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**From the Istanbul Programme of Action to the world we want in 2015 and beyond:  
Implementing the UNIDO Operational Strategy**

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### Background Paper

*Converting commodities into products:  
The role of women in Least Developed Countries (LDCs)*



## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, it is widely acknowledged that women and men experience the same circumstances in different ways. Women's and men's roles in society and their unequal access to resources determine to a great extent their different capabilities of acting and doing to live better lives and to contribute to common advancement. The gender dimension of development interventions is, therefore, central to understand the challenges that women and men face in the process and to promote more efficient and inclusive development.

Women, particularly rural women, are over represented among the poor. The MDG Development Report (UN, 2010) affirms that women are more likely to work in agriculture than in other sectors in most regions, but they have only 40 percent of agriculture-related jobs. They are also more likely than men to work in vulnerable employment—either as own account workers or as contributing family workers—characterized by low earnings and productivity and lack of security and benefits. Women bear the heaviest burden of household chores and poverty and residence in rural areas are still major obstacles to girls' education. According to the report, women are under-represented in industry in all regions (only 30 percent in 2008), and are many times less likely than men to own businesses with employees. In spite of the fact that women are poorer than men and have fewer opportunities to improve their own situation, the percentage of aid aimed to promote gender equality increased only from 3 to 4 percent between 2002 and 2008, and the aid devoted to projects including gender equality as a secondary objective increased from 24 to 28 percent. The trend of feminization of agriculture, however, is far from falling and the consequences of inequalities—as manifested in unequal access to resources and decision-making—continue harming human development, producing inefficiencies and being a root cause of poverty (UN, 2011b and KIT AgriFocus and IIRR, 2012).

Less Developed Countries (LDCs) are the most off track in the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and they are at the bottom of the Human Development Index rankings (UN, 2011a). Additionally, the high indexes of Gender Inequality (GII)<sup>1</sup> prevalent among LDCs reflect that they are not only characterized by constraints, such as low per capita income, low levels of human development and social and economic vulnerability, but that all of these constraints disproportionately affect more women than men (Table 1).

*Table 1: Gender Inequality Index (GII) in LDCs*

Value showing less inequality globally -----	0.065
Value showing most inequality globally ----	0.681
Global Median ---	0.391

<sup>1</sup> The Gender Inequality Index (GII) is a composite measure reflecting inequality in achievements between women and men in three dimensions: reproductive health, empowerment and the labour market. It varies between zero (when women and men fare equally) and one (when men or women fare poorly compared to the other in all dimensions). The health dimension is measured by maternal mortality ratio and the adolescent fertility rate. The empowerment dimension is measured by the share of parliamentary seats held by each sex and by secondary and higher education attainment levels. The labour dimension is measured by women's participation in the work force.

<b>Africa</b>							
Angola	n/d	Benin	0.618	Burkina Faso	0.609	Burundi	0.476
Cape Verde	n/d	C. African Republic	0.654	Chad	n/d	Comoros	n/d
Congo	0.681	Djibouti	n/d	Equatorial Guinea	n/d	Eritrea	n/d
Ethiopia	n/d	Guinea Bissau	n/d	Gambia	0.594	Guinea	n/d
Lesotho	0.534	Liberia	0.658	Madagascar	n/d	Malawi	0.573
Mali	0.649	Mauritania	0.643	Mozambique	0.582	Niger	0.707
Rwanda	0.414	Sao Tome and Principe	n/d	Senegal	0.540	Sierra Leone	0.643
Somalia	n/d	Sudan	0.604	Tanzania	0.556	Togo	0.566
Uganda	0.517	Zambia	0.623				

<b>Asia</b>							
Afghanistan	0.712	Bangladesh	0.518	Bhutan	0.464	Cambodia	0.473
Lao PDR	0.483	Maldives	0.357	Myanmar	0.437	Nepal	0.485
Timor-Leste	n/d	Yemen	0.747				

<b>Australia and the Pacific</b>							
Kiribati	n/d	Samoa	n/d	Solomon Islands	n/d	Tuvalu	n/d
Vanuatu	n/d						

<b>Caribbean</b>							
Haiti	0.592						

Source: Based on the Human Development Report 2013 (UNDP, 2013)

During the implementation of the Brussels Programme of Action<sup>2</sup> LDCs made progress in economic and social development, including the empowerment of women. The UN mid-term review of the Brussels Programme focusing on gender reports significant progress towards gender parity and equality in LDCs, particularly in the social and political sphere. At the same time, it concludes that there are large variations between countries and that the tasks facing LDCs in attaining gender equality is still considerable (UN-OHRLLS, 2006). LDCs renewed their commitment to gender equality in the subsequent Istanbul Programme of Action for the decade 2011-2020 (IPoA). The IPoA's overarching goal is to overcome the structural challenges faced by the least developed countries in order to eradicate poverty, achieve internationally agreed development goals and enable graduation from the least developed country category. In this line, the IPoA reflects the inextricable relation between achieving development goals and the need to enhance gender equity and the empowerment of women through its principles and objectives and, particularly, throughout its priority areas of action. For example, the 'Productive capacity' and 'Agriculture, food and nutritional security and rural development' areas of action involve the promotion of women entrepreneurship to make better use of untapped economic potential, and to promote the empowerment of rural women as well as to ensure their equal access to productive resources, land, financing, technologies, training and markets.

<sup>2</sup> The Brussels Programme of Action adopted in 2001, was based on seven commitments aimed at improving the human conditions of people in least developed countries, through providing a framework for a strong global partnership. Its overarching goal was to make substantial progress towards halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and suffering from hunger by 2015 and promote sustainable development in least developed countries (UN, 2011a).

In the context of the Istanbul Summit and the IPoA, UN-OHRLLS engaged and consulted with other agencies to ensure that the deliverables and commitments in favour of LDCs, including those taken by UNIDO and other agencies, lead to concrete actions. Subsequently, a high level ministerial conference held in November 2011 adopted the UNIDO Operational Strategy 2011-2020, which has the objective of enabling LDCs to promote sustainable sources of income and employment through productive capacities leading to inclusive growth, development and graduation from their current status (UNIDO, 2012). In line with the IPoA and UNIDO's own acknowledgment that gender equality and the empowerment of women have a significant positive impact on sustained economic growth and sustainable industrial development<sup>3</sup>, the UNIDO operational strategy for LDCs sets gender focusing and social inclusion as cross-cutting issues for all three objectives:

1. Converting commodities into products;
2. Targeting communities; and
3. Thinking globally and acting regionally for value chain development.

