

HOW CASH AND FOOD TRANSFERS AND ASSET CREATION CAN CONTRIBUTE TO WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT: LEARNING FROM NIGER, KENYA AND ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Food Assistance for Assets (FFA), a programme of the World Food Programme (WFP), addresses the immediate needs of women and men, and their communities, through food and/or cash-based transfers, while building or rehabilitating productive assets to realize long-term food security and resilience to shocks and stressors. In 2016–2017, WFP conducted a five-country study to explore the potential for WFP's FFA programmes to support women's empowerment. Using qualitative methods, the study documented changes experienced by women and men as a result of their engagement in WFP's FFA programmes. The study countries included Niger, Kenya and Zimbabwe.

Seven domains of change, from the individual to community spheres, were reported. For women, empowerment was experienced through:

1. better organization, social cohesion and mutual support
2. a recognition and strengthening of their roles in the public sphere
3. improvements in intra-household dynamics, including decision-making
4. reduced workload and hardship
5. improved skills and confidence
6. improved livelihoods and increased income
7. a greater understanding of, and ability to exercise, their rights.

Changes occurred due to several FFA and complementary actions working synchronously, rather than as one single intervention. The cash (and food) transfers were necessary but insufficient in themselves to lead to women's empowerment. The transfers needed to be combined with assets, work, the establishment of committees, awareness raising, technical training and other actions. Transfers provided both immediate relief and space for women and men to invest efforts in their livelihood productivity, in order to realize sustained food security and improved livelihoods.

1. INTRODUCTION

From June 2016 to April 2017, a five-country study to explore the potential for WFP's Food Assistance for Assets programmes to empower women and improve women's nutrition was conducted. The aim of the study was:

- to assess **changes** (outcomes or impacts)¹ related to women's empowerment and women's nutrition, and to what extent they occurred
- to examine the **causal linkages** that may explain how and why these changes occurred in the lives of women
- to identify the **key success factors**, be they FFA programme actions, complementary actions or contextual factors, which led to the observed changes.

The study also examined how FFA may contribute to the protection of women by avoiding harm and having a positive effect on people's safety and dignity, on household dynamics and on social cohesion.

This study was *not* designed to be an impact evaluation or a performance assessment. Instead, it was an exploratory exercise to understand the potential of how FFA and complementary actions can empower women and improve their nutrition. To achieve this, qualitative methods inspired by the Participatory Impact Assessment and Learning Approach (PIALA) and the Most Significant Change (MSC) technique were employed to understand why and how the complex transformative processes of women's empowerment and improved nutrition occurred in each context. This paper presents two arguments for the CaLP symposium, 'Gender and Cash-Based Programming in Africa', summarizing findings from the three African case studies, from Niger, Kenya and Zimbabwe.² While the study examined nutrition-sensitive actions and outcomes, this paper only discusses the women's empowerment actions and outcomes.

2. ARGUMENT

For the symposium, 'Gender and Cash-Based Programming in Africa', two main arguments were presented:

1. Cash-based transfers, provided through programmes such as FFA, can contribute to empowering women. While *transfers* and the *assets* created are necessary to provide immediate relief and space for women and men to invest efforts in realizing sustained longer-term food security and livelihoods, they are more effective when combined with *other actions*. Examples of actions studied include the establishment of committees, awareness raising, technical training, savings groups and value chain facilitation.
2. Inappropriately determined transfer values can influence the participation ratios of women and men in FFA programmes. When transfer values were low and insufficient to meet the household's food needs, men were less likely to participate in the FFA programmes. A high ratio of participation by women in FFA programmes may not be a sign of gender transformation or women's empowerment; rather, it signifies pre-existing cultural norms where a lower value is placed on women and their labour relative to men.

¹ Intended and unintended, and positive and harmful changes were examined.

² Countries are listed in the order that they were studied.

3. METHODOLOGY AND EVIDENCE METHODOLOGY

This study used a case study approach covering five countries (three are discussed here), employing qualitative methods and drawing on secondary data. The primary information sources were:

- semi-structured interviews
- focus group discussions (FGDs)
- site visits to FFA assets³
- observations of FFA processes
- sub-national multi-stakeholder participatory workshops in each country
- a global sense-making workshop

Data from these information sources contributed towards four main areas of work:

- (i) contextual analysis
- (ii) process analysis
- (iii) analysis of changes and causal links
- (iv) recommendations

Each country case study covered three sites.⁴ The countries were selected based on the WFP country office's willingness and resources to participate. Each country office was asked to select three sites where results had been observed in empowering women. A 'positive deviance' approach was applied, given the focus on understanding what actions and factors needed to be in place for successful cases to occur. Given this purposive sampling, rather than being representative, the study sites were often the 'best' or 'better' examples of FFA programmes.

