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FHI 360's labour market assessment as a tool for adapting interventions to reduce extreme poverty

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Abstract: *People were thrust back under the poverty line in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change, and conflict. As a result, the development community is exploring ways to mitigate the negative impact of this regression and help the poorest youth and adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) recover by linking them to market-aligned livelihoods. This paper examines how FHI 360's utilization of labour market assessments ensures that youth and AGYW programming is market-driven and aligned, linking the extreme poor to sustainable livelihood opportunities. Three cases are presented where FHI 360's Labour Market Assessment (LMA) was used on projects that support extreme poor youth and AGYW who have been affected by conflict, health crises, and now COVID-19. Each case reviews how FHI 360's LMA identified nuanced market opportunities for youth and AGYW programme participants.*

Keywords: labour market assessment, poverty, AGYW, value chains, employability

Introduction

COVID-19 has undermined the success humanity has achieved in eliminating extreme poverty. Such disruptive occurrences call for tools that remain adaptable while also bridging our understanding of different populations. Specifically, this underlies the need for new tools that offer perspective on an economy *and* the most vulnerable, to bridge the two; this is where we, FHI 360, believe our Labour Market Assessment (LMA) fits in. Our LMA provides data that can inform many levels of decision-making by providing a clearer understanding of the labour market, and information on the issues, conditions, and demands of the market and employers with which extremely poor youth (EPY) and adolescent girls and young women (AGYW) attempt to find jobs or create self-employment opportunities. A LMA is used to significantly strengthen the planning, design, monitoring, and evaluation of a project, and thereby contribute to the efforts to eliminate extreme poverty (Steen et al., 2005).

The need for an adaptable tool has been actualized through FHI 360's LMA – which makes it possible to carry out an assessment of EPY and AGYW in a labour market. Our (FHI 360's) LMA provides an opportunity to analyse the challenges

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of EPY and AGYW's entry into the labour market, particularly in informal economies that are most vulnerable to economic shocks. This article reviews three LMA case studies from projects in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Liberia, and South Africa. These LMAs aimed to broaden the ways to obtain information on the workforce and labour market, namely for EPY and AGYW. The main purpose of our LMA in each case was to gather information on the unique nature of labour supply and demand in the labour markets into which EPY and AGYW were entering. The results of our LMAs can be used to understand constraints to labour market outcomes and identify skill needs, opportunities for self-employment, or market gaps where entrepreneurs or microenterprises might enter. This information is essential for the development and implementation of project activities that promote improved labour markets, job creation, increased employment, and measures to eliminate risk factors that negatively affect the labour force entry of EPY and AGYW (Sohnen, 2018). Our LMA findings also help projects understand informal and formal factors that influence labour market outcomes, such as the effects of gender and socio-cultural norms on the labour market and how government policies can impact job creation and employment trends.

Literature review and background

The support of livelihoods for the most vulnerable is a pressing issue in international development. UNHCR recognizes this, noting that 'one of the most effective ways people can rebuild their lives with dignity and in peace is through the opportunity to work and earn a living' (UNHCR, n.d.). While some authors rightly assert that jobs and livelihoods are first-order concerns for most of the world's population (Parisotto, 2013), livelihoods programming is seen as crucial to youth in conflict- and disaster-affected contexts (McLean Hilker and Fraser, 2012). Of youth populations, among the most vulnerable are AGYW – globally highest at risk of new HIV infections, unplanned pregnancy, and sexual violence (US Embassy in Zambia, n.d.). Saul et al. (2018) note that 'many factors make girls and young women particularly vulnerable to HIV, including … exclusion from economic opportunities' (Saul et al., 2018: 1). This emphasis on the vulnerability of AGYW to shocks, and the challenge they face without viable livelihoods pathways emphasize the need for and purpose of this LMA, which bridges several existing approaches, and attempts to provide a more contextualized understanding of the complex challenges AGYW face.