The UNIDO strategy centres specifically on the agribusiness sector because of the criticality of this sector in many LDCs and the potential of the entire value chain to ensure not only the efficiency and competitiveness of the agribusiness system, but also inclusive growth. The purpose of this paper, then, is to contribute to the mainstreaming of the gender focus and women's empowerment in the implementation of UNIDO operational strategy to be discussed at the upcoming LDC Ministerial conference in November 2012. The document presents a brief description of women's role in the overall agri value chain approach in LDCs and the identification of key challenges and opportunities for women economic empowerment. It also presents examples of good practices for local agribusiness development through which women improve their economic and social status, and draws lessons from these and other experiences. Finally, it identifies key policy issues for empowering women in value chains, with emphasis on the agricultural sector.

## **2. The role of Women in agri value chains in Least Development Countries**

An agricultural value chain can be interpreted as a system of production, processing and marketing that brings together individual and collective actors who participate in coordinated activities that add value to a particular good or service, from its production until it reaches the consumer (Garcia-Winder et al. 2009 and KIT AgriFocus and IIRR, 2012). Women's participation in agri value chains is overwhelmingly concentrated as work force at the producer and processing levels, often under adverse conditions.

**Production.** As producers, women have weak property and contractual rights to land, water, forests and other natural resources (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2009, and FAO, 2013). Paradoxically, and in spite of control and management of property being a crucial requirement to productivity, there is a shortage of gender disaggregated data (quantitative/qualitative) in most regions, because many countries do not collect separate data on women's and men's ownership or access to land, water or credit.

Secure land tenure is central to accessing water, soil fertilizers and improved seeds as well as accessing credit, loans and extension services (Lee-Smith and Trujillo, 2006 and Daley and

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<sup>3</sup> Since 2009, UNIDO has a Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, which acknowledges that "Gender equality and the empowerment of women has a significant positive impact on sustained economic growth and sustainable industrial development, which are drivers of poverty reduction and social integration."

Park, 2011). Gender gaps in rights to land have negative consequences for household food security and nutrition, contribute to differences in productivity between male and female farmers, and it is a major cause for poverty among female producers. In LDCs only seven out of 48 countries have equal inheritance rights and only ten have equal property rights for women and men (UN-OHRRLS, 2006). Many countries still hold legal restrictions on women's equal rights to own, control and inherit property, but even when legal frameworks ensuring women's rights are in place, social constraints and bureaucratic resistance prevent them from being applied. Lee-Smith and Trujillo (2006) mention, for example, that in East Africa—where it may be socially unacceptable for women to inherit property—they may be legally allowed to buy it but unable to do so without offending customs.

Access to water is also a critical factor of production where existing imbalances between men and women's ownership rights, division of labour and incomes result in female producers facing major limitations. In LDCs, women are the main responsible to carry water for household use, sometimes travelling long distances in insecure locations. It is now recognised that the exclusion of women from the planning of water supply and sanitation schemes is a major cause of their high rate of failure (FAO,n.d.). In irrigation schemes women are largely excluded because projects fail to recognize the predominance of women in agriculture and to consider differences in women's and men's roles and preferences in production processes. Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2009) outline that gender analysis is still largely absent in water projects mainly because they are highly technical and implemented by engineers who lack the training to integrate gender concerns. This would explain, for example, why in Sub-Saharan Africa women are often excluded from irrigation projects or stripped of their usufruct rights to land during the implementation of irrigations schemes. In South Asia, “even though joint agricultural holdings are more common than in Africa, there are still significant gender differences in control over water” (ibid.:5).

Extension services are decisive to furthering knowledge, skills, information and technology adoption along value chains. Many studies show that extension systems do not yet pay adequate attention to gender and that extension services are lower for women as compared to men (Ragasa, et al., 2012 and Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2009). For example, a study carried out in Ethiopia (Ragasa, et al., 2012) concludes that female farmers are less likely to get extension services and less likely to access quality service than their male counterparts. Among female heads, those with more male members in their household and more assets in the form of land and livestock are more likely to be visited or to initiate visits to extension service providers. More importantly, the study concludes that, holding other factors constant, plots of male and female farmers are as equally productive. It is not gender *per se* that explains productivity, but the differentiated access to quality extension, radio connectivity and inputs as well as the quality of plots and agro ecological conditions.

When women are involved along the productive process, better results are reported, as the two following examples provided show. In Rwanda, the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT) engaged 90 female farmers to evaluate genetic material over four growing seasons. The bean varieties selected by the female farmers had production increases of up to 38 percent over breeder-selected and outperformed local mixtures 64 to 89 percent of the time. The authors outline that involving women in participatory plant breeding can help not only to ensure that women's preference are not overlooked but can also lead to better-performing varieties. Likewise, involving women in evaluating agricultural technologies in Bangladesh, resulted in poor members of an NGO adopting a polyculture fish technology (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2009).

Various international and regional instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW, 1979), the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (BDPA, 1995) and some regional charters provide the framework for LDCs to take measures for the promotion and protection of women's property rights. Some of these measures include the acknowledgment of women's economic contribution in agriculture and other sectors in national constitutions and the passing of laws, particularly on land reforms, ensuring land titling and women's rights to access to credit. In Africa, for example, the 5-year Land Policy Initiative Strategic Plan and Roadmap (2012-2016), Framework and Guidelines on Land policy in Africa (2006-2009), the AU's 2003 *Maputo protocol, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa* (2003) and the 2004 *Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa* call for action to address gender inequalities, including women's unequal access to land: "This is all the more important as women remain the primary users of agricultural land in most African communities" (AUC-ECA-AfDB Consortium, 2010). Implementation, however, remains weak. Lee-Smith and Trujillo (2006) report on studies that found, for example, 30 percent lower productivity on women's plots than on men's ones within households in Burkina Faso, because labour and fertilizer tend to be more intensively applied on men's plots. A similar case is cited for Ethiopia, where lower land productivity found in female-headed households responds to insufficient male labour and oxen and low substitutability among factors of production.