The five study countries were Niger, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Guatemala and Sri Lanka. The following are summaries from the three study areas in Africa:

- **Niger – West Africa.** Zinder, near the Nigerian border, is an agro-pastoralist area that is currently experiencing typical to good years following drought years. The programme, which started in 2014, has a focus on resilience. The communities visited were predominantly Hausa-speaking and Muslim. While men had typically migrated to Nigeria each year for work, this practice had markedly decreased at the time of the study.
- **Kenya – East Africa.** Kilifi county, in coastal Kenya, is a low-potential mixed farming area with entrenched poverty. The programme, implemented since 2009, focuses on building resilience. At the time of the study, the area had experienced two consecutive poor or failed harvests. The study sample was predominantly Christian, and polygamy was a common practice.
- **Zimbabwe – Southern Africa.** Mwenezi district in southern Zimbabwe is a low-potential mixed farming area with cattle and rain-fed maize and beans. The area is one of the poorest districts in Zimbabwe. The communities studied were predominantly Christian. Many young able-bodied men in Zimbabwe migrate to the cities and to South Africa to work, returning once or twice a year. The programme, which is implemented in annual cycles, focuses on building resilience.

³ Examples of FFA assets examined in this study include soil-water conservation structures (e.g. zai pits, bunds, troughs), water infrastructure (e.g. water pans, micro-dams, irrigation tanks and canals, laundry wash basins), livelihood assets (e.g. cattle dip tanks, vegetable gardens, agroforestry) and community roads.

⁴ The study sampled three sites, comprising three women-only FGDs and three men-only FGDs, as analysis has found that 80 to 90 percent of themes are discoverable in three FGDs. See Guest, G. et al (April 2016) 'How Many Focus Groups Are Enough? Building an Evidence Base for Nonprobability Sample Sizes', *Field Methods*, vol. 29, issue 1, 2017. Available at: <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1525822X16639015>.

The scope of the study included FFA and complementary actions. FFA actions included planning processes, such as the Three-Pronged Approach (3PA⁵), the establishment of asset management committees, participation in asset creation activities, technical training, transfers and productive assets. Where there were complementary actions that were implemented in parallel with FFA, whether by WFP or by other actors, these were also studied for their contribution to changes. Examples of complementary actions in the study include awareness raising,⁶ agricultural extension, training in food preservation, cooking classes, group farming, value chain facilitation, enterprise development, savings and loan groups, latrine construction, and linkages with health services and women's services.

EVIDENCE

Argument 1, presented at the symposium, is that cash-based transfers, provided through programmes such as FFA and complementary actions, can contribute to empowering women.

The study observed seven domains of women's empowerment changes, from the individual to community spheres. For women, empowerment was experienced through:

1. better organization, social cohesion and mutual support
2. a recognition and strengthening of their roles in the public sphere
3. improvements in intra-household dynamics, including decision-making
4. reduced workload and hardship
5. improved skills and confidence
6. improved livelihoods and increased income
7. a greater understanding of, and ability to exercise, their rights.

The extent to which each of these changes varied from country to country, and how they were influenced by FFA and complementary actions and contextual factors, is outlined in Table 1. The results here reflect findings from a sample of three sites in one geographical area of each country case study. They do not necessarily reflect changes across WFP's work across the country. It is also important to note that many of the documented changes were also experienced by men. Women's empowerment is not a zero-sum game. Where FFA programmes empowered women, they empowered men too.

⁵ 3PA refers to the Three-Pronged Approach to resilience building. It brings people, governments and partners together to identify the context-specific actions required, using converging analyses, consultations and participatory approaches. It is made up of three processes that take place at different levels: Integrated Context Analysis (ICA) at the national level, Seasonal Livelihood Programming (SLP) at the sub-national level and Community-Based Participatory Planning (CBPP) at the local level.

⁶ Awareness raising was conducted on a wide range of topics. Examples include women's rights, sexual and reproductive health and rights, gender-based violence (GBV), nutrition and diet, hygiene and the use of mosquito nets.