Because terms such as livelihoods, value chains, and labour market assessments are central to FHI 360's approach to LMAs, we introduce the context for these concepts and their interrelationships below. The Red Cross defines a livelihood as: 'a means of making a living. It encompasses people's capabilities, assets, income and activities required to secure the necessities of life' (IFRC, 2019). Traditional livelihoods programming has sometimes been seen to be at odds with market-based programming, with livelihoods activities sometimes encouraging income-generating activities for which demand is already saturated in the market (Nutz, 2017), while

Gutta (n.d.) claims the Achilles' heel of livelihoods programming is its lack of market linkages.

Small (2007) offers a critical review of the sustainable rural livelihoods approach. In her review, she notes that Moser et al. (2001, cited in Small, 2007) see that a conceptualization of social structure and power relations (including market) is missing from this approach, and she points to Wiggins' (2002, cited in Small, 2007) critique that livelihood interventions that promote proliferation of successful strategies will ultimately ruin the strategies for all after the market is flooded due to such promotion. Finally, Dorward et al. (2003) point out a historical gap in livelihoods approaches, namely a lack of emphasis on markets – which they note is important as it can lead to failure to identify and act on a wider range of market opportunities and constraints.

In contrast to livelihoods programming (which is characterized by an emphasis on the most vulnerable), value chain-focused interventions are broadly seen to be more market-oriented, and likely to focus on areas of economic growth potential and market systems linkages. Duke University defines a value chain as 'the full range of activities that firms and workers do to bring a product/good or service from its conception to its end use and beyond. This includes activities such as design, production, marketing, distribution and support to the final consumer' (Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark, 2016). Yet proponents of value chain programming are aware of its limitations, with Stoian et al. (2020) noting the need to incorporate non-market-based approaches to guarantee that the most vulnerable are reached. USAID's Value Chain Development (VCD) Wiki on Marketlinks (n.d.) notes that VCD programming has historically seen the most vulnerable at the margins of such programming because of: 1) barriers such as lack of time or social exclusion; 2) vulnerable populations lacking the assets needed to participate; 3) trickle-down effects not being seen; and 4) cost-benefit project decisions about achieving large-scale impact for large numbers of less vulnerable people versus focusing concentrated resources on a smaller set of more vulnerable individuals.

Finally, Kenton (2020) defines the labour market as 'the supply of and demand for labour, in which employees provide the supply and employers provide the demand. It is a major component of any economy and is intricately linked to markets for capital, goods, and services'. Traditional labour market assessments have historically differed from both livelihoods and value chain approaches in that they have focused on the supply of labour to a workforce from a quantitative perspective, looking at numbers of workers entering the labour market.

Our LMA threads through all three of these approaches, with the purpose of linking market demand typically seen in a value chain study, to identification of opportunities for employment or self-employment for AGYW, as often seen in livelihoods and labour market studies, while remaining able to adapt to unique and challenging contexts. The purpose of this article is to examine how this tool has been used, commonalities found in this approach that are relevant to programming for market-oriented AGYW poverty reduction programmes, and what areas of further study might stem from this initial examination.

Traditional LMAs and LMA developed by FHI 360

Traditional LMA

The traditional LMA is based largely on the value chain approach that was developed in agriculture marketing and later taught as an economic concept that has been used by agribusiness firms, development professionals, and academics. Since then, it has been adapted and used in other sectors and non-agriculture value chains, which led to its widespread use by development practitioners focused on workforce and labour market improvement programmes.

Traditional LMAs provide a guide to implementers and policymakers in designing and implementing projects to improve productivity, competitiveness, entrepreneurship, and support of growth for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). Often these considered a mix of steps of analysis including but not limited to, *economic context, demand for skills, supply of skills, estimated wages, project trends, mapping systems/stakeholders, policy, or alignment*.

