

**TOOL 3.13****Create Local Economic Development and Empowerment Opportunities for Women**

- » **GOAL:** Develop activities that promote women’s economic empowerment
- » **TARGET UNIT:** Community Engagement

Creating economic opportunity—in the form of employment and use of local suppliers—is one of the most clear-cut ways in which infrastructure projects can contribute to the communities surrounding their operations (For detailed guidance on creating gender-equitable employment and local supplier opportunities, see **TOOL SUITES 1** and **2**).

For women not engaged in formal employment or the supply chain, however, economic activities developed through community engagement activities can often support broader social and economic development by helping them build capital and control of resources. With this comes access to information, influence, and status. Building local businesses that are independent of the natural resource company makes these enterprises more sustainable throughout the various phases of the project, as well as after the project ends.

**TOOL 3.12** addresses the establishment of vital community and social support services. By contrast, this tool provides guidance on creating programs that directly target women’s economic development and empowerment, giving women a path to increased economic and social independence. In turn, they will be able to make positive, long-term contributions to their families, communities, and themselves.

Use this tool in tandem with **TOOL 2.7** in the Supply Chain tool suite, which offers strategies for supporting the development of local women-owned businesses. Note that economic development and empowerment activities can overlap in scope. As with **TOOL 3.12**, women and men alike can benefit from many of the initiatives suggested here. Still, the focus is squarely on ensuring women’s access to such programs, which will eliminate barriers and facilitate the broader goal of progress toward gender equality.

**Designing Programs for Women’s Economic Development and Empowerment**

Here is some guidance on designing programs aimed at boosting women’s economic opportunities and empowerment.

- Involve both women and men in programs whenever possible: This approach ensures benefit for all members of the community. It also contributes to men’s acceptance of the programs, reducing any potential resistance if men believe that women have been unfairly favored. (This could also expand understanding of gender equality and

challenge traditional concepts of gender to show that certain programs or activities are not strictly “for men” or “for women.”)

- Be sure to choose programs that will be relevant to the local context and markets to enhance the chances of success and sustainability. For example, before deciding to train women to make and sell a particular good or product, it is recommended to conduct a market feasibility study or to discuss the idea with community members or businesses in the areas to find out current levels of supply and demand for the product.
- Be sure to think beyond traditional goods and services normally associated with women (baked goods and textiles, for example). When conversing with women to come up with an idea, consider also suggesting ideas that may be new to them or their community.
- Mitigate potential gender role-related consequences: Women’s participation in economic empowerment programs could detract from their traditional gender roles. For example, they may not have as much time for their domestic work. (This could have dangerous unintended consequences, such as increases in gender-based violence in the home.) Mitigation strategies could include:
  - Facilitating childcare for working families
  - Facilitating support groups for working women and families
  - Improving technology and infrastructure to reduce domestic burdens and strengthen market access
  - Lighting to allow women and children to work and/or study after dark
  - Wells to speed up water collection
  - Mills to speed up processing of grain
  - Electricity to enable operation of such infrastructure, as needed

## Women’s Empowerment Framework

For more guidance when considering which community initiatives might have the highest success rate in terms of empowering women in the specific community in which you are operating, the Women’s Empowerment Framework developed by Sara Hlupekile Longwe, a Zambian gender expert, can help.<sup>48</sup> This framework enables assessment of a project’s contributions to gender equality and women’s empowerment. It helps you determine whether the project will address women’s needs and interests and whether it will encourage women’s participation and control during the decision-making process. The framework defines five progressive levels of equality, in order from highest to lowest level of empowerment:

<sup>48</sup> For more, see: “A Conceptual Framework for Gender Analysis and Planning,” an online learning module of the International Labour Organization and the Southeast Asia Multidisciplinary Advisory Team.

- **Control:** The ability to exercise agency and maintain balance of control between women and men over the factors of production.
- **Participation:** The ability to participate in consultation and decision-making processes. In a project context, this means active involvement in needs assessment, planning and design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.
- **Conscientization:** The awareness of gender roles and relations, and the understanding that gender division of labor and of benefit streams should be fair and equitable to both women and men.
- **Access:** The ability to access key factors of production (land, labor, credit, training), and project benefits.
- **Welfare:** The ability to access nutrition, health, medical care, and other key determinants of material wellbeing.

The framework also distinguishes between women’s issues and women’s concerns and helps identify how well the project design reflects women’s issues.

By customizing charts such as the one shown in Table 3I based on a specific project or initiative, the information can assess the degree to which a project or initiative addresses women’s empowerment. Work in tandem with the women who will participate in the programs to complete the chart, which also can be used for input as part of the larger participatory monitoring and evaluation process.

**TABLE 3I | Women’s Empowerment Framework Form**

**LEVEL OF RECOGNITION OF WOMEN’S ISSUES**

LEVEL OF EQUALITY	NEGATIVE	NEUTRAL	POSITIVE
Control			
Participation			
Conscientization			
Access			

### BOX 3F | Programs to Encourage Women’s Economic Independence and Empowerment

- Adult literacy programs
- Financial literacy programs and women-to-women savings schemes
- Employment counseling, vocational training, and business skills development: Programs can either prepare women for employment or business opportunities that currently exist in the local area:
- Direct employment with the infrastructure company, local supplier development, jobs at other firms, or for aspirational roles to fill a new local business or market need.
- Promotion of women’s entrepreneurship through:
  - Startup grants or access to microfinance and microcredit schemes: Before deploying such tools, be sure to find out about any financing gaps that would make entrepreneurship training futile. (See Chapter 1, section III of UN Women’s [“The power of procurement: How to source from women-owned businesses”](#) to learn about the unique challenges women face in accessing financial, social, and human capital.) Work in tandem with financial institutions to offer startup grants or access to microfinance and microcredit schemes.
- Opportunities for women’s entrepreneurship that tie into local markets and/or local supplier development in the infrastructure project’s supply chain.
- Tourism or handicraft opportunities, depending on local context: Do not rely solely on such options, since there is often little market access for them.
- Support for women’s land and property ownership and land titling.
- Affordable social housing programs for female-headed households or other vulnerable members of the community.
- Training and other programs to build women’s confidence: This includes instilling the belief that they have the power to bring about change.
- Scholarships and apprenticeship programs for women and girls to increase their access to education and skills training: Such programs can be general in nature or specific to the project’s sector.