

Gender situational analysis of the Barotse Floodplain



GENDER SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF THE BAROTSE FLOODPLAIN

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INTRODUCTION

Zambia's rivers, lakes and wetlands support extensive agriculture, fisheries and livestock production and contribute to the livelihoods of about 3 million people or 25% of the country's population. These aquatic agricultural systems are particularly important to poor people and provide significant opportunities for agriculture-based economic growth. The majority (72%) of the Zambian population is engaged in agricultural activities, of which almost 65% are women. Globalized market processes, population growth, migration and urbanization that drive changes in aquatic agricultural systems are all gendered. Rural-urban migration, a predominantly male phenomenon in Zambia, has feminized agriculture. According to *World Development Report of 2004*, Zambian women contribute 70% of labor input to agricultural production (Weeratunge et al. 2012).

There is now widespread recognition of the importance of gender and development. This is reflected in the growing prominence of gender strategies for development organizations and their programs, the emergence of compelling approaches for gender integration and the development of indicators for tracking outcomes of research and development interventions. The agricultural research community is increasingly pursuing more substantive approaches to gender, as reflected in the improved gender dimensions of the new CGIAR research programs (Weeratunge et al. 2012).

BACKGROUND

The Barotse Floodplain (BFP), also known as the Bulozzi Plain, is one of Africa's great wetlands on the Zambezi River in the Western province of Zambia. It is a designated Ramsar site,¹ regarded as being of high conservation value. It is the second largest wetland in Zambia after the Lake Bangweulu system, which differs in having a large permanent lake and swamps and a much smaller area that dries out annually (Wetlands International 2007). About 250,000 people live on the plain with a similar number of cattle, migrating to grasslands at the edge of the floodplain when the flood arrives. The floodplain is one of the most productive areas in the country. The Lozi, who are skilled boat builders, paddlers and swimmers, are dependent on the floodplain as it permeates and dictates their economy, society and culture.

There is widespread poverty in Zambia, with almost two-thirds of the population living below the international poverty line (DFID 2009). Western province has the highest poverty level in Zambia; approximately 80% of the population there is regarded as being "poor" and at least 70% of those are women. Approximately 80% of the households in Western province live on small farms and rely on agriculture for their survival. Smallholder mixed farming is at the heart of the economy despite the difficult agricultural conditions. Infertile soils predominate in most of this province as farming systems have traditionally exploited the relatively richer soils found in the plains and wetlands (Concern Worldwide 2009). Women in the Western province hold the key to addressing hunger and malnutrition. They are the growers and providers of food and caretakers of their family. But their reality is rarely understood; their multiple burdens and specific needs are not recognized.

The stakeholders in the BFP identified the Hub Development Challenge (HDC) for the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS): "to make more effective use of the seasonal flooding and natural resources of the Barotse Floodplain (BFP) System through more productive and diversified aquatic agricultural management practices and technologies that improve lives and livelihoods of the poor". They identified major areas of intervention that would help them address this challenge. The challenge requires an interdisciplinary and multi-partner research-in-development approach that focuses on facilitating and supporting multi-scale initiatives that promote more equitable and resilient value chains; improve water management for multiple uses and reduce flood risks; sustainably increase farm productivity and diversification; and improve health, nutrition and food safety. All these processes are gendered (Cole et al. 2014).

Male and female members of households pursue different livelihood strategies, supporting or complementing one another's activities in the pursuit of improved livelihoods and well-being (Weeratunge et al. 2012). However, women and men within the households do not have the same preferences, motivations or aspirations (Mosse 1993). Differences in the gendered division of labor have implications for the nature of poverty, marginalization and vulnerability. Women's disproportionate asset poverty arises from socio-cultural norms that restrict access to, ownership of and control over natural, physical and financial resources (CGIAR 2012).

Women's poverty is characterized by social exclusion and marginalization from social welfare services and safety nets and from decision-making in household, institutional and governance structures that relate to livelihoods, resource management and the functioning of markets (Weeratunge et al. 2012). Women's involvement in community-based aquatic resource management is minimal because of customary power relations and time and mobility constraints due to domestic tasks and pressure to maintain a reputation of decency (CGIAR 2012).

The AAS undertook a rapid gender situational analysis in 2012 as a part of the hub roll-out process to provide social context information that will contribute to the design of a gender transformative research agenda for the hubs. It focused on gender and social differences and livelihood activities of men and women in the communities, and underlying norms, beliefs and traditions.

Four villages in four districts were randomly chosen out of the ten villages that had been targeted for the AAS in the Barotse Floodplain (Table 1) to conduct the gender situational analysis.

