Gender-transformative approaches to address inequalities in food, nutrition and economic outcomes in aquatic agricultural systems

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GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES TO ADDRESS INEQUALITIES IN FOOD, NUTRITION AND ECONOMIC OUTCOMES IN AQUATIC AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past few decades, scholars and practitioners working on gender and development issues have advocated for more in-depth analyses that explore and foster change in the social institutions that create and perpetuate gender inequalities. Gender integration approaches in a research and development context are thus not something new. However, mainstream agricultural research and development programs often apply a rather simple understanding of gender to the design of such approaches, resulting in poor implementation. The CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems uses gender-transformative approaches to help achieve the goal of enhancing development outcomes of resource-poor women and men and their families in a sustainable manner. This paper details the approaches the program utilizes and is beginning to implement in its five learning hubs, which are located in areas where dependence on aquatic agricultural systems is high. The paper provides guidance on how other programs could prepare themselves to design and operationalize gender-transformative approaches and highlights some early learning on their application.

INTRODUCTION

A recent United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) publication unequivocally argues for a stronger commitment in the post-2015 development framework and Sustainable Development Goals to realizing gender equality, women's rights and women's empowerment (UN Women 2013). To achieve these ends, "the new framework must be transformative, by addressing the structural impediments to gender equality and the achievement of women's rights" (UN Women 2013, 2). The call by UN Women is significant because it acts as an indicator of past failures by UN member states and others working on gender and development issues to recognize actions that respond to the large body of scholarly and applied work detailing the social institutions that create and perpetuate gender inequalities across the globe and to build these actions into frameworks, goals, policies and programs. (See, for example, Kabeer 1994; Locke and Okali 2001; Cornwall et al. 2007; Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009; Cornwall and Edwards 2010; Chant and Sweetman 2012.)

The UN Women publication proposes an integrated approach to tackling the structural factors that shape gender inequalities today and to ensuring that gender relations are transformed. The approach focuses on three main areas of gender equality and women's rights and empowerment: (1) freedom from violence against women and girls; (2) gender equality in the distribution of capabilities (e.g. knowledge, good health and access to resources such as land); and (3) gender equality in decision-making power across all public and private domains, including within families and communities. The proposed approach is not something new. It draws heavily on a wide variety of gender integration approaches, including those that aim to transform gendered power relations. The major challenge that lies ahead, however, is how to apply the approach in practice. Gender-transformative approaches have been articulated conceptually since the 1990s (see Young 1993; Kabeer 1994) but have faced a range of obstacles in their translation into applied programming. Some of the obstacles include development organizations' discomfort in engaging directly with unequal power relations, and gaps in gender analyses and integration capacities (Okali 2011a). As such, gender inequalities persist in most development outcomes, regardless of the context.

In this paper we share some of the learning by the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) as it begins to operationalize gender-transformative approaches across its five hubs. AAS seeks to improve the food, nutrition and economic security of resource-poor women and men and their families in a sustainable manner. The program's five hubs are located in areas where dependence on aquatic agricultural systems is high: Solomon Islands, Philippines, Cambodia, Bangladesh and Zambia. By sharing this learning, we aim to enable future research and development programs to respond to calls by UN Women and others to adopt approaches that address the structural causes of gender inequalities, thereby improving gender relations and development outcomes throughout the world.

The next section describes the conceptual framework that guides the gender-transformative approaches AAS uses. We differentiate these approaches from other gender integration models to highlight how AAS is moving beyond "business as usual."

Understandings of gender in development

Attention to the roles of women (and later gender) in development has waxed and waned since the 1970s, when the field of women in development was established. Recently, attention to gender issues has assumed an increasing prominence, including within agricultural development. However, despite (or perhaps because of) numerous theoretical and practical advances, there is much confusion and debate concerning the meaning of gender and the means by which "gender" considerations can be integrated into development practice. These debates concern not only the theoretical approach undertaken and intended goals and objectives, but also the practical strategies and methods used to incorporate gender into development projects and programs (Kilby and Olivieri 2008).

Despite the presence of these fissures and confusions, development studies and practice have advanced since the United Nations, First Development Decade in the 1960s, when economic growth and the "trickle down" approach were seen as the solution to reducing poverty. One of the advancements is the way in which gender equality is positioned as a key element of the development process. Disappointment over the trickle-down approach paved the way for the adoption of the basic needs strategy, which focused on increasing the participation in and benefits of the development process for the resource-poor, as well as recognizing women's needs and contributions to society. Activists articulated women's issues in national and international fora.

The women-in-development approach emerged from these debates and endorsed the enhancement of women's consciousness and abilities, with a view to enabling individual women to examine their situations and to act to change their disadvantaged positions. The movement also advocated for giving women greater access to resources in order to contribute to an equitable and efficient development process. The women-in-development approach tends to understand gender as a characteristic of individuals. This understanding supports the use of gender as an empirical category in comparative analysis of men's and women's experiences, and informs action that targets women for training, technologies or credit within existing social and economic structures (Peterson 2005; Okali 2011a, 2011b). It focuses analysis on identifying and closing "gender gaps," without necessarily identifying or addressing the underlying causes of the differences. Thus the women-in-development approach tended to focus on equal opportunities and individual progress and paid less attention to the way gender inequality becomes institutionalized in norms, organizations and rules of distribution. It therefore also paid less attention to the need for change at this level.