Six aspects of the traditional LMA steps are used in our LMA tools, but we also add several tools that are unique. In this publication we emphasize the role of the value chain map with the workforce overlay, which is critical in understanding the demanded skills and employment or self-employment opportunities in the value chain. The traditional LMA mainly focuses on increasing productivity and performance, including identifying skills levels required by the positions in the value chain; however, the skills information is not overlaid onto the value chain, so is not oriented to specific opportunities for employment or self-employment.

FHI 360's LMA

FHI 360 reviewed existing LMA approaches and tools from across the workforce and youth sectors, learning from and adapting them to develop a core suite of tools that can be used to conduct LMAs. These included Mercy Corps' Labor and Market Assessment Guidance and Tip Sheets, World Bank's Jobs Diagnostic, the International Labour Organization's Employment Diagnostic Analysis, and GIZ's Employment and Labour Market Analysis, among others. Since its development, our LMA toolkit has successfully been used in more than 20 countries to help implementers and policymakers better understand and develop programmes that can develop linkages between firms that increase efficiency in an economy, to build consensus over contextually appropriate and effective interventions, and provide guidance on measurement and evaluation of workforce development initiatives (Sohnen, 2018).

The FHI 360 LMA expanded upon the traditional LMA, enabling more layers of analysis on the current and future demand for skills in a sector, including identifying opportunities for individuals to upgrade their skills within a sector, by integrating a range of additional tools, but most prominently a *workforce overlay* to a value chain map. A *workforce overlay* to a value chain map allows implementers and policymakers to define the key jobs in the chain, use visual markers for identifying entry points for key skill sets needed, and identify where to implement skills upgrading to maximize resources available, such as through formal or technical education, or vocational training. By pairing value chain maps with workforce overlays showing

specific positions, skill needs, and existing and potential training resources, the LMA provides projects with better understanding of what job demand exists within select sectors and the existing and potential responses of the education system to address opportunities. However, as the LMA is only an assessment, it currently is not linked directly to project activities or outcomes.

Methodology

This paper will examine three case studies of our LMA to present information on its use in assessments and projects that are intended to adapt or develop poverty reduction activities predominately for AGYW, though one project focuses on all youth and other vulnerable groups. These three have been chosen out of the other LMAs that FHI 360 has conducted, as all three took place in sub-Saharan Africa and focus on at least partially or wholly AGYW programming. Each LMA prior to being conducted was given a non-research determination. In each, participant selection was coordinated by programme teams based on scheduling availability and, during focus groups, oral consent scripts were read out and participants were asked to orally confirm or decline willingness to participate in the data collection process. Data was anonymized with no names or identifiers recorded about participants.

The case studies are broken down according to stages of the LMA process. Information for these case studies was gathered from final LMA reports, notes from interviews conducted during the LMAs, secondary sources on relevant technical approaches, three key informant interviews (KIIs) with project managers of the programmes where these LMAs have occurred, and input from LMA teams in each country.

Introducing the cases

Each case summarized in Table 1 represents a completed use of the tool. For USAID, AGYW are defined as falling in between the ages of 10 and 29 (USAID, 2021), though all participants who were beneficiaries of programming linked to the LMA were aged 14 to 24. While two projects have since concluded, the Capacity Development and Support (CDS) project in South Africa, is ongoing – having directly integrated the LMA approach into the early stages of the project to design activities. In two of the three cases, AGYW programme participants were selected using some form of community vulnerability assessment to ensure fair programme access.

