



# Fit for purpose? A review of guides for gender-equitable value chain development

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## ABSTRACT

This article presents a review of seven guides for gender-equitable value chain development (VCD). The guides advocate persuasively the integration of gender into VCD programming and raise important issues for designing more inclusive interventions. However, gaps persist in their coverage of gender-based constraints in collective enterprises, the influence of norms on gender relations, and processes to transform inequitable relations through VCD. Guidance for field implementation and links to complementary value chain tools are also limited. The article identifies opportunities for conceptual and methodological innovation to address the varying roles, needs, and aspirations of women and men in VCD.

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## Introduction

Over the past few years, organisations engaged in the development of agricultural value chains have increasingly labelled their interventions as “inclusive”. This conveys an explicit interest to carry out development programmes that “include and substantially benefit large numbers of poor people – often smallholders, but also artisans or small-scale retailers or customers” (Harper, Belt, and Roy 2015). Such value chain development (VCD) often aims to improve access by smallholders and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), including cooperatives and producer associations, to information, inputs, and services. Emphasis is placed on developing more equitable business relationships between different actors along the nodes of a value chain, with expectations that beneficial outcomes accrue to smallholders and SMEs but also to their business partners further downstream in the chain. Interventions typically focus on facilitating stronger links between these actors and expanding the provision of affordable and effective services from within and outside of the chain (Kaplinsky 2016).

However, it is increasingly recognised that inequalities also occur within a given node of a value chain, based on gender, age, ethnicity, and other factors of social differentiation (Coles and Mitchell 2011). Failure to address these inequalities is problematic from a gender and a broader equality perspective, and may effectively undermine the potential of VCD to contribute to both economic and social progress (Bamber and Staritz 2016). This potential has been highlighted in approaches to women’s economic empowerment, with authors advocating the adequate application of a gender lens in value chain analysis and associated development programming (KIT, Agri-ProFocus, and IIRR 2012; Rubin and Manfre 2014; Quisumbing et al. 2015). Gender-based constraints and opportunities for strengthening women’s participation in value chains figure prominently in these publications, often with a strong focus on women’s capacity to enhance income and make decisions on its use.

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To facilitate the operationalisation of gender equity in VCD programming, several international organisations have elaborated guides and tools that support practitioners in the design, implementation, and assessment of gender-equitable VCD. Despite their growing number, the guides have yet to be examined regarding their use of concepts related to gender and value chains, and their potential to effectively transform inequitable gender relations through VCD even if applied by non-gender specialists. This article reviews seven guides for gender-equitable VCD that were published by development organisations with a recognised capacity to influence VCD programming and policy. Our objective is twofold: first, to help practitioners select the guides that best suit their needs; and second, to provide donors, researchers, and development organisations with critical reflection on ways forward for advancing gender equity through VCD. We begin by reviewing the literature on gender in value chains. The subsequent section presents a framework and methodology for the guide review, with the criteria and parameters that guided our assessment. We then present results, with emphasis on the strengths and weaknesses that the guides show against the criteria and parameters. In the final section, we identify opportunities and needs for conceptual and methodological innovation to promote the design, implementation, and assessment of interventions which include the goal of equitable engagement of women and men in value chains.

### **Gender in value chains: reviewing the literature**

The literature recognises that value chains are embedded in socio-cultural contexts in which informal gender norms and values, beliefs, and power relations operate across scales – from the household and community levels to the national and global economy. These social norms, relations, and institutions shape women’s and men’s often unequal ability to participate in and benefit from VCD (Rubin and Manfre 2014). Globally, gender norms attribute to women the responsibility for the majority of non-remunerated activities that maintain the household – the “reproductive” realm. These activities prop up “production” and form an integral, often invisible, part of value chains. The need to engage in these activities, combined with the difficulty to command the labour of other household members, can pose important labour constraints for women, and reduce their time and energy to generate income through value chains.

Women also tend to have more limited control over assets than men, reducing their decision-making power and capacity to engage in more profitable nodes of value chains (Quisumbing et al. 2015). Examining changes in asset endowments resulting from VCD, and how income translates (or not) into livelihood benefits, is therefore critical, not only at household level but also among individual household members (Coles and Mitchell 2011). Women may not participate in certain value chain activities, yet benefit from their spouse’s economic gains. For example, value chain income may be spent on improved housing, better food, and enhanced health services. The reverse is also true, as women’s participation in value chains may fail to deliver expected gains if they do not maintain control over their income. Differences in the intra-household distribution of benefits derived from VCD can both be a result of and a contribution to inequitable access to assets between male and female household members. Such gendered asset gaps are widespread and have a bearing on women’s and men’s ability to negotiate among themselves and with external actors. They also influence how barriers to entry to a given value chain may be overcome and, hence, determine the terms under which women can participate in VCD (Quisumbing et al. 2015).

Gender inequality is also inscribed in laws, regulations, and other formal institutions that, along with the availability and orientation of technical, business, and financial services, influence the differentiated opportunities for women and men to engage in value chains. VCD interventions in the enabling environment may often be non-gender-specific as they address blockages that apply to all value chain actors. In contrast, gender-sensitive interventions may focus on levelling the playing field by reforming laws, policies, and other institutions that constrain women, such as land and property ownership statutes, labour codes, and other forms of governance that may discriminate against them (Coles and Mitchell 2011). Gender-sensitive policies or services may also include

tailoring of financial products to the needs of women in diverse types of households to facilitate their participation in value chains (Oduol et al. 2017).

