



# SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN AND YOUTH

CAPITALISING FROM KEY ACHIEVEMENTS AND EXPERIENCES MADE

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**The contribution of women lead farmers, community resource persons and youth to inclusive development with increased household income, improved status of women and adequate involvement of young people has been significant in RIPOMA.**

## BACKGROUND

From July 2017 to July 2020 HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation implemented the EU-funded initiative Empowering Smallholder Youth and Women Farmers on Rice Postharvest Management and Marketing (**RIPOMA**) in the two districts of Kilosa and Mvomero in Morogoro region, Tanzania. The project aimed at increasing competitiveness and improving postharvest management (PHM) of smallholder farmers, in particular women and youth, in the rice value chains in Morogoro region. RIPOMA was implemented by HELVETAS in partnership with CODERT, a local NGO specialized in micro-finance, i.e. savings & credit, and other key value chain actors. During its implementation the project reached out to 3,338 smallholder rice farming households organized in 113 groups across 40 villages and involved 132 specific rice value chain actors such as farmer associations, cooperatives, rice millers, traders, agro-dealers and various service providers.

## CORE CHALLENGES IN INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT OF RICE FARMING

Smallholder rice farmers, especially women and youth, in the districts of Kilosa and Mvomero cultivated small plots mostly in a traditional and subsistence way. Other than excess paddy, they had hardly any other income sources. Women and youth experienced amongst others insecure low household incomes, dependence on moneylenders, insufficient savings for hard times, and seasonal food shortages. In its efforts to address gender equality and women and youth economic empowerment for smallholder farmers in Morogoro region and to promote inclusive development, RIPOMA faced the following challenges:

- There is a knowledge gap on roles and responsibility of women, men and children at the family and community level; the distribution of roles negatively affects mostly women and youth due to unequally constructed social norms, beliefs and attitudes towards them
- Farmers including lead farmers (LF) and community resource persons (CRP), both women and men, hardly understood such existing unequal relationships
- Women and youth had low levels of confidence when speaking at household, group community level; their opinion was often not heard or not taken seriously when voiced during meetings that involved men
- Women and youth lacked competences and practice in public speaking and felt often inferior and incompetent to contest and acquire leadership
- Participation of women and youth in engaging in socio-economic and political development activities such as in business activities and political affairs was limited
- Involvement of women and youth in decision making related to rice production and in ownership of and control over resources (farmland, livestock, business entities) and household income both at family and community level as well as sales of produce was very low
- Sharing tasks and responsibilities by community members was imbalanced with women and youth given the more “lower” tasks within the rice value chain and being neglected at the “higher” levels of the chain, such as decision making on sales and expenditure of income. As a result, women farmer group members had lower incomes compared to men
- Unequally existing social norms, beliefs and attitudes towards women and youth in communities shaped them to feel inferior and affected their opportunities in socio-economic development and leadership positions in their communities

## HOW DID THE PROJECT ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES?

RIPOMA integrated gender equality in the project design using the HELVETAS Women and Economic Empowerment<sup>1</sup> approach. While designing the project 70% of the beneficiaries were meant to be women and 40% to be youth. This was a strategic decision aiming to ensure high women and youth participation from the start to the end of the project and result in sustainable inclusive economic empowerment.

The project interventions prioritized capacity building for women. For instance, more than 80% of LF and 60% of CRP were women, though both women and men benefitted from the knowledge and skills that LF and CRP cascaded to their fellow farmers. At project/community level, women participated in and shared with men the same project interventions including travel.

A gender consultant was engaged to conduct a gender needs assessment and develop a gender training package and an implementation plan. 187 LF and CRP (103 women and 84 men) representing 101 rice producer groups were trained on gender and social equity. The main objective of the training was to strengthen participants' understanding and knowledge of and enhancing their skills on how to address gender inequalities that affect women's and men's ability to actively participate in processes to improve their livelihoods.