Case study analysis

Sector selection

The LMA conducted in Liberia (Galloway et al., 2019) used desk research, macroeconomic data sets, and tools from the LMA toolkit to examine the potential of sectors and their potential for employment and self-employment broadly across Liberia. These included a trade share matrix and product space analysis. Based on this macro guidance, the team then gathered data from employers, NGOs, government

Table 1 Overview of the projects from which the cases were drawn

Country	*Programmatic context*	*Project duration*	*LMA study period*	*Reason for LMA*	*Populations engaged*	*Actors engaged*
Democratic Republic of the Congo	Ebola relief (health/ humanitarian)	2019–2021	2019	To inform programming	Ebola-affected populations in parts of eastern DRC	Govt/ healthcare, humanitarian workers, employers, USAID
Liberia	AGYW employment	2018–2021	2019	To adapt programming	AGYW 14 to 19 years	BRAC, govt, employers
South Africa	DREAMS	2020–2025	2020–2021	To inform programming	AGYW 20 to 24, out of school	Govt, employers, USAID

representatives, a bank, and others, to understand and orient the findings to the reality on the ground and develop several high-level illustrative value chains with opportunity overlays. These findings were also tested through focus group discussions (FGDs) with AGYW, who were asked about the opportunities they saw available, both in terms of common opportunities, and ones that were less well known or were considered more unusual.

The analysis in DRC (Hole and Gebrehiwot, 2020) was based on primary data collected through interviews and FGDs and emphasized income-generating self-employment opportunities that have apparent potential for growth and could be accessible and viable for Ebola-affected communities. Respondents identified the following sectors as having current and future potential for employment or self-employment demand: agriculture/agro-processing, sales/trade, garment production, transportation, construction, and carpentry. While no LMAs with opportunity overlays were developed due to a dearth of sector details and opportunities, this approach helped narratively structure findings on which opportunities for jobs or self-employment could be recommended in each sector.

The South African CDS LMAs differed slightly in that, given the broad nature of the DREAMS programme to provide economic strengthening opportunities, and the significant impact COVID-19 was having, the project did not mandate an industry-specific approach. Instead, it sought opportunities for employment or self-employment in any sector available. Given the depth of data on South Africa, the CDS programme began with a review of existing labour market assessments. However, given the unique challenges that COVID-19 was introducing, many were deemed irrelevant. At the time the team noted, 'the majority of reports predate COVID so their assumptions and projections can't be taken for granted and will have to be examined against the pandemic's effects on the economy' (found in a 'Summary of review of USAID-provided documents for CDS DREAMS LMA', FHI 360 unpublished internal document). The project also hired a consultant to assess economic potential across South Africa, and specifically map private sector partners

and potential linkages with the goal of mapping opportunities to AGYW across all viable sectors in seven target provinces.

Additionally, each LMA occurred in largely informal economies, where jobs can be scarce. In each, new sectors and new formal and informal employment, self-employment or entrepreneurship opportunities were identified that projects had not previously linked programme participants with.

How recommendations were presented for programming opportunities

Programming opportunities and recommendations for the Liberia and DRC cases were similar in terms of structure. Programming opportunities focused more on core programming challenges that have potential to generate actionable programming activities, to support 'quick wins' that would support beneficiaries and community members and offer further areas of potential exploration in the setting up of the project. CDS offered broader recommendations and linkage opportunities, given its simplified approach. In each, these LMAs tried to offer clear steps and actions that could be taken towards implementing an activity.

After completing analysis of the context and findings, the Liberia LMA included programming opportunities guidance concerning: 1) skills-related opportunities, 2) support to vocational training institutions, 3) the need for market information for participants, and 4) the importance of behaviour change in practices towards supporting AGYW to enter 'non-traditional' industries. Both 1) and 3) built on information found in the value chain with the opportunity overlay approach. Under the skills considerations, each made more detailed recommendations around the types of skills needed for different employers by selected value chains, from basic literacy and numeracy, to more robust and deepened technical skills that would enable participants to specialize further. Each also made recommendations on skills related to business start-up and operation or financial literacy, emphasizing the need for such skills even when operating microenterprises.

