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COMBINING PUSH AND PULL STRATEGIES FOR GREATER SCALE AND POVERTY OUTREACH:

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE 2014 SEEP ANNUAL CONFERENCE

LEO
Leveraging Economic Opportunities

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I. INTRODUCTION

Combining Push and Pull Strategies for Greater Scale and Poverty Outreach was one of four learning tracks featured at the 2014 SEEP Network Annual Conference on *Scaling Impact in Inclusive Market Systems*. Co-sponsored by USAID's Microenterprise and Private Enterprise Promotion (MPEP) and Food for Peace (FFP) offices, six peer learning sessions included practitioners and researchers from multiple organizations. This track highlighted field experience in applying elements of a **push/pull approach** to facilitate pathways out of poverty for very poor households through engagement in markets. In particular, all sessions were asked to address how push and pull strategies intersected—in both theory and practice—and how these strategies can work together to create more sustainable and scalable impact.

WHAT IS A PUSH/PULL APPROACH?

A push/pull approach is a market-oriented, pathways-based approach to poverty reduction that utilizes both push strategies—which build capacities, and pull strategies—which facilitate access to economic opportunities, to incrementally drive more beneficial and sustained inclusion of the very poor into market systems. More than just one-off activities, it is a framework for design and adaptive implementation management, grounded in a practical theory of change for pathways out of poverty through markets.

Source: USAID/LEO Project

Many market development programs (such as those using a value chain development or Making Markets work for the Poor (M4P) approach) utilize 'pull strategies' to expand and diversify the economic opportunities available in a market system—through initiatives like partnering with the private sector, creating a stronger business enabling environment, linking producers to markets and finance, etc. The poorest of the poor, however, often lack the appropriate resources, networks, or capacities to take advantage of these market opportunities. On the other hand, those working more directly with the poorest of the poor frequently work on developing capacities and resources, but limited direct linkages with market stakeholders and sources of demand often constrain the sustainability and independence of positive changes in livelihoods.

Many practitioners, as well as donor agencies like USAID, have been paying increasing attention to the design and implementation modalities of how these two 'worlds' of programming interact to create more inclusive market systems that provide sustainable pathways out of poverty for the very poor. The push/pull approach is one way to bring together efforts of livelihoods development initiatives and market development programs to achieve poverty-reducing impact at scale. USAID's Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO) project is focused on addressing gaps in knowledge and practice that exist in the area of push/pull. LEO coordinated one of the sessions ("Push/Pull in Ethiopia"), provided technical input to the track, and funded this post-conference lessons learned synthesis. The conference track was intended to bring forth program experience from a range of practitioners, to provide a forum for discussion on push/pull, and to offer learning for the wider development community.

The following section (II) briefly describes the six push/pull sessions from the SEEP Network 2014 Annual Conference, noting the participating organizations, their focus region, and the content of the session. More detail on each session is found in the Annex. This is followed by a lessons learned section (III) that discusses the overall push/pull approach, targeting, implementing push strategies in market systems programs, and project management. Each lesson learned is supported by field examples from the individual session presentations. The final section (IV) draws brief, preliminary conclusions.

II. BACKGROUND

The market systems initiatives presented in the conference sessions integrated both push and pull strategies into their program design and implementation. As explored in Section III below ("Lessons Learned"), many of these programs did not start out with an intentional push/pull approach, but realized that typical market-oriented pull strategies—e.g., market linkages, private sector services, and financial inclusion—were not adequate to integrate the very poor into market systems. Therefore, many of them adopted push strategies such as skills training, coaching, savings groups, and others. The following table summarizes each session:

Presenter	*Organizations*	*Program*	*Countries of Implementation*
SESSION 1. Improving the Food Security of the Extremely Poor by Linking them to Markets The challenges and approaches to integrating very vulnerable persons into input and output markets as well as an examination of the roles of women and intra household decision making.			
Dun Grover	ACDI/ VOCA	Multi Year Assistance Programs (MYAP)	Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Uganda MYAPs
Laté Lawson-Lartego	CARE USA	Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development (GRAD)	Ethiopia
Dan Norell	World Vision	Multi Year Assistance Programs (MYAP)	Haiti & Malawi
SESSION 2. Push/Pull in Ethiopia: Lessons from Four Years of USAID Programming Examination of push pull initiatives in USAID Ethiopia, the roles of various actors, and highlighting key results and challenges.			
Anna Garloch	ACDI/VOCA	Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO) Project	USA
George Gray	Independent Consultant to USAID/Ethiopia	USAID/Ethiopia	Ethiopia
Adrian Cullis	Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University	AKLDP (Agriculture Knowledge, Learning, Documentation and Policy) Project	Ethiopia
Karri Goeldner Byrne	Mercy Corps	PRIME (Pastoralists Areas Resilience Improvement and Market Expansion)	Ethiopia
Laté Lawson-Lartego	CARE HQ	GRAD (Graduation with Resilience to Achieve Sustainable Development)	USA

SESSION 3. From Displacement to Empowerment: Market Facilitation for Reintegration in Uganda Models for three push/pull initiatives in Uganda two in northern states with former IDPs, one with national outreach using mobile phones.			
Brian Ssebunya	IRC	PEEP (Post-Conflict Recovery and Economic Empowerment of Returnees through Private Sector Development)	Uganda
Robert Kintu	FIT Uganda	FARMIS (Farmer's Records Management Information System)	Uganda
Melaku Yirga	Mercy Corps	RAIN (Revitalizing Agricultural Incomes & New Markets)	Uganda
SESSION 4. Entrepreneurs Wanted: Connecting Push/Pull Approaches Push/pull activities in three countries including value chain strengthening in the Philippines and Tanzania and savings led micro entrepreneurship in Tajikistan.			
Mike Bowles	Aga Khan Foundation (AKF)	Moderator – market development lead and advisor at AKF	Geneva
Kishwar Abdulalishoev	Mountain Societies Development Support Programme (AKF)	(IRIS) Improving Rural Incomes through Savings-led Financial Services	Tajikistan
Henry Panlibuton	Independent	STRIVE (Supporting Transformation by Reducing Insecurity and Vulnerability with Economic Strengthening)	Philippines
Sally Walkerman	Aga Khan Foundation	CRSP (Coastal Rural Support Programme)	Tanzania
SESSION 5. Incorporating Women into Markets using Push/Pull in Ghana, Afghanistan, Pakistan Push/pull strategies for women entrepreneurs in challenging environments.			
Christine Faveri	MEDA	Moderator	Canada
Perveen Shaikh	Entrepreneurship & Community Development Institute	USAID Entrepreneurs	Pakistan
Kerry Jane Wilson	Zardozi	Markets for Afghan Artisans – DFID	Afghanistan
Rachel Hess	MEDA	GROW (Greater Rural Opportunities for Women) Ghana – DFATD	Ghana

SESSION 6. A Savings led Pathway Out of Poverty for the Most Vulnerable Savings groups described and detailed as an important component in integrated push/pull strategies.			
Jason Wolfe	USAID	PEPFAR (US President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief)	Global
Colleen Green	DAI	IMARISHA	Tanzania
Michael Ferguson	FHI360	ASPIRES (Accelerating Strategies for Practical Innovation & Research in Economic Strengthening)	Mozambique
Jackie Aldrette	AVSI, Milan	SCORE (Sustainable Responses for Improving the Lives of Vulnerable Children)	Ivory Coast / Uganda

III. LESSONS LEARNED

The following lessons learned draw on the Conference presentations to capture current learning on the integration of push/pull approaches to achieve scale and outreach in market-oriented programs. They are organized according to four main clusters of learning: **overarching lessons, targeting, push and pull implementation strategies in market systems programs, and project management issues**. Each cluster of learning topics is introduced, followed by specific lessons with supporting examples from the session presentations.

