

## Nutrition is not just a women's issue!

Gender-transformative approaches for overcoming malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies

*In Malawi, male-led, different foods are introduced and their preparation is explained.*

### Transformation of gender norms – how can this be implemented in rural development?

As women and girls are more often affected by all forms of malnutrition, food security interventions need to focus primarily on empowering this target group. However, many women's empowerment interventions often fail to adequately address the underlying causes of gender inequalities. Men usually have decision-making power and control over household resources, they often purchase consumer goods and food on the market and manage the family's income. In this way, they contribute decisively to a balanced or unbalanced diet for the other members of the household. The Global Programme Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience therefore focuses not only on the realisation of the human right to adequate food, but also on the promotion of gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approaches. Men are addressed as indirect beneficiaries in project implementation. Gender-transformative approaches (GTA) have the potential to change political, social and structural dimensions of gender equality and achieve long-term social change.

The inclusion of men and additional household members (e.g. grandparents, mothers-in-law, etc.) is thus an essential prerequisite for sustainable change in dietary diversity and hygiene behaviour in the household. A large number of already established interventions show that the integration of men is central to addressing sustainably gender roles and stereotypes, empowering women and thus creating a basis for achieving project goals. Gender-transformative approaches must be embedded in the structure of the project. In addition, the measurability of behavioural changes must be improved and ensured in order to verify the effects of these measures. The following project examples are intended to illustrate some of the approaches implemented.



*Men usually hold the decision-making power and control over resources in the households.*



In India, street theatre is used to create awareness for gender-transformative approaches.

## Using acting to stimulate thinking

Through “soap operas”, core messages of gender-transformative approaches in Burkina Faso are specifically brought to many people in a vivid and simple way. This approach is therefore so effective because the scenes were inspired by the everyday reality of the communities. The viewer recognises himself in the main character, who is portrayed as a “change maker”. The film provokes laughter and reflection and encourages men to participate in promoting good nutrition and hygiene practices and to empower their wives by, for example, participating in household decision-making processes and contributing to the cultivation of land for food production. The happy ending for the film’s main couple shows that through the man’s communication with his wife and his commitment to nutrition, the whole family can benefit.

Something similar is being done in India as well in the form of street theatre. Participatory and community-based street theatres have been piloted in Khandwa district to expose and challenge gender norms and stereotypes in nutrition and childcare. Men and other household members are explicitly targeted in such street theatres. In addition, these issues were reflected with the audience in a gender dialogue after the theatre performance. The aim is to raise awareness among the local population about the impact of gender norms in relation to healthy and diversified nutrition and hygiene.



*The viewer recognises himself in the main character, who is portrayed as a “change maker”.*



Men accompany their partner when visiting health centres.

## How schools for men promote gender equality

Another approach in Burkina Faso are the “schools for men”. This type of peer education approach is also implemented in a similar form in Malawi, Togo and Zambia. Exchanges provide space for reflection and decision-making between community-designated male role models and other men in the village community to encourage them to adopt positive behaviours. The members of the “École des Maris” meet continuously and participate in training sessions on selected topics. Together, they identify “small feasible actions” that have a positive impact on the household, such as participating in feeding the family, planting a vegetable garden and other household tasks as well as accompanying the partner to visit health centres. Future quantitative studies will show whether these practices are ultimately consolidated in the long term. A comparison of the indicators for knowledge (nutrition, hygiene, production) and food availability at household level between families who participate in the activity and those who do not will be developed for this purpose.

“Father 2 Father Groups” in Malawi encourage other men to rethink gender-based stereotypes. Community volunteers are empowered to facilitate gender dialogues for men and women to challenge beliefs, norms and practices regarding roles, responsibilities and decision-making powers in the household. Patterns of thinking such as that women are inferior to men and that housework is women’s work are to be discarded. The groups also organise male-led cooking demonstrations where different foods are introduced and men learn how to prepare individual meals.



*Patterns of thinking such as that women are inferior to men and that housework is women’s work should be discarded.*



Men in Burkina Faso discussing the difficult tasks of women in the household.

## Gender awareness through discussion groups

In Togo, this type of intervention is also being piloted. Trained men sensitise their relatives and acquaintances, especially other men in the villages, about nutrition-related issues. In the course of the intervention, however, it became apparent that these men had little impact on changing the behaviour of other men. In the future, the project will therefore increasingly involve local male authorities (Chef de Village, Leader Communautaire, etc.). In addition, the nutrition education offered to men was not sufficient for behavioural change. Since then, awareness-raising events lasting several days have been organised. Despite the superficially negative developments, failures in the conception of a goal also bring important insights and should therefore definitely be included in the further development of the measures. From failures, the implementations can be modified and thus sharpened.

Pilot groups by men for men to support behaviour change have also been launched in Zambia. Gender champions, selected and specially trained members from village communities, facilitate focus group discussions once a quarter to discuss gender inequalities and harmful cultural practices.

It aims to contribute to shared decision-making, promoting understanding of roles and responsibilities, and healthy eating. Furthermore, the planning of nutrition education modules at household level is done with women and men to improve men's participation. In addition, a concept for the use of football matches and other cultural events at community level has been developed to interest men in nutrition.

Link to the website of the Global Programme:  
Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience  
to Food Crises ([giz.de](http://giz.de))

Link to the Multi-country Gender Study:  
[giz2021-en-multi-country-gender-study.pdf](https://www.giz.de/~/media/GIZ/DE/Projekte/2021/2021-en-multi-country-gender-study.pdf)

” Gender Champions moderate focus group discussions to discuss gender inequalities.

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**Registered offices:**  
Bonn and Eschborn

Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+36	Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1–5
53113 Bonn, Germany	65760 Eschborn, Germany
T +49 228 44 60-0	T +49 61 96 79-0
F +49 228 44 60-17 66	F +49 61 96 79-11 15

E [info@giz.de](mailto:info@giz.de)  
I [www.giz.de](http://www.giz.de)

**Programme:**  
Global Programme Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience

**Author:**  
Julia Kummer

**Contact persons on the topic of gender:**  
Wolf Berdel ([wolf.berdel@giz.de](mailto:wolf.berdel@giz.de)),  
Rike Riesmeier ([rike.riesmeier@giz.de](mailto:rike.riesmeier@giz.de))

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