



EVIDENCE REVIEW: WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

OBJECTIVES

Women's empowerment contributes to both intrinsic and instrumental benefits, such as meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This evidence review shows that lifeskills training is a promising approach for supporting women's empowerment in climate and agricultural projects. The evidence review was completed alongside the International Fund for Agricultural Development. It answers the following question:

- What evidence exists regarding the effectiveness of interventions that seek to promote women's empowerment in the fields of development and environment?

This review on women's empowerment in developing countries presents evidence in two formats. First, we present the landscape of evidence through an evidence gap map which plots a variety of interventions across a range of outcome areas. This allows practitioners to improve project design by seeing where the evidence base is richest and learning from these studies. It also highlights evidence gaps where more knowledge is needed. Second, we present a systematic review on interventions that provided training to enhance life

skills, defined as abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.

THE RATIONALE FOR THIS EVIDENCE REVIEW

Programmes or interventions that aim to promote the empowerment of girls and women of any age are essential to achieving gender equality. In addition to the intrinsic moral value, empowerment of girls and women may result in better development outcomes. From the perspective of climate change, an equal society with men and women as equal partners can better contribute to the challenges posed by global warming. This evidence review aims to contribute findings that will supplement existing evidence on women's empowerment. As far as the authors are aware, there is no existing EGM on women's empowerment across the same range of sectors and outcome areas in developing countries.

EVIDENCE GAP MAP

Based on a landscape of 5,010 records from databases, the EGM contains 423 studies, of which 288 are impact evaluations, 105 are process evaluations and

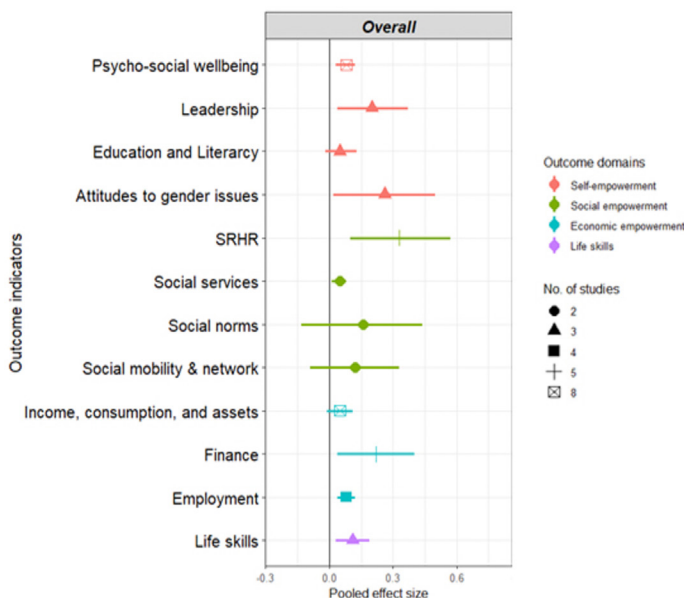


38 are systematic reviews (which totals 431 studies because a single study may be an impact evaluation as well as a process evaluation). In terms of regions, most of the evidence is from studies conducted in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. In terms of intervention types, there is a relatively large amount of evidence on economic interventions and capacity-building interventions, with both categories showing a high number of impact evaluations and systematic reviews. There is a dearth of evidence on policy and institutional interventions. In terms of outcomes, political empowerment outcome categories are far less populated than other outcome categories. Women’s representation in political bodies, digital access and access to justice shows very little evidence.

SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Life skills training has emerged as a popular approach to empowerment, often as a part of a multi-component intervention. Acquiring such skills may enable women to better engage socially, directly increasing self- and social empowerment and possibly contributing to economic and political empowerment. The systematic review aggregated across studies to measure whether these interventions increased self- and social empowerment and contributed to economic and political empowerment.

Figure 1: Effects of life skills interventions on self, social and economic empowerment



The systematic review found that life skills interventions have a small yet significant and positive effect on most self-empowerment indicators assessed in this review. The estimate for studies with psycho-social well-being and self-worth outcomes was significant and positive (see Figure 1).

Life skills interventions also tend to have a clear positive and somewhat larger significant effect on attitudes towards gender issues. For self-leadership, the overall pooled effect size estimate is also positive and significant. **The effect of life skills interventions on various indicators of social empowerment was mixed.** The sexual and reproductive health and rights’ (SRHR) outcome area showed a significant overall pooled effect size, and a small significant pooled effect size estimate was found for the use of social services. The meta-analysis for economic empowerment outcomes was also conducted for income, consumption and assets, finance and employment, with small and significant effects for the latter two intervention types.

CONTRIBUTION

Overall, life skills positively affect a range of self, social and economic empowerment outcomes. Small but significant positive changes were detected for a range of outcome areas including leadership, attitudes to gender issues, sexual and reproductive health and rights, employment and life skills themselves. There is some indication that multi-component approaches may be more effective. Life skills training can be called a mildly promising approach with potential for supporting women’s empowerment in climate and agricultural projects. Including life skills interventions within components of Green Climate Fund and International Fund for Agricultural Development project interventions can contribute to transforming women’s lives, livelihoods and societal roles.

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