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# LEARNING FOR GENDER INTEGRATION AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: THE FEED THE FUTURE PROFIT+ PROJECT, ZAMBIA

## **Learning for Gender Integration and Women's Empowerment: The Feed the Future PROFIT+ Project, Zambia**

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### **Lesson**

The Production, Finance, and Improved Technology Plus (PROFIT+) project approach to strengthening the agricultural market system in Eastern Province, Zambia, focuses on expanding local input and output market options for men and women farmers, while also improving women's empowerment. The project first established a network of demonstration host farmers (DHF) and parallel savings and internal lending communities (SILC). The best-performing DHFs have been subsequently trained to become community agrodealers (CAD), small enterprises that serve as bridges between private sector service providers and rural community members. The PROFIT+ project deliberately reached out to women, for example, through women's agricultural associations, and a reasonably high percentage of women became DHFs and CADs.

This inclusion of women in a market-based approach has led to greater leadership roles for women, increased knowledge of agricultural practices among these women and other women farmers they service, increased use of agricultural inputs by women farmers, and increased asset ownership on the part of the women involved in these activities. This locally based approach opens up economic opportunities for women who are often constrained in their mobility and access to credit. Leadership develops through their roles as entrepreneurs in the community and creates opportunities for more women in the community as these DHFs and CADs build a network among other women farmers. A qualitative survey conducted in April 2016 by the INGENAES project documents how women CADs have become leaders in their communities and are reaching an extended network of women with farming skills.

### **Activity**

The PROFIT+ project, implemented by ACDI/VOCA since 2012 in Eastern Province, Zambia, is the primary Feed the Future value chain project in the Zambia Zone of Influence. PROFIT+ aims to increase productivity and efficiency along seven value chains and increase trade and private sector investment, expanding benefits to include women and vulnerable yet viable groups. The strategies applied to achieve the benefits of women's leadership, entrepreneurship, and expanded roles in agricultural extension include implementation of a demonstration host farmer model, where lead farmers are selected to train other farmers and promote awareness about improved technologies, practices, and products. One DHF works with five lead farmers, each of whom reaches out to 20 smallholder farmers; in this way, one DHF will ultimately reach over 105 smallholder farmers. Best performers and motivated DHFs have been assisted to become CADs.

The CAD model facilitates local access to and availability of improved seed varieties and other inputs and services (such as spraying, mechanization, etc.) for community members by building partnerships between CADs and input companies as well as commodity buyers. CADs serve as input suppliers to local farmers, but they continue to demonstrate improved technologies on demonstration plots, such as conservation farming methods that reduce labor input and maintain soil fertility, promotion of soil testing, methods of proper spraying, fertilizer application, etc. Women CADs thus effectively facilitate farmer-to-farmer extension through regular visits around the demonstration plots and farmer field days, with information aligned to the crop and marketing calendar and promotion of locally available technologies, inputs, and services. CADs also connect to SILC members, where the savings model enables farmers to generate funds for improved inputs. Recently in certain

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<sup>1</sup> The PROFIT+ project is implemented by ACDI/VOCA and other consortium members, including Catholic Relief Services. Alex Pavlovic is chief of party of the PROFIT+ project, and Moses Musikanga is the M&E officer. The INGENAES Project (Integrating Gender and Nutrition in Agriculture Extension Services) is implemented by a consortium led by the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Kristy Cook and Vincent Akamandisa work for Cultural Practice LLC, an INGENAES consortium member.

areas, PROFIT+ has assisted some of the most successful CADs to form producer companies (PC), private sector trade enterprises that generate profits at the cooperative or commercial-farmer level, making them even more attractive to potential private sector partners.

## **Data**

A recent qualitative survey of women CADs explored their roles in agricultural extension: particularly, how women's leadership roles as community agriculture input suppliers (a role previously performed mostly by men) extended their agricultural knowledge and their outreach to a greater number of women farmers.

The project developed a gender strategy at the beginning and reached out to women's groups to identify interested women farmers. Women were targeted in all trainings and represented over 50 percent of all participants in past project years. Starting from 72 DHFs in 2012/13, of whom 34 were women, the project now works with over 1,000 DHFs, of whom 323 are women. These women reach a network of up to 30,000 farmers throughout five districts in Eastern Province. In 2015/16, 115 women advanced from demonstration farmer to functional community agro-input dealers, selling inputs and providing advice to other men and women farmers. Although there are fewer women than men CADs, women have performed better than men in general: 35 percent of women DHFs became CADs, while only 26 percent of men DHFs became CADs. CADs work with SILC groups, of which 76 percent of the 17,000 members are women and 79 percent of leadership roles are occupied by women. Women represent 24 percent of all members in the newly formed PCs, which are community businesses that aggregate inputs and outputs and function as wholesalers, retaining profits in the communities.

In a recent survey, women CADs reported the ability to pay school and medical fees, improve their houses, and purchase assets such as cattle, goats, and bicycles. In the survey, women articulate how owning a shop and having access to improved agricultural knowledge has increased their status in the community providing them with more business opportunities. In the Feed the Future baseline Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI), leadership was cited as a domain in which women were most disadvantaged with 26 percent not yet empowered in terms of group membership. The PROFIT+ project is having an impact on women's involvement in organizations, especially as CADs and PCs, but also in their roles as processors, members in input companies, and buyers. Access to savings has increased through the SILC groups as well. More women are involved in decision making, have access to finance, apply improved agricultural technologies, and are leaders in their communities as a result of the progressive PROFIT+ gender strategy, which deliberately identifies women in all activities. As part of this strategy, the PROFIT+ community-based market model allows women to become leaders and viable entrepreneurs within their own communities, linking community members to external input and output businesses.

## **Stories**

### *Grace Phiri*

As a lead farmer with the PROFIT+ program, a Feed the Future program funded by USAID/Zambia and implemented through ACDI/VOCA, Grace was trained by extension agents in advanced techniques: irrigation, greenhouse seedlings, tenting and drip lines, installing water tanks, managing tomatoes (especially in pest and disease management and fertilizer use), and recordkeeping. She is now growing tomato seedlings from seed for individual customers; white onion; rice; chili pepper; and 10 acres of orange maize, a vitamin A enriched hybrid. Grace has successfully applied her training, but she also trains women in these techniques. Many other women are benefitting from this type of extension as a result of the project.

*Interview: Katy Heinz, Nikki Grey Rutamu, and Vincent Akamandisa, INGENAES Project, March 2015.*

### *Nelia Banda*

Nelia Banda, household head, is the owner of the Small Small Agro Store in Sinda county, Eastern Province, Zambia. Nelia is one of the women farmers who PROFIT+ assisted to become a CAD. Within the Small Small Supply Store are four shelves with several types of seeds, including okra, tomato, and rape (kale), among others, as well as herbicides, pesticides, and other basic farming inputs. She says about 150 people come to her shop

every day during planting season, some from as far as Mozambique. Nelia also serves as an unofficial extension worker, fielding questions about crop health and planting and harvesting techniques – even visiting the farms of community members facing challenges in their fields. From 2012 to present, she attended PROFIT+ trainings on business management and new technologies, including reaping and fertilization, use of certified seeds, and orange maize. Nelia shared that PROFIT+ gender training has been an important part of agricultural livelihood improvements in her rural community. “If people learn about gender, they can learn to work together, they can both understand the work they can do,” Nelia said, explaining some of the changing roles of women and men in her community now that more women are leaders in the community.

*Interview: Katy Heinz, Nikki Grey Rutamu, and Vincent Akamandisa, INGENAES Project, March 2015.*