OVERARCHING TAKEAWAYS ON THE PUSH-PULL APPROACH

This cluster discusses learning that pertains to the push/pull approach overall, how the approach relates to market systems, and the potential to achieve outreach and scale.

INTEGRATED PUSH/PULL APPROACHES OFFER SYSTEMIC SOLUTIONS TO THE BARRIERS OF DISORGANIZED MARKETS

Push/pull approaches consider the position of the very poor in market systems, examine the constraints affecting their engagement in that system, and suggest appropriate strategies to prepare poor producers for market integration while supporting the market to engage with these producers. For example, smallholder farmers may be producing outputs that are desired by actors higher up in the value chain—traders, processors, exporters, etc.—while at the same time these higher level actors could offer farmers much needed market access. The quality, quantity or handling of products by smallholders may mean that their products do not meet market requirements. On the other hand, lack of awareness about smallholder opportunities and solutions to limitations can cause traders and other actors to not engage such farmers. A push/pull approach offers strategies to deal with the constraints of such disorganized markets—building sustainable market system solutions that benefit and incentivize both small-scale producers and other market actors. In Haiti and Malawi, for example, World Vision (Session 1) built capacities and forged market linkages in order to introduce greater organization and improved outcomes in output markets in agricultural value chains. In the same session, ACDI/VOCA presented experiences in organizing input markets in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, and Uganda.

In addition, there are broader systemic constraints beyond the assets, skills, and networks of an individual household that constrain the ability of that household to access opportunities, and for market actors to invest in commercial relationships with the very poor. Some of these systemic constraints include policies or informal barriers that dis-incentivize investment by private companies in certain value chains or regions; and the lack of services and physical infrastructure in regions that makes it unattractive or prohibitively expensive for commercial entities to engage.

THE INTENTIONAL INTEGRATION OF PUSH/PULL IS AN EMERGING APPROACH

As described above, many of the programs featured in the SEEP conference sessions did not intentionally set out to implement an integrated push/pull approach. The portfolio of programs presented in the session on push/pull in Ethiopia (Session 2) is one of the few cases globally where there has been such an integrated, whole-of-mission and government effort to implement the push/pull theory of change. This has resulted in multiple years of experience to draw from, along with some level of evidence to support lessons learned. Having implementers with, at minimum, shared donor and mission strategies to bind them, presents a great base upon which areas of common learning and experience can be shared. Ethiopia is likely to be a source of

rich learning in the future as USAID's portfolio of projects continue to progress along their implementation timeline, and as USAID/Ethiopia continues to invest in reflection and analysis related to where push/pull is and is not working, why, and how this should impact future programming. While other programs were not as integrated or intentional, they too offer emerging lessons from their application of push and pull strategies in a single initiative. While push and pull are still largely treated as individual activities within a program, USAID is trying to move towards a more systemic approach to fulfilling push or pull objectives in households and communities. This is an area of growth in the approach and programming that will need to evolve over time.

PUSH/PULL MODELS WILL BE CONTEXTUALIZED IN UNIQUE WAYS—ALTHOUGH THE MOST EFFECTIVE ARE GROUNDED IN A STRONG, PATHWAYS-BASED THEORY OF CHANGE

The implementation model that supports the overall push/pull theory of change will be unique to the poverty, market, and programmatic context. Some of the variables illustrated at the conference which informed differences in push and pull models are outlined below.

- **Organizational mission and competency:** Organizations have defined missions emphasizing different strengths, which enable them to better implement distinct aspects of a push/pull program. For example, ECDI and Zardozi (Session 5) both have an institutional focus on very poor and vulnerable populations, as well as deep expertise in integrating women into market systems in conservative communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. This means that ECDI and Zardozi's push/pull strategies were driven by an organizational mission that supported the implementation of culturally acceptable solutions to overcome gender-specific barriers faced by poor women. Likewise, as evidenced in Session 6 and the GRAD project in Session 2, many push/pull models emphasize savings as the foundational element in a pathway to stability and ability to engage in markets.

- **Market system differences:** No two market systems are the same. The differences in enabling environment, infrastructure, available service, etc., mean that the level of focus on push or pull, and the types of interventions selected will vary. As with all market systems programs, it is important to evaluate the constraints and opportunities in the system. For example, weaker markets (due to isolation, fragmentation, underdevelopment, etc.) may require more push activities, while in more robust markets, pull activities will be more relevant. In Uganda, the reintegration of internally displaced persons by Mercy Corps and IRC (Session 3) required intensive concentration on rebuilding the capacities of farmers.

- **Socio-cultural context:** A complicating aspect of market system contexts for very poor populations is the socio-cultural environment. In Ethiopia, CARE (Session 1) identified multiple empowerment constraints for women around decision-making power, leadership roles, and division of labor. The solutions were largely based on push strategies: support of Village Economic and Social Associations that foster dialogue between men and women; promotion of female leaders in these and other community associations; and access to labor and time saving technologies, particularly for women, to lessen the workload at home, freeing up time for other activities. However, CARE's push/pull model does emphasize the importance of integrating and considering pull strategies at all stages of the implementation process.

Notwithstanding these variables, it is important to note that the actual interpretation of the push/pull approach amongst presenters was different. While some degree of difference in understanding is valid, some work remains to ensure a flexible but consistent understanding of the approach that leads to the best outcomes for target populations.

TARGETING IN PUSH/PULL PROGRAMS

As push/pull programs aim to enable the very poor to rise out of poverty, targeting strategies are critical in identifying program participants and determining the optimal range of participants to achieve outcomes.

