



MARKET LINKAGE PROJECT: PHASE 2

Solomon Islands | Impact Brief (2019–2024)



About this report

This brief summarises the main findings of the endline evaluation for the Market Linkage Phase 2 (MLP2) project, implemented by World Vision Solomon Islands (2019-2024). The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultant, Julie Imron, from January to June 2024. This brief was prepared by ANCP Impact Advisor Stephen Milford from World Vision Australia (WVA) and reviewed by Evidence Building Advisor Rivika Bisht, Impact Evidence Building Manager Dr. Saba Mebrahtu Habte, and Country Impact Manager Vichi Liyana Gunawardena from WVA. For more information, please contact Vichi Liyana Gunawardena (vichi.gunawardena@worldvision.com.au) or Rivika Bisht (rivika.bisht@worldvision.com.au).

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Front cover photo: Women producer group members prepare coconuts for processing at their crushing mill. "The money we earn from the mill helped our families to meet children's needs and school fees," shares one of the mothers.

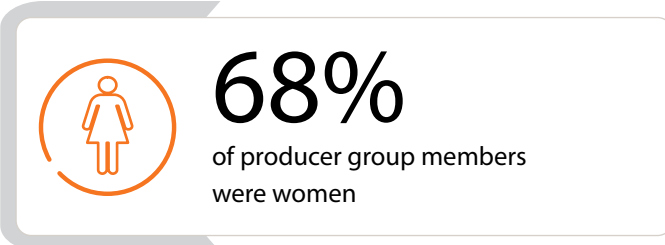


SUMMARY

Goal	The sustainable wellbeing of families through resilience and inclusive livelihoods in 20 communities across Malaita, Makira and Guadalcanal provinces, Solomon Islands
Timeframe	2019-2024
Budget	US\$4,400,467

The second phase of World Vision Australia’s Market Linkage project saw 20 communities in the Solomon Islands significantly improving the livelihoods and resilience of local families.

IMPACT



From 2019 to 2024, the project supported communities to establish 33 savings and producer groups (SPGs). As well as saving together for the future, the groups worked together to produce commodities such as cacao, fish, honey and coconut oil.



Savings and producer group members gather under a tree. Members work together to build collective and personal savings while also producing cacao, fish, honey or coconut oil to boost economic resilience.

More women were also in leadership roles, promoting gender equality and social inclusion. By the end of the project, 64 percent of SPG leaders were women. Other notable impacts include a 16 percent reduction in poverty, with 86 percent of households able to cover children’s health costs.

CHALLENGES

Despite challenges like irregular shipping and payment delays, 64 percent of producer groups secured agreements with regular buyers, enhancing market access.

SUSTAINABILITY AND LONG-TERM IMPACT

Environmental sustainability was prioritised with solar-powered equipment and climate-resilient agricultural practices.

Looking ahead, the project shows promise for long-term impact, with many SPGs planning expansions. To address challenges and build on the project’s successes, ongoing support is crucial – especially in isolated communities. Strengthening formal agreements with buyers, enhancing social cohesion and supporting producer groups with leadership training will be vital for long-term impact and sustainability.

CONTEXT

Rural communities in the Solomon Islands rely heavily on subsistence farming and fishing. Access to larger markets and financial services is difficult, resulting in low prices for low-quality goods. Limited literacy and numeracy skills, coupled with traditional gender roles, hinder business growth in rural areas. They also restrict women's contributions to economic development, particularly affecting vulnerable groups like women and people with disability.

The Market Linkage Phase 2 project built on the success of Phase 1, which focused on South Malaita and Makira. The second phase also included communities from Marau in Guadalcanal Province. By improving production facilities and expanding community involvement, the project created sustainable economic opportunities that fostered growth – despite the challenges of geographic isolation.



