

Women's Role in Agricultural Value Chains Lessons Learnt from VCA4D Gender Equality Analysis

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The European Commission has developed a standardised methodological framework for analysis of value chains (The Value Chain Analysis for Development (VCA4D) methodology <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/valuechain-analysis-for-development-vca4d-/documents/methodological-brief-eng>), which has been applied to more than 45 value chains since 2016. VCA4D aims to understand to what extent the value chain allows for inclusive economic growth and whether it is both socially and environmentally sustainable.

The high-level conference 'Value Chain Analysis for Development: providing evidence for better policies and operations in agricultural value chains' which took place on 18th and 19th January 2023 took stock of lessons learnt from evidence on how knowledge on value chains can support decision-making. All documents and videos from the Conference are available here: <https://capacity4dev.europa.eu/projects/value-chain-analysis-for-development-vca4d/info/5-conference-documents-value-chain-analysis-development-providing-evidence-better-policies-and-operations-agricultural-value-chains-en>

The transversal analyses presented at the Conference have analysed a minimum of three different VCA4D studies, providing cross-cutting analyses on thematic issues of interest to policy-makers. The analyses and knowledge briefs are produced with the financial support of the European Union (VCA4D CTR 2017/392-416). Their content is the sole responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union nor of Agrinatura/ the VCA4D project.

Abstract

The transversal analysis makes a cross-cutting analysis of gender equality (GE) indicators throughout 36 VCA4D reports. The main findings confirm that:

- Women play a pivotal role in ensuring household food security. Their involvement in VCs may both improve (empower) or hamper this contribution (disempower). The gathering of gender-disaggregated quantitative and qualitative information is key to make well-informed policy decisions and undertake transformative actions.
- GE generally scored low in the Social Profiles. The most concerning findings relate to women is limited access to (often low-quality) land. Women also bear unequal workloads and encounter challenges in production activities, also due to limited access to technical improvements, financial resources and support services.
- Short, local value chains are more likely to offer empowering opportunities for women (especially in processing and marketing activities).
- The Social Profile proved as a valid tool for assessing GE, although more in-depth studies are needed to better understand the root causes of inequalities. A gender-based bias in the expert's scoring was observed, with men usually giving better scores to GE (thus possibly underestimating problems).



Materials and method

The researchers undertook: 1. a review of 36 VCA4D studies which revealed trends in the scores to the gender questions; 2. an analysis of all reports which allowed to detail GE aspects and led to a discussion of the different findings in the form of lessons learnt; 3. a literature review which allowed to further validate the significance of the findings.

The transversal analysis also presents a summary of recommendations highlighting the critical requirements for the implementation of gender-responsive policies. These recommendations also underscore the importance of embracing specific methodological approaches, including the use of gender-disaggregated data, which is frequently limited. This approach is crucial for enabling discussions on transformative actions that address a broader range of gender inequalities.

Findings

The statistical approach to the 36 Social Profiles produced a set of general observations:

- Out of a set of 612 observations (17 questions x 36 studies), the best situations for women ("high" and "substantial" respect for women rights) correspond to 33% of the scores (7% and 26% respectively). As for the worst assessments, ("not so good" and "women at higher risk") they account for 65% of the scores (53% and 12% respectively). "Not applicable" (n/a) was used in 2% of the global scores (which reinforces the model adequacy).
- A 'very good situation' for women was often attributed to the participation of women in the VCs' activities (19% of VCs) and to a lesser extent to their collective organisation (14% of VCs). This suggests that the presence of women in these domains has a significant positive outcome.
- Women at higher risk concerns mainly the equality of workloads (in 42% of VCs), the equality of land rights (36% of VCs), the hardship of women's work (31% of VCs), and the women's access to credit (28% of VCs).
- A gender-based bias in the expert's scoring was observed. The six studies with the worst gender scores were all scored by women experts. The three highest rated studies were scored by men experts.

Comparative assessment of the value chains

The VCs with better global results are Benin pineapple, Togo pineapple, Burundi banana, and to a lesser extent Kenya green beans, Cambodia aquaculture and the Gambia fisheries. These results seem to be due to a more equal division of labour, easier access to markets and credit and to women's involvement in production and investment decisions. For the organisation of work, women are only partially autonomous, since they often lack control over their income as they typically work for their husbands.

On the other hand, the most worrying situations were observed in Ghana sorghum, Cameroon and Nicaragua cocoa, and to a lesser extent in Dominican Republic fruits, Angola coffee and Zimbabwe beef. The main constraints are related to women's workload as they are often the ones to handle

household duties. Their work becomes much more intense when an effort in commercial activities is added. Women's access to land, land titles, and the ability to farm are also low, exposing women to risks of exclusion. The difficulty of access to land is also detrimental in women's participation in organizational bodies and in their demand for credit.

Some production activities are seen as masculine according to social norms (i.e. livestock in Zimbabwe). This gender attribute is related to both land ownership (few women own land), labour force and market control.

