



**OXFAM'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK ON
WOMEN'S ECONOMIC
EMPOWERMENT**



OXFAM

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“Removing the barriers that keep women and girls on the margins of economic, social, cultural, and political life must be a top priority for us all – businesses, governments, the United Nations, and civil society.” – *Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon*



Credit: Eleanor Farmer/Oxfam

Economic policy and practice is defined in a way that is fundamentally biased against women and the types of paid and unpaid work they are engaged in. Oxfam's experience shows that 'women make up the majority of the world's low-paid workers and are concentrated in the most precarious jobs'.¹ The full spectrum of women's work is neither recognized nor respected, resulting in economic policy making which undervalues and underinvests in women's unpaid work and stigmatizes women's informal paid work. The creation of decent work for women requires providing services and infrastructure to support unpaid care, ending the gender pay gap, and promoting equal access to resources.

Oxfam asserts that effective economic empowerment for women occurs when women enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, and when they have the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing. However, for Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) to translate into meaningful empowerment, women must also have the autonomy and self-belief to make changes in their own lives, including having the agency and power to organize and influence decision making, while enjoying equal rights to men and freedom from violence.

WEE contributes towards women's empowerment as it focuses on women's ability to gain access and control over productive resources and be recognized as fully participating economic actors. However, women's empowerment is more comprehensive than WEE alone, as the former encompasses the process towards realising a wider set of women's political, economic and social rights.

This framework is intended to assist the development of more consistent, effective and integrated programming on WEE through humanitarian response, long-term development, influencing or campaign approaches. Oxfam's work in agriculture – and particularly rural women's involvement in agriculture – will continue to be a relevant area of work, as 70 percent of people living in extreme poverty are based in rural areas.² Promoting women's WEE in agriculture is critical, as women comprise on average 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.³ At the same time, urban development is becoming a growing area of work due to key global trends, and Oxfam recognises the need to support the voice, identity and welfare of urban women and youth in transition from informal-precarious to decent work.

Women's rights organizations – such as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)⁴ and other women's rights networks from the global South – have highlighted that in recent years, efforts of the international development and private sectors have fallen short of producing the wide-scale changes needed to achieve WEE. They argue that proposing a renewed vision of both society and the economy requires challenging the development and economic models which perpetuate gender and income inequalities.

Political momentum on WEE has the potential to catalyse real progress. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have renewed the commitment to a transformational agenda on gender equality, including through specific targets to expand women's economic opportunities and recognize their rights to resources, and to recognise and value unpaid care work. In addition, at the 2016 World Economic Forum in Davos, the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, charged with recommending how the SDGs and 'Agenda 2030' can be implemented in relation to WEE, and how a step change can be realized in progress towards achieving the targets.

This welcome political momentum must be accompanied by an understanding that WEE requires a holistic approach, which focuses on the structural barriers that women face in the economy and society.

Oxfam affirms that sustainable progress and widespread impact on WEE requires working at many levels simultaneously – individual, household, community, and national. Secondly, the challenges to achieving WEE and gender equality more broadly are linked as part of a process of empowerment along economic, political and social entry points. Oxfam recognizes that effective WEE programme designs need to be based on an understanding of these social and political dimensions and their potential impact on WEE outcomes – and where necessary include an appropriate programme response to these, alongside the economic entry points. Thirdly, increasing the organization and collective voice and power of women living in poverty must be a core principle of WEE, and is essential to promote a strong women's rights agenda that focuses on systemic, structural change.

Therefore, Oxfam's best practice programming on WEE is based on an approach which recognizes:

- The holistic approach to WEE which works across individual and systemic shifts, across informal and formal spaces;
- The importance of identifying economic entry points alongside political and social entry points, and promoting linkages with other gender equality programming;
- The need for action from governments, private sector and civil society, which supports the role of women's rights organizations and the voices of women.



Drawing on Oxfam's comprehensive approach to programming on WEE, this framework proposes a series of basic principles to apply in programme design, and which constitute good practice in programme implementation. They should be considered as the minimum requirements for WEE programming:

Principle 1: Increase the voice of women in the household, in communities, in economic institutions and in political spaces

Principle 2: Take a systems approach to overturn the barriers to realizing women's economic rights

Principle 3: Harness multiple entry points to ensure meaningful WEE and support women's empowerment more broadly

Principle 4: Build partnerships that embed ownership in local systems

Principle 5: Strengthen internal capacity to ensure programme quality

To support this work on WEE, Oxfam's Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Knowledge Hub facilitates a global network of Oxfam staff, partners and wider development practitioners at country, regional and global levels working on women's rights and economic empowerment, particularly in the area of smallholder agriculture. In addition Oxfam has developed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Resource Guide.⁵ This provides guidance on the different stages of the programme cycle, from beneficiary identification through to evaluation.

There is no single, prescriptive approach to working on WEE. Currently Oxfam works in over 40 countries to promote women's economic activities through diverse approaches that often include a combination of skills training, control over assets, collective action in markets, business development and policy advocacy. The different approaches to WEE fall under several overarching themes and include a range of assessment tools to promote WEE in other development programmes, which sometimes overlap. These themes include: i) inclusive market systems development; ii) enterprise development and impact investing; iii) community savings groups and access to finance; iv) productive and resilient smallholder agriculture, v) humanitarian programme, vi) challenging social norms and improving social inclusion, vii) policy, campaigns and influencing, and viii) reducing and redistributing unpaid care work.

Oxfam has various programmes and approaches to promoting WEE. These include, but are not limited to:

- Gendered Enterprise and Markets Programme (GEM)
- Women's Empowerment, Mainstreaming and Networking – for gender justice in economic development (WEMAN)
- Enterprise Development Programme (EDP)
- Enterprises That Change Lives (in Spanish, Empresas que Cambian Vidas) (ECV)
- Women in Small Enterprises (WISE)
- Saving For Change (SFC)
- WE-Care



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2 PURPOSE AND USES OF THIS FRAMEWORK



Credit: Tessa Bunney/Oxfam Australia

This framework is intended to assist the development of more consistent, effective and integrated programming on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Agriculture across the Oxfam confederation, in the spirit of the 'One Programme' approach.

To achieve this, it will:

- Set out the case for Oxfam's work on WEE;
- Clarify concepts and present Oxfam's approaches to WEE;
- Set out key principles for WEE programming.

The framework is the product of collaborations between the Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Knowledge Hub's coordination team and staff working on WEE initiatives throughout Oxfam (See [Annex 3](#) for more information on the Knowledge Hub on Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture). It draws on key strategic documents and the expertise of different Oxfam affiliates' leading programmes which aim to promote WEE.

The framework is intended to inform country, multi-country and regional programming across the confederation, that promotes WEE through humanitarian response, long-term development, influencing or campaign approaches. The framework also aims to improve multi-level and multi-affiliate collaboration, including fundraising. This is a working document that will evolve with our work.

The framework does not aim to provide detailed guidance for programme design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

3 OXFAM'S UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINITION OF WEE



Credit: Sokunthea Chor/Oxfam America

Economic policy and practice is defined in a way that is fundamentally biased against women and the types of paid and unpaid work they are engaged in. Women carry out the majority of unpaid care work and are concentrated in the informal rural and urban economy, which is associated with low average earnings and high average costs and risks. The full spectrum of women's work is neither recognized nor respected, resulting in economic policy making which undervalues and underinvests in women's unpaid work and stigmatizes women's informal paid work. Likewise, economic practices are often based on ownership of physical and financial assets, and undervalue human and social capital, which skews outcomes for women.

This gender bias combines with negative social norms around what type of work is 'appropriate' for women, to constrain women's ability to access decent jobs on an equal footing with men. Furthermore, women tend to have less control over land and access to water, and are more vulnerable to climate change, natural disasters and other risks, relative to men. Alongside weak legal protections, this results in discrimination against women at work, unequal pay for equal work, reduced capacity to cope with shocks, unequal access to and control over finance and assets, and gendered occupational segregation.

3.1 Oxfam's definition of WEE⁶

Oxfam asserts that effective economic empowerment for women occurs when women enjoy their rights to control and benefit from resources, assets, income and their own time, and when they have the ability to manage risk and improve their economic status and wellbeing. However, for WEE to translate into meaningful empowerment, women must also have the autonomy and self-belief to make changes in their own lives, including having the agency and power to organize and influence decision making, while enjoying equal rights to men and freedom from violence.

Oxfam believes that like gender equality, WEE is an end in itself. Therefore, economic justice will only be achieved through an inclusive economic system that upholds the rights of women to ensure they exercise control over their income, assets and time. It is clear that women's increased participation in paid work would support economic growth and wider development goals. Yet evidence shows that not all forms of economic growth are associated with an increase in decent employment opportunities and rights for women.

3.2 WEE and Women's Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a process whereby women's lives are transformed from a situation where they have limited power as a consequence of gendered barriers, to a situation where their power is equal to that of men. Women's economic, social, personal and political empowerment is interconnected; positive change in one dimension of women's lives is unsustainable without progress in the others.

WEE contributes towards women's empowerment as it focuses on women's ability to gain access and control over productive resources and be recognized as fully participating economic actors. However, women's empowerment is more comprehensive than WEE alone, as it encompasses the process towards realising a wider set of women's political, economic and social rights. But economic participation alone is not enough to guarantee women's broader empowerment: this requires additional approaches that challenge the structural barriers that keep women from achieving all the dimensions of women's empowerment: economic, social, political and personal.⁷

4 ARGUMENTS AND RATIONALE FOR WORKING ON WEE

Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care, ending the gender pay gap, and promoting equal access to resources such as land helps reduce inequality and promotes women's rights by enabling women to exercise greater control over financial resources and their time.



Credit: Julius Ceaser Kasujja/Oxfam

According to UN Women,⁸ women's access to decent employment is not only likely to improve their agency and the distributional dynamics within the household, but can also lift whole households out of poverty.

Key facts on gender inequality

- Globally, three-quarters of working-age men (15 years and over) are in the labour force, compared to half of working-age women. Among those who are employed, women constitute nearly two-thirds of 'contributing family workers' who work in family businesses without any direct pay.
- Women continue to be denied equal pay for work of equal value, and are less likely than men to receive a pension, which translates into large income inequalities throughout their lives.
- Yet in all regions, women work more than men: on average, they do almost two and a half times as much unpaid care and domestic work as men, and if paid and unpaid work are combined, women in almost all countries work longer hours than men each day.

Source: UN Women calculations based on ILO data (2015) and UNDESA (2010)

Oxfam's experience shows that 'women make up the majority of the world's low-paid workers and are concentrated in the most precarious jobs'.⁹ The creation of decent work for women requires providing services and infrastructure to support unpaid care, ending the gender pay gap, and promoting equal access to resources.

4.1 Rationale for working on WEE in agriculture

Over the past decades, Oxfam's work has been largely focused on agriculture and rural livelihoods. Going forward, agriculture – and particularly rural women's involvement in agriculture – will continue to be a relevant area of work, as 70 percent of people living in extreme poverty are based in rural areas.¹⁰ Oxfam believes that rural agricultural development has the potential to stimulate the creation of jobs and income opportunities, a critical strategy for chronically marginalized groups who lack productive resources such as land. Promoting women's WEE in agriculture is also critical, as women comprise on average 43 percent of the agricultural labour force in developing countries.¹¹ The development of rural agricultural markets will also be critical for the food supply of expanding urban areas.

Recent data from the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)¹² and the UN's 'The World's Women 2015' report¹³ show the latest trends and statistics about the status of women and men in the key areas identified by the Beijing Platform for Action¹⁴.

With regards to agriculture, the report emphasizes:

- Women account for an estimated two-thirds of the world's 600 million poor livestock-keepers.
- For both women and men, employment in agriculture continues to decline, while employment in the services sector keeps growing.
- However, agriculture remains the largest sector for women's employment in the three regions of Oceania, Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa – representing around 60 percent of overall female employment.
- The diminishing gender gap in agricultural employment at the global level masks differences across regions. In Northern Africa, Oceania, Southern Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Western Asia, women are more likely than men to be working in the agricultural sector.
- Much of the employment in agriculture lacks social protection and job security – both characteristics of informal employment.