The end of the 1970s brought increased concern about gender relations in development. Microlevel studies of the household and its internal functioning drew attention to the differences in entitlements, perceived capabilities and social expectations of men and women, boys and girls. Alternatives to the unified-household model were developed that viewed the household as an arena of bargaining, cooperation and/or conflict (Dwyer and Bruce 1988; Sen 1990).

In the 1980s and 1990s, research demonstrated how gender relations mediate the process of development. Differences in the status of men and women, reflecting the norms, laws and social values of society, were found to have profound implications for how women and men participate in and benefit from market and nonmarket work, as well as for how they participate in community life as a whole. These differences embody social and power relations that constitute the setting for the implementation of development programs, and these differences therefore influence program outcomes. For example, analyses of stabilization and structural-adjustment policies showed that gender inequalities have an impact on the attainment of macroeconomic objectives (Elson 1995).

The shift from women in development to gender and development, with its focus on gendered power relations and its recognition of the embeddedness of gender inequality in how social institutions are created, are maintained and function, was accompanied by a change in the conceptualization of gender. However, much agricultural research and practice tends to continue to apply the women-in-development, individual-level conceptualization of gender, even though gender and development theory and practice has advanced beyond it. The application of the simple concept of gender ends up being a stumbling block to advancing the quality of gender analyses within the agriculture sector (Okali 2012).

While the women-in-development approach might be easily understood and readily applied by nonexperts through gender analysis frameworks and checklists like the Harvard Framework, it dilutes the conceptual and analytical complexity of gender and focuses action on individuals and the visible symptoms of inequality (such as differences in access to credit, technology or land) and not also on understanding and addressing why and how those differences exist and persist. By not viewing gender as part of how society works, mainstream agricultural practice accepts the social status quo without questioning whether and how existing norms, attitudes and distributions of power frame the opportunities and outcomes of women and men, thus creating inequalities. Therefore, approaches based on this simple, individual-level conceptualization of gender cannot guarantee that women will be able to take advantage of or benefit from new agricultural opportunities or technologies, because society's understandings of acceptable behavior for women and men may continue to impose barriers.

In contrast, gender-transformative approaches sit squarely within the gender and development approach and are based on a more complex and conceptually robust understanding of gender as a social construct, embedded in how societies define women's and men's roles and relations and the distribution of resources (Risman 2004; Martin 2004). Gender infuses all aspects of women's and men's daily lives through what is considered acceptable and appropriate for them to be and do. This means gender affects how women and men conceive of themselves and their capabilities; how women and men interact and relate to others within the framework of social expectations; and how opportunities are structured and resources are distributed within institutions like the market and the state.

Gender-transformative approaches in AAS

Social institutions that discriminate are at the root of gender inequalities and "reflect and reproduce underlying gendered power relations" (Cerise and Francavilla 2012, 3). In explicitly recognizing this, gender-transformative approaches differ from other gender integration approaches in their definition of the problem underlying gender inequality and therefore in the solutions they put forward to foster change. They engage with the complexity of gender to support women and men to act on the norms, attitudes and wider structural constraints that limit their opportunities and outcomes.

Gender-transformative approaches also see the institutional context as a key barrier to equality, justice and the achievement of global development outcomes (Razavi 2009; Kabeer 2012; Chant and Sweetman 2012; Okali 2012). Social change in the interests of women and marginalized groups is the goal, in order to expand the types and quality of life and livelihood choices available and acceptable to women and men, and therefore these groups' entitlements to participate in and benefit from development processes in ways that they define and value. This process of challenging and changing the social context within which women and men earn their livings involves engaging with power relations and entrenched norms, which are often legitimized by strong traditions and beliefs. "Power relations between men and women are complex, multi-dimensional and pervasive, [and therefore,] a diversity of tools and angles are needed to disentangle and contest them" (Lewis 2002, 7). While there is bound to be resistance, there is scope for change, and women and men themselves need to be the primary agents of that change to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment (Mayoux and Mackie 2007).

Creating an enabling social environment through supporting more equitable formal and informal institutions that support expanded life choices for women and men is at the core of gender-transformative approaches, and a move beyond "business as usual" in gender integration. Key characteristics that distinguish gender-transformative approaches from other efforts to integrate gender into agricultural research and development interventions include the following (Kantor 2013):

- development of a deep understanding of people in their context and the way social inequalities intersect to affect choices and outcomes;
- engagement with both women and men, as both have a role and stake in gender-transformative change;
- commitment to addressing unequal power relations and to challenging oppressive norms, behaviors and structures;
- commitment to fostering iterative cycles of critical reflection and action among all participants;
- engagement with different actors across scales in response to how the power relations and norms underlying gender and social inequality are distributed.

