



WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: PUSHING THE FRONTIERS OF INCLUSIVE MARKET DEVELOPMENT

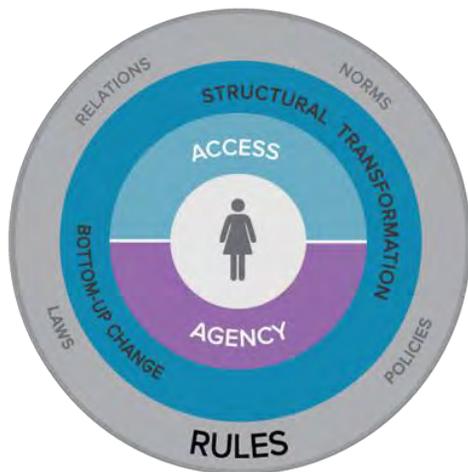
INTRODUCTION

Inclusive market systems development is increasingly recognized as an approach that empowers poor and marginalized people. By explicitly taking gender dynamics into account, inclusive market systems can empower women, leading to wide-ranging development dividends for both women and men, their families, and wider society.

USAID is a leader in global efforts to achieve gender equality and promote women’s empowerment through the agency’s policy on Gender Equality and Female Empowerment.¹ At the same time, USAID’s private sector development programming is increasingly focused on inclusive market systems. Bringing these two objectives together offers the potential for achieving greater market competitiveness, resilience for communities and households, and dignity for all of its members.

The Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO) project aims to improve USAID programs, projects, and activities focused on creating inclusive market systems. To support this process, LEO has developed a framework that defines market systems and offers general guidelines for interventions.² The framework presented in this paper identifies gender considerations and provides examples for facilitating women’s economic empowerment in inclusive market systems.

Figure 1: Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Inclusive Market Systems



LEO’S THEORY OF WEE IN INCLUSIVE MARKET SYSTEMS

Gender equality and women’s empowerment are key considerations in making markets more inclusive. When a market system is inclusive, the structures within it enable and facilitate women’s equal **access** to resources. It also catalyzes the capability of decision making required for women to have the **agency** to act upon the acquisition of those resources and influence the systems in which they live.

The resulting outcome is a reduction in gender inequalities throughout the market system, opening up new opportunities for women to access additional resources and enhance their agency. This dynamic cycle ultimately enables women and men to equally compete for and reap the benefits of market systems on a level playing field.

¹ *Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy*. (Washington, DC: USAID, 2012).

² *LEO Market Systems Development Framework*. (Washington, DC: USAID, 2014).

KEY DEFINITIONS

A **market system** is a dynamic space—incorporating resources, roles, relationships, rules, and results—in which public and private actors collaborate and compete for the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services. Market systems development focuses on catalyzing a process that will result in a market system that is competitive, inclusive, resilient, and adaptive. An **inclusive** market system engages and benefits groups that are often excluded from, or even exploited by, traditional market systems.

Gender equality refers to a society in which men and women enjoy the same rights, opportunities, resources, obligations, and benefits. Gender equality does not suggest that men and women are the same, but that everyone has equal value and the right to not be discriminated against based on their gender or biological sex.

Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. Women's empowerment is achieved when women and girls acquire the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfill their potential. While empowerment often comes from within individuals themselves, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine the possibilities for empowerment.³ The process of empowerment is incremental and involves changes to multiple aspects of a woman's life. Furthermore, women are not a homogenous group, but a diverse group of people who experience empowerment and gender relations differently based on the context in which they live, their social relations (i.e., class, age, marital status), and their socially designated identities (i.e., wife, daughter, co-worker).⁴

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (WEE) IN MARKET SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK

By aiming for inclusivity, a development effort seeks to transform the market system so that it engages and benefits groups that have been traditionally excluded from or sometimes even exploited by that system. The prevalence of gender inequality around the world often precludes women from engaging in traditional market systems development interventions. Women face unique barriers, such as lower ownership of assets, unequal access to productive resources, and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid, household work that limits their time to invest in profitable work—all of which prevent them from benefitting from these interventions. Empowering women to overcome discrimination and exclusion is an essential component of achieving gender equality and transforming market systems to be more inclusive. Since the goals of market systems development are largely economic, the framework outlined in this paper focuses on women's **economic** empowerment.