INTERVENTIONS NEED NOT, AND IN MANY CASES SHOULD NOT, LIMIT PARTICIPATION TO THE VERY POOR

Reducing stigma, building social networks, peer support, and collective risk reduction are a few of the reasons why programs should not be limited to the very poor. At the same time, interventions need to set forth and operationalize clearly-defined targeted goals, to ensure that programs ultimately serve the very poor. A session on savings groups led by PEPFAR (Session 6) emphasized this point for people impacted by HIV/AIDS, noting that savings groups should *not* be exclusively composed of the target population due to stigma, as well as the facts that belonging to a 'group' is a benefit in itself (reasons vary across groups). However, risks associated with including very vulnerable savers (lack of savings, ability to 'keep up' as group grows) should be mitigated. In Session 2, the GRAD project is reserving funds in their budget to work with people not considered 'beneficiaries' but that it knows will be key to the push/pull process. These include local traders or service providers with whom the project needs to work as an intermediary step in building more substantial linkages.

SELF-SELECTION IS A POWERFUL TOOL, BUT FAVORS THOSE WHO ARE LESS VULNERABLE

Within targeting, there remains room for members of a targeted group to self-select into specific activities. Often the least vulnerable are more likely to self-select and to remain engaged over a longer period of time than the most vulnerable. Focused and appropriate push strategies can increase the likelihood that the most vulnerable can and will choose to participate in market activities. The issue of targeting was not a focus of Session 2, but across the portfolio of programs in Ethiopia, the approach to targeting is mixed. For example, participants in GRAD are directly targeted based on their linkage to the Government of Ethiopia's broader Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP), as GRAD is designed to help households 'graduate' from PSNP assistance. Many of the participants in the 'pull' programs self-select into the networks, system nodes, and aggregation structures through which market development efforts are channeled. In theory, as markets develop, people will self-select into the diverse economic opportunities being created in the system.

However, one important lesson from the Ethiopia experience is that this self-selection is not happening at the scale expected. This does not necessarily mean more direct targeting is needed, or that self-selection is not the right approach. It could mean that the 'push' strategies are not building the right *types* of capacities, or that different value chains or commercial models need to be developed, or that designers underestimated the aspirations of the very poor to 'graduate,' or that more time is needed for 'push' or 'pull' strategies to be effective. This was not explored in detail in the session, but it is something that the USAID/Ethiopia mission is sensitive to as it evaluates its push/pull approach.

THE MAJORITY OF THE VERY POOR ARE SMALLHOLDER FARMERS AND ARE THEREFORE A COMMON TARGET, BUT A FARM-BASED LIVELIHOOD IS NOT ALWAYS A VIABLE PATHWAY OUT OF POVERTY FOR THE VERY POOR

Many of the push/pull programs center on agricultural livelihoods as a pathway out of poverty, recognizing that the majority of the world's very poor are engaged in farming. However, the need for an expanded focus on off-farm and non-farm employment is also stressed, as farming does not always represent an economically feasible or viable pathway out of poverty. Several presenters (e.g., in the "Entrepreneurs Wanted" Session 4,

and USAID/Ethiopia Session 2) highlighted this. The AKF Coastal Rural Support Program in Tanzania (Session 4) identifies off-farm agricultural entrepreneurship as a role that not only benefits farmers, but also non-farming individuals engaged in the entrepreneurial activity. However, the majority of their target population are smallholder farmers that are being supported to move from subsistence to commercial production.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKET DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMING

This section highlights several programmatic implications explored by presenters, with a particular focus on considerations for market development programmers trying to integrate push strategies.

VERY POOR HOUSEHOLDS OFTEN NEED IMPROVED LIVELIHOOD SECURITY TO PARTICIPATE MORE FULLY IN MARKETS

In order to benefit more from economic pursuits and improve one's position in life, change is often required—changes in behaviors, in the mix of economic activities or crops, etc.—and with change comes risk, perceived or real. Before they will find these risks acceptable and manageable, very poor households usually require greater financial stability and asset protection. For example, savings groups are a key component of PEPFAR's economic strengthening pathway (Session 6), helping households build an asset base from which they can draw for investment in business opportunities. Livelihood security means being able to meet daily food requirements, cover housing, educational, and health costs, and have savings in case of emergencies.

CONFIDENCE AND NETWORKS OFTEN GO HAND-IN-HAND IN CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Social capital is a critically valuable asset, and it can be built through peer networks and one-on-one support. While individuals build their skills and confidence to expand their enterprises, peer networks offer opportunities to engage in relationships with other producers and market actors. Some presenters found that social networks can be even more critical for entry into informal markets than in formal markets. In Session 1, for example, CARE Ethiopia described how they are building women's leadership and promoting networks to strengthen their confidence and their roles within and outside the home. As seen in Session 6, savings groups also provide a forum for social connections, allowing, for example, input and output market actors to identify and meet with potential producer partners.

SAVINGS GROUPS HAVE IMPLICATIONS FOR BOTH PUSH AND PULL INTERVENTIONS

Traditional savings group models that focus on household-level impacts help strengthen resilience. However, if tied to broader financial inclusion, with strategies to link groups to formal financial institutions, then a pull effect can be leveraged. Even without these linkages, the growth and engagement of savings groups can incentivize market actor engagement. The Mountain Societies Development Support Programme in Tajikistan (Session 4) uses community-based savings groups as a springboard to market linkages. Members of proximate savings groups that are involved in the same economic activity (e.g., livestock, horticulture, handicrafts) are grouped together to take advantage of market opportunities.

'MIDDLEMEN' AND ENTREPRENEURS CAN BE IMPORTANT ALLIES IN DRIVING LINKAGES BETWEEN PUSH AND PULL STRATEGIES

Local entrepreneurs—including 'middlemen' and small scale traders, aggregators, and suppliers of goods and services—often understand the local market context and are ideally suited to connecting rural producers with

input and output market actors. For example, AKF's Coastal Rural Support Program works in remote communities in Tanzania (Session 4) with minimal private-sector activity and low levels of agriculture training to improve rice and sesame value chains. Dealing with an acute lack of input suppliers, they built a model where village based agents (VBAs) from within the community who exhibit strong entrepreneurial and leadership qualities are trained and linked with input suppliers. (The input suppliers are not equipped to work on a small scale with farmers.) More seasoned VBAs are now working full-time and linking with intermediary 'small' VBAs who may work part-time in other endeavors and have closer ties to smallholder farmers.

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION MATTERS

Although Session 2 put a particular emphasis on the importance of the pull strategies in Ethiopia, one of the key constraints to the effectiveness of the market pull for the poor has been that push and pull projects are, for the most part, implemented in different geographic regions of Ethiopia. The areas with the strongest economic growth potential are not the same areas with the most significant numbers of very poor. The assumption was that, given the cross-regional nature of trade channels and migration patterns, market growth concentrated in one area would be able to pull in those graduating from push activities in another region. However, these geographic divisions have proved more challenging to overcome than originally expected, and overlap with the barrier that not all participants in PSNP and GRAD are eager to 'graduate' and leave the security of economic support and public assistance.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT ISSUES

A THEORY OF CHANGE GUIDES PROGRAMMING

A theory of change enables a program to set goals, determine which and when push and pull activities will take place, and provides a framework for monitoring progress. Sequencing of push/pull activities can be important, but it depends on the program and theory of change. In some weak markets, push activities may be sequenced ahead of pull activities, setting the stage for planned pull strategies. In other cases, pull and push interventions are combined from the beginning, creating opportunities to carry out push activities in a less subsidy-driven way. For example, the GRAD project highlighted CARE's model, which makes a point of incorporating pull activities even along the first steps or phases of their work: in other words, avoiding doing push and then pull (Session 2).