Due to deep-seated gender inequalities in informal and formal institutions, women and men commonly engage under different terms in value chains, with regard to different activities in the same value chain or across different value chains altogether. Value chain analysis with a gender lens has therefore focused on sex-segmentation across the nodes of a value chain and on women's and men's overall returns to labour (Ingram et al. 2014). However, women's roles in value chains often lack visibility due to their concentration in home-based work, the informal sector, and part-time employment (Shackleton et al. 2011). Women's participation is also more likely in certain nodes of the chain, and segregation into low-technology occupations may limit their opportunities to generate new skills and capabilities (SOFA Team and Doss 2011). Some authors have examined value chains in which women dominate the production stage and the extent to which corporate social responsibility or ethical trade schemes foster their participation in trainings and membership in cooperatives and other types of collective enterprises. They have also looked into the effects on women's returns on labour, working conditions, and access to markets, but generally found that gender sensitivity of such schemes needs to be greatly enhanced to achieve the desired ends (Barrientos, Dolan, and Tallontire 2003; Elias and Carney 2004; KIT, Agri-ProFocus, and IIRR 2012).

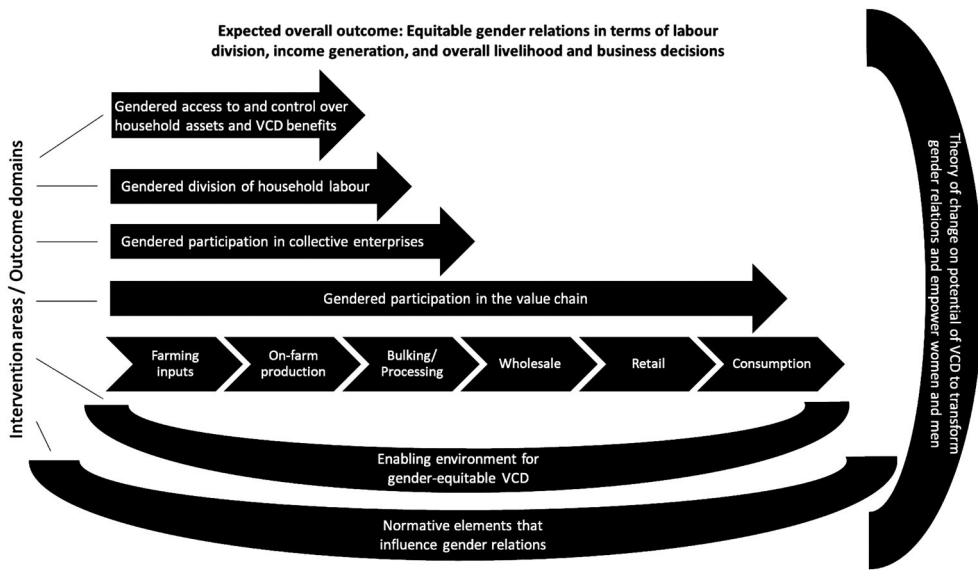
Women's engagement in agricultural cooperatives and producer associations has shown promise for enhancing their benefits from value chains (Ferguson and Kepe 2011). Membership – and particularly leadership roles – in these collective enterprises can improve access to knowledge, information, services (e.g. training, credit), and other benefits. It increases women's ability to manage their work, earn and make decisions on income, and influence business operations (Lyon et al. 2010). Yet, women often face significant challenges to become members and participate in the governance of cooperatives (Manchon and Macleod 2010). Without such membership, they are likely to be deprived of management functions in the enterprises or in other nodes of the chain (Coles and Mitchell 2011). VCD with explicit gender equality goals may focus on strengthening women's own enterprises, particularly for products traditionally produced by women (e.g. Elias and Arora-Jonsson 2017), or women's active participation in mixed-sex cooperatives (Quisumbing et al. 2015).

This literature review shows that VCD can reproduce but also reform existing gender relations. From a development perspective, there is an underlying assumption that careful design and implementation of VCD can provide opportunities to enhance gender equity (Coles and Mitchell 2011; Quisumbing et al. 2015). In many cases, women's economic empowerment can be expected to be an explicit goal of gender-equitable VCD. However, the pathways linking interventions and desired outcomes may be less clear. Focus areas for empowerment may be women's membership in collective enterprises, enhanced income and self-confidence through individual or collective commercial activities, improved intra-household (gender and other) relations, and the ability to make or influence strategic decisions within the household, community, and beyond (Shackleton et al. 2011; Ingram et al. 2014; Rubin and Manfre 2014).

## Framework and methodology

The literature review pointed to key themes to be considered when seeking to enhance gender equity through value chain development. We combined these themes in a framework that guided our assessment of gender-equitable VCD guides (Figure 1).

The framework presents seven assessment criteria derived from the literature on gender in value chains. The first criterion addresses the guides' theory of change for empowering women, men, and households through VCD. Each guide suggests how behaviour change is expected to happen through interventions and their implications for chain stakeholders. Such a theory may be explicitly stated in a guide or deduced from the recommended activities and the expected outcomes and impacts. As women's empowerment is not a linear process and may prompt backlash against them, we also considered whether the guides explicitly mention the assumptions, risks, and potential



**Figure 1.** Framework for assessing guides for gender-equitable value chain development.

repercussions that accompany the change process. The second criterion focuses on the guides' attention to the normative elements that influence opportunities and constraints in value chains as well as preferences and aspirations of women and men in relation to chain engagement. The third criterion covers the instruments and methodological recommendations for analysis of the enabling environment and its implication for gender-equitable VCD. This criterion seeks to understand how the guides orientate users in understanding the laws, regulations, and other formal institutions that, along with support services, influence the differentiated opportunities for women and men to engage in value chains.