Promoting women's economic empowerment in inclusive market systems requires donors and implementers to understand empowerment within its local context and its interactions with the system(s) targeted for change by a development project. The considerations outlined below introduce the conceptual foundations upon which the WEE framework is built.

1. Enhanced access and agency are key indicators of empowerment.
2. Gendered rules are a key determinant of access and agency.
3. Rules influence and are influenced by multiple subsystems in market systems.
4. Noneconomic factors are important influencers of access and agency.
5. The combined effect of both structural transformation and bottom-up change interventions lead to sustained empowerment for women.

³ *Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy*. (see note 1).

⁴ Christine Okali, *Integrating Social Difference, Gender and Social Analysis into Agricultural Development*. (Brighton, UK: Future Agricultures, 2011).

1. Enhanced Access and Agency are Key Indicators of Empowerment

This framework builds on the definition of women’s economic empowerment introduced by the International Center for Research on Women,⁵ as the combination of two primary outcomes: enhanced access and agency.

A woman’s **access** has been enhanced when she has the capacity to obtain greater economic resources. In other words, she has been able to access the opportunities, services, and assets required to upgrade her economic position. Women have multiple roles in the household, community, workplace, etc., and as such may access resources as consumers, entrepreneurs, workers, and/or beneficiaries. Institutions and businesses are key actors in enhancing access. For instance, an agricultural input supplier increases women’s access to productive resources by offering smaller bags of fertilizer to meet the needs of female farmers who generally have smaller farm plots than men. Similarly, changes that make business regulations more female-friendly improve women’s access to business opportunities.

A woman’s **agency** has been enhanced when she has the capacity to make decisions and act on opportunities that lead to economic advancement. Agency is not only about acting on opportunities and decision making but also about a woman’s ability to influence her surroundings.⁶ This tends to be described as her “voice.” This means that she has both the power and capacity to speak up and influence decision making at various levels, such as within the household, during business transactions, or in local and national government policymaking processes.

Access and agency are interconnected and jointly essential for empowerment. A woman’s access to resources and services can enhance her capability to act upon and influence the systems with which she interacts. Similarly, a woman’s ability to make decisions and speak her mind is necessary for her to be able to capitalize on the economic resources that are available to her. Agency is essential for her to negotiate better access to resources such as skills training or business networks.⁷ Women’s economic empowerment is a multifaceted and nonlinear process of change, requiring an interaction of both enhanced access and agency that eventually leads to a sustainable reduction in gender inequality.

2. Gendered Rules are a Key Determinant of Access and Agency

Market systems are shaped by rules, which influence an individual’s behavior and the structures in which individuals interact.⁸ Informal and formal gendered rules—norms, relations, laws, and policies—create and reinforce power differentials that often grant unequal values, resources, and degrees of authority to women and men (see Table 1).

⁵ Anne Marie Golla et al., *Understanding and Measuring Women’s Economic Empowerment: Definition, Framework and Indicators*. (Washington, DC: International Center for Research on Women, 2011).

⁶ *Voice and Agency: Empowering Women and Girls for Shared Prosperity*. (Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2014).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Royal Tropical Institute (KIT), Agri-ProFocus, and International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, *Challenging Chains to Change: Gender Equity in Agricultural Value Chain Development*. (Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, Royal Tropical Institute, 2012).

Table 1: Definitions of Gendered Rules

Gendered rules		Description
Informal	Norms	Norms include gender-defined roles, taboos, prohibitions, and expectations, such as whether or not it is appropriate for women to be in public spaces or hold certain types of jobs.
	Relations	Relations include the way in which two or more women and/or men are connected and how they engage in relationships, partnerships, and friendships to either maintain or change gender discrimination.
Formal	Laws	Laws are rules of conduct formally recognized as binding or enforced by a controlling authority. Laws relating to gender issues include personal property and inheritance laws and laws prohibiting gender-based violence, sexual harassment, and discrimination. ⁹
	Policies	Policies include the regulations, procedures, or other governing principles that have been formally adopted by an institution. They differ from laws in that they do not have legal standing; however, they govern the management, decisions, and actions of institutions. An example of a policy that could undermine empowerment, depending on the context, could be a farmers' cooperative policy that limits membership to only one member of the household.

