Cultivating Rural Entrepreneurs: Gender Integration in Tanzania

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During a recent trip to Tanzania, I traveled with MCA-Tanzania's Gender Specialist, Deborah Sungusia, to observe a day-long training session in Tanga, about five hours north of Dar es Salaam. The seaport city of Tanga marks the starting point of the Tanga-Horohoro Road, one of the Tanzania Compact's road investments (approximately 65 km/$49 million). This investment includes the rehabilitation of a key transportation route between the port of Tanga and the border town of Horohoro, which will create an improved linkage to the port city of Mombasa, Kenya - a major port of trade for East Africa.This road rehabilitation project is expected to increase trade and development between Tanzania and Kenya, create jobs, reduce transportation costs, increase access to vital community services for the people of this region, and will also help small subsistence farmers to more easily access local and regional markets.

In order to ensure that both women and men have equitable access to the economic benefits associated with this road project and others in the Compact, MCA-Tanzania developed a national Gender Integration Program (GIP). In collaboration with MCC and local stakeholders, MCA-T recognized that gender inequality was a significant constraint to economic growth and poverty reduction, identified priority areas for intervention to address this issue, and is currently utilizing an existing network of trained Gender Focal Points (GFPs) throughout the country to implement their program.
MCA-Tanzania is funding targeted trainings to help raise awareness amongst women and men throughout the implementation of each MCC Compact project in the transport, energy, and water sectors. The training program was also designed to increase understanding of the concept of gender and differential benefits experienced by men and women in economic development projects, and to cultivate the skills and economic potential of new or already existing entrepreneurial groups at each Compact project site.

The training I attended in December was a two-day follow-up training session designed to provide knowledge, skills and resources for effective management of entrepreneurial groups from the Tanga region. The group consisted of both direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Tanga-Horohoro road project. Each participant received comprehensive training on topics such as microfinance, access to loans and credit, bookkeeping, mobilization/management of group membership, and hygiene/sanitation education. Approximately ten skill-based groups from eight different villages, and 12 different wards (sub-village level) in the Tanga and nearby Mkinga region were represented at this training.

There were approximately 15 men and 25 women present at the training. Their skill sets ranged from cooking services to masonry, and from small-scale farming to security services provision. Through group discussion and mock problem-solving, feedback from peers and Gender Focal Points, and selected presentations to all participants, it was clear that all attendees were able to brainstorm with like-minded community members, practice their presentation skills, and gain a much deeper understanding about how to access increased economic opportunities that exist while the road is under construction, and new opportunities to expand their businesses, once the road is finished.

Before leaving Tanga, I was able to speak with a number of participants and it became quite clear to me that many of these dynamic men and women would most likely return to their cities, villages, and wards to share their new entrepreneurial knowledge, and become champions of their families', communities' and country's development—teaching others to access new opportunities for growth along the Tanga-Horohoro road. I am looking forward to seeing the impact of this program on the ground over the next year.