

Researching women's collective action

Project Update October 2011

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Welcome

Researching Women's Collective Action gathers much-needed evidence on women's collective action in agricultural markets in Ethiopia, Mali and Tanzania. The project also convenes organisations in a dialogue to improve strategies to support women smallholder farmers. We are learning about the conditions under which women benefit from collective action groups in agricultural markets. We are also identifying innovative forms of collective action in order to improve Oxfam's own strategies of support to smallholder farmers and to influence others.

In this project update, we provide highlights of findings and events on women's collective action (WCA) from the last six months and describe how we did the research. The findings begin to answer common questions: Should we support women-only groups or mixed groups (men and women)? What types of groups benefit women most? Also in this issue: upcoming opportunities to discuss issues related to WCA, such as the webinars organised by Oxfam in collaboration with CARE and the Coady International Institute. The next webinar, focusing on recent findings, is on November 1!



Research methodology – how we did it

The second phase of research started in February 2011 and culminated in May 2011.

A total of 12 researchers carried out the research. Two research advisers, Dr. Daniela Lloyd-Williams (an agricultural economist) and Dr. Carine Pionetti (an anthropologist with a focus on gender issues in agriculture), designed the research methodology and managed country research teams. To view a full list of researchers from Phase II, visit: <http://womenscollectiveaction.com/Researchers+Phase2>

Qualitative research assessed the gender dynamics and benefits of collective action within and across the 15 agricultural sub-sectors that we are studying.

Researchers worked in two regions in each of the three countries. First, researchers analysed secondary sources to compile a literature review and complete a map of each sub-sector showing the various value chains and where collective action occurs within them. Second, research teams conducted field studies consisting of key informant interviews and focus groups in a total of 24 communities per country to answer the research questions assessing collective action and gender dynamics (see Box 1). In two focus groups per community, smallholder farmers used participatory rural appraisal techniques (PRA), such as the use of seeds for ranking benefits, or the use of

chapattis to show linkages between collective action groups (see photos below). In the first group, both men and women identified and characterised all the collective action groups in the community. In the second focus group, women analysed a few collective action groups linked to the sub-sectors of study that 'worked best for women.'

Following the field studies, researchers presented their results in 'stakeholder dialogues,' with farmers, extension workers, NGO staff and government officials in regions of study and national level (see Box 2 inside). Stakeholder feedback was then incorporated into the final analyses and findings.

For more information on Phase II research methodology, visit: <http://womenscollectiveaction.com/Methodology>

BOX 1

Research questions for Phase II

1. Where does collective action occur in each sub-sector, and what form does it take?
2. What benefits do women gain from engaging in collective action?
3. How do these benefits vary with the type of collective action, and why?
4. How does collective action, and the benefits that women derive from it, vary between sub-sectors?
5. Why do the characteristics of collective action vary between sub-sectors?

2nd International Advisory Group meeting held

The International Advisory Group (IAG) met for a second time in Oxfam House in Oxford, UK, on 15th and 16th June 2011. IAG members discussed findings of the latest research, and participants proposed research questions and methods for Phase III, as well as key messages for influencing and communications.

Organisations represented included International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV), COADY International Institute, CARE, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, four Oxfam affiliates (Great Britain, America, Ireland and Novib) and project staff.

Leaders were impressed by the high level of enthusiasm and interest in the findings.

In small groups, members identified key commonalities and differences in findings across countries, and issues requiring further investigation.

For both researchers and practitioners, debating and improving the conceptual framework for understanding collective action was also exciting: our assumptions and theories about factors that influence why women join groups in agricultural markets and why or when they benefit. For more details on this framework, visit: <http://womenscollectiveaction.com/Conceptual+framework+overview>

For a report of the meeting and all presentations, visit: <http://womenscollectiveaction.com/IAG+2011+Meeting>

BOX 2

Stakeholder Dialogues 2011

In April and May 2011, Oxfam and national partners co-convened stakeholder dialogues for the second year in a row. Approximately 300 producers and other stakeholders participated.

Co-conveners of the dialogues were: Mali: National Federation of Rural Women (FENAFER) and Association of Professional Producer Organisations in Mali (AOPP)

Tanzania: Tanzania Association of Women Leaders in Agriculture and Environment (TAWLAE)

Ethiopia (2010): Organization for Rehabilitation and Development in Amhara (ORDA), West Gojam Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BoARD) in Jimma and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Types of WCA per country (Ethiopia, Tanzania and Mali)

Each country has its own smallholder farming systems, a history of promoting groups, and challenges in ensuring women's presence in those groups.