Both informal and formal rules can interact to empower women by enabling access to resources and opportunities and promoting agency and decision-making power. Or they can undermine empowerment by preventing access and hindering agency, placing women at a disadvantage. For instance, a company's policies (or lack of policies) may disempower women. A company lacking a sexual harassment policy or a company having a formal policy that is not enforced due to informal norms can cause discriminatory behavior and practices. On the other hand, a company that introduces an effective sexual harassment policy can help to empower women in the workplace and influence informal rules.

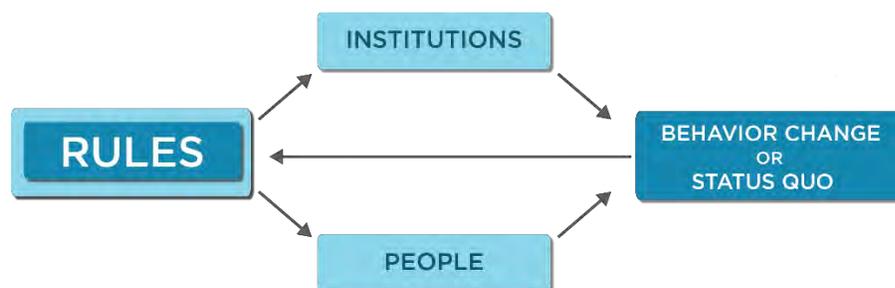
These rules influence institutions and people, how they behave toward one another, and how they interact within a market system. The result can make both women and men believe that women's marginalization and other forms of gender discrimination are normal and thus acceptable. These discriminatory beliefs are then replicated and reinforced between institutions and people within various layers of a market system, resulting in structural barriers. These individual mindsets and structural barriers then perpetuate the status quo by reinforcing the existing rules.

Example: Gender biases about the definition of women's work and men's work are an example of informal norms. Societies around the world are still more likely to associate women with household and caretaking work and men with market-oriented work. When interviewed in population and agricultural censuses, women often report housework as their primary occupation and fail to report their contributions to home-based agricultural work, resulting in significant underreporting about

⁹ "Merriam-Webster Dictionary," Merriam-Webster, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary>.

women’s labor contributions.¹⁰ These informal rules, which downplay women’s contributions to agriculture, are reinforced if government agencies make policy decisions based on this data, such as in designing government extension programs that primarily target and reach men. This could result in women having less access to extension services than men.

Figure 2: Cycle of Rules and Behavior Change



However, gendered rules, like market systems, are dynamic. They are perpetually evolving in response to the changing social and economic environment. The introduction of new ideas, incentives, and influences within a market system can change the cycle to promote change.

Example: In Uganda, a community-led market analysis methodology was implemented by OxfamNovib to promote gender equality in the coffee value chain. The Gender Action Learning System (GALS) built upon the preliminary mapping of the selected market system by engaging different stakeholder groups in additional action research. This action research led to the identification of domestic violence, lack of property rights, and inability to control income from coffee sales as critical market barriers for local women. More specifically, the research found that “intra-household conflicts reduced the quality of the coffee because both women and men were picking and selling unripe beans in order to sell them before their partners managed to do so.” This action research process influenced stakeholders to support changes to informal rules at the household level. Results included significant changes in gender relations particularly with regard to gender division of labor. Participants reported more equal management of household resources and increased income, while coffee buyers reported increased quality of coffee.¹¹

3. Rules Influence and Are Influenced by Multiple Subsystems in Market Systems

Barriers to and opportunities for empowerment exist in each of the subsystems within a market system where women engage. These include the household, community, workplace, supporting institutions, and enabling environment. Table 2 explains how these subsystems can influence empowerment.

¹⁰ Cheryl Doss, *Data Needs for Gender Analysis in Agriculture*. (Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, 2013).

¹¹ Cathy Farnsworth, *Gender-Aware Value Chain Development*. (Accra, Ghana: UN Women, 2011).

