

Gender-Transformative Approaches (GTA) for Food and Nutrition Security

Experiences from the Global Programme “Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience”

Food and nutrition security depends on the active involvement of both women and men.

Context

Women play a crucial role in food and nutrition security and their empowerment needs to be at the centre of measures to overcome hunger and malnutrition, by involving them, their male counterparts, leaders and communities. Even though women make up around half of the labour force in food systems worldwide, they continue to have less access to productive resources, fewer rights and are less represented in decision-making processes than men (FAO 2023). They are more frequently employed in irregular, informal, labour-intensive, and vulnerable jobs and solely work part-time (ibid). At the same time, women and girls are more frequently affected by hunger and all forms of malnutrition (SOFI 2024), making up 60 % of the those around the globe with chronic malnutrition (SUN 2022). They are also more exposed to the effects of the climate crisis, conflicts, and economic crises (FAO 2023), due to structural disparities, such as economic inequality, increasing burden of unpaid care work during crises, less access to land, making them more vulnerable to climate change, and

exclusion from decision-making, among other factors. Addressing these challenges is crucial, not only for women but for societies as a whole. Ensuring equal opportunities and resilience for both women and men is essential to creating sustainable and inclusive solutions to global crises.

Deep-rooted social norms and structures perpetuate gender-based inequalities and (re)produce unequal power relations and gender stereotypes. **Gender-transformative approaches (GTA)** therefore aim to address the norms, beliefs and practices in household responsibilities and decision-making-power to achieve long-term change for gender equality. They create opportunities for individuals to actively challenge gender norms, promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities, and address power inequities between persons of different genders. GTA create an enabling environment for gender transformation by going beyond just including women as participants. Central to GTA is strengthening the “3 Rs”, ensuring women’s access to **resources**, realising their **rights**, and promoting their **representation** in institutions and at all levels, while considering the intersections between diverse forms of discrimination. Those principles are rooted in the Germany’s Feminist Development Policy (BMZ 2023).

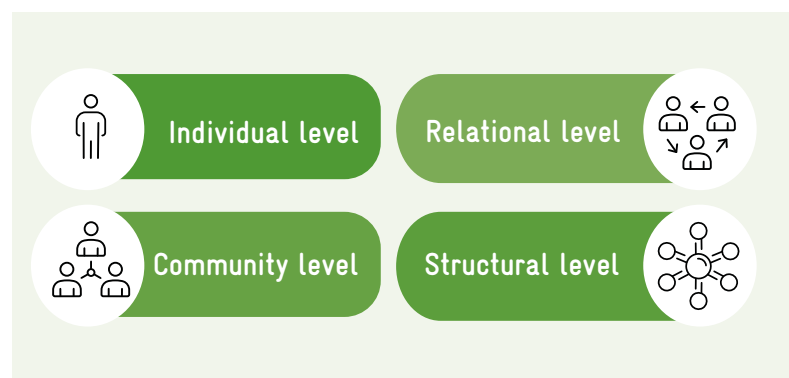


Transforming gender roles in agriculture: men and women share responsibilities during the cowpea harvest in the Eastern Province of Zambia.

The **Global Programme “Food and Nutrition Security, Enhanced Resilience”** was implemented in twelve countries to improve the nutritional status and resilience to hunger crises of food-insecure people, particularly of women of reproductive age and young children. The programme supports gender equality not only as a goal in and of itself, but as a critical step in improving food and nutrition security and enhancing resilience. To this end, the programme leverages measures from different sectors, such as agriculture, health, education, social protection, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) across multiple dimensions to address gender-transformative change.

Addressing Four Levels of Gender-Transformative Change

The programme targets four levels to address underlying social norms and roles to achieve gender-transformative change: individual, relational, community, and systemic/structural levels.



Traditional leaders and government stakeholders participate in the Appreciation Roadshows in Zambia and show their commitment towards improving food and nutrition security.

