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## Patriarchy: An obstacle to women empowerment?

### Experiences of three women

#### Social Protection and Local Economic Development (LED): Graduation Pilot Project

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27 May 2012

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The CGAP-Ford Foundation Graduation pilot programs around the world have been credited for reaching the most vulnerable groups (ultra-poor) living in the bottom 15% of the economy. In fact, what we know internationally is that poverty is more prevalent amongst women, whom in most instances development interventions do not always reach. The May 2014 'International Conference on Graduation and Social Protection' hosted by the Centre for Social Protection (CSP) in Kigali, Rwanda, where SPII participated in also highlighted on gender based poverty issues. Reflections from conference participants was that women's empowerment may perhaps be more than a stone's throw away, and that societal transformation is an imperative in addressing economic vulnerability amongst women.

This article serves to provide three case studies of the experiences of three women in SPII's 'Social Protection and Local Economic Development (LED): Graduation Pilot Project' from fieldworkers (enterprise coaches).

Despite being an important contributor to her families' economic welfare, household participant NO.122 states that being part of the pilot project has posed problems between her and her husband. She owns a small tavern (informal places where people gather to drink alcoholic and be served food), with her husband, and has since told her enterprise coach that she can no longer participate in the

project because her husband does not approve of a woman receiving education. Although she wants to continue being part of the pilot programme, her husband does not see the point of her learning new skills because he is able to provide everything she needs as a married woman.

"Molekane waka ha a dumele hore ke tsamaye sekolo, ke ka hoong enkekeng ka kgona ho tswela pele ho nka karolo projecting ya SPII". Translation: ***"My husband does not want me to attend any schooling, and so I cannot continue with the SPII project because of this."*** (Household No.122)

In addition to withdrawing from the project, her husband has instructed her that moving forward she should concern herself with caring for her ailing father-in-law. She states that she would have loved to stay in the programme and receive other graduation interventions, but she cannot defy her husband's instructions.

In another case, a woman who sells snacks and alcohol in her house speaks of the difficulties of operating a business that sells alcohol if you are not a male. When her late husband was still alive, he was able to control rowdy customers in the house. She says that she can't sell as much alcohol as she used to as this invites more trouble than she can handle. Her current situation is badly affecting her income levels, and she now relies on the less profitable sales from the snacks she sells to sustain herself.

In both experiences, there exists a case of pure gender dominance. In the first case, the dominance comes from the husband, and the second case displays signs of dominance by males over the participant, although in the second case it is not as direct as the first case. Both women see the male as the dominant figure as either providers or protectors.

The last case study involves a female participant in her mid-twenties. She sells fast fast food (a plate of pap, braai meat and relish, a relish is a cooked, pickled or chopped vegetable or fruit food item typically used as a condiment in particular to enhance staple) outside a local tavern over the busy weekend. She says that since attending the Basic Business Management Skills Training component of the

SPII graduation pilot interventions, at which she learned about pricing and comparing prices of different suppliers. She is now sourcing her supplies from a cheaper supplier, and as result she is able to price her fast food at a lower price than other fast foods business operating on the same street.

Due to her reduced prices, a male fast food seller on the same street has been verbally and physically (spitting) abusing her to a point where she is considering stopping this business or finding another location. She tells the enterprise coach that she thinks that her male counterpart is acting like this towards her because she is a woman and that there isn't a male around to protect her or speak on her behalf.

She says that the reason that she started selling fast food in conjunction with her hair styling business is because a year ago she lost most of her personal assets, including household furniture and identity document, as a result of her then -partner setting her place on fire.

Since that fateful day, she has been trying by all means to rebuild her life, including purchasing assets that were lost using the profits from her fast food business. The participant, although currently a bit despondent about the future of her fast food business because of the constant harassment from her male counterpart, feels that she needs to bring her partner to assist her in running the business and more importantly, to offer her protection.

***“Ke nahana hore ke kope ntate wa mona ntlung hore a tsamaye lenna ha ke ilo rekisa, hore moshemane oo a rekisang dijo lenna a tlohele ho ntella.”*** Translation: *“I think that I should ask my partner to come with me at my business, this will make the male trader to stop harassing me”*. Household No. 133.



What these cases bring to the fore is the presence of patriarchy in our society, and more importantly, raise the question of how many more women in the country, despite the guarantee of equality in our Constitution, are subjected to gender based discrimination as they seek productive livelihood strategies out of poverty? Gender based violence is very prevalent in South Africa.

Patriarchy, as indicated in these three case studies does not always exist in private spaces; rather, what we are seeing is that this is also prevalent in public spaces, where acts of dominant masculinities manifest both directly and indirectly. Although these are only three cases, but what we are starting to understand that they may be more challenges that women face in their efforts to escape the trappings of poverty.

One of the key findings from the CGAP-Ford Foundation's Graduation model internationally is the role and importance of supportive husbands/partners. This article does not suggest that these three women, in the absence of these challenges, would flourish in their enterprises and graduate out of poverty. Rather it seeks to question and probe the extent to which patriarchy can hinder the success of female enterprise owners. Does the fact that they are women automatically place them in situations and conditions of vulnerability against such dynamics? What does this suggest about the success of the democratic, rights- based transformation of South Africa and what do we need to do to turn this around?

For a detailed project outlined, please click the following link [www.spji.org.za](http://www.spji.org.za) .

This Project is made possible with assistance from the Ford Foundation and Christian Aid. The 'graduation' methodology is adapted from the BRAC graduation approach which informs the global C-GAP graduation projects.

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