

“It Takes Two”: Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Value Chains

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This brief summarizes the recent assessment of the implementation of the Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education Training for Women Program (ATVET4Women) that aims to support women and their families with vocational training and market linkages in priority agricultural value chains (VCs). The ATVET4Women program has two main components: formal training and nonformal training. Formal training consists of a 2- or 3-year vocational and technical course at an agricultural training center (ATC) where students gain skills (and a diploma) for employment or entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector. Nonformal training provides farmers with 1 to 3 weeks of training on good production and business management practices.

Malawi is one of the six pilot countries for ATVET4Women. In Malawi, ATVET4Women uses a household approach to encourage household members to share responsibilities and decision-making jointly for farm and domestic management (hence the slogan “It takes two”). As of February 2020, formal training had not started because the new curriculum was still under development. Nonformal training, begun in 2018 using preexisting training materials on vegetable production, is the focus of this brief.

In May 2019, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa’s Development (AUDA-NEPAD), and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) launched a 2-year study to assess: (1) the program experience of stakeholders, (2) program benefits and challenges among graduates of ATVET4Women nonformal training, and (3) the baseline conditions on VCs and empowerment. The assessment used a pilot household survey-based instrument called the project-level Women’s Empowerment in Agricultural Index (pro-WEAI) for market inclusion and supplementary qualitative research. This brief summarizes the main findings and implications.

Methods

The study used a mixed methods approach for data collection and analysis. The research team conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews, adapting existing qualitative protocols from the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP2),¹ and a household survey that included both household and individual questionnaires, administered separately to primary women and men decision-makers within sample households. The individual survey allows for calculation of the pro-WEAI for market inclusion, comprising two sub-indices: the Three Domains of Empowerment index (3DE) and the Gender Parity Index (GPI). The 3DE aggregates women’s and men’s achievements across 12 equally weighted indicators that measure three types of

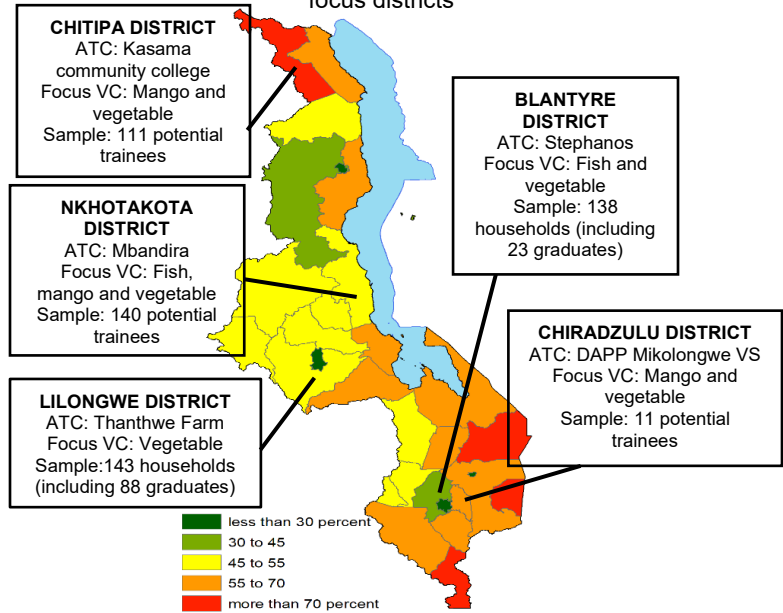
¹ The full protocols are available at <http://weai.ifpri.info/files/2018/04/GAAP2-Qualitative-Protocols-no-comments-.pdf>.

agency: intrinsic, instrumental, and collective.² To capture other dimensions of empowerment that are relevant to participation in agricultural VCs and markets, we piloted additional indicators including (1) entrepreneurship mindset, (2) access to information, (3) sex and fertility agency, (4) access to reliable sanitation, and (5) sexual hostility in the work environment.³ Results from the quantitative and qualitative studies reveal meaningful insights into ATVET4Women and women’s engagement in agricultural VC and markets.

The household survey focused on five districts where ATVET4Women has started some program activities, has gained initial commitment from the ATC, and seems highly likely to continue. These districts are Lilongwe and Nkhosakota in the Central region, Chitipa in the Northern region, and Blantyre and Chiradzulu in the Southern region (see Figure 1). Of program graduates, 111 were tracked in Lilongwe and Blantyre. Of lead farmers and farmers currently engaged in the ATC’s community outreach, 433 sample households were selected; both sets of farmers were identified as potential trainees for future rollout of ATVET4Women. A total 544 sample households were surveyed, including 938 women and men respondents, of whom 121 were graduates (56 men and 65 women).

The qualitative sample included both men and women in (1) participating households with women who participated in ATVET4Women in Lilongwe or Blantyre, and (2) nonparticipating households with women who have not yet participated in any ATVET4Women trainings. Entrepreneurs, instructors, agricultural extension agents, and other key stakeholders from the private sector, government and non-governmental organizations were also interviewed. Fifty-one participants were interviewed using semi-structured interview guides.