Women in agriculture face the following challenges:

- Access to productive resources (such as land and water, training and the time required to develop a viable livelihood) remains scarce. In developing countries, only 10–20 percent of all landholders are women. Farms managed by female-headed households are between half to two-thirds the size of farms run by male-headed households.
- Women are granted fewer and smaller loans than men. Women in forestry, fishing and agriculture receive just seven percent of total agriculture investments.
- Two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are women.
- Agricultural extension services are accessible to only five percent of women that make up the agricultural workforce in developing countries.
- Women hold 14 percent of management positions in the agricultural sector.
- Rural women typically work longer hours than men. When both paid productive and unpaid care work responsibilities are taken into account, women's total work hours are longer than men's in all regions.
- Restriction to mobility constitutes a major barrier for many women entrepreneurs in developing countries in accessing and competing in markets¹⁵.
- In many settings, women bear particular physical insecurity, including sexual violence, when carrying out daily tasks linked to their livelihoods.

Oxfam believes that successful approaches to increasing WEE in agriculture address these barriers and provide a pathway out of poverty.

4.2 Rationale for working on WEE in urban contexts

Urban development is becoming a growing area of work, and Oxfam acknowledges key global trends, such as the rise in informal employment, urban poverty and vulnerability, as a result of rapid processes of urbanization in most regions in the world.

By 2030, over 60 percent of the world's population will live and work in urban environments. This rapid urbanization in low- and middle-income countries has already increased the number of highly vulnerable urban communities living in informal settlements, many of which are exposed to a range of discrete or multi-hazard events. The speed and scale of urbanization today are far greater than in the past, overstressing governments' capacities, taxing infrastructures, challenging traditional social relationships and requiring a rethink of urban-rural dynamics, especially food-supply mechanisms. This implies overwhelming new challenges for cities in poorer countries: they will need to build new urban infrastructure – houses, power, water, sanitation, roads, commercial and productive facilities – more rapidly than cities anywhere have ever done before¹⁶.

The Oxfam Strategic Plan (OSP) includes specific urban objectives or strategies around citizenship, income, habitat and cities as a focus of change, in five Change Goals:

- Supporting active citizens to confront poverty;
- Saving lives and building resilience;
- Fair and sustainable agriculture and food systems;
- Social and gender justice in natural resource use;
- Creating a worldwide influencing network.

As in the agricultural sector, informal employment is unrecognized, unprotected and unregulated, and women are overrepresented – leaving people living in poverty vulnerable to shocks and unemployment and often subject to exploitation, as fierce competition for jobs often push people to accept extreme working conditions for a small income. In this context, Oxfam recognizes the need to support the voice, identity and welfare of urban women and youth in transition from informal-precarious to decent work.

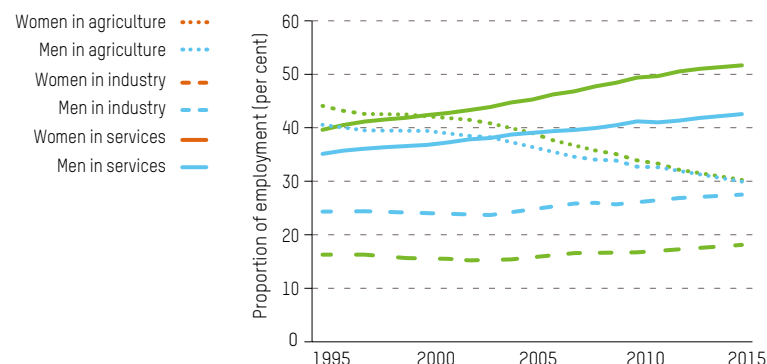
The UN's 'The World's Women 2015' report¹⁷ points to the following trends:

- Globally, the services sector is currently the largest source of employment for both women and men. In 2015, 52 percent of employed women and 43 percent of employed men were engaged in this sector. That said, this trend is less clear when employment in income countries is removed.
- Women dominate in three services subsectors: education, health and social work, and private households as employees. Among 24 developing countries with recent data

available, the average women's share is above 50 percent (or women 'dominate') in these services subsectors.

- Women in informal employment are often concentrated in the more disadvantaged categories of employment, such as domestic workers, piece-rate home-based workers, and assistants in small family enterprises, all of which are among the most vulnerable and lowest-paid types of informal employment.
- Among 43 countries with available data, informal employment accounted for more than 70 percent of total non-agricultural employment for women in 15 countries – six in sub-Saharan Africa, six in Latin America and the Caribbean, and three in Southern and South-Eastern Asia.
- The proportion of informal non-agricultural employment is higher for women than for men in many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean and in sub-Saharan Africa.

Figure 1: Distribution of employed persons by economic sector of employment, by sex, 1995 to 2015

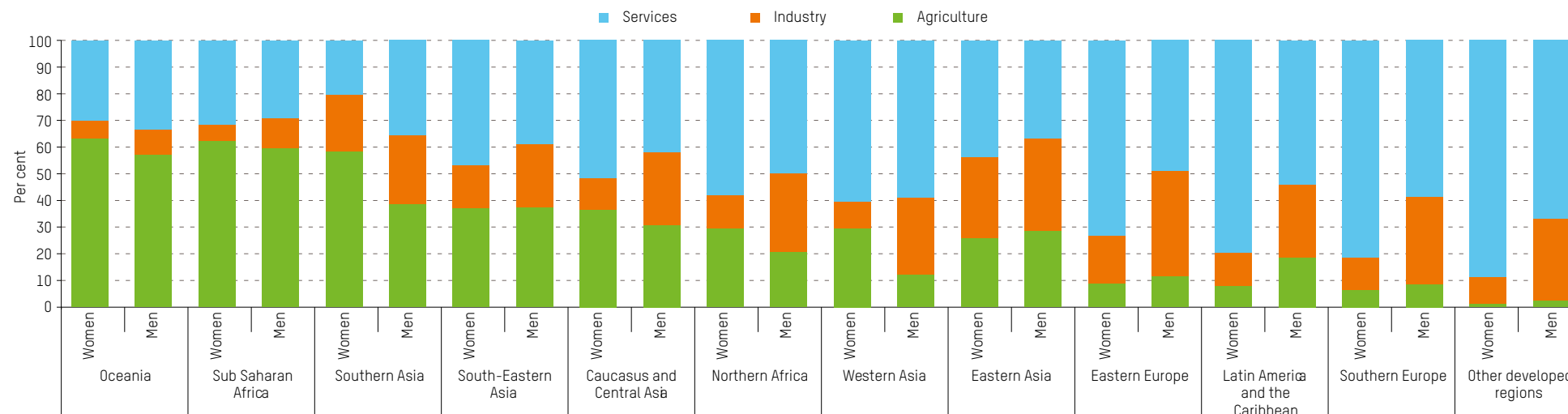


Source: ILO, *Estimates and Projections of the Economically Active Population (EAPEP)*, 2013 edition (April 2014 update).
Note: 2014 and 2015 figures are projections.

4.3 Arguments for working on WEE

While Oxfam's approach to WEE remains fundamentally rights-based, instrumental arguments are also explained here, as it is useful to fully understand and be able to argue about the benefits of women's access to decent work on the terms most commonly used by others (partners and counterparts).

Figure 2: Distribution of employed persons by economic sector of employment, by sex and region, 2015



Source: ILO, *Estimates and Projections of the Economically Active Population (EAPPE)*, 2013 edition (April 2014 update). Note: Other developed regions include countries in Northern and Western Europe, as well as Australia, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States. 2015 figures are projections.

Women's rights and equity arguments: these highlight how women's access to decent work can provide an arena for addressing major inequalities and women's empowerment more broadly.

- Recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care, ending the gender pay gap, and promoting equal access to resources such as land helps reduce inequality and promotes women's rights by enabling women to exercise greater control over financial resources and their time.
- Economic empowerment can be a stepping stone enabling women to realize their human rights more broadly and challenge the social norms that constrain them (social, political and religious).
- Building women's resilience may provide strategies that enable them to cope with different types of shocks.

Instrumental/efficiency arguments: these emphasize the benefits to development and economic growth.

- Global growth: improvements in female educational attainment, greater labour force participation by women, and a better allocation of female workers across occupations and sectors are proven to substantially improve GDP.^{18, 19} A study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) concluded that an additional \$1.6 trillion in output could be generated through a reduction in the employment-to-population gap between 2012 and 2017.²⁰
- Productivity increases: eliminating barriers that prevent women from working in certain occupations or sectors, for example, could reduce the productivity gap between male and female workers by one-third to a half, and increase output per worker by up to 25 percent.^{21, 22}
- Business efficiency for enterprises: companies greatly benefit from increasing leadership opportunities for women. Representation of women at senior management level increases organizational effectiveness.²³
- Child nutrition, education and health: increasing women's control over household income changes spending in ways that benefit children.²⁴

5 WEE IN THE WIDER DEVELOPMENT SECTOR



Investing in *women's economic empowerment* sets a direct path towards gender equality, poverty eradication and inclusive economic growth. Women make enormous contributions to economies, whether in businesses, on farms, as entrepreneurs or employees, or by doing unpaid care work at home.

Source: UN Women (2013), 'Economic Empowerment of Women', Thematic Brief

Credit: Ellie Kealey/Oxfam

Today, promoting gender equality and women's empowerment is an integral part of the international development agenda and is embedded in most strategies and plans of the main multilateral agencies, donor governments and international NGOs. This has come largely as the result of feminist contributions over the last three decades, which have offered critical insight into the gendered processes of inequality and poverty. These contributions have helped us understand that gender inequality cuts across many aspects of women's lives. As part of this broader picture of gender inequality, there is consensus on the importance of working to increase women's control over income, wealth and their own time. While WEE is only focused on the economic sphere of women's lives, it contributes to women's wider empowerment and can provide a stepping stone for the full realization of women's social, political and economic rights (see [Annex 1](#) for some of the main development actors' approaches to WEE).

The concept of WEE that was introduced in the 1980s was a radical proposal to transform economic, social and political structures – as well as the power relations they imply – in favour of women's rights and greater social justice. However, as the development sector has taken on the WEE agenda over the past years, the term has become divested of its original meaning, open to different interpretations and reduced in its scope, giving way to a diversity of approaches, scopes of intervention and outcomes.

International NGOs have been strategic partners to multilateral/bilateral development actors and civil society organizations alike, often prioritizing the WEE agenda based both on equality and economic growth arguments.

'In many rural and urban communities, there are many barriers that marginalize and exclude women and girls in particular, and prevent them from achieving these rights. These take many forms, including social and cultural practices that place women and girls at risk of violence and exploitation, and mean they bear greater responsibility for unpaid care work. This inequality prevents women from pursuing education, livelihood and other opportunities.' – *ActionAid*

Progressive businesses have also taken action to promote WEE in recent years. Within agriculture, it is critical that companies work with suppliers, competitors and local stakeholders to support WEE to drive changes that extend beyond the farm and factory.²⁵ Global initiatives also provide an important space to drive action in the private sector. To date, more than 1,000 business leaders have signed UN Women and the UN Global Compact (UNGC)'s 'Women's Empowerment Principles', committing to empower women in the marketplace, workplace and community. The UN 'HeforShe' campaign has engaged 10 male CEOs as role models for women's empowerment.²⁶

However, women's rights organizations – such as the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)²⁷ and other women's rights networks from the global South – have highlighted that in recent years, efforts of the international development and private sectors have fallen short of producing the wide-scale changes needed to achieve WEE. They argue that proposing a renewed vision of both society and the economy requires challenging the development and economic models which perpetuate gender and income inequalities. Their efforts are thus centred on building alternative and sustainable solutions that address power dynamics and challenge dominant economic agendas, while defending women's participation in public spaces and the international arenas of governance. Notably, they call for a shift in norms, attitudes and beliefs to enable the necessary changes to economic and political systems to achieve greater WEE.

CARES's Pathways Program, aimed at increasing the productivity and empowerment of women farmers, pays attention to the impact of household relations (particularly related to the division of labour), formal policies and informal cultural norms on women's resilience and empowerment.

5.1 The Sustainable Development Goals

Going forward, overall progress of development actors around the WEE agenda will be measured through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in September 2015. The SDGs renewed the commitment to a transformational agenda on gender equality and the empowerment of women as 'a crucial contribution to progress' across the 17 goals and 169 targets, but also in a standalone goal. Goal 5 commits to 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' through eight targets,²⁸ two of which are to expand women's economic opportunities and recognise their rights to resources, and to recognise and value unpaid care work. Goal 8 to "Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" is also related to WEE in promoting decent work, an issue many women working in the informal and agricultural sectors face in particular.

The SDGs are considered an important leap forward from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – in so far as they recognize the need to adapt the goals to national contexts and involve greater consultation with civil society and women's rights organizations. However, important challenges remain in ensuring their effective implementation. Currently, targeted investments for gender equality and public services which support women's empowerment remain inadequate and must be scaled up in aid, domestic finances and private sector investment. Strategic alliance-building between governments, donors, civil society and the private sector is a key factor in coordinating efforts towards the realization of the SDGs.

