



WOMEN'S COLLECTIVE ACTION

Introduction

Collective action is about promoting effective, inclusive organisations for and by women producers and waged workers. It is about helping groups of women, not just the exceptional few, gain more stable and powerful positions within markets — as input-providers, certifiers, quality assurance, processors or wholesale traders – adding value in diversified, higher-skilled, lower-risk, profitable positions in markets.

The women's collective action guidance documents available in the download provide information on how to create effective groups for production and for influencing.

The following exercises are *complementary* to wider strategies on enterprise and markets development, food security or employment. They aim to assess good practices and gaps in the groups and organisations identified by the programme, and to prioritise potential interventions, to improve structures, policies and practices to support women's economic empowerment. This assessment contributes to programme design and/or evaluation.

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Average time for using this tool

2-3 days over 1 week

Who leads

Facilitator fluent in the local language and familiar with the community

Who needs to be involved

Partners and Oxfam staff; male and female smallholders who are members of collective action groups; female community members who have chosen not to join collective action groups.

Important Related Items

- Women's Economic Leadership
- Influencing and Power Analysis
- Access to Markets
- Adaptation and Risk Reduction

Activity 1: Guidance for collective action programming

Exercises for programme teams to assess collective action, select partners, and design interventions to maximise the potential for women's economic empowerment in markets initiatives.

Further reading

Several case studies and reports provide further guidance, and examples of collective action programming.

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Activity 1: Guidance for collective action programming

The exercises are based in part on the findings of three-year programme of Researching Women's Collective Action in agricultural markets in Ethiopia, Mali and Tanzania.

Step 1: Introduce the concept

Agree with your partners on the objectives of the exercises you choose to undertake. Identify together where improving women's collective action fits within your project's ambitions.

Ensure you have baseline data on how inclusive, sustainable, and economically and socially supporting current collective action groups are. This will be useful for monitoring and evaluating change from the intervention.

Step 2: Identify/map collective action groups

Convene a representative group of local women members and non-members of collective action groups, as well as a few men.

Ask participants:

- to map all forms of collective action related to markets in their area. Include formal and informal groups, and women-only and mixed groups.
- how the following is managed within the group: transport and marketing; labour-sharing on planting, production, harvesting etc.; finance (savings and credit); joint childcare, eldercare or housework arrangements; purchasing inputs or technology- and equipment-sharing.
- about the membership of the groups; how many are women with lower-status - young, elderly, widows, 2nd wives, disabled, ethnic minorities or women in poorer households?
- to map and explain existing collaboration between groups.
- about common over-lapping memberships, and the ease/difficulties of participating in several groups
- to map linkages between collective action groups and government entities, companies and services

Step 3: Understanding perceptions

Ask women about the expectations about the benefits of participating in various groups/collective action

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- What has been the real experience of benefits of participation – both monetary/economic and in terms of knowledge, skills, support, or empowerment?
- What are the gaps and weaknesses of different types of collective action – what would they like to see happen?
- What is their perspective of adding new functions to existing groups, or providing support to them.

Step 4: How groups function

Convene a focus group including representatives of the most relevant collective action groups (based on the mapping), and identified partners and stakeholders of the markets programme. Present an overview of the findings of the mapping during this discussion.

In small groups, discuss structures, policies and practices of groups and organisations, and identify and prioritise changes/interventions to promote women's economic empowerment. Use the following talking points as a guide:

2a) (Inclusive) membership rules

- Membership dues, and how women members access a lump sum to join
- Land or literacy requirements
- Time requirements (and implicit requirements for mobility)
- By-laws that allow more than one member per family

2b) Practices to develop women's benefits, skills, capabilities and leadership

- Women's participation in positions and on committees: marketing, quality, finance, technology, governance (not only on the 'women's committee'!)
- Women's participation (voice, speaking up) in group meetings
- Practices of electing or rotating leadership and positions
- Accountability of female/male leaders – decision-making and reporting requirements
- Transparency and equity and leaders – who benefits most, sells most?
- Other

2c) Sustainability of (benefits of) women's collective action

- How supportive is the community about women's collective action? Do women's groups or increasing women's leadership in mixed groups have the support of men?
- Have groups assessed and developed strategies to reduce commercial, social or environmental risks of women's market activities?
- How have (or how could) women's control over productive assets be ensured?

Step 5: The wider system analysis

The same group is asked to discuss ways in which the wider policy environment is (dis)enabling of women's collective action. Use the following questions as a guide:

- How do the policies of second-third tier organisations/associations promote women's collective action and leadership? How can the project promote positive change?

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- How do government entities' policies reflect attitudes and beliefs about women's roles in markets and economic activities? Can the project promote positive change?
- Advocacy with government entities can promote principles and policies to promote and protect women's collective action and leadership, increase investments and services for women's groups.

Step 6: Action planning and programme design

Design an exercise to review outputs from the preceding discussion, to prioritise potential actions, identify roles and responsibilities and set timelines for change.

Identify and agree indicators of change in the prioritised action areas. Some examples of indicators are:

- Changes in formal organisation policies (membership requirements etc)
- Changes in informal practices (e.g. rotating facilitation of meetings; outreach to marginalised women; more transparent decision-making)
- Changes in reported benefits for women: sales, inputs, access to equipment, training
- Changes in perceptions of women about collective action
- Changes in perceptions and attitudes of men about women's collective action
- Changes in numbers of women members, women in leadership positions
- Actions taken by groups to influence government policies/practices on WCA

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Further reading

The following papers are all included in the Women's Collective Action download folder, available on the GEM+ toolkit website.

Baden, S (2013) *Women's Collective Action: Unlocking the potential of agricultural markets* Oxfam GB: Oxford

Kidder, T (2013) *Women's Collective Action: Findings and recommendations* Oxfam GB: Oxford

Schmitt, J (2015) *Supporting Smallholder Livelihoods in Tajikistan: Working with women farmers to build new forms of collective action* Oxfam GB: Oxford