Below are some highlights of the types of WCA found in each country.

Ethiopia

The Ethiopia research identified three types of collective action involving women:

- Formal marketing cooperatives, both commodity-specific and multi-purpose
- Savings and self help groups
- Traditional informal groups, such as those for labour sharing.

Women gain different benefits from different forms of collective action: commodity coops (such as coffee) provide significant economic benefits, but women are only 10-20% of members. Most women tend to be members of informal collective action, providing material and non-material benefits (e.g., savings groups enable women to access markets, and develop leadership skills).

External actors have supported all groups except informal traditional groups.

Mali

All product sectors studied have collective action, but high value sub-sectors, such as sesame, have more because external actors invest heavily in organising those sectors.

Researchers found gender differences both by product and function in the value chain. In certain products, women are the majority (e.g., shea butter). Women's groups focus on production and processing, while mixed groups are the majority in inputs supply and marketing.

Contrary to findings in Ethiopia and Tanzania, women's participation in groups in Mali was not seen as a source of contention among men. As more women have organised, women's participation has become more socially acceptable. This is evidence of positive effects of WCA on attitudes and beliefs. Interestingly, however, women expressed a strong preference for women-only groups.

Tanzania

Collective action tends to be mainly formal, mixed groups that are multi-functional (e.g., inputs supply and savings and training). These groups have very high women's participation. There are very few women-only groups, in contrast to findings in Ethiopia and Mali.

Women derive different benefits from mixed versus women-only groups. Mixed groups were found to provide more economic benefits and also enable women to overcome restrictions placed on them by husbands, as men perceive them to be less threatening than women-only groups. Women-only groups, on the other hand,

help women develop their leadership skills and confidence. As women value the different benefits, they participate opportunistically in multiple groups.

The study observed that development actors have focused most of their support to collectives on improving production, and promoting savings and credit – but very little support in collective marketing. Thus, most of the income benefits from collective action are due to lower production costs or risks, rather than accessing higher prices and value addition. Collective marketing is rare; a very small percentage of agricultural outputs is being sold through groups in Tanzania.



Women in Tanzania use chapattis and venn diagrams in a focus group discussion to show linkages between groups in their community.

Highlights of findings from Phase II

Development practitioners frequently ask: *When promoting women in markets, should we work with women-only groups or mixed groups?*

Research findings indicate:

1) Asking the question ‘which type of group works better for women?’ is too simplistic. The more appropriate question we are finding is: *Which types or combination of groups provide the benefits these women need and work better for women in a specific context?*

Why?

First, communities have a spectrum of groups not just women-only and mixed groups. Some ‘women-only’ groups have a few men in them to carry out functions, like transport, that women may not have the capacity to do. Some mixed groups are heavily dominated by women, and others are heavily dominated by men (see Figure 1).

Second, women-only and mixed groups deliver different benefits, and third, groups evolve! We are finding webs of interlinkages between groups (see Figure 2). Women participate in different groups in opportunistic ways, deriving different benefits. For example, women may be able to participate in *formal*

marketing organisations because they organise *informally* to save money to pay for member contributions. Though economic benefits may be higher in mixed groups due to access to transport, etc., women may value women-only groups because they are able to exercise leadership. The context determines which groups work better for women. Likewise, gender dynamics in groups depend on evolution over time from women-only to mixed or from production to marketing.

2) In all communities studied, development actors’ support to WCA groups focuses mostly on improving production and on promoting small scale savings and credit. Rarely do development actors explicitly attempt to help women gain power in markets through *collective marketing*. As a result, most of the women’s income benefits from collective action are due to reduction in production costs and risks, rather than from accessing higher value markets.

