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Implementing Gender-Transformative Approaches (GTAs) in Agricultural Initiatives

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Key Terms

Gender-transformative approaches – Strategies that aim to move beyond individual self-improvement among women toward transforming the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gendered inequalities (Hillenbrand, Karim, Mohanraj, & Wu, 2015).

Gender-accommodating approaches – Strategies that adjust for gender norms and inequalities but that don't aim to change them (Rottach, Schuler, & Hardee, 2009).

Intersectionality – The combination of various oppressions that together produce something unique and distinct from any one form of discrimination standing alone (Hankivsky, 2005).

What are GTAs?

Gender transformative approaches (GTAs) aim to change existing power dynamics, structures, and social norms that are the root causes of gender-based inequality as a means of achieving development objectives (Cornwall & Rivas, 2016; Hillenbrand, Karim, Mohanraj, & Wu, 2015; Kabeer & Subrahmanian, 1996). In this way, GTAs are different from most other gender-related approaches in the development realm, which simply address the *symptoms* of gender-based inequality rather than its underlying causes.

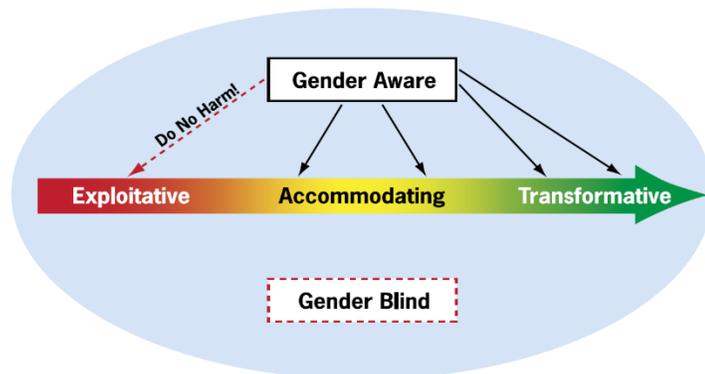


FIGURE 1: THE GENDER INTEGRATION CONTINUUM.
(ROTTACH, SCHULER, & HARDEE, 2009)

Figure 1 depicts GTAs on a continuum of gender-aware approaches, located opposite exploitative initiatives, which seek to take advantage of harmful gender norms in order to achieve development outcomes. In between exploitative and transformative approaches are gender “accommodating” approaches, which adjust for gender norms and inequalities but do not seek to change them. For example, initiatives that seek to generate income for women accommodate for the norm of women earning less than men, but they do not seek to affect the underlying causes of this income gap. GTAs, in contrast, actively strive to examine, question, and change gender norms and imbalances of power, encouraging critical awareness among men and women and challenging the distribution of resources and gendered allocation of duties.

GTAs have not yet been widely implemented in agricultural initiatives; they are currently more commonly used in the health sector, where they were originally developed. However, preliminary evidence suggests that implementing GTAs within agricultural initiatives has the potential to create positive long-lasting change for both women and men (Cole, Kantor, Sarapura, & Rajaratnam, 2014). In fact, some argue that GTAs are the only means through which agricultural technologies will be adopted and scaled out in a gender-equitable manner (Kantor, Morgan, & Choudhury, 2015). This paper will explore the key elements of GTAs and will provide examples of their application within agricultural initiatives, as well as resources for agricultural practitioners.

Background

GTAs aim to address perceived weaknesses in existing gender approaches used in development initiatives. Cornwall and Rivas (2015), for example, argue that mainstream gender approaches historically have relied too heavily on women's economic success as a means for empowerment, while neglecting issues like inequality and oppression, which are harder to quantify. The so-called "business case" for empowerment, they argue, glosses over the importance of transforming power relations, which are the real root of gender inequity. Rather than focusing on relationships between men and women, mainstream gender approaches tend to aim to engage women either individually or in groups, without acknowledging that the men in their lives are a critical component of their potential empowerment.

