

# Gender inclusion in market systems programming

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines gender inclusion and women's empowerment with a market systems lens. It draws on an earlier gender inclusion framework for market systems commissioned by the M4P Hub and published as a Springfield Paper in 2012 as well as an updated and expanded version of the framework published by the BEAM Exchange in 2016. This paper provides a brief background on the M4P context for gender inclusion, explores the evolution of intentional gender inclusion in economic market systems programming since 2008, outlines proven approaches to influence and facilitate private sector engagement, and describes supplementary time-bound approaches to promote and support inclusive market systems change that benefits women. It concludes with a set of guiding principles for inclusive market systems, presenting concepts that are fundamental to our understanding of gender inclusion.*

**Keywords:** women's economic empowerment, gender equality, M4P, market systems, inclusive market systems, gender

## Introduction

The Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) approach offers a ground-breaking framework for addressing the systemic failures faced by disadvantaged people. The M4P approach has influenced how we tackle poverty – in economic, education, health, and other sectors – where market weaknesses affect the lives of the poor. This paper specifically examines gender inclusion and women's empowerment within economic systems. It draws on an earlier gender inclusion framework for market systems commissioned by the M4P Hub and published as a Springfield Paper in 2012 (Jones, 2012) as well as an updated and expanded version of the framework published by the BEAM Exchange in 2016 (Jones, 2016).

This paper provides a brief background on the M4P context for gender inclusion, explores the evolution of intentional gender inclusion in economic market systems programming since 2008, outlines proven approaches to influence and facilitate private sector engagement, and describes supplementary time-bound approaches to promote and support inclusive market systems change that benefits women. It concludes with a set of guiding principles for inclusive market systems, presenting concepts that are fundamental to our understanding of gender inclusion (Jones and Bramm, 2019).

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## Background

The systems approach, as defined in the original M4P guidance documents (The Springfield Centre, 2008a, b, c), was criticized by some for not explicitly tackling social exclusion and therefore paying insufficient attention to the systemic constraints faced by marginalized people, especially women. However, this criticism is not founded in the original M4P conceptualization, as evidenced by the following quote from the guidance documents:

M4P recognizes that conventional economic theory is not enough. That is, in conventional economics, markets are seen to operate under conditions of perfect competition and perfect information with rational market players. ... This thinking does not take into consideration how people behave within market systems or market imperfections such as asymmetry and externalities (The Springfield Centre, 2008a: 12).

The Springfield guidance documents further emphasized the importance of context and going beyond purely economic analysis to look at behaviour and other dynamics in a market system; that is, the M4P approach explicitly seeks to understand and address underlying causes so as not to treat superficial symptoms that typically offer only temporary relief. For example, a common assumption may be that certain farmers do not use improved fertilizers or irrigation technologies due to lack of access to these technologies. However, analysis of underlying causes might reveal, for example, that target male farmers do not have clear title to the land that they cultivate, and they fear losing access to the land if they invest in its improvement. In the case of women farmers, gendered analysis may further uncover that women not only have little or no access to land, but that their use of fertilizers is limited by socio-cultural norms that restrict their access to markets, finance, chemicals, or other needed supports and services.

The Springfield M4P guidance documents have always underscored that there is no single analytical tool that should steer the research process but a range of tools from which to draw, for example, socio-economic studies, poverty assessments, livelihoods analysis, competitiveness analysis, value chain analysis, regulatory review, and stakeholder analysis, among others. The original M4P documents also promote a participatory approach to research to uncover details of the lived reality of the target group (The Springfield Centre, 2008a: 41). These two factors alone have allowed M4P to grow beyond its own guidance documents – a testament to the power of the approach – opening the door to the development of tools, methods, and techniques that can enrich a market system, make it more equitable, and advance in new and unexpected ways.