***The labour market.*** FAO, IFAD and ILO (2010) and Kabber (2012) report that women workers are generally segregated in certain nodes of the chain that require relatively unskilled labour and are characterized by lower wages and limited opportunities to acquire new technical and entrepreneurial skills (e.g. processing and packaging). Gender stereotypes, such as men being the main providers and woman lacking technical abilities, are often used to justify the casual or temporary nature of contracts and limited training opportunities for women. Some authors suggest that modern supply chains, particularly those that hire women in labour-intensive industries, may only exploit women's vulnerable positions in harsh and hazardous conditions in the lower levels of the supply chain. The reasons for women's willingness to work for very low wages in bad work conditions may be due to their lack of better opportunities, pressing family needs, low self confidence and inability to bargain for fairer wages (Kaaber, 2012 and UNSRID, 2005). By contrast, Maertens and Swinnen (2008), report that women in African countries tend to benefit more from employment generated by modern supply chains rather than from contract farming, because in the latter case they participate as unwaged family labour, whereas in the former one they are more likely to control the proceeds of their labour. Factors which may explain why some jobs generated by global value chains are empowering, include better wages and often better benefits for workers as a result of better productivity than local and family owned enterprises. Additionally, public control through journalist, human right activists and NGOs seem to have a positive influence on companies providing better working conditions. The same authors point to compliance with stringent ethical standards and certification schemes such as the Ethical Trading Initiative in Senegal, as a factor which reduces gender discrimination in high-standards supply chains and improve working conditions and wages.

***Markets.*** Both men and women face market risks, such as high transaction costs and asymmetric information. They are particularly vulnerable when poverty does not allow them to save for their own protection and to react against possible losses. Kabber (2012), outlines that power inequalities are reflected in market transactions in a way that those with power are better able to frame 'the rules of the game' to protect their own privilege or to ignore the rules

they themselves have framed. Women often face many gender-specific barriers to accessing markets not only because of weak skills, such as less literacy levels, but also because of cultural norms. These may include inappropriate modes of transportation for women, such as trucks or motorcycles, physical harassment, overloaded reproductive tasks, marital conflict and others (Quisumbing and Pandolfelli, 2009 and FAO, IFAD, ILO, 2010). Higher value domestic and export markets are even more difficult to access because women are the ones less likely to have access to transportation, cold stores, processing facilities, communications and information.

According to FAO, IFAD and ILO (2010), both men and women often face difficulties in meeting the rigorous quality standards and deadlines of contractors, particularly for perishable products. Women are further constrained by competing demands on their time. For example, the authors cite the case of West African women harvesting perishable vegetables only late in the morning, after their domestic and child care work, with negative impacts on the vegetables' quality.

Factors that potentially contribute to improving women's links to the markets and services are various forms of technology (for example, mobile phones), better road and transport networks and an appropriate legal environment guaranteeing women's right to work outside the home without needing permission from their husbands (Kaabere, 2012).

***Entrepreneurship.*** For women and men setting up a business can be a complex, time consuming, and expensive process. However, it is rural women who are often illiterate, or lack basic education to allow them to navigate business registration bureaucracies. They are not as mobile as men, because transport is too costly and distances are far, or because social norms and insecurity limit women's mobility outside the home. Additionally, women, more than men, are considered soft targets for bribes (WOCAN, n.d.). Consequently, reducing travel time and other costs associated with setting up a business can have a positive impact on female entrepreneurs.

Unequal intra-house power relations also affect women's success as entrepreneurs. Taking examples from West Africa and rural Tanzania Kabeer (2012), found that women's obligations to work on their husbands' fields and at home mean that they have less time from their own field and enterprises. She also found that more successful women entrepreneurs "were more likely to treat enterprise as their primary activity and to have chosen it for its earning potential while the later were more likely to treat it as sideline activity, an attempt at diversification, or because it had low capital requirements" (idem:51). An additional risk for women with low status at home is that some men tend to take over entrepreneurial activities established by women once they have proved to generate profits (FAO, IFAD, ILO, 2010).

While it is well documented that rural enterprises have the potential to lift people out of poverty, particularly among unemployed and underemployed women and youth, the establishment of micro and small enterprises entails the identification of opportunities, skill development, technology generation, attainment of quality standards, market analysis and many other requirements, which have directly to do with people's needs, perceptions, expectations and enabling conditions. From a gender perspective, it is important to analyse the legal frameworks, education levels, time constraints, cultural norms and access to resources that may exclude women or men from entrepreneurial opportunities and device specific strategies to tackle them (Avilés and Gutierrez-Amo, 2013).

***Chain supporters.*** Financial institutions are among the main supporters of value chain actors. It is widely documented that women in developing countries, particularly women headed households and single women, have little access to credit and loans, often because of lack of collateral requirements, high transaction costs, limited education and mobility and the assumption that they will be unable to meet financial obligations in the absence of a male partner (Fletschner and Kenney, 2011 and Henriksen et al., 2010). Because women face several barriers specific to their location, culture and personal situation, committed lenders have to explore innovative ways to reach them. One of the better examples is the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh that provides credit overcoming the need for collateral through group lending. Grameen Bank covers more than 97 percent of the total villages in Bangladesh and, as of October 2011, 97 percent of its 8.349 millions of borrowers are women (Grameen Bank, 2011). Opportunities for some women are not only short in accessing credit, but even to the possibility to save. Quisumbing and Pandolfelli (2009) report a case from Malawi, where the Opportunity International's Bank (OIBM), extended its services from traditional credit-led microfinance to savings based on two strategies: a biometric smart card that allows the use of fingerprints for identification and the placement of community branches. The authors report the case of a widow whose savings could not be retrieved by the dead husband's relatives because the mismatch with the biometric reader did not allowed it and the woman could keep her only asset.

***Women empowerment and value chain context.*** The UN (2001) defined women's empowerment in terms of five components: Women's sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. This definition points to several dimensions of empowerment and to the need of a wider perspective when analyzing and promoting women's empowerment in value chains. For example, transport networks and infrastructure are seldom considered priorities in isolated communities. However, as Kaaber's study (2012) found out, the absence of infrastructure, particularly road and transport networks, exacerbates the spatial fragmentation of markets, reflecting local power structures rather than market forces. Furthermore, the study outlines that infrastructure deficits are likely to have a far more severe impact on female than male earning opportunities because of the greater constraints on women's physical mobility.

Access to credit and loans has been more clearly linked to women's empowerment, but it is not an automatic relation. Evidence from Bangladesh shows mixed results on the impact of credit access contributing to changing social norms and gender equality. Some studies show that women's bargaining position within households is strengthened by access to credit and the control over income and assets it brings. Other researchers, however, argue that the loans and the pressure to repay lead to stress, and to higher levels of domestic violence. Another study in Tanzania shows that while men seemed willing to acquiesce in women's new cash earning opportunities, they were much less willing to accept a restructuring of household relations. Complaints over women arose from husbands who resent their wives' efforts to realize extra cash from trade and beer-brewing and even beating was cited as an increasing problem for women (UNSRID, 2005).

