

# Valuable Vegetables: synthesis of lessons from Dutch investments in the horticulture sector

Focus on: Inclusiveness | Webinar 17 September 2020

A stronger horticulture sector in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) is expected to contribute to many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as it can contribute to (inclusive) business development, profit and income generation, employment, enhanced Food and Nutrition Security and economic growth. This is why the Netherlands invests substantially in horticulture initiatives in these countries.

As part of the “Valuable Vegetables” initiative, Wageningen University & Research (WUR) was commissioned to conduct an initial synthesis study to collect the key findings from these Dutch publicly funded horticulture initiatives in LMICs. A [synthesis paper](#) was produced with the aim of summarizing general lessons learned, which would serve as input for further debates and exchange, in view of improved policy and practice of future horticulture development initiatives.

## Key findings Valuable Vegetables Synthesis Study

[Presented by Edwin van der Maden](#) (WUR Centre for Development Innovation)

The synthesis paper provides an inventory of 160 Dutch publicly funded horticulture sector initiatives since 2009 in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East with a budget exceeding €10,000. Dutch public institutes contributed €211 million to these projects through a variety of funding mechanisms. Projects fall into four categories: 1) studies, fairs, events and trade missions; 2) value chain and sector development (this category used the largest part of the budget); 3) education, capacity strengthening, training and demonstration; and 4) private sector investment. These 160 projects give an extensive picture of Dutch investment in the horticulture sector, though the inventory cannot be considered as ‘complete’.

The second part of the synthesis paper consists of a quick qualitative analysis of eight selected representative projects to extract key findings and formulate general lessons learned. The eight

projects analysed have all contributed to development of the horticulture sector in LMICs, each at different scales and with different impact. Capacity strengthening remains an important part of horticulture projects. The creation of linkages, partnerships – particularly visible between farmers and service or input providers – and the information flow between various actors within the value chain or in the horticulture sector has fostered adoption of technologies, created better trust among actors, and strengthened collaborations.

## More explicit inclusiveness strategies needed

The synthesis paper observes that although most of the eight projects analysed included women, youth and marginalised groups in their interventions, limited information was documented on the lessons learnt regarding inclusiveness<sup>1</sup>. In most cases no clear inclusiveness objectives or strategies had been defined, apart from reaching or participation of a targeted number or percentage. Projects do work on these elements, however few projects were explicit about, or have been designed to specifically address these issues. The authors team recommends that horticulture projects be challenged to be more explicit about their strategies to contribute to inclusiveness, resilience and sustainability.

The paper describes a number of examples of inclusive approaches:

- Activities to sensitize horticulture programme field staff on gender aspects, and to train women in leadership and technical aspects of farming. (HortiLIFE<sup>2</sup>, vegIMPACT)
- A specific focus on female producers, to improve their access to land and households to become more resilient. (Drops4Crops, also referred to below)
- A specific focus on young farmers for the adoption of new techniques and technologies. (Sevia)
- Offering capacity building and GAP training activities to (female) field workers and contractors, who have important roles in the horticulture sector. (vegIMPACT)
- Trainings designed to consider women's needs and time availability improves the engagement and interest of women in capacity strengthening activities.

### Reference for this webinar: IFPRI framework on the empowerment of women

*Ms. Angelica Senders, Fair and Sustainable Advisory Services* shared the 'Empower women' framework by IFPRI<sup>3</sup>. When discussing inclusiveness for women, and more particularly the opportunities to enhance women's empowerment in horticultural value chains, this framework is

