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A Qualitative Assessment of a Gender-Sensitive Agricultural Training Program in Benin

Findings on Program Experience and Women's Empowerment across Key Agricultural Value Chains

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ABSTRACT

This study presents qualitative findings from an assessment conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute and Cultural Practice, LLC of the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training program for women (ATVET4Women) in Benin, supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). ATVET4Women in Benin targets women working in value chains for four target commodities (soy, rice, chicken, and compost) to support capacity building in their respective nodes (production, processing, and marketing). The contributions of this study are multifold. First, it assesses program experiences and impacts. Second, it examines the gender dimensions of production, processing, and marketing activities in four specific value chains. Third, this research is a component of a broader study to adapt and validate the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index for market inclusion (pro-WEAI+MI) on key agricultural value chains in Benin and Malawi for ATVET4Women.

This study employed multiple qualitative methods to assess beneficiaries' program experiences and impacts. Fifteen key informant interviews were conducted with various actors along the value chain and agro-processing center managers involved in ATVET4Women. Thirty-eight semi-structured interviews were conducted with women beneficiaries of ATVET4Women, husbands of beneficiaries, women that were involved in the value chain but did not participate in ATVET4Women, and ATVET4Women trainers. Structured observations were conducted of five ATVET4Women training centers.

In general, women beneficiaries and their husbands shared positive reviews of ATVET4Women in that the program increased women's confidence in their abilities and taught women best practices for producing and selling higher quality products, generating higher incomes for women. Women noted several challenges and barriers to participate in ATVET4Women, including limited availability to travel to or partake in the trainings due to competing demands and priorities on their time, requiring their husbands' permission to attend, and limited means to support travel to and from trainings. Related to findings around empowerment, results suggest that an empowered woman is closely tied to her ability to generate income, regardless of her decision-making autonomy, whereas an empowered man is one who generates higher incomes and is autonomous in his decision-making. A woman is expected to be submissive to her husband and defer to his decision-making, which holds implications for her ability to participate in activities outside of the household, including but not limited to ATVET4Women and similar programs. This study concludes with specific recommendations for ATVET4Women and similar programs to consider in future iterations of further programming to increase women's empowerment in Benin.

Keywords: agricultural value chains, Benin, gender, WEAI for market inclusion, women's empowerment

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Sarah Eissler designed the analytic framework, lead the analysis, and drafted and finalized the manuscript. Ampa Dogui Diatta co-developed the research protocol and data collection instruments; co-led the enumerators training; monitored data collection, management, and control; and contributed to the analytic framework, analysis, and draft manuscript. Jessica Heckert conceptualized the overall mixed-methods study and its objectives in Benin; oversaw and managed study activities; contributed to fundraising; and provided input into the study design, results, interpretation, and their write up. Caitlin Nordehn co-developed the qualitative research protocol and data collection instruments; and co-led the enumerator training.

ACRONYMS

ATVET	Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training
ATVET4Women	Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training for Women
AUDA-NEPAD	African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development
CP	Cultural Practice, LLC
EFTPA	Éducation et Formation Technique Professionnelle Agricole
GAAP2	Gender, Assets, and Agriculture Program, Phase 2
GBV	Gender-based Violence
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GoB	Government of Benin
IFPRI	International Food Policy Research Institute
IPV	Intimate-partner Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
OPHI	Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative
PNPG	National Gender Promotion Policy
Pro-WEAI+MI	Project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index for Market Inclusion
SSI	Semi-Structured Interview
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents findings from the qualitative research study undertaken to assess the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD) Agricultural Technical Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) (or Éducation et Formation Technique Professionnelle Agricole (EFTPA) in French) program for women (ATVET4Women) in Benin, supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). The study was implemented by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in conjunction with Cultural Practice, LLC (CP) and is a component of a broader study to adapt and validate the project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)[1] for market inclusion on key agricultural value chains in Benin and Malawi (pro-WEAI+MI).

ATVET4Women is intended to strengthen agriculture in Africa by offering training on topics including agronomic practices, agri-entrepreneurship, processing, marketing, group dynamics, and gender issues in agriculture to women farmers. The intended result is to develop a cadre of skilled and knowledgeable actors working in agricultural value chains, and ultimately the creation of a more productive agriculture sector. ATVET4Women builds on an earlier program starting in 2012, titled "Promotion of Technical Vocational Education and Training for the Agricultural Sector in Africa" (ATVET or 'ATVET Classic'), supported by GIZ. An initial two-year pilot of ATVET was held in Ghana and Kenya, before expanding into a total of six countries (Kenya, Malawi, Ghana, Benin, Burkina Faso and Togo) in 2014, initially focused on building capacity for young people. A second phase launched ATVET into another additional six countries in 2017 (Tunisia, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Uganda, Namibia, and South Africa).

ATVET4Women began in 2017 as ATVET Classic launched into this second phase. ATVET4Women specifically had a gender-sensitive program design with the overall objective to increase women's access to, and benefits from, formal and nonformal training in the agri-food sector by training value chain actors (mostly women) with materials developed by ATVET Classic, and overall enhance women's empowerment. ATVET4Women achieves these goals by targeting: i) women already in formal vocational training; ii) women smallholder farmers without access to formal or nonformal training; and iii) women small and micro entrepreneurs. Its flexible design considers women's time burdens, and diverse roles and needs in society.

This report details findings from the qualitative assessment of ATVET4Women in Benin.[2] It first presents an overview of the research and salient gender dimensions of agriculture in Benin, with particular attention to value chains prioritized by ATVET4Women. The next section presents the methods, sampling, and analysis employed by this study. Finally, results from the qualitative interviews are presented and followed by a discussion on what can be learned from the links between ATVET4Women, increased participation and benefits from engagement in agricultural value chains, and local attitudes towards and understandings of empowerment. The concluding section offers recommendations to ATVET4Women in Benin on refining the training content and the potential for future expansion of the program.

1.1 Background on ATVET4Women in Benin

ATVET4Women launched in Benin in 2017 and trainings began in 2018. ATVET4Women in Benin focused on three training areas: 1) building capacity along the value chains for three target commodities, chicken, rice and soy; 2) training women to make, use, and sell organic compost generated from waste

[1] The original WEAI was developed by IFPRI, the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to assess levels of women's empowerment in agriculture at a national or zonal level, based on representative population-based samples.

[2] See Heckert et al., *forthcoming* and Ragasa et al., *forthcoming* for complementary reports that present mixed-methods outcomes for ATVET4Women in Benin and Malawi, respectively.

collection in response to women's lack of access to fertile land under the Going Green Project; and 3) building awareness around best practices for sanitation measures, including good infant and child feeding practices, hygiene, and food safety.

ATVET and ATVET4Women in Benin utilized public and private training centers across the country to train selected participants. Of the ten training centers partnered with and utilized by the ATVET Classic programs in Benin, four were also used for ATVET4Women. Participants were selected to receive trainings if they were already involved in the respective value chains, with a quota of at least 66% women participants. Trainings were typically short-term—only one week in duration. Trainings on chicken and rice were held at existing agribusinesses (private training centers) that also allowed their employees to participate, whereas trainings on soy and compost were hosted at training centers or by selected NGOs. Training modules were developed to deliver best practices for the four target value chains and good hygiene in the value chain and household. The soy module aimed at processing soy into different products, such as soymilk, cheese, and others. The chicken module aimed at improving the quality of local chickens and focused only on poultry rearing and did not cover topics related to processing or marketing. The rice module aimed at improving the processing of paddy rice to parboiled rice for the local market. The compost module focused on key information related to degradable and non-degradable materials, as well as processing compost from such materials.

1.2 Gender Dimensions of Agriculture in Benin

Approximately 80% of Benin's population is connected to an agricultural livelihood, most of whom grow staple crops on small plots of land largely for home consumption (USDA 2014; Dah-gbeto & Villamor 2016). Cash crops, such as cotton, cashews, shea nuts, palm, and pineapples are essential to national export earnings, with cotton representing 70% of total export income. Food crops, such as corn, beans, rice, peanuts, other tubers, and vegetables are grown primarily for local consumption. Since 2008, the Beninese government has actively pushed to diversify and strengthen its agricultural sector, with a specific aim to promote crops that increased food security as well as strengthen its export profile (USDA 2014).

Additionally, the Government of Benin (GoB) prioritized reducing gender inequality in agriculture, adopting the National Gender Promotion Policy (PNPG) in 2009. The PNPG serves as a "reference framework for strategies and actions intended to reduce, even eliminate, disparities between men and women by 2025" and has been applied to specifically focus in the agricultural sector (GIZ 2017). ATVET4Women in Benin supports this framework by directly targeting women and providing them access to formal and informal training opportunities to strengthen capacity in the respective value chains. GIZ conducted a thorough assessment of important value chains in Benin to target specific ones that had the best capacity to integrate, empower, and benefit women specifically for ATVET4Women. Rice, soy, poultry, and composting were selected as a result of this assessment (GIZ 2017).

Both rice and soy are very important crops to West Africa in general. In Benin, rice has significantly contributed to increasing food security and reducing poverty (Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010). The majority of rice (90%) is produced by small-scale farmers with an average land size of one hectare (USDA 2014). Soy has become an important staple crop to the economy, particularly since the 2008 food crisis and subsequent declines in cotton production (GIZ 2017). The demand for soy and soy products sharply increased between 2007 to 2016, resulting in production increases from 12,433 tons to 156,901 tons, respectively (GIZ 2017).

Women are involved in both value chains, albeit to differing degrees and at different nodes. In rice, women engage in paddy rice production and rice processing and marketing but are typically are not involved in rice milling or white rice production (GIZ 2017; Kinkinginhoun- Mêdagbé et al. 2010). In soy, women are very active in processing and marketing to meet local and national demands, particularly for products such as soymilk, cheese, flour, afitin[3], and others (GIZ 2017). However, women face specific challenges to participating across value chains as well as in respective nodes.

[3] A local soybean-derived product that is used to enhance food flavor.

Lack of land is a major barrier for women's equality in agriculture in Benin, as it limits women's engagement in production (Goldstein et al. 2016). Discriminatory laws and historical inheritance rights limit women's ability to own or access land, and often women do not have the financial capacity to purchase their own land (Goldstein et al. 2016; Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010). Beninese women do have legal backing from a 2007 national law that guarantees women the right to inherit their parents' or spouse's land. To what extent this law is followed or enforced is not clear, particularly in rural areas. A lack of access to resources, including land, inputs and credits, extension services and markets are persistent challenges for women engaged in these value chains (GIZ 2017; Goldstein et al. 2016; Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010). Most cultivated land belongs to men, and women often serve as family labor on men's fields (GIZ 2017). Sometimes men, either a husband or male family member, 'provide' women with small areas of land for themselves to cultivate their own crops, however the land is often poor quality, and women lack access to necessary inputs such as fertilizer (Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010).[4] For these reasons, women typically gravitate to producing lowland rice and soybeans; otherwise, they mostly engage in processing activities, such as parboiled rice, soymilk, and cheese to earn income.