The multi-actor, cross-scale nature of gender-transformative change rests on the understanding that gender shapes social relations at the micro, meso and macro levels, placing women and men in a complex set of relationships and institutions that influence their power, voice and status, and which they themselves can influence. (See Figure 1.) Therefore, targeting women or men alone is not sufficient to bring about enduring gender equality outcomes; action must cross actors and scales to create an enabling environment within which women and men can achieve expanded choices and improved livelihood and well-being outcomes.

Gender-transformative approaches therefore seek to foster change in individual capacities (knowledge and skills), attitudes, agency and actions; the expectations embedded within relationships between people in the home, in groups and in organizations; and institutional rules and practices. These changes are expected
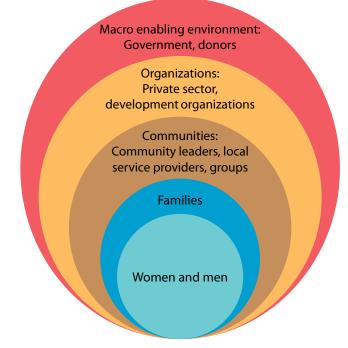

Figure 1. Change across actors at multiple interconnected scales.

to lead to more and better choices for resource-poor and marginalized women and men, more equitable norms and institutions, and finally an expansion in women's and men's potential to contribute to and benefit from development. (See Figure 2.) The interconnected and cross-scale nature of these changes underlies the complexity and challenge involved in fostering transformative change; it also defines the transformative character of the changes in that they focus on altering the structures of society. For example, family member attitudes and mindsets need to shift in order to facilitate a change in women's and men's accepted roles, such as in domestic work or paid work outside of the home.

Community opinion leaders and local service providers can stymie or support progress through how strongly they hold on to norms and attitudes that limit women's access to opportunities, such as by upholding mobility constraints. Community norms may influence the willingness of families and individuals to step outside of what is expected of them, due to fear of losing their social support networks (Saito 2007). Private sector and development organizations both have roles in supporting or constraining gender-transformative change. Private sector actors may be blind to women as economic agents, and may bypass their needs and interests in the design and dissemination
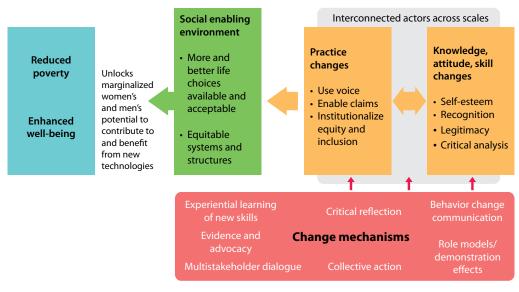
Figure 2. A theory of gender-transformative change.

of technologies. Staff within development organizations need to understand the relevance of and actively support gender integration in order to ensure that it is not viewed as an added work burden but becomes a core part of any activity. Finally, the policy environment and donor approaches, including project timetables and pressures for scale and rapid results can all affect how development is done and the ability to invest in longer-term program approaches that address the structural inequalities underlying many development challenges.

Development actors cannot impose gender-transformative changes upon individuals or people in communities or societies from the outside. A willingness to engage in gender-transformative change processes needs to emerge among those who will bring about and experience the changes—in families, communities, and local and national institutions. Development actors may have a role in sparking such processes through providing information, linking people to different networks, or demonstrating through role models or other means that change is possible, while at the same time not imposing external definitions of what changes are "good." For development actors to play this supporting role, they themselves must buy into the argument that social and gender justice are important in their own right, as well as underlying the achievement of other development goals. For some agencies this is a significant shift in thinking about their scope of action, and one that will involve its own internal transformation process. AAS is no different in this regard.

The dual nature of the gender-transformative change process is reflected in the change mechanisms that AAS plans to implement to catalyze the process. While the program seeks to foster gender-transformative change "out there" by working with people in communities in its five learning hubs, the program also recognizes that this change process will not happen unless AAS staff and partners themselves go through a process of gender-transformative change through which the relevance of gender and social equity to wider program and personal goals is internalized. Central to both processes is transformative learning through critical reflection and action.

Change mechanisms: Critical reflection and more

Developing critical consciousness through transformative learning approaches that are integrated into agricultural and rural development interventions is a core means through which AAS will foster gender-transformative change. These approaches support the use of agricultural interventions as vehicles to enhance the capacities and willingness of participants to critically question how their social context has a role in creating and maintaining poverty and gender inequality (Apgar and Douthwaite 2013). These learning processes must involve program staff as well as program participants.

The gender-transformative change required to overcome gender inequality and create an environment for inclusive development calls for the critical reflection and learning process to engage actors across scales and at deep system levels to address the power relations and social norms underlying inequalities (Argyris and Schon 1978; Brookfield 2000; Kreber 2012). The process must look beyond superficial "problems" to appreciate and engage with their underlying causes. The causes emerge through deeper questioning and critical engagement that build an understanding across actors of the underlying structures of the system and how the structures work to constrain the ability of various groups to fulfill their own potential. This process provides opportunities to identify and engage in actions to redesign the system so that better outcomes are achieved for all. The deepest level of engagement is the space that requires people to reflect upon and shift their own beliefs and ways of viewing the world; for gender-transformative change, this reflects shifts in mindsets regarding what is acceptable for women and men to be, do, own and control. Through combining critical reflection and experiential learning processes, AAS will design and implement its agricultural and rural development interventions in ways that catalyze system change, foster empowerment, and lead to sustained livelihood improvements for the resource-poor and marginalized.