Furthermore, Cornwall and Rivas argue that dominant gender approaches have overemphasized a gender binary—diving the world into just two categories of "men-in-general" and "women-in-general"—which has led to several damaging outcomes. First, this frames gender identities as opposing each other, with little acknowledgement of the commonalities between men and women. Second, this view leaves little room to explore or address the harms that patriarchy presents for men and for those who question or attempt to change conceptions of masculinities, or indeed to challenge the idea that imbalances of power always favor men. Additionally, an overemphasis on a gender binary diminishes the importance of other social groupings and hierarchies, such as those that stem from race, caste, class, nationality, ethnicity, age, disability, or sexuality. In other words, intersectional forms of oppression, in which multiple forms of discrimination act together, have been largely left out of mainstream gender approaches. Hanivsky (2005) further explains the importance of an intersectional approach to gender: "women are not a single constituency with the same social and cultural backgrounds. Not all women who live within the same society at any given point in time are oppressed or subjugated in the same way" (p.987). Given the aforementioned concerns from Cornwall and Rivas, one might include men in this statement as well. One last weakness of gender approaches that are based on a gender binary is that they exclude individuals who do not conform to this binary.

Key Characteristics of GTAs in the Agricultural Sector

GTAs hold promise to address many of these shortfalls of past gender approaches. Kantor, Morgan, and Choudhury (2015, pp. 308-309) outline five key elements of GTAs within agricultural research for development initiatives:

- I. Development of a deep understanding of people in their context and the way social inequalities intersect to affect choices and outcomes.**

Kantor (2013) states that in order to address gender inequality in agriculture, it is essential to begin with a rigorous participatory analysis that examines several elements of a given society,

including: how social norms, values, and power relationships shape and are shaped by women's and men's understandings of their roles and capacities; societal expectations of what is appropriate for women and men to be and do within the agricultural sector; and how these expectations and differences are institutionalized in the way the market, family, community, and state work.

The INGENAES project has published several brief info sheets designed to quickly orient agricultural extension agents to tested methodologies for conducting gender analyses, and to therefore help them implement this first element of GTAs. The first of these info sheets provides an overview of the Moser Gender Analysis Framework,¹ the second describes the Harvard Analytical Framework,² and the third is about the Gender Analysis Matrix.³

2. Engagement with both women and men as both have a role and stake in gender-transformative change.

As iterated by CARE International (n.d., p.1): “Over the years, gender work has engaged men as ‘the authorities’ whose permission we need in order to help women learn new skills, as ‘the partner’ whose support is needed in order for women to thrive, and ‘the oppressor’ whose abuses and privileges must be ended in order for women to be free. Each of these approaches, however, reduces men, their relations to women, and the institutional forces that shape them on a societal scale, to a thin slice of a more complex reality.” In contrast to these past approaches, GTAs aim to engage men in a more careful and purposeful way that acknowledges their nuanced relationships with women, aiming to position them as agents of change on the path to gender equality while strengthening the interdependent and mutually supportive relationships that exist between men and women.

3. Engagement with different actors and institutions across scales in recognition of the way that social inequality is created and maintained through their attitudes and practices.

Figure 2 illustrates the scales at which GTAs operate; notably, they are not limited to working only at the individual or “grassroots” level. At the individual level, GTAs aim to promote shifts in knowledge, skills, attitudes, agency, and actions. Family, community, and organizational-level changes generally focus on the embeddedness of gendered expectations, while institutional and macro-level efforts often target rules and practices (Kantor, Morgan, & Choudhury, 2015).

4. Commitment to address unequal power relations.



FIGURE 2: GTAs INVOLVE MANY ACTORS AND SCALES OF CHANGE. (COLE, KANTOR, SARAPURA, & RAJARATNAM, 2014).

¹ http://ingenaes.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/ING-Info-Sheet-2016_09-3-Moser-Triple-Role-Framework-Ludgate.pdf

² http://ingenaes.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/ING-Info-Sheet-2016_09-2-Harvard-Analytical-Framework-Ludgate1.pdf

³ http://ingenaes.illinois.edu/wp-content/uploads/ING-Info-Sheet-2016_09-4-Gender-Analysis-Matrix-Ludgate.pdf

As previously discussed, unequal power relations are considered a key root cause of gender inequality and must therefore be addressed head-on in order to effect lasting change. GTAs aim to promote critical questioning about (and eventually, create changes in) norms, attitudes, and institutionalized rules and relationships that maintain these unequal relations.

As an example, Kantor et al. (2015) discuss the common trend of promoting agricultural technologies to women that can be used in homestead areas, and which thus accommodate for women's mobility constraints and household responsibilities. Such an approach does not address power relations, but rather works around them in an attempt to increase women's agricultural productivity while maintaining the social limitations that prevent women from leaving their homes. A GTA, in contrast, would aim to directly address and alleviate women's mobility constraints and reproductive burdens by fostering conversations with women and men in order to change the social norms and attitudes (and ultimately, power relations) that uphold these limitations.