Fresh fish are sold at a local market in Kirakira. With better access to markets like these, MLP2 participants experienced increased income to help support their children's basic needs.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Phase 2 ran from July 2019 to June 2024, with a budget of US\$4,400,467. The project engaged 20 communities across Malaita, Makira and Guadalcanal provinces to build sustainable family wellbeing through resilience and inclusive livelihoods. As part of this goal, the project worked closely with project participants to achieve the following key outcomes:

1. Households experience economic self-reliance through strengthened, self-sustaining economic development.
2. Families benefit from improved production and increased income.
3. Savings and producer groups (SPGs) access improved markets.
4. Community resilience, safety and opportunities became more accessible to all people.

The project supported communities to establish 33 savings and producer groups (SPGs). Members worked together to build collective and personal savings while producing cacao, fish, honey or coconut oil. Their efforts boosted economic stability, self-reliance and social cohesion. With extra income and savings, members could cover key expenses such as education, health, living costs and, when needed, emergencies. Communities also grew more resilient and inclusive of vulnerable groups such as people with disability, children and women.

Despite challenges such as the impact of logging activities in 2023 and general elections in April 2024, the project surpassed its goals. By the end of the project, 5,773 people had benefited from it – exceeding the initial target of 4,210.



A savings group member gives his contribution to the club's committee.

TECHNICAL APPROACHES

CHANNELS OF HOPE

Channels of Hope for Gender¹ is a long-standing program developed by World Vision to empower faith communities to improve children's wellbeing. Community leaders, especially faith leaders, are mobilised to challenge harmful attitudes and cultural norms surrounding gender and disability. They also work to promote respectful relationships and safer communities.

The training program uses human rights norms, Bible passages and World Vision policy to explore gender norms in the community and identify attitudes that condone gender-based violence. As a faith-based organisation, World Vision is ideally placed to work in partnership with church institutions to address gender-based violence.

SAVINGS FOR TRANSFORMATION GROUPS

Self-managed Savings for Transformation² groups consist of 10 to 15 people, who collectively save small amounts of money on a regular basis. Once savings accumulate, they can be invested into income-generating activities. Savings groups can also lend money to members when needs arise, such as family illness, education fees or decreased income during drought. By saving together, communities build resilience for the future.



Equipped with basic financial literacy and business skills training through MLP2, community members are now earning and saving money more regularly to support their families' needs.

- 1 World Vision International, *Channels of Hope for Gender* (2019): [Channels of Hope for Gender | Faith and Development | World Vision International \(wvi.org\)](https://www.wvi.org/)
- 2 World Vision International. *Savings for Transformation* (2020): <https://www.wvi.org/economic-development/savings-transformation>

EVALUATION OVERVIEW

The project's evaluation included quantitative household surveys and qualitative focus group discussions and key informant interviews. An in-depth desk review of project reports also took place. Quantitative data collection aimed for 350 respondents and successfully interviewed 323. Stratified random sampling was conducted among the respondents. Among these, 81.7 percent were active SPG members. The team conducted 16 focus group discussions and 24 key informant interviews, gathering rich qualitative insights. Additionally, 23 SPG checklists provided valuable information on the groups' status at the project's conclusion.

The endline household survey, a streamlined version of the baseline, focused on key indicators and evaluation-specific questions. Digital data collection via the Kobo platform ensured high data quality, despite limited internet access during fieldwork. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS statistical analysis software, with comparisons to baseline data to measure progress, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis in Excel.

LIMITATIONS

The evaluation had two limitations. First, the baseline survey did not clearly define and collect data for several indicators. In addition, the baseline dataset was not available. This affected future surveys and the project's ability to measure its impact or conduct change analysis that includes statistical significance tests for all project indicators.

Secondly, the evaluator had limited control over data collection, as well as limited interactions with the data collection team. As a result, data issues could only be identified after the collection team had completed their work. This meant data quality could not always be ensured.