One key research issue around gender-transformative approaches is how to spark critical reflection and action processes that foster gender-transformative change among program staff and participants. A range of mechanisms might accomplish this, with different actor groups in different contexts likely to respond to different triggers. Some options include behavior change communication approaches such as community theater and the use of role models or positive deviance to demonstrate that change is possible; strategic use of evidence of the consequences of gender inequality to motivate behavior change; gaining new skills through experiential learning approaches that build confidence in and demonstrate the capacities of marginalized groups; collective action that builds shared experiences and interests and creates critical mass for change; and multistakeholder dialogue processes through which marginalized groups gain confidence in voicing their needs

and others gain awareness of the life experiences of marginalized groups, and all together identify how their interests might intersect. (See Figure 2.)

Part of the AAS learning agenda is to understand what approaches work across different contexts and actor groups to catalyze change in the interests of the resource-poor and marginalized. The next section describes how AAS is approaching gender-transformative change in two of its hubs, while the final section looks inside of the program and illustrates its approach to fostering organizational culture change as a means to institutionalize attention to gender equity.

Southern Bangladesh Polder Zone[1]

The Southern Bangladesh Polder Zone, the learning hub in which AAS is operating in Bangladesh, covers four districts in the southwest: Khulna, Satkhira, Barguna and Patuakhali. The region faces a range of development challenges and opportunities. Through participatory action research, AAS supports farmers in 16 pilot communities to work with stakeholders across scales to sustainably leverage opportunities, overcome challenges and learn together. Part of this process involves understanding how gender and social inequalities shape opportunities and challenges. The process also involves identifying locally defined means to address the social constraints that limit the range and quality of choices available and acceptable for resource-poor and marginalized women, men and their families.

Working with AAS in the Southern Bangladesh Polder Zone, women and men farmers become co-researchers as they move through a community engagement process to articulate a development vision for the next 10 years and develop an action plan to move towards achieving it. The action plans are operationalized through participatory action research. One priority that has emerged from the community engagement process is improving the productivity of homestead vegetable cultivation, particularly through improving seed quality, seed preservation methods and market access. As women and men both prioritized this issue and are both involved in the work, AAS launched its initial participatory action research cycles around this issue.

Community discussions were facilitated by AAS officers to identify the root causes of the constraints to homestead horticulture. The aim of these discussions was to critically assess women and men farmers' current practices to inform the research design. To support both women and men to participate and to identify how gender relations may affect the issue, separate community discussion sessions were arranged for men and women.

A research support team was formed to support the participatory action research on technical horticulture matters. The support team members also worked with AAS staff to develop their science skills to manage field experiments. A communication and networking system was put in place to support farmer researchers to independently contact research support team members to ask questions and gain technical support. Support team members designed the first action research cycle, which essentially used a farmer field school approach. The women and men farmer researchers learned new farming practices regarding raising beds, sowing techniques and the like. They then put their knowledge into practice through testing different seed varieties, monitoring results, sharing and analyzing findings in gender-separated farmer groups, and applying the learning to ongoing horticulture activities in the homestead.

The research support team gave farmers a data collection format to record their field information. Farmers brought their record books for their respective vegetables to group discussions in which they together analyzed pest and disease management, plant growth, gross production, etc. The farmers also identified the problems they faced and discussed what they had learned during the research cycle.

This analysis opportunity was taken to a different scale in the reflection stage of the participatory action research. AAS organized farmer field days to enable reflection, foster knowledge sharing and learning, and provide the opportunity to scale out the learning and the results of the field experiments to more community members across the 16 communities involved in the program. Three farmers, each representing one of the vegetable crops tested, were selected from each community to speak to the participants about their experiences. They described the research design, objectives, problems and successes for each crop individually, as well as the learning and outcomes of the research. Both women and men farmers were selected to present. It was anticipated that women might feel uncomfortable talking in front of the large

audiences; this was proved wrong. The women selected were confident enough to present their research activities and answer audience questions. Women's public role in the event provided visibility to the women farmer groups, and demonstrated the knowledge they had gained through the participatory action research. This began to challenge existing perceptions that women are not farmers and lack the capacity for scientific learning and leadership.

Emergent gendered outcomes of the participatory action research and farmer field school approach

The social context in Bangladesh set boundaries on how women engaged in AAS. Women had to seek permission from husbands and other family members to participate in research work and to gain access to land, since women tend not to own land or have independent user rights. Women's mobility is also limited by social norms about family honor and by their domestic responsibilities. This means women tend to have very limited access to markets and need to negotiate for permission to participate in groups and other learning and sharing events. Finally, in early stages of the program, there was evidence of husbands not believing that their wives had the capacities to engage in farming research. At the end of the first cycle of participatory action research, there is emerging evidence of small shifts in some of these perceptions and boundaries, which the program needs to build from in its future engagement.