Legislation design and enforcement lay at the core of women's empowerment. For example, reforms to introduce women's rights to property and protection of female workers have a multiplying effect on women's income-generation opportunities. Additionally, laws aimed at protecting women against domestic violence, eliminating child marriages and fighting against

discrimination in the work place, for example, do not only address women's human rights but have positive outcomes on a range of other areas, including economic growth. Legal reforms alone, however, do not change the subordinated status of women, which is rooted on traditional values and beliefs. Supportive measures such as communication processes on people's legal rights and legal services are necessary. As the Asian Development Bank (2009: 32) outlines: "Projects with mainstream gender considerations provide more effective strategies for women's and community empowerment and are, therefore, more conducive to incorporating legal empowerment elements. Conversely, incorporating legal empowerment activities as an element of broader gender strategies enhances women's empowerment."

Here again it is important to underline the role of local context in empowerment processes. A recent guide on the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI)<sup>4</sup> (Alkire et al., 2013) reports on three country case studies that show that gender and empowerment are both culture and context-specific. For example in Bangladesh, factors that contribute most to women's disempowerment are weak leadership and lack of control over resources while lack of leadership and influence in the community contribute much more to men's disempowerment as does time poverty. In Uganda, the factors that contribute most to women's disempowerment are time burden and lack of control over resources. For men, the lack of decision making around agricultural production contributes much more to disempowerment measured in terms of production, resources, income, leadership and time. In summary, while some processes contribute to women's empowerment, its universal application does not guarantee positive outcomes in all socio-cultural settings, and additional reinforcing mechanism may be necessary to overcome women's subordinated position.

### **3. Key challenges and opportunities for women economic empowerment in the agri value chain in LDCs**

Challenges and opportunities are built upon power relations defined globally and locally. Markets, as an expression of power fragmentation at both levels, can contribute either to improving or to worsening women's situation according to how they function locally. That means that gender analysis and the consideration of women's roles must be context specific to provide a better understanding of how constraints and opportunities play out in different socio-economic scenarios. LDCs share some general key challenges and opportunities for women's economic empowerment, because of the characteristics of their agricultural sectors and the disadvantaged position of women in relation to men across LDCs.

#### ***Challenges.***

- Gender-based segregation in the labour market. Segregation of women from skilled and well-paying jobs perpetuate their subordinated position.
- Growth without social equity. Not all forms of economic activity result on women's empowerment and the proliferation of value chains do not automatically result on better conditions for women. While gender equality promotes economic growth, economic growth not necessarily promotes gender equality.
- Isolated efforts for gender equity and women's empowerment into value chain development and agri business. Weak convergence of interventions of individual and collective chain actors and chain supporters—legislators, development agents,

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<sup>4</sup> Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) is a new survey-based index designed to measure the empowerment, agency and inclusion of women in the agricultural sector.

financial services providers and technological innovators—hinders women’s ability to overcome structural constraints.

- Weak access of women to agricultural inputs and markets, associated to their illiteracy and innumeracy, lack of property rights, deficient access to credit and discriminatory cultural norms.
- Weak transport infrastructure and social services that result in increased demands for women’s work and time.
- Perception of inclusive business strategies as a risk factor. Women’s empowerment may not be considered as part of the business practice, because it may take longer to become profitable and because of lack of tools and information to implement action. This perception may be exacerbated when other factors, such as high transaction costs, legal insecurity or weak physical infrastructure, are already in place.
- Lack of information and reliable qualitative and quantitative data on gender-sensitive issues. For example, on access to property, training and extension services, participation in the labour market and public investments on women’s empowerment.
- Women’s lack of information on market demand and preferences, market prices and paths to join high-value chains.
- Insufficient field research and documentation on inclusive businesses in LDCs.
- Resistance to change based on cultural or religious norms, which perpetuate women’s subordination. Resistance to women’s empowerment is multifaceted. It is expressed, for example, in the deficient enforcement of legislation, gender-blindness in development projects and conservative thinking on women’s role in business. It is critical to keep gender issues at the forefront not only in production and labour market regulations but also in the development of technological capabilities, national systems of innovation, infrastructure and other factors that comprise the value chain context.

### ***Opportunities.***

- Progress of some LDCs in fulfilling their commitment to the MDGs, CEDAW and other international mechanisms for women’s empowerment.
- Governmental, civil society and international support to enabling women’s participation in the formal economy and their integration into value chains in many LDCs.
- Inclusive, ethical and social responsible business gaining ground in LDCs.
- Increasing flow of information; for example, via mobiles, cooperatives and extension services.
- Increasing evidence on good practices that result on women benefiting from value chains and business development across LDCs.
- Increasing public-private partnerships, where committed NGOs help to introduce gender-sensitive practices.
- Increasing local renewable energy projects and labour-saving technologies with the potential to alleviate women’s burdens on the reproductive and productive spheres.

- Expansion of innovative credit schemes for women and for the poor.
- Strengthened South-South relations for appropriate technology development and common positioning on innovative inclusive business solutions.

#### **4. Good practices in empowering women in agribusiness development**

This section presents examples on how good practices at local level, such as the convergence of several chain actors, low-cost inputs and gender analysis, have the potential to empower women along the value chain in different contexts. The examples were selected for the variety of their approaches, but there are numerous studies showing other valuable experiences (see for example, KIT, Agri-ProFocus and IIRR, 2012 and Henriksen, 2010).