FLEXIBLE MANAGEMENT IS KEY

A common theme from across the Ethiopia session presenters was that in a push/pull project, a significant increase in time must be invested by managers in coordinating and communicating externally and internally, building the capacity of partners and staff, understanding the change processes that are or are not taking place, and ensuring alignment between theory/approach and the work plan. At the same time, flexibility is key to dealing with changing needs and realities including shocks or shifts in market demand, end market or buyer preferences, and systems. To the extent possible, implementers need to negotiate a work plan that allows for this flexibility in activities (e.g., outputs), while remaining firm on outcomes. For example, both the PRIME and GRAD project presentations emphasized the importance of management driving the linkages between push and pull activities. PRIME highlighted understanding what will incentivize stakeholders to collaborate and build on their partnership. USAID/Ethiopia explained how they initially underestimated the amount of resources required from their end to drive cross-project and cross-donor collaboration, learning, and adjustment.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION MUST BE ADAPTED TO THE VERY POOR AND THEIR PATHWAYS OUT OF POVERTY

Monitoring and evaluation should be adequately resourced since in a push/pull framework, the knowledge management system must support a program's ability to understand changes along the pathway out of poverty. Moreover, when dealing with the very poor, characteristics of multi-dimensional poverty (not just income, but access, assets, livelihoods, and facilities) requires a more diverse set of indicators than is typical to determine poverty status and improvements. For example, links between increased income and increased food security and nutrition are not always clear and direct (Session 1). Furthermore, programs also need tools to determine if interventions are continuing to meet the needs of the most vulnerable participants, particularly when they are included in programs with other community members who may be less risk averse (Session 6).

IV. CONCLUSIONS

As noted by USAID and reinforced in the conference sessions, operationalizing a harmonized approach to providing both temporary support and also commercial incentives to the very poor as a pathway out of poverty is challenging. In particular, push and pull activities are often separated into different activity threads, and are not interconnected in project design or implementation. In fact, in the past, push and pull activities did not typically take place in the same projects, but were implemented by disparate organizations who had distinct visions and approached incentives and objectives from variable perspectives.

Despite this, early successes show that by integrating push interventions into market systems projects that have been dominated by pull activities, it is possible to create pathways out of poverty for the very poor. These push interventions can help the very poor build the resources, capacities, and access that they need to participate in markets, with reduced risk and greater confidence.

Learning is at a preliminary stage in the area of push/pull, but USAID, LEO, and the SEEP Network are committed to pushing the envelope on push/pull strategies and developing an approach that can be replicated and scaled to promote sustainable economic growth for the very poor.

ANNEX: INDIVIDUAL SESSION SUMMARIES

SESSION 1. IMPROVING THE FOOD SECURITY OF THE EXTREMELY POOR BY LINKING THEM TO MARKETS

A primary post-2015 Development Agenda goal is to bring the number of people living on less than US$1.25 a day to zero by 2030. Development organizations will play a significant role in promoting the inclusion of the extremely poor in markets. As these organizations have shifted toward facilitation, there is a greater recognition that changing the behavior of private-sector actors, particularly agricultural input suppliers and output market buyers, is key to sustainable rural poverty reduction. This session looked at the ways that push/pull activities can overcome barriers to participation in output and input markets that are faced by the most vulnerable, and how a push/pull graduation model addresses intra-household decision-making and other gender issues.

Presenter	Organization	Focus of Presentation/Programs	Countries
Dan Norell	World Vision	Output markets/MYAPs	Haiti and Malawi
Dun Grover	ACDI/VOCA	Input markets/Multi-year assistance programs (MYAPs)	Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, and Uganda
Laté Lawson-Lartego	CARE USA	Intra-household financial decision making; gender dynamics/GRAD Project	Ethiopia

OUTPUT MARKETS—WORLD VISION

Challenges exist that prevent extremely poor producers and other output market actors from engaging with each other. Producers often cannot physically and/or socially access these markets, nor can they produce sufficient high-quality goods to make their participation worthwhile. Even when networks exist to link buyers to extremely poor producers, the buyers perceive risk and face cost inefficiencies in engaging with these producers.

Constraint	Push Strategies	Pull Strategies
High transaction costs faced by producers	Training in collective marketing	Commercial buyers interested in bulk purchases; farmers eager to engage in collective marketing
Producers have limited knowledge of the market	Producer groups trained in collective marketing	Agribusiness service providers
Unfair trading practices (e.g., tampered scales) faced by buyers	Project provides scales	Government advocate to enforce weights and measures law
Local vendors buy produce right after harvest when prices are low, and then sell during the hungry season when prices are high	Financial management training	Village savings and loan associations (VSLAs)

Push/pull activities work on both sides of the producer/output market relationship to facilitate mutually beneficial solutions. Facilitation—rather than trying to fill the market gap—is key to the long-term viability of relationships. Also recommended are: integrating the staff role of village savings and loan organizer and producer group buyer/supplier; market linkage facilitation; using a market systems approach; and training village savings and loan private-sector providers and agribusiness service providers from the community to build fee-for-service advisory models.

INPUT MARKETS—ACDI/VOCA

Suppliers of agricultural inputs often have limited or unrealized incentives to sell to very poor producers, who may also have limited ability to purchase and apply inputs to achieve improvements in yields.

Constraint	Push Strategies	Pull Strategies
Low agronomic knowledge	Project-provided extension; farmer groups	Input supplier extension agents; promotional materials; agro-dealer franchising
Lack of access to financial services	Direct input distribution; vouchers	Buyer financing; savings approaches (VSLAs)
Product size too large for smallholder farmers	Project-commissioned small-packing of seed, fertilizers, agro-chemicals	Input supplier marketing of small (1–5 kg) packages of seed, fertilizers, agro-chemicals
Geographic and infrastructure barriers; demand unrealized by suppliers	Subsidized input distribution; project-sponsored agricultural fairs	Input sales and marketing agents; ICT platforms for trading

Solutions to building and/or improving relationships between producers and input suppliers are aimed at helping producers become profitable customers and increasing their access to key technologies that will improve productivity. First, there must be a clear articulation of the business case for input suppliers. Facilitators should carefully identify those constraints that can be overcome and those that cannot. Tradeoffs may have to be made to balance sustainability and outreach to the poorest. Any subsidies by a program should be tapered off gradually and structured in a way that promotes interaction between suppliers and farmers, and leads to sustainability.