While the 2008 series of M4P publications was ground-breaking, it did not offer practical guidance on how to deal with gender exclusion. While some M4P advocates adopted a strict 'doing deals with the private sector' approach, relying on business partners to overcome exclusion barriers, other practitioners delved deeper into methods for greater inclusion made possible by the M4P lens. The original body of work was followed over time by case studies and field experiences that offered examples of how to deal with gender biases and barriers,

by influencing the attitudes and behaviour of private sector actors, government and civil society partners as well as women, their households, and communities. As a result of these contributions and a re-examination of the approach and guidance needed, gender inclusion was more robustly addressed in the updated and refined Operational Guide (The Springfield Centre, 2015) and by a range of market systems publications.

## The evolution of more intentional gender and social inclusion

An early central debate that has impacted the adoption of market systems development as an approach for women's economic empowerment (WEE) was whether increased income from enterprise or employment can alone advance women's empowerment. Researchers and practitioners have argued that economic development is not necessarily empowering for women and might in fact be disempowering. Simon-Kumar (2011) posited that issues such as women's time and work burden, control of income, and decision-making authority were dimensions of empowerment that could suffer as women became more economically active. However, others (for example, the World Bank, 2011; Kabeer et al., 2011; CIDA and UN Women, 2011) brought forth compelling arguments that women's economic advancement does support women's socio-economic empowerment.

The emerging evidence on the alignment of women's economic development with socio-economic empowerment coincided with and became imbedded in the proliferation of market system initiatives around the world. This resulted in the impetus to revisit the explicit incorporation of gender inclusion within the M4P approach. A framework document for M4P and women's economic empowerment (the 'M4P WEE Framework'; Jones, 2012) was therefore commissioned by the M4P Hub as part of a multi-donor (DFID, SDC, Sida) effort to strengthen the market systems approach, and to encourage dialogue and consensus-building on how to prioritize and operationalize women's economic empowerment within M4P initiatives.

The commissioned document married WEE and M4P in a single framework by:

- unpacking definitions of women's economic empowerment and identifying elements that are compatible with sustainable economic development;
- presenting definitions, principles, and an approach that are consistent with the basic tenets of market systems development;
- aligning women's economic empowerment methods with the facilitation role of market systems programmes; and
- reinforcing the scalability and sustainability of M4P projects while taking women's economic empowerment into account (Jones, 2012, 2016).

The M4P WEE Framework concluded that to achieve women's economic empowerment in market systems programming, it was necessary to define women's economic empowerment and its main elements. As a result of research and analysis presented in the framework, a tightly worded definition was not offered, but rather a summary of the key dimensions of empowerment that could guide M4P practitioners in gender inclusion and women's empowerment efforts (Jones, 2012) (see Box 1).

**Box 1 Common dimensions defining women's economic empowerment**

- ✓ Economic advancement – increased income and return on labour

**Access dimensions**

- ✓ Access to opportunities and life chances such as skills development or job openings
- ✓ Access to assets, services, and supports needed to advance economically

**Agency dimensions**

- ✓ Decision-making authority in different spheres including household finances
- ✓ Control over manageable workloads

Since its publication in 2012, the M4P WEE Framework has been widely adopted and adapted, demonstrating the potential for systems approaches to be compatible with gender inclusion and women's economic empowerment in some of the world's most challenging environments. In particular, the work of AIP-PRISMA in Indonesia; Katalyst and M4C in Bangladesh; the Market Development Facility in the Indo-Pacific region; Kenya Market Trust; Financial Sector Deepening Zambia; the Arab Women's Enterprise Fund in Egypt, Jordan, and Palestine; Alliances Lesser Caucasus Program; and Mennonite Economic Development Associates' (MEDA) Ghana GROW and Myanmar IMOW projects, to name a few. Experiences have been widely documented, many of which were summarized in an updated guidance document on M4P and WEE: *The WEAMS Framework – Women's Empowerment and Markets Systems: Concepts, Practical Guidance and Tools* (Jones, 2016) published by the BEAM Exchange. Beyond M4P, there have of course been other learnings in inclusive economic development such as the work by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and others around women's empowerment in agriculture (IFPRI, n.d.).