The following two criteria address the issue of sex-segmentation and different levels of women's and men's participation across chain nodes and in collective enterprises. The sixth criterion examines how the guides cover the gendered division of household labour across market and non-market livelihood activities. In particular, we considered how such arrangements condition the roles of different household members in value chains and the trade-offs that often exist between these activities. With the final criterion we look into the guides' focus on women's and men's (separate or joint) access to productive assets as well as the intra-household distribution of benefits derived from value chain participation, including income and decision-making on its use.

Along with the assessment criteria, the deductive approach to our study required the definition of parameters for detailed assessment, following a similar approach used by Donovan et al. (2015) in their comparative review of generic guides for VCD programming. For each assessment criterion we defined one to four parameters, for a total of 17 parameters across the seven assessment criteria (Table 1).

Given the objective of this study, we selected methodological guides for gender-equitable VCD that: (1) principally target development practitioners engaged in VCD programme design, implementation, and assessment; (2) include a set of specific methodological steps and practical tools for collecting and analysing gender-sensitive data; and (3) are published by an influential international development or funding organisation, thus offering the prospect of wide-scale circulation. The seven guides selected according to these criteria are presented in Table 2.

Where relevant, we reference how each of the guides addresses a given criterion. In case of uneven coverage across the guides, we focus on the most illustrative examples. The guides are presented according to the level of attention given to each criterion, beginning with those where coverage is more extensive.

**Table 1.** Criteria and parameters for review of guides.

General criteria	Parameters
(1) Theory of change on potential of VCD to transform gender relations and empower women and men	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assumptions about strengthened capacities and access to information and decision-making</li> <li>• Building of self-confidence with effects on intra-household relations (increased equity, but also potential backlash or repercussions)</li> <li>• Enhanced ability to influence strategic decisions within the household, enterprise, community and beyond</li> </ul>
(2) Normative elements that influence gender relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual versus household-level outcomes</li> <li>• Gender norms and values</li> <li>• Social acceptability of value chain activities</li> </ul>
(3) Enabling environment for gender-equitable VCD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preferences and aspirations</li> <li>• Gender-responsiveness of laws, policies, formal rules, and regulations in relation to VCD</li> <li>• Service offer of support organisations with focus on gender-equitable VCD</li> </ul>
(4) Gendered participation in the value chain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Roles of women and men along value chain nodes</li> </ul>
(5) Gendered participation in collective enterprises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Position of women and men in the enterprise (e.g. management, administrative staff, permanent or temporary labour)</li> <li>• Influence on strategic business decisions</li> </ul>
(6) Gendered division of household labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Division of labour in market and non-market-oriented activities (gender roles, time and labour constraints, drudgery)</li> <li>• Trade-offs across activity realms</li> </ul>
(7) Gendered access to and control over household assets and VCD benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to and control over productive assets (separate versus joint assets)</li> <li>• Intra-household distribution of VCD benefits/income</li> <li>• Influence on strategic livelihood decisions</li> </ul>

## Findings: what the guides cover

### *Theory of change about potential of VCD to transform gender relations and empower women and men*

Few guides specify the mechanisms by which VCD is expected to transform gender relations at the individual, household, enterprise, or chain levels. Anticipated impact pathways can be deduced from the envisaged outputs, outcomes, and impacts resulting from implementation and

**Table 2.** Reviewed guides on gender-equitable value chain development.

Guide	Year	Authors	International organisation
Making the strongest links: a practical guide to mainstreaming gender analysis in value chain development	2007	Linda Mayoux, Grania Mackie	International Labour Organization (ILO)
Promoting gender equitable opportunities in agricultural value chains: a handbook	2009	Deborah Rubin, Cristina Manfre, Kara Nichols Barrett	United States Agency for International Development (USAID)
Improving opportunities for women in smallholder-based supply chains: business case and practical guidance for international food companies	2010	Man-Kwun Chan	Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (BMGF)
Gender mainstreaming in value chain development: practical guidelines and tools	2010	Jacqueline Terrillon	Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV)
Gender in value chains: practical toolkit to integrate a gender perspective in agricultural value chain development	2013	Angelica Senders, Anna Lentink, Mieke Vanderschaeghe, Jacqueline Terrillon	Agri-ProFocus
Measuring women's economic empowerment in private sector development: guidelines for practitioners	2014	Erin Markel	Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED)
Developing gender-sensitive value chains: a guiding framework	2016	FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

the recommendations for addressing gender-based constraints. Most guides foresee the elaboration of action plans or actionable strategies that specify interventions to overcome these constraints, enhance women's engagement in a given value chain, and promote equitable VCD outcomes.

SNV expects a strategic plan for addressing gender issues in VCD across seven areas (effective public policy management, market intelligence, multi-stakeholder processes, value chain financing, group consolidation, strengthening value chain service providers, and impact on micro level). For each of them, a possible formulation of "*gender equality objectives*" and "*targeted performances*" is derived from indicative "*key gender equality issues*" (2010, 27–39).

USAID envisions a "*framework*" and a "*process*" for integrating gender issues into agricultural value chains. Gender-based constraints are anticipated to be removed by taking stock of them and identifying corrective actions. These actions are expected to be mutually supportive and transformative – a "*win-win*" based on synergies between gender relations and VCD. Gender integration approaches and resulting outcomes are projected to move along a continuum from "*gender exploitative*" to "*gender accommodating*" and "*gender transformative*" (2009, 101–104).