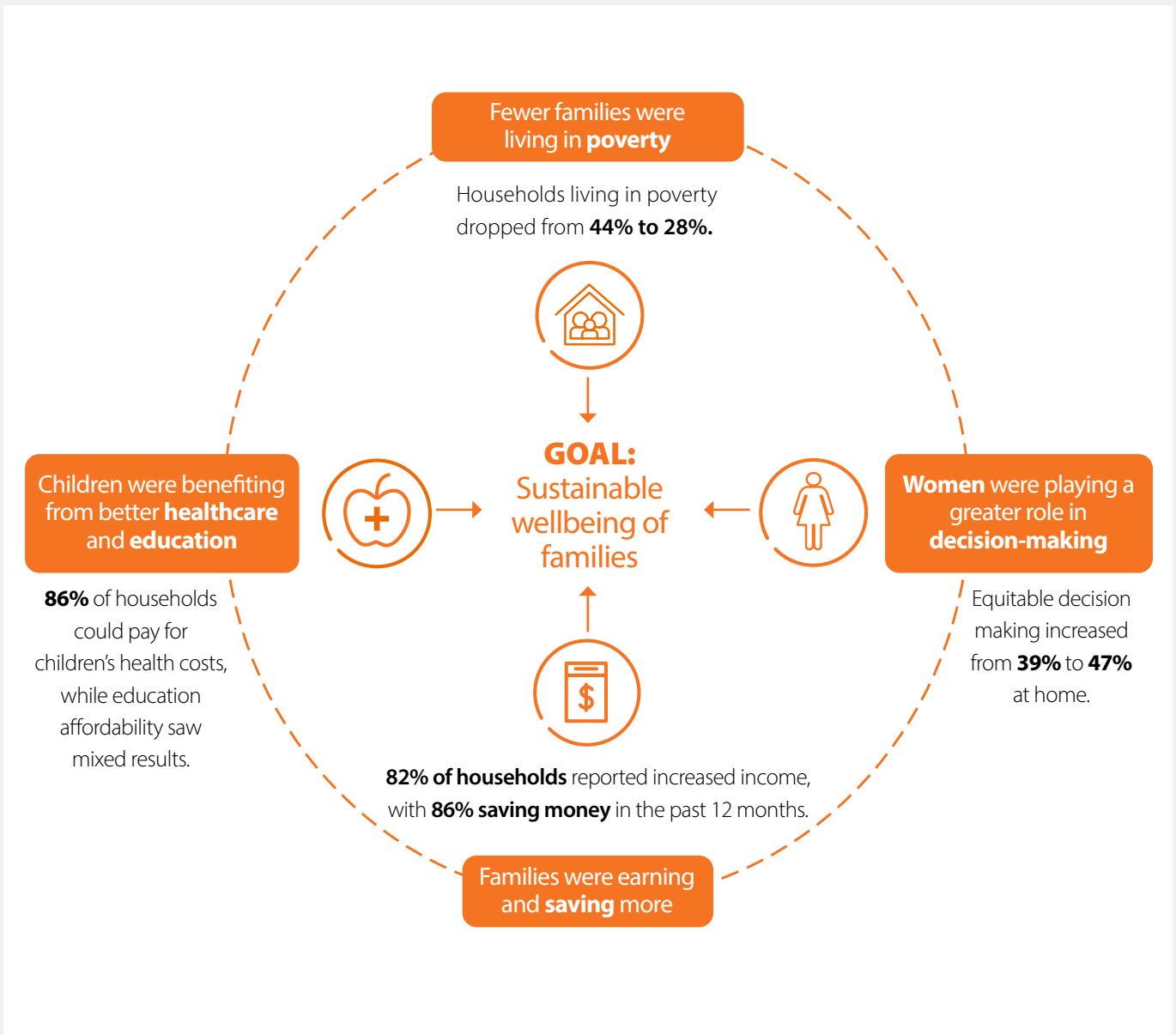
Despite these limitations, the evaluation offers a thorough and insightful overview of the project's successes and areas for improvement, paving the way for future project enhancements. Furthermore, though the evaluation design did not include a control group, its multifaceted approach provided a comprehensive assessment of the project's impact.



An array of products is available for sale by producer group members, including honey, cacao and coconut oil.

FINDINGS

The evaluation found that the project successfully achieved its goal by significantly enhancing the sustainable wellbeing of families through resilience and inclusive livelihoods. By the end of the project:



"We have set up the roles of the females in the community. We have worked together to spread awareness on domestic violence and abuse. By-laws were implemented to support and maintain law and order in the community."