INTRA-HOUSEHOLD FINANCIAL DECISION MAKING/GENDER DYNAMICS—CARE

A discussion of the context of food security in Ethiopia (where 8 million are chronically food insecure, and 44 percent of children under five years of age suffer from stunted growth) was followed by an introduction of dimensions of gender inequality and how CARE addresses them in their GRAD initiative.

Constraint	GRAD Solutions
Decision-making power: Women control less valuable assets, have limited access to financial services, are less engaged in high-value commodities, and have less control over household resources. ***Leadership roles:*** Communities have less confidence and trust in women as leaders, which has implications for men's perceptions of women as leaders in and out of the home. ***Division of labor:*** Women receive less support from family members regarding household chores and spend longer hours working year-round.	***Village economic and social associations*** (VESAs) that foster dialogue between men and women, develop a vision for "graduation" and set an agenda for nutrition and livelihood education. ***Establishment of male role models.*** ***Promotion of labor- and time-saving technologies***, particularly for women, in order to lessen the workload at home and free up time for other activities. ***Promotion of female leaders*** in VESAs and other community associations.

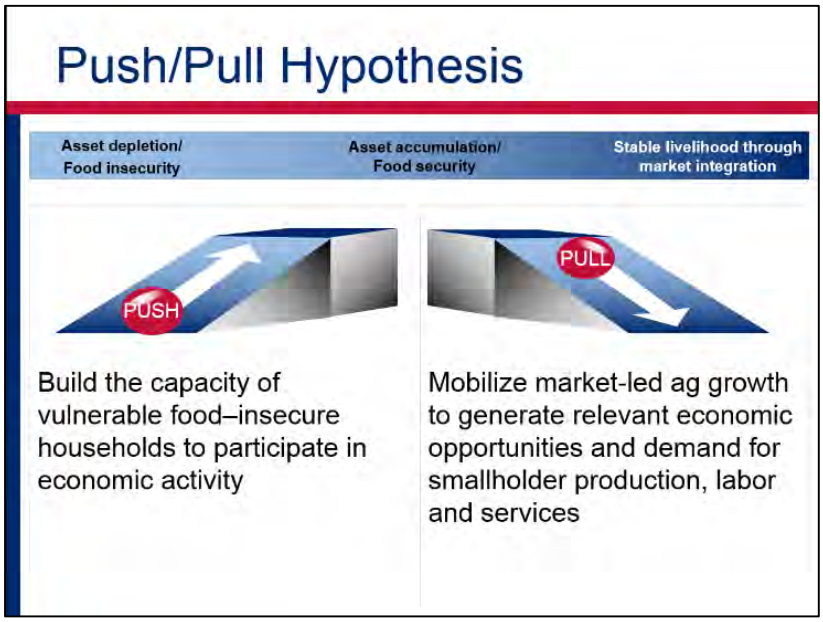
SESSION 2. PUSH/PULL IN ETHIOPIA: LESSONS FROM FOUR YEARS OF USAID PROGRAMMING

USAID/Ethiopia, building on and in close partnership with the efforts of the Government of Ethiopia, has been a pioneer in using a push/pull framework as part of its Feed the Future strategy. Several years into the implementation of that strategy, the lead consultant for a recent USAID/Ethiopia assessment, plus team leaders from multiple projects focused on different elements of the overall push/pull theory of change, came together in this session to reflect on lessons learned, to discuss challenges, and to share impacts observed to date.

The USAID/Ethiopia mission designed six projects that all contribute to the push/pull agenda. Three of these projects were represented in this SEEP session: GRAD, PRIME, and AKLDP.

Presenter	Organization	Focus of Presentation/Program	Country
Anna Garloch	ACDI/VOCA	LEO Project	USA
George Gray	USAID/Ethiopia	Overview of USAID/Ethiopia's Push/Pull Assessment	Ethiopia
Adrian Cullis	Feinstein International Centre, Tufts University	Agriculture Knowledge, Learning, Documentation and Policy (AKLDP) Project	Ethiopia
Karri Goeldner Byrne	Mercy Corps	PRIME	Ethiopia
Laté Lawson-Lartego	CARE	GRAD Project	USA

To set the context, George Gray, a senior agricultural specialist and lead consultant for USAID/Ethiopia's recent assessment of its push/pull work, provided an overview of how USAID/Ethiopia defines push/pull, the central role that push/pull played in the development of the mission's Feed the Future strategy, and the projects that, collectively, support that approach. Adrian Cullis, chief of party for the Agriculture Knowledge, Learning, Documentation and Policy Project, then provided an overview of some broader economic trends in the agricultural sector and smallholder livelihoods.



Gray emphasized the need to look at push and, especially, pull from a more macro-economic perspective. As he noted, "Push/pull is not simply a matter of 'pushing' and 'pulling' on opposite ends of a value chain to strengthen the range of stakeholders, but understanding the macro-economic context that will support large-scale growth across market systems." Field assessments of the Ethiopia portfolio are raising important questions about the viability of agriculture-led approaches to growth and poverty reduction. Thus far, "graduation" from the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) —that is, no longer requiring government support to meet daily needs—has been slow and, in some cases, not sustained.

Presenters offered several insights as to why this is the case when the agriculture sector accounts for 40 percent of the country's GDP and 80 percent of employment.

- Small farmers do not hire more workers when income increases but instead spend earnings on household needs. Thus, increased productivity does not necessarily lead to increased employment.
- Farmers do not see farming in their family's future. It is simply not considered a viable activity for the future.
- There is growing evidence that non-agricultural employment (in manufacturing, the service sector, etc.) is a more likely source of income, as it responds to growing demand for goods and services from large-scale farmers.
- Even when graduation from PSNP is imminent, households fear losing support because of the uncertain future. They are concerned that without the buffer and consistency of government support, they will be "stuck" if hard times come.

There are other challenges as well. The push and pull programs are mostly implemented in different geographic regions of Ethiopia; the areas with the strongest economic growth potential are not the same areas with the most significant numbers of extremely poor. These geographic divisions have proved more challenging to overcome than originally expected. In addition, systemic barriers exist that constrain the ability of poor households to access opportunities and the ability of market actors to invest in commercial relationships with the very poor. These barriers include policies and informal barriers that dis-incentivize investment by private companies in certain value chains or regions, as well as the lack of services and physical infrastructure that makes it unattractive or prohibitively expensive for commercial entities to become involved.

While outcomes of these activities show inconsistent results for the reasons provided, the programs presented in this session offer a number of important lessons in operational success.

