Gender and Women’s Empowerment: Economic Strengthening for preventing family separation and family reintegration of separated children

Why address gender in economic strengthening programs for prevention of family separation for vulnerable children and family reintegration – what do we already know?

The need to address gender in implementing Economic Strengthening (ES) programs for the prevention of family separation and family integration has been highlighted by many experts. However, there is little or no evidence, nor documented analysis of gender issues in this area.

Statistics on Women’s Empowerment, Gender and Poverty Reduction (USAID)

- Increasing gender equality correlates with less poverty: According to the World Bank, the poverty incidence tends to be lower in countries with greater gender equality. Countries with more gender equality rank higher on the UN Human Development Index.

- Augmenting women’s income fosters investments promoting family and community wellbeing. Women spend more of the income they control on food, healthcare, home improvement, and schooling for their families, which improves outcomes for children healthier citizens and greater resiliency in the event of market downturns.
  - A study in Brazil showed that the likelihood of a child’s survival increased by 20% when the mother controlled household income.
  - The greater the female share of household income in Cote d’Ivoire, the higher the spending on food.
  - Raising women’s income may increase economy-wide savings: Women have higher micro-loan repayment rates and tend to save more than men. They are also more willing to form groups to collect savings, decreasing the delivery costs on many small loans.

What does the existing literature say? (Chaffin et al., 2013)

- Most ES programs—including large-scale Conditional Cash Transfers (CCT), savings groups and microcredit schemes—focus more on women than men as primary program beneficiaries. Multiple studies have shown female caregivers allocate more resources to children than do their male counterparts.

- Household economic status and parental education level were the most consistent predictors of negative outcomes for children. Even when programs are effective at the level of the household, they may be ineffective in reaching all members of the household so that benefits are shared equally, and may put children at greater risk.

Therefore, it is crucial to anticipate and explore with participants the possible unintended consequences of economic interventions, as well as the potential benefits, and to take these into account in selecting and designing interventions. Further, it is vital to compare outcomes for boys/versus girls at different ages to disaggregate and assess the effects (Chaffin et al., 2013).
**Principles & Standards** (Chaffin et al., 2013)

Principles and standards for designing and implementing Economic Strengthening Programs for children, include:

- In programs targeting adults, one key to maximizing the benefits to children is attention to community and household gender roles and power structures. Programs targeting adolescents should consider that boys and girls are likely to require different provisions in order to participate safely and equitably.

- As far as possible, agencies should make special provisions to include households with children who are particularly vulnerable or marginalized due to their gender, disability, ethnicity, HIV and AIDS status or other factors (Chaffin et al., 2013)

**Key issues and questions for further discussions:**

**Adults and caregivers:**

1. Do gender dynamics within a household and community increase a household’s vulnerability or contribute to separation of children from their families? If yes, then, how? What is the evidence?
2. Evidence indicates that economic empowerment of women should be in conjunction with woman’s ability to make decisions (i.e. agency). Do you agree? How do we measure the changes in economic empowerment and agency strengthening?
3. Should the ES programs take into account the changing nature of ‘family’ i.e., single mothers, woman headed households, child headed households, for reintegration of children into families? What should be different in designing such programs? What are the risks?
4. Should ES programs for women for preventing family separation and supporting reintegration, address unintended negative consequences i.e. gender based violence within HH? If yes, then how?
5. Are there any examples of “gender-targeting” in the context of preventing family separation and/or facilitating family reintegration?
6. Should the ES program design include conducting a gender analysis for designing prevention of separation from family, and reintegration programs for vulnerable children? If yes, are there any tools available?

**Children:**

1. Do gender issues affect children’s separation from family or reintegration? If yes, then how?
2. How does gender impact the reintegration process for boys and girls from context to context (sex trafficking, domestic labor, post conflict, associated with armed forces or groups)?
3. How do ES programs for reintegration take into account the different needs of boys and girls especially adolescents?
4. In providing ES programs to children i.e. skill and vocational training – is the choice of skill training influenced by gender stereotypes and roles?
5. If gender-neutral skills are provided to children, how does one ensure future job prospects (for example girls wanting to learn carpentry?) since job prospects are driven by community norms and perceptions of gender-stereotyped jobs?
References

3. USAID. *Strengthening Economic Growth through Investments in Gender Equality.*
5. FHI 360. 2012. *Integrating gender into care and support of vulnerable children.*