—Community leader, Guadalcanal

Table 1: Summary table of results for the Solomon Islands Market Linkage Phase Two Project

Indicator	Baseline result (N)	Endline achieved (N)	Target
Goal: The sustainable wellbeing of families through resilience and inclusive livelihoods			
% households reporting good social cohesion	77% (332)	80.2% (323)	87%
% households in poverty (using the Multidimensional Poverty Index or MPI – simplified tool)	44% (332)	27.6%* (323)	N/A
% households able to pay for children's basic education costs in the past 12 months	82% (332)	76.2%* (323)	30%
% households able to pay for children's health costs in the past 12 months	67% ³	86.1% (208)	75%
% households with equitable decision-making in productive sphere	48% (332)	58.8%* (323)	70%
% households with equitable decision-making in domestic sphere	39% (332)	47.1%* (323)	80%
Outcome 1: Households experience economic self-reliance through strengthened, self-sustaining economic development			
% households that report increased income in the past 12 months	34% (332)	82.2%* (292)	N/A
% of respondents that saved money over the past 12 months	83% (332)	86.4% (292)	90%
Outcome 2: Families benefit from improved production and income			
% of respondents who are members of a producer group with an agreement in place	N/A	64.4% (323)	N/A
Outcome 3: Savings and producer groups access improved markets			
% of households who believe they have adequate market information	12% (332)	27.1%* (292)	N/A
% of respondents recognising economic roles/contribution of women within households and community	99.7% (332)	99.4% (323)	N/A
Outcome 4: Community resilience, safety and opportunity is accessible to all people			
% of women who feel confident and are willing to get involved in rewarding/high influence roles in SPGs	70% (184)	82.8%* (186)	N/A

* Statistically significant difference between baseline and endline at p<0.05 significance level.

³ Sample size for this indicator measure at baseline was not available for the endline evaluation data analysis.

FINDINGS BY OUTCOMES

OUTCOME 1: HOUSEHOLDS EXPERIENCE ECONOMIC SELF-RELIANCE

The project boosted economic independence for families. An impressive 82.2 percent of households reported increased income, up from 34 percent at baseline. Savings behaviour also increased slightly, with 86.4 percent of respondents saving money in the past 12 months, compared to 83 percent at baseline.

Thanks to increased financial stability, households could invest in crucial areas such as education, health and housing improvements. However, regional disparities emerged, with South Malaita showing the least progress in terms of income, savings and community benefits. Despite these challenges, the project successfully fostered economic independence for most participants.

OUTCOME 2: FAMILIES BENEFIT FROM IMPROVED PRODUCTION AND INCOME

Families reaped benefits from improved production and income. Notably, 64.4 percent of respondents belonged to producer groups with regular buyer agreements.

The project provided essential technical training and equipment, resulting in higher production, especially for cacao and fish. New production techniques were adopted by 92.2 percent of respondents, while 70.5 percent utilised new machinery. Qualitative data reinforced these findings, highlighting increased production quality and better market prices.

Despite these achievements, logistical challenges such as irregular shipping and payment delays persist, particularly in isolated communities.

“We want to extend our current crushing mill [...] so that we can process two barrels of oil in one day.”

—SPG leader, South Malaita

OUTCOME 3: SAVINGS AND PRODUCER GROUPS ACCESS IMPROVED MARKETS

Market access saw significant improvements, with 95.3 percent of SPG members finding it easier to sell their products and 94.3 percent reporting higher prices than before the project.

More people were accessing market information, up from 44 to 82.2 percent. Another 27.1 percent felt they had adequate market information. Women played a crucial role in market access, with 86.4 percent accessing market information compared to 74 percent of men, reflecting the project's emphasis on gender inclusion.

While these successes are notable, challenges remain with formal buyer agreements, especially concerning payment delays and transportation issues.

OUTCOME 4: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE, SAFETY AND OPPORTUNITY

Community resilience and inclusiveness showed promising trends, with 82.8 percent of women feeling confident in leadership roles, up from 70 percent at baseline.