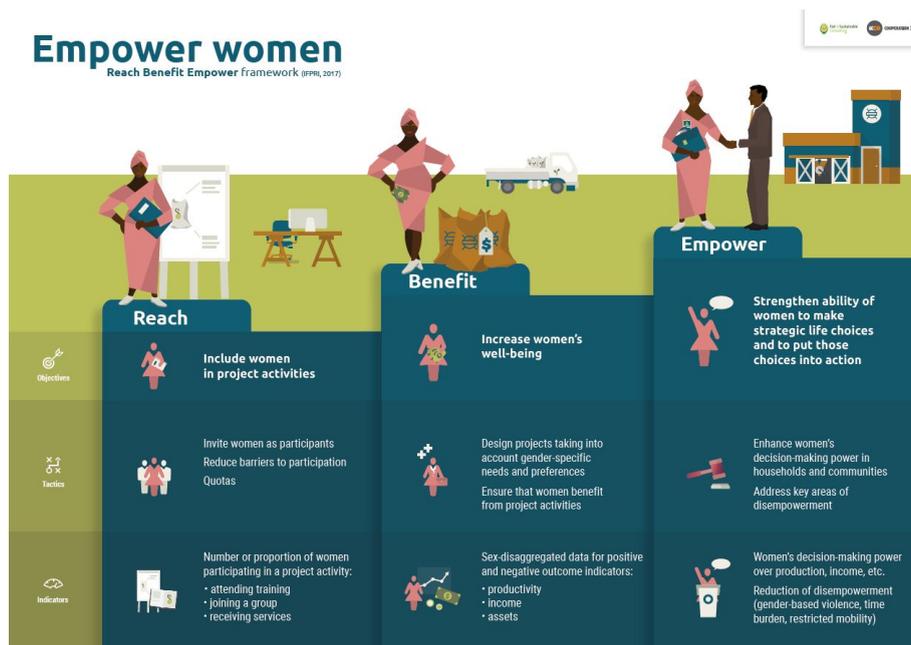
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<sup>1</sup> Inclusiveness is defined in the report, as the extent to which all types of horticulture producers, value chain actors and others stakeholders – including smaller scale, remote, youth and female – have access to services, markets and agencies in the sector.

<sup>2</sup> For full information on the projects mentioned here, please refer to the synthesis paper.

<sup>3</sup> Visual presenting this framework was developed by FSAS and AgriProFocus [Reach Benefit Empower framework infographic \(agriprofocus.com\)](#)

a recommended reference. It facilitates the analysis and action on key bottlenecks of women to not only benefit from the opportunities the horticulture sector could offer them, but also become further empowered by being a strategic stakeholder in this sector.



It is important to use the right definition of inclusiveness. This means, not limiting it to the access of specific groups to services such as capacity building, finances or the market, but also including the dimension of empowerment. A concept used by international organisations such as FAO and DCED: "A woman is economically empowered if she has both access to productive resources and power and agency." The same could be applied to youth inclusiveness and empowerment. IFPRI developed this framework because many projects had general intentions to advance the position of women, but did not translate those into actual strategies. The framework is a table with three pillars. Action is needed for each of the pillars, hence, for each pillar you have to formulate clear objectives and strategies. For benefit, e.g. improve the wellbeing of women. For empower, e.g. strengthen the ability of women to make strategic life choices and to put these choices into action.

## Experiences shared during the webinar

Several participants shared practical experiences to enhance inclusiveness in horticulture programmes.

*Mr. Francis Shivonje, Horticulture Programme Manager Solidaridad East and Central Africa.* The Food For All project, Kenya, is a 5-year programme funded by Netherlands Enterprise Agency, which aims to improve food security of 48,500 households in East Kenya, working in various value chains. It includes a processing business case, building smallholders' capacity and linking them to sales company that exports and sells on domestic markets. It also has a nursery business case, raising seedlings for vegetables and fruits to sell to communities, which brings inclusion as it works with women and youth in particular. 300 youth in 15 groups developed seedling business and generated in total 900,000 seedlings and 10,000€ every year. And 200 women formed 10 groups, which have sold tissue culture banana seedlings to the farming communities, raising 50,000 seedlings per year since 3 years, which generated 20,000€ last year. Youth and women faced the challenge of access to land, as due to legislation and policies the land is mainly owned by the men. This implies that young women who start a nursery on lands they don't own, may run the risk of losing that if the owner claims back the land. Other challenges are related to the seasonality of the business, the access to irrigation water and to the market.

*Mr. Jan van Saane, Project advisor at RVO Netherlands Enterprise Agency,* highlighted the experiences from one of the RVO funded PPP projects. The Drops for Crops project in Burkina Faso, led by Woord & Daad, actively engaged women in horticulture. The role of the cooperative was important for that, as they were among the project partners which provided the farmers with access to markets, inputs, training and to (guarantees for) finance. Further, the local public partner facilitated women's access to a 10 years' land lease. Some women with small plots of land could still participate in the project, because they are member of the cooperative.