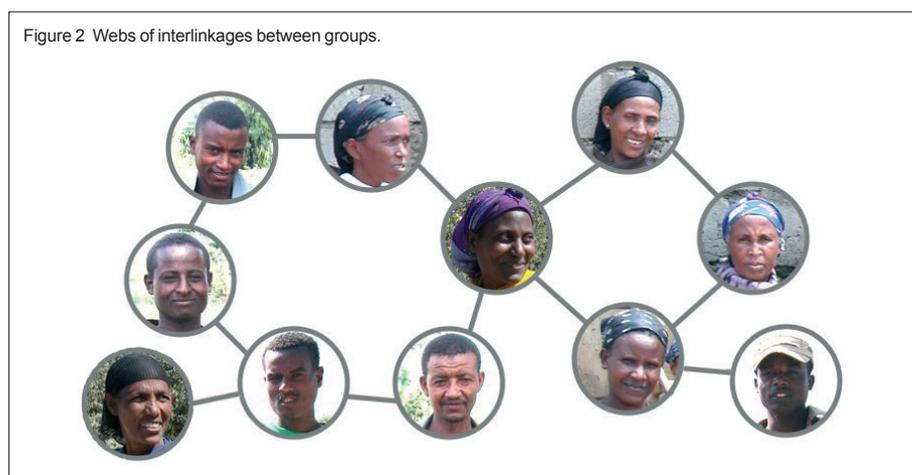
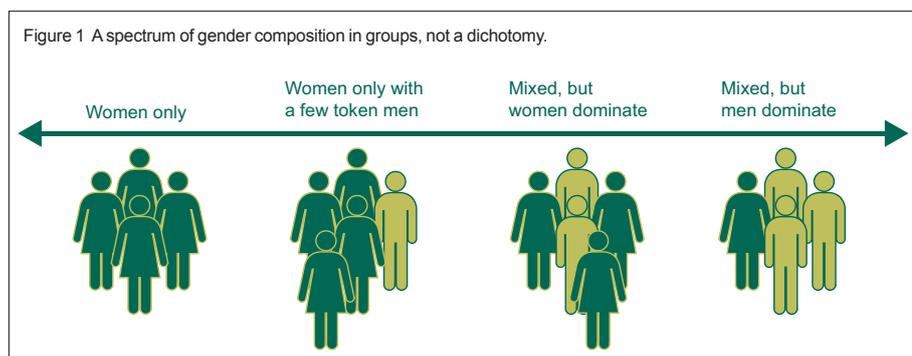
3) In focus groups, women identified significant barriers to accessing markets. Several are not addressed, or even considered, by most development actors’ interventions: access to land and productive resources, time poverty,

mobility, transport, and “restrictions from husbands and/or community” on women’s actions and roles.

How could these barriers be addressed? Why do development actors’ interventions focus mainly on addressing business skills, literacy and access to inputs, and not the other more gender specific barriers mentioned above?

4) Women’s participation in *formal* cooperatives is limited and is greater in *informal* groups. Yet formal groups are often linked to informal groups. Initial explanations for this are that:

- Formal collectives in agricultural value chains are not sufficiently inclusive to attract and enable participation of smallholder women to engage in marketing.
- Women’s lack of ownership of land and other assets appear as a major obstacle to women’s membership/engagement in formal cooperatives. What new strategies might facilitate women’s participation in formal cooperatives (e.g., changes in cooperative by laws) or support informal groups as an integral part of collective action in agricultural markets?



Benefits ranking using the seeds PRA technique in Ethiopia.



IAG members: Carmen Reinoso on behalf of Gine Zwart (Oxfam Novib), Anuj Jain (Coady), Catherine Le Côme (SNV), Sally Smith (Independent researcher), Ruth Vargas-Hill (IFPRI), Gina Castillo (Oxfam America), Monica Gorman (Oxfam Ireland), Andrea Rodericks (CARE), Audrey Bronstein (Chair), Hugo Sintes (Oxfam Great Britain). Not shown: Nicola Jones (ODI), Samira Daoud (Oxfam Intl.)

Webinars on WCA – co-facilitated by Oxfam, CARE and Coady

Oxfam, CARE and Coady are cofacilitating a series of webinars (online seminars) that promote dialogue between researchers and practitioners working on women's collective action (WCA) in agricultural markets.

In these webinars, different organisations share their findings and learning on WCA to:

- Develop tools for analysing WCA;
- Identify innovative forms of WCA, and effective strategies of support to WCA; and

- Identify current gaps in knowledge, areas of synergy and/or opportunities for future research collaborations.

A total of 6 webinars will be held between August 2011 and April 2012. In August, the first two webinars focused on tools for analysing WCA: A conceptual framework for better understanding WCA, and a typology of collective action.

The November webinar is on a 'Synthesis of research findings of WCA in agricultural markets.' In this webinar, we discuss

implications on these findings for policy and practice: held Tuesday, November 1 from 12:00-14:00 GMT. We hope you will join us!

If you are interested in presenting your work in a future webinar, please send us details on your proposed topic at wca@oxfam.org.uk.

For more information on how to register for the webinars, including links to recordings of past webinars, visit: <http://womenscollectiveaction.com/Webinars>

What's next? A glimpse of what is planned for Phase III

In Phase III (September 2011 – February 2012), Oxfam will conduct an in-depth quantitative survey to assess the impact of collective action on income, assets and empowerment. In addition, Oxfam will develop in-depth case studies of effective collective action and development actors' strategies.



A focus group discussion in Tanzania.

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