BMGF seeks to stimulate policies and practical action of food sourcing companies to improve women's opportunities as part of their ongoing sourcing from smallholders and associated support programmes (2010, 10). Unlike the other guides, which largely focus on analysing and overcoming gender-based constraints, BMGF makes a business case and provides companies with practical guidance for improving opportunities for women in their supply chains.

ILO envisages an action plan for external agencies to support gender equity in the value chain, with a focus on identifying a "*basket of win-win strategies*" for short-term improvements; for more contentious issues where gender-specific conflicts of interest between stakeholders require careful negotiation they suggest a long-term view and strategy (2007, 63).

AgriProFocus (2013) anticipates a "*picture of the value chain*" that illustrates men's and women's roles in terms of positions and power. Along with the identification of constraints and opportunities for women's upgraded involvement in the value chain, this picture serves as an input for practitioners to enhance their interventions.

DCED leads to a "*strategic results framework*" that integrates the women's economic empowerment theory of change into strategies for private sector development, and to programme-specific "*results chains*" (2014, 10–13). The general focus is on defining indicators and collecting data for a gender-responsive system for results measurement (2014, 13–34), without specific guidance for developing an actionable strategy.

FAO puts forth a "*gender-sensitive value chain framework*" (2016, 23–29), with gender-sensitive value chain analysis as a first step toward implementation. Beyond this analysis no directions are given for interpreting the findings and translating them into action points.

Several guides direct the user in designing interventions based on the findings of gender-sensitive value chain analysis (ILO, BMGF, AgriProFocus and, to a lesser extent, USAID). However, only DCED points to potential trade-offs between increased value chain engagement of women and their other livelihood activities, as well as limited choices in the most vulnerable households where trade-offs and risks tend to be highest. Most guides (USAID, SNV, AgriProFocus, DCED and FAO) identify women's lack of self-esteem and confidence in their own skills as a factor limiting their pursuit of non-traditional roles in value chains. SNV and AgriProFocus consider the importance of developing human agency, self-assertiveness, and confidence among women as critical elements of both empowerment and organisational strengthening.

### **Normative elements that influence gender relations**

Most guides address the normative elements that influence men's and women's ability to participate in value chains. They present a list of indicators or questions that cover gender norms, values, and beliefs in relation to value chains and market activities. Three guides provide more detailed guidance in this respect: SNV, USAID, and FAO. The SNV guide includes a list of questions to encourage

discussion among women and men stakeholders on the implications of the cultural setting, values, and norms on gender relations. Brief examples are provided to demonstrate the influence of stereotypes and presumptions about what men and women can and should do. Users may, however, require additional guidance on how to contextualise such testimonies and how to translate the findings into intervention goals and activities, including constructive dialogues with men for achieving envisaged behaviour changes.

As an input to “*gender-based constraint statements*”, USAID (2009, 82) suggests four questions to guide data collection in relation to “*perceptions and beliefs*”. One example is “*Are there aspects of production that men/women are discouraged from doing?*” Tool users are expected to present their findings during stakeholder workshops to determine normative gender-based constraints. AgriProFocus derives insights into such constraints based on the questions, tables, and examples from USAID. FAO cautions that, as a result of prevailing sociocultural norms, women may lack the self-confidence to exercise agency as value chain participants. “Understanding and addressing this challenge requires taking into account the fact that social dynamics are often complex and require a holistic approach. Norms and values affect and are likely to be internalised by all of a given society’s members, including those who are excluded or disadvantaged.” (2016, 21)

Analysis of gender norms focuses essentially on women, with regard to their sexual and reproductive roles, work, mobility, and gender-based violence (2016, 39). Similar to the other guides, emphasis is placed on the analysis of gender norms, with scarce guidance on how to translate the findings into practical action.

The other guides also address gender norms, though in less detail. DCED considers “*gender norms, and men’s and women’s attitudes toward gender roles*” as one of seven areas where household-level outcomes and women’s economic empowerment are measured. The underlying assumption is that “*positive changes in norms and behaviours can bring about long-term changes in women’s economic empowerment*” (2014, 21). The guide limits its directions to measurement and attribution, leaving it to the user to determine how normative and behavioural changes can be induced. ILO identifies indicators at individual, household, community, national, and international levels. Some indicators are focused on gender norms (“*cultural constraints and stereotypes*” and “*gender blind/discriminatory concepts of ‘ownership’, ‘worker’ production/reproduction, market/non-market*” (2007, 56)). BMGF makes occasional reference to gender norms, for example, when pointing at cultural norms that restrict women’s interactions with men on business matters. It argues how companies sourcing from smallholders may challenge traditional gender norms concerning land and crop ownership (2010, 20), but it lacks guidance on how to assess the influence of norms on gendered constraints and opportunities within the value chain.

