Women’s Economic Empowerment
The ceci Approach
Introduction

CECI has been supporting and contributing for many years to different projects for empowering women. Sometimes, this involves specific projects targeting women's and girls' access to education (PADENF and PRODENF in Niger), women's rights (the regional DCF and PDPF in Senegal, ACIPA in Rwanda, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo), violence against women (Great Lakes region), and gender equality (PROJES in Mali); sometimes, these efforts are integrated into projects seeking to develop income generating activities and/or increase women's incomes (FSA in Niger, microcredit for women in Nepal, PROSOL in Guatemala, etc.). However, few projects have the economic empowerment of women as their essential aim, as is the case with the shea sub-sector projects that have enjoyed continuing support from CECI programming for many years.

As part of Strategic Orientation #5—“Gender Equality”—the GE team set itself the objective this year of developing a position and an intervention model on the “Economic empowerment of women.” The present document integrates contributions from CECI’s GE resource persons and teams in the field, as well as discussions with managers and project officers at the HQ.

1. Justification

In updating its gender equality policy in 2007, CECI strongly reaffirmed its commitment to promoting women's rights through inclusive, equitable and sustainable development that transforms the unequal relations between men and women, and girls and boys.

Gender equality and equity, women's empowerment and a determination to combat all forms of gender-based discrimination are fundamental elements of our conception of sustainable development and of an effective fight against poverty and exclusion, both of which are at the heart of CECI’s mission.

CECI endeavours to act in relation to the complex web of social, economic, political and environmental relationships which may represent obstacles to women’s participation and empowerment. In a context, where gender inequalities are persistent, it’s essential to develop specific measures for women in order to affect the policies, practices and attitudes that buttress gender inequalities. It is fundamentally a question of justice and rights, but it is also an inescapable economic issue.

It is in this context that CECI proposes an intervention model specifically focusing on the economic empowerment of women.

Empowerment depends on the capacity of persons to take charge of their lives and influence the decisions that bear on their living conditions and their quality of life.

Empowerment constitutes an essential precondition to the political, social, economic, cultural and environmental advancement of all peoples.
In the following pages, we present the frame of reference on women’s economic empowerment in three stages:

- The starting point: the problem
- The goal-ending point: expected results
- The fundamental levers: the strategies and means to be implemented

This document concludes with a diagram summarizing our approach.

2. Starting point

Poverty is a social issue that affects women and men; however, women and girls are the most severely affected. Poverty leads to marginalization and often to forms of exclusion which are gender specific. The causes of women’s poverty are due in part to the social inequalities between women and men.

These inequalities are mainly characterized by an inferior status, unequal power relations and systemic discrimination at all levels of social, economic and political life in respect of all of the economic, social and cultural rights of women.

They are perpetuated by social mores, entrenched cultural and religious obstacles, as well as an absence of political will on the part of the political, social, economic and religious powers that be, which contributes to maintaining the status quo. These inequalities are often intertwined with other types of exclusion arising from social class, ethnic origin and, in certain countries, the caste system.

The social inequalities between women and men, and girls and boys result in a failure to recognize the rights of women and girls, as well as very limited access to economic opportunities and decision-making circles.

The devastating combined effects of poverty, discrimination and the lack of opportunities affect women in many different ways: from their economic situation (income levels, right of access to property, access to credit, etc.), to their well-being (access to health services and education, etc.), as well as their aspirations for recognition of their rights and their hopes for better conditions (re the burden of domestic labour, the opportunity to obtain stable employment or to be self-employed, etc.).

In addition to these obstacles, one must recognize the widespread phenomenon of violence against women and girls which constitutes a major constraint in their lives and which has, moreover, considerable economic consequences. Violence saps women’s confidence and dramatically hinders their capacity to act and fully contribute in the economic sphere.
What is poverty?

We define poverty as “an absence of means, power and knowledge.”

Poverty is not just the absence of means (inadequate or irregular income, limited access to resources, etc.). It is also the absence of power to act on material conditions and modify one’s environment as an autonomous agent.

Finally, poverty is also the absence of knowledge due to lack of education, information and the technical training necessary to act and especially due to a diminished capacity to act in accordance with already acquired knowledge.


A few facts:

Despite undeniable progress, notably in health and women’s political representation, there is still a long way to go.