At the **individual level**, the programme works directly with women to improve their children’s nutritional status and support their empowerment. Capacity development changes how women are perceived in their community and family and offers new roles. While the general workload of women is not generally transformed, the knowledge and skills on the individual and family nutrition and health, the family needs, the management of the household and

the recognition of the tasks in combination with enhanced communications skills fosters the female power in the household. In **India**, women organise themselves into Self Help Groups (SHG) to manage **Community Nutrition Gardens**. The produce from the gardens improves the dietary diversity of the women, their families, and their communities. Women's work in the community nutrition gardens has many positive attributes: women earn an income, which increases their agency, financial independence and self-esteem. Through the exchange within the group, they become more aware of their rights, which contributes to increased decision-making power. By engaging in economic activities and community leadership, women challenge traditional roles that limit them to unpaid domestic work. Another approach to improving women's financial literacy and empowerment is the programme's support for **savings groups** in 8 countries. In **Burkina Faso, Cambodia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali** and **Togo**, savings groups are linked to income-generating activities of small businesses that aim to make nutritious food more available and

accessible. In **Malawi**, women could improve their skills processing, drying, and storing mangoes under safe hygienic conditions. As a result, the women increased their income and increased the availability of vitamin A-rich mangoes in their communities. In Cambodia, self-regu-

"Working together brings unity at home, and we find a solution when we work together."

Female participant, Zambia

lated saving groups evolved into food banks, turning food loss into income-generating products. Recognising the value of the "Commune Facilitator" role, one saving group created a funding scheme to sustain it on community level, without external funding, displaying women's leadership in financial decision-making for their community.



Family involvement and joint decision making is key to building healthier, more resilient communities in Zambia.



A member of the Husband Schools (École des Maris) helping the children to wash their hands in Burkina Faso.



Promoting shared responsibility for nutrition: men and women participate jointly in a cooking demonstration to learn how to cook healthy meals with locally available ingredients in Zambia.

A family's well-being depends on all its members – and on joint decision-making within the household. The programme therefore addresses the **relational level** by involving men and the whole household in its activities to challenge gender stereotypes such as the belief that housework is women's work. When men are involved in child-care, the nutritional situation of the household improves, and women benefit from a reduced workload. With this goal in mind, programme activities in **Madagascar** and **Burkina Faso** include positive masculinity trainings, where participants openly discuss the impact of persisting gender

"We are happy because inequality has reduced as we do things together."
Female participant, Zambia

roles. In **Malawi**, participants in **father-to-father groups** share how they can better contribute to their family's nutrition, for example by learning how to prepare different types of meals in men-led cooking demonstrations. Volunteers are trained to facilitate dialogues for men and women to challenge beliefs, norms and practices about roles, respon-

sibilities, and decision-making power in the household. In the **École des maris (husband schools)** in **Burkina Faso**, husbands and wives come together to reflect and identify ten small, feasible actions that will have a positive impact on the household. These actions include planting a vegetable garden, accompanying wives to a health check-up and mentoring other husbands who are not yet members of the school.

As gender stereotypes are often deeply embedded in social norms, the programme also addresses the **community level** by collaborating with **traditional leaders** and **nutrition ambassadors**. In **Ethiopia**, two famous singers worked with the programme to promote the importance and interconnection of dietary diversity and gender equality. In **Malawi, Mali** and **Zambia**, local and religious leaders are participating in dialogues on gender inequalities and cultural practices to reduce them in a context-sensitive way. In Zambia traditional leaders and community members nominate Gender Champions, who receive in-depth trainings on disseminating gender appropriate messages and facilitating community engagement. In **Burkina Faso**, **soap operas** are being used as to entertain, inform and encourage men to adopt good nutrition and hygiene practices and to involve their wives in household decision-making processes by showing positive results for the whole family.



Father-child interaction in rural Cambodia by fostering hygiene practices and challenging traditional gender roles at home.

To achieve transformative and lasting change in discriminatory gender roles and norms, it is essential to address the **systemic and structural levels** of gender inequality. Recognising this, the programme has increasingly mainstreamed gender into **nutrition governance**. In **Mali**, the programme is collaborating with the relevant authorities to ensure that women are legally guaranteed land to grow vegetables. To date, 4,600 women have gained access to

"I had for many years wanted to return home, however it was too hard to earn a good income in the provinces. [...] When I had the opportunity to return home to help my wife with her food bank project, I was happy as the whole family are reunited."