Fishery SPGs contributed to the local economy by purchasing catches from local fishermen and selling processed fish to families across the area. The project supported social and gender-sensitive training, boosting women's participation in economic activities.

However, challenges in social cohesion and the inclusion of people with disability persist. While women and people with disability reported positive changes, some still faced participation barriers.

The project also promoted community by-laws and inclusive financial literacy, enhancing trust and collaboration among community members. While substantial social changes require more time, the project has laid a strong foundation for ongoing improvement.

IMPACT STORY

Fishing for success in Gupuna

Gupuna is a small community of 587 people on Santa Ana Island. Here, access is a challenge – it's a four-hour boat ride from the provincial capital, Kirakira.

In the past, local producers struggled to reach bigger markets. Most people relied on subsistence farming to get by. But since the start of World Vision's Market Linkage project, there has been great change in Gupuna and nearby communities.

With an abundance of fish around the island, Gupuna chose it as a priority product to develop. World Vision mobilised the community to form a savings and producer group (SPG), which trained in sustainable fishing techniques and financial management. A fish storage facility was constructed, with two deep freezers to store fish for markets.

Now, the Gupuna SPG can purchase fresh fish from local fishermen, freeze it for transport and sell for double the price at Kirakira markets.

Ripple effects are already clear throughout the community. With SPG members and fishermen earning more, there is more money in circulation – and more buyers for locally grown food. And with more buyers closer to home, profits have increased due to reduced transport and marketing costs. As a result, households are earning enough to support their children with basic needs such as school fees and healthcare.

Motivated by their success, the Gupuna group plans to start filleting fish to sell directly to markets in Honiara. They also plan to diversify their income by setting up a secondary enterprise.

Thanks to their efforts, the SPG is helping to build resilience not just for their business, but for their entire community.



Producer group members in remote Gupuna filet fish outside their solar-powered cold storage facility. The local community can purchase fish to sell at Kirakira markets.

SUSTAINABILITY

SAVINGS AND PRODUCER GROUPS

By establishing savings and producer groups, the project actively worked towards establishing long-term impact and sustainability. By the end of the project, many SPGs were actively planning expansions due to their successful cohesion and boosted incomes.

Approximately 50 percent of the project’s 33 SPGs are projected to thrive well beyond the project’s lifespan. However, many participants requested extra support from the project to sustain or expand activities, as well as supporting the functioning of SPGs. Resolving shipping and payment issues is also imperative to maintain formal agreements with buyers.

SKILLS TRAINING

Capacity building efforts were transformative, empowering SPG leaders with critical skills in savings, business and leadership. Although challenges in financial literacy and management remain, the overwhelming majority of SPG leaders and members were eager to continue their activities. This commitment, fuelled by tangible benefits, is promising in terms of project sustainability. Social cohesion was less evident in provinces like Makira, which will likely face more difficulties in sustaining savings activities.

EQUIPMENT MAINTENANCE

Most SPGs managed to maintain their equipment and assets independently. Some groups proactively started repairing equipment and diversifying production, demonstrating a robust approach to sustainability. In groups with highly increased production, such as cacao and fish, communities have witnessed the benefit of collective enterprises.

MARKET ACCESS

Enhanced market linkages underscored the project’s success, yet addressing payment and shipping issues is vital. While support from local community leaders and government partners helped build a solid foundation for the project, forging stronger partnerships is essential to securing the project’s long-term success.

“We seek extension for this project so we can really build our foundation before the project leaves us.”

—Cocoa savings and producer group, Makira



At a cacao demonstration site, farmers are equipped with training in harvest techniques to improve their skills.

GENDER EQUALITY AND DISABILITY INCLUSION

GENDER

The project's promotion of gender equality had a big impact on women. Women actively participated in SPGs, making up 68 percent of membership. Women were also well-represented in leadership roles. On average, women held 3.2 out of 5 key management positions in each SPG.

Training and awareness programs also helped boost gender equality. Joint family decision-making increased, as did recognition for women's contributions to economic development. Nearly all household survey respondents acknowledged women's economic role.