- In Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, girls have less access to school than boys, and are less likely to graduate from elementary school or receive adult literacy training.
- Maternal mortality still remains extremely high in most developing countries.
- Women’s incomes from employment or other economic activities are lower than men’s in both developed countries and developing countries.
- Women farmers only receive 1% of the credits accorded to agriculture and possess fewer economic rights as well as limited access to resources and economic opportunities, particularly land and credit facilities.
- The majority of women’s economic activities are very small scale, generally take place in the informal sector, are low-paying and peripheral to major economic activities.
- An African woman’s working day is 50% longer than an African man’s, which limits the former’s availability and mobility.

Moreover, women assume the burden of unpaid activities, often having to do with issues such as access to water, firewood, the absence of social services in the community and tasks connected with their spouses’ economic activities.

The poverty experienced by women & girls translates into their incapacity to engage in significant economic activities, thus giving rise to discrimination and social and economic exclusion that is harmful to them and to their communities.
3. Goal-ending point

“The ability to earn income, the economic role outside of the family, access to education, property rights [...], all of these things have at least one thing in common: they contribute to making women’s voices audible, they confer upon them a certain independence.”
— Amartya Sen, 2000

When women contribute to the prosperity of their families and have their own source of income that has a major impact on their social status. “As soon as they become less dependent, their voices carry more weight,” explains 1998 Nobel Economics laureate Amartya Sen.

Our objective is to support the economic empowerment of women in order to break the vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion and thus enable them to fully participate in the economic development of their society, both within the family and as part of the community.

In this context, we define economic power as the capacity of women to generate and administer sufficient resources to ensure their autonomy and development within their families and the community as a whole. Thus, enjoying access to equal rights to economic development signifies the following:

- Participating in and influencing economic decisions
- Knowing one’s rights and being able to ensure that they are respected
- Ownership of individual or collective enterprises (as well as of land)
- Disposing of significant income and exercising control over the utilization thereof
- Easy access to and control over technical and financial resources (i.e., credit)
- Access to profitable markets
- Having disposable income and the ability to save
- Employment with decent remuneration
- Benefiting from a lessening of their workload and men’s participation in housework
- Benefiting from a safe and non-violent environment
- Access to education and technical training
It is our assumption that if women achieve results in these areas, living conditions for them, their families, in particular, their daughters, and their communities will be improved:

- **They will have greater access to economic opportunities and services** (education, health, etc.) and to decent employment.*
- **They will enhance their social status**, i.e., they will be more independent and respected and their rights will be better respected.
- **They will be more able to contribute to and influence the processes of change** that affect them, their families and their communities.

As we can see, fighting against poverty, in particular women’s poverty, is not a purely economic struggle. This fight requires changes that are political, social and cultural in nature, as well as coherent development programs with adequate funding.

4. **Framework for action**

   How do we get there? How do we go about supporting the economic empowerment of women? What might the strategic programming priorities and promising approaches be? Reflecting on these issues has led us to define several interrelated and complementary strategic priorities.

   As projects are unable to deal with all of these aspects at the same time, they will endeavour to impact the most strategic levers depending on the given context and opportunities, while also developing needed synergies and engaging in concerted actions with other actors.

* The ILO defines decent work as the possibility for every woman and man to find productive work under conditions of freedom, equity, security and dignity.
<table>
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<th>Strategic priorities</th>
<th>Promising approaches and programming issues</th>
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| Empowering women & girls                    | • Accompaniment/appropriation to foster empowerment of women stakeholders  
• Strengthening women's confidence, leadership abilities and capacities to engage in negotiations  
• Sensitization and training on women's rights  
• Women's access to literacy programs  
• Knowledge of laws that enhance women's rights |
| Sensitization re gender relations            | • Sensitization and information activities on gender relations targeting youth and social actors, including on the issue of violence against women  
• Working more with men with a view to transforming gender relations |
| Women's participation in economic decisions  | • Knowledge and full understanding of laws, mechanisms and procedures  
• Affirmative action measures to increase women's participation in decision-making circles  
• Strengthening women's decision-making authority and influence |
| Access to/control of financing (credit) and savings | • Measures focusing on access to investments, opportunities and credit  
• Recapitalization program |
| Access to/control of land and property rights| • Measures in order to extend land entitlements and women's property rights  
• Sensitization and policy dialogue |
| Job creation and business development        | • Support for the development of individual and/or collective enterprises  
• Setting up credit programs to support women entrepreneurs  
• Strengthening technical and organizational capacities, entrepreneurship, business plans, etc.  
• Investment programs in infrastructures that reduce women's work time |
| Strengthening women's networks               | • The empowerment approach contributes to building the capacities of persons, groups and communities to define and participate in decisions and actions. It is, moreover, the result of the relations that women establish when joining in collaborative efforts and coalitions to mutually support each other.  
• Organizational development, coalitions and network development |
| Policy dialogue                             | • Support for advocacy on public policy issues  
• Support for mobilization  
• Support for proposal writing  
• Sensitizing policy makers |
POVERTY AND EXCLUSION OF WOMEN

