

Can Dairy Value Chain Projects Change Gender Norms in Rural Bangladesh? Impacts on Assets, Gender Norms, and Time Use

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THE GOAL OF CARE-BANGLADESH'S STRENGTHENING THE DAIRY VALUE CHAIN PROJECT (SDVCP) IS TO improve the dairy-related incomes of 35,000 households in northwest Bangladesh. To achieve its goal, SDVCP addresses the major challenges to improving smallholder participation in the value chain, namely farmer mobilization and education, access to markets for their milk, and access to productivity-enhancing inputs. The project assists in the formation of dairy farmer groups as well as increasing women's participation in the dairy value chain, particularly in such nontraditional occupations as milk collectors and livestock health workers. The SDVCP evaluation looks at how both tangible and intangible assets may have changed, particularly for women, as an outcome of the intervention.

In Bangladesh the number of women in the agricultural labor force is increasing, although strong cultural norms encourage women's seclusion and undervalue their productive and reproductive labor. Women and men in Bangladesh have very different roles and responsibilities within the agricultural sector, particularly in regard to livestock. Women have limited decisionmaking ability—especially when it comes to marketing and control over income—and own few assets. Within this context, the nongovernmental organization (NGO) CARE-Bangladesh implemented a five-year program to increase incomes for poor households along the dairy value chain and increase employment opportunities, especially for women.

When value chain projects target households, men and women do not necessarily benefit equally. Growing empirical evidence shows that (1) individual men and women in households do not always pool resources or share the same preferences, (2) women's participation in local markets is often constrained because of their lack of access to transportation and social norms prohibiting women from traveling outside the home (Hill and Vignieri, forthcoming), and (3) when commodities traditionally under the control of women become commercialized, women's control over the income earned from them is weakened (Njuki et al. 2011).

This study by the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project (GAAP) uses a mixed-methods approach to analyze the impact of CARE's dairy value chain project on gender norms surrounding ownership and control over assets, on decision-making regarding dairy-related activities and milk distribution, and on women's mobility and time use.

INTERVENTION AND STUDY SITE

From October 2007 to December 2012 CARE-Bangladesh implemented a dairy value chain project to increase the incomes of 35,000 smallholder and landless milk-producer households and to increase employment opportunities for extremely poor households—and especially for women in those households. This project, known as the Strengthening the Dairy Value Chain Project (SDVCP) was implemented with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF) in nine districts in northwestern Bangladesh.

The project sought to (1) improve milk collection systems in rural and remote areas, (2) improve access to inputs, markets, and services by mobilizing groups of poor farmers, producers, and *char* dwellers, (3) improve the artificial insemination network, (4) ensure access to quality services at the

producer level, and (5) improve the policy environment in the dairy sector.¹

To accomplish these objectives the SDVCP took two steps. First, it linked producers with service providers and with milk-chilling plants, informal sector sweet makers, or both. Second, it documented and disseminated efficient techniques and best practices. The project also supported the creation of dairy farmer associations, primarily among poor women who are smallholder dairy farmers.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

A mixed-methods approach was used to analyze the SDVCP's impact on various gender outcomes. The study attempts to answer the following four questions:

1. Did the SDVCP increase asset ownership among men, women, or both? If so, ownership of which types of assets?
2. Did the program change gender norms regarding ownership and control of those assets?
3. Did households' participation in specific nodes of the dairy value chain change gender norms regarding decisionmaking within those nodes?
4. What were the tradeoffs and time costs involved in participation in this value chain project?

OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY AND DATA COLLECTION

CARE partnered with GAAP to undertake a study with both qualitative and quantitative components. The quantitative component compared data from beneficiary households and control groups to assess the project's outcomes for beneficiaries. The study drew from two sets of longitudinal survey data: a baseline survey conducted in 2008 and an endline survey conducted in 2012.

Both survey questionnaires—baseline and endline—collected information on land and assets, including landholding area and asset value and ownership. Respondents were asked about the number and kind of livestock they owned and their livestock and dairy care practices.

The qualitative component included focus group discussions (FGDs) in ten subdistricts in Rangpur and Bogra Districts. The groups were composed of beneficiaries purposively selected for the study. Eleven groups were interviewed, including seven groups of only women and four groups that

mixed women and men. The groups ranged from 14 to 30 participants. The FGD interview protocols consisted of three primary topic sections: (1) asset ownership, (2) access to resources, and (3) decisionmaking about dairy production and dairy-related income.

RESULTS

Impacts on Asset Ownership

While project participation did not appear to have changed the overall values of a household's asset portfolio, it did have significant impacts on particular assets' values. For example, the project increased the value of participant households' livestock assets. Because participant households owned cross-bred cattle that were more productive than other varieties, the cattle's value increased, even if the number of cattle owned did not. The project also increased agricultural and nonagricultural productive assets' value.