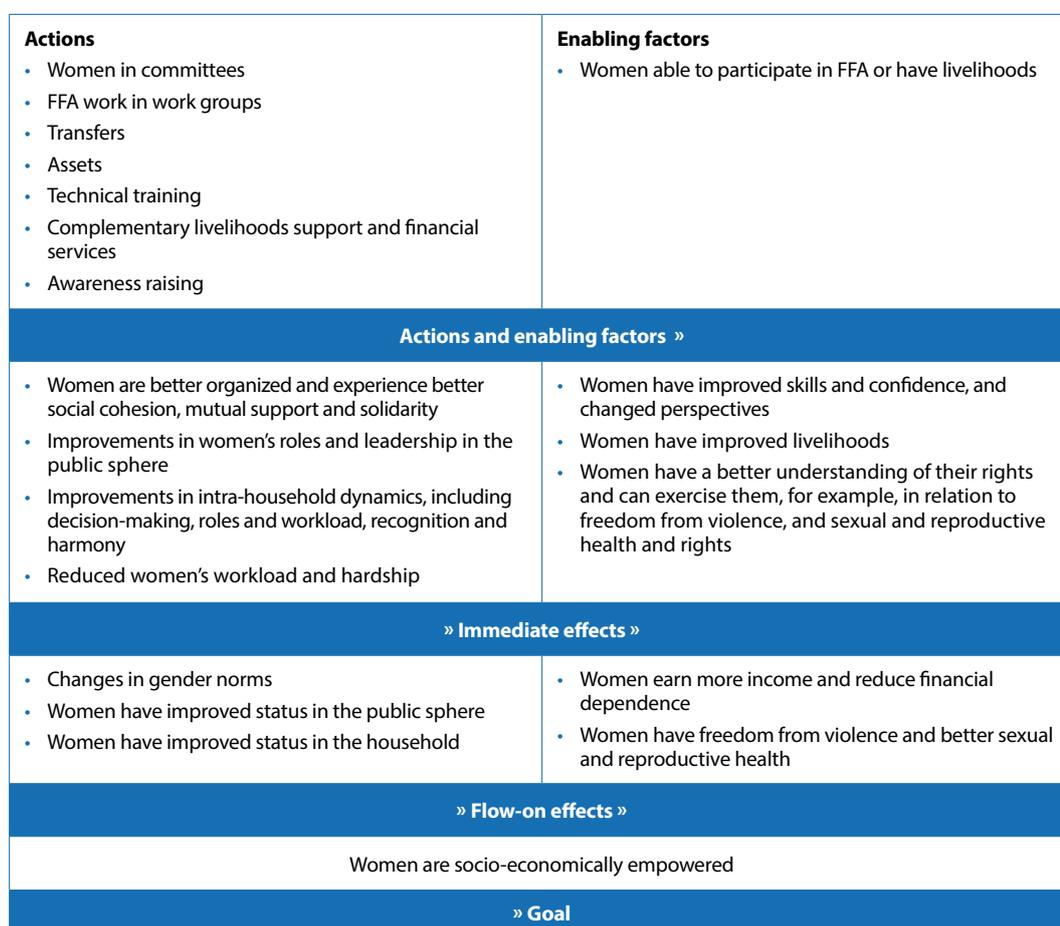
Table 1. Women's empowerment changes and the extent to which they were reported in each country case study

Changes	Niger	Kenya	Zimbabwe
1. Women are better organized and experience better social cohesion, mutual support and solidarity		✓✓✓	✓✓✓
2. Improvements in the recognition of women, women's roles and leadership in the public sphere		✓✓✓	✓✓✓
3. Improvements in intra-household dynamics	✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
4. Reduced women's workload and hardship	✓✓✓	✓	✓✓✓
5. Women have improved skills and confidence, and changed perspectives	✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
6. Women have improved livelihoods, earn more income, and have reduced financial dependence		✓✓	✓✓
7. Women have a better understanding of their rights and can exercise them			✓✓

Note: No tick indicates that no change occurred; ✓ indicates that the change occurred to some extent (i.e. changes occurred for a small proportion of women participants, or limited change was experienced by most women); ✓✓ indicates that change occurred to a moderate extent (i.e. changes occurred for many but not all women, or moderate change was experienced by most women); ✓✓✓ indicates that change occurred to a significant extent (i.e. significant change occurred for most women).

Figure 1. Overall women's empowerment impact pathway for FFA and complementary actions

Please note: Given the multiple interactions between and among the various factors and effects, detailed arrows have not been drawn in.



From the information collected through this study, seven *key success factors* were identified, including both FFA programme and/or complementary actions, which led to the observed changes. Put another way, women were empowered when this factor, or a combination of these factors, were in place.