### **Enabling environment for gender-equitable VCD**

Three guides (USAID, SNV, ILO) stand out for their attention to the enabling environment for achieving gender-equitable VCD. Focus and scope of assessing the enabling environment vary, without clear distinction between formal and informal institutional aspects. USAID concentrates on the business environment and provides guidance on how to analyse gender aspects associated with transaction costs (registration and licensing fees), discrimination laws, and information access (2009, 45). The guide also suggests critical themes to be considered when developing strategies to enhance the enabling environment (2009, 46), particularly as regards policies and procedures that adversely affect men or women, and for improved public–private sector coordination to foster women’s entrepreneurship (2009, 47). SNV recommends to collect data on the regulatory environment using a “*macro-meso-micro grid*” that covers the cultural context and regulatory environment as well as the delivery of “*pro-poor development services*” (2010, 12). The analysis of the formal institutional environment with a gender lens is to draw on databases of legislation, pertinent research findings, and project and government reports (2010, 14–15). ILO recommends analysing both enterprises and the enabling environment to identify inequality along the chain and its underlying causes

(2007, 63–64). It focuses on macro-level factors like enterprise regulation, inflation, infrastructure, and property legislation, as these are considered to be often more significant in influencing the income levels and women's vulnerability than targeted enterprise projects or programmes. Examples of favourable macro-level policies in support of women homeworkers are also included (2007, 65).

The other guides pay less attention to how the enabling environment shapes gender outcomes. AgriProFocus covers access to finance (2013, 26) and gendered influence on enabling factors (2013, 51–52) to determine how women and men leaders can influence policy-making and legislation to promote their economic rights and gender equality. While it clearly recognises the influence of the business environment on value chains (2013, 10), it provides little guidance on how to analyse and advance intervention strategies. BMGF does not consider macro-level analysis, but advocates "*engaging national governments to improve relevant regulations and policies*" (2012, 63). DCED does not recommend indicators beyond the household level, safe for those cases where a programme combining private sector development and women's economic empowerment seeks to have direct influence on them (2014, 22). FAO makes a reference to the national and global enabling environments, including societal and natural elements shaping these (2016, 16), but provides no guidance for analysis or actions to be taken.

### **Gendered participation in the value chain**

Most guides address gendered value-chain participation by suggesting questions to be considered and presenting simple designs for data collection and analysis, often linked to value chain mapping. They recommend the collection of sex-disaggregated data on gender roles in production and marketing, although recommended analysis is almost exclusively focused on women. No distinction is made between domestic and global value chains, despite the fact that extending such analysis to the downstream segments of global value chains is costly and of little use when VCD interventions focus on the upstream and midstream segments of a given chain.

Four guides (FAO, AgriProFocus, SNV, ILO) provide in-depth coverage of gendered participation in value chains. FAO proposes gender-sensitive value chain mapping as a first step towards making women's work and participation in the value chain visible, including identification of gender-based constraints at each node of the chain (2016, 26–27). AgriProFocus suggests value chain mapping (2014, 54–57), including reflection on differences in women's and men's activities in each node as well as women's constraints and opportunities to participate in each of them. Similar to FAO, the guide emphasises women's under-recognised contribution to on-farm production. Participatory workshops are the recommended method for data collection and analysis. SNV suggests participatory chain mapping (2010, 17–19), with sex-disaggregated estimates of the number of persons involved and the relative share of value contributed and received by actors at each node. This is accompanied by a list of questions that cover the gendered division of labour, roles in different nodes of the chain, and the value given to women's roles in paid and unpaid work. ILO recommends the use of secondary sources or workshops to collect sex-disaggregated data on workers and their skills composition along the nodes of a chain (2007, 50). This is supplemented by questions to stakeholders on gender discrimination in tasks, markets, and production processes, as well as gendered differences in skills, resources, and time availability.

The other guides limit their coverage to the number of workers along the chain nodes and the major roles within each of them (USAID), or they recommend sex-disaggregated outcome and performance indicators without regard to the varied roles of women and men along the nodes of a value chain (DCED, BMGF).

### **Gendered participation in collective enterprises**

The guides provide limited orientation for analysing how collective enterprises help smallholders engage with other value chain actors, or with input and service providers operating from outside



of the chain. They also pay scarce attention to the roles that women and men play in collective enterprises and options for facilitating change in associated power relations. However, some guides do recognise possible constraints to women's participation in such enterprises. USAID, for example, cautions that membership criteria may discourage women's participation when insisting on single membership for an entire family or when requiring proof of legal land ownership (2009, 26). Some general guidance on collecting data and analysing barriers at the level of collective enterprises is provided by DCED, BMGF, AgriProFocus, and SNV.

At the enterprise level, DCED recommends sex-disaggregated data collection on ownership, number and position of employees, and participation in training, among others (2014, 24). BMGF explains why women tend to be underrepresented as members and leaders in collective enterprises and provides guidance on what large-scale buyers and processors can do to increase women's participation via their engagement with collective enterprises. Suggestions include quotas for representation on committees and boards, along with focused support to women assuming leadership positions (2014, 25–26). AgriProFocus provides guidance on how to design workshops that facilitate women's participation in producer associations. It recommends targeting women in capacity building to support their active participation (2013, 28) and negotiation of equal access to productive resources (2013, 30). SNV encourages stakeholders to discuss the participation of women in producer associations as well as their voice in governance, access to benefits, and opportunities to be elected to governing bodies (2010, 24).

### **Gendered division of household labour**

Save for BMGF, the guides address the gendered division of labour within households. DCED points to the *"division of labour, time, responsibilities"* as a category for which indicators are proposed. It introduces the concept of time poverty and recommends time-use surveys *"to examine gendered divisions of labour and potential trade-offs between time spent on market, non-market, and leisure activities"* (2014, 20). AgriProFocus poses questions on the division of labour between women and men in the household and along chain nodes (2013, 50), including guidance for activity mapping, identification of associated gender-based constraints and opportunities, and the design of actions to ameliorate these (2013, 63). Importantly, DCED and AgriProFocus reference the potential for trade-offs between women's reproductive activities and those directly oriented to value chains.