A key emergent gender outcome is women's increasing self-confidence, or "power from within" (see Rowlands 1998), gained through learning new skills, taking on new roles, and interacting with a wider network of people (farmer group, program officers and research support team). The women researchers mentioned that they have gained skills on how to monitor the growth of plants, how to test soil moisture, etc. Many also used record books for the first time. Women's new roles in research plot management have increased their confidence and challenged the perception that men are farmers and women are helpers (Sen and Aktar in press).

Involvement of women as members of the farmer group has given some of them a new sense of identity; now they are called by their own name, not only as their husband's wife. The monthly group meetings also provided space for them to communicate with peers, which they did not have before. The women have mentioned that earlier they did not have scope to discuss production-related issues, such as about vegetable seeds, with their neighbors in a systematic way. In Gojendrapur village, one woman researcher said, "In our monthly meeting we do not discuss only the research-related issues but also exchange and share our sorrows and joys among ourselves."

Involvement of some of the women farmers in processes like organizing meetings, talking with different unknown people and participating in the farmer field day has enabled them to build leadership capacity. Women participants in focus group discussions that were aimed at exploring gendered outcomes of the farmer field school approach shared their new involvement in heavier tasks like plowing, digging, bed raising and fence building, which had been exclusively men's domains, and remarked how these new opportunities were appreciated. This may be recognized as the start of a shift in stereotyped traditional gender roles (Sen and Aktar in press).

Apart from changing perceptions and confidence among the women themselves, growing recognition of women's roles as farmers and researchers is also beginning to appear among others who help to "enact gender" locally. One catalyst for this change has come through the linkages developed between the AAS farmer researchers and the research support team and other stakeholders, as well as through opportunities to share learning with non-AAS farmers. These linkages have increased others' recognition of women's capacities as farmer researchers. Women farmers also specifically noticed a change of attitude among their husbands. Across the villages, some women farmer researchers mentioned that before they became involved in research, their husbands thought that they would not be able to understand the issues related to aquatic agricultural systems (Sen and Aktar in press). The women reported that their husbands had a habit of undermining them. Now their husbands' attitudes have changed. The women farmers believe that this happened due to their husbands' recognition of the value their new skills and knowledge have brought to the family

(Sen and Aktar in press). As one program officer said, "When we go to their husbands for any discussion related to the research, they refer us to their wives, which was not common before. This is quite a change of attitude from the one they had a couple of months ago."

Amplifying emergent outcomes: Systematic gender-transformative approach design

These steps in the long process of gender-transformative change have emerged due mainly to the transformative nature of the participatory action research process itself, which enabled participants to build new skills, gain visible roles in knowledge sharing, and begin to see themselves and their capabilities differently. The next step is to build upon these emergent outcomes and systematically design actions that respond to the core characteristics of gender-transformative approaches, directly engaging with the mindsets and practices that perpetuate gender inequality. Participatory action research led by the women and men farmers will remain a key component, supplemented by actions that engage directly with actors across scales who shape the opportunities available to and acceptable for resource-poor women and men.

Program officers met in an intervention design workshop in June 2014 to identify these actors and their roles in perpetuating gender inequality in women's involvement in commercial homestead horticulture, and identified actions that the program can take through staff and partners to foster change. Some key points to highlight about the transition from the first phase of participatory action research to this more purposefully gender-integrated one include the following:

The need to explicitly engage with the women and men farmers in the participatory action research groups not only as individual farmer researchers, but also as members of families. The farmer field school approach tends to focus largely on technical issues, without much consideration of how solutions to technical constraints (e.g. the need to buy better-quality seeds or other inputs) involve negotiation in the family. To deal with this in the next phase of participatory

action research, the program can more systematically include spouses in AAS activities. It can also be more gender aware in considering what types of issues to bring up for discussion in the farmer groups—including sharing strategies for intra-household negotiation within the women's groups and discussing the benefits of joint decision-making in men's groups. Learning and sharing about successes and challenges in implementing actions emerging from these "social discussions," as well as about vegetable cultivation, can enable the integration of critical reflection on social as well as technical issues within the groups.

The need to motivate increased gender responsiveness among market actors through understanding their existing incentives. Approaches to market systems analysis can assist in developing this understanding. Facilitating participatory market systems analysis and multistakeholder dialogue processes through which the women and men farmers themselves analyze the market system and build links with market actors is a particularly relevant approach. Through this process, the actors can build an understanding of opportunities and constraints in the sector and identify action areas of mutual interest. Working with the participants to ensure that women have the space, confidence and voice to participate in these processes is a means of fostering gender-transformative change.

The relevance of behavior change communication approaches to disseminate information on role models and success stories of gender-transformative change, as well as the need for gender champions who can invest in ongoing engagement and dialogue around gender at the community level, including with key leaders. Altering mindsets and behaviors about gender is a long-term process and needs to emerge from local recognition of a need for change. This recognition is unlikely to come about through short-term, one-off engagements. Sustained interaction is needed with a range of community actors, so that thinking and talking about new gender roles and relations becomes normal and acceptable.