Market systems practitioners have developed valuable approaches for working directly with businesses to encourage the inclusion of women as viable actors in market systems – reflecting the M4P 'who does, who pays' analysis for sustainability. These approaches encourage and incentivize based on economic motivations alone. For example, women offer new markets for products and services; women can be excellent suppliers of raw materials to traders, processors, and other 'core' actors; women are often reliable and productive employees who expand labour pools; and women contribute to or even control buying decisions in the majority of households globally.

Practitioners have also learned there is value in time-bound approaches that can catalyse or reinforce women's engagement in economic systems before or during market entry. Compatible with market systems approaches, although not core to them, time-bound support at the project, household, and community levels both prepare women to engage with markets and pave the way with their direct supporters (project staff, families, community members) to ultimately achieve more equitable engagement in market systems. There is recognition that this work is frequently best carried out by local partners such as civil society actors that are a part of the local system and can sustain ongoing learning and gendered support.

Direct private sector engagement and time-bound approaches are described in more detail below in the next two sections.

### **Greater inclusion in direct private sector engagement**

Utilizing the key M4P tool of ‘who does, who pays’, market systems programmes have been able to actively promote gender inclusion among private sector actors. This requires demonstrating and even convincing private sector actors of the business case to engage with women as consumers, suppliers, and employees. The following points illustrate how this mutual reinforcement – gender inclusion and business growth – can be teased out through market systems assessment, presented to private sector partners and then applied in gendered interventions.

- What is the business case for encouraging private sector partners to serve women in the system – do they offer a new or expanded business opportunity?
  - Do women represent a new market segment for business partners as consumers of products and services?
  - Would working with women lead to greater profitability for businesses by reducing costs or increasing revenues?
  - Could a business realize increased efficiency by working with women in situations where they may be more suited to the work?
  - Would a business have access to higher volumes of raw materials – from agricultural outputs to textiles for garment and handicraft manufacturing – if engaged with women suppliers?
  - Might a business expect improved quality from engaging with women suppliers who are responsible for certain aspects of production?
- What are the challenges and risks for private sector partners to engage with women? What can the programme do to mitigate the challenges and risks, and create a demonstration effect?
- How will women’s empowerment be impacted by involvement in the interventions? Will they have higher incomes, better jobs, improved access, increased control and decision-making, greater return on labour, more manageable workloads?
- What challenges will be faced in facilitating private sector change? Are there critical barriers or challenges for women that will need to be addressed by the facilitating organization or its partners?
- What opportunities can be leveraged? Are there social norms that will facilitate the intervention (e.g. women’s current roles and social attitudes that support women’s work in the sector)?

Once these questions have been answered, the market systems programme must design interventions that incentivize private sector partners to work with women while strengthening their beneficial inclusion in the market system. This can be achieved by:

- Mastering the facts and figures about women’s roles and contributions in the market system to promote the value of women as consumers of products and services, suppliers, employees, or partners.

- Considering business partners' growth aspirations and the roles women can play in that growth.
- Highlighting opportunities for business partners to have access to more customers, higher volumes of raw materials or other commercial advantages.
- Educating potential partners on women's roles and contributions in the market system that, if overlooked, will negatively impact the overall success of business partners' work.
- Developing inclusive innovations which will create business incentives for partners: for example, made by women for women.
- Continuing to consider the local context and social norms.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (n.d.) Gender Integration Criteria offer a useful articulation of the difference between *gender intentional* activities and *gender transformative* activities. Gender intentional activities reduce gaps in access to resources, while gender transformative activities deal with power relations and gaps in agency. In the case of financial services, for example, products such as savings accounts, loans, and insurance might become available to women (gender intentional) but women's ability to access those resources with equal power/agency may be more challenging to achieve (gender transformative).