- ***Management*** of a push/pull project requires a significant increase in time invested by managers in coordinating and communicating externally and internally, building capacity of partners and staff, understanding the change processes that are or are not taking place, and ensuring alignment between theory/approach and the work plan.
- ***Flexibility*** is key to deal with changing needs and realities, including shocks or shifts in market demand, end-market or buyer preferences, and systems. To the extent possible, implementers need to negotiate a work plan that allows for this flexibility in activities (e.g., outputs), while remaining firm on outcomes.
- ***Regular monitoring and evaluation*** are critical for making timely decisions and should be adequately resourced. In a push/pull framework, the knowledge management system must support the ability to understand changes along this pathway; understanding impacts on multi-dimensional poverty requires a more diverse set of indicators than is typical.
- ***Partnerships must be mutually beneficial*** and include common goals.

USAID policies may need adjustment to meet these challenges, as well as to make sufficiently large investments to have an impact, and to allow for timelines long enough to support activities that take a while to show results (e.g., market facilitation, policy initiatives, cultural shifts related to gender, etc.).

SESSION 3. COMBINING PUSH/PULL STRATEGIES FOR ACHIEVING GREATER SCALE AND POVERTY OUTREACH

Presenter	Organization	Focus of Presentation/Program	Country
Brian Ssebunya	IRC	PEEP (Post-Conflict Recovery and Economic Empowerment of Returnees through Private Sector Development)	Uganda
Robert Kintu	FIT Uganda	FARMIS (Farmer Record Management Information System)	Uganda
Melaku Yirga	Mercy Corps	RAIN (Revitalizing Agricultural Incomes and New Markets)	Uganda

Three separate initiatives integrating push/pull activities were discussed in this session. Brian Ssebunya of IRC discussed the agriculture-focused PEEP project that works primarily with returnees (former IDPs—internally displaced people) in northern Uganda; Melaku Yirga from Mercy Corps also described working with former IDPs in northern Uganda; and Robert Kintu described the FARMIS fee-for-service mobile platform offered by FIT Uganda.

As the summaries below demonstrate, each initiative offers a similar suite of push activities to help farmers increase and improve agriculture production. Pull approaches vary, as did definitions of what constitutes "pull" activities, although all involved recognize the need for more and stronger activities aimed at improving market readiness and opportunities for smallholder farmers, particularly the very vulnerable (i.e., former IDPs). Working in the context of very weak or non-existent markets, these projects take more of a direct approach to market growth rather than a facilitative one. Also, a weak communication infrastructure necessitates using multiple channels to convey market information; mobile platforms work for some, but paper-based communication is still important.

INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE

	Push Strategies	Pull Strategies
Context	Acute post-conflict setting of low agriculture production and lack of access to inputs, land, etc., exacerbated high food insecurity and hunger.	Very little market activity in post-conflict setting; pull activities emphasize developing markets in which farmers can participate, rather than strengthening existing systems or molding new ones. It was noted that "more pull" is needed.
Activities	***Agronomy skills and inputs*** support through cost-sharing, demonstration gardens for better practices and mother gardens for seed/seedling multiplications, and post-harvest technologies support ***Collective marketing*** and value-adding using several tools, including collective market committees	***Business development services,*** which include business skills training and mentorship, a competitive grant scheme for progressive individuals and groups, and related mentorship ***Business leaders forum*** to aid in the spread of commerce (e.g., trade fairs), networking, and collective engagement of any pertinent issues

	Savings groups—VSLAs to improve access to finance through toolkits, mentorship, linking to formal section, and mediation group, when needed	
Results	Targeted households were food secure; yields per acre improved 140%; average annual household income increased from US$123 to US$649; 70% of farmers were selling collectively; all were participating in savings groups, and the business community was organized in active forums for advocacy and networking.	

MERCY CORPS

	Push Strategies	**Pull Strategies**
Context	Faced same challenges as IRC in working with former IDPs.	Faced same challenges as IRC in working with former IDPs. The presenter emphasized the impact of legal and cultural constraints (gender roles, gender-based violence, etc.).
Activities	***Technical advice and training information***, such as research, cost sharing, advisory services ***Expansion of financial institutions*** ***Input subsidies***	***Market facilities and infrastructure construction*** ***Development of agent network models*** ***Local government capacity building*** ***Partnerships*** with local CBOs and institutions to address gender and related social issues
Results	Approximately 18,000 farmers (40% female) participated in training and/or accessed agricultural inputs. Almost 11,000 (75% female) received access to finance (loans or savings).	

FIT UGANDA

	Push Strategies	**Pull Strategies**
Context	Farmers face constraints of fragmented production units, poor networking, limited access to marketing opportunities and financial services, and unwillingness to expend resources toward market linkages.	Poor governance of cooperatives, structural limitations of financial institutions, and lack of incentives prevent market actors from working with rural, smallholder farmers.

Activities	***Technology*** to transmit information via SMS and radio alerts (weather, market prices, farming tips, financial literacy, etc.) ***Business management services*** and technology used to support self-delivery of information to mapped users ***Credit linkages***: FIT organizes the ecosystem and partnerships with private service providers to package credit tailored to the needs and profiles of the mapped farmers. ***Advisory services*** to meet information needs of the users ***Marketing*** of services via agribusiness radio programs through use of strategic partnerships	***Market research*** (little info available previously) ***Mapping*** of potential users of services Profiling and creation of ***system IDs*** for users ***Selection of crops/enterprises*** that match farmer interest ***Market linkages*** to credit and crop insurance
Results	Of the 15,360 farmers who have been profiled in the country, 42% are female and 58% male. Over 8,200 farmers are active on the platform, and 63% are receiving information via phone. On average, FIT sends out 101,300 tailored messages to farmers on a monthly basis. The service is provided in partnership with 63 cooperatives and associations in the country.	

SESSION 4. ENTREPRENEURS WANTED: CONNECTING PUSH/PULL APPROACHES

Presenter	Organization	Focus of Presentation/Program	Country
Mike Bowles	Aga Khan Foundation	Moderator	
Kishwar Abdulalishoev	Mountain Societies Development Support Program (Aga Khan Foundation)	Improving Rural Incomes through Savings-led Financial Services (IRIS)	Tajikistan
Henry Panlibuton	Independent Consultant	STRIVE Philippines	Philippines
Sally Walkerman	Aga Khan Foundation	Coastal Rural Support Program (CRSP)	Tanzania

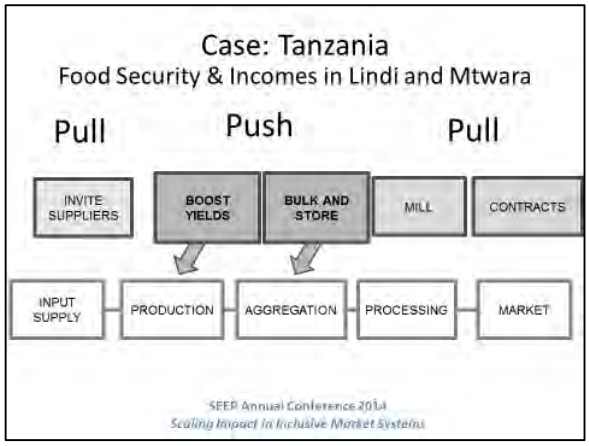
ACTION FOR ENTERPRISE

Models for three push/pull initiatives were shared in this session. STRIVE Philippines (implemented by Action for Enterprise—AFE) strengthened weaving value chains with the ultimate goal of improving the wellbeing of the children of entrepreneurs. Its designation of a specific household-level outcome is notable, although metrics are unavailable due to programmatic shifts that prevented consistent data collection.

