

Empowerment of Women and Profit: The Role of Coevolution Partnership



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This presentation is about measuring empowerment and the role of women's empowerment in determining profits in the smallholders' business enterprises.

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is an intergovernmental organization helping governments, civil society and private sector to harness ICT and distance learning for improving the access to education. COL's believes that learning is the key to sustainable development and it can play a key role in economic growth, social inclusion and environmental conservation. It develops models which can then be replicated and scaled up by various stakeholders.

One of its models, Lifelong Learning for Farmers (L3F) in 9 countries is reaching over 200, 000 farmers of which more than 80% are women.

COL's L3F model believes that learning should take place in the context of social capital and financial capital. In this model, a poor farmer is not merely a passive learner but an active participant in the community's knowledge management, which leads to better management of agricultural enterprises and strengthening of livelihood security. Learning includes learning from experts as well learning from the community and other stakeholders. ICT based Open and Distance learning helps in reducing the direct costs as well as the opportunity costs for learning. The semi-literate and illiterate masses use audio-based learning through tools such as mobile phone and radio.

L3F project has led to some interesting results. Communities gained \$9 return for every \$ investment. Banks earned 8 times more income and the cost of capacity building was six times lesser than conventional training programmes. In eastern Africa, it enhanced the household food security.

While it has economic impact, what about its impact on social inclusion- particularly the empowerment of women?

Let us first look at the definition of the term empowerment. We used the definition offered by Naila Kabeer that empowerment is "the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them"- in the context of resources, agency and achievements.

Very interesting definition. But how do we measure empowerment? Development agencies are already involved in measuring empowerment through qualitative and quantitative data and techniques. But COL

felt that the empowerment is not a uni-linear, homogenous process and there are different dimensions and different levels. Hence it developed a three dimensional framework for measuring empowerment through an index.

The framework looks at empowerment at three levels: Household, community and enterprise. The mechanism of choice is captured in the Degrees which include: Knowledge, Resources, Desire and Action. The third dimension addresses the aspects such as Psychological/ Emotional, Social/ Cultural, Economic/ Entrepreneurial and Political/ Legal. Through this three dimensional framework, COL believes that the resources, agency and achievements for making choices can be captured well. The index measures the empowerment in a 0 to 1 scale where 0 is completely disempowered and 1 is fully empowered.

The analysis is based on studies in Kenya, Uganda and India where L3F participants were compared with two other control groups within similar socio economic and agro ecological backgrounds. Women in L3F group constituted 100% in India, 80% in Kenya and 50% in Uganda.

Women in the L3F village in Uganda have a higher mean empowerment score than men in the Non-L3F village. Compared to the non-L3F samples, gap between the men and women's empowerment scores are less.

Kenya also shows more or less the similar results. Empowerment scores are higher for the L3F households compared to other two control groups. Female empowerment scores are almost equivalent to Male in L3F. Female empowerment scores in L3F is much higher than male empowerment in other two control groups.

In India, the pattern is similar to that of Kenya.

How does empowerment relate to the success of the enterprises?

Our study in Kenya found out that profit and profit efficiency of women small holder poultry enterprises under L3F programme were higher compared to the other two control groups.

We also found out that an increase of one unit in empowerment score resulted in increase in profit by 2.3 units.

Similarly in India we found that the profitability and the profit efficiency of women dairy farmers under L3F were highest indicating strong determinant role of empowerment in influencing profits

Can empowerment be considered as the fifth factor of production – in addition to land labour, capital and organization?

Partnership played a crucial role in the success of L3F. It offered a win-win framework for secondary stakeholders like banks, industries and government that lead to a self-sustaining development process.

In L3F, partnership was perceived beyond cooperation and collaboration and focused on bringing a transformation to the community which in turn can benefit the partners also. This coevolution framework of partnership is vital to bring a change in the conditions of women.

<http://www.everactive.org/uploads/files/Documents/STF/2015/PPT/Mobilize%20the%20Village.pdf>

In such a partnership the interdependence between the primary stakeholders and the secondary stakeholders assumes importance.

Financial institutions realize that empowered women are important for their business, since they are in a position to run the enterprises effectively with better credit management and profit. Mobile phone companies find that empowered women involved in the business form a good clientele. Governments are able to deliver the development programme at a lower cost with better social returns to investment.

The experiences of COL has encouraged it to develop projects such as “GIRLS INSPIRE” supported by the Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) Australia to end the cycle of child early and forced marriage and reach the unreached women of the Commonwealth. COL is also discussing with Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network regarding launching an MBA programme for women in Africa through Open and Distance Learning.

The 11th WAMM can promote the capacity building of large number of women through ICT and ODL which reduce the direct cost as well as the opportunity costs of the learners.

The 11th WAMM can build coevolution partnership with the finance ministries and financial institutions and encourage re-financing and revolving fund mechanisms for women groups (as done in Bangladesh and India where learning, social capital and the group behaviour are the only collateral) in Africa, Pacific and Caribbean region.

On behalf of the Commonwealth of Learning, I would like to thank The Government of Samoa and Commonwealth Secretariat for providing an opportunity to share COL’s experiences.