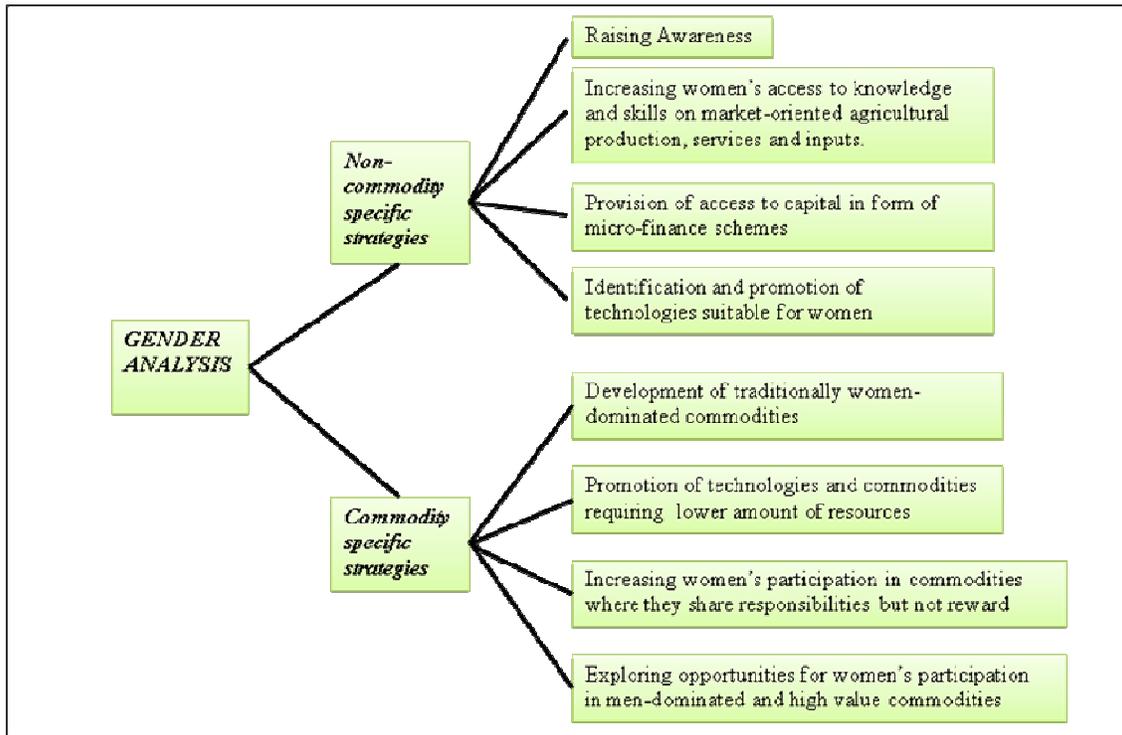
##### ***Empowering women through value chain development: good practices and lessons from IPMS experiences in Ethiopia***

Improving Productivity & Market Success (IPMS) of Ethiopian Farmers was a five-year project (2004-2010) funded by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and implemented by International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) on behalf of the Ethiopian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA). IPMS report on several good practices resulting from its experiences of reaching women in order to increase their access to resources, technologies and knowledge to promote the improvement of women's economic and social status in Ethiopia (Aregu, Puskur, Renard and Hoekstra. 2011). As a first step, IPMS carried out a gender analysis that led to the identification of gender division of roles in agricultural production, marketing and decision making, and their share of benefits. Benefits were identified not only in relation to crop and livestock production but also to accessing agricultural services, knowledge and skills about market-oriented agricultural production, services and inputs. The findings on the role of women along the value chain for priority crop and livestock commodities formed the basis for designing interventions in two fronts: non-commodity and commodity specific strategies (see figure 1). On the first front, four main strategies were implemented to increase women's access to knowledge and information; enhancing their capacities and increase their participation in selected value chains. First, awareness was raised through production and circulation of information in form of "gender commodity fact sheets" and capacity was built as a prelude to taking up the action plans through workshops aimed at staff, particularly at development agents who had minimal exposure to required skills for effectively integrating gender into their work. Awareness was also raised through recognition of women's achievements in project organized contests and visits to best performer female farmers. Second, actions were taken to increase women's access to knowledge and skills about market-oriented agricultural production, services and inputs. Women were targeted to reach 50% of participation in trainings, field visits and other interventions in value chain development. Key aspects for female participation were venues selected by women themselves in a place near their village, consideration of daily calendars and the training of couples where husband and wives were trained together. Sharing experiences proved to be also a powerful tool to spread new technologies among farmers and "inspiring women to adopt new ways of working". That is because during field visits women were aware of new technologies and able to adopt them, even taking seedlings of new products for demonstration purposes. A third strategy key to address a major constraint for women entrepreneurs is provision of access to capital in form of micro-finance schemes. IPMS project assisted the community in including women in the preparation of credit proposals to engage them in agribusiness. Additionally, IPMS was involved in linking

women to an innovation credit scheme, not normally covered by the existing lending institutions, to overcome women's lack of knowledge and skills to commercialize their production, earn profit and repay their loans. IPMS also supported linkages amongst input suppliers and farmers that contributed to women engaging with feed suppliers, buyers, cooperatives and markets in general. A fourth strategy was the identification and promotion of technologies suitable for women, such as conservation tillage through the use of bio degradable herbicides to reduce ploughing and minimizing weed infestation.

As mentioned above, IPMS also adopted innovative commodity specific strategies to increase women's involvement in the production and marketing of agricultural commodities. A first strategy on this front was to support the development of traditionally women-dominated commodities, such as poultry and dairy products. New practices for poultry production were promoted, such as raising day old chicks, introduction of higher producer breeds and vaccinations guided by veterinarians. All this enabled women to be part of the value chain as input suppliers, in this case pullets; as producers as they raised chickens and egg layers in a more efficient manner and; more important, as part of the poultry supply system and owners of their own enterprise. A similar approach was taken for dairy products that resulted also in women making profits. A second commodity specific strategy is the promotion of technologies and commodities requiring lower amount of resources. For example, backyard fruit seedling production was identified as suitable for women because it does not demand large size of land and excessive inputs. The main improvement introduced was through grafting technique, which women adopted to sell grafted seedlings from internationally known varieties. Third, the project promoted the increase of women's participation in commodities where they share responsibilities but not rewards. That is the case of the production of small ruminants, where the project provided technical knowledge, credit and increased access to inputs and markets. Credit was channelled to purchase goats and fatten in 3 cycles per year and repay the loan after a year. Part of the scheme was to train women in business skills, saving and goat fattening. A last and critical strategy was to explore opportunities for women's participation in men-dominated and high value commodities, such as bee keeping, cattle fattening and vegetable production. The project identified that modern techniques allow women to potentially manage bees and engage in the business. Therefore, and together with partners, the project carried out training of couples, which resulted in increasing women's participation in apiculture production and marketing. Training of couples was also introduced for fattening large ruminants. Interestingly, raising cattle closer to home and stall feeding were identified as most attractive practices for widows, many of whom succeeded in men-dominated ruminants' value chain. However, IPMS reports that the application of this strategy for interventions in male-dominated commodities—either large ruminants or vegetables—is not as easy as to target women for interventions where they dominate the commodities.

**Figure 1 : Strategies to empowering women through value chain development in Ethiopia  
Improving Productivity & Market Success of Ethiopian Farmers Project**



Source: Own elaboration based on Aregu, Puskur, Renard and Hoekstra (2011).