5 WEE in the wider development sector

Knowledge networks on WEE

In recent years, several knowledge networks focusing on women's rights and economic development have emerged, and are positively influencing the debates around WEE.

UN Women's Knowledge Gateway has created an open global community for WEE on the web portal www.empowerwomen.org. This 'Knowledge Gateway' provides opportunities for its members to find and share resources and learning tools; connect with peers and experts; and to discuss, generate new ideas and advocate for WEE. It brings together a diverse range of partners, networks and members from international organizations, private sector, governments, academia and civil society.

The SEEP Network (www.seepnetwork.org) is a global network of international practitioner organizations dedicated to combating poverty through promoting inclusive markets and financial systems. It is comprised of international development organizations and global, regional, and country-level practitioner networks. Its Women's Economic Empowerment Working Group (WEEWG) aims to improve the ability of market systems and other inclusive economic development practitioners to facilitate inclusive, empowering and sustainable services to women across the globe.

Beam Exchange (www.beamexchange.org) is a global network of policy decision makers, programme advisers, consultants and implementers sharing knowledge and learning about how market systems approaches can be used to reduce poverty. Its goal is to improve the impact and effectiveness of programmes across a wide range of poverty-reduction fields. The network also considers key questions and issues around market systems and WEE.

The Gender and Macroeconomics Group in Latin America (GEMLAC) (www.gemlac.org) is a group of feminist economists who promote the incorporation of a feminist economics lens into the production of knowledge, activism and advocacy, and in the design, management and evaluation of public policies.

5.2 UN High-Level Panel on WEE

At the 2016 World Economic Forum in Davos, the then UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon launched the High-Level Panel on Women's Economic Empowerment, charged with recommending how the SDGs and 'Agenda 2030' can be implemented in relation to WEE, and how a step change can be realized towards achieving their targets. Oxfam called on the UN High-Level Panel on WEE to ensure that a comprehensive approach to WEE should, among other things, champion (1) the need to promote positive social norms; (2) the recognition, reduction and redistribution of unpaid care; (3) macroeconomic policies which support gender equality; (4) inclusive financial systems; and (5) the connection between WEE and violence against women.

The panel's first report²⁹ identified seven primary drivers of WEE and served as a global call to step up action on women's empowerment to meet the deadlines set by Agenda 2030.

Figure 3: Seven primary drivers of women's economic empowerment



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In parallel, members of the panel, including Oxfam International's Executive Director Winnie Byanyima, made a series of commitments on new actions and partnerships.

Oxfam urged the High-Level Panel to ensure that its commitments contribute to three transformative pathways for all women, particularly those living in poverty, to gain and maintain control over opportunities for decent work and achieve economic empowerment:

- **Promote women's collective organizations, voice and agency in economic decision making, the market, the community and at home.** For example, governments and donors should ensure women's right to organize, and that women's collective enterprises and representative organizations are involved in the policy-making and rule-setting processes that impact on their work and their lives.
- **Promote and implement a legal and policy environment which supports WEE in line with international human and labour standards.** Policies to invest in strong public services in childcare, healthcare, education and social protection, supported by progressive tax systems which enable governments to collect the revenues needed from those in society who can most afford it, are critical. Governments should also invest in positive social and economic norms change campaigns, and support community-level norms change programmes.
- **Implement positive business practices and market innovations to transform the gender bias in the world of work.** This should include areas such as flexible working, maternity protection and paid parental leave for both women and men; family-friendly working arrangements; and childcare provisions. Private companies must understand where women are in their supply and distribution chains, to support improved hiring and procurement practices. This sensitivity in procurement should span country borders.



Credit: UN Women/Ryan Brown



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6 OXFAM'S THINKING AND APPROACH TO WEE



In order to really 'lift' women and their communities out of poverty and achieve lasting equality between men and women, it is imperative to address the structural barriers to the full realization of women's rights.

Credit: Phil Moore/Oxfam



Oxfam's vision is a just world without poverty, in which people, particularly women and minorities, can influence decisions that affect their lives and enjoy their rights to life and security, a sustainable livelihood and essential services. Oxfam continues to place a strong emphasis on supporting women at all levels to become leaders and take valued roles in society and the economy.

WEE stands at the heart of Oxfam's commitment to achieving economic justice. Oxfam understands that in order to really 'lift' women and their communities out of poverty and achieve lasting equality between men and women, it is also imperative to address the structural barriers to the full realization of women's rights, including by supporting the transformative leadership of women in their communities and their organizations.

Oxfam has the capacity to contribute to the advancement of the WEE agenda by taking advantage of its vast programme experience, research and policy work on the subject matter. With this in mind, in 2015 Oxfam established the Knowledge Hub on Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture with the aim to facilitate a coordinated approach to learning and programming across the Oxfam confederation (for more on the WEE in Agriculture Knowledge Hub, see [Annex 3](#)).

Oxfam's Strategic Plan (OSP) includes among its six external Change Goals, three that are particularly relevant to achieving WEE: Goal 2 – *advancing gender justice*; Goal 4 – *sustainable food*; and Goal 5 – *fair sharing of natural resources*. In addition, work under Goal 3 – *saving lives, now and in the future* integrates WEE approaches, particularly in emergency food security and vulnerable livelihoods and resilience initiatives. These goals reflect the intention to support poor and marginalized women to: occupy key positions of power and influence, provide transformative leadership in support of women's rights; become economically empowered and able to influence the decisions that affect them; benefit from proper management of natural resources; and claim their rights to decent work.

WEE requires a holistic approach, which focuses on the structural barriers that women face in the economy and society. The challenges to achieving WEE and gender equality more broadly are linked as part of a process of empowerment along economic, political and social entry points. Oxfam recognizes that effective WEE programme designs need to be based on an understanding of these social and political dimensions and their potential impact on WEE outcomes – and where necessary need to include an appropriate programme response to these, alongside the economic entry points. In doing so, Oxfam's WEE programming complements Oxfam's broader gender justice programming.

Oxfam's thinking and approach to WEE is rights-based, holistic, systemic, and aims to challenge mainstream economic thinking which systematically discriminates against women. In addition to important issues of decent work and of control over assets and material resources, it is also about the choices women make over their time, and requires social and political interventions. Ultimately women will not achieve economic empowerment until the following are in place:

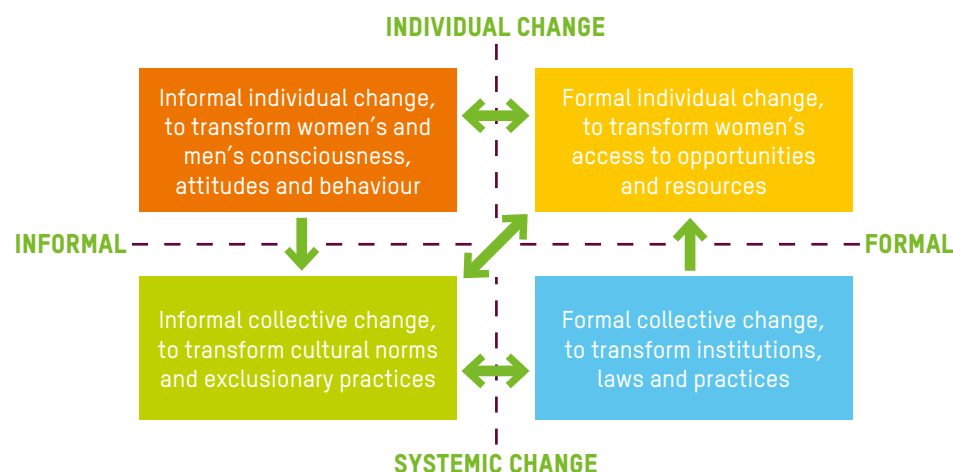
- Women's ability to participate and lead in decision making and collective action;
- Women's ability to maintain a job with a living wage, participate in or lead an enterprise, or retire with sufficient savings;
- The reduction and sharing of heavy care responsibilities;
- Women's control over income, assets and natural resources in the household and vis-a-vis formal and traditional institutions;
- Women's ability to live a life free from violence with confidence, mobility, security (no harassment), agency and organization to access markets.
- Women's ability to build their resilience to external shocks, climate change and associated risks.

6.1 Change across individual and systemic levels, in formal and informal institutions

Oxfam's transformative approach to achieving women's rights, whether in economic, political or social spheres, requires changes at both the individual level (both of women and men) as well as systemic levels. Change is also required at both the informal level in rules and practices and the formal level in terms of institutional rules, laws and governmental policies.

The framework below (Figure 1) suggests that sustainable change and long-term impact requires women to be actively involved in a number of areas.

Figure 4: Framework for transformative leadership



Source: Gender at Work (no date)³⁰

The **framework** is useful to understand prevailing and emerging leaderships and power dynamics in a specific context, which is the first step in developing the theory of change that will underpin any WEE initiative. Oxfam affirms that sustainable progress and widespread impact on WEE requires working at many levels simultaneously – individual, household, community, and national. For instance, Oxfam assumes that change at an individual level is unsustainable without positive change in organizations and government policy. Likewise, pro-women economic development policy may not be effective without working to address changes in communities and households. This model supports the design of effective theories of change by identifying the different pathways of change that need to be considered.

Systemic change to remove the barriers to women's rights requires understanding the interactions between different parts of a system and how together they effect change, rather than trying to understand specific components in isolation.³¹ Oxfam believes that to achieve truly transformational and sustainable change for women and girls means analysing the complex mix of social, political and economic systems they are immersed in – as well as the actors involved and their relations of power – through the lens of gender. Women are not only excluded from the economy because they have lower skills, less access to financial assets or land, or even less power. The dominant economic system and prevailing policies systematically disadvantage women, for example, because of:

- The perception that women's work is unproductive or less valuable: most work that women do is not considered work, and the production of goods and services outside monetized markets are not considered as contributions to growth.
- The unequal valuation of capacity to absorb shocks: in time of economic crisis, or when facing austerity policies, the costs absorbed by women's unpaid work are not counted as damages, but as 'savings'.
- The failure to recognize women's contribution to the national economy: in all countries, the occupations, skills, products and sectors where women are concentrated are given little priority in economic and investment policy.

Consequences of current systems

This results in women's concentration in jobs that are low-paid and in the informal sector, without social protection or security. In addition, it sustains an economic elite which is able to exercise influence over policies and practices that discriminate against and exploit women – for example, corporations can lobby against minimum wages and governments can invest in sectors which are not a priority for women.

Analytical approach

Analysing whether certain policies, practices and social norms have a positive or negative impact on the realization of women's rights is useful to improve understanding of gender inequalities in different types of systems. For example, identifying where women are concentrated in markets (within which products, occupations or trading locations), or how household work and care are distributed within the household, reveals how power dynamics influence women's roles and opportunities in market systems. By applying a gender lens to the implementation of national-level policies and laws, it is possible to identify gender-based inequalities such as wage discrimination, job segregation, limited mobility, and lack of access to education and training.

Resilience

Oxfam defines resilience as the ability of women and men to realize their rights and improve their well-being despite shocks, stresses and uncertainty.³² Making change sustainable requires building resilience by addressing the causes of multiple risks, fragility and vulnerabilities, without causing new risks and vulnerabilities. A systems approach recognizes the relationships between the complex causes of risk and poverty. Because systems are dynamic and achieving transformational change for women is a process, continual analysis is necessary to develop adaptive capacity. In addition, the involvement of multiple stakeholders – such as duty-bearers, citizens, men and others – is necessary to co-create new solutions to difficult problems.

Change economic narrative

Although women do benefit from outputs found in traditional livelihood programmes – such as jobs, access to land, loans, improved food security or new skills – the full achievement of WEE means designing programmes that change unjust economic systems. It is right to bring income and food security benefits, but WEE programmes also need to challenge the prevailing economic narrative in the majority of economies, for example by challenging what is considered as 'work' to include unpaid care work.