Table 2: Market Subsystems and Sample Changes to Enhance Empowerment

Subsystem	Potential changes	
	Changes to Access	Changes to Agency
Household	Changes in access to resources at the household level such as increased access to income, nutritious food, or productive assets	Changes in household relationships, participation in household decision making, household valuing of women’s roles and entitlements, time use, and rates of violence within the household
Community	Changes in access to community resources such as public services, infrastructure, or community-based savings platforms	Changes in participation in community decision making, community leadership roles, community valuing of women’s roles and entitlements, and rates of violence or harassment in public spaces
Workplace	Changes in sales, production, occupational segregation, profit, work hours, conditions, and remuneration; access to markets as buyers and sellers	Changes in workplace participation, decision making, and roles and responsibilities
Supporting institutions (e.g., banks, media, NGOs)	Changes in access to their services and their products that meet the needs and preferences of women	Changes in the understanding, valuing, and portrayal of women; decision-making opportunities within the institution
Enabling environment (e.g., government, industry associations)	Changes in policies and regulations that affect women; access to basic services	Changes in decision-making ability and influence, political leadership roles, and valuing of women’s roles and entitlements

Both the *household and the community* are spaces where gendered rules, particularly informal rules, can either be reinforced or evolve. For example, in many contexts, a woman’s access to markets and services is constrained by household and communal norms that restrict her mobility outside the home or community. More fundamentally, norms and relations within the household and community, as well as formal legal restrictions, can determine how and to what extent households members benefit from social and economic opportunities, resources, and services.

A *workplace* is made up of owners and managers of enterprises, as well as the employees who work for these enterprises. A workplace can also include institutions outside the private sector such as government offices and the household.¹² Formal and informal rules not only create barriers or opportunities to securing work or income-generating activities but also influence a worker’s experiences at work. The quality of work

¹² Man-Kwun Chan, *Making Agricultural Value Chain Programmes Work for Workers: A Practical Guide for Development Donors and Practitioners*. (Cambridge, MA: WIEGO, 2012).

and workplace conditions are governed by formal and informal rules and significantly impact a woman's empowerment. For example, certain types of jobs can be disempowering, putting women and men in situations that may be unsafe or exploitative. Occupational segmentation that results in unequal wages between men and women is another example. Formal and informal rules shape how easily this exploitative behavior can be changed. For these reasons, labor market issues, including concerns around job quality, should be an integral aspect in inclusive market systems programming.

Support institutions are important spaces through which workers, businesses, and entrepreneurs access resources, information, and services. Financial institutions are a type of support institution. Almost all entrepreneurs require ongoing access to capital to operate and expand their businesses. Although a range of financial institutions exist, in practice many women remain excluded from various financial services. Studies show that access to credit remains a leading constraint facing women entrepreneurs worldwide.¹³ Agricultural extension services are another type of support service that have significant gender gaps in terms of the proportion of women who are hired as extension workers and the proportion of women who receive those benefits. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), female farmers receive only 5 percent of extension services and are only 15 percent of extension agents in low-income countries.¹⁴

The **enabling environment** plays a significant part in shaping women's empowerment given its responsibility for designing and enforcing most formal rules. For example, governments implement formal rules such as policies and regulations. Yet, these formal rules affect women and men in different ways—unintentionally and intentionally. Gender-blind policies and regulations can perpetuate gender inequalities such as women's ability to own land or a business. Where laws are responsive to gender issues, their efficacy can be undermined by informal rules and result in uneven enforcement.¹⁵ Currently, most countries still maintain legal differences on the basis of gender, constraining women's ability to exercise their rights and fully benefit from market systems.¹⁶

These unique subsystems often interact and influence one another. Women's ability to enhance access and agency in one of these subsystems may be catalyzed or impeded by the dynamics in another, or the level of agency can be out of sync between these subsystems creating even more complex situations for women to navigate.¹⁷ Understanding how these realms interact to reinforce or change gendered rules can greatly affect how well a project empowers women.

Example: A study of household income distribution arrangements in a value chain project in the French bean subsector in Meru, Kenya, found that the majority of French bean contracts were issued to men, yet unpaid female family workers carried out most (72 percent) of the work on the bean plots. These women did not receive much of the income from or recognition for their work. They retained control over just 38 percent of the income that was generated.¹⁸ Understanding the rules that govern the household and workplace and how they interact could have helped the intervention to prioritize which subsystem to

¹³ Deborah Rubin and Christina Manfre, *A Guide to Integrating Gender into Agricultural Value Chains*. (Washington, DC: Cultural Practice, LLC, 2013).

¹⁴ *The State of Food and Agriculture Report 2010-11*. (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization, 2011).

¹⁵ Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Canada, accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.international.gc.ca/international/index.aspx?lang=eng>.

¹⁶ *Voice and Agency* (see note 6).

