



ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT & FOOD SECURITY

VAM GENDER AND MARKETS BRIEFING #4

DIVERSIFYING LIVELIHOODS STRATEGIES IN THE SAHEL : CHAD, MALI & NIGER

KEY MESSAGES:

- The main Limiting factors of food security in the region are physical isolation, poor soils, absence of funds and poor availability of state services.
- In Mali, social status seems a greater determinant of women's power within the household than their economic contribution. a woman with many sons for example, is likely to have better agency in household decisions than a childless one.
- Migration appears as a frequent livelihood strategy among Sahelian countries. In rural Niger, women's migration is nearly as prevalent as men's migration. for the majority of women, migration represents increased physical and social vulnerability.

The case of Chad

In rural Chad financial structures are available for savings or credits, but very few are available to women (or even most men), as they generally require guarantees. In the lean months, farmers are obliged to buy food on credit, generally at unfavorable rates, to be reimbursed after harvest. Women are culturally constraint to consult their husbands before joining any credit association, work group, or other social structure, or making any significant economic decision. However, men do not have the right to claim women's produce or animals without their consent that women have been able to purchase with the profits from their commerce. Although considered as a consistent priority, educational resources vary widely from villages. Some villages have very well built schools by the World Bank, in some others, makeshift hangars have been improvised.

Unsurprisingly, overall high school degree rates are low.

In terms of livelihoods strategies, some households often lack the necessary labor, soil quality, inputs, and/or capacity to survive until harvest without diverting household labor resources away from their fields. Pastoralism is the most highly preferred source of wealth and savings, and constitutes a major livelihood strategy in the Sahel. It works as a buffer against food insecurity. Given the precariousness of agriculture, the poor depend on a wide variety of subsidiary activities for supplementary income. Especially younger men migrate out into urban centers. To a lesser degree, women from very poor households also migrate out. For supplementary income, women also rely on collecting and selling firewood.



The case of Mali

In Mali social position is a greater determinant of a woman's power within the household than is her economic contribution. A woman with many sons is likely to have more voice in household decisions than a childless one. Women have relative control over the use, purchase and sale of their goods in most contexts, this is also true for land allotments, men often retain authority over the use of that land and older men hold central positions in the allocation of resources and village-level decisions. Inheritance provides little security for women with the absence of a formal system of inheritance. Women's possessions, are not exactly their own, heads of households claim titular oversight of women's goods. Consequently, looseness in the definition of ownership allows for situational interpretations.

Animal husbandry provides regular cash income and is often viewed as the optimal strategy to assure food security. Men and women participate at different scales; women generally prefer to keep their savings in the form of poultry, goats and sheep. Women are limited in the ability to sell their animals independently, because a woman should not sell an animal without her husband's express permission. Potential buyers will refuse to purchase or will give her a much worse price than her husband could get. This is a key factors limiting women's participation in the market.

In terms of livelihoods strategies decision making women have multiple strategies to exert influence, and have much greater say in certain domestic domains such as children's education. However, in many circumstances a woman does not have the right to bring her sick child to a health center without her husband's approval. A wife's responsibility is to bear children, provide domestic services, and farm for the husband's family on collective fields.

Male out-migration creates demographic imbalances and has become a significant livelihood strategy which results in increasing demand for women's agricultural

labor. To a much lesser degree, young women are involved in patterns of urban migration, working as housemaids and nannies, predominantly in Bamako. Migration for both women and men has consequences on the social dynamics of village life, threatening the stability of pre-existing social structures and relationships. The fact that so many men are physically absent seems to increase the decision-making power and status of women in their households and communities.





The case of Niger

In Niger, entrepreneurship in both animal husbandry and in commercial activity is limited due to the lack of formal or informal credit structures. Women, in particular, hesitate to participate to the few available credit systems out of fears of penalties for non-repayment but also because seeking credit is perceived as humiliating particularly when requests are rejected. As they are structurally least able to absorb risk, least able to provide guarantee, they are particularly excluded from formal credit. Women nevertheless enjoy relative freedom in their entrepreneurial decisions.

In terms of livelihoods strategies, both women and men diversify their livelihood strategies, through migration but also through animal husbandry or commerce. Migration

engage a majority of men but also women. Animal husbandry is also a preferred strategy for insuring food security.

For some women, migration can be an empowering experience, providing powerful entrepreneurial experience, social capital and extended social networks. Some migrant workers have found greater autonomy and relative security in employment outside of the village. However for the majority, migration lack of legal protection and represents increased physical and social vulnerability with cases of abuse, overwork or underpayment. Women also risk social sanction for spending time away from their families and are exposed to stigmatization.

« MIGRATION REPRESENTS INCREASED PHYSICAL AND SOCIAL
VULNERABILITY FOR WOMEN »

PROGRAMMES

Slight refinements to the criteria for determining the type of assistance (cash vs. food) and the structure of targeting may greatly increase the local effectiveness of assistance programs.

