

# EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN SMALLHOLDER FARMERS IN THE RICE VALUE CHAIN

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**Sector: Agriculture**

## CHALLENGE

Female smallholder rice farmers in Tanzania face many challenges. The majority of women in rural areas are the main producers in agriculture, but most still live in poverty because they do not benefit from what they produce. This is due to socio-economic gender inequalities that deny women equal resource ownership and control, and to joint decision making, coupled with inadequate education on family planning and the burden of a heavy workload limiting social and personal time.

Due to gender inequality, women's status is very low, they are overwhelmingly more disadvantaged than men, and face continuous discrimination. These inequalities are not only a threat to women's basic human rights, but also pose a serious threat to the social and economic development of societies. (Gender Assessment Report, 2015).

At the beginning of the Empowerment of Women Smallholder Farmers in the Rice Value Chain project, SNV conducted baseline surveys and observed the following challenges and gaps between men and women in social and economic activities:

- Women constitute most of the labour force in rice production and related activities including planting, irrigating, weeding, harvesting, threshing, winnowing, and sorting. Men who do engage in those activities put in fewer hours compared to women.
- Men are mostly the ones involved in the selling of the crops and deciding how income is to be used. Women's financial gain is not comparative with the labour they provide. As men dominate in the milling industry, as middle agents, for the sale of fertilizer and other inputs, and on irrigation schemes and water management boards, the decisions made in this arenas tend to favour the interests of men more than women.
- Men tend to be more skilled and knowledgeable about farming technology than women.
- Across all project areas it was evident that men have more access to and control of resources and benefits, when compared to women. Men are also the main decision makers, especially in determining what resources to have, what crops to grow and the use of income in the family. In a few families, women and men discussed this together, but the men still make the final decision. It was clear from the assessment that overall it is men who have the last say.
- The baseline also revealed that there are customary laws, norms, beliefs and practices that determine the extent to which women can access, own and control resources and benefits in the community.

In spite of their immense contribution women have not tangibly benefited from the dividends of the rice sector in the Project areas. This is due to the strong cultural and traditional inhibitions that give the men the upper hand in bargaining, negotiating and selling the rice. Also women continue to shoulder the largest burden of care at household level as well as face the consequences of poor health due to highly manual and labour intensive activities (Gender Assessment Report for the Women Empowerment, 2015).

Further, the predominately patriarchal culture dictates inequitable gender roles in the ownership of land and household decision making. Women's equitable access to and ownership of land is supported by the legal framework (Village Land Act, 1999) but, due to customary practices, land ownership by women is limited.

Women only own 19% of titled land, and in turn this limits their access to collateral and to finance. (World Bank 2007). Local Government is the main extension service provider, but women's access to extension services is deterred as these extension services are male dominated and corruption is pervasive. There remains widespread gender discrimination, making it more difficult for women to practice agriculture and other activities. Unstructured rice markets and a male dominated buyers' market, also prevents women's participation. (Policy Analysis Report on Women Empowerment, 2015)

On recognition of the existing gap between men and women, SNV as the lead partner in a consortium developed a project on women empowerment which would minimise gender inequality through the following:

- Men and women facilitated to recognise and change current gender dynamics.
- Existing women producer groups and women's groups become strong bodies for self-organisation.
- Increasing market demand for quality rice.
- Processors purchase and process increased volumes of paddy.
- Women control income accruing from paddy sales through Village-based Contact Farming.

The success of this project depended largely on the extent to which the synergies between women and men can be harnessed and translated into positive collaboration and equal sharing of power, resources and benefits. It was also hoped that an improvement in the income levels of women would translate into an improvement in the standard of living at household level.

The project goal is to contribute to improvements in the livelihoods and influence of 15,000 smallholder women rice farmers in project districts of Kilombero, Iringa, Mbeya, Momba, Mbarali and Sumbawanga in Tanzania.

### **Project objectives:**

- To strengthen the capacity and efficiency of women producer groups and farmer's organisations in the target areas/villages
- To increase profitable and sustainable women-led enterprises
- To enhance smallholder women farmer's access to structured markets for paddy.
- To unlock cultural barriers that hinder women development and dignity

### **Key outcome targets:**

- Women challenge inequality as change makers for social and economical change.
- Women producer groups promote sustainable growth of women rice farming as a business.
- Women rice farmers competitively access markets.
- Women rice farmers influence policies for a conducive environment for rice farming as a business.

The project is working with Women Producer Groups to facilitate social and economic empowerment. Project activities give women more voice and decision making power in their communities and households, as well as organising women, and brokering trade relationships between their groups and rice buyers/processors.