SNV points to the need to collect gender-disaggregated data on labour division at household (2010, 16) and chain (2010, 19) levels, and on how public policy influences this division (2010, 27). It guides users in applying their findings to formulate *"gender equality objectives"* and *"performances"* – measured as gender-equitable outcomes – in multi-stakeholder processes (2010, 31) and at the micro-level (2010, 38). USAID recommends interviewing men and women farmers and key informants to collect data on the gendered division of labour, including production, marketing, and selling (2009, 74). A hypothetical case study is used to facilitate tool application. However, the way it is presented may actually reinforce existing gender stereotypes by stating that *"women and girls do most of the household work"* while *"on the farm, men typically provide labour for field preparation"* (2009, 79). ILO presents questions on the gendered division of labour, in regard to *"individual differences in skills, resources, time between men and women"* and *"gender constraints at household/family/kinship level"* (2007, 57). FAO stresses the importance of the topic as the *"division of labour in many agrifood contexts is both gendered and unequal, a reality that frequently results in women's activities being overlooked or underestimated in conventional 'gender-blind' VC analyses"* (2016, 27). Both the ILO and FAO guides rely on the user to define data collection methods and derive meaning from the data collected.

### **Gendered access to and control over household assets and benefits**

All the guides consider access to productive assets among household members, along with the intra-household distribution of benefits derived from using these assets. Overall, however, they

offer insufficient guidance for asset analysis. While most focus on land, labour, and equipment, AgriProFocus and USAID take a broader view by accounting for human, social, natural, physical, and financial capitals. AgriProFocus draws on the frameworks and methods regarding access to assets and intra-household allocation of benefits presented in the SNV and USAID guides, distinguishing between intangible (e.g. education and social relationships) and tangible (e.g. land, livestock, and machinery) assets. USAID proposes access to assets as one of the four areas of gender assessment, including examples of how issues such as “women typically need to have husbands co-sign loans” (2009, 80) translate into gender-based constraints. SNV poses questions to facilitate tool users’ engagement with local stakeholders, including “What is women’s and men’s access to resources in order to perform tasks?” and “Do women and men benefit equally at the household level?” (2010, 22). DCED includes “decision making regarding income, productive assets, investments, and expenditures” as a category for which indicators are to be defined (2014, 19). The guide focuses on women’s decision-making power on income and expenditures, rather than looking across a portfolio of assets. ILO identifies indicators such as income, individual and household asset endowments, and control over income flows (2007, 56) and suggests participatory workshops and key informant interviews for data collection. FAO proposes “access to and control over productive resources” and “access to and control over benefits” as key areas for which gender-sensitive indicators should be applied (2016, 27), without specifying the methods. Except for AgriProFocus, SNV, and USAID, there is limited guidance on how to collect and analyse this sensitive information.

### Summary assessment

All the guides seek to shed light on opportunities for gender-equitable VCD involving smallholder farmers. Most focus on women’s empowerment, while only some address gender relations in value chains and the context in which they operate. The guides vary in their focus across different levels of chain actors and with regard to the attention paid to the environment in which VCD takes place. Table 3 reveals the emphasis for analysis and action placed by the guides across the following levels: (1) individuals, (2) households, (3) collective enterprises, (4) value chain, and (5) business and regulatory environment.

**Table 3.** Focus of the guides across different levels of the value chain.

	ILO	USAID	BMGF	SNV	AgriProFocus	DCED	FAO
Individual	++	+++	+	+++	++	++	+++
Household	++	+++	+	++	+++	++	++
Collective enterprise	+	+	+	+	++	+	+
Value chain	+++	++	++	++	+++	+	+
Business/regulatory environment	+	++	+	+++	+	+	+

Note: strong focus (+++), some focus (++), limited focus (+).

Table 3 shows that the guides, except BMGF, prioritise analysis and proposed action at the household level, while focusing in at the individual level for a better understanding of gender differences and inequalities between female and male household members. In addition, several guides examine gender issues along the nodes of the chain, although little attention is paid to the role of women and men in collective enterprises. Similarly, only SNV and USAID suggest in-depth analysis of policies, laws, and formal regulations affecting gender equity as part of the business and regulatory environment. In general, there is significant variation in the extent to which the guides cover the topics addressed by our assessment criteria (Table 4).

As Table 4 illustrates, the guides advocate stronger coverage of four out of the seven criteria that underlie our assessment: (1) gendered participation in the value chain; (2) enabling environment for

**Table 4.** Coverage of the guides across the assessment criteria.

	ILO	USAID	BMGF	SNV	AgriProFocus	DCED	FAO
Theory of change on potential of VCD to transform gender relations and empower women and men	+	++	++	++	+	+	+
Normative elements that influence gender relations	+	++	+	++	+	+	++
Enabling environment for gender-equitable VCD	++	+++	+	+++	+	+	+
Gendered participation in the value chain	++	+	+	++	+++	+	+++
Gendered participation in collective enterprises	+	+	+	+	+	++	+
Gendered division of household labour	+	+	+	++	+++	+++	+
Gendered access to and control over household assets and VCD benefits	+	++	+	++	+++	++	+

Note: strong (+++), some (++), limited /none (+).

gender-equitable VCD; (3) gendered division of household labour; and (4) gendered access to and control over household assets and VCD benefits. Even in these cases, only two to four guides – usually including SNV, AgriProFocus, USAID, and DCED – pay more attention to these. The other topics receive markedly less attention, namely the theory of change on the potential of VCD to transform gender relations and empower women and men, the normative elements that influence gender relations, and gendered participation in collective enterprises.