One of the key practical issues faced by the WFP is identifying the appropriate level of granularity for its areas of intervention. An intersectional approach taking into account diverse variables such as age, gender, disability, ethnicity etc. can help in assessing a more accurate social perception of the community as a whole. With limited resources, the national office must determine the form and amount of assistance for each area. There are practical issues that limit the degree of specificity by which programs can be tailored to meet local needs.

In Niger, for example, beneficiaries of the CFA labor program universally expressed a preference for receiving assistance in the form of food rather than cash. In these highly vulnerable communities, households are using their paychecks exclusively to feed their families, and traders in the area, recognizing the limited access these populations have to other markets, are artificially raising the prices for grain. Non-beneficiaries also wish that food were given instead of cash, as it is more culturally appropriate to give gifts in the form of food.

The other aspect of assistance in which specificity is of perennial concern to the WFP is the decision whether to make assistance distribution generalized, self-targeting (i.e. for work programs), or to impose ceilings and inclusion criteria. In the communities visited in Niger, recipients of both cash for assets and cash transfers were selected by vulnerability criteria (leaving aside for the moment the question of whether this selection process fairly captures only those in need). Establishing target criteria and caps for the number of beneficiaries in villages like these is potentially problematic, because the entire community, with very few exceptions, is highly vulnerable and food insecure. In itself, distributing assistance to communities with very slight differences between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is conducive to situations of jealousy and other threats to social cohesion and local authority. Fortunately, in this case, the communities themselves mitigated potential conflicts and inequities through extensive redistribution of received assets, both in the form of labor-hours at

the work site and cash received in salary by beneficiaries.

In two of the communities visited in Chad, the above situation was essentially reversed. Members of these communities, who participated by voluntary self-selection on a water retention project, could clearly be divided into economic strata; a significant number of relatively wealthy inhabitants had access to an entirely different range of strategies for mitigating risk, generating income, diversifying livelihoods, and accessing credit than did the majority of the villagers. Moreover, unlike the Nigerien example, the degree of support from those relatively wealthy inhabitants to their less wealthy neighbors was extremely limited, even in the lean months before harvest, when exchange and mutual support is common in the Sahel. In this case, because the activities were self-targeting, very vulnerable households, with limited labor and time resources expendable beyond subsistence farming activities, were less able to take advantage of the program without endangering the viability of other livelihood strategies, whereas relatively wealthy households were less at risks. One can imagine how a self-targeting program in a case such as this might have limited impact for the most vulnerable, and even serve to exacerbate socioeconomic stratification within a community.

The country case studies from Niger and Chad therefore stand in counterpoint to illustrate the need for local assessments in determining target populations. Although the calculations for program design are necessarily complex and limited by practical considerations, in all of the examples discussed above, the ability to factor in the effect of a very small number of variables might have greatly improved the quality and effectiveness of services. In the decision of providing cash vs. food assistance to communities in Niger, for example, those variables would be the degree of market isolation and the likelihood that assistance will be expended to meet household consumption demand rather than productively (i.e. through income-generating activity). For the question of target design, including a consideration of the degree of economic stratification in the recipient community, could significantly bolster the effectiveness of programs; secondary considerations would include the degree and structure of mutual assistance within the community, and the strength of local authority.

In Chad, 60% of women over the age of six have no level of formal education at all.

Reducing women's migration helps to stabilize marriages, but has also had a significant impact on children's school enrollment rates.

In Niger and Chad, the average first marriage for girls occurs before 17.

TAKING ACTION

Gender Analysis transforms, generates effective programs and is applicable at every level. In design and monitoring, gender analysis is essential as differential access to resources by gender lead to predictable challenges to program effectiveness. In program implementation, mutual reinforcements addressing women's needs make programs much more powerful. Consequently, the synergy between programs can be mutually increased, reinforcing each programs in such a way that outcomes have multiple positive impacts on vulnerable populations.

Programs success depends on partner organizations's response to community needs. Partner organizations implement and monitor WFP interventions, they are important in establishing trust and rapport with communities; in brokering relationships; in understanding social dynamic factors that may threaten program sustainability; and in adapting programs to local politics and needs.

program effectiveness and better targeting will increase if a particular attention to criterias for determining the type of assistance is given. For example the study showed how a self-targeting program might have limited impact for the most vulnerable, and even serve to exacerbate socioeconomic stratifications within a community. Attention to micro dynamics between women and men, expressed preferences for receiving assistance, economic stratification of the community, degree of mutual assistance within the community and the strength of local authorities are criteria to consider for effective planning.

The WEAI remains a powerful tool to capture microdynamics of empowerment. However, to fully asses empowerment it should be partnered with other qualitative or participatory methods, particularly in capturing programs impacts rather than outcomes. Yes/No questions do not always adequately captures the complexities of household dynamics.

TO GO FURTHER :

Gender and Market Initiative: Empowering West African Women through Market-based Food Assistance : <https://resources.vam.wfp.org/node/106>

FOR THE LATEST INFO ON THE SAHEL:

<http://www.wfp.org/crisis/sahel>

SOURCE(S) :

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