In addition, women have limited influence in household decision-making, have lower levels of education compared to men, and have low levels of participation in formal groups or organizations (GIZ 2017; Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010). Women rarely occupy leadership positions in agricultural groups. They are also excluded from major agricultural decision-making processes, either within the household or community, although they constitute a significant portion of labor on their husbands' fields, grow vegetables or their own crops on small portions of land, and work as agricultural laborers on other fields (Miassi et al. 2019). Women must also receive their husband's permission to participate in an association or cooperative, which operates as a potential barrier to their value chain participation (Miassi et al. 2019).

In addition to rice and soybeans, ATVET4Women also targeted the poultry value chain. Women represent a small proportion of those engaged in poultry activities, especially for production (GIZ 2017). For general livestock ownership, women tend to own goats as they are cheaper and less risky to manage than other ruminants (USDA 2014). Compared to poultry production for export, women are more involved in raising poultry for local markets and are most active in processing and marketing. Poultry for domestic consumption is mostly raised for eggs rather than meat, given the increasing competition for feed products, such as corn and soy, by human consumers (USDA 2014). Poultry raised for export mainly occurs on large, professionally operated farms. The neighboring Nigerian market is officially closed to Beninese poultry producers due to the Government of Nigeria's ban on imported frozen poultry products, primarily enacted to protect Nigerian producers (USDA 2014). Similar to rice and soy, a lack of access to land and financial capacity to invest in necessary inputs limits women's ability to raise fowl, and thus shifts their ability to engage towards the processing and marketing nodes, which require little to no land and limited initial investments (GIZ 2017). Compared to rice and soy, women are more organized in the poultry value chain. Several nationally based cooperatives or associations include or are exclusive for women, such as the Poultry Cooperative of Benin and the Association of Resellers of Poultry Producers, affiliated with the Benin Poultry Industry (GIZ 2017). Faced with competition from frozen imports of poultry products, there was low market orientation to processing or marketing in the poultry value chain (GIZ 2017; USDA 2014). ATVET4Women identified this as an area of potential for increasing women's capacity aimed at local markets for consumption.

Finally, ATVET4Women also selected compost as a fourth target value chain. There is less information on formal compost value chains in Benin than compared with poultry, rice, and soy. Compost and green manure are options for poorer farmers with less access to quality land for crops, particularly for responding to adverse impacts of climate variability (dah-Gbeto & Villamor 2016). As previously mentioned, women farmers in Benin have less access to quality plots of land and ability to purchase inputs to improve their land quality (Goldstein et al. 2016). To address these challenges, ATVET4Women

[4] To this extent, a widowed or divorced woman would not have rights to that land, presenting unique challenges to this demographic (Goldstein et al. 2016).

selected compost as a key value chain to increase women's skills to create quality compost that can be used either for sale – and thus as an alternative livelihood option – or on their own land (GIZ 2017).

1.3 Purpose and Objectives of this Qualitative Study

This study complements quantitative surveys using the pro-WEAI+MI instruments to evaluate the outcomes of ATVET4Women training on women's participation, benefits, and other dimensions of empowerment in their agricultural efforts, not only in production, but also in entrepreneurial activities at different value chain nodes (see Heckert et al., *forthcoming* for a mixed-methods assessment of ATVET4Women in Benin). This study operationalizes Kabeer's definition of empowerment as the "expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where this ability has been denied to them" (2001: 1). It builds on previous work developing the WEAI (Alkire et al. 2013), the project-level WEAI (pro-WEAI) (Malapit et al. 2019), and the pro-WEAI+MI (Malapit et al. 2020). Pro-WEAI measures empowerment through twelve indicators that represent three types of agency, intrinsic agency (power within), instrumental agency (power to), and collective agency (power with). The related indicators are:

1. Intrinsic agency: (i) autonomy in income, (ii) self-efficacy, (iii) attitudes about domestic violence;
2. Instrumental agency: (iv) input in productive decisions, (v) ownership of land and other assets, (vi) access to and decisions on credit, (vii) control over use of income, (viii) work balance, (ix) visiting important locations; and
3. Collective agency: (x) group membership, (xi) membership in influential groups, and (xii) respect among household members (Malapit et al. 2019).

The in-development pro-WEAI+MI intends to measure the empower of women in agriculture, beyond the production node by expanding applicability to processing- and marketing-related value chain actors. It uses these same indicators as the core with some modifications to reflect different value chain activities. In addition, it uses new complementary indicators that measure barriers to market access and inclusion for different value chain actors. Optional indicators are also included in the survey to measure the empowerment-related environment; these include reliable sanitation and perception of sexual hostility in the working environment (Malapit et al. 2020). The data and results generated from both the qualitative and the quantitative studies will strengthen institutional knowledge about gender transformation in agriculture to inform the planning processes for future interventions by the AUDA-NEPAD. After refinement, the pro-WEAI+MI may be incorporated into evaluations of other ATVET projects as a key indicator of women's empowerment.

IFPRI contracted CP to lead a qualitative research study to complement the quantitative surveys led by IFPRI. The qualitative work draws from a sample of adult men and women in 1) households where adult women have participated in ATVET4Women and 2) households where women had not participated in any ATVET trainings but may eventually become eligible to participate in ATVET4Women. As discussed below, a range of other stakeholders and service providers were also interviewed. Overall, the following two primary research questions guided the design, implementation, and analysis of this study:

1) How do individuals who are involved in agricultural value chains experience (*and understand*) empowerment and disempowerment? And how does this inform best practices for the measurement of empowerment among those operating in agricultural value chains?

2) How does ATVET4Women enhance women's livelihoods across value chains and providing opportunities for women to empower themselves?

2. METHODS

The methods used in this study adapt the qualitative protocols[5] prepared for IFPRI's work on the project-level WEAI (pro-WEAI) (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019) for the Gender, Assets, and Agriculture Project, Phase 2 (GAAP2) in combination with gender and agricultural value chain approaches (Rubin et al. 2009) to address issues around the gender dimensions of men's and women's participation, benefits, and empowerment at different nodes of selected value chains targeted by ATVET4Women in Benin.

2.1 Training and the Qualitative Field Team

A training for the qualitative interviewers was held in Cotonou, Benin from October 28 to November 2, 2019. The training covered the background of ATVET4Women and the related study; key conceptual topics including gender, gender issues in value chains, and women's empowerment; as well as best practices and ethics in qualitative research. The field team included two women and two men[6], all of whom had qualitative research experience in Benin and are fluent in French and the respective local language, in accordance with the geographic location of their data collection assignment. The interviews in the North (departments of Donga, Collines, and Atakora) were conducted in either French, Dendi, or Bariba, and those in the South (departments of Atlantique and Ouémé) were conducted in French or Fon. Throughout the training, the facilitation team and trainers refined the interview protocols in French. The instruments were piloted in a community near Cotonou and revised based on feedback from the pilot. The final protocols in French are available upon request from the authors.

2.2. Qualitative Instruments

The qualitative instruments utilized in this study include key informant interviews (KIIs), semi-structured interviews (SSIs), and structured observations. The next section describes the full sampling approach. KIIs were conducted with purposefully sampled actors in the target value chains for this study, including input suppliers, extension agents, credit providers, local traders, and agro-processing center managers. These KIIs covered questions related to respondents' respective roles in their enterprise or value chain activity, how they engage with men and women customers along the value chain, their perceptions of ATVET4Women, understandings of empowerment, and barriers for women's empowerment.

SSIs were conducted with women beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of ATVET4Women, husbands of women beneficiaries, and ATVET4Women trainers. SSIs with ATVET4Women beneficiaries covered questions relating to opportunities and challenges for participation in their respective value chain as well as ATVET4Women, perceptions of safety and sexual harassment in their working environments, general perceptions of ATVET4Women, understandings of empowerment, and barriers for women's empowerment. SSIs with husbands of beneficiaries asked similar lines of questions but were sometimes reframed to ask their perception of their wives' participation in ATVET4Women. SSIs with non-beneficiaries also covered similar lines of questions but reframed some with regard to ATVET4Women to understand reasons for non-participation. The SSIs with ATVET4Women trainers covered questions regarding their role in ATVET4Women, their selection process, description of the trainings, working with beneficiaries, understandings of empowerment, barriers for women's empowerment, and linkages between ATVET4Women and women's empowerment.

Structured observations were conducted at different training centers that hosted ATVET4Women trainings, which captured observations regarding the training centers' environment, safety, hygiene, functionality, and structure.

[5] The GAAP2 qualitative protocols are available here: at http://weai.ifpri.info/files/2018/04/GAAP2-Qualitative-Protocols-no-comments-.pdf.

[6] The qualitative field team was recruited, hired, and managed by CIRFOSS, a Beninese survey firm.

2.3 Sampling

This study was conducted in fourteen communes across Benin. In the North, five communes were selected across three departments, Donga, Collines, and Atakora. In the South, nine communes were selected across two departments, Atlantique and Ouémé. Some of the same beneficiaries participated in both the quantitative (Heckert et al. *forthcoming*) and qualitative parts of the study. The sample was pulled from these two regions to focus on two different value chains prominent in each of these areas: the rice value chain, which was the focus of the program in the Northern departments (Donga, Collines, and Atakora) and the chicken value chain, which was the focus of the program in the Southern departments (Atlantique and Ouémé). Soy and compost value chains were included in both areas. In this way, the study also focused on understanding empowerment dynamics by geographic region within the country. The field team was split into two groups (one man and one woman per group) and assigned to either the North or South. Table 1 presents the total number of interview participants by location and interview type.

Table 1 Comparison of Proposed and Actual Interview Participants, by Type, Location, and Quantity

Type of Respondent	North	South	Total Planned	Total Completed
Women ATVET4Women Beneficiaries	10	10	20	20
Husbands of ATVET4Women Beneficiaries	4	4	8	7[1]
Non-Beneficiary Women	4	4	8	7[2]
Sub-total	**18**	**18**	**36**	**34**
Input Suppliers	1	1	2	2
Extension Agents	1	1	2	2
Credit Providers	1	1	2	1[3]
Local Traders	2	2	4	4
Sub-total	**5**	**5**	**10**	**9**
Rice Module Trainer	1	0	1	1
Soy Module Trainer	1	1	2	2
Chicken Module Trainer	0	1	1	0
Compost Module Trainer	1	1	2	1
Sub-total	**3**	**3**	**6**	**4[4]**
Mentor (Rice)	1	0	1	0
Mentor (Soy)	1	1	2	0
Mentor (Chicken)	0	1	1	0
Mentor (Compost)	1	1	2	0
Sub-total	**3**	**3**	**6**	**0[5]**
Agro-processing center managers (Rice)	1	0	1	1
Agro-processing center managers (Soy)	1	1	2	2
Agro-processing center managers (Chicken)	0	1	1	1
Agro-processing center managers (Compost)	1	1	2	2
Sub-total	**3**	**3**	**6**	**6**
Total Interview Participants	**32**	**32**	**64**	**53**

[1]There is one incomplete interview of beneficiary husbands.
[2]In the North, there were no non-beneficiary women of ATVET4Women engaged in composting available to participate.
[3]There were no credit providers related to the study available for interview in the North.
[4]A chicken trainer was not available to be interviewed in the South and a compost trainer was not available to be interviewed in the North.
[5] Mentorship activities had been planned, but not yet implemented by the time of the qualitative study.