Barotse Hub, Western Province, Zambia

AAS in Zambia is operating in four districts located within the Barotse Floodplain System in Western Province. In the Barotse Hub, "learning by doing" is being conducted with women, men and youths in 10 focal communities. In addition, a wide variety of other stakeholders working within government, national and international nongovernment organizations, agricultural research institutes, the private sector, interest groups, and others are part of this learning process. By interacting with a variety of stakeholders working within and outside the Barotse Floodplain System, AAS aims to achieve impact at a larger scale. Much like in Bangladesh, AAS operating in Barotse adopts a community-driven approach that identifies a development challenge (or an opportunity), facilitates the development of community visions and action plans around people's strengths, and informs research that enables the design of research-in-development interventions to help people tackle the various constraints they face. The Barotse Hub Development Challenge is "to make more effective use of the seasonal flooding and natural resources in the Barotse Floodplain System through more productive and diversified aquatic agricultural management practices and technologies that improve lives and livelihoods of the resource-poor."

The Hub Development Challenge was developed through discussions and consultation processes and formed the basis for developing stakeholder commitment to tackling development challenges, with the goal of increasing household incomes and sustainable food security for all. The goal corresponds to the overall AAS core objectives that frame its research agenda. Through productivity gains, improved natural resource management, better access to markets, transformed gender relations, improved policies, impact at scale, and flourishing knowledge exchange and innovation systems, significant poverty reductions and improved food security can occur for people living in and around the floodplain. The Barotse Hub's specific research-in-development activities, which aim to help catalyze the means to achieve these outcomes, are depicted in the petals of a flower (the Barotse flower) in Figure 3. The multilevel initiatives were identified through community visioning exercises and input from various stakeholders.
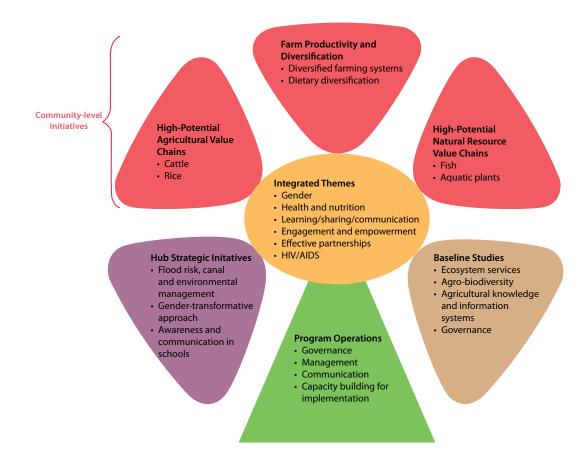

Figure 3. The Barotse Hub research design.

To date, a number of more traditional types of gender research-for-development activities have taken place in the hub. This is because during the development of community visions and action plans, few instances occurred whereby people in the 10 focal communities highlighted retrogressive social and gender issues they would like to see change. Identifying such issues is difficult in many rural contexts in Zambia, as few spaces exist for women and marginalized groups to articulate their concerns and be heard. This is precisely why AAS has both a strategic gender-transformative research focus and one that integrates gender into all programmatic activities. This enables partners and other relevant stakeholders to integrate gender-transformative approaches into the design of their more "technical" activities and provides the program an opportunity to track change processes over time via its more strategic work.

In late 2012, a rapid gender situational analysis was conducted to broadly explore gender and social differences, livelihood activities, norms, beliefs, and customs of women, men and youths in selected AAS focal communities. This research informed the more substantive social and gender analysis that was carried out from September to November 2013 in all 10 focal communities. A gender partner landscaping exercise was also conducted in 2013 to get a sense of the number of organizations working on gender in Western Province. The information gathered was used to generate the participant list for the first dialogue held under AAS on gender-transformative approaches and also enabled the program to identify representatives within partner organizations who could be part of the qualitative methods training for the social and gender analysis and be part of the study team.

The social and gender analysis utilized a participatory research design, facilitating separate focus group discussions with women and men on the topics of changing gender norms, social inequality, well-being, issues related to seasonality, significant events taking place over the past 10 years, and the social and material resources accessible in their areas. The study acts as a benchmark to track how change occurs within such a dynamic system once interventions are implemented, as people living in and around the floodplain system are exposed to a number of drivers of change (e.g. demographic, socioeconomic and climate changes). The data gathered are now being analyzed and used to inform not only the design of research-in-development interventions that aim to support women, men and youths to achieve their community visions, but also the design of community action plans that to date were void of social change activities that address harmful norms and power relations.

Key learning from Barotse Hub

While more extractive types of research are not always welcomed in such a context and may contribute to research fatigue if data is inappropriately gathered, under utilized or not disseminated back to the communities, they do enable a very rich understanding of the social and gender landscapes that are unique in each of the 10 focal communities. For example, some basic demographic information and geo-spatial coordinates were collected on all households in each focal community. When aggregated, these data unambiguously highlight the more-than-typical number of women heading their households. The complementary qualitative data gathered suggest some major social and gender issues that begin to explain these figures. While the reasons are no doubt complex and interrelated, many focus group discussions with both women and men revealed that harmful masculinities (e.g. men's alcohol consumption and engagement with multiple sex partners) partially account for the high divorce rates (37.06%) among women heading their households.

