

Impact Evaluation

Summary of the Evaluation Report



Impact of a Marketing Intervention to Empower Women and to Reduce Risk of Intimate Partner Violence in Colombia

Preventing *violence against women* (VAW) is intertwined with alleviating food insecurity and malnutrition. *Intimate partner violence* (IPV) is a common form of violence against women. IPV includes emotional, physical, or sexual harm or its threat by a marital, cohabiting, or dating partner. Empowering women economically is a promising approach to reduce VAW, including IPV. However, knowledge gaps persist about the impacts of women's economic empowerment programs on household food security and women's risk of IPV, especially in impoverished and conflict-affected settings, where the risk of backlash may be high. **SEED** (the Spanish acronyms for *Study of Food Security, Economic Empowerment, and Gender Rights*) is the **first gender-transformative randomized intervention trial of this scale to be implemented in conflict-affected populations in Latin America.**

Evaluation purpose

The World Food Programme, in partnership with Emory University, Plan International, the National University of Colombia, and UN Women undertook this impact study on *Food Security, Economic Empowerment, and Gender Rights*. The objective was to evaluate the **impacts of skills-based women's economic empowerment programming on household food security, women's economic empowerment, and women's risk of IPV.** SEED was designed specifically to compare the impacts of two program designs: 1) *enhancing market access* through agricultural product purchases and training in marketing (PMT), and 2) *creating market access plus gender transformative training* on gender equity, rights, and nutrition (PMTGNT).

Intervention's Theory of Change

Table 1 summarizes the intervention **components.** All farmer associations in the intervention component of SEED participated in productive activities. Half of the smallholder farmer associations received supplemental training. All women and men members of farmer associations were invited to participate in all components included in that arm of the intervention.

The SEED's **theory of change** is that creating market access (PTM) in intervention Arms 1 and 2 would result in women's greater participation in markets, increased

incomes, and improved agricultural and marketing skills, all important human and economic pre-conditions for women's empowerment. Increased incomes would lead to improvements in the economic situations of their households and in household food security. These improvements, in turn, would reduce stress among women, their partners and the family. Intrinsic, instrumental, and collective agency also may increase among women due to participation in markets, increased incomes, and enhanced skills in agriculture and marketing. Lower family stress and increased agency among women may reduce risk of exposure to IPV.

Additionally, the supplemental gender-transformative training (TGN) in Arm 2 would heighten awareness of gender rights and increase women's and men's shared responsibility for household food and nutrition security, thereby enhancing the human resources or pre-conditions for women's empowerment. These changes were expected to result in greater multifaceted agency among women. Increased awareness also may result in more gender equitable attitudes and reduced acceptance of violence against women (an aspect of intrinsic agency), which subsequently may reduce the risks of women's exposure to IPV. Importantly, it was expected that the enhanced training provided in Arm 2 may lead to an additional reduction in IPV risk among women, above and beyond that resulting from the market-access only activities.

Table 1. Description of the Intervention Components by Study Arm

Arm	Intervention	Hours of Training	Intervention Components	# of Associations	Departments
1	PMT	14	Product purchases + 14 hours of marketing training	29	Caquetá,
2	PMTGNT	40	Product purchases + 8 hours of marketing training + 24 hours of gender training (gender equality and rights, economic empowerment, gender-based violence prevention) + 8 hours of nutrition and food security training (with a focus on gender)	32	Cauca, Nariño, Valle del Cauca
3	Comparison group	0	No intervention	33	Meta

Research Questions

WFP began looking at the issue of income increases and violence in Colombia to ensure that its interventions were aligned with humanitarian principles, including do no harm. Thus from a programmatic perspective the question was: 1) **Will increasing women smaller holder farmers' incomes create tensions within the family or within the community?** Additional questions included: 2) What is the magnitude of the effect of the **PMT vs the PMTGNT on household food security?**; 3) And **on women's economic empowerment?**; 4) And **on women's risk of IPV?**

Impact Evaluation Design

The study team designed SEED as a **mixed-methods, pair-matched, cluster-randomized intervention trial (CRT)**. The trial was undertaken with 857 members of 61 smallholder farmer associations in five conflict-affected departments in Colombia.

The mixed-methods approach included a qualitative component and a quantitative component with eligible members of participating smallholder farmer associations. The **qualitative component** entailed 14 focus group discussions (FGDs) with women and 22 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with women at baseline and 75 IDIs with women and men at endline. These narratives provided an in-depth understanding of the effects of the interventions from the perspectives of beneficiaries. The **quantitative component** entailed a baseline and endline surveys of approximately 857 partnered women ages 18 to 60 years old who were members of participating farmer associations. This component allowed for a rigorous impact evaluation of the interventions' effects on food security, women's empowerment, and women's risk of IPV over a 12-month period.

Findings

Baseline qualitative and quantitative results showed that women farmers were considerably disadvantaged. In in-depth interviews (IDIs), women expressed concern over not having enough food for their families. Women also described instances of emotional, physical, and economic violence. Their narratives suggested a positive relationship between household food insecurity and IPV.