In each community, women were selected to participate in the qualitative part of the study based on whether they had participated in ATVET4Women trainings (referred to as 'beneficiary'), and men were selected to participate if one of their wives participated in an ATVET4Women training. None of the men included in this study had attended a training. Women who had not attended an ATVET4Women training but worked as a producer, processor, or marketer in the target value chains were also selected for SSIs (referred to as 'non-beneficiary'). Additional SSIs were conducted with trainers who led ATVET4Women trainings on separate rice, soy, chicken, and compost modules. Mentors of the women beneficiaries in rice, soy, chicken, and composting were intended to be selected for SSIs, however the mentor component of ATVET4Women had not yet begun by the time of data collection. The following value chain actors were also purposively selected to participate in KIIs based on their respective service provided to producers, processors, or marketers in the targeted value chains: agro-input suppliers, local traders, extension agents, and credit providers.

Enumerators conducted structured observations of the ATVET4Women training centers (Table 2). The purpose of these structured observations was to observe a variety of pre-determined factors, such as the availability of adequate latrines at the training sites. The enumerators took notes of their observations at each site.

Table 2 Comparison of Proposed and Actual Observations, by Location and Quantity

Type of Respondent	North	South	Total Planned	Total Completed
Observations				
Training Center for Rice	1	0	1	1
Training Center for Soy	1	1	2	2
Training Center for Chicken	0	1	1	1
Training Center for Compost	1	1	2	1[1]
Total Observations	**3**	**3**	**6**	**5**

[1]There was no observation done for the compost training center in the North.

2.4 Data Processing, Monitoring, and Analysis

The interview teams conducted 53 total interviews and 5 structured observations from November 2019 until February 2020. After receiving verbal consent, many of the interviews were audio recorded; however, 23 respondents did not give consent for audio recording.[7] In cases where interviews were recorded, the full recording was translated and transcribed verbatim into French, and these transcripts were supplemented by interviewer notes. In cases where interviews were not audio recorded, the notes were used in data analysis. The two lead authors developed a mix of deductive and inductive coding themes to code the qualitative data. Coding was done by the authors using NVivo™ 12 software.

2.5 Limitations

Overall, the study design had a few limitations. First, the differences between the proposed and actual samples arose from the inability to incorporate the most recent updates to the program's progress. For example, the mentorship component of the program had not yet been rolled out when the qualitative data were collected; therefore, no mentors could be included in this study. Additionally, during the data collection, several interviewees did not give consent to audio record their interview. A notetaker accompanied each interview and took diligent notes for each response, but nonetheless, more complete analysis of these participants' perspectives was not possible. Finally, observations in the training centers

[7] Many respondents did not give permission to audio-record their interviews. Several cited fear as a response, describing that their voices could be recognized by country authorities and if authorities were not happy with their answers, they could suffer sanctions or no longer benefit from the program. Others were worried that their answers would be used for other purposes, despite reassurance from the facilitators. And finally, some denied permission with no justification.

were held after the trainings were conducted, which did not allow field researchers to observe the organization and the flow of activities and interactions between beneficiaries and trainees and between beneficiaries.

2.6 Ethics and Compensation

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of IFPRI as well as the ethics board of the National Council of Statistics of Benin. The interviewers all received training on research ethics and the process for seeking informed consent. Before each interview began, the facilitators read the prepared statement of voluntary consent for participating in the interview and all participants provided oral informed consent. Additionally, all participants were asked for their consent prior to audio recording the interview. In the cases where this consent was not granted, the facilitators did not record. To compensate participants for their time, each participant was offered an in-kind gift, such as a loaf of bread, a bunch of bananas, or tubers.[8]

[8] These in-kind gifts had an approximate value in USD of $0.50-$1.00 per participant.

3. RESULTS

3.1 Participant Description

In this section, we describe the study participants. We separate these descriptions by beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries (Table 3), and then the local value chain actors, agro-processing center mangers, and ATVET4W trainers (Table 4) that participated in the study.

Table 3 Description of Beneficiary and Non-Beneficiaries

	Beneficiaries		Non-Beneficiary
	Women	Men	Women
Primary value chain			
Rice	4	1	1
Soy	8	2	3
Compost	4	2	1
Chicken	4	2	2
Marital status			
Single	-	-	-
Widow(er)	-	-	-
Married	100%	100%	100%
Average age[1]	36.44	35 years	34.3 years
Average years of education[1]	8.87 years	10.3 years	10 years

[1]There were missing data for four beneficiary women, one beneficiary man, and one non-beneficiary.

All beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries were married. Beneficiary women in this study were slightly older than beneficiary men and non-beneficiary women, however missing data may have biased these averages. Likewise, while beneficiary men had the highest number reported years of education (10.3 years), missing data may have also skewed these averages. All beneficiary men reported a range of years in education between 5 (primary school) to 13 (reaching Baccalaureate exam). Non-beneficiary women reported a range of years in education between 4 (attended but did not finish primary school) and 20 (received a master's degree). Beneficiary women reported a range of education between 0 (never attended school) to 23 years (received doctorate in veterinary medicine).

Table 4 Description of ATVET4Women Trainers, Agro-Processing Center Managers, and Value Chain Actors

	ATVET4Women Trainers	Agro-Processing Center Managers	Value Chain Actors			
			Local Trader	Agro-Input Suppliers	Extension Agents	Credit Providers[1]
Sex						
Men	2	3	0	0	0	1
Women	2	3	4	2	2	0
Marital status						
Single	25%	-	-	-	-	-
Widow(er)	-	-	-	50%	-	-
Married	75%	100%	100%	50%	100%	100%
Main value chain						
Rice	1	1	1	0	1	-
Soy	2	2	2	1	0	-
Compost	1	2	0	0	0	-
Chicken	0	1	1	1	1	-

[1]Note that the credit provider did not focus on a specific value chain.

Table 4 presents characteristics of ATVET4Women trainers, agro-processing center managers, and value chain actors who participated in this study. Of the four ATVET4Women trainers interviewed in this study, three were married and one was single. One led a rice-focused training; two led soy-focused trainings; and one led compost-focused trainings. All of the agro-processing center managers were married; two managed soy centers, two managed compost, one for rice, and one for chicken. All of the traders, extension agents, and credit providers interviewed in this study were married. Of the two agro-input suppliers, one was married, and the other was widowed. None of the value chain actors operated or worked on compost in their profession. One trader worked with rice; one worked with chicken; and the other two traders worked in soy. One extension agent focused on soy while the other focused on chicken. The one credit provider did not focus on a specific value chain.

3.2 Gender and Empowerment in Select Agricultural Value Chains in Benin

3.2.1 Gendered divisions of agricultural labor along different value chain nodes

There exists a clearly defined gendered division of labor with regard to agricultural and value chain activities, specifically within those commodities targeted for this study. Respondents often described this division of labor as preordained by social norms or natural given perceived differences between the sexes. For example, one husband attributed his perceptions of gender differences to natural ability, "*With experience, women don't hold up like men when it comes to energy. There are exceptions, but generally speaking, women don't hold up like men and say it's too hard. You have to give them what is a little more relaxed and the man takes care of the hardest"* [chicken, South, beneficiary husband]. A woman linked her perceptions of natural ability with social norms, explaining that,

> "*Preparing food is a very difficult job for [my husband,] because it is part of household activities and men do not have the skill to do these tasks. Household activities, like cleaning, are difficult tasks for men, because these are women's tasks. That is what was done before us; since my childhood, I saw my mother doing these tasks, which is why I say that these are women's activities. Men's activities are in the field…women cannot manage to do the same quantity of work in the field as men, which is why these are difficult for women. Men have more strength than women"* [soy, North, beneficiary woman].

3.2.1.1 Producers

Both men and women engage in production-related tasks, however this depends on the task and the product or crop being produced. We find that, in general, men produce cotton, rice, corn, sesame, and yam**,** and women produce okra, chili pepper, peanuts, tomatoes, and sometimes paddy rice and soy, if they have access to land for production. Women with access to land will grow soy, but having land is uncommon for most women. One woman explained that women grow these crops because, "*These are crops that do not require much time. In addition, in our community, we do not give enough land to women. If the woman asks for land, she is given just a small portion, which is not enough to cultivate*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

Women will work on their husbands' fields during production, and actively work during harvest seasons of all crops. Men typically will raise larger livestock or herd livestock away from the household, such as oxen or ducks, whereas women will engage with smaller livestock, such as chicken and goats, which are generally kept near the home. One beneficiary explained the gendered division of production labor within her household, which represents many of those included in this study:

> *I produce the okra, chili peppers, soybeans, and peanuts. [My husband] produces the corn, cowpeas, cotton, [and] soybeans. The man produces these because the production of the man must be more important than what the woman produces. The man must have more packaging, because he is the head of the household. And it's he who has to provide food for the household, which is why he must produce more [than the woman]. I produce [these crops] to be able to use directly in preparing the sauce for the household. We have goats, chickens, oxen. I raise the chickens and the goats and my husband raises the oxen…I cannot raise the oxen because I could not bring them to the pasture, but if I had the money, I would buy the oxen and give them to my husband so he could help me raise them* [soy, North, beneficiary woman].

Additionally, existing structural barriers and perceptions of differences in physical strength contribute to how respondents define these gendered divisions of production labor. In general, the lack of access to land and financial means are major reasons respondents attribute to women not producing as much as men do. One beneficiary explained, "*We [women] don't have enough land [to produce] corn, sesame, or yams…because plowing the field is difficult for women*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman]. Also, both men and women describe women's lesser physical strength or energy levels, compared to men, as a reason for why women do not engage as much in production activities, as summarized by one man, "*It's because she doesn't have many fields like me. She doesn't have as much financial means as I do. Besides, she doesn't have as much physical strength as I do"* [soy, South, beneficiary husband].

