

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

P4P Experiences in Systemic Change

Women play a crucial role in agriculture in developing countries, particularly in food production. However, their labour is often invisible, unpaid and undervalued, and they generally have less access to productive resources than male farmers. Involving women more fully in agriculture can drive economic development, increase food security and nutrition and improve household welfare.

P4P and Women Farmers

Purchase for Progress (P4P) has improved the lives and livelihoods of smallholder farmers facing many challenges in profiting from their agricultural labour. For women farmers, these challenges are compounded by deeply-rooted inequalities. Therefore, P4P adopted a gender transformative approach, focusing on women to ensure they benefit fully from the project, while promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women in agriculture.

Through the provision of time- and labour-saving equipment such as tractors and shellers; awareness-raising about the benefits of gender equality; and by increasingly purchasing crops which can be farmed and controlled by women farmers, P4P has supported women to be active participants in transforming rural agriculture.

Highlights

- Women's empowerment is not automatic. Handing women money or ensuring they participate in training does not necessarily translate into improving their lives. While designing programmes, the socio-economic constraints and potential risks for women must be taken into account. Success must be measured through broad examinations of women's access to opportunities.
- Women tend to participate in different areas of agriculture than men. This may mean working as unpaid labourers or farming different crops than those produced by men. This may also mean that women don't participate in farmers' organizations, or they participate in different groups than men do. Therefore, empowering women through pro-smallholder demand-side initiatives requires specific analyses of women's needs and desires. Projects should then be designed to benefit them accordingly.

Household negotiation

- Women's empowerment must start in the household. Strengthening household-level joint decision-making



Achievements

- P4P has seen women gain greater control over their lives and an enhanced voice in their communities and households.
- Since the pilot began in 2008, women's participation in P4P-supported farmers' organizations has quadrupled, going from **100,000 to 400,000**.
- Women account for **48 percent of leadership positions** in P4P-supported farmers' organizations.
- P4P enabled nearly a **quarter of a million women to gain access to productive resources** such as training, extension support and agri-inputs.
- More than **US\$7.1 million** has been paid directly to 29,000 women farmers.
- **Women are increasingly gaining confidence** to voice their opinions, and are empowered to make decisions in collaboration with their male counterparts in both, farmers' organizations and their households.

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practices between men and women can translate into broader gains within communities and farmers' organizations. P4P has developed an approach to strengthen support gender equality in the household.

Including men

- Including men in gender equality efforts can have powerful positive impacts on the uptake of interventions. Community, customary and religious leaders—who generally tend to be male—can be reliable partners to move forward gender equality objectives. Overall, men are found to be receptive to women's empowerment when it is presented through economic benefits to the household. This has potential impacts on women's access to land and property, and household decision-making.

Marketing

- Although women are increasingly marketing their crops to WFP, overall the percentage of crops marketed by women still remains relatively low. However, improved joint decision-making means that women are increasingly able to take part in decision-making processes on when, where, why and how to market these crops.
- Increasing the production and procurement of crops which could specifically be controlled by women is one of the successful approaches piloted and promoted under P4P. This has allowed an increasing number of women to engage in decision-making and marketing of their crops.

Time- and labour-saving equipment

- Equipment such as tractors and shellers enable women to complete farm work more efficiently and with less time and effort. The women can then produce larger quantities of higher quality crops and balance their time between farming and domestic duties more effectively. Seemingly simple technologies such as bicycles can make a significant difference in women's lives by allowing them to transport crops to markets more quickly and easily move between their homes and fields. This gives them the time needed to care for their children and to rest.

Further reading

- Report: [Women's Empowerment Pathways: Roadblocks and Successes](#)
- Strategy: [P4P Gender Strategy](#)
- Article: [Women in Guatemala Take Charge of Their Farms](#)



Mazouma Sanou is a farmer from Burkina Faso, appointed by WFP and Oxfam as a field monitor to coach the women's groups affiliated with her union. She says that since the women's involvement in P4P, more women are able to make decisions together with their husbands. This has made income management easier, allowing families to plan for the possibility of unexpected illness and to set aside money for their children's school fees. While Mazouma says that gender dynamics are certainly changing for the better in her community, she acknowledges that there are still challenges ahead.

"Women have to help educate their husbands. Dialogue can certainly change attitudes, but you can't command people to do things," she says.

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Buying Women's Crops

Gender norms and practices, such as the divisions of labour in crop production, tend to be deeply rooted. This means that in some societies men are considered to be responsible for certain crops while others are seen to be in the domain of women.

Many of the commodities purchased by WFP under P4P are traditionally considered to be "men's crops", although women generally contribute a great deal of labour in production and processing. This proved challenging when working to help women participate in sales to WFP, as women's engagement in marketing these crops could be seen as a conflict of interest within households. One of the successful approaches piloted and promoted under P4P was for WFP to increase procurement of crops which could be specifically controlled by women farmers.

- Purchasing crops traditionally farmed by women can enhance their participation in market initiatives without causing conflicting economic interests within households and communities.
- Each country and context can have very different gendered distribution of crops.
- New income streams for women can be created or strengthened by focusing on the commercial production of women's crops. This can lead to benefits for whole families and enhance resilience to shocks.
- Women's crops may be farmed in small quantities, as they are generally grown for household consumption rather than sale. Significant efforts may be required to increase their production in order to make marketing of these crops viable.
- Given challenges women face in access to land, increasing production of "women's crops" may be difficult.
- Encouraging and supporting women to produce these crops rich in nutrients, can significantly improve household nutrition levels.



Achievements

- WFP purchases of crops traditionally farmed and controlled by women has enhanced women's participation in farmers' organizations, strengthened women's groups and increased women's contribution to sales.
- Some communities and families have given women titles to land to support their production of "women's crops".
- In West Africa, more farmers' organizations now produce higher quantities of a nutritious and resilient local bean called *niébé*. Families are also consuming the bean more.
- In Burkina Faso, **96 percent** of participants in cowpea sales to WFP are women.
- **30 to 50 percent** of pulses required for HGSF in Zambia being procured from P4P-supported women farmers' organizations.

Case study: Buying *niébé* in West Africa



In West Africa, many women produce a variety of cowpea called *niébé*, which has provided an entry point for women to benefit from P4P. However, *niébé* production faces a variety of challenges. It is generally produced only in small quantities, due to high input costs and challenges with storage. To address these challenges, P4P has equipped farmers with PICS triple bags specifically designed to extend the shelf life of *niébé*. The bags proved so effective that women's organizations began purchasing them independently. In addition, P4P has worked with supply-side partners and farmers to identify high-producing varieties of *niébé* beans to reduce input costs.

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