Figure 1. Map of Malawi, prevalence of poverty per district, and focus districts



Findings

Training implementation

A large majority (90–94 percent) reported being satisfied or completely satisfied with the ATVET training. Nonetheless, graduates had many suggestions to improve training implementation, including improving logistics, provision of transportation allowance, and adequate training materials. Graduates also recommended including other topics (e.g., additional crops and climate change adaption) and offering more hands-on and practical training.

Only 2 percent of farmers had registered their farm/firm, and 17 percent maintained records on inputs, costs, and sales. Both graduates and nongraduates lacked basic business management skills such as recordkeeping and cash flow analysis, and trainings should augment these skills.

Joint training or skills development (of both women and men within the household) was not enforced by the program. Despite invitations to both women and men, and program emphasis on joint attendance, almost all households had only one trainee. It is often not feasible for a woman and man within the same household to attend a training—one attends while the other works. Approaches like having shorter and more practical

² For details on pro-WEAI, see <https://www.ifpri.org/project/weai>

³ See accompanying Brochure on Pro-WEAI for Market Inclusion.

trainings, offering convenient times and locations, and providing childcare services can increase participation. Face-to-face training can be complemented by the use of information and communication technology—for example, to send market and price information, reminders, and important messages via mobile phone or radio.

Program structure and implementation

The ATCs and stakeholders were generally receptive of ATVET4Women but had several suggestions for improving implementation. ATCs suggested the following: (1) contractual agreements and a clear roadmap between ATVET4Women and the ATC to guide implementation of activities; (2) better planning and adherence to schedules; (3) better coordination and regular communication; (4) monetary support to the ATCs and other key stakeholders to assist with program implementation; and (5) support in terms of staff capacity building, equipment, and materials needed for training and demonstrations. Key informants also suggested amplifying awareness of the program to mobilize and incentivize participation across a more diverse set of stakeholders and to help implement activities.

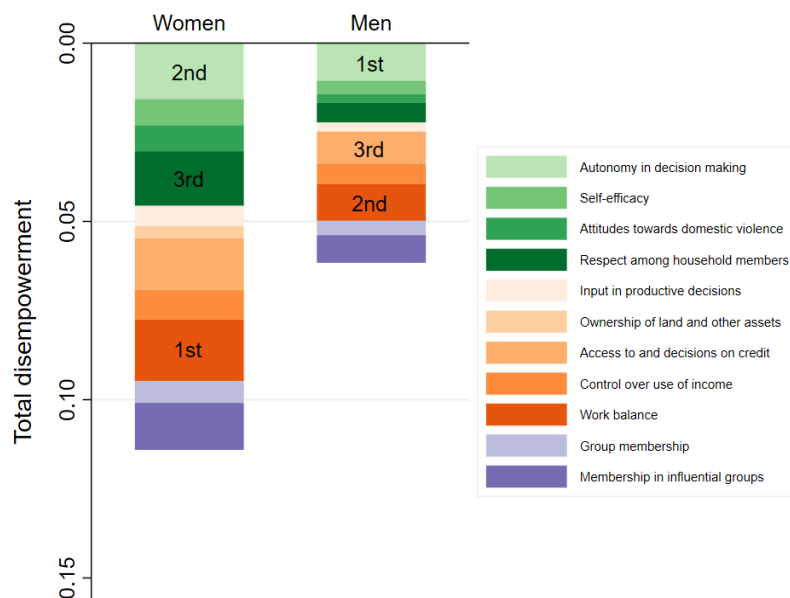
Value chain outcomes

The majority (74 percent) of the sample households reported crop farming as their main livelihood activity. Vegetable VCs contribute significantly to the livelihoods of the sample households, but constraints include limited availability of high-yield seeds, spoilage, lack of funds for upgrading to high-value vegetables, and lack of reliable markets. Results show graduates are satisfied and have applied the lessons from ATVET4Women’s vegetable production trainings; some graduates reported accessing more lucrative markets. Positive changes in several other outcome indicators among graduates are limited, however. Survey data show that only 31 and 28 percent of graduates reported increased production and sales, respectively. No significant difference was reported in changes and levels of vegetable production and profits between graduates and nongraduates. Both graduates and nongraduates had low levels of productivity and small profits. Profits were MWK 238,000 per year on average (USD 380 per year—or just over USD 1 per day). Considering that vegetable production accounts for at least half of household income for most sample households, these incomes are low and inadequate for households that average 5–6 members each. Qualitative findings reveal graduates were constrained by a lack of resources to implement the lessons learned and some lacked market linkages.

Empowerment outcomes

Results on empowerment outcomes reveal that 73 percent of women and 85 percent of men in the sample are empowered and that 73 percent of sample households achieved gender parity. For women, top contributors to disempowerment are lack of work balance, lack of autonomy in decision-making, and lack of respect among household members (Figure 2). For men, top contributors to disempowerment are lack of autonomy in decision-making, lack of work balance, and lack of access to and decisions on financial services. Adequacies in attitudes about intimate partner violence, respect among household members, input in productive decisions, and asset ownership are generally high for both women and men, but are significantly lower for women than for men.