3.2.1.2 Processors

Consistent with the literature and background studies that informed program design (GIZ 2017; Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010), the qualitative findings suggest that women are most active in the processing node of the value chains considered in this study. While this may be linked to limited access to land or financial means as the literature suggests (Kinkinginhoun- Mêdagbé et al. 2010), the results also indicate that women's role in processing is closely linked with social norms, particularly women's responsibility to prepare food and care for their households. According to respondents, men did not engage in the processing node, because, as one woman explained,

> "*Processing is difficult for men. Also, it's a lack of will on the part of the men. In our community, if you are a married man, you should not prepare [food]. Processing the rice requires putting the rice in the fire. It's tradition that demands that…it is the woman who must prepare and give this to her husband. [If he prepares the food], then [the community] is going to criticize his wife and say that she is the one who does not respect him*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

According to a manager of an agro-processing center for chicken, "*Women are more engaged [with processing] because it remains an activity linked to cooking. And when we talk about cooking, we think directly of women. It's quite cultural; everything in the kitchen concerns women*" [chicken, South, agro-processing center manager, woman]. A beneficiary woman elaborated, "*It is the woman who takes care of the processing of the products because the processing is like a secondary role or activity for the men. Women always have the secondary role, and this is due to our habits and customs. If the men manage to play the secondary roles, they are not treated well by community members, like mockery and taunts*" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

3.2.1.3 Marketers

Both men and women engage in marketing and distribution of their crops, products, or livestock, but as explained by one beneficiary, this "*depends on the type of sale: If these are high level, or using commercial techniques, or big sales, the man goes there to sell and negotiate. But generally speaking, if there are small sales, like going to a customer or for commercial recruitments, it is the women who sell"* [chicken, South, beneficiary woman]. Men manage all larger sales, in both product quantity and sale price, and women manage the smaller sales for either her or her husband's products. One beneficiary described why men may negotiate the larger sales on a fixed price to fulfill immediate cash needs, "*When he wants to sell the rice, it is the man who knows what he wants to do with the money. And he's the one who knows how much he needs. He negotiates based on that*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

Regardless of the sale size, men typically direct and make decisions for when and how much to sell, unless it is the woman's own crops, in some instances. One beneficiary described how sales decisions occur in her household,

> "*We don't sell corn; we sell some rice; we can sell sesame; [and] we do not sell okra or chili. If [the rice] belongs to me, I sell. But if it's my husband's, he's the one selling it. [In our community], it's the husband who brings the product to market. Sometimes he can ask the woman to sell or he himself can sell…When he needs a lot of money and [has] a large number of products, he does it himself. But when it's a small amount, he can ask the woman to sell it. When it's a lot, you can also go and sell together"* [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

But this decision-making dynamic depends on the product being sold and household arrangement. Men make decisions around staple crops, such as corn and cotton. For all other crops, sometimes women decide for those that they grow on their own, and sometimes they discuss with their husbands. In certain cases, women will decide without informing their husbands if they perceive it as a smart business decision. One woman explained that while she and her husband prefer to sell chickens only when they are fully grown, she will sell them if they become sick, "*Sometimes his animals are attacked by diseases. It is to avoid these losses that I sell sometimes without his knowledge, and I come back to give him the sales money*" [soy, South, beneficiary woman].

According to respondents, the smaller sales are more common, and therefore women are marketing, negotiating, and selling more frequently than men. Respondents observed that women are better negotiators and typically can garner better prices for the products. One woman explained, "*It is the woman who sells, because he [the man] himself cannot sell well at a good price. It is the corn that the men keep because the corn is the staple food of the household. It's important to keep it to ensure the household's food security*" [soy, South, beneficiary woman]. Another beneficiary clarified that, "*It is the men and women that decide how to market what he has produced. It's the women who do the negotiations, not because things have changed in the world and the man hands over his production to the women to sell for him, but because women are better negotiators. Women must always find the best price, while the man is satisfied only with the prices that the purchaser gives him*" [soy, North, beneficiary

woman].

From a value chain actor's perspective, one agro-input dealer, who works with both men and women clients, shared his experiences, "*No gender dominates. A woman can come to give me the goods on behalf of her husband, the man also can come himself…A husband can send his wife to buy from you on credit and promise to pay you back on a certain date. So, I cannot refuse"* [North, agro-input dealer, man]. He further observed differences in men's and women's strategies in selling their soy products, "*When the woman comes [to sell], she packs her product herself. Indeed, to have the product packaged by us, she would have to pay us a commission. The woman doesn't like to do that. She prefers to use this [saved] money in other services. Men usually pay us to have his product packaged…"* [North, agro-input dealer, man].

3.2.2 Barriers and Opportunities for Men and Women Engaged in these Value Chains

Women and men identified barriers to fully participate in the selected value chains in this study. A lack of financial means is a barrier for both men and women, albeit to varying degrees and with different impacts. Women generally do not own enough property to use as collateral to access suitable credit options and therefore rely on a higher number of unsecured, smaller loans to finance their operations, characterizing them as higher risk applicants. Their limited financial means also translates to a limited access to land ownership, as they often do not have enough money to purchase or rent land. Consistent with the literature (Goldstein et al. 2016), limited access to land and limited financial means constrain women's ability to participate in the production node, into which several women express wanting to integrate. One rice processor wanted to get into production because, "*[she] could then use what [she] produces to process and it would provide [her] many benefits"* but she cannot because, as she described, "*I do not have enough land for producing rice*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman]. A further discussion of gendered access to resources follows in a section below.

Men cited limited incomes and financial means as inhibiting their ability to handle challenges in their respective value chain activities. For example, one man explained, "*What discourages me is climate change; the flood destroys production sometimes,*" and the degradation of soil quality disrupted his production activities. Because of his limited financial means, he could not "*overcome*" or adapt his fields to respond appropriately, and he was searching for other means to increase his income [chicken, South, beneficiary husband].

In addition to limited financial means, women value chain actors cited further barriers to their full participation, notably a lack of female representation, and other necessary resources. A woman poultry supplier indicated that not enough women were represented in her line of work, which limited her ability to share best practices and experiences with other women. She explained, "*There are not enough women in this work… in this work, monitoring and following up is a challenge. To compensate for this, I approach those who have done this work to seek out more information and learn from those at the management level. A woman who doesn't do this is doomed to failure. It's not automatic, but it's what stands out"* [South, trader, woman]. They also lacked necessary resources for processing activities, such as water. Both rice and soy processors described that gathering the water to process these crops is challenging as both activities require large quantities of water, and therefore a lot of time to collect it.

Despite these barriers, both women and men expressed satisfaction within their respective value chain roles. Specifically, their respective work enables them to feed their household as well as increase sources of revenue. An input dealer explained, "*I started this work when there was a problem with the farm. Even though it is a temporary job, it allows me to feed my family…it's a good activity, because my family lives off of it"* [South, agro-input dealer, man]. Husbands of beneficiaries in this study typically engaged in agricultural activities as a secondary means to supplement household incomes or more commonly, to reduce household expenses. One man explained, "*Agricultural production makes it possible to reduce expenses for the purchase of food at home…while adding another source of revenue"* [chicken, South, beneficiary husband]. Specifically, for processors, rice and soy do not spoil and can be

stored for long amounts of time, which reduces potential risk incurred at the processing node. One beneficiary explained her satisfaction as a processor, "*I like processing rice…if there is a market for it, you sell that. It flows quickly. Even if you couldn't sell it, the rice is not going to spoil. We can keep it"* [rice, North, beneficiary woman]. However, a rice producer from the North indicated that despite rice's shelf life, it is sometimes challenging for her to find customers at the market, which results in time wasted traveling to the market and returning home empty handed.

3.2.3 Experiences with Sexual Harassment in the Value Chain

Women in Africa South of the Sahara face higher levels of intimate partner violence (IPV) and sexual assault than women anywhere else in the world (Garcia-Moreno et al. 2013). In Benin, there are relatively high levels of acceptance of IPV, approximately 15.7% of the population according to the 2011-2012 Demographic and Health Surveys (Kpozehouen et al. 2018), suggesting that the prevalence of such violence is much more widespread than reported (McCloskey et al. 2016). In 2012, the GoB passed a national law (Act No. 2011-26) to officially recognize and define different forms of violence against women, and implement measures to prevent and repress gender-based violence (GBV). Under the PNPG, adopted in 2009, counseling centers for victims of GBV were established in 49 municipalities. This study asked participants if they had experienced or witnessed an incident of sexual harassment in the workplace, and if and how they would report such an incident.

Both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of ATVET4Women expressed that sexual harassment influences their ability to engage in value chains and workplaces, albeit to varying degrees. All respondents interviewed conceptualized sexual harassment as an act committed by a man against a woman, and not, for example, a form of bullying among men. Most women and all men in this study indicated they had not experienced nor even witnessed an incident of sexual harassment while working in their target value chain.

One woman who experienced sexual harassment explained, "*Harassment is heavy and harder to deal with when you are dependent [on the harasser]. When someone is superior to you, harassment is harder*" [compost, North, beneficiary woman]. Another explained,

> "*Yes, it happens to me often. I was going home one evening after a long day at work when a gentleman stopped me and asked me where I was going. He started making advances at me. I gently pushed him away, but he refused to understand. Our voices were raised, and several curious people came to surround us. Among those curious people were those who called my husband to inform him of the situation. My husband then came and spoke with the gentleman and the situation got back to normal"* [compost, South, beneficiary woman].

This woman explained that she would report such an event, because it is against the law, but she will "*tell [her] husband first because he's the head of the family. If I don't tell him and something happens again later, he's not going to get involved"* [compost, South, beneficiary woman].

In general, both men and women agree sexual harassment is more dangerous for a married woman, because it could trigger issues between the victim and her spouse. It is generally perceived that women who are victim to sexual harassment are in some way responsible for instigating or accepting the behavior. Although several women indicated that they had not witnessed or been a victim of sexual harassment, they explained not feeling comfortable reporting such an incident, mostly out of fear of repercussions for themselves and for the victim. One woman explained, "*It's a private issue. But I can call the harasser to tell him to stop. If I go to denounce the person [in public], I can be the cause of the breakdown of his relationships at home. I wouldn't like or want that"* [soy, South, beneficiary woman].

On the other hand, some women did indicate they would report such incidents, regardless of the victim's marital status. For example, one woman was connected to a social center in a nearby village, to which she felt comfortable reporting incidents of harassment or GBV. Another explained, "*This behavior*

could lead to divorce and can have negative impacts on children…I will report this [even if the girl is unmarried], because it could damage the girl's future. However, the boy or the man is not affected by the harmful consequences of this act" [soy, South, beneficiary woman].

No accounts of sexual harassment in this study considered men as a victim, only the harasser. The extent to which men may be victims of sexual harassment is unclear from this study. While none of the men interviewed said they had experienced or witnessed an incident of sexual harassment, they felt they could report such an incident between a man and a woman, if they had. The extent to which they actually would report such an incident varied among the men in this study. Some indicated they always would report the incident to either the police or a manager, whereas others indicated it depended on the woman's marital status or if he could just speak to the woman directly to help her.

3.3 Findings on Concepts of Empowerment

3.3.1 Local Understanding of Empowerment and Perceptions of Empowered Women

While this study operationalizes Kabeer's (2001) definition of empowerment, this definition may not always align with local understandings of empowerment. This study aimed to explore local perceptions of empowerment (the emic perspective) amongst beneficiaries and nonbeneficiaries of ATVET4Women in Benin.[9] Each interview asked respondents to describe a woman who was able to make her own decisions, how this woman is perceived by the community, and then to define the word 'empowerment' in their own words.