Push activities were led by lead firms whose capacity was built to train producers, provide better materials, and set and enforce quality control standards. Continuous engagement with lead firms was critical. Also, considering the risk involved in a particular value chain was also a lesson learned, as the initial value chain selected (seaweed) was too vulnerable (to the environment and the market) and unsustainable.

AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

In **Tanzania**, the Aga Khan Foundation works in remote communities with minimal private-sector activity and low levels of agricultural training to improve rice and sesame value chains. Dealing with an acute lack of input suppliers, they built a model where village-based agents (VBAs) from within the community who exhibit strong entrepreneurial and leadership qualities are trained and linked with input suppliers not equipped to work on a small-scale with farmers. More seasoned VBAs are now working full-time and linking with intermediary, "small" VBAs, who may work part-time in other endeavors and have closer ties to smallholder farmers. The ability of this system to work vertically, horizontally, and with in-group networks (VBA associations, farmer groups, etc.) has been critical. Strong VBAs are now leading these initiatives.



In rural **Tajikistan**, the Mountain Societies Development Support Program uses common interest groups (CIGs) to link entrepreneurial savings group members to markets, through microenterprises. Lessons learned through this program include the following: (1) CIGs that became growing microenterprises or small enterprises had strong entrepreneurial leadership at the start, entrepreneurs with technical or family background in the industry, and start-up finance from informal sources (e.g., family, CBSGs, grants); (2) CIGs not "purposed" to meet the needs of lead firms were unlikely to link up with such firms afterward; (3) lack of finance was the lead constraint to growth among both lead firms and CIG enterprises (e.g., for capital investments).

All three projects discussed in this session describe an important central role for local entrepreneurs who know the local context and can make a full-time job of connecting rural producers with input and output market actors (e.g., village-based agents who connect producers with wholesalers). These projects also shared the experience that weaker markets (isolated, fragmented, underdeveloped, etc.) required more push activities, which set up pull activities. In weak markets, push activities should be sequenced ahead of envisioned pull activities that can help the facilitating agency exit—that is, push activities should help enable and incentivize market actors to engage and begin to lead.

SESSION 5: INCORPORATING WOMEN INTO MARKETS USING PUSH/PULL IN GHANA, AFGHANISTAN, AND PAKISTAN

Presenter	Organization	Focus of Presentation/Program	Country
Christine Faveri	MEDA	Moderator	
Perveen Shaikh	Entrepreneurship and Community Development Institute	USAID Entrepreneurs	Pakistan
Kerry Jane Wilson	Zardozi	DFID/Markets for Afghan Artisans	Afghanistan
Rachel Hess	MEDA	DFATD/GROW (Greater Rural Opportunities for Women)	Ghana

This session focused on integrating women into market systems by using push and pull strategies. Three primary questions led opening small group discussions. Three presentations on initiatives in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Ghana offered further insight into these areas.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION SUMMARIES

What kind of skills/capacity do NGOs require to effectively facilitate push and pull with women producers? The skills/capacity required include the need to be flexible to determine what women need; the ability to understand deeply the context, aspirations, and barriers (household, community, legal, etc.) faced by women, and the extent to which those barriers are felt persistently; the ability to get women involved in strategy development; and the potential to also work with men as needed to facilitate cooperation/support for women's activities.

What are the challenges/barriers faced by private-sector buyers to working with women/women's groups? Women have demonstrated a pattern of using their income to meet family needs, such as food, shelter, and school fees. After covering these costs, women may have little left to invest in their businesses. Perceived lack of skills, training, decision-making capacity, and capital can make women less desirable business partners. It is often necessary to work with men (i.e., to address mobility barriers) in order to work with women.

Discuss how gender affects women's ability to access markets. Women face (1) a lack of access to market information—pricing, demands, etc.; (2) weak networks (social and enterprise); (3) limited access to capital, finance, land, skills training, communication (mobile phones), and distribution channels; (4) difficulty in getting people to take them seriously; (5) the need to balance multiple household demands and expectations; and (6) cultural, religious, political, legal, and educational barriers.

INDIVIDUAL PRESENTATIONS

All three presentations discussed gender-based constraints that compounded the challenges of poverty in participating in livelihood activities. Two projects work with local craftswomen and one with female farmers. Technical and business skill building was central to all projects, as was overcoming the lack of social and enterprise networks through market linkages and peer-to-peer opportunities.

Zardozi—Markets for Afghan Artisans works with local women to develop handicraft skills and to link to markets that will increase incomes and reduce household poverty.

Constraint	Push Strategies	Pull Strategies
Poverty and food insecurity; lack of confidence, ambition, and inspiration	Three months of business and technical skills training; provision of equipment and first orders	
Emotional abuse; lack of family support	Work with men; highlight successful women	
Formal markets require networking and trust	Community business centers	
Markets are easily saturated, so opportunities must be created		Link with business opportunities: bead work (typically imported from Pakistan) and school uniforms (previously imported from Iran)

The Entrepreneurship and Community Development Institute's USAID Entrepreneurs Project helps poor, home-bound Pakistani women use their handicraft skills to begin or expand their sales networks to improve incomes and reduce household poverty.

Constraint	Push Strategies	Pull Strategies
High skill level, but few sales opportunities		Link to high-end Pakistan brands
Lack of mobility	Used a sales-agent model	
Minimal entrepreneurship skills	Formed producer groups with leader and sales agent (training)	

MEDA's Ghana Rural Opportunities for Women (GROW) initiative works to increase the income of 20,000 female farmers through agricultural training and market linkages.