¹⁷ Linda Jones, *Discussion Paper for an M4P WEE Framework: How Can the Making Markets Work for the Poor Framework Work for Poor Women and for Poor Men?* (Durham, UK: Springfield Centre for Business in Development, 2012).

¹⁸ *The State of Food and Agriculture Report* (see note 14).

target and how to sequence the interventions in each subsystem to generate the most benefit within a broader market system.

4. Noneconomic Factors are Important Influencers of Access and Agency

Noneconomic factors such as gender-based violence (GBV), education levels, and reproductive health issues can have strong impacts on a woman's ability to increase her access and agency. For instance, GBV restricts women's agency and their ability to make and act on decisions about their economic advancement. GBV also has negative impacts on economic productivity and social well-being of societies at large. Another example is how literacy can enhance empowerment. Even basic, functional literacy or numeracy skills can provide people with critical skills as well as the confidence to engage in, and not be exploited by, market transactions. Assessing how these noneconomic factors affect actors within market systems can help programs understand how to design more effective empowerment interventions. Interventions to address noneconomic factors constraining women's access and agency, such as reducing GBV, can leverage the influence and advocacy of grassroots-level change agents and civil society groups to link market systems initiatives to wider community-based initiatives that support the empowerment process for women.

5. The Combined Effect of Both Structural Transformation and Bottom-Up Change Interventions Lead to Sustained Empowerment for Women

Just as access and agency are essential to drive sustainable empowerment outcomes, global case studies show a more significant long-term impact on empowerment from interventions that combine both change in structural barriers and bottom-up change from individuals themselves.¹⁹

Structural transformation is the process by which the embedded rules—norms, relations, laws, and policies—in the institutions within the above-mentioned subsystems (e.g., household, community, workplace, support institutions, and enabling environment) are changed to promote or restrict woman's opportunities and choices. These structural changes tend to increase women's access to resources and open up new economic opportunities.

Example: A USAID Feed the Future program in Ghana attempted to increase female smallholder farmers' access to production technologies and markets by connecting them with nucleus farmers in an outgrower model. The project encouraged nucleus farmers to include female producers and female-majority farmers groups as outgrowers. As the nucleus farmers began to observe that women repay services in a timely manner, the percent of female outgrowers increased from 26 to 39 percent over four years. This is an example of structural transformation, where the outgrower model is the structure that becomes more inclusive of women—enabling their access to information, markets, and more—as the perceptions about women's abilities as farmers changed.²⁰

Bottom-up change is the process by which individuals who are exploited by or excluded from market systems interact to change the system themselves. Bottom-up change focuses on the individual and their networks within a market system. It is about creating the “power to” accomplish goals and people's ability to be or connect with change makers or local role models. It is also closely linked to women's social capital and horizontal connections with other marginalized women or their ability to exercise “power with”—the type of power commonly exercised in social groups to achieve collective goals. There are various platforms for collective action that enhance aspects of women's access and agency such as savings groups, cooperatives, or

¹⁹ KIT, Agri-ProFocus, and IIRR. *Challenging Chains to Change* (see note 8).

²⁰ Michelle Stern, *Gender Impact Assessment Report for the Agricultural Development and Value Chain Enhancement (ADVANCE) Program*. (Accra, Ghana: ACDI/VOCA, 2013).

self-help groups. These platforms are critical to promoting social cohesion and resilience. Yet not all collective models have the ability to influence and transform market systems. Bottom-up change interventions in market systems development are those that are sustainable over time, interact with other actors in the market system, and strengthen the process of advocacy on behalf of the marginalized population to continuously increase inclusiveness within the market system over time. It is a platform where women can exercise their agency and have influence over the market systems that surround them.

Example: The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a registered trade union in India for women working in the informal economy. In 2008 the organization had close to one million members.²¹ The main goal of SEWA is to organize women to obtain work, income, food, and social security. According to an impact study completed by Martha Chen for SEWA, the organization offers two types of collective activities that they call “struggle” and “development.” The former demands change by creating local advocacy systems and the later offers services such as microfinance and childcare. For example, SEWA members have fought for the legal status and official recognition of its members under labor laws, resulting in informal workers receiving business licenses, written contracts for services, and inclusion in labor statistics and research. SEWA also intentionally promotes women’s leadership. As local leaders emerge from within the groups, they are supported as local business and political leaders. SEWA offers leadership trainings, exposure visits to speak with public officials, and a supportive space for women to succeed.²² SEWA is an example of a collective platform that has catalyzed bottom-up change. It continues over time to sustainably bring a voice to local women and allows them to influence the market systems in which they live.

