

USING HEA TO HELP UNDERSTAND THE NEEDS OF FEMALE HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

Source: Out-take from A Guide to the Household Economy Approach, FEG Consulting and SC-UK, for the RHVP, 2007

In many rural economies labour is commonly the poor's only productive asset and a key constraint for increasing income. Understanding how poor households allocate their labour, and measuring the income they receive from it, is crucial in the identification and design of appropriate poverty reduction measures that will not simply add another burden to poor people's lives. This is especially true for labour-poor female-headed households.

Case study: Programmatic implications of an HEA analysis of poor, female-headed households in Tigray, Ethiopia

Female-headed households in the Ruba Lomine project area of Tigray represent the poorest category of economically active households. Their survival patterns are particularly difficult to understand because they are constructed out of many fragmented and often hidden food and income sources. An HEA study of 1999 included a special inquiry into these households and pieced together a specific calendar of access which reflected the constraints faced by these women and which highlighted their overwhelming capacity to exploit the smallest margins of opportunity. A comparison of monthly income and expenditure constituted part of the calendar of access and is shown in the figure below. It reveals the painfully small increments by which these households survive.

Two principles arose from this analysis that had clear implications for development planning: first, that these households maximise their available labour to an extreme; and second, that they have no extra capital or assets to buffer them in emergencies. Since interventions based on new income generating activities always involve a new labour requirement, the point was made that any engagement of these households in such activities must either realize immediate returns, or be compensated in the short term by temporary assistance in the form of food or cash. In addition, these women have limited capacity to recover from the negative potential implied by a risk. Any risks involved in taking on a new venture should be offset by the implementing agency for as long as necessary.

Comparison of income and expenditure among female-headed, labour-poor households in Tigray, Ethiopia

