

Empowering Marginalised Actors

‘Marginalised actors have the skills to make the market system work for them.’



Juan Pablo Moreiras/FFI

AIM: to empower marginalised actors to become **willing and able to engage proactively** with more powerful market actors.

This typically involves working with micro-entrepreneurs, small-scale producers or smallholders, as individuals or in organised structures such as co-operatives. However, labourers, local input and service providers and intermediaries also often need empowerment to engage with better-off actors.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Focus on developing market literacy, and skills for representation, mobilisation, dialogue and negotiation.
- It is impossible to empower every actor; instead, engage representatives who can inform and mobilise their peers.
- You may also need to provide guidance to more powerful actors on how to work productively with marginalised actors.

Empowerment for engagement is not about training fishers on how to dry or salt fish, or farmers how to produce more rice, or how to manage their cooperatives better. Ideally, **any such training should be provided by the market system and be available to the users beyond project-end.** It **is** about enabling marginalised market actors to engage with other market actors so that they can work together to make markets work better for all.

WHO SHOULD WE EMPOWER?

The preliminary market mapping and stakeholder analysis should give you an initial list of the people you should engage in the process of improving the market system.

Marginalised actors are those producers, intermediaries or consumers who face disadvantage as a result of low socio-economic status and/or lack of bargaining power, knowledge and/or influence. For example, women, the poorest and minority ethnic groups are often more marginalised/disadvantaged than their peers, due to a combination of these factors (status, power, knowledge, influence).

SELECTING APPROPRIATE REPRESENTATIVES

Ideally, representatives should be selected by their peers. A small 'team' of representatives for each community/group of producers should comprise members who, between them, have the following characteristics:

- **Translators:** people who can translate ideas between different market actors in ways that they can all understand e.g. communicate producers' issues and ideas to buyers and feedback discussions with buyers to their peers;
- **Connectors:** people with good interpersonal skills who are able to develop effective working relationships with different types of market actors;
- **Opinion-makers:** people who have the respect of their peers and can thus influence and mobilise them.

A good way of finding the right people, while enabling them to be democratically elected by their peers, is to:

1. Explain the role of representatives to **formal and informal community leaders** and ask them to identify **potential candidates** under the three categories;
2. **Talk to the potential candidates** to explain the role and ascertain if they are interested to stand for election;
3. Describe the role and necessary characteristics of a team of representatives to **the wider community/producer group** and ask them to **select at least one representative from each category**.

Note that, for the most marginalised groups within a community (e.g. women), it can help to have more than one representative so that they can support one another to actively participate.

Once selected, work with the team of representatives in each community/producer group to understand their role, build their market literacy and develop their dialogue and negotiation skills.

BUILDING MARKET LITERACY

Market literacy is the ability of marginalised actors – and their representatives, in particular – to understand the market system, the different actors within it and how they can interact to make the system work better. It includes awareness of where they can find the inputs, services, advice and buyers they need. Other aspects of market literacy include household financial management and establishment and management of co-operatives and marketing groups.

Marginalised actors need to be encouraged to try to **understand why other market actors make the choices they do**. Such understanding enables them to work out how to interact with those other actors on terms that will interest them and be mutually beneficial. The following exercises can be used to build key aspects of market literacy.

PARTICIPATORY EXERCISE 1: 'HUMAN MARKET MAP'

In the Preliminary Market Mapping step, the project team create a market map based on their current knowledge. By contrast, the Human Market Map exercise enables market actors to build up the map from the beginning without reference to the map produced by the project team. This exercise helps the actors explore their roles, as well as inputs/services and the enabling environment – and helps the project team to see the system from market actors' perspectives.

1. Introduce the exercise to participants, explaining that we are going to explore how their product moves from the primary producers through to the end consumer.
2. Ask two men and two women to stand at one end of the room/space, representing producers' families. Give them a large card with their role written on it to identify themselves (e.g. 'fishers', 'rice farmers'), and another card with a picture of their 'product' (or the raw product itself if feasible e.g. a small bag of rice).
3. Ask the group who the primary producers sell their product to e.g. 'local trader'. Ask someone to volunteer to play the role of the local trader, giving them a card with their role written on it.
4. Act out the transaction between producer and trader by having the producer hand over the product to the trader and the trader hand back (a representative amount of) money.
5. Ask the actors questions regarding volumes traded and prices paid, including whether these vary by season, by volume or by some measure of quality i.e. what affects the price paid.
Discuss the nature of the transactions: are they one-off/ad hoc, contractual agreements, include embedded services (i.e. the buyer provides inputs or services as part of the deal)?
Document the answers to all these questions.
6. Next, ask the group what the trader does with the product. How does s/he add value to it? E.g. through covering cost of transport, preserving/storing (e.g. putting fish on ice), bulking up, sorting (by size or by another measure of quality), packaging, processing, etc.
Make a note of the answers. If possible, illustrate how the product is 'transformed' by making up a new picture card.
7. Ask the group what happens next to the transformed product – who does the local trader sell it to? In what form, quantity, etc., where and at what price?
Ask them to consider what costs they think the trader incurs in transforming the product. This can help them see that the differences in prices paid to them and the price the trader sells are not all 'profit' i.e. that the trader is providing a service and is incurring costs themselves.
If there are several different channels through which the product passes for different end-markets, it can be helpful to use string to illustrate the different links between the actors.
8. Continue to build the market chain by repeating the steps above for each new actor, transaction and transformation (adding value). Document each stage, identifying the information the participants know (or think they know) but also their knowledge gaps. Make sure to note for each actor or group of actors whether they are generally men, women or both.
9. If the preliminary market mapping and interviews with other market actors have identified some of the actors and steps the producers don't know about, these can be introduced by the facilitators.
10. Once the market chain has been developed as far as possible, ask the participants what **inputs and services** are needed to support the market actors e.g. finance, equipment, training or market info. Add these to the human market map, illustrating which inputs/services are used by which market actors (tip: use string to link the service to the actors). Ensure these are documented.
11. Ask participants which wider issues affect how the system works (the **enabling environment**) e.g. taxes, regulations, quality standards, resource tenure/rights, cultural norms (e.g. culturally defined roles of women and men or different ethnic groups). **In a conservation context**, it is important to include the enabling environment and the institutions (practices, customs, rules, etc.) that affect both the ecological sustainability of the system and how costs and benefits of biodiversity use and conservation are distributed.
12. Finally, the information drawn from this interactive exercise can be transcribed into a physical market map diagram on the ground or wall and documented for future reference (including as a baseline to monitor and evaluate change over time) and for use in subsequent exercises.

