



Public works and rural women's economic empowerment: Rwanda's Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme



THE PROGRAMME

The Vision 2020 Umurenge Programme (VUP) is Rwanda's flagship social protection programme managed by the Local Administrative Entities Development Agency (LODA) within the Ministry of Local Government (MINALOC). The programme started in May 2008 and, as of March 2015, it covered a total of 130 000 households in all provinces in Rwanda.

VUP has four components: public works, cash transfers (direct support), financial services and sensitization. Our study focused on the public works component through which the government offers temporary employment to extremely poor households with at least one adult member able to work. The majority of public works consists of activities geared towards supporting agricultural livelihoods and land conservation, as well as maintaining physical infrastructure.

Job availability for each beneficiary varies depending on project implementation at sector level. The duration of jobs also varies from one to several phases of 15 days each. The target number of work days available for beneficiaries each financial year is of 72 days; however, target is rarely reached. During the financial year 2013/14, the median days worked by beneficiaries were 49.

THE RESEARCH AND DATA

The research carried out by FAO's From Protection to Production (PtoP) project aimed to gain a better understanding of the way VUP promotes women's economic empowerment as a strategy for rural poverty reduction. It also aimed at identifying good practices from the programme that ensure equal access by both women and men to social protection benefits. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The consistency and integration of both strands of research was guaranteed by the use of the same theory of change and research hypotheses, alignment of

research tools (e.g. questionnaires) and constant triangulation of the findings. The study was conducted in October and November 2014.

The **qualitative study** was conducted in Kigembe sector (Gisagara) in the Southern province, and Ndego sector (Kayonza) in the Eastern province. In each sector, two beneficiary communities and one comparison community were selected for the study. A total of 34 focus groups discussions, 19 key informant interviews, as well as several in-depth household case studies, were undertaken covering

both male and female beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, as well as resource persons.

The **quantitative study** was conducted in four districts in the Southern province (Gisagara, Muhanga, Nyanza and Ruhango). The main instrument of this component of the study was a qualitative survey of 369 participant households from VUP sector cohorts II and III (households that joined the VUP programme in 2009/2010); and 247 comparable 'VUP eligible' households to become VUP participants in financial year 2015. An individual

survey was conducted for each principal adult male and female in each household, using the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) methodology.

RESULTS

The study comprised three areas of enquiry: economic advancement, power and agency and operations. Below the key findings for each area and the conclusions reached from both quantitative and qualitative methods are summarized.¹

The VUP only marginally promoted the economic advancement of female beneficiaries

The study found that in addition to its safety-net function, VUP wages were used, for a minority of female beneficiaries, as a catalyst for small investments in petty trade, brewing and selling beer and renting small plots of land. However, women beneficiaries were not always able to retain full or partial control over their own incomes, with mostly men making these decisions. Retaining control over income was easier for women who owned an individual account (e.g. in Savings and Credit Cooperatives – SACCOs). Limited number of work days available and delays in payment compromised the potential for improving women's and men's economic advancement.

VUP beneficiaries learned new skills through public works; however, women were less likely to find jobs elsewhere with similar required skills because of domestic obligations and few viable opportunities in the labour market. Only about a fourth of public works employees in the survey conducted in the Southern province received training to perform their jobs. The majority who received training were VUP workers in higher positions.

The study found that VUP participation increased women beneficiaries' workload. The quantitative study did not observe changes in time allocation for domestic activities between spouses and, as a result, children's workloads increased as women offloaded part of the domestic burden onto them.

VUP payments through SACCOs enabled some women to own a financial account for the first time and the possibility of accessing other financial services such as credit. The quantitative analysis from the Southern province data also suggests that VUP increased women's decision-making in relation to credit. Nevertheless, women were less likely to own SACCO accounts than men. More accessible Village Savings and Loan Groups (VSLGs) and other informal lending sources such as *totines* were found to be the main sources of credit for women. Both quantitative and qualitative results suggest that VUP income enabled a number of female beneficiaries to join VSLGs and access credit through them to a greater extent than the use of SACCOs for this purpose. Constraints to accessing credit loans included women's lower literacy skills and unequal bargaining power within the household *vis-à-vis* men to dispose of resources.