This links to the broader discourse on the target groups of Dutch-funded public private partnerships: should this be the smallholder farms, or farms of other sizes? In preparatory discussions for the current SDG-P programme, this definition has evolved to the broader group of 'farmers'. A consideration was that private sector partners prefer dealing with a few cooperatives instead of with large amounts of farmers; primarily because it is cheaper and easier, hence, better for the business case.

*Mr. Thomas Tichar. Youth and gender advisor for Hortifresh Ghana at WCDI.* In two projects in the horticulture sector in Ghana and Rwanda, in which WCDI is involved, current work concentrates on reaching and generating benefit for women. In Ghana, a number of clusters were set up with gender and youth components in mind, though when cooperatives were restructured this wasn't given systemic attention, nor were structural challenges such as land access systemically addressed yet. The youth employment fund under the HortiFresh programme focuses specifically

on young women and men starting up and scaling enterprises in quite a variety of horti subsectors. This could be classified as 'benefit' or 'empower' depending on the criteria for that. In Rwanda, a mid-term evaluation was done of the youth and gender impact of the HortINVEST programme, early 2020. WCDI used the slightly adapted 'reach-benefit-empower' framework, to help the team to improve their collective understanding of their intervention's impact on women and youth. They realised that much of the work was at the level of 'reach', and there were components at the level of 'benefit'. E.g. workshops discussed how to address particular constraints that women and youth face. Inclusiveness may be enhanced during the project cycle: if project cycle management includes relevant youth and gender indicators, you can adapt to that in the consecutive project phase.

*Ms. Riti Herman Mostert, MSP advisor at WCDI.* Project team in Rwanda tries to establish a specific window for youth entrepreneurship. Besides looking at reach, benefit and empower, one may add a component of 'attracting' youth. Particularly the groups that are not present now and not visible in the sector, nor in a job or an enterprise. Teams in Rwanda have been actively lobbying and motivating youth to involve them in cooperatives and in collaboration with fresh graduates. More generally, it is important to remind that working on gender and youth is about interests and power struggles, and this is one of the main difficulties we face with this topic in a lot of projects. Some aspects may be addressed when a project is mid-way, but if you really want to plan and strategize on gender and youth, this also needs to be part of the budget.

### RVO review on the inclusiveness on public-private partnerships

In 2018, a [review](#) assessed whether the public-private partnership programmes in the RVO portfolio reached their objective of improving the living conditions of smallholder farmers, women, vulnerable groups and poor households. It looked at various value chain projects, including horticulture. Its overall conclusion was that the programmes were inclusive on the producers site, but less inclusive on the consumers site. The best practices from the review were as follows:

- Making access to finance more inclusive. Cooperatives can play a role therein, as well as the private partners and financial institutes.
- Dedicated steering towards inclusive results (measure, analyse, adapt). It starts with the M&E, if you see that the number of women participating in training is low, analyse the obstacles, and thereafter make the training more accessible to women.

- Tailor towards specific target groups, e.g. women and youth.
- Sustaining capacity building efforts for low income groups. It is not just part of the project, but also after the project ends that training continues, e.g. demo fields, lead farmers, accessible for all.
- Using the strength of the broader community. Make sure farmers are not acting on their own, but other key stakeholders involved in interventions.
- Composition of the right partnerships (e.g. public partner for access to land). Check whether you have the right partners in your initiative.
- Getting the message across and the target group on board. E.g. some of the messaging may be passed by health workers, e.g. on nutrition.

## Discussion

The discussion among the participants focused on the key question: what can be done to enhance the inclusiveness of horticulture projects and programmes, while being aware of their complexity?

*Angelica Senders, FSAS.* Referring to general introduction of the reach-benefit-empower framework (described above) it is positive to hear that quite a few of the participants have already used the reach-benefit-empower framework in their work in the horticulture sector. As explained, there is work to be done at the three levels, in parallel and/or iteratively. 'Reach' strategies in the horticulture sector are used by projects that make sure women participate in trainings, providing training at the right time, in the right language and addressing mobility constraints for example. Talking about the participation of women in training sometimes already leads to little changes in the position of women related to that men. Projects that want to foster women's 'benefit' have to make sure the newly acquired knowledge can be applied by women, and actually leads to higher productivity and a reduced workload for them. For 'empowerment', it is about the decision making, and the recognition of women as farmers. At this level, it is not only about women but also about men: about transformation.