This type of learning provides an opportunity to integrate gender-transformative approaches into the design of technical interventions and activities that employ participatory action research methodologies. Such targeted research-in-development activities could incite critical reflection about the underlying causes of, for example, the exceptionally high number of women heading their households, and thereby begin to facilitate change in behaviors and attitudes that over time can lead to deep and enduring shifts in mindsets and more equitable agricultural development outcomes for women and men.

Setting up research-based activities, conducting trainings and strengthening partnerships to begin operationalizing gender-transformative approaches require a great deal of capacity, time and funding—let alone patience—by all stakeholders who work within the typical three-year program cycle. Capacity building on how to integrate gender-transformative approaches into technical interventions and activities will be the main focus during the latter part of 2014 and into 2015. AAS will work with Promundo-US and one of its local partners, Caritas-Mongu,[2] to integrate a gender-transformative approach into a savings and internal lending program. Specifically, the initiative will engage men in the prevention of all forms of violence against women and girls, promote their increased involvement in caregiving practices, and involve them in ways to support collaboration with women in achieving their strategic life goals. Piloting such a research-in-development intervention that integrates a gender-transformative approach into participatory action research processes to enable women and men to achieve their individual and household goals will be an exciting combination of approaches to test—and if successful, scale out—in the coming years.

Photo Credit: Nixon Chisonga/WorldFish

Woman weeding in her rice field

AAS acknowledges that integrating gender-transformative approaches into agriculture and food security research and development programs can be challenging, particularly when skills, capacities, knowledge and institutional processes have not yet caught up with an organization's gender integration intentions. This section explores these and other challenges to shed light on how programs that envisage applying gender-transformative approaches need to prepare themselves to be able to catalyze transformation "out there."

A key purpose of AAS is to tackle the root causes of social inequality in order to unlock the potential of resource-poor women and men to participate in and benefit from agricultural development efforts. It seeks to do this through engaging women and men (and girls and boys) in processes of reflecting on and seeking change in the social norms they identify as stymieing progress towards locally defined development goals. Achieving this purpose requires broad buy-in and engagement with gender and gender-transformative approaches across the organizations and individuals involved in program design and implementation. Achieving this buy-in and engagement also requires investment in strengthening gender capacities and skills and fostering new gender-aware ways of viewing the world among staff and partners, as well as among women and men in the communities where AAS operates. It also requires nurturing an organizational culture in which principles of gender equality and diversity are valued and embedded in everyday operating practices.

A gendered institutional perspective is a key input into efforts to foster change from within. This perspective integrates attention to regulative, normative and cultural cognitive pillars (Scott 2008) and emphasizes the complex ways in which organizational rules, social norms and practices from different institutional sites intersect to produce and sustain inequalities across the societies with whom we work (Kabeer 1999), including within our own workplaces. Institutions guide human behavior and shape human interaction (North 1990), framing gender roles and relationships and the distribution of power between women and men. They create a taken-for-granted basis of people's behavior and interactions in all spheres of life; through specifying what is accepted or normal, they shape things such as the social and economic opportunities deemed appropriate for women and men, accepted levels of autonomy in making decisions (Bloom et al. 2001), and/or women's and men's capabilities to live the life they value (Sen 1999). In these ways, institutions affect the framing of development priorities and contribute to gender inequalities (de Soysa and Jütting 2007).

Creating opportunities that enable people to change their taken-for-granted beliefs is not easy and requires approaches designed to fit an organization's particular context (Jütting and Morrison 2005). This means that effective organizational change to support social and gender equality requires consistent and active participation from staff, as it is their attitudes and practices that the process seeks to engage with to create opportunities to foster change. Some identified ways to achieve this include articulating clear goals and associated indicators to assess progress towards results; strong leadership from senior management; practical, context-relevant strategies that demonstrate the relevance of gender issues to the day-to-day work of staff; accountability and incentive systems that motivate behavior change; and avoiding a woman-only focus (UNDP 2006).

Integrating gender-transformative approaches within AAS demands deep shifts in social and gendered "habits of mind" (Mezirow 2000) and hearts from all involved—not only natural and social scientists, but also senior leaders, communication officers, administration, finance and human resource professionals, development partners, and women and men (and girls and boys) living in and beyond the communities where the program operates. Such transformation does not arise from comfort; it happens when we encounter adversity and inequalities. Taylor and Jarecke (2009) argue that in order to support individual transformative learning, those helping to facilitate the change effort should provide catalytic experiences

exposing people to alternative beliefs and behaviors. This exposure aims to foster personal transformation that enhances capacities for systemic action (DeTurk 2006). Achieving organizational change therefore requires a multilevel approach that fosters individual change via applied experience in integrating gender and reflecting on the results, as well as system-level changes that demonstrate the value the organization places on transformation. This suggests that the organization cannot merely present the new desired ways of thinking and acting in relation to gender and gender-transformative approaches but also must embed them in organizational values, systems and procedures, since these surroundings play a key role in shaping individual actions and attitudes (Davis et al. 2008).

