Abstract

In Ghana, upwards of 50% of the population is reliant on agriculture for a livelihood. Many aid organizations ranging from public to private to non-profits have focused on agricultural based development to reduce poverty. Women face systemic resource bias, restrictions on land rights, and barriers to accessing to more robust commodity markets. International development organizations, social enterprises, and local governments are attempting to tackle gender equity issues with a variety of agricultural initiatives for women's development. The current initiatives often take simplistic approaches that disregard the underlying structural causes of gender inequality. I argue that in order to foster gender equality, organizations need to focus on an agency-based approach to women's status within agricultural value chains. An agency-based approach includes giving woman an autonomous voice and independent access to resources. This thesis asks:

1) What evidence of fostering enhanced agency can be detected in these three distinct programs?
2) Which initiative factors seem to be most effective in fostering women’s agency?

Agency vs. Empowerment

The term empowerment has “emerged as a possible counter force to achieving gender equality” (Phillips 2015). Women can benefit from services that are meant to “empower,” such as microcredit programs, but still be constrained by structures of oppression such as negative household relationships or barriers to leadership.

The term agency encompasses both economic and structural factors of gender equity and equality. The difficulty in measuring agency lies in societal and cultural factors outside of quantitative measures. While these factors are significantly more difficult to both measure and change, they are vital to creating equality for women not only in the agriculture sector but also around the world.

Definition: “women’s ability to take autonomous choices in life and to control resources” describes agency in a simple, understandable way (Selhausen 2016)