Husband of female participant, Cambodia



With a smile and two chickens held high, this woman leads three savings groups and a food bank in rural Cambodia, inspiring others through her entrepreneurial spirit and community leadership.

"[The program] has given me the confidence to tackle whatever comes my way, no one can lead my life better than I can. I shape my future and see the world with new eyes."

Female participant, Cambodia

vegetable plots. In **Cambodia**, the programme is supporting the implementation of national legislation, by establishing lactation rooms in companies and offices, to support breastfeeding and childcare in the workplace. The improvement of maternity leave laws strengthens women's ability to work while enhancing their children's nutrition. In **Benin** and **Zambia**, the programme advocates for gender-sensitive multisectoral policies and supports women's participation in district nutrition committees.



Discussions on women's heavy household chores, like collecting wood, water, etc. in Burkina Faso.

Measuring Change, Showing Impact

Evaluations of the programme show that the GTAs not only have a positive impact on strengthening women's rights, but also on their nutrition and that of their children and families.

The programme uses an **ad-hoc, abbreviated index** based on the dimensions of the **Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index** (WEAI), developed by IFPRI, Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI), and USAID, to measure the impact of activities on women's empowerment, track progress, adjust interventions and develop targeted measures. The index captures five dimensions of empowerment: production/agency, income, leadership, resources, and time. In five out of twelve countries, **women who participated in programme activities were substantially more empowered than women who did not** (GIZ 2024, Follow-up Survey III). Measures that promote women's participation in groups and support from their partner or other household members were found to have the greatest potential for improving women's empowerment.

The index is complemented by specific studies in individual countries. In **Zambia**, in a gender impact study comparing levels of decision-making power before and after participation in programme activities, women reported that they have a significantly **stronger voice in decision-making**.

In **Burkina Faso**, the effects of the husbands' schools are monitored in annual output assessments. Husbands who participated in husbands' schools were more likely to help their wives with their workload (62 % vs 14 %), produced more micronutrient-rich fruits and vegetables in their home gardens, and had better knowledge of production methods, hygiene, and nutrition, which they passed on to their wives. The combination of these results led to a significant **improvement in the dietary diversity of women and their children**. Qualitative interviews also showed that participation in the husbands' schools improved relationships between couples, as husbands became more aware of their family's needs and more involved in the household.



Zambian ward-level stakeholders gather to strengthen local nutrition governance through inclusive dialogue and collaboration.

Recommendations from the Programme

- › **Incorporate GTA from the beginning:** Integrate gender into programme objectives and resource allocation right from the start for a transformative impact.
- › **Design interventions that create opportunities** for individuals to actively challenge gender norms and promote positions of social and political influence for women in communities.
- › **Elevate women through the 3R:** Support women in attaining an equal access to **resources, rights, and representation** in decision-making processes at all levels.
- › **Embrace diversity:** Consider different backgrounds, capacities, and needs – paying attention to intersecting forms of discrimination, where possible.
- › **Engage with key influencers:** Use the influence of men, the family as a whole and traditional leaders to promote gender equality. Create strategies that involve and empower these key figures to boost your efforts.
- › **Challenge norms and drive change:** Conceive gender beyond working with women, involving men and including the broader societal structures.
- › **Measure and share impact:** Track the effects of your actions and share compelling stories that inspire others and drive change.

Further information

BMZ (2023). **Feminist Development Policy – For Just and Strong Societies Worldwide**

FAO (2023). **The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems**

Father-to-Father groups in Malawi. **Towards a gender-transformative approach to improving nutrition – Healthy DEvelopments (bmz.de)**

FAO, IFAD, WFP & CGIAR (2023). **Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture**

IFPRI (2012). **Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index**

Madzorera et al. (2023). **Women's input and decision-making in agriculture are associated with diet quality in rural Tanzania.**

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Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32+36 53113 Bonn Germany T +49 228 44 60-0	Dag-Hammarskjöld-Weg 1-5 65760 Eschborn Germany T +49 61 96 79-0
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E info@giz.de
I www.giz.de

Programmes:
Global Programme Food and Nutrition Security,
Enhanced Resilience

Authors:

Annalena Herrmann, Ceren Kavlo, Tom Collet, Leandra Oerter, Rike Riesmeier, Marina Noack

Responsible:

Julia Kirya

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