### Taking stock and looking ahead

The seven guides are grounded in theories and concepts of gender studies, particularly as regards women's empowerment, and advocate persuasively for the integration of gender into VCD. They make an important step forward in sensitising development programming on the importance of incorporating gender into the design of value chain interventions. Emphasis is placed on understanding and strengthening women's ability to benefit from value chain engagement. With farming households as the entry point for analysis, the guides focus in to help understand gender-based constraints and opportunities at the individual level, and contextualise these with a broader view on the different nodes of a chain and the business and regulatory environment in which it operates. Most guides seek to advance gender equality in terms of labour division within the chain and decision-making and distribution of benefits derived from it. To some extent, they also advocate gender-equitable access to livelihood and business assets and shared engagement in non-market livelihood activities (e.g. agricultural production for household consumption and reproductive activities).

At the same time, our review uncovers some blind spots in the conceptual and methodological underpinning for advancing gender-equitable VCD. Conceptually, the guides tend to treat economic growth and gender equality as mutually supportive goals, which VCD initiatives can help achieve if adequately designed. Theories of change on the transformative potential of VCD, as reflected in the outputs and outcomes expected from guide implementation, are premised on the notion that women and men make decisions individually, with little attention given to areas of jointness and negotiations within the household. Deeper engagement in value chains, particularly of women, would consequently be based on individual considerations, rather than household-level coordination and shared, often complementary responsibilities. Most of the guides thus envision transformation through development of women's capacities and skills, strengthening women's participation in collective enterprises, and associated changes in the enabling environment. Chant and Sweetman (2012) caution, however, that conflating the empowerment of women as individuals with the goal of removing the structural discrimination which women face recreates the very problems gender development seeks to transform. Few of the guides point to the importance of strengthening women's bargaining position within the household to enhance their capacity to make strategic household and life decisions, and to effectively negotiate the new roles or opportunities they assume within a value chain. In general, the guides underestimate the potential trade-offs between these new roles and engagement in other, non-market-oriented livelihood activities.

Repercussions on women's and men's overall workload and leisure time, and trade-offs between market-oriented production and food security, go largely unaddressed. So too do the complex processes of redirecting labour and other household resources across the portfolio of livelihood activities, with varied involvement of women and men in each of them. Yet, these require specific consideration in view of their effects on individual and household well-being (Rubin and Manfre 2014).

A deeper reflection on the effects of VCD on women's and men's well-being and household-level livelihood outcomes also requires a better understanding of masculinities. This includes attention to the potential challenges to men's idealised roles as business and community leaders and household providers as gender relations are renegotiated. In many cases, unlocking women's ability to increase their participation in market-oriented activities will hinge on men assuming a greater share of other livelihood activities, including care responsibilities within the household. Shifts in gender relations can cause anguish and backlash, including situations where men try to assert their masculinity in violent ways. Such shifts must therefore be carefully managed to support both women and men in the change process (Diallo and Voia 2016). While in some contexts men may deliberately want to be "left out" of women-focused rural development initiatives, excluding them upfront increases the likelihood of men's disapproval or frustration with the initiative, and of women ending up with greater workloads and responsibilities.

Laudably, all the guides recommend the collection of sex-disaggregated data on gender roles. However, guidance for analysis of such data is limited and, where provided, the analytical focus tends to be on women only. Without a dual view on women and men, however, there is a risk that targeted outcomes may empower women economically but compromise their personal well-being and quality of life. Practitioners need clarity about how to address these complex and sensitive processes during the VCD design phase and once the interventions are underway. In particular, they would appreciate design and implementation options that stimulate a fruitful dialogue and reflection on gender norms and ways to overcome gender-based constraints. Such discussion would also help to deepen the understanding of the conditions under which women's and men's empowerment are mutually reinforcing, and those when they are at odds.

At the micro level, an opportunity exists for deeper coverage of how household and individual asset endowments, livelihood strategies, aspirations, and vulnerability influence smallholders' priorities and their options for value chain engagement. From a food security perspective, households highly constrained in land and other critical assets often orientate farm production towards their own consumption rather than the market, given the uncertainty of output prices and the cost of purchased food (see Graef et al. 2016). In contrast, households with assets above a minimum threshold stand a greater chance to assume risks and use their assets for market participation and, thus, are more likely to engage in value chains over the long term (Stoian et al. 2012). Differentiation also exists within the household, often with a strong gender dimension. For example, male members may prioritise income generation while female members may primarily seek to ensure household food security. Decisions on the use of income, however, may depend on "spousal dominance" rather than gender per se, as shown for decisions on education expenditures among ethnic groups in Indonesia exhibiting either male or female dominance (Fernandez and Kambhampati 2017). Moreover, in terms of labour division, decision-making and asset control, households are more than the sum of individual aspirations and realisations. Guides for gender-equitable VCD will therefore benefit from greater attention to intra-household negotiations, including decisions taken jointly by men and women, with regard to the distribution of income and access to resources and the implications they hold for the design of gender-equitable VCD.

Another aspect that merits stronger attention are the contributions of VCD to positive (or negative) feedback loops of asset-building (or erosion) within the household. None of the guides considers the interplay between expenditures – based, for example, on increased income derived from VCD – and the building of different types of assets (e.g. spending of income on farm investments, nutrition and health, and education to increase natural and human capital), or their erosion (e.g. using income

to buy alcohol, drugs, and other items that compromise health and household well-being). It would also be important to distinguish between assets managed predominantly by men or women, and those that are jointly managed. The latter would be particularly relevant for understanding how individual and collective outcomes can best be achieved (see Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011). In addition to differentiating between male, female, and jointly controlled household assets, the guides could better account for the complementary sets of knowledge and skills needed for building and using these. Bringing these aspects to light requires analysis that looks for both trade-offs and synergies across gendered realms of activities, assets, and benefits.