***Empowering women through the transformation of community organisations: linking people to the markets in Nepal***

PROCASUR supports knowledge management and capacity building strategies for scaling-up best practices and innovations for poverty reduction among International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) partners in the Asia and Pacific Region. In an identification and systematization process, PROCASUR reported the outcomes of the Pragatishil (“Progressive”) Agriculture Co-operative Leasehold Forest User Group experience in the Kapilvastu district (PROCASUR, 2012), which led to both the formation of a village level cooperative and the diversification of members’ livelihoods. Kapilvastu is one of the 55 districts where the Poverty Alleviation Fund Program (PAF) has been implemented since 2004, with IFAD as co-financer since 2008. Although the Program did not explicitly aim at empowering women through supporting community organisations and the creation of cooperatives, its participatory and inclusive approach resulted in benefiting them economically and socially.

The Pragatishil Agriculture Cooperative Ltd. development began in 2009 with the identification of different areas of investment for increasing income generation, including developing trading businesses. The Cooperative is a second tier organization, as it comprises twenty community organisations in the district. Some of the activities carried out by the cooperative include savings and loan investment, cooperative shop for its members, wheat and paddy farming on leased land on a short term basis to local people, vegetable farming

and sales, fertilizer reselling at lower than retail price, fish farming in local ponds, local market management and onion farming.

Before the Cooperative was established, the main occupation was farming with rice as the predominant crop. In that area, as in the whole country, women generally faced discrimination, daughters and sons tended to marry into nearby villages to establish and maintain good relations between neighbouring communities.

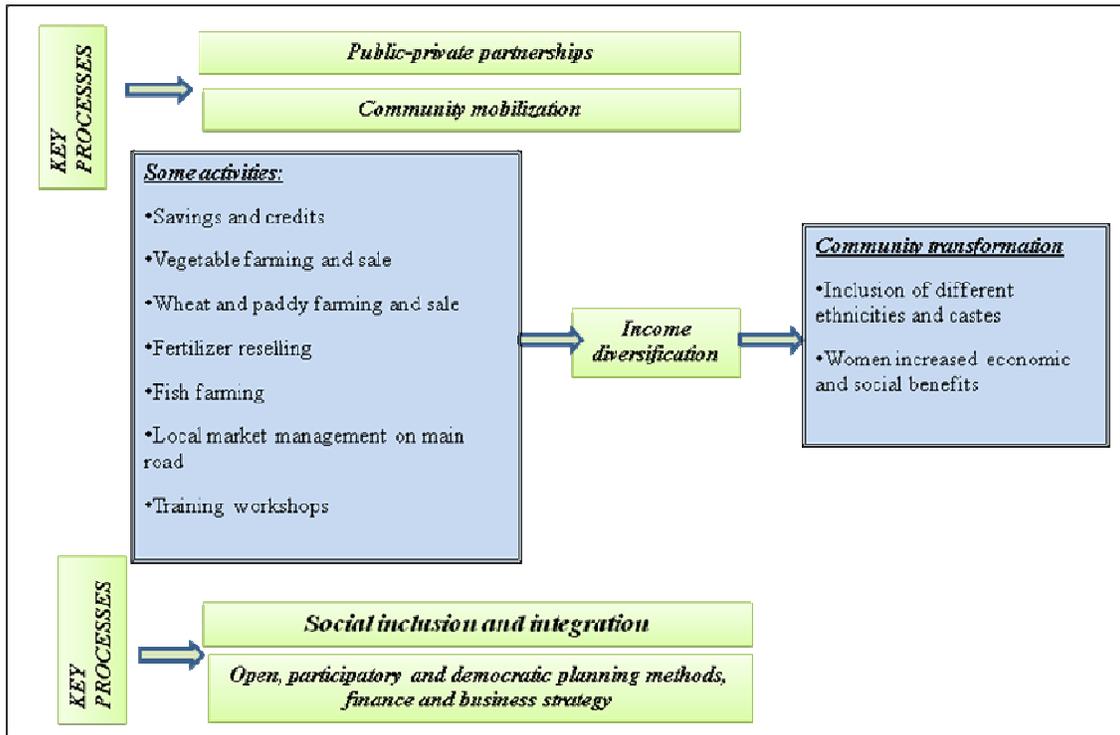
Four processes were identified as key to the success of the Cooperative experience, from where some lessons for women's empowerment can be pinned down. First, public-private partnerships between co-operatives, NGOs, private companies and government, which allowed the community to develop proposals for funding. The role of the NGOs and government in benefiting women and men are very relevant in including proposals where men as much as women benefit from the projects. The second key factor has been community mobilization, which allowed their networking into wider second-tier organizations. PROCASUR reports that the leadership role of women in the establishment and management of Saving and Credit Groups and the involvement of *Dalit*, *Janajati* and other socially marginalised groups have been crucial; women have been increasingly empowered, mainly through their role in household decision-making and their increased role in leadership positions within communities. The formation of Savings and Credit Groups has led to the formation of Co-operatives. The establishment of Public Private Partnership targeting poverty reduction has secured communities' access to markets and, in turn, promoted the diversification of livelihoods.

A third key process has been social inclusion and integration—especially Dalit and Janajati—through education and economic activities and has been supported by the establishment of equal teaching of boys and girls. Finally, the planning methods, finance and business strategy have been open, participatory and democratic. PROCASUR reports that the work carried out has been regularly audited, but still is work to be done as not all members have benefited yet.

The main result from the Pragatishil Agriculture Cooperative Ltd. is the income diversification as members have started, for example, to produce vegetable crops and wheat, rearing animals by taking credit facilities and selling products through the Cooperative. Because of the processes involved, this result also influenced a change of social norms related particularly to women's roles (covering of women's head completely has virtually ended, shaking hands with visitors as common use, increase in women's participation in meetings and training), and inclusion of different ethnicities and castes, although depending still on literacy skills.

Mainstreaming women's participation across all actions and involving them in public activities has reportedly contributed to women's empowerment. "These factors have contributed to a decrease in discrimination, better education and greater independence for women who now have a strong and recognized role in the community." However, "important improvements in socio-cultural context will continue including the elimination of the dowry system, prohibition of early child marriage and improved relations between ethnic groups" (idem: 16). Additionally, the main pervasive challenges affect more women than men: illiteracy and innumeracy within the community, non-acceptance of social change on the part of a minority, lack of access to health services and, in particular, low levels of knowledge on health and family planning.