5. Commitment to foster iterative cycles of critical reflection and action as a means to challenge oppressive norms, behaviors, and structures.

A key component of GTAs is the ongoing commitment to understanding the changing social context in which they operate. This should be done through repeated collaborative efforts with men and women community members as well as other stakeholders across scales to reflect on and question the gender norms and power relations that maintain gender disparities in resources, markets, technologies, and other realms.

Examples of GTAs within Agricultural Initiatives

Participatory action research in Zambia's Barotse floodplain

The CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) sought to achieve a development goal that, on its surface, is not inherently gender-related: "making more effective use of the seasonal flooding and natural resources in the Barotse Floodplain system." However, participatory assessments with project stakeholders revealed that the processes needed in order to achieve this goal were all highly gendered. These processes included promoting more equitable and resilient value chains, improving water management, and sustainably increasing farm productivity and diversification.

In order to attain this important information about the gendered nature of agricultural processes in this region, AAS created spaces for women and men to critically reflect together on the underlying social norms and power relations that exist in their communities. These research activities took place both prior to and throughout the project's implementation and included methods such as a gender and nutrition scoping analysis, a fish value chain study, an agro-biodiversity study, a gendered agricultural water management scoping study, a comprehensive social and gender analysis, a seasonal food availability assessment, and a mapping of ecosystem services. Importantly, research participants included not only men and women community members, but also community leaders, service providers, government and nongovernmental agencies, research organizations, and private sector actors (Cole, et al., 2014).

A number of "transformative change interventions" were spawned as a result of this research. One such initiative is a social and behavioral change communication campaign that aims to change social norms and power relations that prohibit women from participating in more profitable nodes of the fish value chain. For example, the initiative addresses norms that prohibit women from catching large fish in deep waters, as well as perceptions that certain tasks like cutting reeds, using fishnets, and paddling canoes are "men's

jobs.” The initiative engages both men and women—in many cases, working with married couples—encouraging them to share tasks and fostering conversations about the benefits that they could both enjoy as a result of their collaborative efforts (Bevitt, 2017).

The Gender Action Learning System (GALS)

Linda Mayoux developed the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) in 2008 as a methodology for transforming gender relations in a variety of arenas. Several organizations have since modified and expanded this methodology, including Oxfam Novib, which integrated GALS into its Women’s Empowerment Mainstreaming and Networking (WEMAN) program for agricultural value chain initiatives. The specific methods utilized in this program are described in Oxfam Novib’s guide, *Gender Action Learning System: Practical Guide for Transforming Gender Relations in Value Chains*.⁴

GALS has three main components, which operate on multiple scales:

- 1. Individual life and livelihood planning:** Women and men develop visions for change in gender relations and improved livelihoods, and plan how they can move toward these visions.
- 2. Institutional awareness-raising and changing power relationships:** This component utilizes the “individual life and livelihood planning” tools for staff reflection and learning, aiming to increase respect for the views and interests of poor men and women and to challenge established attitudes and behaviors within institutions.
- 3. Collective action and gender advocacy for change:** Women and men share their individual strategies and combine them to form collective strategies, which are then linked to participatory decision-making in governments and development agencies.

To give an example of an activity from this guide, “Diamond Dreams” instructs a facilitator (potentially an agricultural extension agent) to ask men and women to describe things that they like and dislike about being men or women. They then guide the participants through a discussion about their deeply held beliefs about gender, which may be rooted in religion, culture, and socialization. Next, participants act out role plays and role reversals on topics like property ownership, division of labor, poverty, domestic violence, polygamy, promiscuity, alcoholism, or other themes that emerge through their discussion. Another activity (“Challenge Action Tree”) asks participants to go a step further, analyzing the root causes of gender inequities, proposing solutions, identifying actions, and making commitments to improving gender equity in their personal and professional lives.

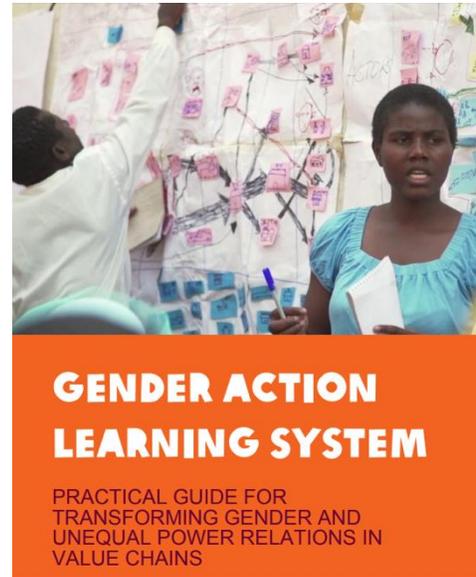


FIGURE 3: THE GENDER ACTION LEARNING SYSTEM (GALS) PROVIDES GUIDANCE ON TRANSFORMING GENDER RELATIONS WITHIN AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAINS.