Identification of value chain effects or specific country

The analysis on GE also focused on the '**VC effect**', to see how the same VC behaved in different countries, or on the other side on the 'country effect' to see how different VCs scored within the same country.

To assess the 'VC effect', the cocoa and coffee VCs with larger observations were studied. Amongst the five cocoa VCs (Ecuador, Cameroon, Nicaragua, Papua New Guinea, São Tomé), Ecuador showed the best performance, while the four remaining indicated very similar scores in women's access to resources, leadership and decision-making. The four coffee VCs (Angola, Ecuador, Honduras, Tanzania) showed similarities, especially concerning women's leadership and participation in VC activities, but Angola differed significantly from the three others with its lowest scores on women's inclusion in VC activities and hardship of their tasks. Like in cocoa VCs, Ecuador had again the best overall scores amongst the coffee VCs.

Positive scores were numerous in coffee VCs compared to cocoa VCs revealing a relatively better situation in coffee VCs. As for other products, it emerged for example that women benefit more from VCs whose products can be easily sold in local markets (e.g. pineapple), rather than VCs with longer circuits and with a strong masculine cultural connotation (e.g. livestock).

The scores were often mixed, but the 'country-effect' emerged as slightly more significant than the 'VC effect' based on the number of similar occurrences in the scoring. For instance, the scores of cocoa and coffee VCs in Ecuador were very similar. Likewise, in Zambian VCs (aquaculture, egg, maize) significant similarities were observed, especially in women's access to resources and participation in decision-making. These similarities are explained by how the national context, including public policies, cultural norms and other relevant aspects, affects GE. However, because there are few countries where more than one product has been analysed, the **country effect** should be considered cautiously.

The findings from the Social Profiles' scores emphasize the wide range of situations that define GE. The fact that indicators highlight such complexity, confirms that they were well-selected. However, further exploration in the reports is also required since the findings based on the scores may also conceal certain details of women's and girls' lives.

1. Women deprived of land ownership

The lack of land titles decreases women's eligibility for formal credit needed to acquire agricultural inputs and hired labour. Women's autonomy is highly diminished in many aspects of their lives when these rights are denied. Strengthening women's land rights can significantly increase their income and their families' welfare, and consequently their social status and can empower them to negotiate and make choices.

2. Gender division of labour, women daily burden

The responsibility of ensuring family sustenance, including domestic daily tasks, places a significant burden on women. This burden hampers women's capacity to fully engage in wage-earning efforts, to achieve autonomy in pursuing income-generating activities, or make other choices for their lives in a broader sense.

Women's entry into the labour market may also have unintended negative consequences on their autonomy, especially in countries with rising food processing industries which contribute significantly to economic growth. Women, on the other hand, experience an even greater shortage of time which is described as women's 'time poverty'. The fact that they are compelled to combine paid work with family duties is even considered, by the social experts, as a threat to their households' food security, since, not being able to cultivate their plots, they experience higher levels of food stress, as well as poorer diets (Tanzania coffee).

3. Women and girls' access to education, training and information

Women's household responsibilities reinforced by social and cultural expectations prevent them from receiving formal education and training, which would improve their productivity, income, and overall well-being and sustainability. In some countries, women's affiliation with organizations provides them with training and ability to market their products directly to consumers (without having to resort to middlemen), thus stabilizing their income (Ecuador coffee, Burkina Faso mango).

4. Gender division of tasks in agriculture, and women access to labour-saving technologies

In general, men are more likely than women to have access to technology that reduce their workload. There is little evidence that labour-saving technology is promoted to replace traditional female tasks to alleviate their effort (Guinea Bissau lime; Sierra Leone cashew and Cameroon cotton).

In livestock VCs, extension services are focused on men's cattle to the detriment of women's goats and chicken. Men are more likely than women to own large livestock (Zambia egg). Or men own the animal while women control milk production (Zimbabwe beef). The access of women to improved technology is even perceived as a threat to men's job security.

5. Growing feminization of some agricultural practices

Women's contribution to the household's income has been increasing because of men's declining participation to meet

the family's economic needs due to migration, diseases, internal conflicts, etc. This in some cases significantly increases women's authority (Nigeria maize, Ecuador coffee, Dominican Republic banana) with still unforeseen outcomes.

6. Women's lack of transportation

Women are less able to sell their produce in the markets beyond the village boundaries and supply good quality products in enough quantities in the more competitive town markets. This also impedes their interaction with the other actors involved in the VC, (Nigeria maize, Kenya green beans) and therefore the building of wider networks.

7. Women marital status

Various reports document the conditions of widowed women (Angola coffee, Sierra Leone cashew). The situation of civil war widows in the coffee plantations in Angola is described as total dependency on men coffee producers, close to slavery. There are also reports describing men's emerging polygamous behaviour in countries where this is not allowed both legally and culturally, causing higher distress to women and reducing their autonomy (Sierra Leone cashew, Benin pineapple, Angola coffee).