**Figure 2: Empowering women through the transformation of community organisation in Nepal**



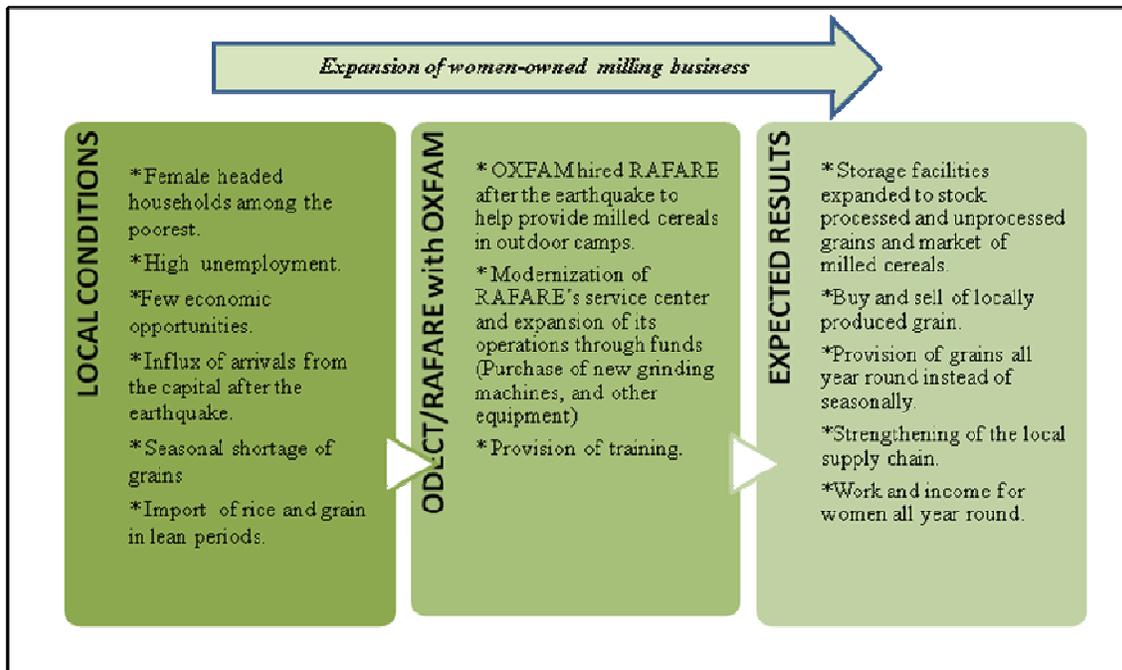
Source: Own elaboration based on PROCASUR (2012)

**Enabling women to run their operation as a proper business: A grain milling operation in Haiti**

According to Arias, Leguía and Sy (2013), women play an important role in Haitian agriculture. Their report affirms that one fourth of heads of household are women in the South and Centre departments, and in the South East department the proportion is even larger (34 percent). The study also mentions a recent survey conducted by the *Conseil National de Sécurité Alimentaire* (2011) reporting that the proportion of female-headed households (pooling data from the South East, Centre, and South) is 45 percent. However, women who are head of households are among the five poorest groups in the country, moreover if this factor is combined with location in rural areas (IFAD, n.d.). For example, Arias, Leguía and Sy mention that being a female-headed household can be correlated with smaller farms that tend to receive less extension services. An estimated 75 percent of the population is not in salaried employment, and jobs are scarce, especially in rural areas. This was a major issue in Haiti, as much before the earthquake of 2010 as now (Oxfam, 2012). Attention to women in the value chain development is recent in Haiti as several development agencies find themselves in initial intervention phases. One of them is the Organization for Community Development in Thomazeau (ODECT), an OXFAM partner. OXFAM (2012), reports that most people in Thomazeau are small scale farmers living off their land and selling what crops they can. The number of unemployed has risen as the area saw a large influx of arrivals from the capital after the earthquake. At ODECT, women are organized under ‘Rallying Women to Access Economic Resources’ (RAFARE for its French acronym) with the goal of improving the economic status of women. RAFARE owned one milling machine and earned money

processing grain brought to the centre by farmers and merchants. After the earthquake OXFAM hired RAFARE to help provide milled cereals, which formed part of food kits to be distributed in the outdoor camps. Currently, OXFAM is assisting the group in modernizing its service centre and expanding its operation with funds and training, including enlisting the help of expatriate Haitian experts with specific skills. The goal is to enable women to run their own business: “They will buy and sell locally produced grain throughout the year, rather than just seasonally; and during lean times, in between the harvests, they can sell surplus stocks in the local market.” According to some RAFARE members, this will overcome the seasonal shortage of grains by providing processed grains and, at the same time, create more jobs and income for women all year round. As people will not need to travel to other markets, it will be easier to purchase food locally and strengthen the supply chain. OXFAM assistance to this project is part of the transition made in 2011 from emergency response to longer-term rehabilitation and development-focused programming, which includes supporting employment creating through development of small enterprises. Plans for the future include the provision of timely grants and loans to encourage the growth of small and medium sized businesses with a view to taking on other employees and investing in building capacities within local organizations. They also include strengthening networks of partners and NGOs so that information and learning can be shared.

**Figure 3: Enabling women to run their operation as a proper business: A grain milling in Thomazeau, Haiti**



Source: Own elaboration based on OXFAM (2012)

### 5. Key policy issues for empowering women while converting commodities into products

Given the complexity of roots, practices and mechanisms that perpetuate inequality against women, a combination of measures should be taken if women’s empowerment is going to be achieved. While the participation of several actors—governments, international agencies,

private sector, NGOs and social organizations—is required, national policies are critical to pave the way for all these actors to succeed in enabling inclusive growth and development.

### ***Legal framework.***

- Ratification and full enforcement of international mechanisms against women’s discrimination, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the ILO conventions on equal remuneration, discrimination in employment, workers with family responsibilities and maternity protection.
- Reform or implementation of laws aimed at ensuring women’s access to land through, for example, preferential treatment in land titling, land registration in the name of both spouses rather than only in the name of male partners and promotion of women’s rights to inherit and lease land.
- Harmonization of conflicting legislation and legal procedures that on the one hand endorse social equity and economic rights and, on the other hand, provide room for the predominance of discriminatory customs. This includes raising gender awareness among legal service providers and law enforcers as well as formulating gender-sensitive legislation.

### ***Social services for economic empowerment***

- Provision of education, health and child-care services, particularly in rural areas, is necessary to provide women with better abilities and more time to position themselves in the value chain. To provide training in various issues related to women’s reproductive and productive roles while developing value chains can contribute to tackle their lack of business skills and to reduce their work load. Supporting women to participate in value chain development must not have a negative impact on child care if labour-saving technologies and child care facilities are introduced. Chain supporters are called to provide child-care facilities during training and other events and are local governments to provide sanitary services in market and public places. Provision of health services in rural areas and near-by women workers’ residence reduces the time and effort that women need to take care of ill relatives.
- Provision of social services must contribute to transform gender stereotypes in the private and public spheres. For example, men and women should be targeted in technical education as much as in reproductive health. Technical entrepreneurial careers must devise strategies to attract more female students.