Incentives for private sector partners can be used to promote behaviour change on the part of the business so need to be predicated on strong business motivations as described above. Once businesses are interested in gender inclusion, the changes they need to make can be fairly simple. For example, Kenya Market Trust worked with its partners to improve engagement of women through activities such as the following (Jones, 2016):

- *Contents of informational and promotional material* appropriate to women's educational and socio-cultural background as well as their specific roles in the sector. For example, if women are illiterate, then business materials can use pictorial cues. Multi-media can also be a useful tool for illiterate women.
- *Locations of meetings, trainings, demo plots, etc.* accessible by women and in some instances, relatively close to where women live in a non-threatening environment. This will be driven by context – socio-cultural norms and women's household responsibilities. Some business representatives meet women at workplaces (e.g. during suitable hours).
- *Timing of interactions convenient to women's schedule* in the workplace and at home. There are context-specific times of day that are more convenient for women to interact with business partners and their staff. The social context will need to be determined and will be dependent on the service or product offered by the business.
- *Invitations to both women and men for meetings, trainings, expos, demos, etc.* so they both feel welcome. It has been found that business engagement invitations are often addressed to the head of the household (usually male) or to the household in general. In these cases, the assumption is often that invitations are for men alone if women are not explicitly included.
- *Sensitivity to gender norms is key for women's participation.* In some cultures, mixed groups are natural and comfortable, in others family groups are considered

appropriate, while in others segregated groups are preferred. The gender of the business partner or their staff may need to be considered.

This section has offered a few insights into how it is possible to work directly with private sector partners to promote inclusive change in market systems. This direct work may be accelerated by other types of interventions discussed in the following section.

### **Time-bound approaches to support market systems change**

As introduced above, many organizations that facilitate market systems change have added time-bound and/or pre- or post-market entry interventions to smooth the way for gender inclusion. These approaches are in addition to the core M4P work and seek to create the circumstances for social change within the implementing organization, as well as across local communities, households, and individuals, even dealing with some very challenging social issues, such as gender-based violence, which can impact women's ability to function in market systems (see for example Hughes et al., 2015). This work is often carried out and sustained separately by a civil society partner or government agency alongside core market systems work. The following sections examine the value of such parallel initiatives and how they bolster gender inclusion in market systems programming.

### ***Organizational transformation and capacity building***

An institutional and community transformation process to programming can contribute to meaningful and long-lasting change in organizational cultures and individual employee attitudes regarding women's empowerment. This method employs project funds to change the 'gender system' of organizations and communities, build capacities, and enable the gendered effectiveness of market systems facilitation.

CARE's global Pathways programme offers an interesting case of institutional and individual change that can be foundational for inclusive economic growth (Nurul, 2016; Jones, 2016). The goal of the Pathways programme is to empower women in agricultural sectors across regions and countries. It is based on the conviction that 'women farmers possess enormous potential to contribute to long-term food security for their families and substantially impact nutritional outcomes in sustainable ways'.

In the Pathways programme, CARE pioneered a participatory mid-term evaluation to focus on socio-cultural changes that had impacted women's economic inclusion at the household level and in their communities. A key objective of the process was not just to measure change, but also to use the process to transform both the organization (CARE) as well as project communities, to support the internalization of gendered understanding and to further build capacity for market system change. As part of a project evaluation, the cost is covered in the short term by the project or the organization itself, with the expectation that transformational change will be systemic and enduring within the organization.

CARE worked with programme staff to directly participate in the evaluation process and engage in conversations with community members about changes they had observed or experienced. The themes of the evaluation were: women and men's current understanding of 'empowerment'; shifts that had taken place in women and men's behaviours and thinking around empowerment; changes in community leaders' practices and views; and the status of decision-making authority in the household and at the community level. By engaging CARE staff in the process, they reported that it transformed not only their view of gender relations but also their vision of what is possible to achieve in gender inclusion as a development agency. This experience illustrates how capacity building of practitioners through novel organizational approaches can be utilized to discourage exclusionary institutional biases that may still prevail and negatively impact gender inclusion in a market systems programme.