Despite challenges like low confidence due to limited education, the overall assessment is highly positive, with women's involvement now deeply integrated and widely accepted within the community.

DISABILITY

People with disability were actively supported by the project through culturally relevant messages and practical assistance. The household survey revealed that 12.7 percent of respondents were categorised as people with disability using the Washington Group Questions.⁴ Their involvement has significantly improved community attitudes towards disability. Many people with disability also benefited from joining savings activities.

While challenges remain in fully integrating people with disability into all SPG activities, particularly production roles, the overall assessment is positive. The project has laid a solid foundation for their inclusion, with ongoing efforts expected to further engage people with disability.



John manages a fish storage facility used by an MLP2 producer group. The facility has two 300-litre deep freezers powered by a solar panel to store their daily catch.

⁴ Washington Group on Disability Statistics. Question Sets (2024): <https://www.washingtongroup-disability.com/>

CONCLUSION

After nearly five years of project implementation, the majority of savings and producer groups increased production and boosted their savings. They are accessing more and better markets while deepening their market knowledge. Women have gained confidence and gender equality is progressing.

As SPGs continue to grow, market linkages will need strengthening to secure buyers for their products. Strong relationships are also essential to make sure those products reach the market without delays – and to avoid quality loss. This is especially the case for coconut oil and cocoa, which are often produced far away from large markets and are highly dependent on relationships with primary buyers. In Malaita, honey production was still fragile when the evaluation took place. Sustainability will depend on whether groups are able to access a good market.

The evaluation also highlighted that some groups are still fragile due to poor management and a lack of cohesion among members. Such groups will likely stop functioning unless they are strengthened through targeted support. Social cohesion is especially an issue in Makira, along with gender inequalities around decision-making.

Another ongoing priority should be creating opportunities for people with disability to get involved with production or marketing activities. Many have shown eagerness to participate in SPGs. People with Disabilities Solomon Islands (PWDSI) confirmed that, while mentalities are changing, progress is slow. Self-help groups, which were established to promote the rights of people with disability, are mostly inactive. Similarly, more efforts should be made to achieve the domains of change⁵ necessary for gender equality and social inclusion. These include economic advancement, access to opportunities, services and resources, agency and equitable systems.



A solar dryer is being used by MLP2 producer groups to dry cacao. Income from selling cacao helps support group members' children and families.

⁵ World Vision International. *Gender Equality and Social Inclusion: Approach and Theory of Change* (2nd Edition, 2023): <https://wvusstatic.com/2023/pdf/GESI-docs/docs/WV-GESI-Approach-Theory-of-Change-2nd-Edition-2023.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations for future projects are based on insights from evaluation participants and data collection findings:

1. Conduct rapid appraisals for savings and producer groups

Identify SPGs needing more support and tailor approaches based on each group's specific challenges. Encourage groups to diversify commodities and upgrade production facilities, implementing a graduation approach for providing subsidised equipment and inputs based on performance criteria.

2. Improve value chain and market analyses

Collaborate with SPGs to perform more thorough value chain and market analyses. Use the results to design effective business plans and identify multiple buyers to increase market competition and options for SPGs.

3. Explore local markets and build competition

Sell commodities locally to overcome shipping challenges. Identify multiple buyers for each commodity to enhance competition and provide more options for SPGs.

4. Enhance follow-up and coaching

Increase visits by project partners to help SPGs with cohesion and management issues, providing close coaching for management committees. Focus on building trust and cooperation. Support women with leadership training to build skills and confidence, focusing on access, decision-making and empowerment.

5. Raise awareness around social cohesion and inclusion

Promote social cohesion, gender equality, prevention of gender-based violence and inclusion of people with disability. Use successful SPGs as models and support community leaders in identifying accessible jobs.

6. Explore public-private partnerships

Explore partnerships to help buyers coordinate with groups, aggregate products and acquire storage and transportation equipment.



In a small community in South Malaita, a fisherwoman arrives by boat to sell her fish to the local producer group.



Community members gather to celebrate their new fish storage facility. This facility helps safely store freshly caught fish in this remote community until transport arrives for markets.

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