### ***Value chains***

- Promote niche markets for women-dominated commodities, such as poultry and dairy products.
- Promote technologies and commodities requiring lower amount of resources, such as backyard fruit seedling. Promote the empowerment of women in commodities where they share responsibilities but not rewards, such as in the case of the production of small ruminants, by providing them with technical knowledge, credit and increase access to inputs and markets.

- Support training and extension services that work for women by, for example, recruiting local female extension workers and staff trained to work with women and men in a gender-sensitive manner.
- Encourage and support local initiatives aimed at organizing women in cooperatives or associations and improving their access to capital, transportation, markets and technology.

### ***Production and dissemination of information***

- Decades after the international community acknowledged the central, but different roles of men and women in producing, transforming and marketing products, dearth of gender-disaggregated data still constitutes a pervasive feature in many countries. This hinders the design, implementation and monitoring of public policy-making and helps to perpetuate structural inequalities. Collecting, processing and publishing gender-disaggregated data periodically represent priorities in value chain development with equity.
- Empirical evidence on issues related to value chains and gender, particularly coming from LDCs' perspective, is needed. For example, on the differential impact of value chain development on women and men, issues of gender discrimination in rural labour markets and gender-related barriers according to cultural and economic settings. Major gaps in research refer to the alternatives for labour-saving technologies for women and the gender impact of automated industrial processes in small and medium enterprises.
- Systematic dissemination of information on universal economic rights, existing laws and mechanisms supporting women's empowerment, good practices and enabling factors that promote value chains with focus on the poor (enforcement mechanisms, credit schemes, social oriented public-private partnerships, findings and experiences).

### ***Partnerships***

- Value chain development with equity cannot be achieved only through the market or through State interventions alone. Partnerships among multilateral organizations, NGOs, grass root organizations and the private sector play a vital role in giving shape to the terms of transactions and trade. Explore and establish partnerships within the IPoAs and UNIDO LDC strategy frameworks would result in their more effective implementation.
- Take action to fulfill commitments with international and national partners regarding the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women and the achievement of the MDG.
- Ensure that all partnerships and agreements include gender and women's empowerment principles and actions, particularly in reference to labour standards and equal opportunities.
- Encourage private sector initiatives aimed at increasing corporate social responsibility and certifying ethical behaviour, fair trade or environmental protection, because of their positive effect on economic prosperity with social equity.

### ***Comprehensive monitoring***

- Production and dissemination of information is necessary but not sufficient to monitor progress. Measures such as female representation at all levels during regular country reviews of the IPoA and participation of representatives of gender and women's offices in the design, implementation and monitoring of value chains must be encouraged. This will contribute not only to a more equal distribution of benefits, but also to more efficient and sustainable value chains.

### ***Gender mainstreaming***

- Integrate gender equity goals into planning processes in different sectors: finances, transport, agriculture and industry. This includes explicit goals and indicators, as well as gender responsive budgets. It is worth highlighting that to promote gender equity along the chain of actors must not be understood as female and male egalitarian participation in all value chains, activities and distribution of profits. Rather, it means the consideration and addressing of men's and women's specific needs and interests in order to guarantee that the less advantaged have the same opportunities to negotiate their insertion in the value chain.
- Public policy mechanisms addressing value chains must include gender-related considerations and specific measures, such as gender-monitoring indicators and gender-responsive budgeting.
- Partnerships open up opportunities for the establishment of institutional frameworks where public ministries, financial organizations, primary producers and others are involved. Every such opportunity must be taken to promote also dialogue and awareness on the gender dimensions of value chains.
- Pay attention to the role of men in empowering women along the process. For example, attention must be paid to assess the convenience to work with couples or only with women, according to the local setting. Raise awareness about the role of women's economic empowerment in growth and development among men as much as among women at all levels.

## **6. Conclusions**

Advancement on gender equity and women's economic empowerment in LDCs is slow and sparse. While some countries have taken innovative measures to include women in the labour market in better conditions, including the passing of innovative laws for changing cultural uses and customs, other countries remain indifferent when not reluctant. Common triggers for women's insertion in value chains with equity are governments' commitment, a vibrant civil society—particularly NGOs and women's movements—public-private partnership with an ethical vision and pro-poor policies. These conditions allow, for example, the passing of comprehensive legislation where women and men are put at the centre of the development process and women enjoy legal rights and protection. They also permit investments on social credit schemes and on appropriate technology and infrastructure. Above all, these factors contribute to the organization of actors along the value chains with opportunities to negotiate their own terms of participation. The much debated issue on the balance between State and the market cannot ignore that there is no process with absence of state regulation, and that regulations are called to ensure better opportunities for all. This is more so when efforts to improve the situation of women are threatened by conflict, climate change and economic crisis.

The road taken by LDCs through the Brussels Programme and the Istanbul Programme of action has the potential to dramatically improve gender equity and women's empowerment, as evident from the moderate gains reported. LDCs political will and the implementation of the Istanbul Programme will open up new possibilities for women's economic empowerment and the strengthening of value chains as management tools to promote competitiveness and implement public policy. More specifically, the UNIDO Operational Strategy for the LDCs 2011–2020 addresses the critical issues discussed in this paper by taking gender equity as a cross-cutting issue to its three strategic objectives and making it implicit in its priority areas of action. LDCs should focus on reforming gender-based discriminatory legislation and enforcing property and inheritance rights for women, promoting participatory private-public partnerships at local level, encouraging accountable and ethic labour markets and on producing high-quality, gender disaggregated data periodically. Additionally, more empirical research is needed on critical issues, such as ways to overcome culturally-based gender discriminations in labour markets and on whether modern or traditional supply chains are more likely to empower women and under what conditions.

LDCs good practices, knowledge and experience on creating value chains with equity must be a source of common progress. Evidence that gender equality promotes economic growth and has positive outcomes for all household members is a strong argument to mainstreaming it in the development process, similar to other issues, such as environmental sustainability or technological innovation, even more when it is about the lives of half of the population. A LDC Ministerial conference brings about a renewed opportunity to strengthen partnerships, and it must be taken in order to delineate joint action and commitments towards acting regionally for strengthening women's economic position, particularly in products and processes that are already part of regional integration and South-South cooperation.

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