The quantitative survey found that beneficiaries still experience high food insecurity. Low numbers of available work days under VUP public works programme and unreliable payments minimized the use of VUP income to reduce migration as a coping strategy. However, the study did find indications that in the case of some beneficiaries VUP income helped them cope better through investments in livestock, used as precautionary savings.

VUP public works only marginally increased women's bargaining power and decision-making in the household

The study found favourable conditions for women's empowerment and positive views on women's economic role and capacity to engage in income-generating activities. The VUP has contributed to this process at community level. Nevertheless, the effect is limited as these positive views are often related to activities that women perform which involve small amounts of cash, such as dealing with day-to-day household expenses in correspondence to their domestic roles.

In terms of bargaining power within the household, the quantitative survey from the Southern province found that men owned more assets than women. In this light, women reported to have limited ability to negotiate, to voice their opinions and assert their rights.

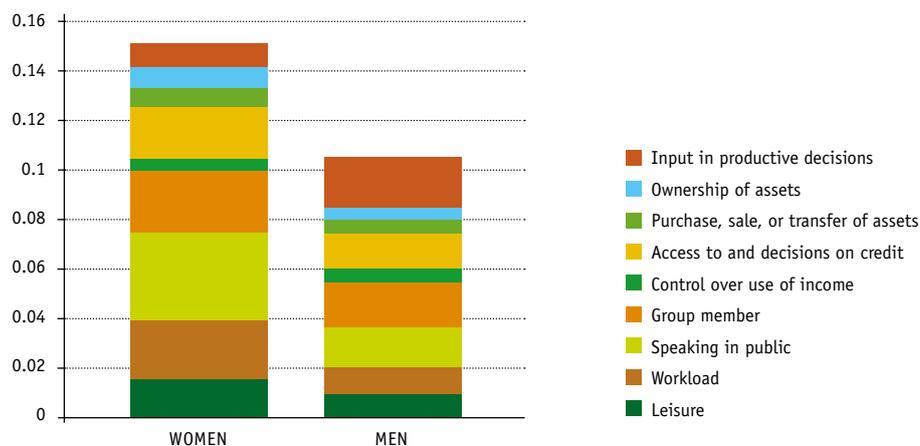
Participating in public works catalysed women's inclusion in social networks and facilitated the formation of new friendship networks, enabling women to join VSLGs and 'mothers' evenings' groups as a result of having more cash income. Income via VUP helped to redress women's (and men's) obstacles in accessing these networks by, for example, enhancing personal hygiene, and increasing exposure to work life and interactions at work sites. Adhering to these networks is positive as it increases a sense of unity and support among women, in addition to facilitating access to income-generating activities.

The quantitative analysis used the WEAI² as a measure of empowerment. Descriptive statistics

¹ Full reports for both the quantitative and the qualitative research findings are available, as well as a synthesis report of both methods.

² The WEAI is a composite index of different domains of economic empowerment including production, income, resources, leadership and time.

Figure 1 Rwanda (Southern): domains contributing to men and women's disempowerment



Figures calculated using the full sample of all female and male primary adults. Columns show the average disempowerment score for women and men, and the contributions to the scores from each indicator. The disempowerment score is 1 minus the empowerment score.



show that overall, in both VUP and comparison communities surveyed, men tend to be less 'disempowered' than women (see figure 1). While men are more disempowered in their input in productive decisions relative to women, women's overall disempowerment is driven by a disadvantage in speaking in public, workloads, group membership and access and decisions on credit. This gives us an indication that VUP is well positioned for enhancing the areas of empowerment in which women are seen to be largely disadvantaged.

Finally, quantitative analysis indicated that participation in VUP public works was related to more decisions on credit and greater control over income; however, the VUP seems not to promote overall women's empowerment, as defined by the WEAI. Analysis results show

no effect of 'empowerment' by participating in VUP. In addition, the study found that for households with a married couple, working in VUP tended to empower the men rather than the women in the household.

Issues in VUP operations pose great obstacles for economic empowerment

The study found several inconsistencies in the targeting mechanism with risk of excluding the poorest. Inconsistency across sectors and at village level in the use of criteria for targeting led to inclusion errors. Inefficiency in targeting was also explained in part by obstacles preventing some households from attending targeting meetings and rendering the VUP not attractive enough for the poorest given its short-term employment status, low payments and delays in

receiving payments. In this light, the quantitative survey showed that a majority of VUP workers are indeed females. Focus groups discussions revealed that males find VUP work unattractive in relation to migrating elsewhere for work.