The DRC LMA differed in that it categorized recommendations on skills trainings into short- and longer-term opportunities, as Scaling Up Ebola Response through Community Engagement (SUERCE) was a rapid response project, and detailing potential opportunities that would extend beyond the life of the project served as a potential resource for future programmes. The DRC LMA also offered recommendations shaped by the challenging context that the project operated in, and the emphasis on immediate responses to the Ebola crisis. First, it emphasized programming opportunities for strengthening basic literacy and numeracy skills. It also noted the opportunity for a participant-led LMA, to engage programme participants in data collection and to provide them with local market data. This differs from the Liberia LMA only in so far as that LMA recommended local market data collection, and making that data available to participants, but didn't specifically call for participant involvement in data collection.

With the Liberia LMA, there was an additional recommendation to encourage programming activities that would interface with polices relevant for youth, not just AGYW. These included policies that supported investment in certain key sectors

AGYW could engage in – an empowerment act that supported preference for state engagement with small businesses and opportunities generated by new special economic zones. The Liberia LMA recommended opportunities for programmes to provide mutual support, or layering, in certain instances where developed resources from one could support participants in another, and to provide AYGW participants with access to understanding of opportunities through localized LMAs with opportunity overlays.

With the focus of the CDS LMAs on provincial-level opportunities for generating linkages, the presentation of the findings differed slightly from the above cases. The Gauteng Labor Market Assessment Report (LMA) (unpublished) identifies where there is alignment and misalignment of AGYW skills with market demand. It notes that while there are growth sectors with potential, the lack of aligned skills keeps AGYW excluded. It also details the alignment of training institutions with market actors, and notes how such institutions engage with employers, indicating that supporting AGYW to build skills would be beneficial as local institutions have proactively sought linkages to employers. Finally, it details specific opportunities for linkage generation with such training institutions. The Gauteng LMA is like the other cases in terms of finding importance in deepening skills training. However, because of the focus on linkages, creating actionable programming from this finding, and being aimed at internal programming, it does not offer additional or broader programming opportunities, nor provide in-depth or illustrative LMAs with overlays. Instead, such findings are inserted directly into an employer opportunity linkage database.

Discussion and lessons learned

Findings and themes

In all three cases, AGYW or AGYW and other vulnerable populations were squarely the target population of these LMAs in identifying economic livelihood support. This deliberately provided more insight into the needs of these populations compared to more traditional LMAs or value chain analyses, while also maintaining a focus on market demand. The findings from the case studies demonstrate confluence in the four following areas detailed below, suggesting how best to adapt or develop poverty-reducing interventions aimed at AGYW.

Programming around skills. With the value chain map with overlay at the centre of our approach, each LMA grounded its qualitative data collection by first using quantitative trade and macroeconomic data to understand the growth potential of different industries from a country-level viewpoint. This helped establish orientation to sectors that had broad potential employment or self-employment, before undertaking qualitative KIIs and FGDs to map the selected value chains and develop opportunity overlays as lists or visual maps, articulating needs around key jobs, skills for those jobs, and new self-employment or entrepreneurial opportunities. In each, a gender analysis was also included, looking at what role gender might play in the viability of each sector and set

of opportunities as a realistic means of livelihoods and poverty alleviation for participants.

In each, employers both formal and informal reported large skills deficits in youth and vulnerable AGYW groups. This was mirrored in the findings of the FGDs, where AGYW acknowledged their desire to learn technical or soft skills, depending on country, that would help them enter work or start their own work. What was surprising to find in these contexts was the degree to which employers acknowledged the importance of engaging AGYW in traditionally male-dominated work, and the potential that employers thought AGYW had as employees. These comments appear to be based on anecdotal experience from employing AGYW previously. However, skills remained a major barrier in almost every sector, with many of the value chain analyses with opportunity overlays illustrating multiple viable points of entry for AGYW, if they had the right skills. Overwhelmingly the needs were technical as compared to 'soft' skills, as many jobs required some degree of technical expertise as a hiring requirement, apparently due to their ease of assessment compared to less tangible soft skills. Many businesses in the informal sector, contrary to existing evidence (Lippman et al., 2015), didn't appear to possess an interest in the more nuanced role soft skills might play in employee performance when compared to the more tangible outputs of specific technical skills.