Land ownership did not significantly change. However, households expanded land under cultivation through renting and mortgaging. As a result, the amount of land in use increased over time in all treatment and control groups.

SDVCP participation increased the value of not only men's agricultural assets but also jointly held agricultural assets. The project did not have any impact on assets exclusively owned by women. However, given how skewed the distribution of assets was toward men, increases in jointly held assets were compelling evidence of a transition toward greater gender equity, even if joint ownership could not be equated to joint control over those assets.

Impacts on Women's Access to Credit, Mobility, and Human Capital

Participation in the SDVCP appeared to have reduced, relative to control groups, the proportion of participant women who took NGOs' loans. FGDs indicated that the source of credit had shifted: women said they were able to receive credit from alternative sources easily and preferred to raise money by saving rather than by borrowing with interest. Women also stated that men went through women to access credit from NGOs.

The project resulted in a greater proportion of SDVCP participants than control group members reporting that husbands and wives jointly decided whether wives could go by themselves to visit friends outside the community, to the bazaar, and to the cinema. SDVCP participants also would face no objections to a woman visiting friends outside the community or visiting the hospital if she could cover her own expenses (which may indicate that the woman would be able to mobilize the necessary financial resources).

¹ *Char* refers to remote areas of new land formed through a continual process of erosion and deposition associated with the major rivers that run through the country

Women’s mobility was essential for better linking smallholder dairy producers to markets. Results suggested that SDVCP participation increased women’s mobility by necessitating such mobility for training and participation in the project and by changing social norms. The project also improved smallholder linkages to dairy markets by increasing the proportion of households in which women participated in the decision to go to an agricultural input dealer or a milk collection point.

Possible spillover effects of women’s increased mobility on human capital should not be underestimated. Through training, women gained knowledge and skills and subsequently gained respect from (and improved their status among) their communities and families.

Impacts on Decisionmaking

Whether the project changed gendered patterns of decisionmaking surrounding dairy production, use, and sale remains to be seen. Results from the study’s quantitative component suggested that the program had negligible impacts on decisionmaking related to the buying, selling, and leasing of cows and dairy-related expenses. While the project seemed to shift decisionmaking regarding which type of livestock feed to use and where to purchase inputs and services, husbands generally made up the majority of decisionmakers in all groups and in all decision spheres. At the time of both the baseline and end-line surveys, men dominated decisionmaking within the household. Women’s decisionmaking, even in the areas in which they were trained through the program (vaccinations, artificial insemination, and so on), was also unaffected.

The study’s qualitative component revealed that women were the primary marketers of milk; they sold milk both from their homes and to collectors. While women sold milk, the study suggested that the *decision* to sell milk was still predominantly the husband’s. However women *did* decide whether and how to allocate milk for home consumption (for example, for children). Husbands’ decisions generally involved financial outlays or inflows, while wives’ decisions involved the allocation of milk that is not for sale.

SDVCP also appeared to have had an effect on household time and labor allocation. Adult women increased their time spent on dairy-related activities within the homestead, while adult men increased time spent on dairy-related activities outside the homestead. The increased allocation of adult women’s time to dairy activities came at the expense



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of their time spent doing other household activities, and consequently young girls increased their time doing domestic work. This is an example of the unexpected and unintended impacts that may occur even in a “gender transformative” project.

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This impact study of CARE’s Strengthening the Dairy Value Chain Project found several positive impacts. For example, project participation had significant relative impacts on household assets’ composition: the relative value of participants’ livestock—as well as their agricultural and nonagricultural productive assets—increased in comparison to that of control groups.

Program participation increased the value of both men’s assets and jointly held assets, suggesting that women could build up assets by acquiring jointly owned assets instead of individually owned assets. Participation also increased the value of jointly held nonagricultural productive assets, consumer durables, jewelry, and large livestock.

This impact evaluation highlights the importance of considering a broad range of indicators related to poverty reduction and well-being when setting program performance targets. In the SDVCP’s case, a narrow focus on dairy income would suggest the program has limited impact. However, expanding the evaluation’s focus to other relevant indicators, such as asset portfolios, household dynamics, and gender norms, reveals a richer story with considerable positive impacts. Neglecting these other outcomes would underestimate dairy value chain projects’ potential as a catalyst for positive social change in rural areas.

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FOR FURTHER READING

- Quisumbing, A. R., S. D. Roy, J. Njuki, K. Tanvin, and E. Waithanji. 2013. *Can Dairy Value Chain Projects Change Gender Norms in Rural Bangladesh? Impacts on Assets, Gender Norms, and Time Use*. IFPRI Discussion Paper. Washington, DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, forthcoming.

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