In general, study respondents defined 'empowerment' to mean financial independence and self-sufficiency. An empowered woman is someone who has skills, can contribute to her household income, and can support her own needs, whereas an empowered man does all of this in addition to making his own decisions. According to local understandings of empowerment, it is essential for women to earn their own incomes in order to cover their own financial needs as well as contribute to their household expenses, effectively alleviating financial stress from their husbands. A beneficiary explained, "*Without an income, it's not possible to be empowered*" [compost, South, beneficiary woman]. To earn an income, a woman must gain skills that she can apply to income-generating activities and then become financially independent. A manager of a compost processing center observed differences in how men and women decide to use their earned incomes, attributing these patterns to established social norms, "*Yes there is a difference in the use of income, depending on whether it is a man or a woman. Men think too much about partying, while women seek to save as much as possible. These two beings are naturally like that, and I cannot understand the reasons"* [compost, South, agro-processing center manager, woman].

Only three respondents (two trainers and a highly educated woman beneficiary from the South) included autonomous decision-making in their definitions of empowerment, albeit to differing degrees. The beneficiary explained, "*Women's empowerment means making them able to have their own income, to be able to manage it without someone else, and to make the decision to remain submissive like all other women, if that is how your culture imposes on you or if that's what you like"* [chicken, South, beneficiary woman]. She further explains this decision in her own life,

> "*In the home, it is the man who makes the decision in general. In our society, if a woman wants to stay married, she must submit. At some point, she can do whatever she wants, but the man is left to decide. Indeed, I did the same training as my husband. Everyone has her/his structure and I know roughly what he owns, and everyone can manage himself. For example, there are times if he wants to travel, it's the day before or the same day that he tells me that he forgot to tell me that he will take the plane soon. But, when I am invited somewhere, before I can make a decision, I ask for his opinion. In the end, I found a system to accept my decision too, but I had it accepted"* [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

[9] ATVET4Women did not explicitly aim to change understandings of empowerment.

This woman's decision to "*remain submissive*" enables her to exert agency in her decision to align her behavior with that of societal norms around how a married woman should behave.

The trainers included decision-making without conditions in their definitions. A rice trainer explained, "*For me, empowerment is the ability to execute decisions, whether it's financial or managerial. Financially because she is financially independent, able to support herself. She doesn't have to ask anyone for money. On a managerial level, because they will rely on her ability to manage, whether it be her husband or those in her group*" [rice, North, trainer, woman]. A compost trainer explained, "*It takes money to be independent. You must be able to do what you want to do to take care of your family. The criteria for an empowered person are to take care of yourself without waiting for your husband, have an income to meet your needs, and don't be forced to ask for permission before making a decision"* [compost, South, trainer, man].

Most respondents were familiar with women in their community who made their own decisions, and generally agreed that this kind of woman would not be well received at home or within the community. A non-beneficiary explained, "*This woman will not be loved, because the family will see that the woman is imposing. For a woman, it is not a good thing to be imposing. They say that a woman must ally with her husband and the two will be one. If the woman refuses to do so, she will then not experience good development"* [compost, South, non-beneficiary woman]. Another non-beneficiary woman described, "*These kinds of women are selfish…she is sometimes wealthy and stubborn. We [the community] will see her as being too egotistical*" [compost, South, non-beneficiary woman]. Even if the community might accept this woman, as one man explained, "*It would still be hard [for her] to stay in [her] home*" [chicken, South, beneficiary husband]. A beneficiary agreed that while the community would not perceive her well, an empowered woman could conditionally be well-received in the household, "*When [women] make decisions that bring good results, these decisions are accepted by her family and she is loved. But in the community, she is frowned upon. Often these women do not have a husband because men do not accept them*" [compost, North, beneficiary woman].

Despite negative perceptions of empowered women, several respondents in the study support the empowerment of women. A trainer explained, "*[Empowered women] have their say on the development of the country. It is thanks to Marie Elise Gbedo*[10] *that men are afraid of mistreating their wives. Women today are able to give money to their child. Before, without a man, a woman could not do* that" [soy, North, trainer, woman].

3.3.2 Other Dimensions of Empowerment

3.3.2.1 Household Decision-Making

Respondents describe the gendered dynamics related to decision-making and particularly its effect on men's and women's empowerment. For all decisions, men have the final say, however the extent to which women may influence a decision or not need to inform her husband before making a decision varies. Decision-making is intimately engrained in local understandings of empowerment. A woman can be perceived as empowered even when she does not make her own decisions or must rely on her husband's permission, yet empowered men are those who make all the decisions for himself and those within his household.

An empowered woman, specifically if she is married, must still submit to her husband and cannot make her own decisions, otherwise she is viewed as disrespecting her husband. One non-beneficiary woman explained, "*To be independent is not to depend on someone, to have sources of finance and materials, and to be self-sufficient. The empowered woman must even submit to her husband. The empowerment of women must only be in financial and material terms. However, the empowerment of a*

[10] Marie Elise Gbedo is a Beninese politician who ran for president several times, the first of which marked the first women presidential candidate in West Africa in 2001. She championed women's rights and empowerment.

man can be total…financial and he's not required to receive permission from anyone before acting" [soy, South, non-beneficiary]. This likely stems from perceptions that men's role as decision-makers as a divinely bestowed or a natural, traditional right. One husband explained, "*It is easy for a woman to make decisions when she is not married. But when a woman is married, it is more difficult because she must have the consent of her husband before making these decisions. God made it that way. We can't help it"* [soy, North, beneficiary husband]. A man who provides credit in the South shared his perspective, *"We cannot say that the woman has the facility to make a decision, since it is not allowed. We [men] are superior to them [women], which is why they must refer to us [men] before making a decision. As a married woman, she has to do for her home and vice versa"* [South, credit provider, man]. Another man explained why men must make decisions for their wives,

> "*The husband must know, because the wife is weak. That's why she [must] tell her husband. Let the husband have an eye on these interviews with her. Women are weak. They do a lot of things. They reflect. When I say weak, that doesn't mean they're not intelligent…it means that they don't think much. They do not see far…the man is making projections while very few women make projections*" [chicken, South, beneficiary husband].

A woman shared this perspective, explaining that it is difficult for women to be able to make her own decisions, "*Because it's tradition…there are certain things to do, and we must first always warn our husband"* [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

A woman's ability to make her own decisions is closely linked with her marital status, such that a married woman's primary role is to care for the household and respect her husband. A manager of a soy processing center explained he knew of women who made their own decisions, however "*they are single or widowed…And they also have money"* [soy, South, agro-processing center manager, man]. A married woman cannot make her own decisions because that would disrespect her husband by essentially eschewing her primary role as a submissive wife. Women who make their own decisions or do not request permission from their husbands are often described as if they were single women. For example, a beneficiary describes how she navigates controlling her time and making decisions while still maintaining respect for her husband,

> "*Some will say that I am still single, where I do what I want without a constraint of a man or constraint of children. My husband doesn't refuse me anything when I warn him in advance. He taught me to be organized in what I do. If, for example, I am at home and a customer calls me to say they need rabbit, I can call the farm and deliver it. The important thing for me is to have money. I don't like to miss opportunities…even if I plan in advance but then find an opportunity for money to be made, I can revisit my schedule and adjust*" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

Women may sometimes make their own decisions, and often explain how they provide evidence or support to advocate for their own decision-making, yet ultimately must inform their husband and receive his permission before acting upon their decision. One beneficiary clarified, *"It's not difficult [for women] to make decisions. But it's difficult to apply these decisions, because she always needs the consent of her husband"* [Compost, North, Beneficiary Woman].

One woman observed it is common for married men to leave their wives should their wives make their own decisions without seeking their permission first, which ultimately has higher consequences for the wife. She explained,

> *"It can happen that there is no longer confidence [in the relationship] and the woman learns her husband cheated on her with another woman. There, she has to decide if needs to take precautions to care for her children if this other woman will send them back to her, or she must*

> *find the strength to go on without her children. This happens in our society. If you see a woman making decisions [for herself], know that her relationship is no longer continuing. I know many cases [like this] of intellectual ladies"* [chicken, South, non-beneficiary woman].

Sometimes men will consult with their wives over a decision, or women will provide suggestions; however, this varies by household. One woman explained, "*The head of the family decides. I make suggestions, and he analyzes them and takes them into account if it's necessary. He is the head of the family who decides, because god made him the first person in charge. God himself said that a woman must submit to a man if she doesn't want to deal with the consequences"* [soy, South, non-beneficiary woman]. Another woman in the North said she provided feedback or suggestions to her husband, however other household members were "*not happy"* with this, "*because they say that it's the woman who commands the man*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

In some circumstances, it is acceptable for women to make decisions without first informing their husbands. Typically, these kinds of decisions fall under women's domestic and reproductive roles. For example, if a household member, such as a child, faces a health emergency, and the husband is not home, a woman can seek care or help without first informing her husband. Men confirm that women often do not inform them about little things, such as deciding what food to buy at the market, her own business decisions, or the children's daily activities. A woman rice trainer explained her own circumstance:

> "*When the husband is not there and the wife finds herself alone with her child and that he is suffering, she ends up taking initiatives and does not wait for the approval of her husband before taking the child to get them care. Another example, in order to maximize her profit on a sale or purchase and those instinctively, the woman ends up making decisions"* [rice, North, trainer, woman].

Another woman explained, "*She can make decisions about her children's schooling, or during an election she chooses who to vote for*" [soy, North, beneficiary woman].

These decision-making dynamics hold important implications for women's participation in ATVET4Women as well as the levels of control women possess to leverage skills to improve their wellbeing and overall empowerment. For example, according to these household decision-making dynamics, men would make the decision whether or not to allow their wives to participate in a training program like ATVET4Women or those similar, limiting women's control in accessing capacity building opportunities. Indeed, results indicate that securing their husbands' permission was a common barrier to participation reported by women beneficiaries (discussed in further detail in a section below). Women would also lack full autonomy in seeking new income-generating activities in which to apply new skills or best practices, as she would rely on her husband's consent. Financial decision-making is another important component of household decision-making patterns, specifically if women have control over their own income or to what extent they may influence household budgeting decisions. However, results from this study did not yield findings with regard to the gender dynamics of household financial decision-making.

3.3.2.2 Agricultural and Value Chain Decision-Making

Respondents described decision-making dynamics around agricultural and value chain decisions, specifically around land use and selling versus consuming what is produced. With regard to land use, respondents explained that men make the decisions, because they are the head of the household, and because men own the land. Men make land use decisions also because they own the land; according to one beneficiary, "*He makes the decisions for how we use the land, because he is the head of the*

household and more: he owns the land. I'm not making any suggestions, because I don't need to use the land" [soy, North, beneficiary woman]. Men also make production-related decisions, because, "*They are the ones who have the [financial] means to buy fertilizers and other inputs. If you have money to finance the purchase of inputs, you can oppose it. Otherwise, you can only be silent"* [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

In unique circumstances, where a woman purchases or rents her own land, respondents explained that women can then make the decisions for that piece of land. But if a husband allows his wife to utilize a piece of land that he owns, typically he will still make the major decisions on how that land is used. While less women are engaged in the production node across value chains, due to limited access to land in general in Benin, those that do have access to land to cultivate via their husbands would lack full autonomy on how to utilize that land. The results do not shed light on whether ATVET4Women attempted to address these dynamics for beneficiary women in producer nodes, but a lack of autonomy in how to apply best practices could pose potential barriers for women's ability to leverage the full benefits of participating in ATVET4Women (or similar programs).