Table 2. Key success factors and their occurrence in the study

Women were empowered when the FFA programme (and complementary actions):	Occurrence in the study
1. actively supported the free and fair participation of women in FFA activities	In some programmes
2. used the 3PA to analyse the context and ensure that programming was gender-transformative and empowers women	In most programmes
3. actively promoted women's social cohesion and organization	In some programmes
4. actively promoted women's leadership and engagement in community decision-making	In some programmes
5. reduced women's workload and hardship	In some programmes
6. supported women's livelihoods and reduced women's financial dependence	In some programmes
7. supported women's access to information on rights and referrals (for gender-based violence and sexual and reproductive health and rights) and the ability to exercise their rights	In some programmes

The second argument presented at the symposium is that transfer values can influence the participation ratios of women and men in the FFA programme. Cash-based transfers, provided through programmes such as FFA, can contribute to empowering women and improving their nutrition. Across the three countries, the transfer values (in US dollars) were compared to women's participation. Acknowledging imperfections⁷ in the country comparisons and the small sample size,⁸ the evidence suggests that the lower the transfer value, the less likely it is that the men will participate in FFA work (see table below).

Table 3. The relationship between transfer value (for each day of participation in asset creation) and women's participation across the three study countries

Country case study ⁹	Transfer value per day of participation in asset creation	Women's participation
Niger	Equivalent to US\$8.10 per day ¹⁰	Under 5 percent
Zimbabwe	US\$3.67 per day x 15 days per month	Over 50 percent
Kenya	Equivalent to US\$0.97 per day ¹¹	About 70 percent

⁷ Imperfections in this comparison include not taking into account purchasing power parity or local wage rates in each context.

⁸ Despite the small sample size, qualitative results support the argument that men are more likely to participate if the transfer value per day of FFA participation is higher.

⁹ These transfer values are from one geographical area of each country case study. They do not necessarily reflect transfer values across WFP's country portfolio.

¹⁰ As per project reporting, the work requirement in Niger was 13 days per month for seven months. A transfer of US\$67 per month was provided for 11 months of the year (4 months unconditional transfer). This is the equivalent of US\$737 for 91 days of work, or US\$8.10 per day of work.

¹¹ At the time of the study, the work requirement in Kenya was 12 days per month for 12 months of the year (a total of 144 days). A transfer of US\$20 was provided for only 7 months of the year, coinciding with the food gap. This is the equivalent of US\$140 for 144 days of work, or US\$0.97 per day of work.

For example, among the three countries presented, Kenya had the lowest rate of male participation as well as the lowest transfer value; and it was this reason, coupled with delays in payment, that was cited by men in focus groups as a key reason for not participating in the programme. In addition, many of the men who participated in FFA programmes (particularly elderly men) do so because they are unable to obtain other higher-paying work. In fact, men had indicated that a dual approach of having men working for a daily or weekly income further away from home, and for women on FFA activities closer to home for a lower but regularly paid income, was part of many households' livelihood strategy.

When the transfer value is relatively low, a high ratio of participation by women in FFA may not be a sign of gender transformation or women's empowerment, but, rather, it may signify pre-existing cultural norms where a lower value is placed on women and their labour relative to men. A higher rate of participation by women may indicate that most men are not interested in participating in the FFA programme, as it is perceived as being inferior due to the availability of better-paying alternatives. In some countries in the study, women participated because they felt they had no other prospects nearby. Women may have participated so that the community could benefit from the asset, and this reflects a social norm that places a different value (evidenced through the quantity and nature of the compensation) on women and men's labour and time.

In Kenya, men indicated, in focus group discussions, that they would increase their participation if the transfer value also increased. This highlights another risk: that if transfer values are raised, women may be pushed out of the programme. This may, in turn, reduce women's control over the transfer, in addition to the many other benefits of their participation. For example, in the sites visited in Niger, where the transfer value was relatively high, fewer than 5 percent of FFA participants were women.

Transfer values are typically set to fill a food gap or to ensure parity with social protection instruments, and WFP and other actors are not always able to change the transfer value. However, as the evidence in this study suggests, there is an inverse relationship between the transfer value and women's participation. This creates a dilemma for development practitioners, who seek, amongst other objectives, to ensure the sufficiency of the transfer and women's empowerment.

Consequently, this raises three questions for future research:

- Is there an optimum transfer value where both women and men participate, and no one group is effectively excluded, while still addressing the competing demands of adequacy, efficiency and appropriateness?
- How would this optimum transfer value be determined?
- If the transfer value is relatively low, are there other non-monetary incentives or benefits that can be provided for women to improve their longer-term food security and livelihoods, such as technical training, soft skills training, access to credit and access to markets?