Building from this understanding of the process needed to support gender-transformative change in organizational culture, WorldFish[3] has invested in a gender capacity development and organizational culture change initiative. Key elements of the initiative include the following:

- recognizing and valuing the different skills, knowledge, learning capacities and interests that people involved in AAS and other WorldFish research programs have, including the resource-poor women and men with whom it works in the hubs, and their common objective of improving development outcomes;
- strengthening and further developing gender capacities and capabilities of individuals and teams;
- fostering the gender-equitable organizational cultures and behaviors needed to create and sustain gender-related capabilities and competencies;
- creating an open and inclusive environment to support learning and sharing in AAS sites.

Gender training approaches separated from application have not yielded good results in agricultural research for development and cannot be the main means of building gender-transformative knowledge in WorldFish. Different models of learning are necessary to influence the informal, socially constructed realities of WorldFish and the communities within which we work. To achieve gender-transformative change, a paradigm shift in

approaches to gender capacity development is needed. In recognition of this, WorldFish is adopting a blended learning approach that combines formal learning of new concepts and skills (learning for action) with practical application (learning in action) and opportunities for reflection (learning from action; Bloom et al. 1956; Krathwhol et al. 1964; Gronlund 1970; Simpson 1972; Wilson and Biller 2012; Figure 4). The approach builds from the understanding that learning processes are not only cognitive, but also rely on performing new skills and re-examining behaviors. This is particularly the case for learning processes associated with gender-transformative change, as they are complex and depend on different factors, many of which are embedded in the specificity of the systems and structures within a context. Inside this context, gender identities intersect with other identities, such as culture, religion and class, to influence how women and men relate to each other and act. Combining learning for, in and from action is central to recognizing and overcoming these influences on attitudes and behaviors.
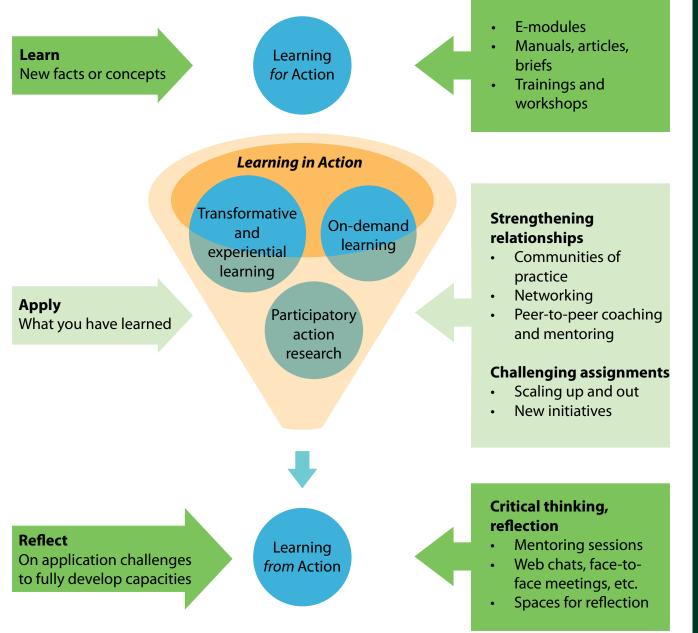
Learn
New facts or concepts

Learning *for* Action

- E-modules
- Manuals, articles, briefs
- Trainings and workshops

Learning in Action

Transformative and experiential learning

On-demand learning

Participatory action research

Apply
What you have learned

Strengthening relationships
- Communities of practice
- Networking
- Peer-to-peer coaching and mentoring

Challenging assignments
- Scaling up and out
- New initiatives

Reflect
On application challenges to fully develop capacities

Learning *from* Action

Critical thinking, reflection
- Mentoring sessions
- Web chats, face-to-face meetings, etc.
- Spaces for reflection

Figure 4. A blended learning approach.

As more research and development programs throughout the world respond to UN Women's call to adopt new gender integration approaches that are transformative and address the structural causes of gender inequalities, there is great need to share learning. There is no "one size fits all" gender-transformative approach that can be applied across contexts. This paper has highlighted some of the ways AAS operating in Bangladesh and Zambia is beginning to develop and apply gender-transformative approaches. The paper has also detailed how AAS (and WorldFish more broadly) aims to facilitate change processes within itself to enable change to occur in the contexts where it operates. The aim is for this initial thinking and learning to contribute to wider knowledge sharing and learning around processes of gender-transformative change. This is part of an effort to generate a robust evidence base on how to catalyze such change processes across diverse contexts, and on their effects on the equity and durability of wider development outcomes.

NOTES

[1] This section draws from material in the April 2014 version of the AAS Learning Report: Research on Summer Vegetable Issues.

[2] Caritas-Mongu is a nongovernment organization in Zambia that implements programs under Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

[3] WorldFish is one of the CGIAR centers implementing AAS. Bioversity and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) are the other two centers helping implement the program.

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