**Women attending a training session**

## METHOD/SNV INTERVENTION

Empowering women rice farmers to challenge inequalities and influence change in control and ownership of productive assets and income was addressed as follows: Facilitate women to recognise their subordination, have a sense of rights, and organise for collective action through Women Producer Groups; brokering market linkages such as moving the market to women through Village based Contract farming, and access to agro-services and productive resources through cooperatives, producer associations, processors and government to increase women's access to agro-services and productive resources.

SNV received funding from *Comic Relief* to implement the three-year project (*Empowering Women Smallholder Farmers in Rice Value Chain in Tanzania*), in consortium with four partners; Mbozi-Ileje and Isangati Consortium (MIICO), MS Training Centre for Development Cooperation (MS-TCDC), Vijana Vision Tanzania (VVT) and Women Poverty Alleviation Tanzania (WOPATA).

SNV and the project team started work in the villages by mapping and assessing the women rice producers and their levels of organisation in 4 Regions and 6 Districts; Mbeya- (Mbarali, Momba, Kyela), Rukwa (Sumbawanga), Iringa (Iringa Rural), Morogoro (Kilombero) which was followed by the assessment of the baseline analysis, a gender analysis and policy analysis to get a good overview of the current situation in the households and villages.

SNV role has been to manage the project and coordinate all the project activities across the 4 regions; Morogoro, Iringa, Mbeya and Rukwa. Throughout the year the capacity and skills of the project implementation team has been strengthened, the team of district and regional project staff have been had training sessions and coaching on topics such as: monitoring evaluation and learning; entrepreneur skills; facilitation skills; gender and women empowerment; contract farming; and market linkages.

### Roles of each partner

MS-TCDC have been responsible for gender and empowerment analysis, capacity building for MIICO and WOPATA on gender issues, coaching of field workers, multi-stakeholder dialogue and policy analysis.

VVT's role has been to conduct a group needs assessment for women empowerment, policy dialogue and analysis, business start up, entrepreneurship, opportunities for youth employment, coaching and mentoring of field staff.

WOPATA & MIICO roles include: mobilise and organise group meetings, village based contract farming training with farmers and processors, group strengthening and leadership, women empowerment, improved productivity and land rights.

In each district the project has one district field officer supported by regional project staff who are working in collaboration with community volunteers and the leadership of the Women Producer Groups. Many of the women smallholder farmers participating in the project have low literacy rates and low levels of education, and live in a traditional rural family setting.

In each village the project is working with one or more community volunteers who are also receiving regular training and coaching on how to best support the Women Producer Groups. The community volunteers have attended a rice productivity farmers' field school on rice production and facilitating village demonstrations plots for farmers to learn and practice in their respective villages and the Farmer Field Schools have also been conducting farmers field day to demonstrate Good Agricultural Practices for rice production. The project extends training and coaching support to community volunteers on how they can best support the Women Producer Groups.

In order to ensure comprehensive sustainable outcomes, SNV have engaged government and district officials and the private sector in all the project activities through multistakeholder meetings.

## OUTCOME

The project team facilitated 58 members of Women Producer Groups to present their rice in the Nane Nane Festival which takes place each year in August. Many of these farmers had never been to such a festival and they were very surprised to discover that there was such a demand for their rice. With the support of the project they developed a new brand - Tanzania Mamaa Rice -and they got contact addresses of potential buyers.

The project team had established contacts and relationships with 16 key rice processing enterprises in the project districts and regions and has started link groups of women to these enterprises. Contract farming support was offered to processors and WPGs laying the initial foundation for increased collaboration in the future years.

Overall there has been an increase in women's participation in the project. More women are willing to participate because they see the opportunity to challenge gender inequalities. The participation of other

stakeholders in the project has also increased, there is more enthusiasm among other stakeholders such as financial institutions, processors, input suppliers to participate in the project. There has been a good support from the local government, to the extent that the government in the district that the project is implemented has contributed extension staff who are now supporting the project. Last but not least there has been increased awareness of the men to allow their wives to participate in the project.

## IMPACT

At the end of 2015, the intervention was in place in 100 villages in six districts, and was working with 397 Women Producer Groups. To date 10,500 people have benefitted, of which 6500 are women. In 2016/2017 income increase as a result of paddy selling and number of people employed in processing and rice farming will be assessed.

## LESSONS LEARNED

During the first year, a large number of men and women started working together and sharing information, and women are now able to stand up and hold leadership positions.

Stakeholder participation in the project has increased. There is more enthusiasm and commitment among stakeholders such as financial institutions, processors, and input suppliers to participate in the project. The project is receiving good support from the local government, to the extent that local government in some of the project districts have contributed extension staff to support the project.

With increasing market demand for rice from smallholder farmers, the Village-based Contract Farming model is attracting the attention of farmers and processors, and is an appropriate inclusive business model ensuring local rice producers access reliable markets.