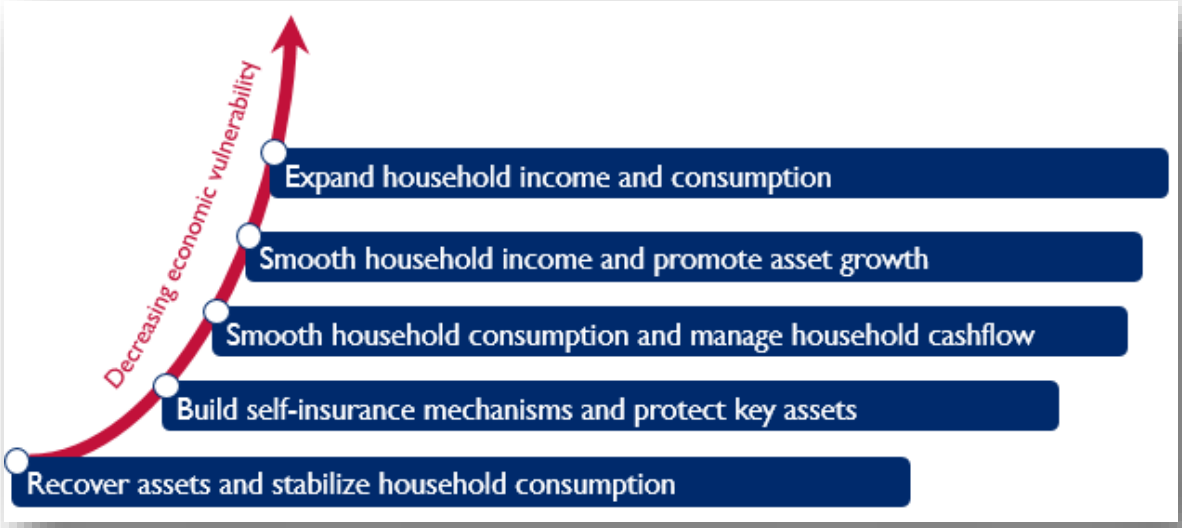
Constraint	Push Strategies	Pull Strategies
Not served by input suppliers, training, etc.	Facilitate introductions between farmers and suppliers	
Selling only in small quantities		Site visits bring formal sector buyers to farms, where they meet farmers. The visits result in large quantity purchases at an agreed price.
Lack of access to information	Lead farmer networks developed, with lead farmers equipped to access information for their farmer groups	
No access to capital	Connections to VSLAs and financial institutions	

SESSION 6: A SAVINGS-LED PATHWAY OUT OF POVERTY FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE

Presenter	Organization	Focus of Presentation/Program	Country
Jason Wolfe	USAID	PEPFAR	Global
Colleen Green	DAI	IMARISHA	Tanzania
Michael Ferguson	FHI 360	ASPIRES	Mozambique
Jackie Aldrette	AVSI, Milan	OVC Project/SCORE	Ivory Coast/Uganda

This session focused on the design and outcomes of savings groups that were an integrated part of push/pull initiatives rather than on the push/pull continuum itself. Jason Wolfe gave an overview of the role of savings groups in PEPFAR programming; Jackie Aldrette spoke of savings groups supported by AVSI (an Italian NGO) in the Ivory Coast and Uganda; Colleen Green of DAI spoke of savings groups for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) caregivers in Tanzania; and Michael Ferguson, director of USAID's ASPIRES project, discussed a portfolio review of USAID's savings groups initiatives in Mozambique.

Wolfe described how savings groups fit in PEPFAR's economic strengthening pathway as a critical component of asset protection. In push/pull models, savings groups are often used in both push and pull capacities: they are a means of helping households build an asset and capital base from which they can draw to stoke investment in business opportunities. Savings groups also provide a forum for social connections, allowing, for example, input and output market actors to identify and meet with potential producer partners.

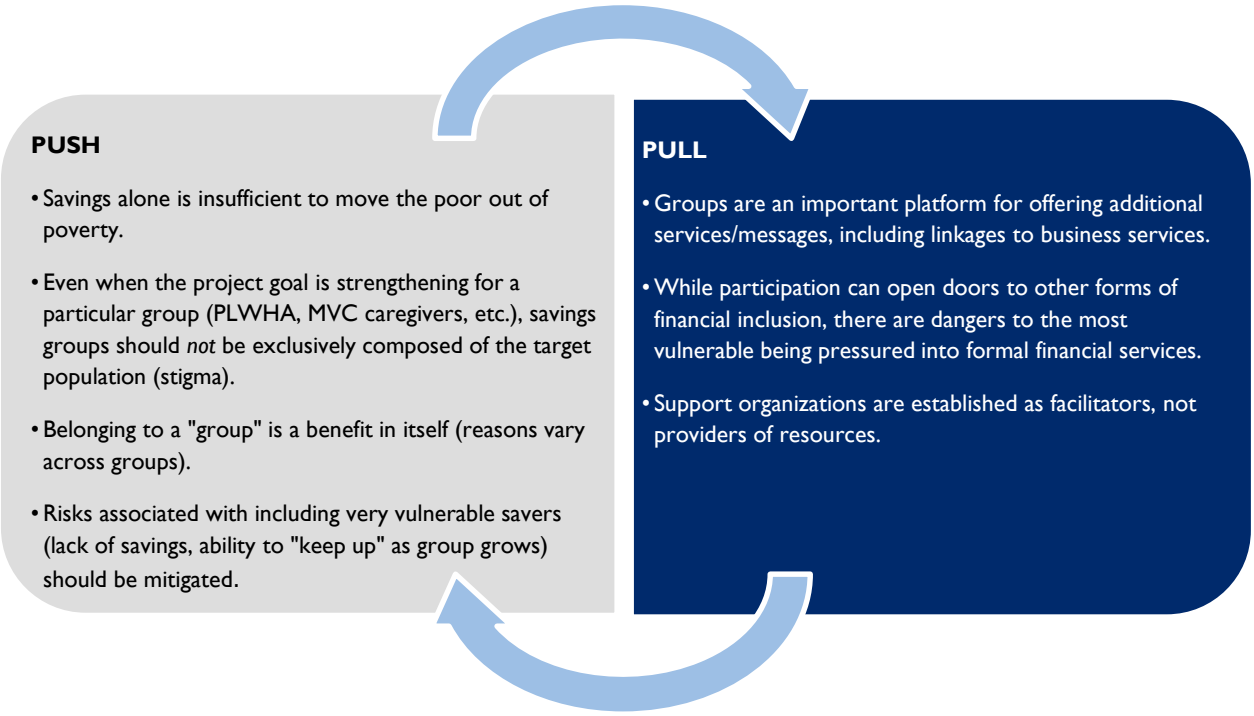


Each of the other presenters described savings groups as one component of larger initiatives. The specific pathways or methods of intervention sequencing were not discussed, but each presenter described the role of savings groups in their programs in similar terms.

- ***AVSI Ivory Coast/Uganda***: Smooth consumption, facilitate long-term support for children, and build social networks
- ***USAID portfolio, Mozambique***: Improve economic stability, build social networks

- ***DAI Tanzania***: Increase access to savings/credit in order to increase consumption of health, education, and other basic needs

Their collective learnings—both successes and challenges—can be categorized according to their role on the push or pull side of economic strengthening activities.



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