The WFP study recommended further research to identify and understand the actions and contextual factors that support fair transfer values and women's participation. In the absence of such research, actions to be taken include:

- promoting women's fair participation in FFA activities
- establishing transfer values in line with the WFP 'Cash and Vouchers Manual' and the FFA programme guidance manual
- providing non-monetary incentives and benefits for participating women, such as technical training, soft skills training, access to credit and access to markets
- monitoring gender participation ratios and, as necessary, understanding the dynamics and decision-making behind who participates; if required, take corrective action to promote women's participation.

4. LESSONS

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to explore the potential of how FFA and complementary actions can empower women. This study found that FFA programmes can indeed transform gender dynamics and empower women. FFA supported women's empowerment through the following actions:

- **Gender-transformative planning processes, such as the 3PA, including Integrated Context Analysis (ICA), Seasonal Livelihood Plan (SLP) and Community-Based Participatory and Planning (CBPP).** Good planning and quality assets were critical to achieving women's empowerment outcomes. Planning resulted in women's empowerment outcomes when women and men were equitably involved in CBPP (or other planning processes), and when the plans were developed with strong gender equality and empowerment elements in mind.
- **Committees.** Women were empowered when they held key leadership positions in community committees that oversaw FFA works (Kenya) or asset management (Zimbabwe). Leadership in FFA can result in women having a greater role in community decision-making and governance. When committee members are trained in skills such as leadership, management and conflict resolution, it increases women's confidence in carrying out their leadership roles (Zimbabwe).
- **Participation in asset creation activities.** The process of bringing women and men together to work on a shared (group or community) asset provided valuable opportunities for women (and men) to form new friendships, to establish and be part of support networks, and to reinforce their sense of self-efficacy and self-worth (Niger, Kenya and Zimbabwe). Women reported using new networks to support each other in times of crisis and to seek or provide advice. Workplaces can model gender relations, with women and men working together as equals (Zimbabwe). Work arrangements need to be mindful of women's needs, particularly of the nutritional and health requirements of pregnant women and lactating mothers.
- **Assets.** Assets, when strategically selected to reflect the needs and priorities of women and men, can significantly reduce women's workload and hardship – particularly in relation to unpaid domestic work, such as carrying water – create opportunities to generate an income, and improve diet. Water-harvesting assets, such as dams and ponds, can reduce a woman's workload by up to three hours a day. When layered with additional assets, such as wash basins and nutrition gardens, this can create an 'asset package' that yields significant change for women's lives (Zimbabwe).

When women and men's long-term and equitable access to the assets are secured, they are more likely to be able to invest their energies and resources in them (Kenya and Zimbabwe).

“The process of bringing women and men together to work on a shared group or community asset provided valuable opportunities for women (and men) to form new friendships, to establish and be part of support networks, and to reinforce their sense of self-efficacy and self-worth.”

“This study has found that women’s participation in FFA activities is a necessary precondition, but not a guarantee, of women’s empowerment. Greater effort and understanding is required for WFP to realize its ambition for its food assistance programmes, including FFA, to be gender-transformative and to empower women.”

- **Transfers.** Transfers provide immediate relief and provide space for women and men to invest efforts in their longer-term food security and livelihoods. Transfers can reduce men’s migration for work (Niger). As men’s migration significantly increases women’s workload, the transfer therefore indirectly reduces women’s workload and hardship. Cash transfers may be used differently when provided to a man or a woman (Zimbabwe). Messaging around the use of the cash increases the chances of joint decision-making between women and men (Zimbabwe).
- **Awareness raising.** Awareness raising on gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights for both women and men can, potentially, improve knowledge and change attitudes and practices (Niger and Zimbabwe). Awareness raising can be used to promote joint decision-making in households, as well as a redistribution of unpaid care and domestic work within households (Zimbabwe). FFA can serve as a platform from which other actors provide messaging, referrals or service delivery, for example on GBV and sexual and reproductive health and rights (Niger, Zimbabwe). When women and men are introduced to other actors – government entities, health centres, civil society organizations – FFA programming builds their networks and enhances their ability to seek services beyond the life of the programme (Zimbabwe).
- **Technical training.** Many women and men identified the technical training they received, for example, in agriculture, soil-water conservation and construction, as being the most significant FFA action to bring about changes in women’s empowerment. As well as providing the opportunity to develop knowledge and skills, training has empowering, confidence-building and resilience-building effects.
- **Complementary actions.** Agricultural extension, group farming, value chain facilitation, savings and loan groups and latrine construction are just some of the complementary actions with reported success in empowering women.