The above is one example of an approach to advance both organizational change and capacity building. Implementation challenges are largely around capacity of local staff and partners for whom gender inclusion and women's empowerment may be new areas of practice. MEDA has found that a significant amount of effort is required to raise awareness of gender bias, train staff and partners in approaches to creating more gender equitable market systems, and building approaches to monitor and evaluate the same. Recommendations for capacity building go beyond the scope of this paper; however, a very helpful article that was added to the literature in 2018 (Stoian et al.) presents a review of seven guides for gender-equitable value chain development. The study found that the guides advocate persuasively the integration of gender into programming; however, it raises concerns about implementation issues and the gaps that persist in coverage of gender-based constraints in collective enterprises, the influence of norms on gender relations, and processes to transform inequitable relations. The article also notes that guidance for field implementation is weak and there are opportunities for conceptual and methodological innovation to address the varying roles, needs, and aspirations of women and men in value chain development (Stoian et al., 2018).

### ***Engagement at individual, household, and community levels***

Groups that are excluded from market systems are often confronted by hurdles that are much more daunting than economic constraints alone; women, for example, face pervasive social, legal, and cultural barriers implied in the informal rules of the M4P framework. These informal rules cut across all parts of the system inhibiting women's participation in the economic sphere due to prejudice and power imbalances in transactions, discrimination in access to supporting products and services, differential treatment in formal rules and regulations, and the biased attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of other market system actors. Various methodologies, for example confidence and skills building, networking, leadership training, and gender champions, have been layered onto market systems programmes to prepare women and other excluded groups for mainstreaming into market systems. Drawing from private sector terminology, this has been labelled a 'push-pull' approach in market systems thinking. In a 2015 paper, Garloch states that push-pull responds to the need 'not only to



facilitate more competitive systems, but more inclusive and resilient systems as well' (Garloch, 2015). As such, this is not an M4P 'who does, who pays' approach, but a time-bound activity that sets the stage for transformation in the market system.

Practitioner experiences have shown that strategies which directly engage women can enable them to overcome persistent gender-based discrimination, even before women are ready to enter the market system (Faveri et al., 2015). For example, Ghana GROW, a CA\$22 m (US\$16.8 m) project in remote areas of northern Ghana, successfully integrated over 20,000 women smallholder farmers into mainstream markets. As part of this project, MEDA first facilitated time-bound approaches to stimulate pre-market entry demand for services: awareness raising through various media from radio and phone, participatory tools such as focus group discussions and village savings groups add-on sessions to enhance understanding and adoption, and more. These initiatives were carried out alongside incentivizing private sector engagement among buyers, input suppliers, and financial service providers that were strengthening the market system while women were being primed to participate in that system (MEDA, n.d.).

The intent is that these short-term project initiatives will build sufficient gender inclusion and women's empowerment to enable gendered market systems change to continue over time (see for example, Bekkers et al., 2015). MEDA's experience in Ghana demonstrates that even hard-to-reach groups can be beneficially integrated into market systems with a time-bound, pre-market push which creates the conditions for market systems facilitation and private sector engagement.

### *Dealing with challenging social issues*

In some cases, social issues such as women's workload and gender-based violence have seemed out of the purview of M4P programmes – even for upfront short-term interventions. And yet, tackling these very issues can facilitate women's contribution to a target market system and promote their benefit from engagement at the same time. For example, the challenges of time poverty and women's workload have long been a consideration in development circles. 'The assumption that women's empowerment automatically results from engagement in paid employment has been widely contested' (Sancar and Bieri, 2009). That is, paid employment or enterprise opportunities can overburden women without providing them with greater control of resources or decision-making authority. Women may be involved in unpaid work at home (e.g. farm labour, elder care, household work) as well as informal paid work such as piecework and seasonal agricultural labour that do not decrease with the arrival of other income-earning opportunities. However, Sancar and Bieri (2009), along with others, provide guidance on how women's economic programmes can be sensitively designed – taking into consideration aspects such as clear objectives, research and analysis, and refinement of monitoring and evaluation. Kabeer (2009) proposed a range of interventions that can support women and redistribute unpaid labour: encourage public investment in infrastructure including water, roads, and electricity; promote women's participation in planning of infrastructure and other projects; facilitate growth in affordable child and elder care; and encourage men's involvement in unpaid household work.