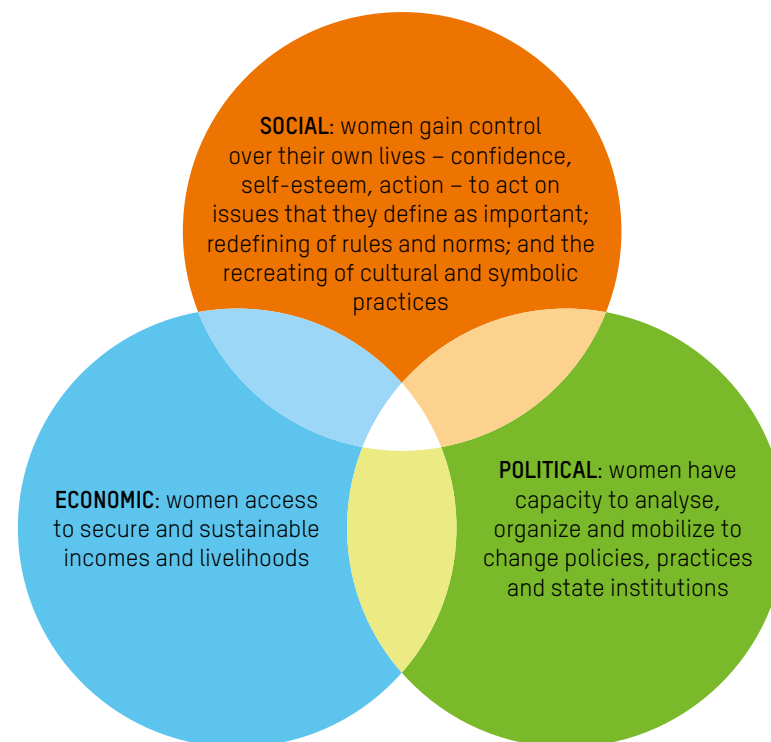
WEE initiatives should therefore also aim to challenge these economic narratives. That means shifting social norms and cultural attitudes; recognizing women's time, labour and unpaid care work; as well as promoting women's power, voice and decision making. Further analysis or budget monitoring is needed across a range of macro-level outcome areas such as pricing, employment opportunities, investment, spending on essential services such as social protection etc., in order to understand how the economic system enables women's inclusion as fully fledged economic actors.

6.2 WEE and wider women's empowerment: Linking across entry points

WEE can at times lend itself to a dangerous misunderstanding: identifying the economic sphere as the only possible entry point through which women can become empowered. While women do sometimes report that generating their own income or disposing of their own assets helps them to build confidence and agency, Oxfam maintains that the most appropriate 'entry point(s)' to women's broader empowerment depends on the context. In addition, given the interconnected nature of women's empowerment across social, political and economic spheres, in many cases, addressing social and cultural empowerment are prerequisites, or provide the best entry point, for challenging the social norms and cultural practices that prevent women's full participation in economic activities.

Partners and donors may often focus solely on creating and supporting women's economic activities; however, Oxfam understands that actions on social and political dimensions are critical for WEE to be sustainable (see Figure 4: Spheres and domains in achieving women's economic empowerment).

Figure 5: Spheres and domains in achieving women's economic empowerment



Source: Kidder, T. and Smyth, I.³³

6.3 Collective action and collaboration between actors

Increasing the organization and collective voice and power of women living in poverty must be a core principle of WEE, and is essential to promote a strong women's rights agenda that focuses on systemic, structural change. Organizations of women workers, women's collective enterprises and representative organizations across the world promote the voice of grassroots women leaders to propose the wide-scale transformations needed to make the economy work for women. When women work together, they are harder to ignore – and great things are possible. Twenty years of research in 70 countries confirm that the number one strategy for combating violence against women is to support a strong feminist movement.³⁴ And decades of experience in countries around the world confirms that the number one strategy for women workers to demand changes to adverse norms – and thereby to be economically empowered – is through organization and voice, one of the four 'pillars' of decent work³⁵.

Roles of public and private sectors

Governments also have a key role to play in providing the legal and policy safeguards to protect women in the market and support WEE through strong public services, gender-budgeting systems and action on social norms. Progressive companies also help to push the boundaries by pioneering innovative approaches by working with others and adopting progressive practices in their own business models. This supports a race to the top in terms of strengthening women's access to decent work.

Critically, when governments, private sector companies, agricultural producers and workers' unions, women's organizations and civil society intentionally work together or form partnerships, positive change can be achieved at scale. For example, Oxfam's programme to support women strawberry workers in Morocco involved collaborating with British retailers and strawberry importers taking part in the Ethical Trading Initiative to encourage the Moroccan government to comply with employment law and ensure that workers are registered for social security³⁶.

6.4 A comprehensive approach to programming

Therefore, Oxfam's best practice programming on WEE is based on an approach which recognizes:

- The holistic approach to WEE which works across individual and systemic shifts, across informal and formal spaces;
- The importance of identifying economic entry points alongside political and social entry points, and of promoting linkages with other gender equality programming;
- The need for action from governments, private sector and civil society, which supports the role of women's rights organizations and the voices of women.

7 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE, POSITIVE CHANGE FOR WEE

Principle 1: Increase the voice of women in the household, in communities, in economic institutions and in political spaces

Principle 2: Take a systems approach

Principle 3: Harness multiple entry points to ensure meaningful WEE and support women's empowerment more broadly to overturn the barriers to realizing women's economic rights

Principle 4: Build partnerships that embed ownership in local systems

Principle 5: Strengthen internal capacity to ensure programme quality

Credit: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Oxfam

This section proposes a series of basic principles to apply in programme design, and which constitute good practice in programme implementation. They should be considered as the minimum requirements for WEE programming. These principles are drawn from the comprehensive approach to WEE outlined in [section 6](#) 'Oxfam's thinking and approach to WEE', which supports:

- Change across individual and systemic shifts, across informal and formal spaces;
- Change across economic, political and social entry points;
- Collaborative action by civil society, governments and the private sector.

Principle 1: Increase the voice of women in the household, in communities, in economic institutions and in political spaces

WHY?

Women within these groups can become spokespeople to promote women's strategic interests and ensure that women's issues and proposals are properly addressed.

HOW?

- Build **women's agency** by encouraging women's participation and **promoting women's voice and leadership**, at each level from the household to economic institutions. Development programming for women requires women themselves to lead these processes.
- Dedicate time and resources to **strengthening the capacity of marginalized groups** so their voices are heard. **Women's rights and workers' rights groups should be supported as effective actors in delivering community-level programming to promote positive social and economic norms** relating to women's economic leadership and women's voice more broadly.

Principle 2: Take a systems approach to overturn the barriers to realizing women's economic rights

WHY?

Economic progress is dependent on a complex web of social, economic and political factors that interact with each other. Understanding the role of these issues is critical to design effective interventions and reduce risks of negative impacts on women.

HOW?

- Identify the **critical issues** that either offer the best work opportunity, or that constitute the major barriers to realizing economic rights that affect the target female population.
- **Understand the local context.** Take a differentiated view of women that does not treat them as a homogenous mass but reflects differences in social status, income, location, ethnicity etc.

- **Good analysis.** Get a holistic picture and understanding of the systems involved from the start of programme design. This includes understanding formal and informal power structures, and aids the design of appropriate strategies for challenging them (traditional campaigning, multi-stakeholder processes, co-creation etc.). Analysis and diagnosis should be ongoing, as social, political and economic dynamics shift continuously. Programme design should adapt in response to this analysis.

A good systems analysis will open up the need for fundamental structural change, both at the individual and institutional levels. Some of the areas you may need to consider include:

- Tackling **adverse social norms**.³⁷ Changes in individual and institutional attitudes in combination with social norms are critical in creating long-term changes in behaviours. Norms are also about perceptions on the value and skills of economic activities, both paid and unpaid. Duty-bearers are important in both modelling positive attitudes and influencing their institutions to create a positive enabling environment. Influential 'norm setters', including traditional and community leaders, are powerful allies in this work. Engaging men and boys is critical to sustaining change in social norms.
- **Promoting policy change** at national and global levels. Policy analysis and advocacy should seek to transform economic policy (by using both macroeconomic levers such as fiscal policy and sectoral policies impacting the agricultural sector for example) so that the economy recognizes, values and invests in women's work, including unpaid work; challenges discrimination against women; and creates decent jobs with living wages. Governments also have a key role to play in providing the legal and policy **safeguards** needed to protect women in the market, and supporting WEE through strong public services, gender-budgeting systems and action on social norms. Analyses should explore the interplay between economic and social policy to understand how they result in challenges to WEE and the realization of women's rights. Analyses need to be systems-oriented as well taking into account the multiple formal pathways (laws and policies) that impact women's ability to earn a decent living.
- Extending advocacy to promote **changes in beliefs and practices** among market actors/ service providers, not just communities.
- **Building resilience** by addressing risk, instability and environmental degradation. It is important to ensure that beneficiaries of long-term development programmes are resilient to shocks, for example by introducing measures such as asset transfers to enable women smallholder farmers to shift from vulnerable livelihoods to more sustainable livelihoods, or through work on social protection by enabling access to safety nets (rights and entitlements).

7 Fundamental principles for achieving sustainable, positive change for WEE



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Principle 3: Harness multiple entry points to ensure meaningful WEE and support women's empowerment more broadly

WHY?

While partners and donors may often focus solely on creating and supporting women's economic activities, Oxfam understands that actions on social and political dimensions are critical for WEE to be sustainable and meaningful.

HOW?

- **Identify the best entry points to WEE according to the context.** Addressing social or political empowerment may be prerequisites or provide the best entry point for women to be able to participate meaningfully in economic activities.
- Programme design should **avoid working in silos** and ensure linkages between relevant programmes working across the different dimensions of women's empowerment. For example, link humanitarian programming to long-term development for increased resilience.

Principle 4: Build partnerships that embed ownership in local systems

WHY?

Women's empowerment requires focusing on specific opportunities that are feasible with specific groups of women and the context, and building partnerships across a range of actors to advance those.

HOW?

- Build **strategic partnerships** that support and strengthen women's rights organizations and feminist movements in economic decision making and support the creation of new women's rights organizations where they do not exist. Women's rights organizations are critical to creating lasting change. Oxfam tends to partner with women's rights organizations around social and political issues more than economic issues; however, equal consideration should be given to partnering with women's rights organizations and feminist movements to challenge economic systems.
- Build **contextually relevant multi-stakeholder initiatives**³⁸ to promote a holistic approach, generate new thinking to solve complex problems, generate new types of partnerships or bring together actors who do not normally engage. They can also be forums that give women and men smallholder farmers opportunities to exert influence. When governments, private sector companies, agricultural producers and workers' unions, women's organizations and civil society intentionally work together or form partnerships, positive change can be achieved at scale.

- Support **effective forms of organizing for women**. It is important to support a mix of groups, both formal and informal, mixed or women-only, that are interlinked and have complementary benefits.³⁹
- Focus on **potential and specific barriers for most women**. Avoid focusing only on exceptional women.
- **Strengthen economic organizations** by promoting women's collective action in a variety of trade unions, marketing organizations, producer groups and financial institutions. Emphasize with partners how effective economic organizations contribute to stable economic development.
- **Oxfam as a facilitator**. Engage with multiple stakeholders to make changes in market systems, rather than funding partners to provide the 'missing' resources and services.
- Promote the **co-creation of knowledge and solutions together with stakeholders** through supporting the scaling up of innovative programmes, influencing, and research/generation of solid evidence. Integrate local capacities and knowledge, and put local stakeholders in a leading role.

Principle 5: Strengthen internal capacity to ensure programme quality

WHY?

Implementing WEE initiatives requires multidisciplinary teams to develop a basic understanding of the barriers that prevent women from becoming fully empowered, and to be able to tap into available resources and expertise throughout the confederation.

HOW?

- Use **tools and methods** that ensure a focus on women in all stages of programme design.
- Ensure solid **MEAL mechanisms**⁴⁰ – going beyond other actors in the sector who only measure e.g. increases in income or number of women in jobs. While taking stock of the different multidimensional indexes currently being developed or tested, Oxfam recommends: a) implementing a wider range of indicators that reflect our definition (see Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning for Women's Economic Empowerment Resource Guide⁴¹); and b) including achievements and progress for WEE in organizations, economic policies and economic thinking.

8 MAIN THEMES OF OXFAM'S PROGRAMMES AND APPROACHES FOR PROMOTING WEE



- Inclusive market systems development
- Enterprise development and impact investing
- Community savings groups and access to finance
- Productive and resilient smallholder agriculture
- Humanitarian programme
- Challenging social norms and improving social inclusion
- Policy, campaigns and influencing
- Reducing and redistributing unpaid care work

Credit: Tessa Bunney/Oxfam

There is no single, prescriptive approach to working on WEE. Currently Oxfam works in over 40 countries to promote women's economic activities through diverse approaches that often include a combination of skills training, strengthening women's control over assets, promoting women's collective action in markets, business development and policy advocacy. Oxfam's commitment to gender justice also includes programmes which target barriers to women's rights more broadly, such as violence against women, social norms, unpaid care work, and lack of gender awareness and leadership, which impact on WEE.