Support for vocational training. In all three LMAs, findings indicated that vocational schools of sufficient quality offered skills training at a level that would enable AGYW to access entry-level jobs or gain enough skill to start a microenterprise, which is corroborated by some evidence outside these LMAs (Psilos and Galloway, 2018). While the ease of access to and quality of vocational programmes varied in each country, employers frequently indicated the direct line between such applied skills and particular roles they would likely have available for AGYW. In each instance, challenges around paying for, or physically accessing, vocational courses remained for AGYW, including a lack of quality vocational partners and centres. In each instance it was apparent that project implementers may not have known the extent or quality of training at vocational programmes and did not understand the importance and link between such programmes and the feasibility of AGYW finding work. It appeared that participants instead often participated in vocational programmes that had the lowest cost and shortest training time, both of which could undermine quality and effectiveness, and contributes to negative vocational perspectives. The impact of quality vocational training on livelihoods and self-employment, along with cost effectiveness, is another area of potential study.

Participants' need for market information. When examining the prospects for both employment and self-employment, all three LMAs found that market information was important for AGYW. This was particularly important in all three markets which were highly informal. It was found that previous projects had not included any substantial or updated mapping or examination of what market opportunities existed, or demand for products or services in the market, including drawing the clear link that the value chain with opportunity overlay can provide. This crucial

gap meant that while livelihoods programming approaches may have been applied, the end market linkage to what employers and the market demanded was absent. With CDS, the programme is currently developing linkages between participants and employers and self-employment opportunities, based on findings and opportunities mapped during the LMA. While the LMAs for CDS are not complete, the use of the LMA to guide participants is demonstrating the value in knowing which markets have demand for certain jobs and skills – in making linkages to both continued training or directly to work. In addition, once participants undergo a 'youth-led' LMA training, which is part of the CDS programme design, AGYW will be equipped to gather information, hold conversations with actors in different value chains, develop a map of opportunities in their own communities, and gather their own information to understand market opportunities for (self) employment.

Importance of changing perceptions on AGYW entry into new jobs. In all three LMAs, emphasis has been placed on opening up opportunities for AGYW in non-traditional employment sectors. In two instances, previous livelihoods activities – prior to these LMAs – predominantly focused on sectors that were 'traditionally' women-oriented, such as hair salons, cosmetics, and cooking. In the instance of DRC, no previous programming recommendations existed. In the case of Liberia, while previous livelihood programming existed, analysis to back it up was limited and focused on 'traditional' women's roles. This may have been due to programming choices based only on what AGYW saw as opportunities, which was also shaped by traditional negative gender stereotypes. In the case of CDS, several opportunities have been identified, especially through paid internships and apprenticeships, though many will require AGYW to develop new skills to take on these jobs. This is broadly true of the other two country LMA examples as well, though because the focus of those two was just on assessment, it did not directly track any feasibility of linking AGYW to jobs.

Challenges and limitations

In addition to successes, the cases also allow one to identify challenges that arose from the use of the LMA approach. The following issues that emerged from identified opportunities of the LMA approach are worth further study.

One challenging aspect of AGYW entering into previously male-dominated sectors is the risk of sexual harassment and exploitation. In Liberia and CDS, AGYW noted instances of being asked for sexual favours in exchange for a chance to apply for a job. The DRC LMA noted that women in both rural and urban settings emphasized sexual harassment as a barrier to female economic participation. The LMA recommended that businesses conduct sexual harassment training for both male and female workers. The LMA also noted that programmes that promote income-generating activities outside of the home have an increased burden to safeguard, with risk mitigation and sensitization strategies needing to be established and monitored. As the CDS programme is ongoing, once AGYW have been linked to opportunities, this data will be

tracked, and the programme will implement approaches to mitigate these risks. Given the extremely serious nature these risks pose it should be considered a major area in need of further study.