Most respondents in this study explained that decisions around how much of their harvest (or processed product) should be sold or kept for home consumption depend on the husband and wife's personal arrangement, but whoever produced the crop or product generally makes that decision. However, as one beneficiary clarified, "*Everyone knows what to keep according to their production. But it is the husband who gives the directives that they agree to keep*" [rice, North, beneficiary woman]. Another described,

> "*Not all of the production is sold. A part of it is reserved for household consumption…Men keep the corn to guarantee household food consumption, whereas woman keep the gari*[11] *from processed cassava. The woman decides how much to keep, because it is she who provides the food for the children. So, it is she who makes the decision to keep this or that, but with the participation of the man*" [chicken, North, beneficiary woman].

One beneficiary explained how these kinds of decisions might negatively impact women's income or budgets, "*The man keeps the corn and rice; the women keeps the [condiments*[12]*] peanut, pepper, and okra. The woman directly participates in the preparation and consumption of the condiments, which go into the sauce [for the meal]. She can no longer ask her husband for money to purchase these condiments, since she has now produced them. The man must ensure the food of the household, which is why he makes the decision for how much corn to keep as the staple food of the household. It is to make this decision that we see how things must happen with a woman and her sauce, and the man providing the food for the household*" [soy, North, beneficiary woman]. This type of decision-making dynamic holds important implications for a woman's ability to control her income, particularly in cases where men make these decisions, and the timing of sale is important.

3.3.2.3 Access to Resources

Consistent with the literature (Goldstein et al. 2016; Kinkinginhoun-Mêdagbé et al. 2010), women in this study have limited access to land compared to men, and when they do, the land is typically controlled by men. Land is an important resource for women's value chain activities. For example, one man explained, "*You must have land…After land, there is money. These are the two most important resources*" [chicken, South, beneficiary husband]. Women either are given access to land owned by their husbands or a male family member, or they can purchase or rent their own land. However, given limited financial means, women generally cannot do the latter, resulting in women either not having land available to cultivate or having access to land but not having full autonomy in how to utilize that land.

[11] *Gari* is a typical West African dish made from fermented cassava flour.
[12] Condiments are non-staple food items that women are typically responsible for providing for household meals.

Cultural gender norms and lack of ownership rights dictate women's ability to obtain necessary financing from formal institutions to support their entrepreneurial endeavors. While women tend to take more loans from formal credit providers than men, those taken are lower in amount and interest. A credit provider explained,

> "*Women generally take less risk [low interest, small amount loans], because while they themselves do activities, men often say that women are there to take care of children and their homes. In order to keep the home with their husband, women decide to carry out an activity, which is why they outnumber men. But to respect their engagement and not create trouble for their husband, they prefer to go* molo-molo[13] *to be able to pay their credit, by taking a small sum and to start with a small activity to see if it will work…"* [South, credit provider, man].

Women typically take smaller loans, because they lack collateral, such as a motorbike or existing land, for larger loans. To circumvent this challenge, a credit provider observed,

> "*Considering this, for example, let's say she wants to take more than 500,000 fCFA,*[14] *she has to go to other institutions. Maybe she takes 200,000 fCFA*[15] *with us and 200,000 fCFA with others and then she has the amount that she wants. But these are things we particularly advise against, because when problems arise, she will be unable to pay or respect her commitment"* [South, credit provider, man].

On the other hand, if a man did not have the necessary guarantee for a loan, "*He asks a friend to bond him, so he can benefit. But the woman, it is difficult for her to ask a man for the bond, unless it is her brother. Otherwise, when the husband is informed, it will create trouble*" [South, credit provider, man].

Beneficiary and non-beneficiary women described the initial process for entry into their respective value chain activities. Most women relied on either their husbands or parents, or an accessible financing source for a small loan to cover the startup costs of their value chain activity. A few women had saved enough money from prior employment to invest in their new activity. For example, one woman spent 2000 fCFA repaying a loan, as other members will help the individual who took out a loan in case he or she cannot repay it within the terms. In one instance, a loan provider in the South requires that women loan grantees are members of an association. Sometimes, solidarity groups seek the creditors' assistance in officially registering and utilizing this platform for obtaining access to financing for their agricultural or value chain activities.

While not a formal group, women typically travel to markets in groups or in pairs to purchase their items, which also affects women's ability to access credit. One agro-input dealer explained how this influences his decision to sell to women on credit, but not men:

> "*It is easier for women to [buy on credit]. Indeed, we rarely sell to men on credit. As for women, they often come to the market, and she doesn't come alone. So, you try to identify the person with whom she comes to the market with, because they have to leave the same village [to come to the market]. So, if the person to whom you sold [products] on credit does not come [to repay], you can accompany the person or persons you identified [previously with her] at home to get your money back*" [South, agro-input dealer, man].

Having an established practice in the respective target value chains was important criterion for participation in ATVET4Women as the trainings and support were intended to grow women's existing

[13] *Molo-molo* means "slowly" or "step by step".
[14] Approximately $838.37
[15] Approximately $335.35

enterprises or activities. However, compared to their male counterparts, women do not have equal access to the necessary resources, such as land or suitable credit options, to establish such practices or enterprises, and thus are generally limited in their ability to do so. Considering this limited access to resources coupled with limited control or influence over value chain or household decisions, women may not experience the full empowerment benefits of newly learned skills or practices ATVET4Women (or similar programs) if these important barriers are also not concurrently addressed.

3.3.2.4 Time Use

While some women cited no limitations for managing their own time, many do. Limitations include being deferential to one's husband and external pressures. Many women indicated they cannot always do what they intend, because they are required to prioritize domestic duties above all else. One woman explained that she prioritizes domestic tasks in managing her time out of respect for her husband, "*To make better use of my time, I must respect my husband and put my household at the center of all of my actions. In doing so, my husband will not be able to refuse me anything, and I will be able to do that activities I want"* [compost, South, beneficiary woman]. Additionally, many women cited that being married, and thus being under their husbands' control, is a limitation on their time. For example, one woman explained, "*Sometimes you do your schedule to do this or that, but my husband can come and tell me to do something else. And I leave what I should do"* [soy, North, beneficiary woman]. Another cited, "*If I was single, I would have some time because I will no longer waste time at home preparing for my husband"* [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

Others expressed external pressures affecting their ability to control their time, specifically a lack of financial means, a need for better time management skills, or a general lack of agency. Only one woman cited a general lack of agency, such that her time is controlled by god and she acts accordingly. Another explained, "*When I have money on me, I can look for laborers to work for me. If you work well and have your own resources, you can manage your time well. When you have the money, you can manage your time well*" [soy, North, beneficiary woman]. Many women expressed needing to build better time management skills. One had attended a training on time management and commented on its impact, "*I [now] manage my time as well as possible. I had to follow [a] training on time management, management of many things and what allows me to plan from the day before the next day*" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

Men do not express many limitations to their time, except for their own ability to plan their daily schedules or not having adequate financial means. Some men do not plan their schedules and recognize that thinking more about how they spend their time might be useful. Others feel that if they had more financial resources, they could reduce the amount of paid work they are required to do to earn an income. For example, one man explained, "*It's money that will allow me to better manage my time. When I have a lot of money, I will know how to manage my time better because with a lot of money, I can hire farm workers to help me in the field"* [soy, North, beneficiary husband].

Limits to one's control and agency over personal time use pose barriers to participating in capacity building opportunities, such as ATVET4Women or other similar programs. Women's time is burdened by domestic responsibilities and the option to tradeoff domestic work for paid work (or capacity building time, such as participation in ATVET4Women) is under a woman's husband's control. Married women, in particular, have limited control over their time use, and those that express some agency in controlling their time use still navigate their schedules to prioritize domestic responsibilities before including additional activities, either paid or unpaid. Men do not face similar burdens to their time and therefore have freer capabilities to spend their time on income-generating or capacity building activities, if available.

3.3.2.5 Employment and Entrepreneurship

Most women in this study were either entrepreneurs or employed as either an agricultural laborer or in another profession. Regardless of their type of employment, women must complete their domestic responsibilities first before engaging in employment activities and are required by social norms to receive the permission and support of their husbands before undertaking paid work. An employer confirmed, "*We prefer to employ men than women. Women have too many family constraints. But everything that requires physical strength is provided by men and packaging by women. There is no difference for [hired] women and men in terms of hours of work, post, and wages"* [chicken, South, agro-processing center manager, woman].

Men shared that evidence of increased incomes encourages their willingness to support such activities, on the condition that women's domestic duties are not neglected. One non-beneficiary woman worked as a health inspector, media consultant, nutrition consultant, and managed her husband's farm business. She described her experience and why she found her husband's support essential for her to operate in the formal sector,

> [*For a businesswoman to make her own decisions*], *it's good but risky. Me, for example, I knew a man through a friend who came to the farm to offer me work. I wanted to do it, but I decided to inform my husband, because when people will see us together in the office during lunch, and they cannot hear what we are saying, even if it's not about matters of money, and we do not want our colleagues to hear us. They will then call my husband and tell him everything, and I will have serious problems. Fortunately for me, my husband decided to have more information about this man. It turns out, it was a rumor. If I had never informed by husband, I would start to cry with problems. It's true that you don't have to tell [your husband] everything, but you have to tell him to avoid these problems. My sister and my brother can come to see me for the problem, and then I'm going to start telling my husband? These are the intimate things that I cannot do…you will create problems for yourself. And when [your brother and sister] see you, they will insult you"* [chicken, South, non-beneficiary].

3.3.3 Access to Capacity Building Opportunities

Both women and men participants noted gendered access to capacity building opportunities that hold implications for women's empowerment, specifically those around achieving higher education, leadership opportunities in respective value chains, and access to information.

Men and women beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in this study report a wide range of years of education (Table 2). While beneficiary women reported lower average levels of education compared to the men in this study, they also reported the widest range of education levels, from never having had attended school to receiving a medical degree in veterinary studies. One beneficiary described her motivation for pursuing higher education, "*Currently, I am doing my master's degree, because I have the ambition to be a consultant. And I said to myself that to assert myself, I need to have a minimum level of a master's. This is why I started it. After, I will follow a cooperative management training course and then follow a consultant training course to open my practice. I do not follow this training in order to participate in a competition, but there are projects coming that I want to participate in, like winning contracts to organize women in cooperatives. [I want to do this] because women suffer too much, they need it. It's my ambition*" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

However, a non-beneficiary woman explained how her career ambitions were limited when she had children, suggesting that even if women have access to higher educational opportunities, it becomes conditional given her increased domestic duties and time burdens, "*I had a background in law. I have a master's degree in legal science, business law option and a judicial career. I worked for two years in a law firm. After that, I had a twin pregnancy, which led me to leave because there was no help with the*

children at home. It was too much stress for me. It was a Caesarean section; that's why I gave up, [and focused] on taking care of my children. When they were a little bit older, I looked for what to do and went to farming" [chicken, South, non-beneficiary].