The different approaches to WEE fall under several overarching themes and include a range of assessment tools to promote WEE in other development programmes, which sometimes overlap. These themes include:

- inclusive market systems development;
- enterprise development and impact investing;
- community savings groups and access to finance;
- productive and resilient smallholder agriculture;
- humanitarian programme;
- challenging social norms and improving social inclusion;
- policy, campaigns and influencing;
- reducing and redistributing unpaid care work.

Assessment tools help programme teams to know what the issues are in WEE in wider programmes, while global programmes have developed good practice in certain thematic areas. Both aim to improve outcomes on WEE.

Oxfam works on WEE both through standalone and gender-mainstreaming programmes. Standalone programmes promote WEE as their main goal; they focus on innovating and strengthening approaches for WEE. Gender mainstreaming, on the other hand, refers to initiatives in which WEE approaches are promoted but are not the sole focus. Resilience – 'the ability of women and men to realize their rights and improve their well-being despite shocks, stresses and uncertainty' – cuts across all programme areas and themes.

In this section, we describe the overarching themes, Oxfam programmes and approaches that promote WEE, and linkages between these programmes and the themes. These linkages can help to support cross-learning, sharing and collaboration across the Confederation.

8.1 Inclusive market systems development

Oxfam's work within inclusive market systems development remains rights-based and centred on the beliefs that: women and men smallholder farmers need to have greater levels of influence; women's empowerment and rights need to be prioritized for more equitable market systems to be achieved; the private sector has a duty to behave responsibly; and governments are responsible for ensuring that there is an enabling environment for this.

Work under this theme aims to shift power in markets and promote WEE by addressing power imbalances between women and men, and between smallholder producers and larger market actors along the value chain. This requires working at the market systems level – looking not just at the value chain, but also at the services that support it and the political, economic, social and environmental enabling environment that is necessary for it to function effectively and equitably. Inclusive market systems approaches bring together a range of stakeholders in the enabling environment and various service providers required for market access, as well as those in production, distribution, marketing and sales processes. In addition, women and marginalized smallholders are supported to increase their power by working collectively through producer organizations, women's groups and informal groups. Key to this work is selecting subsectors and market positions and channels that have the most potential to work for women, and promoting women into new, more profitable and less risky roles in markets, beyond production.

8.2 Enterprise development and impact investing

Oxfam sees opportunities in supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) which can provide leadership and economic opportunities for women, youth and smallholder farmers, and which can develop commercial viability. This can be achieved through a combination of finance provision and business technical support. WEE is addressed in this thematic area by supporting enterprises that: promote women's leadership and challenge stereotypes; provide economic opportunities for large numbers of women; open up opportunities to increase gender and women's rights awareness and the ability of key institutions such as banks to reach women with appropriate services. SME training and support can include both 'soft' skills (e.g. negotiation skills) and 'hard' skills (e.g. accounting, financial literacy) development for women, as well as training for men around new masculinities.

This work focuses on the promotion of SMEs that provide increased market access and value-addition opportunities for farmers, as vehicles for job creation, and provide affordable products and services for people living in poverty. Conventional financing institutions tend to dismiss such enterprises as unfit for investment – they fall into what is known as the

'missing middle' – i.e. the financing gap between the plentiful microfinance available for micro-enterprises and the corporate finance available to large, established firms. SMEs are stifled by perverse regulatory climates and poor access to inputs.

Impact investing involves contributions of capital into SMEs and related funds, with the intention of generating social impact alongside financial returns from below-market to market rate. Depending on the arrangements made with the investors/donors, capital may be returned either to the investors or to Oxfam at the end of the life of the investment. In several circumstances, the money earned/repaid by the investment recycles so that the resources can be reinvested, thereby expanding the impact the funding is able to create.

8.3 Community savings groups and access to finance

This work focuses on increasing women's and communities' access to adapted financial services (savings, credit, micro-insurance), but also includes business skills development and entrepreneurship, training on agricultural techniques, promotion of active citizenship, asset building, and comprehensive risk management. The aim is to secure women's control over productive assets and resources, increase their income and improve food security, ensure duty-bearers are accountable to women and communities, build social capital and increase resilience of rural vulnerable populations, especially women. Savings groups provide an efficient platform to strengthen women's financial inclusion, economic empowerment and engagement as active citizens.

8.4 Productive and resilient smallholder agriculture

Work under this theme involves: i) improving production and reducing risks by enabling access to better quality assets and innovation (knowledge, agricultural inputs, irrigation systems, fertile soils, etc.); ii) promoting more equitable control over land and access to water; and iii) tackling vulnerability to climate change, natural disasters and other shocks. This work also includes the promotion of public and private investment in social protection and asset transfers that enable the most vulnerable and marginalized people, who often tend to be women, to access improved livelihoods opportunities. Examples of these are transfers of land, subsidized salaries for employees in producer groups, or the provision of social safety nets, including food distribution schemes, to ensure food security of households and enable farmers to engage in growing commercial-oriented crops.

8.5 Challenging social norms and improving social inclusion

The root causes of women's unequal access to assets and services, economic opportunities and decision making can be traced to social norms that dictate and freeze the expected roles of men and women. Thus, women (and girls) face time poverty due to the uneven distribution of household and care work, social restrictions on their mobility and roles, lower confidence and skills, and women-specific risks such as gender-based violence, early marriage and multiple unwanted pregnancies. As well as being fundamental human rights issues, all of these hinder WEE. Activities that address these issues include: reduction and redistribution of care work; literacy promotion; leadership and confidence building; support to women's collective action; promotion of sexual and reproductive health rights and access to services; and addressing the root causes of gender-based violence.

8.6 Reducing and redistributing unpaid care work

Across the world, women carry out the majority of unpaid care work, and this work is not perceived as skilled or valuable. This heavy and unequal responsibility for care limits women's control over their time and mobility, and undermines opportunities for leadership and training. This constraints women's access to decent productive work, pushing them into lower-paid, precarious roles. Provision of care services, like child care, health care, eldercare and HIV care would provide carers with more support, more time and greater choice around employment. Care services also 'care for the economy': they create a healthier, more productive workforce, getting workers back to work more quickly.

Similarly, water and energy for domestic use is critical for reducing difficult, inefficient tasks like cooking, preparing meals and laundry. Yet governments rarely make sufficient infrastructure investments in these areas. Progressive labour policies such as maternity, paternity and parental leave are also critical.

The private sector can also play a key role by supporting progressive practices to support the care needs and responsibilities of its workforce: first, as employers, by providing decent employment (in terms of hours and pay) and benefits (sick leave, parental leave); secondly, by marketing affordable and accessible domestic technologies to reduce time for domestic work such as preparing meals, and through responsible advertising which promotes new 'norms' around sharing care work.

Oxfam is developing evidence and arguments for global and national advocacy to increase investments in infrastructure and care services, based on human rights, economics and experiences of success. In addition Oxfam and partners have successfully worked with communities to better measure time spend on care work, improving recognition of the value of this work and advocating for example for new water systems, electricity-generating plants, and child care services.



Particular emphasis has been placed on integrating this theme into existing tools on livelihoods, food, security or vulnerability, to help ensure that women can fully participate in and benefit equally from development programmes (see Rapid Care Analysis in [Annex 2](#)).

8.7 Policy, campaigns and influencing

Women, food security, and agriculture

Oxfam's work on food security and agriculture places women's rights at the centre of efforts to tackle three of the biggest drivers of hunger:

- Insecurity of access to natural resources;
- Current unsustainable food/agricultural production practices, resulting in the need to support agricultural livelihoods that build resilience, and create and enhance economic opportunities through both informal and formal markets linkages; and
- Climate change and the need to support farmers in building their adaptive capacity to address its negative impacts.

A focus on understanding and influencing public policy is the foundation of Oxfam's work. Agriculture and rural development are intrinsically intertwined and remain primarily the responsibility of governments: setting environmental regulations; ensuring local communities have control over the natural resources they depend on; investing in research and development along with infrastructure such as roads and irrigation; providing appropriate extension support to farmers; regulating markets to ensure farmers receive fair prices for their goods; and providing weather information so farmers know when and what to plant. In all of these areas, governments have a key role to play. The policies they promote and investments they make can hinder or help women farmers.

At the same time, it is recognized that private sector actors hold substantial power in the food system. Identifying and improving company policies and practices is necessary to address imbalances in power relationships between business and smallholders, to improve formal market opportunities, and to improve the roles of women within value chains.

Women, wages and economic inequality

Among other issues, Oxfam is focused on: living wages for working women in all sectors (including agricultural workers); fairer, more progressive taxation systems that help rather than harm women; policy and practice that deliver fair labour laws and rights for women; public spending that combats gender economic inequality, in particular social spending (on social protection, health and education); ensuring a fair share of value for agricultural producers; challenging land grabs that threaten community rights; and calling for companies to take increased responsibility for the impact of their operations on the environment. In this work, Oxfam uses a variety of tactics and approaches:

- Budget monitoring, including gender budget analysis, to identify current spending trends, along with recommended changes to improve focus of expenditures to support women, from education to health and social protection spending;
- Development at the national level of policy frameworks that promote inclusive private sector and public sector investment;
- Social recognition of the role women play in agriculture, through activities such as Oxfam's 'Female Food Heroes' awards;
- Increasing social recognition of the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work and its affect on women's lives;
- Influencing private sector investment strategies, e.g. development of new financial products aimed at women-led enterprises;
- Showcasing inclusive business models that benefit smallholders, particularly women;
- Working with local communities to address extreme examples of malpractice by companies in order to shed light on the systemic patterns of abuse that keep people in poverty;
- Demonstrating the concrete and unfair impact of regressive tax systems and cuts to social spending on women, and campaigning to change these systems for women's equality;
- Advocating for national and regional policies and agreements to grant women fair wages and labour rights.

8 Main themes of Oxfam's programmes and approaches for promoting WEE



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Oxfam's multifaceted work toward WEE

The GROW campaign's work focuses on addressing current and emerging challenges faced by smallholder farmers. Less emphasis has been placed on challenging the current economic system in which the private sector plays an increasingly important role in determining whether livelihoods are sustainable and secure, although the gendered nature of the current economic system was a key focus of Oxfam's advocacy work with the UN High-Level Panel on WEE in 2016–17.

The Even It Up campaign and Fiscal Accountability for Inequality Reduction (FAIR) programme together address issues of gender economic inequality – specifically wage and labour rights for women (in all sectors), the gendered burden of unpaid care work, and the way taxation and fiscal policy/spending can empower – or disempower – women. When taxation systems are regressive, the tax burden can often fall hardest on women; and when public/social spending is cut, it affects the lives of women disproportionately. In this way, the fight for fiscal justice is intricately linked to the fight for women's economic equality. Oxfam works to ensure that public spending contributes to women's economic equality – through processes like budget-monitoring and gender-responsive budgeting – and that governments and publics recognise and seek to address the inequitable burden of work that women bear, and the inequitable pay and rights they receive. Oxfam also works to combat violence against women and girls in its ENOUGH campaign. It is only through this wider lens, across multiple campaigns and areas of work, that Oxfam's approach to WEE can be seen as taking a systems approach to gender-based barriers.

Oxfam's Behind the Brands Case Study⁴²

Behind the Brands (BtB) is part of Oxfam's GROW campaign to help create a world where everyone has enough to eat. The campaign scores and ranks the world's 10 biggest food and beverage companies⁴³ on their agricultural sourcing policies on seven themes (Land, Farmers, Water, Women, Transparency, Workers, and Climate). After the launch of the campaign in February 2013, Behind the Brands focused on addressing women's rights and the unequal treatment of women in cocoa supply chains with Mars, Mondelez, and Nestle as specific targets.

As part of the UN High Level Panel on WEE, Oxfam has been instrumental in ensuring that topics such as the particular context of women working in agriculture, addressing harmful social norms and the importance of collective voice and agency were included in the analysis. Oxfam has been part of all 8 working groups set up on key drivers of WEE identified in the first panel report, and has notably co-lead the working group on care work. In line with the draft influencing strategy on unpaid care developed by the WE-Care initiative, Oxfam successfully advocated for the inclusion of recommendations which ask for governments, international institutions and private sector organisations to:

- Recognise and invest in care;
- Promote equal sharing of care work between women and men;
- Ensure unpaid carers are better represented in decision-making.