Programs that are successful at catalyzing a process of empowerment appear to be those that promote both structural transformation and bottom-up change, as well as find ways to integrate interventions seeking both types of change.

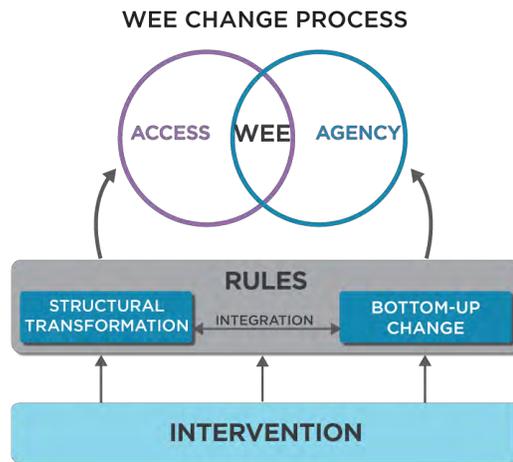
Example: The Behind the Veil program, implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) and Economic and Career Development Institute (ECDI) in Pakistan, combined structural transformation and bottom-up change by introducing female sales agents into the embroidery value chain. They were able to conduct in-person transactions with female suppliers, who, due to gender norms about women’s mobility and interactions with men, were previously prevented from engaging in and benefitting from formal value chain activities. This is structural transformation because it changed the nature of the embroidery value chain to be more inclusive of women suppliers. It is also an example of bottom-up change because it enabled women to take on a role of power and influence—as sales agents—to be leaders of that structural change.²³

²¹ Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA), accessed October 15, 2014, <http://www.sewa.org>.

²² Martha A. Chen, Ruchi Khurana, and Nidhi Mirani. *Towards Economic Freedom: The Impact of SEWA*. (Ahmedabad, India: SEWA, 2005).

²³ *Behind the Veil: Access to Markets for Homebound Women Embroiderers in Pakistan*. (Ontario, Canada: MEDA, 2008).

Figure 3: WEE Intervention Change Process



To facilitate sustained empowerment, it is also important to align the incentives and interests of institutions and businesses with the empowerment interests of excluded groups and their advocates. This is not always easy. In cases where they are incompatible, market systems development efforts can leverage other local—sometimes noncommercial—institutions to fill this gap. Interventions can work through local actors, such as local governments, community organizations, or civil society associations, to address barriers and enable women to access the resources, opportunities, and services they need to take advantage of and benefit from market opportunities.²⁴ The sequence of these change processes is significant. In certain contexts, both structural transformation and bottom-up change can be promoted in parallel. In other contexts, bottom-up change may be needed prior to intervening in structural transformation in order to build local ownership through community mobilization and identification of change agents.

IDEAS FOR FACILITATING WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN MARKET SYSTEMS

Some of the core implications that market systems implementers should consider are highlighted below.

1. Gender-Responsive Market Systems Analysis

The market systems analysis process needs to examine gender roles and relationships, as well as the unique constraints and opportunities faced by women within a market system. This gender-responsive analysis should be completed as an integrated part of a project’s overall market systems analysis process. Each level of analysis as laid out in the overall LEO market systems framework (e.g., macro, meso, and micro)²⁵ will identify where gender inequality and empowerment opportunities exist. The analysis should incorporate an in-depth understanding of how the rules interact with the different subsystems—household, community, workplace, supporting institutions, and enabling environment—and the people the intervention is trying to benefit. These rules can draw out the interconnections within a market system such as gendered power dynamics; gender relationships, roles, and rules; and the parts of the system that include the greatest catalyzers for reducing gender inequality.

²⁴ *Local Systems: A Framework for Supporting Sustained Development*. (Washington, DC: USAID, 2014).

²⁵ *LEO Market Systems Development Framework* (see note 2).

2. Interventions that Support Access and Agency

Different interventions will support unique empowerment outcomes. Because much of market systems work to date has focused on enhancing access, it is important to consider how interventions can also promote agency. This means that programs not only focus on the types of economic opportunities an intervention creates or expands but also whether the process of creating that opportunity promotes women's increased self-confidence and decision-making abilities. It also means that certain interventions like leadership development and enhancing support systems and networks become critical due to their effects on women's agency.