In addition to viewing higher education as a path to empowerment, women also indicated wanting to engage in select value chains as a means to gain financial independence, and thus empowerment. A non-beneficiary woman began raising chickens when she saw a woman on TV discussing poultry rearing and was motivated to participate in the poultry value chain as a pathway to empowerment, "*There are many things a woman can do to be independent … it caught my attention*" [chicken, South, non-beneficiary]. Women in this study favored involvement in their respective value chains as it enabled them to increase their incomes and become more financially independent, a critical component of empowerment according to local understandings.

However, value chain actors – both men and women – did not always perceive women as competent leaders in the value chain relative to their male counterparts, and often did not support women in leadership. One local supplier shared her perspectives on women's limitation for working in their respective value chain node, "*Indeed, in the African context, women do not always have the audacity to lead men. Therefore, they do not have the firmness to lead men*" [South, agro-input dealer, woman].

Other value chain actors perceived women as being less agentic than men and attribute this to perceptions of lower levels of education or initiative, while also acknowledging women's limited access to information as a potential barrier. One agro-input dealer shared his perspective,

> "*For example, we had a beekeeper's magazine. I took the initiative to bring it home. But despite this, the women come to ask me questions, but the [magazine] had the answers! So, they don't bother to read. That's why I said that women often do not go to [seek] their own information. However, there is also the level of education that could be a factor"* [South, agro-input dealer, man].

He later continued,

> "*Often women do not go looking for information, they wait for information to come to them. And [internet and technology] has also helped men in this sense, as very few women have access to the internet. Those who use it, hang on and keep using it. But unfortunately, many give up and just use tapes to do [their work] for three to four months. It's difficult to keep up with tapes"* [South, agro-input dealer, man].

3.4 Findings on Impacts of ATVET4Women

3.4.1 Opportunities, Benefits, and Positive Impacts of ATVET4Women

Respondents shared generally positive comments and attitudes of ATVET4Women regarding its structure, implementation, and objectives. Beneficiaries described appreciating the format of ATVET4Women trainings, such that each training first started with the theory (the "why") behind the new practices, and then taught them the best practices, which facilitated their understanding and acceptance of the training material and new techniques.

Beneficiaries and their husbands discuss their experience with ATVET4Women and the positive impacts it has had on their lives. Specifically, respondents discuss these impacts in terms of newly acquired skills, behavior changes, and tangible positive outcomes. ATVET4Women trainings taught beneficiaries best practices and new techniques to improve their overall integration into their respective value chain. One husband noticed that due to the training, his wife "*improved her technique for producing compost*" [compost, North, beneficiary husband]. A woman explained that now she has "*the best quality*

cheese" due to the ATVET4Women training [soy, North, beneficiary woman]. Specifically, she learned technical and hygienic practices for soaking the soybeans during processing, which she has now adopted in her processing activities. Another beneficiary learned that she can use a machine to sew bags of rice after they are processed, which she previously thought "*could only be done by hand,*" saving her time in her work [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

ATVET4Women also increased women's intrinsic agency to operate as entrepreneurs. Beneficiary women indicated they learned new best business practices to manage and grow their businesses and had increased confidence levels due to the ATVET4Women trainings to utilize these best practices. For example, one beneficiary described how she learned recordkeeping and money saving techniques, which had shifted her outlook on and confidence in operating a business. She explained,

> "*As a technique for selling my production, for all of the expenses I take, I wrote them down. At minimum, I write down a note that allows me to know the cost of the item and to know how much I will sell the product. This is the most confident attitude I've had! I no longer confuse my personal expenses with business expenses"* [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

Another woman described how ATVET4Women training increased her confidence in her own abilities, "*With the training, I understood that I have the ability to increase my livestock and to make my business more profitable…if someone asked me about participating in the training, I would tell them 'yes,' because it helps to build your capacity*" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

Husbands also noticed their wives' behavior and attitudes had changed due to the program. One noticed, "*These behaviors have changed. She now wears overalls for work, and her way of cooking has changed. She is more concerned with food hygiene and quality*" [soy, South, beneficiary husband]. Another noticed his wife is more confident and motivated in her work with poultry rearing, "*After her training, when it came to self-employment, she was more decisive…before she was quickly discouraged about certain risks and thought of withdrawing, but I had encouraged her to stay. Her mentality changed after the training. She had motivation"* [chicken, South, beneficiary husband].

In addition to behavior and attitude changes, beneficiaries and their husbands describe noticeable positive impacts resulting from their participation in ATVET4Women. Specifically, ATVET4Women teaches best hygiene practices for overall health and wellness related to household activities, as well as hygienic value chain activities. One woman observed that since the trainings, there is now a "*decrease in the frequency of illness in my children, because [she] now respects the rules of hygiene…[she] uses them daily in all [her] household tasks, whether it is to prepare food or clean the house*" [soy, North, beneficiary woman].

Additionally, respondents also observed how improved value chain techniques translated into increased incomes as a result of ATVET4Women. One husband explained, "*After the training, [my wife] returned with new equipment and the way that she heated the rice changed…[I am encouraged] if I see positive results from the training"* [rice, North, beneficiary husband]. Another explained, "*Thanks to the trainings given to my wife, there is now a reduction in household expenditure. So, if I myself participate in the trainings, our conditions will improve more"* [compost, South, beneficiary husband]. One husband explained that the per diem allotted to his wife to participate in the training supported her in purchasing the raw materials for her compost business for the first time.

A poultry producer in the South spoke extremely highly of the women's leadership component of the training, citing its effect on her time management and organization. However, she also indicated that she did not learn any new value chain specific skills, since she had attended prior trainings from other organizations:

> "*The women's leadership training has changed me in terms of organization and management of personnel. Before, I was a bit messy, but now I'm learning to put more order and discipline. And, I insist that everyone send me their schedule by Friday. But, the technical side of production,*

breeding and short training, I have not acquired any new skills" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

3.4.2 Challenges to Participation and Barriers to Adoption

Respondents noted several barriers to participating in ATVET4Women, either reflecting on their own experience or perceived potential barriers. In general, these barriers include childcare duties, time and transportation requirements to attend the trainings, and ultimately, receiving their husbands' permission and support.

Some non-beneficiary women cite that they do not have alternatives to childcare and can only participate in such a training if it is physically close to their home. One beneficiary explained that if she or her child were sick, she could not attend or participate in any kind of training. Especially if a woman is pregnant or a child is sick, even if she wanted to attend, her husband would not allow it, according to a soy trainer from the North.

A lack of transportation and specifically, the initial lack of per diems to support transportation were barriers to women's participation. Husbands of beneficiaries observed the lack of transportation as likely women's largest barrier to attending such a training. Initially, ATVET4Women did not provide women per diems to attend, which resulted in reduced attendance. One trainer described, "*Women are accustomed to receiving per diems for trainings. The project initially didn't give that, other than a coffee break and lunch. We then noticed a decrease in participation, so we were obliged to give them travel costs in order to retain them. We paid 4,000 fCFA*[16] *per person…"* [soy, South, trainer, man]. To ameliorate this challenge, one trainer said, "*I would suggest in the future the project takes [per diems] into account, at least for transport. Sometimes women go far away [from home] and spend a lot on transport"* [soy, South, trainer, man].

A major potential barrier to women's participation is securing her husband's permission and support to attend such a training. One man's wife had informed him about the training, and he permitted her to attend, but qualified that, "*If I had not been informed in advance of such training, I cannot allow my wife to participate*" [soy, South, beneficiary husband]. Another agreed and further explained, "*I can also prohibit my wife from going there if I notice that she becomes disrespectful in the household*" [compost, South, beneficiary husband]. Some women said that they can convince their husband to consent if they have a plan for childcare during the training, or if the training will produce tangible, positive results, such as improved skills or most importantly, more money. One husband confirmed, "*If she goes to the training, I must see an improvement in her participation in meeting the needs of our household*" [rice, North, beneficiary husband].

Trainers noted additional barriers to women's full participation. For instance, even when only women participated in ATVET4Women trainings, sometimes men were present in the building, which prompted a trainer to share why acute awareness of group dynamics is important to effectively lead trainings, "*I have not had any cases where the husbands also attended the training. But I can say from experience having led trainings when the husband is present, women express themselves less. Sometimes, too, when there are only women and there is a leader amongst them, the women tend to give the floor to the leader"* [rice, North, trainer, woman].

Another trainer indicated that a lack of necessary materials or equipment, such as a mill, was a challenge for conducting a soy processing training, and noted that trainings should target those already in the processing business, "*If someone is not in the business [already when they come to trainings], it would be difficult for them to put into practice everything that is taught"* [soy, South, trainer, man].

When discussing challenges to putting newly learned skills or techniques into action, beneficiaries described that while they rarely faced any barriers to implementing what they had learned, sometimes they would forget the specifics of what they learned in the training and had to wait to be retaught at the next training. Although ATVET4Women usually supplied refresher materials to the

[16] Approximately $6.71

beneficiaries, this did not happen in all cases. Additionally, some new techniques or practices incur more time to complete, resulting in beneficiaries needing to make certain tradeoffs to accommodate. For example, one rice processor learned she needed to wash her rice well before processing, which takes more time. Now she "*reduced the amount of rice [she] was making"* to accommodate for the increase in time [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

A barrier to adoption that trainers and value chain actors noted was a lack of financial literacy among women beneficiaries, which results in women being less credible borrowers and therefore less able to obtain loans from credit providers. For example, a credit provider perceived that men were more credible than women in repaying their loans, "*When women start making money, they think about how to dress. This is why trainings need to teach women on their financial management*" [South, credit provider, man]. A rice trainer suggested "*integrating the financial management component [into trainings], because despite [women's] activities, [they] must understand how to manage the benefits from a financial term. She must know how to make [financial] forecasts and schedules*" [rice, North, trainer, woman]. The program may have also benefited from identifying gender sensitive lending organizations or offering gender trainings to the staff of the credit organizations with which they worked.

Trainers noted that one barrier to adoption stemmed from women beneficiaries' initial lack of interest in certain curricula topics. For instance, the concept of hygienic processing methods did not initially resonate with most participants as none understood the health value of this practice. However, after some time, participants came to understand the value of hygiene, and trainers continued teaching this practice. One soy processing trainer explained, "*Women had no idea what hygiene is all about. For a previous training, they are told to wear gloves and nose covers. But when you leave, women always will work without gloves or masks, because they have worked without them before, and they didn't become sick. When we come into the community, we give them specific examples about hygiene and show how they can benefit. Now they are all equipped"* [soy, South, trainer, man].

