

# Rough Guide to Women's Economic Leadership in Agricultural Markets

## What is Women's Economic Leadership (WEL) in agricultural markets?

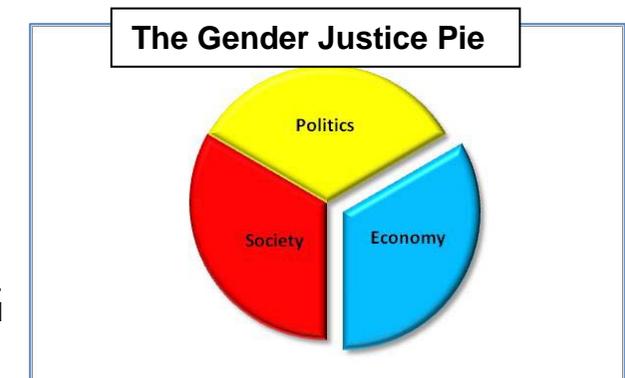
- WEL is an approach to designing agricultural enterprise and market programmes that explicitly prioritize increasing women's power in markets and wider society.
- Rather than working with small numbers of exceptional women, WEL is about empowering larger numbers of poor women to participate in economic activities and promoting gender equality in economic decision-making at household, community and market levels.
- The WEL approach integrates our expertise in livelihoods and gender justice- in the past, agricultural enterprise has not consistently promoted women beyond participation in production, likewise rural women's projects have struggled to develop viable business models.
- Concretely, WEL is a series of training and learning materials that aim to shift the design focus of agricultural markets programmes in order to achieve gender justice, as well as improved economic outcomes for poor men and women.

## Why do we prioritise Women's Economic Leadership in agricultural markets?

### Three arguments for WEL:

#### 1. Women's/Human Rights

- Gender inequality and the denial of women's basic human rights is one of the greatest barriers to poverty eradication worldwide.
- Achieving gender justice means overcoming such inequality in society and in politics and in the economy – a 'pie' that requires working together, across livelihoods, advocacy and social initiatives.
- WEL in agricultural markets is just one of the approaches Oxfam uses to promote gender equality in the economy. We also work on national economic policy, food security and social protection programmes, empowering waged workers, and urban livelihoods.



#### 2. The 'Business Case'



Often it helps to show business or government officials that investing in women has other benefits for society or markets- For instance, support to women can improve the efficiency and profitability of a value chain;

In Colombia, a large private dairy company was reluctant to pay for training for *women* farmers. When Oxfam's research demonstrated that on farms supplying milk, women tend to be responsible for cleaning milking utensils and sanitizing teats, the company agreed to invest in women's training in hygiene. Through formalising women's role within the value chain, the company was able to improve the quality of dairy products, increasing sales and profit.

This more formal role of women within the dairy value chain is expected to increase women's political power and generate additional income - leading to positive impacts on gender roles at household and community levels.

For more information on this case study example, please visit <http://growsellthrive.org/page/dairy-colombia>

### 3. The 'Development Case'

- According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report on the State of Food and Agriculture "[Closing the Gender Gap for Development](#)", equal access to key assets could raise total agricultural production in developing countries by **2.5- 4%**, and potentially raise production on women's smallholdings by as much as **20%**. This increase in agricultural production would in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by **12-17%**, or **100-150 million people**.
- Studies show that when income is in the hands of the mother, the survival probability of a child increases by about **20%** in Brazil, and in Kenya, a child will be up to **17%** taller, because mothers tend to invest more of their income in health and nutrition.

#### MYTH BUSTING BOX:

- WEL **is** for mixed groups as much as for 'women's projects'; sustainable economic and social change requires involving and addressing men too
- WEL programme design brings together- i) the analysis of household and community care work and family production, with ii) gender inequalities in markets
- WEL programme design is context-specific – identifying opportunities for *specific* actors and localities to enable women's economic and social empowerment- rather than a single checklist of activities or interventions
- WEL requires Oxfam staff to act as a *facilitators* - engaging with many stakeholders to make changes in market systems, rather than funding partners to simply provide the 'missing' resources and services
- WEL programme design is for business and markets experts, and agronomists, as well as gender specialists; all are able to make decisions that will result in better social and economic outcomes for women smallholders and their communities

#### How do we start working on Women's Economic Leadership in agricultural markets?

- WEL requires a **shift** in existing livelihoods practice and the knowledge and skills of staff and leaders. At different points of programme development, or re-design, WEL approaches can be used to assess whether new crops are viable and work for women, or to identify new market channels and opportunities to promote and 'upgrade' women in value chains and market systems.
- The focus for this set of WEL resources has been on **market-based agricultural programmes**- empowering women smallholders to participate and lead in producer organisations and/or market service providers, to demonstrate the ability of women to play key roles in making more profitable and sustainable pro-poor value chains and market systems. In the future, we hope to adapt WEL to other contexts; urban, fisheries, waged labour etc.

#### Tools and resources:

1. The 'Grow. Sell. Thrive.' online community ([www.growsellthrive.org](http://www.growsellthrive.org)) has been set up to encourage programme staff to share their experiences and lessons learned, and hosts the latest tools and guidelines about putting WEL into practice;
  - Linking Gendered Household Analysis & Market Analysis
  - Gendered Market Selection
  - Gendered Market Mapping
  - Identifying Market Opportunities and Interventions for WEL
  - Stakeholder Identification and Stakeholder Engagement Strategy
  - How to? Asking Questions of Stakeholders to gain support for WEL
  - Facilitating Positive Change at Household Level
2. The 'Gendered Market and Enterprise Toolkit' has more information about how to implement WEL in markets-based programmes (Due out in November 2011)