**Table 1** Mapping project solutions to women's workload challenges

<b>Change</b>	Adapt market system to work around care	Reduce arduous and inefficient care tasks	Redistribute some responsibility	Improve women's representation and agency (bottom up)	Influence norms and regulations (top down)
<b>Examples</b>	Change location of collection points Change timing of training	Labour-saving equipment (e.g. laundry facilities) Prepared foods (labour-saving product)	Provision of crèche Health services (e.g. at work or in the community)	Women's social capital (e.g. support groups) Quotas for women in leadership	Influence social norms Support for women's collective action to change regulations

Source: Maestre and Thorpe, 2016

More recently, market systems research conducted by the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) researchers Maestre and Thorpe (2016) found that solutions to address problematic aspects of care provision can create changes that: adapt market systems based on the recognition of care responsibilities; reduce arduous and inefficient care tasks; or redistribute responsibility from women to men or from the household to the community, state, or market by using a facilitating approach. Maestre and Thorpe found that the right solutions can improve women's representation and agency, or influence existing norms and regulations. Table 1 presents a simple mapping of the changes programmes can facilitate (developed further in Maestre and Thorpe, 2016). While some of the activities in the table can be facilitated by a market systems approach – for example incentivizing private sector actors to change collection points, changing timing of training offered by businesses, and the sale of labour-saving equipment – others need to occur alongside facilitation approaches to enable women to engage in the target market system.

Implementation of these interventions involves working with market actors – government agencies, community organizations, cooperatives, and businesses – to identify (and unlock) the incentives for changes that either accommodate unpaid care responsibilities or offer alternative solutions.

## Guiding principles for inclusion in market systems programming

A set of principles were first outlined in the original M4P WEE Framework to guide policy makers and practitioners in their inclusion of women in market systems programming. These guiding principles have been updated and expanded, drawing from a recent publication on women's empowerment in market systems (Jones and Bamm, 2019).

The principle of **context and intersectionality** has long recognized that women are not a homogeneous group (for example, AWID, 2004); they live in different socio-cultural contexts with varying political, business, and geographic environments. Within a specific context, women are differentiated by class, caste, religion, race, and ethnicity, facing dissimilar barriers and unequal access to

opportunities. Further, as intersectional analysis aims to reveal, the combining of multiple identities leads to distinct experiences rather than a simple addition of multiple experiences. For example, the difference in barriers and opportunities for a rural woman in India versus an urban woman in India is not a straightforward distinction between rural and urban, as other factors such as class, caste, and education affect outcomes.

The second principle recognizes that **constraints manifest differently** for women and men. That is, the typical market constraints may be in the same areas: weak land tenure, insufficient productive knowledge and skills, limited access to technology, and lack of services including finance. But how these manifest, and the nuances of the barrier, are gendered phenomena. As noted above, M4P provides guidelines for analysis to determine underlying constraints that interfere with market success and leverage points that would enable change for the target group – poor people. However, the analysis of such constraints and opportunities must be gendered, and programme design should be based on understanding the differences between women and men's underlying constraints. Men for example may lack title to land due to customary ownership without legal documentation. Women, on the other hand, may have access to land as provided by their families, but have no customary rights over land or legal rights.

