at the international, regional, national and community levels.

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- To strengthen AfCoP's partnership with other results initiatives and institutions in the continent such as the ACBF for joint ventures at pursuing rural women's livelihoods development and effectively engaging other stakeholders in the process.
- Detailed studies on the impact of programs on rural women livelihoods could be advocated at national, sub-regional and continental level with a view to identifying program milestones achieved in different organisations, documenting comprehensive lessons and success stories of interventions for propagation across the continent, and highlighting challenges to inform future interventions.

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