3. Interventions that Facilitate Systemic Changes for Women's Economic Empowerment

The complexity of empowerment can make it challenging to prioritize which aspects to focus on. This reflects the broader challenge of defining the intervention space within the "soft" boundaries of market systems. No program will be able to address all of the constraints that women face within a particular market system. Programs should use information generated from the gender-responsive market systems analysis to select and adapt interventions that will facilitate the greatest degree of systemic change for women's economic empowerment and is appropriate and feasible within the given context.

4. Facilitation for Both Structural and Bottom-Up Interventions

Applying a facilitation approach to project interventions is a cornerstone of market systems development.²⁶ It is important for sustainability and local ownership of development results as well as for stimulating a longer-term process that promotes adaptive behavior and practices. By definition, the process of empowerment corresponds with a facilitation approach because of its correlation to local ownership. The term "agent of change" is rooted in the concept of agency and defined by someone driving their own change process. Applying a facilitation approach to structural transformation and bottom-up change interventions will support the empowerment agenda to reach further scale and sustainability.

5. Planning and Monitoring for Adverse Impacts on Gender Relations Affecting Both Men and Women

Women's economic empowerment is a complex process. It interacts with market systems, which are also complex and dynamic. Unintended and unforeseen outcomes are therefore inevitable. Up-front intervention analysis and regular monitoring with effective tools must be able to assess and articulate potential negative consequences, particularly ones specific to women.²⁷ It is important to follow "Do No Harm" principals and understand the circumstances under which risks become more acute. Monitoring systems should incorporate the potential risks into their theories of change and develop indicators to measure them. Projects must track these potential risks and develop response procedures to promote adaptations in interventions where needed. For women's empowerment in particular, tracking and mitigating adverse effects includes collecting data from multiple perspectives and from both women and men and assessing people's reactions to interventions and shifting gender norms.

6. Monitoring and Evaluating Empowerment Processes and Systemic Changes to Empowerment

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems must be regularly updated and adapted along with the changing needs of women in order to effectively address the market constraints they face. This requires a carefully designed M&E system that captures data on women's economic empowerment from multiple perspectives. It should track empowerment indicators regarding both access and agency such as the ones put forth in the

²⁶ Jeanne Downing and Ruth Campbell, *Understanding Facilitation Briefing Paper*. (Washington, DC: USAID, 2012).

²⁷ Erin Markel, *Measuring Results of Women's Economic Empowerment in Private Sector Development*. (Cambridge, UK: Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, 2014).

Women’s Empowerment Agricultural Index²⁸ or in other resources like the guidance on measuring women’s economic empowerment from the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development.²⁹ The M&E systems should also allow for an assessment of whether the project has stimulated a pathway of empowerment—in terms of enhancing access and agency—for its female participants and beneficiaries.

Projects should also assess whether interventions have created system-level changes that are gender-responsive and relevant to women. Often, measures of systemic change focus on changes among institutions rather than the individuals within or serviced by those institutions.³⁰ Changes in individual behavior, or within the households and/or community subsystems, are normally seen to be outside a market system and are therefore not traditionally tracked as measurements of systemic change. Instead, households and communities are viewed as receiving the benefits of systemic changes. However, the LEO Inclusive Market Systems Framework defines households and communities as systems in and of themselves. This viewpoint opens up new discussions around what constitutes system-level change and presents the case for programs to explore measuring systemic change across the various subsystems.³¹

Disclaimer: This publication was prepared by Erin Markel of MarketShare Associates and Lindsey Jones of ACIDI/VOCA with funding from USAID Leveraging Economic Opportunity (LEO) project. The paper was informed by the review and contributions of Jennefer Sebstad, Linda Jones, Ruth Campbell, Jeanne Downing, Anna Garloch, Kristin O’Planick, Anastasia de Santos, and Ben Fowler. For more information on LEO, contact leo@acdivoca.org or visit www.acdivoca.org/leo. The author’s views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

²⁸ Feed the Future, *Women’s Empowerment Agricultural Index*. (Washington, DC: USAID, 2014).

²⁹ Erin Markel, *Measuring Results of Women’s Economic Empowerment* (see note 27).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Aly Michlbradt, Interview. March 27, 2014.