Future guidance on gender-equitable VCD also requires stronger focus on the roles of men and women in collective enterprises. Strengthening the capacity of these enterprises to address discriminatory gender norms and to provide entry points for more meaningful participation by women needs to figure prominently in initiatives for gender-equitable VCD. In support of these goals, research can show how gender relations within collective enterprises impact their business performance. In the case of microfinance institutions, for example, female chief executive officers and female board chairs were found to be positively related to their performance, though this result was not driven by improved governance (Strøm, D'Espallier, and Mersland 2014). In a global context, it has been demonstrated that women entrepreneurs make important contributions to enterprise performance, and that the diversity and complexity of women's entrepreneurial leadership is both economically and contextually embedded (Henry et al. 2015). An enhanced understanding of the context-specific conditions that allow women to assume leadership roles in collective enterprises is critical, as is active enabling of such leadership to translate into benefits for enterprises, households, and individuals. As a first step, guides for gender-equitable VCD can draw on the VCD literature, particularly generic guides for value chain analysis and development that address leadership and management aspects at enterprise level (e.g. Bernet, Thiele, and Zschocke 2006; Lundy et al. 2007; Purcell, Gniel, and van Gent 2008; Donovan and Stoian 2012). These aspects can then be brought under a gender lens to identify entry points for enhanced gender equality at enterprise level, as well as related benefits for business performance and well-being among members.

Methodologically, our review highlights the potential for future guides to offer more integrated and practical guidance for the design, implementation, and assessment of gender-equitable VCD. Arguably, the perceived ease of use will be a key criterion when practitioners decide which guide to select. Most guides provide general guidance on methods for analysis and development of gender-responsive intervention strategies. This may be appreciated by research and development organisations with high capacity to customise methodology and tools according to their needs and local conditions. However, development practitioners with limited research capacity and less exposure to international debates on gender likely will be challenged to specify their approach, to select the appropriate instruments, and to adapt them to a given context. Virtually all the guides omit details on implementation requirements in terms of skills, time, and budget. The extensive checklists of topics featured in most guides, with numerous considerations and questions, will pose a challenge for even the more experienced implementers. Importantly, the lack of guidance on how to interpret potentially ambiguous findings increases the risk that gender stereotypes are perpetuated rather than tackling them through differentiated analysis and action.

Finally, guides for gender-equitable VCD need to provide clear links with other value chain tools. None of the guides reviewed here claims to cover all relevant aspects of VCD. At the same time, they fall short in making reference to well-established tools covering complementary aspects of VCD. This prompts the question: to what extent are they fit for purpose as a standalone tool? In the previous sections we suggested opportunities for making explicit reference to widely adopted guides for value chain analysis and development. The task ahead is to enable practitioners to assemble an appropriate set of tools including, but not limited to, those that apply a gender lens. A recent review of VCD approaches and tools used by practitioners in Nicaragua and Vietnam brought to light that the agencies leading VCD typically rely on a single tool (Donovan, Stoian, and Poe 2017). As most VCD interventions seek to promote multiple goals, including gender equality, practitioners will appreciate suggestions for combining a

guide for gender-equitable VCD with other tools for VCD programming. Alternatively, there might be an opportunity for developing an integrated tool for VCD that adopts a gender lens for all relevant aspects, from programming and execution to monitoring and evaluation. In their current form, the practical use of the guides for gender-equitable VCD seems to lie principally in their capacity to sensitise development practitioners on the importance of, and to introduce the basics for, considering gender dimensions in VCD. They can also be used for upgrading existing systems for monitoring and evaluation of VCD initiatives to elucidate gender-differentiated effects, but they do not serve as standalone guides for effective design, implementation, and assessment of gender-equitable VCD.

Looking forward, this review points to important opportunities for a deeper integration of gender into VCD through conceptual and methodological innovation in practitioner-oriented guides. Particularly important will be the elaboration of new tools that cover to a fuller extent the capacity of households, and of women and men therein, to deepen their engagement in value chains. Such tools will employ the notion of jointness inherent in household activities, decision-making, and access to productive assets. They will also address the complementarities and frictions between women's and men's individual aspirations, capacities and benefits; and they will allow to better understand the actual and potential effects of women's and men's (separate and collective) empowerment on overall outcomes at the household and enterprise levels. Doubtless, any deeper consideration of the gender dimension in VCD adds complexity. This, in turn, requires more detailed guidance for practitioners on how to plan for gender-equitable VCD, considering the skills needed, the time required, and the additional costs incurred. Finally, a deeper understanding of the circumstances and needs of individuals, households, enterprises and other value chain actors and the complex dynamics of their interactions requires a structured process of monitoring, evaluation, and learning – another aspect to be included in future guidance on gender-equitable VCD. The refinement of guides over time will be accelerated by the availability of research findings that shed light on context-specific options for negotiating change in household and business relations, the critical factors behind the change, and resulting implications for promoting gender equality through VCD. Researchers and practitioners will benefit from deeper collaboration among themselves and joint learning with chain stakeholders to better address the “how” and “what now” questions, which have largely been absent in discussions on gender-equitable VCD.

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