

# WOMEN'S LIVELIHOODS AND RESILIENCE IN COMPLEX AND VOLATILE ENVIRONMENTS

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**An Analysis of Best Practices**

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# Key Messages

1. As the nature of emergencies is rapidly changing and global development challenges are becoming more pressing than ever, women are particularly at risk of bearing the harmful social and economic impact of recurring shocks and stresses. There is a need to identify effective, sustainable, cost-effective and innovative practices to strengthen the capacity of women to reduce risks and vulnerabilities, while preserving and strengthening their rights, dignity, livelihoods and overall well-being.
2. The core objectives of women's livelihood programs should be defined around these deliverables:
  - Women meet basic vital subsistence needs without resorting to negative coping mechanisms.
  - Women generate income and assets to meet needs in a sustainable manner.
  - Women have information about, and can access and control, economic resources.
  - Women can anticipate and mitigate shocks and stress and reduce the latter's harmful impact on their social and economic well-being and those of their families.<sup>5</sup>Ultimately, social and economic well-being is achieved when major vulnerabilities are meaningfully reduced, and when the exposure of women, their families and communities to more risks is eliminated or significantly lowered.
3. Successful women's livelihood programs must analyze gender roles, norms, power and other social dynamics, to durably transform power relations between women and men.
4. Livelihood interventions should embrace a system-based approach which recognizes that isolated interventions are not sufficient to address root causes and complex problems. Livelihood programming should integrate inter-related components from other sectors, such as protection, climate resilience, energy, education and health.
5. As crises are occurring more often than ever before, livelihood programs and resilience strategies have become interdependent. 'Successful livelihood programs must incorporate mechanisms for coping and bouncing back when difficulties emerge'.<sup>6</sup>

# Best practices in the implementation of women's livelihood programs

This report explores best practices for the following types of interventions:

## Market-based and market-strengthening programs

Such activities aim at supporting the 'recovery, development and strengthening of markets' in fragile and volatile environments. They include market development, market diversification, and value chain development.<sup>7</sup>

## Associations and cooperatives

Associations or cooperatives for the commercialization of agricultural or non-agricultural products can counteract the barriers of distorted value chains and enhance the social and economic influence of women. However, cooperatives should not be applied as a default solution. Rather, program managers should conduct careful contextual analysis in order to establish whether the targeted environment is favorable to cooperatives.

## General training, vocational training and income-generating activities

- 1. General training approaches:** Training alone has proved to have very limited – if any – impact.<sup>8</sup> It must be accompanied by other interventions, such as cash injection, market development components, community-based activities to build trust, awareness-raising activities to tackle social norms, institutional advocacy, support with work placements or with access to markets, ongoing business mentoring, etc.
- 2. Vocational training:** Successful vocational training programs include a combination of:
  - Comprehensive market analysis and value chain analysis
  - Comprehensive gender analysis and social norms analysis

- A parallel technology analysis to assess which technology can help achieve the set goals
- Comprehensive, demand-driven training in technical skills
- Training in value chains, access to market, business literacy and marketing
- Partnerships with external actors such as businesses or employers
- Parallel community-based activities to build trust and promote social and economic cohesion
- Basic educational skills especially when working with women who face chronic poverty or with vulnerable youth

**3. Income-generating activities:** Vocational training programs should not only focus on enhancing knowledge and skills but should also offer clear pathways towards income-generating activities. Best practices show that the core focus and objectives of livelihood programs should be income-generating activities supported by a series of integrated training courses – organized either before or throughout the income-generating activities.

### Cash support to micro, small and medium women's businesses

Livelihood interventions can help women launch small businesses with targeted injections of capital, provided that this cash support is combined with vocational training and support for income-generating activities.

### Innovation and technology

Technological innovations can help women reach sustainable livelihoods in complex and volatile environments, provided they are **contextualized, simple and sustainable, and do not exacerbate existing divisions nor create new ones**. Local or regional technologies should be, whenever possible, prioritized over technologies brought from the northern hemisphere that may be expensive, irrelevant, complex or difficult to maintain, and that perpetuate dependency on external actors. Partnerships with national innovation hubs can maximize local innovation and fuel local economies. When local technologies are not available, technology transfer from other parts of the world can address gaps, provided that sustainability, relevance, ethics and procurement criteria are met.