⁴ https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/150115_Practical%20guide%20GALS%20summary%20Phase%201-2%20lr.pdf

Research indicates that the GALS methodology produced positive empowerment-related outcomes in Uganda, where stakeholders in the coffee value chain noted “remarkably powerful” changes in the gendered division of both domestic and farm work, household decision-making, access to and control over assets and services, as well as decreases in alcohol abuse and violence (Reemer & Makanza, 2014). These authors report that “both vulnerable women and men improved their position in the coffee value chain and women are moving up the value chain to larger scale bulking and trading” (p.10). In addition, Reemer and Makanza note that GALS improved democratic decision-making processes within organizations in the coffee value chain in Uganda.

Conclusion

Though the “business case” for women’s empowerment is commonly lauded as an efficient and effective way to integrate gender within development initiatives, many have come to the conclusion that simply elevating women’s economic status does not in itself constitute empowerment. Many also have taken issue with the divides between men and women that have been exacerbated by dominant gender in development approaches. To address these concerns, GTAs aim to change power relations, social norms, and institutional structures, as well as foster collaborative relationships between men and women. In other words, GTAs do not simply work within existing social structures, making accommodations for the limitations that have been placed on women; rather, they act upon these social contexts in order to tackle the root causes of gender-related disparities and thus achieve development outcomes. Through relatively new to the agricultural sector, GTAs have already led to positive outcomes in several agricultural initiatives, and many believe that they are the only gender approach that will lead to equitable agricultural outcomes for men and women.

The multi-scale—and in many cases, fairly drastic—societal changes promoted by GTAs take time; in many cases, it may be impossible to demonstrate measurable outcomes of GTAs within the typical 3-to-5-year grant cycle. This points to the importance of governments and other long-lasting institutions as key partners for implementing GTAs, and also serves as a call to the donor community to recognize that a shift away from an “economics as empowerment” viewpoint will likely also necessitate a shift to longer funding cycles.

Unfortunately, GTAs have so far largely neglected to address intersectional forms of disempowerment, such as those that stem from race, caste, class, nationality, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality, and other types of social differences. A notable exception is the [GESI \(gender equity and social inclusion\)](#) approach⁵ that is dominant in Nepal, although it can be argued that this approach is largely accommodating rather than transformational in nature.

Recommendations

Efforts to implement GTAs within agricultural initiatives should include the five elements of GTAs as outlined by Kantor, Morgan, and Choudhury (2015):

⁵ *Best Practices for Integrating Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategies within Nepal’s Agricultural Extension System* [Technical Note](#) and [Tip Sheet](#)

- Before implementing a program, conduct a thorough analysis that explores how social norms, values, and power relationships affect men’s and women’s roles and expectations in a particular context.
- Engage men in a way that encourages and supports their positive relationships with women and positions them as agents of change on the path to gender equity.
- Do not limit gender-related efforts to the household level; rather, aim to also promote gender equity within institutions and organizations, community leaders, and (to the extent possible) larger entities like governments and donors.
- Facilitate questioning and promote changes in the norms, attitudes, and institutionalized rules that maintain the unequal power relationships that negatively affect men’s and women’s agricultural outputs. This ensures that the root causes of gender equity are being addressed, rather than simply its symptoms.
- Make continuous efforts to understand the changing social context in which agricultural programming is operating, for example examining gender disparities (and their underlying causes) in agricultural resources, markets, and technologies.

Actors within agricultural extension systems can borrow and tailor existing resources to implement these recommendations. In addition to the previously referenced gender analysis tools and the GALS resource book, the African Transformation Facilitator’s Guide⁶ provides instructions for a variety of activities in English and French that are designed to bring about transformational change. Similarly, Helen Keller International’s “Nurturing Connections” guide provides an extensive set of detailed instructions for field agents who wish to bring a transformational approach to nutrition- and agriculture-related initiatives in rural communities.⁷

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⁶ https://www.thehealthcompass.org/sites/default/files/project_examples/African%20Transformation%20Facilitators%20GuideEF_profiles.pdf

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