8. The effects of the expansion of commercial agriculture on women's autonomy: men's crops

The expansion of commercial agriculture may create greater opportunities for women in terms of wage and salaried labour, but the situation is more complex. Rural women's employment is characterized by insecure contracts, long working hours, low pay, and a lack of social protection.

However, women at semi-artisanal processing units work part-time and receive lower wages (Mali cashew), but this helps them to lessen the impact of their domestic unpaid work.

9. Women successful engagement in food production and specialized commercial produces: women's crops

Women tend to be engaged in food production rather than in cash crops that have been subject to fewer price fluctuations caused by speculation in liberal markets (Papua New Guinea vanilla, Côte d'Ivoire cassava, Ghana groundnut). This relates to their responsibility for ensuring food security of their household but also to their difficulty in participating in negotiations with traders. Nonetheless, social experts have reported that investors are more hesitant to provide credit for food crops, thus preventing women from improving their food production (Côte d'Ivoire cassava).

10. Innovation does not reach women and they are not supplied with technologies meeting their needs

Women's access to innovation is closely related to their access to the innovation-related information. When women are not active participants in decision-making, nor in technological decisions, they are often supplied with technologies that do not meet their needs (Cambodia aquaculture, Nigeria maize, Angola coffee).

Few research and innovation projects attempt to have more systemic and sustainable social and political impacts, while most rather focus on technological transfer. Additionally, women's access to resources to increase food security has taken precedence over their access to innovation related to other productive activities. Discussing how women's access to resources has changed and how this has improved their social well-being and ability to decide for their lives would be a more innovative and inclusive approach.

Conclusions and implications for policymakers

Most countries part of the studies have national legislation on women's rights (including national policies targeting women and, in some cases, through dedicated government bodies). However, the implementation and **enforcement** of the **legislation** can be **uneven** and take time.

More work is still to be done to engage political commitment in broadening the legislation to cover more spheres of GE and to ensure the application of these legal instruments. Women are often not legally protected because of lack of knowledge of their legal rights and sociocultural norms that obstruct law enforcement.

Lack of expertise in gathering appropriate information in the field is one of the key factors of **poor supervision of women's rights**. Given that the agriculture sector is going through profound changes that are reshaping traditional agricultural practices and related ways of living, researchers lack the tools, knowledge, and good practices to integrate gender perspectives in their work. The results of the statistical analysis provide evidence of gender-biased assessments of women's rights by the VCA4D experts which serve to reinforce this assumption.

Gender issues have been addressed independently in the VCA4D model as part of the social analysis, and the economic and environmental experts have not assessed women's roles and contributions in certain fields. Since the data are not "sex-disaggregated" and thus "gender-blind" when research methods are applied, this leads to gender gaps in the generation of data. In other words, aggregate data may miss out on what works best for rural women.

Most VCA4D studies assessing women decision-making or empowerment focus on the production side. Less information exists, although not absent, on female trader and retailer and on the challenges they face in male-dominated VCs environments, implying greater mobility and many times displacements far from their homes to earn a living.

Indeed, a variety of trends that empower and disempower women can be seen from the various studies, all of which are driven by factors that operate at different levels. Women's situation is therefore dynamic and complex. It is crucial to identify the transformative drivers and root causes of gender inequality as well as those that unexpectedly bring women to a stage of greater dependence and lack of autonomy. It is also critical to comprehend how, as in the example of women working in the food industry, an apparent backlash in women autonomy may produce transformative change in the long term, leaving a space of unpredictability that only continuous observation and data collection can fill.

The VCA4D reports provide some excellent examples of how women are building new opportunities for themselves: i.e. women leading short but high-valued VCs (specialized coffee in Ecuador); women building strong social networks within their communities by selling lime products in Guinea-Bissau; or any other factor that has the potential to lessen women's unequal circumstances, reinforcing their social representation within their communities, while also lowering the poverty level for themselves and their families.

The situation of women in Global South agriculture environments is far from simple. There is a high risk that social researchers may contribute to reinforce static prevalent stereotypes based on their own cultural expectations. Nonetheless it is possible to observe how effective synergies and mutual reinforcement can be observed through comprehensive comparative approaches on women participation in social, economic and environmental sustainability like those offered by VCA4D model, on the one hand, and its specific participatory field observations on the other. The objective of more in-depth field observations and interventions should be to identify and address the root causes of GE transformative trends and the structural barriers hindering the attainment of them.

Value Chain Analysis for Development (VCA4D) is a tool funded by the European Commission / INTPA and is implemented in partnership with Agrinatura. Agrinatura (<http://agrinatura-eu.eu>) is the European Alliance of Universities and Research Centers involved in agricultural research and capacity building for development.

The information and knowledge produced through the value chain studies are intended to support the Delegations of the European Union and their partners in improving policy dialogue, investing in value chains and better understanding the changes linked to their actions. VCA4D uses a systematic methodological framework for analysing value chains in agriculture, livestock, fishery, aquaculture and agroforestry. More information including reports and communication material can be found at: <https://europa.eu/capacity4dev/value-chain-analysis-for-development-vca4d->

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