« Lack of OWNERSHIP (O), POWER (P) and KNOWLEDGE (K) » in the household, the community and in the society

What are the economic causes of the poverty and exclusion of women?

UNEQUAL SOCIAL RELATIONS BETWEEN WOMEN AND MEN

Characterized by an inferior status, unequal power relations and a systemic discrimination

Forced by social norms, beliefs and cultural influences and exclusion caused by social class, ethnic origine and casts

Maintained because of lack of willingness of powers (political, social economic and religious)

Bringing unequal sexual division of labor; reduced mobility; Early marriages; multiple pregnancies, Violence

AND MORAL AND PHYSICAL VIOLENCE: as a major constraint on women’s capacity of action
POINT B
GOAL-ENDING POINT – EXPECTED RESULT

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN
« Women's ability to generate and manage resources to ensure their own autonomy and development within their families, and the entire community »

- Have access to economic opportunities
- Enjoy a social and legal status that recognizes their rights and its implementation
- Participate in decision making spheres

IMPACTS
- Improved social position of women
- Improved living condition, as well as living conditions of their families
- Improved access to health care and education
- Economic empowerment in obtaining a decent work or at own a business
  - Legal rights to land, property and inheritance
Fundamental leverages

TO REINFORCE ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WITHIN THE FAMILY, THE COMMUNITY AND SOCIETY

- Access/control to economic opportunities and resources
- Strengthening the status and rights
- Access/influence in decision-making bodies

IN AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PROJECT / PROGRAMME NOT SPECIFIC TO WOMEN:

Based on a gender analysis AND pertinent sex-disaggregated data, include measures taken into account empowerment in a specific GE strategy with specific outcomes and indicators, equity measures and gender quotas, consequent human and financial resources, monitoring and reporting on gender equality.
**Definition of Levers**

**Women's empowerment (women are able to conduct their own analyses, make their own decisions and define their own courses of action)**
- Building self-esteem
- Program for literacy, access to education and health, and technical training
- Raising awareness about legal status and rights
- Strengthening women’s leadership
- Building capacities to engage in negotiations

**Women's participation in economic decision making**
- Training program (knowledge and strong understanding of laws, mechanisms and procedures)
- Strengthening women's decision-making power and influence
- Affirmative action measures so that more women are heading companies and participating in decision-making bodies

**Access to/Control over financing (credit) and savings**
- Micro-credit programs
- Re-capitalization programs

**Job creation and business development**
- Job access program
- Support for the development of individual companies and/or social economies
- Strengthening organizations’ abilities to meet women’s needs and promote their economic interests
- Credit programs supporting women entrepreneurs
- Building technical and organizational capacities (agricultural extension, entrepreneurial capacities, business plans)
- Building market access
- Infrastructure investment program to reduce women’s work time
- Recognition/Promotion of women’s work in the community

**Political dialogue**
- Support for political representation
- Support for mobilization
- Support for proposal development
- Raising awareness among decision makers

**Strengthening women's networks**
- Strengthening organizations
- Supporting coordination and networking at the local, national and international levels

**Raising awareness about unequal gender relations**
- Roles/Responsibilities and promoting women’s work
- Sharing household duties
- Approaches on masculinity
- Violence, etc.

**Access to/Control of land and property rights**
- Raising awareness about land rights and women’s property rights
- Political dialogue with a view to legislative changes
- Access to investments and opportunities

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