Engaging Low-Income Partners in the Value Chain

WealthWorks Peer Learning Gathering
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“Grasstops without grassroots get blown away in the wind. Sustenance comes from the roots.”
Lasting Livelihoods

Increasing:
Upward mobility
Resilience
Future prospects
How do we choose, organize or adjust our economic or community development strategy so that those on the margins can participate in its design, and so that they will benefit from it?
Engaging low-income people as partners

• Working with low-income community members to identify the kind changes they want to see in their community and supporting them in pursuing their goals.

• Ensuring that community change is accomplished by working in partnership with low-income community members, rather than doing things for them or to them.
Opportunities to engage as...

Value chain exploration and planning provides opportunities for lower-income residents to share ideas for how to help meet the needs and interests of low-income people.
Opportunities to engage as...

Explorers and planners

Producers or suppliers

Value chains can provide opportunities for lower-income producers and suppliers to connect to new or growing markets
Opportunities to engage as...

**Explorers and planners**

**Producers or suppliers**

Employees

Value chains can provide opportunities for lower-income employees to move into new or better jobs, sometimes with ownership potential.
Opportunities to engage as...

- Explorers and planners
- Producers or suppliers
- Employees
- Owners of assets

Value chains help bring underutilized assets into production - saving costs or generating income for the lower-income people who own those assets.
Opportunities to engage as...

- Explorers and planners
- Producers or suppliers
- Employees
- Owners of assets

Value chains can provide opportunities for lower-income consumers to save money and/or access higher quality goods and services.
Opportunities to engage as...

- Explorers and planners
- Producers or suppliers
- Employees
- Owners of assets
- Consumers
- Beneficiaries

Value chains can produce indirect benefits for low-income people, even if they are not the primary customers.
Caveats

• All levels of partner consultation and engagement are important and may be employed simultaneously

• Successful partner engagement looks different from place to place and from value chain to value chain

• Different people will be engaged at different points in the process – and that’s ok!

• It takes a broad range of actors being engaged – not just those on the margins – to build a successful value chain. The challenge is finding the right balance.

• “Change moves at the speed of trust” – approaching this work with respect and humility is critical. Takes time to build social capital.
A few examples…

- Explorers and planners
- Producers or suppliers
- Employees
- Owners of assets
- Consumers
- Beneficiaries
Think about your own value chain...

• Where are you already working with low-income partners?

• How are you engaging them in the value chain? Consultation/engagement/both?

• Where might you begin to engage low-income partners more intentionally in the value chain? Where are the greatest leverage points?

• What one challenge or question do you have about engaging low-income partners in your value chain?
Your Turn

Four breakout groups:

Engaging low-income partners as…

1. **Planners / explorers**
   - choosing/developing value chains that meet the needs/interests of low-income

2. **Producers / suppliers**
   - organizing value chains that work for low-income producers, suppliers, and entrepreneurs

3. **Employees**
   - organizing value chains that work for low-income employees

4. **Consumers / beneficiaries**
   - designing products and services for low-income benefit

Group discussion:

- Each person shares one question/challenge you have related to engaging low-income partners in your value chain efforts
- Let those questions guide the conversation

What to listen for:

- **Strategies** others are using to engage low-income partners in various roles
- How engaging low-income residents has *benefited* value chain efforts / *challenges* you have faced

Report Back:

*Top 3* key insights from the group’s conversation