Humanitarian programme

During crises, as well as in pre- and post-shock situations, inclusive market development and other approaches mentioned here can be used to ensure that humanitarian responses address women's critical needs effectively, protect livelihoods, and support the development of long-term, resilient economic opportunities for women ('building back better'). Promoting gender-sensitive and market-driven responses to shocks can help strengthen local markets and women's ability to recover in times of crisis. Where markets are functioning and accessible in times of shock, this could include cash transfer programming (CTP) options such as emergency cash or voucher responses which target women, female cash-for-work interventions (including agricultural cash-for-work), small grants to female traders, or cash-for-training for women. At the very least, those interventions should be designed along the principle of 'do no harm' and preserve whatever social advances had made before the situation arose.

9 MEASURING WEE



Measuring the contribution of specific interventions to WEE is a prerequisite to assessing the effectiveness of those interventions.

Credit: Simon Rawles

Measuring the contribution of specific interventions to WEE is a prerequisite to assessing the effectiveness of those interventions. Oxfam has therefore developed a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Resource Guide on WEE.⁴⁴ This provides guidance on the different stages of the programme cycle, from beneficiary identification through to evaluation. It identifies 21 Outcome Areas (see Figure 3: Measuring WEE – Outcome Areas) articulated around three domains (personal, relational and environmental domains) and suggests indicators and useful resources for measuring outcomes. The following section provides an overview of the Resource Guide.

9.1 Identification

Oxfam’s Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability (CAMSA) lays out guidance for identifying and estimating the intended ‘beneficiaries’ of a project (also called ‘primary change agents’). At this stage, it is important to consider the different characteristics or social categories that people might embody (or experience) in their lives – things like age, ethnicity, etc.

Consideration of gender is required to understand how markets function and how to strengthen them. A gender analysis examines how the social roles of men and women are determined, and how those roles affect development outcomes. For example, in agricultural interventions a gender analysis provides insights into how socially constructed roles and responsibilities shape the myriad decisions around agricultural production and processing. Power Analysis⁴⁵ and Stakeholder Analysis⁴⁶ can then support the identification of appropriate strategies and entry points for our interventions.

9.2 Planning and design

Oxfam uses a ‘theory of change’ process to help us think through and express how we think change will happen on a given issue or for a given group of people. Oxfam’s Common Approach to MEL and Social Accountability states that a theory of change must be ‘defined in a participatory manner, including the views and lessons learned’ from partners, other key actors and project beneficiaries/primary change agents (where appropriate).

When developing a theory of change for a WEE intervention, we recommend the following:

- Consider expressing how you expect gender-related changes to happen at different levels – within and among individuals, within communities, within institutions and in formal spaces such as national policies and laws.
- Be sure to consider both the visible and formal changes that must happen (changes in production, access to finance, etc.) and also the ‘hidden’ changes in social norms, in time use, and the things people think and assume.

- Consider some of the risks and unintended consequences of WEE activity (for example, reallocation of care work to girls, or a violent backlash) and ensure that they are documented, so that we can consider how to monitor and respond to them.
- Consider time as a factor – many complex social changes take a long time (a decade or more) to come about. What is the time horizon in your theory of change?

9.3 Monitoring and evaluation

Reach and process indicators can provide information on participation, issues faced by women, successes related to implementation as well as unintended outcomes.

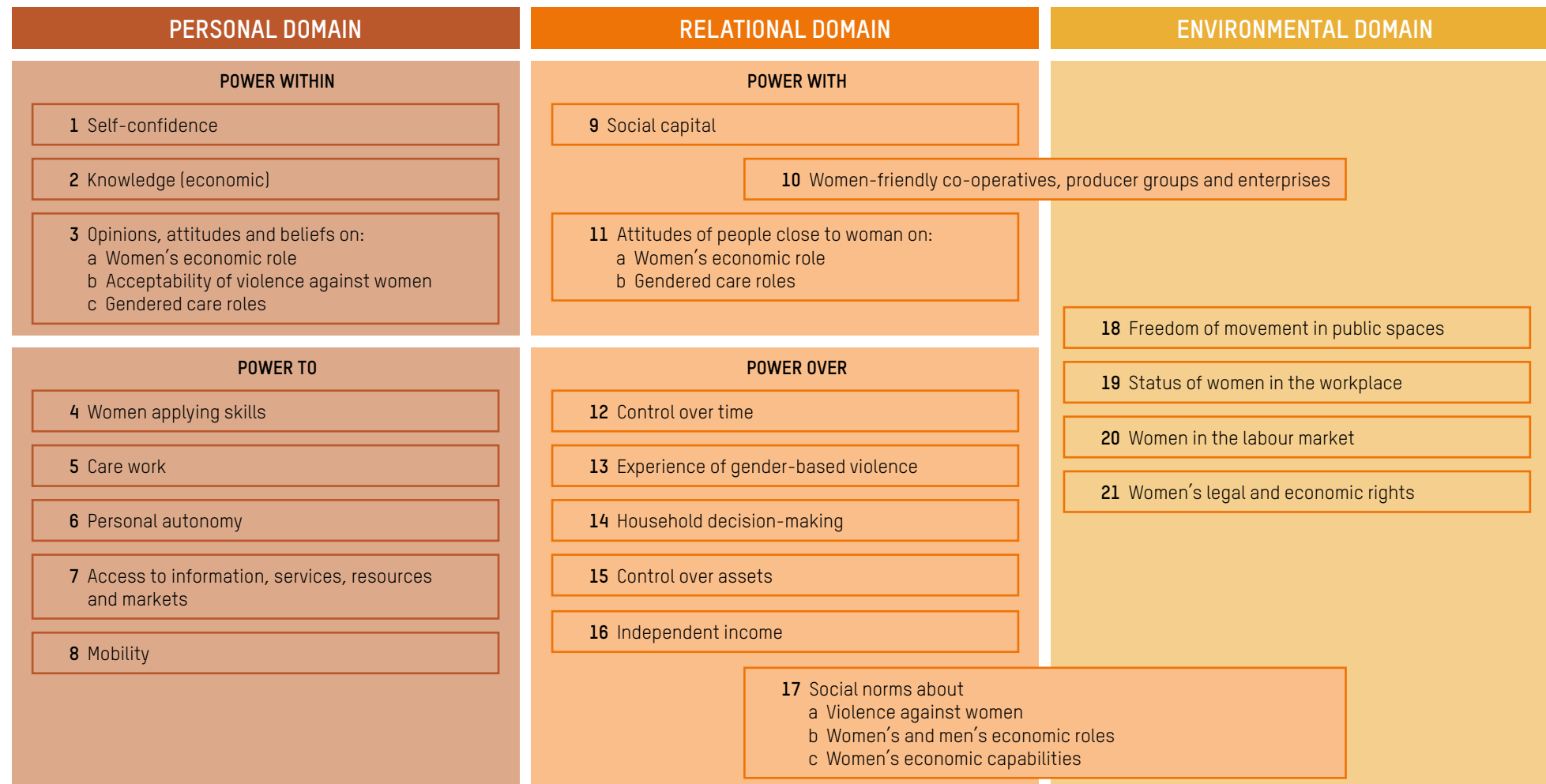
Oxfam’s MEL Resource Guide⁴⁷ is structured around 21 ‘Outcome Areas’ (see Figure 3: Measuring WEE – Outcome Areas) that are articulated around three domains:

- The **personal** domain (relating to women’s individual knowledge, mobility, attitudes and beliefs, and self-perception);
- The **relational** domain (relating to the attitudes and norms of people within women’s lives and the enterprises they interact with);
- The **environmental** domain (relating to the broader social and political structures in the public space which impact women’s empowerment).

For each Outcome Area, suggested indicators, methods and useful resources are provided.

Those elements are not meant to be integrated in their entirety into each programme or project. Rather, specific elements can be integrated and used as appropriate in different points of the programme cycle. The Outcome Areas in this resource guide started with the “Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index” (WEAI) indicators⁴⁸, but evolved during five years of Women’s Empowerment Effectiveness Reviews ([impact evaluations carried out by OGB](#)) and a formative evaluation which resulted in a [Conceptual Framework for Women’s Economic Leadership in Asia](#).

Figure 6: Measuring WEE – Outcome Areas



Source: Adapted from CARE (2014) 'Women's Empowerment Framework'

Example: Outcome Area 6 – ‘Personal Autonomy’

‘Personal Autonomy’ is defined as *the capacity to decide actions for oneself and pursue a course of action in one’s life, often regardless of any particular moral content*. Three measurement approaches are suggested (respectively from International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), Oxfam GB’s Women’s Empowerment Effectiveness Reviews and The Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative):

- Linking autonomy with mobility and including indicators such as the ability to visit friends, family and associates; the ability to use public transport/travel freely in public spaces; the use of media, phone, technology; and at the community/public level, rates of abuse, assault and harassment of women in public spaces.
- Using household surveys (conducted with women) to assess autonomy by:
 - Asking respondents who takes the decisions about a specific area (for decisions that apply to the whole household).
 - If the woman (/respondent) reports not being the one responsible or the only one responsible, then asking ‘To what extent do you think you can influence this decision?’ Responses are scaled from ‘Not at all’ to ‘To a large extent’.
 - Assessing respondents’ ability to personally travel to visit relatives outside the community and to participate in community groups’ activities.
- Using vignettes (short stories) that describe people with more or less autonomy, and then asking ‘Are you like this person?’

Oxfam’s Women’s Empowerment Effectiveness Reviews aim to measure the impact of a sample of our programmes in terms of women’s empowerment. These reviews use data from household surveys to help draw conclusions about changes across a range of different dimensions:

- ability to make decisions and influence;
- self-perception;
- personal freedom;
- access to and control over resources; and
- support from social networks.

The reviews use a common framework and select different indicators depending on logic and context of the programme under review.

10 OXFAM'S PROGRAMMES AND APPROACHES TO PROMOTING WEE



Credit: Aurelie Marrier d'Unienville/Oxfam

This chapter presents an overview of some of Oxfam's main programmes which have pioneered different assessment tools. Oxfam has various programmes and approaches to promoting WEE. These include, but are not limited to:

- Gendered Enterprise and Markets Programme (GEM), Oxfam Great Britain
- Women's Empowerment, Mainstreaming and Networking – for gender justice in economic development (WEMAN), Oxfam Novib
- Enterprise Development Programme (EDP) Oxfam Great Britain
- Enterprises That Change Lives (in Spanish, Empresas que Cambian Vidas) (ECV) Oxfam Intermón
- Women in Small Enterprises (WISE), Oxfam America
- Saving For Change (SFC), Oxfam America
- WE-Care, Oxfam Great Britain

These programmes tend to fall within one or more of the thematic areas described in [Section 8](#). The table below shows the various themes under which the programmes fall and identifies similarities in approaches and potential opportunities for cross-learning, sharing and collaboration.

Table 1: Main themes of Oxfam programmes and approaches to promote WEE

	GEM	WEMAN ⁴⁹	EDP/ECV	WISE	SFC	WE-Care	EYW
Inclusive markets systems development	■	■				■	
Enterprise development and impact investing	■	■	■	■			
Community savings groups and access to finance			■		■		
Productive and resilient smallholder agriculture	■				■	■	
Social inclusion and norms	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Reducing and redistributing unpaid care work	■	■				■	■
Policy, campaigns and influencing	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Humanitarian programme	■					■	

GEM Gendered Enterprise and Markets

A holistic market-system approach to sustainable livelihoods development. GEM brings together Oxfam's experience in three areas:

- Smallholder power in agricultural markets;
- Women's Economic Leadership;
- Climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction.

Approach

GEM applies a wide variety of methodologies and tools:

- The **Women's Economic Leadership (WEL)** methodology links **gendered market analysis** with **gendered analysis of household work, women-specific risks (including gender-based violence)** and **norms about women and men** in communities to increase women's agency.
- **Rapid Care Analysis (RCA)** is used to understand women's time poverty and support measures to reduce and redistribute unpaid care work.
- **Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (VRA)** is used to assess and categorize the livelihood activities and social groups of a community, based on their vulnerability to environmental hazards, socio-political and socio-economic issues. It identifies impact chains for the most relevant hazards and designs interventions to potentially reduce the negative impacts.
- The **Participatory Capacity and Vulnerability (PCVA)** tool is a risk analysis process designed to engage with communities in contexts where natural disasters are significant drivers of poverty. It enables the design of programmes based on a community's capacities and vulnerabilities. It draws on a wide range of participatory learning and action techniques and tools.