Several limitations to our approach also exist. First, in all three cases, ultimately analysis and programming opportunities stem from qualitative data collection. While quantitative tools from the LMA toolkit and economists were used to orient to growth sectors in each country, findings are still largely based on qualitative analysis of mostly the informal sector and remain challenging to navigate. In each case, programming should always be updated as contexts change. This fact has been driven home by the impact of COVID-19 on these three country contexts. While the LMA offers adaptability to challenging contexts, it would need to be conducted during the crisis in question to still hold relevance for a context.

An additional limitation comes from how the LMA has been used in several of these cases. While information generated by the LMAs is useful, it is a study, not a set of programme activities, so without broader integration of the tool into direct programming activities or design, its findings will carry less value or potential for positive impact. One area of further study would include developing indicators linking specific findings of an LMA to programme activities and outcomes, drawing a more direct link to positive outcomes. For example, the LMA does not study changes in participant income, nor the diversity of dietary options, though those are areas of important study, and would be interesting outcome links if an LMA were to connect specific findings to those activities and outcomes. In Liberia, findings from the LMAs have since been integrated into programming. For BRAC's ELA model – which is where, through a peer mentorship model, girls learn about gender issues, women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and family planning, financial literacy, business skills, soft skills like conflict resolution and negotiation, and more (Together For Girls, n.d.) – the LMA helped inform the 'career pathways' modules delivered to AGYW by peer mentors. This impacted the approach for the overall ELA curriculum and in Liberia, specifically emphasized the exploration of (and entry into) non-traditional job opportunities for AGYW in a community, such as in trades or digital sectors. SUERCE, which integrated the LMA into mapping opportunities, was unable to act on the findings prior to COVID-19. As a result, despite findings that could have been implemented, funding was instead used for support and response to COVID-19. The CDS programme in South Africa is the only one of the examples to still be integrating findings from LMA activities into the programme, due to its inclusion in the initial CDS programme design. As CDS is ongoing, it is not possible to analyse a broader outcome, though it is apparent that the LMAs and high-level opportunity overlay findings have served to identify market linkages and orient training for AGYW more towards sectors with potential demand for workers. A key detail that is not yet known is how much the LMA successfully maps out and informs sectors or informal and formal actors that then become successful linkage opportunities for AGYW, compared to a less structured approach to engaging market actors.

Conclusion and going forward

This review found that the tool achieved its intended use to include input from both market-oriented actors as well as intended AGYW participants. It also has identified at least four areas of confluence in programming recommendations. These stem from the inclusion of AGYW considerations in developing poverty reduction programming and the input of growth sector relevant actors.

We recognize that working at FHI 360, which developed this approach and led its use, involves the potential for bias toward this tool. We attempted to minimize this bias by noting challenges or weaknesses where they were perceived and including the voices of implementing partners or clients when possible. This paper is not intended as a statement towards or evidence that this LMA approach is 'better' or more impactful than other similar tools. This is beyond the scope of this study and would be a welcome area for additional research and publication.

Additional limitations include the fact that two of the three cases cited stem from a period before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has disrupted many programmes aimed at increasing income-generating activities for AGYW. Moreover, these case studies were derived from the use of our LMA approach and tools in circumstances in which clients had not initially intended for its use to be studied. Going forward, greater intentionality should be used when the LMA approach and toolkit are implemented, to provide a sound foundation from which more rigorous data and evidence might be gathered. This could include a more deliberate examination of budget, level of effort, and resourcing, in contrast to findings or resulting programming activities.

By introducing the use of this LMA approach and toolkit in case studies, we are taking the first step in reviewing and more rigorously analysing this tool, which may offer alternatives to those seeking a resource to bridge programming between market-oriented activities and those focused solely on AGYW and other vulnerable populations. We hope that practitioners, governments, and academics will carry forward the use and study of this approach and toolkit and support the work of filling in the evidence base on its use, and the strength of programming outcomes that it can identify to reduce extreme poverty and further a more inclusive market for all AGYW.

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