Figure 2. Contributors to disempowerment



Both women and men fared poorly on work balance—less than 55 percent of respondents achieved adequacy in this indicator. Fewer women than men achieved adequacy in work balance. In participating households, women had the lowest adequacy in this indicator (35 percent). The qualitative study reveals that general decision-making and work balance indicators are inextricably linked, especially in producer households, where deciding what agricultural tasks to do and when to do them are the principal choices spouses discuss together. The qualitative work also found that decision-making, and therefore work balance, is moderated by two factors: (1) marital status and (2) entrepreneurship and employment opportunities. As women graduates explained, unmarried women have greater control because they have no husband they must consult. Social norms dictate that good wives defer to their husbands, but real-world examples from participants reveal that norms guiding women's deference to their husbands are more nuanced in practice. One woman from Lilongwe mentioned that she and her husband strategize the best course of action before completing any task. In her words, *"I make my decisions on my own depending on the space I have.... Sometimes my husband will tell me to do something and if I don't have time to do it, I will push it to the next day."*

In terms of additional VC-related indicators piloted, most women and men achieved adequacy in entrepreneurship mindset, although women (49 percent) were less likely to report acquiring information or advice on any income-generating activity in the past 12 months compared to men (70 percent). Regarding access to reliable sanitation at the place of work, access to such facilities was quite low, and women reported having less access to any of the three facilities compared with men among graduates and non-graduates. The last indicator is about perceptions of sexual hostility, for which we asked respondents whether they thought others like them in the community had ever experienced various forms of sexual hostility or violence; 41 percent of all women and 22 percent of all men believed that others like them in the community never experienced sexual hostility. Qualitative data suggest otherwise, especially among women; women explained that women small business owners are often presumed to be promiscuous or unfaithful due to the public-facing nature of their jobs.

The qualitative interviews show that the household approach (i.e., "it takes two") is starting to change some respondents' perspectives with regard to joint work and joint decision-making. One woman from Lilongwe attributed positive changes in her household to ATVET4Women, explaining, *"We have learnt how to grow vegetables and tomatoes but also how to have a good discipline at home for development to follow.... You know that for a husband to have his own budget and a wife another separate budget, you cannot achieve anything because it means that right away the family has no focus. So, this is why I talk about having discipline."* Another female graduate from Blantyre said trainings improve intrahousehold relations: *"Things have changed and they need to change too, that women can also do other things than just taking care of her husband and children."*

Implications for Better ATVET4Women



This mixed-methods study examined the implementation of ATVET4Women in Malawi and participants' and other stakeholders' views on program successes and limitations. Results show that most graduates are satisfied with the training and value the skills gained. A key finding is that, despite longstanding social norms and resistance from women and men, perceptions of gender equality are changing. Both qualitative and quantitative data show that some graduates have implemented their learning, evidenced by adapting their agricultural practices, growing new crops, and, in some cases, linking to more lucrative markets. Data also reveal, however, that only a few graduates had observable changes in production and incomes. Since the program's inception in 2018, graduates and nongraduates have not experienced significantly different changes in production, sales, or profits of vegetable production. Graduates faced two major challenges post-participation: lack of support for market linkages and lack of funds to produce high-quality vegetables or engage in agro-processing.

As ATVET4Women heads to the next phase with greater funding commitments and new partners, it has opportunities to enhance its impact. Improved implementation will be critical in the next phase and requires a clear road map to revise the program structure and available human resources, careful planning, and better coordination and communication among stakeholders.

Graduates note that a transportation allowance and training materials could make participation easier. They would also welcome more hands-on and practical training; graduates suggested new training topics on additional crops, climate change adaptation strategies, basic business skills, recordkeeping, and cash flow analysis.

Future iterations of ATVET4Women should emphasize market linkages. The program can explore strategies to enhance beneficiaries' access to credit. Thanthwe Farm's approach is an excellent example of a strong nucleus farm that aggregates produce and coordinates farmers through contract farming or similar arrangements; this example can be replicated and ultimately enhance graduates' access to markets.

Social norms around women's domestic responsibilities limit women's participation in agribusiness, and should be addressed to increase benefits to women entrepreneurs and their families. The qualitative work finds that the program's household approach shows promising signs of changing mindsets among women and men; the approach should be intensified to address constraints. Additional programming to enhance gender awareness in the community would complement the household approach and strengthen ATVET4Women's impact overall.

Last, the main contributors to disempowerment among women and men are lack of work balance and lack of autonomy in income. Profitable businesses can provide greater autonomy in choices and use of incomes for both men and women. The household approach encourages women and men to share responsibilities and workloads, thus improving work balance. The program can also invest in productivity-enhancing and labor-saving technologies, such as treadle pumps, to enhance work balance, especially for women. By combining gender-transformative approaches with support that helps farmers and entrepreneurs have profitable businesses, the program can get closer to achieving its goal of empowering both women and men and improving household welfare.

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