Strengths

- Looks at the whole market environment in order to identify barriers and opportunities for engaging women in rural livelihoods and ensuring they are recognized as economic agents.
- A holistic proposition for creating sustainable income opportunities for women and men living in poverty.
- A focus on commercially viable solutions – selecting markets that offer potential for growth, and developing collaboration between market actors, including links to commercial buyers and markets.
- Supports innovation in services around input provision, extension services, access to ICT, market intelligence and financial services.
- Uses advocacy to promote improved market governance, as well as public and private investment in pre-commercial infrastructure and women farmers' assets.
- GEM initiatives spread across Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Latin America and the Caribbean, thus providing access to a global action learning process and community of practice.
- Can be adapted to deliver a variety of market-related outcomes – increased sales of produce, access to food, and access to labour opportunities.
- Can be adapted for humanitarian situations, including pre-crisis planning.
- GEM toolkit available to support programmes in design, implementation and learning.

Geographical focus

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Chad, Colombia, Ethiopia, Honduras, Malawi, Mauritania, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Paraguay, OPTI, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe

Type

- Gender mainstreaming
- Standalone

Works in

- Rural contexts
- Urban contexts

WEE outcomes

- Identification of market subsectors that are commercially viable for women
- Upgrading of women's roles to roles that are more profitable and less risky
- Adaptation and risk-management strategies that are inclusive of women's lifecycle risks, gender-based violence and gendered impacts of climate change
- Women's collective action strengthened and power in markets increased
- Women recognized as economic agents

WEMAN

Women's Empowerment, Mainstreaming and Networking – for gender justice in economic development

WEMAN enables vulnerable women and men in rural communities to articulate and follow through on their ambitions to address gender inequality and other root causes of poverty. Controlling their own development process, they become more resilient to socio-economic shocks. WEMAN envisions women and men realizing their full potential as empowered economic, social and political actors, free from discrimination. It includes:

- Gender mainstreaming in market and value chain development, financial services and economic policy and planning;
- Community-led empowerment (GALS);
- A learning and advocacy network.

Approach

WEMAN uses the **Gender Action Learning System (GALS)**, an innovative methodology for community-led empowerment, designed for integration in rural development programmes and based on principles of inclusion, respect and equity (see [Annex 2](#)).

Strengths

- Views gender as a strategic issue, not as an add-on.
- Engages both women and men for change.
- Aims to put decision-making power in the hands of those who do the work.
- Works at different levels: household, community and multi-stakeholder, and creates mutual respect and collaboration across people of different caste, ethnicity, religion etc.).
- Addresses the internal dynamics of household decision making.
- Engages public and private actors in a community-led change process.

Geographical focus

Uganda, Rwanda, Nigeria, Sudan, DRC, Burundi, Zimbabwe, Niger, Mali, Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan

Type

- Gender mainstreaming
- Standalone

Works in

- Rural contexts
- Urban contexts

WEE outcomes

- Household/community level: Changes in gender relations (gender division of labour, decision making about income and expenditure, women's property rights/control of assets, gender-based violence, women's mobility etc.) and livelihoods improvement
- Organizational level: Community-led and gender-transformative methodologies mainstreamed in economic interventions, and gender equitable partnerships developed for business or economic planning
- Donor/investor level: Influencing of policy, programme design and implementation



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EDP/ECV

Enterprise Development Programme/Empresas Cambian Vidas – Businesses that Change Lives

EDP and ECV support early-stage agricultural enterprises through a social-impact-only vehicle that provides: loan finance (typically in partnership with local banks), business grants (e.g. for capital equipment) and business development support. The funds recovered from loans are recycled within the portfolio for new investments or additional support to existing ones.

Approach

Uses WEL and GEM methodologies – for instance to ensure that a systemic perspective of market systems is applied, and to ensure climate change adaptation and women's empowerment are supported (see [Annex 2](#)).

Strengths

- Targets early-stage enterprises, with loans ranging from \$20,000 to \$250,000.
- Builds sustainable businesses by strengthening them and helping them grow.
- Uses gendered analysis of markets to understand who is present in the different links of the supply chain, who can access services, assets and inputs, as well as gaps and opportunities for enterprise development.
- Analyses specific barriers that women face in the market and the household, as well as economic opportunities that work better for women.
- Applies multi-dimensional strategies such as supporting agricultural and business skills, but also carrying out separate activities to build women's confidence or address particular structural constraints.

Geographical focus

- EDP: Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Honduras, Nepal and Rwanda. Previous investments in Colombia and Armenia
- ECV: Bolivia, Paraguay, Burkina Faso, Mauritania

Type

- ☒ Gender mainstreaming
- ☐ Standalone

Works in

- ☒ Rural contexts
- ☐ Urban contexts

WEE outcomes

- Better access to credit
- Increased household income and material wellbeing
- Increased involvement of women in decision making at household, enterprise and community levels
- Improvement in women's self-perception



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WISE

Women in Small Enterprise

With an integrated investment and grant-funded model, WISE takes a 'gender lens' approach to supporting financial institutions in Guatemala. It aims to improve services to women-run small enterprises through a loan guarantee fund and specialized training, while offering coaching and peer-to-peer support for women entrepreneurs. The ultimate aim of WISE is to gather evidence that informs the policy dialogue about women's economic exclusion and pushes for policy changes at national and global levels.

Approach

- WEL methodology.
- WISE training and coaching methodologies delivered by partners.

Strengths

- Supports women-led enterprises (individually or as cooperatives) with loans ranging from \$5,000 to \$50,000.
- Works through local financial institutions.
- Brings together experts in small-enterprise finance, gender justice, community development, market access and advocacy.
- Offers a services package that includes:
 - Financing for women-owned small enterprises;
 - Gender-specific business training and coaching to improve skills and confidence;
 - Development of links to new markets;
 - Advocacy efforts to promote changes in public and private policies that favour women's empowerment.

Geographical focus

Guatemala (pilot phase)

Type

- Gender mainstreaming
- Standalone

Works in

- Rural contexts
- Urban contexts

WEE Outcomes

- Sustainable access to appropriate finance
- Improved performance of women-run businesses
- More empowered and influential women entrepreneurs
- Women entrepreneurs perceived as positive role models and leaders
- Policy environment improved to benefit women entrepreneurs

SAVING FOR CHANGE

Saving for Change (SfC) is a savings group methodology that increases resilience and financial assets. It trains groups of women to save regularly, borrow from their group's fund and repay loans with interest. At the end of a saving cycle, the fund is divided and each woman receives her savings plus a share of the profit.

Approach

Savings groups respond to the unmet needs of the rural poor by providing a secure place to save; the opportunity to borrow in small amounts and on flexible terms; and a network of support and solidarity.

Strengths

- Successful in increasing savings, food security and investment in livestock.
- Promotes solidarity and builds social capital.
- Savings groups constitute a transparent and sustainable complement to formal and informal financial services.
- Methodology is simple, efficient and easily scalable, as groups are self-selected and self-managed by rights-holders.
- Cost-effective model requiring minimal infrastructure.
- Great platform for additional capacity building trainings:
 - SfC + Business
 - SfC + Leadership
 - SfC + Citizenship
 - SfC + Ag
 - SfC + WASH
 - SfC + Mobile banking
 - SfC + R4
 - SfC + Reproductive Health
 - SfC for Youth

Geographical focus

Cambodia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Laos, Mali, Senegal, Timor-Leste, Ethiopia

Type

- Gender mainstreaming
- Standalone

Works in

- Rural contexts
- Urban contexts

WEE outcomes

- Sustainable access to appropriate finance
- Improved performance of women-run businesses
- More empowered and influential women entrepreneurs
- Women entrepreneurs perceived as positive role models and leaders
- Policy environment improved to benefit women entrepreneurs



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WE-CARE

Women's Economic Empowerment and Care

WE-Care is an initiative to make care work more visible and address it as a factor influencing gender inequality. It aims to work with others to build solutions to the centuries-old challenge of providing care for people while also ensuring women's human rights are fulfilled. Addressing care work is a precondition for achieving women's political, social and economic empowerment, and for overcoming poverty.

Approach

WE-Care applies the **Rapid Care Analysis** methodology and a **household care survey** to understand the nature of unpaid care and mobilize stakeholders to take action. It uses multi-stakeholder platforms and other forms of engagement, including advocacy and communications, to stimulate the development of practical solutions such as the expansion of equipment, infrastructure and services, and changes to gender norms and roles.

Strengths

- A low-cost approach involving practical steps.
- Can be embedded or integrated into wider WEE/ Economic Justice or Gender Justice programmes working with mixed groups and where there is already a logic of promoting WEE. For instance, it has already been integrated into EDP and GEM, supporting their objectives for WEE.
- Results in increased recognition of a fundamental issue by local stakeholders and generates locally led action.
- Provides evidence for influencing policy and practice.

Geographical focus

Colombia, Ethiopia, Malawi, Philippines, Uganda, Zimbabwe (embedded within existing Oxfam programmes); Bangladesh, Honduras, Tajikistan (implementation of certain components)

Type

- Gender mainstreaming
- Standalone

Works in

- Rural contexts
- Urban contexts

WEE outcomes

- Addressing heavy and unequal care enables women to benefit from participation in development programmes
- Unpaid care work is recognized, reduced, redistributed
- Negative outcomes (such as violence against women) are mitigated

EMPOWER YOUTH FOR WORK

The Empower Youth for Work programme creates economic and social empowerment for young women and men (age 15–24) living in rural climate-change affected areas. It addresses policies and involves institutional commitments that open up new opportunities for women and youth. The programme supports and replicates new business models that are fit for purpose. A multi-stakeholder approach ensures a wide dissemination of programme models.

Approach

Empower Youth for Work uses a holistic analysis including gender, markets and climate change. The program is co-created with youth and the IKEA Foundation. It focuses on learning and innovation. The programme brings together civil society partners, government and the private sector.

Strengths

- Through quality training, young women and men gain soft and technical skills demanded by employers.
- Young women and men gain entrepreneurship skills in line with market opportunities.
- Young women and men in rural climate-affected areas are linked to employment or entrepreneurship opportunities.
- Care and domestic responsibilities are recognized, redistributed and reduced at household level.
- Sexual and reproductive health barriers inhibiting young women's economic empowerment are addressed.

Geographical focus

Bangladesh, Indonesia, Ethiopia, Pakistan

Type:

- Standalone

Works in:

- Rural contexts

WEE outcomes

- Young women and men use their agency, soft and market-led technical skills
- Young women and men benefit from new or improved employment or entrepreneurship opportunities
- Enabling environment for young women and men's social and economic empowerment promoted



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11 OXFAM'S TRACK RECORD ON WEE



Credit: John Ferguson/Oxfam GB/International

Oxfam's desire to strengthen programmes' effectiveness and to achieve change at scale has given prominence to a more holistic and systemic approach in recent years

Oxfam works on WEE in the vast majority of countries where it operates, and externally this is perceived as a major strength of the organization. Oxfam's work has involved direct delivery and facilitation to build technical skills; better access to inputs, financial services and markets; and collective action.

Here are some facts and figures about some of Oxfam's key programmes on WEE (for more information, see [Annex 2](#)):

- **Saving for Change:** Through its innovative community-based saving and loans programme, as of 2016 Oxfam has reached 730,000 women⁵⁰ that have achieved savings worth \$55m, improved access to credits and resilience.⁵¹
- **WEMAN (Women's Empowerment Mainstreaming and Networking):** Through community-led gender action learning, influencing of civil society organizations, local government and the private sector, and the establishment of a global learning network and advocacy movement, over 100,000 women and men and more than 70 organizations have been directly involved in WEMAN.⁵²
- **WISE:** By serving a convening role to support collaboration between financial institutions, non-profit organizations and academia to advance women's economic rights in Guatemala, WISE support has led to the launch of Guatemala's first loan product developed specifically for women-run small businesses. To date, 19 loans have been issued to women-run businesses such as pharmacies, and food processing/transportation enterprises.
- **WE-Care (Women's Economic Empowerment and Care):** Methodologies used in 20 countries focusing in its first phase on six countries – Colombia, Ethiopia, Malawi, the Philippines, Uganda and Zimbabwe – the programme has been implemented on small scale and entered its second phase in 2016 and expanded to Kenya and the Philippines. A key success has been to provide visibility for the issue of unpaid care work in the development sector.
- **EDP (Enterprise Development Programme)/ECV (Empresas que Cambian Vidas/Businesses that Change Lives):** 20 enterprises (14 for EDP) have been supported in total, and representation of women in leadership positions has risen to 49 percent for EDP.
- **GEM (Gendered Enterprise and Markets):** Since 2014, GEM has established over 220 producer groups in Bangladesh, Tajikistan and Zambia, working directly with over 7,000 producers (84 percent female) involved in dairy, vegetable and soya value chains. Ninety-five percent of leadership positions within producer groups are held by women, helping to promote women's decision-making ability within their communities and changing societal attitudes and beliefs to enable equal relations with men.

