



PRESENTATION

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT AND THE MILLENIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS – AN ACP CASE STUDY

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PRELIMINARY NOTE

- The following presentation is based on a gender assessment study, which is in the process of being carried out, and which looks into the likely impacts of future EU-Zimbabwe trade arrangements on poor women and men. For this purpose, APRODEV is working with the Zimbabwe Non-State Actors Forum, which was interested in carrying out such a study.
- We are, however, very mindful of the current political and economic crisis in the country, and recognise that the domestic economic situation is being radically transformed.
- Despite this situation, the preliminary results of the study illustrate the importance of a process approach to impact assessments, as it shows once more that there is no linear progress, but that situations keep changing, both in response to domestic, climatic and external factors (e.g. the US farm bill).

MAKING TRADE ARRANGEMENTS WORK FOR THE POOR

- The basic challenge is making trade arrangements work for the poor. The question arises how do we go about ensuring that trade arrangements work to the benefit of the poor, who experience poverty precisely because they lack access to economic resources, which enable them to produce and trade competitively.
- The first question, which has to be addressed is: who are the poor?

For example in Zimbabwe, figures show that 62% of the rural population is classified as poor to very poor, with 70% of women living in communal areas. 74% of female headed households are poor to very poor compared to 54% of male headed households.
- The second issue, which needs to be addressed is: how are the poor affected by trade arrangements?
- Often when people think about trade and trade arrangements, they first think about exports and trade preferences, but the import part of the trade equation is far more important under moves towards trade liberalisation, particularly for women who are often primarily involved in production for the local, national and regional markets.

- The question needs to be raised: To what extent does cash crop production for export – which may increase due to CAP reform – affect food production for local markets and, hence, food security for families – in which women often play a key role?

Certainly this is a complex issue. It is assumed that increased production of export crops can undermine food security. However earlier in Zimbabwe the shift to cut flower production for export improved incomes and wages on the farms concerned and created new market opportunities for small-scale maize farmers. The actual impact on food security will vary from case to case but it does not necessarily follow that increased exports automatically undermine domestic food security.

- Against this background we need to look at those products which are important to women in terms of what they currently produce and what they can produce in the context of the complex social structures within which women gain access to economic resources.
- Often SIA studies consider aggregate and macro situations, which lose sight of the micro realities on the ground. They tend to focus on the major products traded and since women are less involved in these areas, they tend to neglect developments in markets which are important to women

For example, principal crops produced by women in communal areas are maize, cotton, sugar, groundnuts, beans, cowpeas; minor crops in commercial terms are beans, cowpeas and groundnuts. Women in communal areas face a subordinate economic position, ie women only have access to land in semi arid regions, are allocated the smallest or worst pieces of land, often at a long distance, with secondary access to land via husbands or male relatives.

During lean seasons, women and children depend largely on wage remittances from family members employed in the formal sector. Rural women are thus as much consumers of externally produced foodstuffs as producers of commercial surpluses.

A complex network of social and economic linkages binds women in communal areas with developments in the wider economy. For example, developments in employment trends in the wider economy (closure of factories, retrenchment of state workers) will have a direct bearing on the economic well being of women in rural areas.

- We need to understand this wider social context within which women engage with the economy in order to understand how trade arrangements will impact on women.
- What we need to do is find ways to analyse the micro level issues, which are important to women and have a bearing on the impact which trade arrangements have on women.

SIA AS THE STARTING POINT FOR PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

- The approach we have chosen is to engage in an impact assessment study as a starting point, not a one-off event. The objective is to launch a process that allows stakeholders to deepen their understanding of trade policy issues over time, to identify the policy questions at stake, and to look into the likely impacts of policies on people. The participatory process aims at helping those affected to understand and find solutions to problems faced.

- The approach we have chosen is to take available data as a basis for further study, and to provide possibilities for a reality check with actors/stakeholders in the different sectors or communities.
- It needs to be acknowledged that this is a difficult process to undertake. In this light, support and co-operation for such a process should be sought from a broad range of actors on the ground.

In the case of Zimbabwe, we have chosen a three phase approach. A design phase, a research phase which takes account of different expertise available in the country, in sectors and social groups, and an advocacy and strategy phase, where findings of the research are used to develop a strategic advocacy approach for non-state actors.

A PROCESS APPROACH: BRINGING OUR UNDERSTANDING CLOSER TO REALITY

- Once non-state actors understand and contribute with their experience on what is actually happening on the ground, then a meaningful analysis of the impacts will be possible.
- We must bear in mind that, in developing countries, we will often find a huge discrepancy between the formal reality, or written and agreed policy, and the actual reality on the ground.
- It is necessary to bear in mind that, formal and informal economies follow different rationale and rules and come up with different survival strategies. Production units are not individual units, but interact or involve the whole of the community. And it is the household unit with its gendered roles of women and men that interacts continuously with the formal and the informal economy.
- We need to explore and understand the differential impact of big issues on little people. The position of women in society and their participation in the market differs greatly from the position of men, but they are intrinsically linked with each other.

For example, any agricultural development programmes need to be designed and implemented in a gender sensitive manner. If not, women will not only fail to benefit from a commercially orientated and male dominated modernisation of agriculture, but may be forced to cope with a growing demand for labour intensive farm tasks, and sometimes be forced to adapt themselves and their households to lower living standards and increasing poverty.

TRANSLATING SIA INTO POLICY FORMULATION

- Policy formulation needs to ensure that trade arrangements work to the benefit of the poor.

The ultimate aim of trade policies for developing countries should be how trade policies can assist or bring about the transformation of the economy in developing countries and enhance the quality of life, especially for poor women and men. Specifically, those trade preferences which encourage production in sectors which improve the status and working conditions of women, should be preserved and enhanced.

- For example, more than 50% of employees in cut flower production are women. A shift from seasonal to permanent employment of women in cut flower production has seen considerable improvement in the labour conditions of all women employed on the farms concerned with cut flower production for export. This improvement in labour conditions has led to improved efficiency and quality standards.

Women on cut flower farms have been the primary beneficiaries of improvements in wages and working conditions. As such they are likely to be adversely affected by any loss of preferential access to the EU market, which any reversion to standard GSP treatment (generalised system of preferences) would entail. All other factors being equal (which in Zimbabwe they clearly are not), this would result in disincentives to investment and production.

- In addition the issue of women's access to land and economic resources needs to be addressed domestically if women are to be economically empowered to meet the challenges of free trade. This is a major challenge and one which will require specifically designed programmes to overcome existing gender bias and progressively bring about social change. This cannot be achieved overnight. Yet without such change women are likely to find themselves by-passed by the opportunities opened up under free trade arrangements. This would have profound implications for some of the poorest of the poor.

LESSONS TO BE LEARNED

- While the Commission should fund impact assessment studies these should be just the starting point for more extensive discussions and debate with concerned stakeholders. The process of discussion and debate will need to be broken down to address the specific issues, which face particular social groups. The Commission is not well placed to support this type of process approach to impact assessment. NGOs could however play a useful role in supporting these participatory processes. The scope for collaboration in this regard should be exploited. Ex ante prevention of damage to poor people is by far better than efforts for ex post corrections.
- We need to “Keep our eyes on the prize”, namely making sure that new trade arrangements work for the poor. Therefore criteria are needed, which help to assess the likely impact of particular trade measures on various social groups, which go to make up the poor in different developing countries. If new trade arrangements do not benefit the poor, such arrangements will not be socially, politically or economically sustainable. Growing inequality will provoke social conflict, political instability, and will undermine the necessary conditions for macro-economic stability. We will instead see increased crime and social conflict and declining investment.

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