Recommendations

While the study confirmed the potential for FFA programmes to empower women, there remain areas for improvement across WFP’s FFA programmes globally. Over the past years, FFA has focused on promoting women’s participation and leadership. This study has found that women’s participation in FFA activities is a necessary precondition, but not a guarantee, of women’s empowerment. Greater effort and understanding is required for WFP to realize its ambition for its food assistance programmes, including FFA, to be gender-transformative and to empower women.¹²

¹² ‘WFP Gender Policy 2015–2020’ (available at: http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp276754.pdf?_ga=2.13531316.2050382093.1500368287-1922240214.1488375611), also citing ‘Summary Evaluation Report of the WFP Gender Policy (2008–2013)’, ref. WFP/EB.1/2014/5-A*.

To advance women's empowerment, the following issues need to be addressed:

1. Promote women's participation, social cohesion and leadership. Women's participation in FFA activities, including FFA work, technical training and complementary services, is a precondition for their equitable benefit and empowerment. This study found that women's participation in FFA activities brought many benefits, including better social cohesion, women's organization, women's leadership, improved skills and transformed gender dynamics.

Further action is required of FFA programmes to promote women's participation, social cohesion and leadership. Examples include ensuring that women are not overburdened (e.g. ensuring flexible and appropriate work times, tailored and appropriate work norms), women's work teams, women's group assets, supporting women's membership of FFA committees and providing training to FFA committee members to foster leadership skills. Further work is required to systematize and take these actions to scale across FFA programmes globally.

2. Use appropriate transfer values. Across the programmes studied, the transfer value seemed to impact the participation ratios of women and men in FFA work. When transfer values were low, men were less likely to participate in the FFA work. In these situations, a high ratio of participation by women in FFA may not be a sign of gender transformation or women's empowerment; rather, it could signify pre-existing cultural norms where a lower value is placed on women and their labour relative to men. Therefore, although the transfer value is generally based on other considerations, and is not designed to impact gender participation, it may, inadvertently, do so. When setting the transfer value, there needs to be careful consideration and monitoring.

Action is required to ensure women's place in FFA activities, even when the transfer value is increased. Alternatively, action is required to ensure that women receive other non-monetary incentives or benefits to improve their longer-term food security and livelihoods, such as technical training, soft skills training, access to credit and access to markets.

3. Promote women's skills, livelihoods and income. Across many communities, women and men described the skills gained from the FFA programme as leading to lifelong change. Livelihoods and income were high priorities for women across the five countries. It was particularly important for women heads of household, who are usually solely responsible for providing for their families.

FFA has significant potential to improve women's skills, livelihoods and income through both FFA and complementary actions delivered by partners. Supportive FFA actions include assets that support women's livelihoods or save labour, and technical training. Supportive complementary activities include training (e.g. livelihoods and financial management), value chain facilitation and access to credit. This is a nascent area of work within WFP's programming toolbox, and the study highlighted both successes (e.g. brokering relationships with agricultural exporters and FFA groups) and pitfalls (e.g. confining women's livelihood options to small-scale and unprofitable ventures). Further work is required to develop WFP's capacity and partnerships in this area and linkages with FFA programmes.

4. Use FFA as a platform for messaging and awareness raising on rights and referrals. The study highlighted the potential for using FFA programmes as a platform for awareness raising on a wide range of topics, including women's rights, GBV, sexual and reproductive health and rights, malaria prevention, diet, hygiene, care practices, infant and young child feeding (IYCF) and child growth monitoring. WFP can potentially act as an enabler, with awareness raising delivered by partners such as government or other service providers. This appeared to be most successful when partners provided awareness raising to both women and men – and not only to women.

Despite the potential benefits, only a few FFA programmes currently deliver awareness-raising initiatives. Further work is required to document good practice and develop guidance and partnerships to take this to scale.

5. Impact pathways and measurement. Although WFP staff have a clear vision of how their FFA projects contribute to women's empowerment, the study found that FFA projects currently do not universally have project-level impact pathways documenting how FFA (and complementary) actions empower women. Mechanisms to measure changes in women's empowerment are limited.

To improve the quality of programming, with tangible and empowering impacts, putting in place impact pathways and indicators is essential. Findings from monitoring during the life of the programme can inform adjustments to implementation.

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