• GROW

- **Behind the Brands:** In 2013, more than 100,000 people around the world joined Oxfam's campaign in the first two months, signing petitions and taking action to urge Mars, Mondelez and Nestlé to tackle the hunger, poverty, and unequal pay facing many women cocoa farmers and workers. The three companies committed to assessing the treatment of women in their supply chains and to taking measures to strengthen the rights of women. All agreed to publish the data from first stage impact assessments in 2014, to publish concrete action plans to address gender inequities and to be public champions for women's empowerment in the cocoa industry.
- **Female Food Hero:** Started in 2011 in Tanzania, Female Food Hero has been adapted and applied in 7 countries (Armenia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Nigeria, Tanzania, Russia and Indonesia) to elevate female farmers' voices at the community and national levels and to advocate for women's equality in agriculture and food security policies. In Ethiopia, where it takes the form of a reality TV show, some 35 million people viewed the live award ceremony.
- **A National Forum for Rural Women** was organized in Colombia in March 2015, during which a WE-Care/GROW-produced film was presented to representatives of government agencies. The Forum received substantial coverage in television news, radio programmes and two national newspapers, with quotes from members of Congress who were panel members at the Forum events.
- **Make Trade Fair – Trading Away Our Rights:** The Campaign supported 12 national campaigns on women worker's rights in agriculture, clothing and home-based work.

A review of OGB's programming conducted in 2015 showed improvements in women's decision making and influencing power outside the household.⁵³ The increase in income witnessed in programmes has been uneven. Oxfam's desire to strengthen programmes' effectiveness and to achieve change at scale has given prominence to a more holistic and systemic approach in recent years ([see section 6: Oxfam's thinking and approach to WEE](#)).

The recognition within the organization of the gendered nature of markets and livelihoods has permeated programming, but is yet to fully translate into influencing on economic policy.⁵⁴

Through its campaigning work, Oxfam has been instrumental in: i) providing visibility to the issue of WEE, with a focus on rural smallholder farmers; ii) triggering changes in policies within global food companies; and iii) broadening donor approaches to WEE, beyond job creation.

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Credit: Abbie Traylor-Smith/Oxfam

ANNEX I: Sample approaches to WEE across the development sector

	Rationale	Definition	Priorities
OECD ⁵⁵	Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development and pro-poor growth. Achieving women's economic empowerment requires sound public policies, a holistic approach and long-term commitment and gender-specific perspectives must be integrated at the design stage of policy and programming.	Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways which recognize the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Economic empowerment increases women's access to economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets, skills development and market information.	Women must have more equitable access to assets and services; infrastructure programmes should be designed to benefit the poor, both men and women, and employment opportunities must be improved while increasing recognition of women's vast unpaid work. Innovative approaches and partnerships include increased dialogue among development actors, improved coordination amongst donors and support for women organizing at the national and global level.
DFID ⁵⁶	Economic empowerment matters for women and girls – contributing to their broader empowerment, agency and voice, and to better welfare outcomes for them, their households and their wider communities. It also matters for economic growth – for example, through its impacts on firm performance, agricultural productivity and generation of tax revenues. There are multiple barriers to accessing resources and opportunities – discriminatory cultural and social norms, de facto implementation of formal or customary laws and regulations, unequal access to resources, knowledge, information, networks and markets, informality and workplace discrimination and exploitation.	WEE relates to women's ability to bring about positive changes in their lives and communities as a result of their participation in economic activities. DFID understands economic empowerment as 'a process that increases people's access to and control over economic resources and opportunities including jobs, financial services, property and other productive assets (from which one can generate an income), skills development and market information' (2012).	DFID's position on WEE up to 2015 has been focused on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring women have equal rights to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land, property, inheritance, natural resources, and financial services. • Ensuring women achieve full and productive employment and decent work. • Recognizing, valuing, reducing and redistributing the burden of unpaid care and domestic work.
USAID ⁵⁷	Gender equality and female empowerment are core development objectives, fundamental for the realization of human rights and key to effective and sustainable development outcomes.	Under USAID's Gender Equality and Female Empowerment Policy, 'Female Empowerment is achieved when women and girls acquire the power to act freely, exercise their rights, and fulfil their potential as full and equal members of society. While empowerment often comes from within, and individuals empower themselves, cultures, societies, and institutions create conditions that facilitate or undermine the possibilities for empowerment.' The Leveraging Economic Opportunities (LEO) initiative aims to promote WEE in inclusive market systems by opening up new opportunities for women to access additional resources and enhance their agency.	The USAID WEE framework gives equal emphasis to access to resources, decision making, agency and gender inequality. It is built on the following principles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhanced access and agency are key indicators of empowerment. • Gendered rules are a key determinant of access and agency (including norms and policy). • Rules influence and are influenced by multiple sub-systems in market systems (household, companies, state policy etc.). • Non-economic factors are important influencers of access and agency (e.g. GBV, reproductive health rights etc.). • The combined effects of both structural transformation and bottom-up change interventions lead to sustained empowerment for women.

	Rationale	Definition	Priorities
SIDA⁵⁸	<p>Women's economic empowerment is a priority in promoting gender equality and women's rights, as well as a precondition for sustainable development and pro-poor growth.</p> <p>The economic empowerment of women is a human rights and social justice issue, but it also reduces poverty and strengthens economic growth and development.</p> <p>SIDA advocates for a holistic approach to economic empowerment, which recognizes the importance of political, social, sexual and reproductive health empowerment as essential contributors to economic empowerment.</p>	<p>Women's economic empowerment is the process which increases women's real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in society. Women's economic empowerment can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market, including better sharing of unpaid care work.</p>	<p>SIDA's work on WEE has focused on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Entrepreneurship and private sector development; • Access to land and property rights; • Productive employment and decent work; • Unpaid care work; • Education and skills development; • Social protection. • Agriculture and rural development.
DFATD⁵⁹	<p>Addressing the constraints to women's economic empowerment is fundamental to lasting, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, food security and to the achievement of gender equality.</p>	<p>Economic empowerment combines the concepts of empowerment and economic advancement in the marketplace. This includes increasing skills and access to productive resources, improving enabling and institutional environments, and assisting women in their ability to make and act upon decisions. Economic empowerment is intertwined with social and political empowerment. Addressing the underlying social and cultural factors that limit women's ability to interact with and benefit from markets, such as unpaid and inequitably distributed domestic and care work, limited mobility and the prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence, is essential if initiatives are to address the full range of constraints to WEE.</p>	<p>Programming in women's economic empowerment can work towards three interrelated and mutually supportive objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enable the institutional framework by assisting countries to establish and implement laws, policies and institutions that support women's economic empowerment, economic security, and rights; • Increase women's economic opportunities by supporting women to secure decent work, successfully establish and grow their businesses or increase their agricultural productivity and earnings; • Strengthen women's agency by building women's ability to identify and act on economic opportunities, define, influence and make economic decisions; and challenge social and cultural norms.

ANNEX 2: Tools and guidance

Rapid Care Analysis (RCA)

Designed to easily integrate into existing tools on livelihoods, food, security or vulnerability, the RCA makes visible how care responsibility impacts women's time, health or mobility, and identifies practical interventions to help ensure that women can fully participate in and benefit equally from development programmes.

- › Participatory Methodology (Revised: 2016): Rapid Care Analysis. Guidance for managers and facilitators

Household Care Survey (HCS)

The purpose of the HCS is to build understanding about pathways of positive change for more equitable care provision in households and communities. As a baseline, the HCS documents the problems and existing conditions that influence the design of care interventions. As a follow-up survey, the HCS monitors change and impact, and gathers evidence on 'what works' to address care work in specific contexts. WE-Care has implemented the HCS as a baseline⁶⁰ and follow-up⁶¹ in 2015–2016.

- › Household Care Survey Questionnaire

Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (VRA)

The VRA methodology aims to develop a common understanding among a wide range of stakeholders about the main hazards and issues affecting people in a social-ecological landscape; and subsequently to jointly design measures to reduce risk, enhance wellbeing and promote resilient development in that landscape.

- › Vulnerability and Risk Assessment (VRA)

Participatory Capacity Vulnerability Assessment (PCVA)

PCVA is used for multi-stakeholder risk analysis and project planning, designed for communities in contexts where environmental factors are significant drivers of poverty and suffering. It draws on a wide range of participatory techniques and tools that are designed to channel participants' ideas and efforts into a process of analysis, learning, and action planning based on a community's capacities and vulnerabilities.

- › PCVA Practitioner's Guide

Gendered Action Learning System (GALS)

GALS is an innovative methodology for community-led empowerment, designed for integration in rural development programmes and based on principles of inclusion, respect and equity. It is a robust self-mobilization methodology that enables marginalized people to control their own development process, change gender relations, reverse peer pressure and change social norms. It is integrated into value chain development, financial services, economic planning or other interventions.

- › GALS guide

Women's Economic Leadership in LAC

This three book series supports the development and delivery of Women's Economic Leadership (WEL) programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean. It builds on work done by Oxfam GB and Value for Women on the delivery of market-based livelihood programmes with a focus on gender justice. It provides also a solid foundation for applying WEL in other contexts.

- › Book 1: A guide to key concepts
- › Book 2: A guide to implementation
- › Book 3: Prevention of violence against women in the context of programmes

Gendered Enterprise and Markets (GEM) Toolkit

The GEM Toolkit hosts a selection of tools that bring together good practice guidance on how to design, implement and evaluate markets development programmes that have women's economic leadership (WEL) at its core. There are various WEL tools for promoting women's collective action, and analysing and addressing social norms, unpaid care work and violence against women.

- › GEM Toolkit

ANNEX 3: Oxfam's Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Knowledge Hub

Oxfam's Women's Economic Empowerment in Agriculture Knowledge Hub facilitates a global network of Oxfam staff, partners and wider development practitioners at country, regional and global levels working on women's rights and economic empowerment, particularly in the area of smallholder agriculture.

The hub promotes impactful programmes and supports influencing and fundraising through:

- Decentralized support services via regional communities of practice (CoPs) and thematic groups, which drive a large part of the learning agenda;
- Central support services, such as an online platform for learning and coordinating programme and policy development.

The core activities of the Knowledge Hub are to:

- **Promote networking and peer-to-peer collaboration.** The hub connects staff and partners through regular calls, webinars and online discussions. It holds an annual learning event and support other face-to-face learning meetings organized by regional CoPs or thematic groups. It manages wee.oxfam.org, an online platform on WEE in Agriculture, to disseminate learning and share experiences within Oxfam and the wider development sector. Finally, the hub organizes annual WEE Leadership Awards³ to recognize staff and partners who have shown exceptional championship of WEE.

- **Support learning and innovation.** The Knowledge Hub prioritizes knowledge building and sharing on key learning themes which were identified by the community of practice during its launch event in November 2015: (1) Influencing systems, (2) Gender and resilience, (3) Enterprises and access to finance, (4) Private sector agricultural investment, (5) Changing social norms at scale. Learning groups support learning on some of those themes. Regional CoPs endorsed the themes and added two additional themes: WEE in urban contexts (Asia), and WEE and youth development (Southern Africa). Collaborations with other Oxfam knowledge hubs on these learning themes are also underway.
- **Promote good practice and access to resources.** The hub curates and disseminates accessible tools and learning resources, and supports documentation and sharing of good practice. The hub aims to partner with other networks, such as UN Women's Knowledge Gateway on WEE, to link Oxfam staff and partners to new ideas and opportunities to learn from and share learning with others.
- **Support influencing and fundraising.** The hub enables Oxfam to leverage the knowledge and expertise of the Oxfam confederation to expand our sphere of influence, as illustrated by Oxfam's engagement in the UN High Level Panel on WEE. It helps link global and local campaigns to relevant resources, learning or country teams. The hub also helps Oxfam articulate its added value in the area of WEE, and access evidence of our track record to support fundraising.

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- 45 Power Analysis is a learning process that supports staff, partners and other actors to understand the forms of power that reinforce poverty and inequality, and to identify the positive kinds of power that can be mobilized to fight poverty and inequality.
- 46 Stakeholder Analysis is a methodology used to incorporate the needs of those who have a 'stake' or an interest in a particular intervention. Stakeholder Analysis is closely linked to Power Analysis, because it helps to illuminate divergent viewpoints about an intervention, and potential power struggles among groups and individuals.
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Cover photo: Bayush (left) and Belaynesh with a machine at the Assosa Edible Oil Processing Facility, part of the Assosa Farmers Multipurpose Cooperative Union supported by EDP. Credit: Tom Pietrasik/Oxfam



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