3.4.3 ATVET4Women's Impact on Women's Empowerment

Respondents described their perceptions of ATVET4Women's impact on women's empowerment, and specifically refer to skill building and increased incomes as evidence on enhanced empowerment. Both of these results align with the local understanding of empowerment that an empowered woman is financially independent. A woman trainer explained she was motivated to continue leading soy processing trainings "*in order to contribute to the empowerment of women. Thanks to the training that I lead, this allows them to earn more income so as not to depend on men and complain about the amount of money men give them*" [soy, North, trainer, woman]. Another beneficiary described how the ATVET4Women training increased her confidence to assert herself,

> "*For a long time, I was dependent on my husband…Even if I have the money to do something, I am still waiting for him to come with me. Simply because I am a woman. Workers and other service providers do not give enough consideration to women. They have to be harassed to do it. So, I always brought my husband to do things. But thanks to the training, I learned to assert myself. They now know me*" [chicken, South, beneficiary woman].

One husband described how ATVET4Women improved women's empowerment, reflecting on his wife's experience, "*Yes, ATVET contributed to the empowerment of women because before [the training], my wife did not even have the money to buy a condiment. But now, she can do certain things in the household without waiting for me. For example, she buys condiments for the kitchen, and even covers some expenses for the children*" [soy, South, beneficiary husband]. One woman confirmed, "*Yes, these training courses are empowering women, because we put into practice what we have been taught. Like that, there is improvement in production and, therefore, an increase income"* [soy, North, beneficiary woman]. Another beneficiary explained that the trainings "*give women a job through which she can*

become free," and even if women do not immediately practice the learned skills, "*the trainings give women a skill they will always have to rely on"* [compost, North, beneficiary woman].

A woman trainer, who understood empowerment in terms of ability to make their own decisions, expressed why she felt ATVET4Women increased women's empowerment,

> "*I think that women today, in terms of managerial decisions, can do it, but ATVET empowers her most to make decisions around finance. The ATVET program has enabled women to get involved in their investments, whether in soybeans or livestock. It is true that all of this might not be well perceived, but the fact that women do these activities are already creating examples for young women of the next generation. Contributing to improving the quality of his wives' rice has enabled men more attention today. The training has helped give more visibility to the women who value themselves in their work (in the field, in services, etc.) and, for sure, this work will generate financial resources that they will be able to use to meet their own needs. This is why I say that the project contributes to the empowerment of women"* [rice, North, trainer, woman].

However, one husband did not feel that ATVET4Women could have had an effect on women's empowerment, as he described, "*No, because an independent [empowered] woman is not under the roof of a man"* [compost, South, beneficiary husband]. Another woman who was not familiar with the word 'empowerment' nor knew any women who made their own decisions also said ATVET4Women did not empower women, only "*taught [her] new techniques and information about processing"* [rice, North, beneficiary woman].

4. DISCUSSION

This report describes the findings of a qualitative study of the ATVET4Women program in Benin, which focuses on women's integration into target value chains, understandings of local empowerment, and the program's impact on women's empowerment. In this section we discuss the implications of these findings, provide feedback to strengthen future iterations of ATVET4Women and other programs that aim to enhance women's livelihoods and empower them, and suggest research questions for further inquiry.

4.1 Understandings of Empowerment

Both men and women participants in this study understand 'empowerment' to be different for men and women; women are seen as empowered when they become financially independent, whereas men are seen as empowered when they are both financially independent and autonomous in their decision-making. Women can be perceived as empowered even as she defers to her husband and does not make or act on her own decisions. Married women who make their own decisions are perceived as being like single women, because a married woman must demonstrate respect to her husband and remain submissive, whereas a single woman is not submissive to a husband. Married women who do make their own decisions were not well received by their community and are generally perceived as disrespectful to their husbands. Although a few participants did perceive women's empowerment to include their ability to execute decisions and supported efforts to empower more women to be able to make and act on their own decisions.

This study explored how ATVET4Women affected women's empowerment. Study respondents conveyed that the trainings improving women's financial independence and built their intrinsic agency and confidence in their work. Evidence from this study suggests that both men and women are encouraged by women's increased incomes as a result of the trainings, particularly among men, as women then are able to contribute to household expenses and alleviate men's typical financial burdens. However, it is not clear from this study if women are autonomous in managing and deciding how to use these increased incomes, and how women's income either supplements or replaces men's traditional household expenditure. It also is not clear how the increase in women's income shapes or influences her confidence to contribute to household decision-making, and how, if at all, this affects intrahousehold dynamics.

Additionally, while most respondents indicated not having had a personal experience with sexual harassment, either as a victim or a witness, they all conceptualized sexual harassment as an act of a man against a woman, and depending on the victim's marital status, the response to such an incident varied. Sexual harassment was considered more dangerous for a married woman because of perceptions that she somehow was responsible for instigating or enabling such an interaction and was therefore accountable to her husband for this incident. Many respondents would not get involved had they witnessed such an incident for fear of creating problems between a married couple. A married victim would need to immediately tell her husband, who would then confront the abuser; however, it is not clear from this study if this is always the case, what should happen if a woman does not immediately report, or what happens for unmarried women. Many respondents directly conveyed that in their community, men face no repercussions as the abuser, yet women, married or unmarried, will always bear the burden of potential repercussions.

These findings further our understanding of emic definitions of empowerment and highlight intersectional barriers and opportunities for improving women's empowerment in Benin. Future research should explore these emergent themes and findings to better understand conditions of empowerment in Benin and to better to inform policy and programming. These findings highlighted household decision-making dynamics that hold strong implications for women's empowerment, specifically around income and time use, women's participation in income-generating or capacity building activities, and agricultural activities, among others. Future research should further explore these decision-making dynamics among women of different characteristics, such as single or widowed women, or those in households with more

complex decision-making dynamics, like polygynous women. For example, previous research from Burkina Faso demonstrated that first wives are typically prioritized for access to land, capacity-building or income-generating opportunities, and have more influence in household decision-making than lower-order wives in polygynous households (Eissler et al., 2020). This information may be used to strengthen implementation of ATVET4Women or similar programs by designing program activities that can ensure they are adapted to provide opportunities for women in a variety of household circumstances to empower themselves.

With regard to general, agriculture and value chain-specific decision-making, targeted research should be conducted to better understand women's influence in certain decisions and the impact of that influence on their empowerment. There is a need to further explore these dynamics and their impact for women's empowerment, particularly as ATVET4Women seeks to increase women's incomes and overall empowerment. With such information, policy makers may be better able to design programs that encourage joint decision-making and trust amongst men and women, as well as target women in specific demographic categories, such as polygynous or widowed, to support them in their decision-making abilities.

Finally, further research should explore perceptions of sexual harassment for unmarried women, and how, if at all, these issues are handled to uncover and develop context-specific solutions to reducing incidents. Additionally, ATVET4Women may want to explore community sensitization programming that would focus on changing community norms around sexual harassment or consider bystander trainings focused on respected men and elder women in the community to identify and speak out against sexual harassment. ATVET4Women and other similar programs may want to open dialogs and work with women engaged in the value chains as well as community members to determine feasible strategies and pilot them. ATVET4Women may also consider implementing a gender-sensitization component to both men and women in order to reduce bias against victims of sexual harassment, provide information both about what is legal and illegal in Benin, and promote effective mechanisms of support for both victims and witnesses. It is essential to note these are cautious next steps that should be undertaken with guidance from local experts and informed by future research.

4.2 Implications of ATVET4Women and Feedback for Improvement

The findings of this study suggest that overall, beneficiary women and their husbands were satisfied with the program implementation and delivery. Overall, beneficiaries appreciated the curricula format and reported learning new, tangible skills in which they were able to apply to their respective value chain activities. Women beneficiaries particularly liked the women's leadership and business management components of the trainings. Both beneficiaries and their husbands report noticeable changes in women's intrinsic agency after the trainings, such that beneficiary women had increased levels of confidence in conducting their business activities. ATVET4Women improved women's skills in respective value chain activities, such as teaching best practices in rice processing or making compost to sell. Women were encouraged by these new skills as they applied them in their practices and noticed tangible improvements, such as higher quality products, work time saved, or additional incomes earned. Both beneficiaries and their husbands noted an increase in women's incomes as well as an increased attention to hygiene in both value chain and household activities. Beneficiaries reported abiding by higher hygiene standards, which resulted in less household illness and cleanlier products in the value chain. The higher quality products increased incomes, and given women's time burdens, the time saving components enabled women to have more time to dedicate to their income-generating work, or domestic responsibilities, as needed. However, the extent to which ATVET4Women enabled women to have control over their earned income or influence in important household decisions was not observed in this study.

Women faced barriers to participating in the training, particularly tied to domestic duties, limited means for transportation, and most importantly, securing their husbands' permission and support to attend. A primary challenge reported by women to participate in ATVET4Women (and similar) training programs is the need to secure their husbands' permission. Cultural and social norms dictate that women

are under men's control and attending a training without receiving her husbands' permission would be perceived as disrespecting her husband, which could hold severe consequences for married women. As previously mentioned, ATVET4Women did not include trainings or program components focused on increasing women's decision-making autonomy within the household, nor did it target husbands for gender sensitization trainings. Thus, this study did not demonstrate observable impacts for women's decision-making autonomy.

Value chain actors and beneficiaries of ATVET4Women shared several recommendations for improving the program. The program should consider women's financial and time burdens in order to attend trainings and should provide transportation stipends or per diems to support their attendance. However, women with young children and no childcare support will be unlikely able to travel and attend such a training. ATVET4Women should consider providing childcare options to beneficiaries. Facilitating access to suitable capital to enable women to grow their businesses and finance startup costs should also be integrated in future iterations of the program or other similar programs.

Targeted financial management trainings should complement existing trainings so that women can grow and manage their current businesses effectively. The program can continue to incorporate activities and trainings focused on marketing aspects of each value chain, particularly as this study demonstrates that women are more active in the marketing node, although they may be operating at a smaller scale than men. ATVET4Women could assist facilitating linking beneficiaries to existing buyers or identifying products for sale.

Finally, ATVET4Women and other similar programs should aim to integrate and target men for gender-focused trainings around women's leadership and capabilities in their business activities, as well as sensitize men to gender considerations of time burdens, specifically those tied to women's domestic duties. Men should be engaged in conversations and dialogues around women's empowerment. And in instances where a lack of permission or support inhibits a woman's ability to participate, ATVET4Women could facilitate buy-in directly with the husband by sending a program leader to advocate on behalf of the training. Given potential challenges of resource constrains to facilitate this, perhaps program leaders could meet with husbands in groups to advocate for the benefits of such a training for their wives and households.

In conclusion, this report provides qualitative evidence of ATVET4Women's implementation and delivery in Benin, as well as gendered dynamics in the targeted value chains and understandings of empowerment. Further research should seek to answer questions generated from this report to better facilitate pathways fostering women's empowerment through agricultural and vocational trainings in Benin.

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