PARTICIPATORY EXERCISE 2: 'PUT YOURSELF IN THEIR SHOES'

This exercise is designed to help participants: understand the issues faced by other market actors; frame problems as blockages in the system that they can work together to overcome, rather than just blaming each other; and develop negotiation strategies for future engagement with other market actors.

1. For each type of market actor identified in the Human Market Map exercise, ask participants to form small groups to take the role of each type of actor i.e. one group as producers, one as local traders, one as processors, wholesalers, exporters, etc. Try to achieve an appropriate gender balance e.g. if most local traders are female, ensure that the group representing local traders consists mainly of women.

2. Ask them to discuss in their group the following questions:

What is the biggest problem you face (in your role as...) that stops you being as efficient and profitable as you'd like to be?

*What other market actors **contribute** to this problem? What other market actors **are affected**?*

How does this problem affect the market system as a whole?

Note: producers may need some help thinking of problems from other actors' perspectives. Information you have gained from other market actors beforehand can be used as prompts if people get stuck. For example, other actors may face issues with product quality, low volumes, transport or storage logistics/costs, sourcing at certain times of the year etc.

3. Encourage participants to think beyond the 'problem' of price paid for their product. This is the hardest point to start with in future negotiation with buyers because, of course, the seller wants the highest price possible and the buyer the lowest! **Starting negotiations** with discussions on how to **overcome challenges** with specific issues related to **quality, volume and/or timeliness**¹ is usually much more helpful. This can then lead on to constructive discussions on price e.g. a better price paid for better quality, larger volumes and/or supply when demand is high.
4. Bring everyone back to plenary and ask each group to describe their problem and document the information.
5. For each new problem identified by one type of actor, ask other actors if/how they experience the same problem. Facilitators should emphasise that these are different sides of the same problem and hence blockages in the system, rather than the fault of any one actor.
6. Encourage participants to discuss how market actors could work together to overcome blockages.

These two exercises can be repeated in Participatory Market Mapping workshops where all actors are brought together to better understand their system and identify ways to work together to improve it. Producers' representatives, having already experienced the exercises amongst their peers, should feel more confident to participate in them with other market actors playing their respective 'real-world' roles.



1. Supply of the product at the most favourable time e.g. when demand/price is high; when the buyer most needs it. This can be particularly problematic for fresh natural resource based products which tend to be very seasonal.

CASE STUDY

INCREASING MARKET LITERACY AND CONFIDENCE OF MARGINALISED ACTORS IN MYANMAR

FPI's marine conservation work in the Myeik Archipelago of Myanmar includes a Participatory Market System Development approach to improve the livelihoods of marginalised communities who have committed to sustainably managing their nearshore fisheries. Both female and male members of fisher households participated in Human Market Mapping exercises in order to help improve their market literacy and build their confidence to engage with other market actors in subsequent meetings and workshops. Pictures of the key commercial species helped participants feel comfortable that they were to be talking about something they were very familiar with. Use of coloured string to link the different market actors helped facilitate active engagement in the exercise and provided a clear visual representation of the 'value chain' as an interconnected web of interactions and relationships with some key nodes and bottlenecks. Such visual aids also helped overcome language and literacy barriers and added an element of fun to the proceedings. One immediate indication of increased self-confidence after this exercise came when a previously 'shy' participant from one of the poorest indigenous groups invited facilitators to her home so she could demonstrate how she processed sea cucumber, a high value target species for these fishers.

SPONTANEOUS INNOVATIONS

One of the many benefits of flexible participatory exercises like Human Market Mapping is that they enable facilitators and participants to come up with their own adaptations. In this case in Myanmar, the first spontaneous innovation was when one facilitator suggested starting the session with a 'Chinese Whispers' icebreaker. This proved to be a great way of getting participants on their feet, engaging with the facilitator and each other and having a good laugh! It also provided a brilliant introduction to a key element of PMSD – improving communication and information flows. Another unplanned adaptation occurred when participants wanted to talk about a commercial species for which there was no pre-prepared picture. An impromptu drawing session ensued with fishers critiquing the facilitator's initial attempts before putting their own artistic skills – and intimate knowledge of the species – to work. Finally, while originally the facilitators intended to use only the Human Market Map exercise, the process naturally evolved to include some elements of the "Put yourselves in their shoes". Participants spontaneously role-played transactions and negotiations between different market actors, highlighting key challenges they faced.





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