The third principle takes the stand that **gender-neutral is gender-blind**. *Gender blind* refers to the lack of recognition that the roles and responsibilities assigned to women and men are determined by socio-cultural norms and political and economic contexts (UN Women, n.d.). Gender blind programmes do not consider the diverse situations of women and men resulting from these assigned roles, and do not attempt to change the status quo. *Gender neutral* originally referred to language that could be more inclusive by not giving prominence to the male gender; for example, changing the word *mankind* to *humankind*. In development, policy makers and practitioners at times refer to their work as gender neutral, implying they do not give preference to one gender over the other. However, similar to gender blind, gender neutral does not acknowledge that economies, sectors, business relationships, and communities have typically been male dominated, so in order not to favour men nor further disadvantage women, programme activities must be gender inclusive and proactively address the gap, rather than widening the gender equality gap (Jones and Bramm, 2019).

The fourth principle encourages us to be aware of **trends and externalities** that impact contexts for gender inclusion in sometimes obvious and at other times more subtle ways. War, for example, places a huge burden on women and, in the most extreme cases, the systematic abuse of women becomes a weapon of war. But in less dramatic ways, the creep of climate change and the new Sustainable Development Goals along with shifting priorities of aid agencies, and the exposure of millions or even billions of youth to social media worldwide are changing gendered norms, attitudes, and behaviours. In market systems programming, we cannot assume that the world of just a decade ago is the same as today. We need to look anew at contexts, be aware of trends, and understand

externalities that may positively or negatively affect our desire to improve market systems, particularly to work better for women.

The fifth principle, **spheres of engagement**, emphasizes that women, like all economic actors, engage in different spheres: individual, household/community, institutions, and sectors (see for example, DFID, 2011). In some analyses, the spheres are described in terms of micro, meso, and macro levels. Constraints and opportunities are different depending on the sphere of engagement, and success in one sphere may be thwarted by dynamics in another: for example, even if a woman comes from a progressive household where she is empowered, the workplace may not offer the same respect/opportunities, or vice versa. Moreover, when designing and facilitating gender-inclusive initiatives, market systems practitioners benefit from analysing how factors at two levels of the enabling environment affect women's participation and advancement in economic systems. On the one hand, as discussed here, it is necessary to consider the constraints and opportunities that gendered social norms present in the upgrading of women's contributions to and benefits from market growth. On the other hand, there are laws and regulations that may restrict women from participating in economic opportunities that are commonly available to men. Engaging a variety of stakeholders at multiple levels (which leads into our final principle) early in the design phase of a market systems project ensures that the multidimensional factors of the enabling environment are strengthened to holistically tackle gender disparities and promote WEE beyond the life of the project (King and Schneider, 2019).

Finally, the sixth principle is acknowledgement that **collaboration** with local partners or communities is key to a holistic development process where there is an interplay between market systems facilitation and gender inclusion. Collaboration with partners in private, public, and civil society, across a range of agencies, and at various levels, is critical in achieving long-term change in societies such as attitudes, beliefs, and norms around gender inclusion and women's economic empowerment. Local civil society partners will have strong knowledge of norms and attitudes, barriers, and even opportunities. However, international NGOs may bring best practice and lessons learned to the table and can be effective facilitators so long as they recognize that their role is temporary and their focus is to develop local capacity and sustainability.

## Conclusion

The industry's understanding of the characteristics of and the interplay between social and economic dimensions of inclusion has become much richer in recent years due to the M4P foundational thinking and leadership. Programmes around the globe have reshaped gender inclusion in market systems practice, adding new approaches and tools. Policy makers and practitioners are better versed in the complexity of the challenges as well as more equipped to design and implement innovative solutions. Today, addressing gender and other forms of social exclusion (disability, ethnicity, extreme poverty, etc.) is a standard requirement of aid agencies, receiving comprehensive support from think tanks, a growing pool of qualified experts and other service providers. There is no longer a need to shy away from

inclusion in market systems programmes; in fact, it is incumbent upon us to take the opportunity and resources to contribute to needed societal transformation around the globe.

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