Consistently, in the **baseline survey**, more than two thirds of women rated their economic situation in the prior month as fair, poor, or very poor, and almost half reported living in moderately to severely food insecure homes. A majority of women earned money by themselves, participated in food- and cash-crop farming, and made decisions related to getting inputs for agricultural production in their associations; however, a notable minority of women reported exposure to economic coercion, and women's exposure to IPV by a current partner was common. One in three women had ever experienced any physical, sexual, or emotional IPV by a current partner, and 23.6% of women had ever experienced any such IPV in the prior year.

Endline results showed a decline in food insecurity in both intervention groups. IDIs with men and women supported this finding, with both groups saying that their households had sufficient quantities of food.

Aspects of women's economic empowerment appeared to have improved in both intervention groups. Improvements in women's relative economic contributions and economic independence may have been greater in the marketing only intervention,

which involved more hours of marketing training than in the PMTGNT group.

Notable changes were in women's attitudes about and experiences of IPV. There was **evidence** of declines in justifying IPV and disfavoring recourse after IPV in both intervention groups, no evidence of harm arising in the form of IPV in the market-access only group, and evidence of decline in the risk of IPV against women in the market-access plus gender-transformative training group.

Conclusions

First, both interventions appear to have been effective in at least two of the three domains of interest to WFP. Specifically:

- WFP activities to enhance market access appear to have improved aspects of household food security as well as women's economic contributions and independence **without increasing women's risks of IPV**.

- The integration of gender-rights trainings into WFP's market-access activities appears to have had the added benefit of **reducing women's risk of experiencing IPV**.

These findings suggest that a multi-sectoral "empowerment plus" programme shows promise to become the **new best practice for engaging smallholder farmers in Colombia to reduce household poverty and food insecurity while economically empowering women**, improving attitudes about the treatment and rights of women, and reducing women's risk of violence by their partners.

Recommendations

The findings from SEED have important **implications for policies and programs** that WFP and similar organizations might consider:

1. To ensure that trainings achieve the greatest impact it is preferable that they are carried out over a time period that allows for confidence build and absorption of the material, this will empower women as agents of change and transformers in their communities, developing their capacity and abilities to improve their quality of life.

2. Further to ensure that actions have positive results it is important to involve a range of community members and leaders as well as women and men.

3. Integrate gender-transformative activities into WFPs other sectoral programmes. The findings from SEED demonstrate the feasibility and added benefits of integrating gender-transformative trainings into WFPs sectoral activities in poverty alleviation, food security, and nutrition. Gender programming has the capacity to shift norms and behaviors to protect women from violence while empowering them to provide for themselves and their families. Moreover, the benefits of training women and men in terms of program acceptability and sustainability should be underscored. Finally, the skills-based approach to empowering women economically is important, as it transfers human assets that women can carry with them and control, even in humanitarian conditions characterized by protracted periods of conflict.

4. Scale up programs that integrate gender-transformative training. WFP Colombia should consider implementing its market-access plus gender-rights trainings with all partner smallholder farmer associations in all departments where it has operations. Scaling-up in this way creates the potential to reduce on a broad scale women's risks of IPV while continuing the important work of alleviating the intertwined challenges of poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition.

5. Adapt SEED programs to other settings. WFP, as well as other humanitarian and development organizations, should consider adapting the programmes assessed in SEED to other conflict- and non-conflict affected settings in countries within and outside of Latin America.

6. Integrate gender-transformative trainings into other economic empowerment programmes. Organizations that support other marketing interventions, such as micro-finance, cash transfers, and voucher programs, should consider integrating gender-transformative trainings into their economic empowerment activities and to evaluate the impacts on household poverty, food security, women's economic empowerment, and women's risk of IPV.

The findings from SEED also have important **implications for research** that WFP and similar organizations might consider.

1. Expand internal research infrastructure. WFP should consider expanding its infrastructure to support rigorous impact evaluations of its activities. Specifically, WFP should consider developing an internal scientific review panel that reviews all study protocols for scientific rigor. WFP also should consider establishing and maintaining an internal, accredited IRB to review study protocols and to provide ethical oversight of impact evaluations that are designed as research studies with human subjects.

2. Expand partnerships with external researchers. WFP should consider expanding its partnerships with universities and research institutes to strengthen the research capacity of WFP staff in country offices, as well as the independence and rigor of its impact evaluation work.

3. Encourage multiple stakeholder engagement. WFP should consider fostering a model of multi-disciplinary, multi-sectoral partnership, as exemplified in SEED. Engaging multiple stakeholders, including governmental entities, other UN agencies, international non-governmental organizations, and universities presents challenges in terms of coordination and diverse stakeholder interests. However, active community engagement of relevant stakeholders builds mutual trust, program ownership, and learning, thereby enhancing the quality of the programmatic work and the usefulness of the science. Such engagement, when undertaken with consistency and care, also enhances the potential scale-up and sustainability of programs beyond the original implementing team.

4. Adapt the impact evaluation design to other settings. WFP, as well as other humanitarian and development organizations, should consider adapting this overall impact evaluation design to other conflict- and non-conflict affected settings in countries within and outside of Latin America.

In sum, SEED offers a rigorous and feasible model for evaluating the impact of empowerment-plus programs, even in conflict-affected settings. Routine implementation of this design will build the global evidence base needed to understand how integrating gender-transformative programs into humanitarian and sectoral development programming can benefit households while empowering women and protecting their rights to freedom from violence.

Findings will be actively disseminated and the final evaluation report is publicly available on WFP's website.

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