1: [https://www.shareweb.ch/site/EI/Documents/HowTo/Gender%20Sensitivity%20WEE/Coffey%20-%20Guideline%20-%20Mainstreaming%20WEE%20in%20Market%20Systems%20Development%20-%202013%20\(en\).pdf](https://www.shareweb.ch/site/EI/Documents/HowTo/Gender%20Sensitivity%20WEE/Coffey%20-%20Guideline%20-%20Mainstreaming%20WEE%20in%20Market%20Systems%20Development%20-%202013%20(en).pdf)

## KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Through gender and social equity interventions, the project was able to achieve the following results:

- **113 farmer groups with 3,338 members, each one representing one household**, acquired gender knowledge and skills from their trained LF and CRP

### THE MAIN CONTENTS OF GENDER AND SOCIAL EQUITY TRAINING

- Introduction to key gender concepts
- The difference between sex and gender
- Gender norms and socialization process
- Male engagement to promote gender equality and women empowerment
- Gender based violence and its implications
- Gender roles and responsibilities of women and men
- Resource ownership and control of household income
- Women and men participation to enhance rice production at household level

- **Improved male engagement to promote gender equality and women empowerment:**

As a result, there has been improved cooperation between husbands and wives in the intervention areas. Women and youth feel freer and more confident to express their opinion at household level and in public. Women and youth are motivated and family relations improved, such as better division of labour concerning farm preparation and management, nursing children, cooking, washing clothes and collection of firewood. Family conflicts have become rare because of the significant economic contribution of wives to the household income.

- **Increased participation in joint family decision making:**

Results from the gender assessment conducted in the two project districts at the end of the project revealed that, women and men jointly make decision including on buying or selling of assets like land and harvested crops as well as on family expenditure and family size. All these changes have contributed to more equal benefits of increased family income and property ownership.

- **Increased women and youth engagement in economic activities:**

By June 2020, a total of 1,965 project beneficiaries were involved in economic activities and generated additional income of TZS 558,887,579. Among them were 1,440 women earning TZS 271,720,553, 525 men (TZS 117,273,750) and 888 youth (TZS 169,893,276). The economic involvement of many women and youth contributed to the increase of capital in the Village Savings & Credit Associations (VSLA).

- **Increased women leadership at group and community level:**

Unlike before, more women nowadays join and participate freely in farmer groups and are elected in leadership positions, including in VSLA and Input Market Associations, so-called IMA. Women's work is better recognized at the household and community levels which has increased women's confidence. As a result, women are able and prepared to contest in elections and are elected into leadership positions at both group and community levels. Apart from LF and CRP who are mostly women, an additional 118 women were elected as group leaders (61 chairpersons and 57 secretaries), while 87 women were elected in various leadership positions for IMA (4 IMA chairpersons) and 64 women became sub-village chairpersons and village council members.

- In a few cases, thanks to the lobbying and follow-up of the project, women through their groups managed to access loans from the Government's **Women and Youth Development Fund**



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

Awareness creation and training of communities on socio-economic gender equality and providing women and youth with leadership competences and opportunities has substantial impact on women and youth empowerment. Based on the project's achievements and lessons learnt, important recommendations to address gender inequality and promote socio-economic empowerment of women and youth are as follows:

- Inclusive development means vulnerable groups, women, youth, etc. should not be addressed as mere passive beneficiaries of a project intervention but as active participants in and contributors to their development process; this should be considered by any public, private or NGO actor engaging in development.
- If women and youth are to benefit from a project intervention, then using women and youth from the beneficiary groups as change agents to support and guide their fellow colleagues is strongly recommended as an efficient and effective approach.
- The Local Government Authorities (LGA), specifically the District Community Development Department should facilitate more groups with women and youth to access loans from the Women and Youth Development Fund and other financial sources to empower them socially, economically, and politically.
- The District LGA should continue recognizing and promoting the use of Community Resource Persons (CRP) and Lead Farmers (LF) to cascade gender equality training to other communities to reach many people and bring community change. Also, the use of LF and CRP will ensure ongoing regular awareness raising and discussions on gender inequality. Changing gender behaviour is a slow process as it is strongly embedded in the cultural context.
- The LGA should continue promoting VSLA groups as they are important in providing access to finance; especially women and youth benefit from its economic empowerment and increase their income.
- The District authorities, the Ward Extension Officers and Ward Community Development Officers, should continue monitoring both the farmer and VSLA groups and work together with LF and CRP respectively to sensitize and promote gender equality in households and in development activities.