

# Research Sheds Light on Behavior Patterns

By Hannah Schiff

## How do gender roles affect participation in value chains?

Development practitioners generally agree that gender influences household and value chain economics (see article on page 8). Studies describe how the prescribed roles of men and women influence their economic behavior in different contexts and communities. Less well understood is why gender affects individuals' responses to market signals—that is, what are the underlying incentives driving behavior and how are they affected by gender?

Moreover, how can value chain interventions change these behaviors in the long run—beyond the life of a project—to increase the competitiveness of the chain as a whole and benefit both sexes? Through our USAID-funded FIELD and AMAP programs, ACDI/VOCA has undertaken new research that seeks to answer these crucial questions.

### Incentives Matter

The behavior of individuals—whether economic or otherwise—depends on their incentives. The prospect of increased returns, for example, may motivate producers to invest in upgrading their production processes. Gender often plays an important role in determining how value chain actors respond to incentives in the value chain.

For example, in households where women do not control the income from production of a particular item or crop, they may not be responsive to market signals that would otherwise stimulate quality upgrades. Understanding how gender affects

incentives is key to effective interventions in value chains, since the value chain approach seeks to align the incentives of individual actors with a plan for increasing the competitiveness of the value chain as a whole.

A typical intervention to increase women's incomes might change the structure of a transaction so that women receive payment for a product instead of men. In this scenario, the women's income immediately increases, providing a household benefit since studies have shown that women more often use a greater share of their income to pay for items such as children's education, food or clothes.

### But Incentives May Not Stay Fixed

But what happens in the household over the course of the next several months or year? Perhaps men begin to reduce the amount of money they contribute to the household income pool, since they can maintain the same standard of living with their wives' increased income. This could result in more responsibility (and more work) for women.

Consider another intervention in which women get paid in a household staple like sugar or salt rather than in currency, so that the money cannot be immediately appropriated by their husbands. In the short term, this may provide an incentive for these women to invest in upgrading, since they will be able to get the returns in the form of a useful staple. But it is likely that within a short span of time, a spot market for sugar or salt will pop up,

and the problem will return as the salt or sugar is bartered or sold for currency.

### Ultimately, Behavior Patterns Are Key

These approaches, while seeming to address the gender issue at hand, do little or nothing to change the behavior patterns behind the actions of men and women in the value chain. ACDI/VOCA's work in this area seeks to challenge the underlying behavior, drawing from the lessons of other disciplines that have successfully used behavior change methodologies, such as adult education and public health.

We are developing and testing a framework for determining what patterns of behavior and gender norms have positive effects on both household income and overall value chain competitiveness. Specifically, the framework will focus on gender differences in financial behaviors, business practices, and value chain relationships and will help development practitioners design strategies to promote incremental adoption of the identified behavior patterns. With this work, ACDI/VOCA will remain at the forefront of value chain development thinking and deepen the application of the value chain approach to economic development.

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