The quantitative survey conducted in the Southern province revealed that, on average, public works sites are between 2.5 and 3 hours away from participants' dwellings. Distance and difficulty of public works tasks are particularly problematic for female-headed households.

The study found that delays in payment were a recurring problem in the Southern province. The survey data from that province suggested that 32 percent of total payment had not been paid at the time of the data collection.

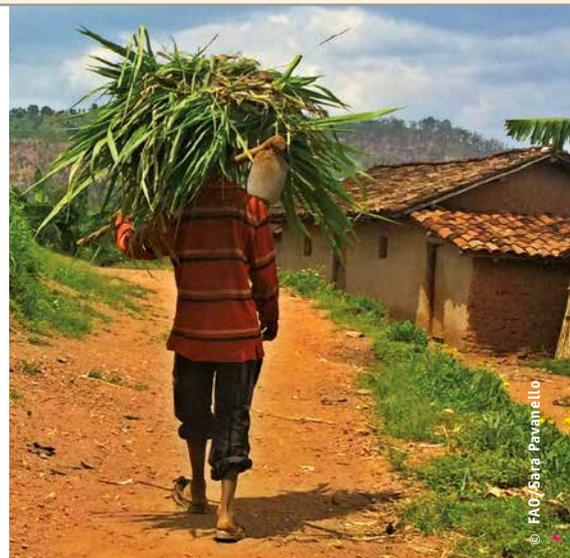
The study faced challenges in obtaining accurate information on beneficiary participation. Beneficiary lists obtained for the study had several inclusion errors and/or were incomplete. Multi-year information to track individuals and household beneficiaries across financial years was not available.

The qualitative study revealed a general lack of awareness among beneficiaries on how VUP projects were selected. The process of project selection also had limited gender sensitivity for addressing specific challenges, needs and priorities of female beneficiaries to reduce their time poverty and to enhance their economic role in the household.

Finally, there was lack of awareness in relation to the VUP complaint mechanism. Survey data from the Southern province revealed that about 50 and 61 percent of households, male-headed and female-headed respectively, did not know where to file complaints about the VUP. The qualitative study also found mixed feelings about the effectiveness of the complaint mechanism, for example in relation to finding solutions to payment delays.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- » Ensuring that wage payments are delivered on time and public works beneficiaries work a minimum number of days in each financial year to enable their economic advancement.
- » Offering the opportunities to more females to open their own individual accounts with a financial institution to increase their decision-making capacity and control over their own incomes.
- » Exploring how to best develop synergies between the VUP and other programmes that address rural development issues.
- » Strengthening the implementation of sensitization activities concerning intra-household gender relations and ensuring the dissemination and systematic use of the Sensitization Manual across all geographic sectors.
- » Establishing or extending support to local community spaces to enhance female beneficiaries' participation in social networks and public life, enhancing the formation of women's groups, particularly around economic activities.
- » Strengthening overall the VUP's monitoring and information system (MIS) to better track beneficiary households and understand pathways to more productive livelihoods and economic empowerment. MIS could include basic indicators that measure progress in women and men's economic empowerment, particularly in intra-household decision-making.
- » Consider impact evaluation of VUP public works and their impacts on economic advancement and empowerment by implementing quantitative baselines and follow-up surveys.
- » Strengthening the programme targeting mechanism to ensure compliance and consistency in its implementation.
- » Redirecting households with high dependency ratios and/or low labour capacity to the direct support component (cash transfer) instead of the public works component.
- » Expanding VUP project portfolio to include projects that can be performed closer to the household and addressing priorities and interests of women and men in project selection (e.g. child care services, health and educational services, construction of water wells, nutrition clubs or by providing agricultural labour on fields from labour-constrained households).



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SOURCES

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please visit: www.fao.org/social-protection/en **or write to:** social-protection@fao.org

FAO, together with its partners, is generating evidence on the impacts of social protection on poverty reduction, food security, nutrition and resilience and is using this to provide related policy, programming and capacity development support to governments and other actors. Countries include Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Lesotho, Malawi, Rwanda, Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