*WCDI representative.* Donors may be challenged on the fact that projects are constructed to do everything. Projects have become very complex, working at the same time with youth,

smallholder farmers, BoP consumers, while promoting horticulture production and trade and involving Dutch companies. What choices can be actually made, rather than doing everything?

*EKN representative.* Projects tend to be complex indeed, trying to serve many objectives at the same time. This is to a large extent due to the way the Dutch food security policy is formulated and the results EKNs have to achieve through their projects and to report to parliament. If the emphasis were more on inclusiveness, we would have had a greater chance of achieving some results on it. In current practice, the planning of actions to enhance inclusiveness regularly follows only when other project activities have been planned already. One could consider putting inclusiveness higher on the agenda, and plan other actions accordingly. But there are limits to that. We work in an economic sector, with the ambition to make it sustainable in accordance to the functioning of markets and other circumstances. This often goes against inclusiveness. There is no one comprehensive answer to this dilemma, but it could help if we were clearer about these dilemmas, and had a transparent discussion and (more) realistic expectations.

*EKN representative.* Also recognises the dilemmas and trade-offs between various policy objectives and the importance of being clear about those. Be clear about the risks of enforcing an inclusiveness agenda on economic development programmes: projects that provide microfinance to poor farmers, for example, who try out certain new technologies, may put their livelihoods at risk; projects that facilitate access to international markets may imply risks regarding food safety standards. This does not mean we should not be as inclusive as possible. But we need to be realistic about the context - very often markets we operate in are oligopolistic, with a dominance of large scale farmers - and about the expectations we have of sector transformation. With small projects, you cannot have the illusion to be very transformative, while if you are too ambitious, you may end up doing nothing. Science could help answering these questions, with evidence on what works and what does not work, what is realistic and what is not realistic.

*Ministry Foreign Affairs representative.* Interesting work is ongoing on M&E indicators, together with stakeholders and with embassies. This helps the understanding of the key expectations of projects and how these relate to each other. Gradually we are making the shift from measuring at the level of the outputs to the level of the outcomes. This work can also feed into how we address the dilemmas.

## Conclusions

This webinar has facilitated the sharing of findings of the synthesis paper Valuable Vegetables, and in particular of the findings related to inclusiveness for women and youth of horticulture programmes. Several practices have been shared, amongst others from Kenya, Burkina Faso, Ghana and Rwanda, in which action was undertaken to foster the reach and benefit of programme interventions for women and in some cases for youth. At the same time, many programmes still need specific strategies to foster women's and youth's benefit and empowerment. It was clear from the webinar that the dilemma remains whether various policy objectives - related to inclusiveness respectively economic development – can be achieved by one single programme.

The results from the Valuable Vegetables Synthesis paper and the series of webinars held in second semester 2020 will be shared online and in a mailing to participants. Food & Business Knowledge Platform and AgriProFocus will merge into Netherlands Food Partnership, and will use the findings of Valuable Vegetables learning as an input for further work in collaboration with horticulture sector stakeholders.

### Related documents

#### Synthesis Paper

Key findings and lessons from Dutch publicly funded horticulture initiatives in low- and middle-income countries – Valuable Vegetables Synthesis Paper, June 2020 (revised August 2020)

<https://www.nlfoodpartnership.com/knowledge-expertise/horticulture/key-findings-and-lessons-dutch-publicly-funded-horticulture-initiatives-lmics/>

#### Presentation WCDI, Edwin van der Maden

"Valuable Vegetables Synthesis Paper: Key findings and lessons from Dutch publicly funded horticulture initiatives in low- and middle-income countries. Focus: inclusiveness"

[https://www.nlfoodpartnership.com/documents/12/200917\\_vv-webinar\\_ppt-edwin-vd-maden.pdf](https://www.nlfoodpartnership.com/documents/12/200917_vv-webinar_ppt-edwin-vd-maden.pdf)