District	Village	Silalo ²
Senanga	Nalitoya	Liangati
Mongu	Lealui	Siwito
Kalabo	Mapungu	Ngu'nyama
Lukulu	Kapanda	Mbanga

Table 1. Villages selected for the gender situational analysis.

Qualitative information was collected from the representatives of community members and leaders. The primary method of data collection was focus group discussions (FGDs), which were facilitated using a set of guiding questions. Secondary data was used to complement the findings from the focus group discussions. The questions for community members mainly focused on: (i) gender and livelihoods; (ii) gender norms and expectations; and (iii) the influence of gender norms on the activities undertaken by women and men. The information generated was expected to provide an understanding of how and why women's activities differed from men's; the barriers to men and women participating in more diverse livelihood activities; and local gender norms, attitudes and practices and how they influence the livelihood choices and roles of men and women. It also aimed to gain an understanding of the factors and identify the opinion leaders, that could facilitate change. The questions were designed to elicit information from community leaders on the key events that had affected the communities in the recent past and how different social groups dealt with them; the organizations and actors the different social groups had access to; how the community was governed and whose interests were being represented; and what education and health services were available and who had access to them.

Age and sex specific groups were formed prior to conducting the focus group discussions. In each of the four villages, focus group discussions were held with male and female community leaders; men and women between 18 and 24 years, between 25 and 39 years and over 40 years. Women and men respondents were interviewed separately. Each group had 6 or more people. A total of 32 focus group discussions were conducted in the four villages, each lasting between 2 to 3 hours. A total of 24 females and 24 males were selected in each of the four villages to participate in the focus group discussions, bringing the total number of participants to 192 (96 female; 96 male). The participants were selected (based on their age and sex) by community facilitators with the help of village headmen (*indunas*). The village *indunas* usually mobilize local people for community action as they are respected figures and have local authority through the traditional leadership system. The focus group discussions facilitation team included both women and men to facilitate the interaction with women respondents. The focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were analyzed manually.

GENDER DIMENSIONS OF LIVELIHOODS IN THE BFP AND THE INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL NORMS

The BFP is predominantly an agrarian economy. The 'tri-economy' includes floodplain agriculture, with maize, millet and cassava being the main crops grown, animal husbandry on seasonal communal pastures, and extensive (seasonal) fisheries. In some locations irrigation-based rice cultivation is expanding. Both men and women engage in farming and fishing activities.

According to Jiggins et al. (1992), the majority of women in the Western province farm to feed their family and earn cash to meet their basic needs. A large proportion of households is headed by women, especially in the poorer and more remote rural areas, where agriculture is the sole basis of survival. Few sources of income besides farming are available to women in western Zambia. The sale of mats and baskets, wild fruits and mushrooms, bananas, mangoes and small-scale fishing activities provide occasional income for some. Studies show that women spend their income on, in order of importance, food, clothing and schooling for their children. By far the most common source of cash for women is the brewing and sale of beer. On average, women

brew beer four to five times a year, mainly in the dry season (Women for Change 2011).

Table 2 maps the livelihood activities that men and women in BFP engage in. There were no significant differences reported amongst the various locations or between various age groups of men and women.

What we find here is the usual pattern of women growing crops (beans, tubers) for home consumption and men growing cash crops (rice, cotton etc.) as in most of rural Africa. Rice farming, fishing and mat making are perceived as the most profitable enterprises amongst those mentioned in Table 2. Both men and women now grow rice and vegetables for sale whilst previously women did not grow rice and men did not grow vegetables. Crop cultivation, especially rice, has gradually gained importance in BFP and is considered profitable. The consumption of rice has been increasing and the Mongu variety of rice (*supa rice*) is gaining popularity. Men and women hope to expand rice cultivation in the coming years.

Women only	Men only	Both men and women
Farming cassava, sweet potatoes, groundnuts	Farming millet, cotton	Farming and selling maize, rice and vegetables
Fishing using baskets	Fishing using nets	Selling fish
Selling fruits (bananas and oranges) and seasonal produce such as mushrooms, mangoes and wild fruits (<i>mawawa and mahululu</i>)	Carpentry	Basket and reed mat making and sales
Bartering cassava for fish	Building houses and fences	Cutting and selling reeds - <i>mashasha</i>
Making and selling brooms	Blacksmith (making hoes, axes, knives etc.)	Small business such as sale of air time ³ , groceries
Brewing and selling local beer	Selling logs, fiber and poles	
Selling scones	Charcoal-making and sales	
Wage labor on other people's farms (for cash or in kind payments)	Carving mortars, canoes	
Knitting	Rearing and selling cattle and milk	
Hair plaiting	Paddle canoes to transport people	
	Loaning of cattle for soil improvement and ploughing in other fields	

Table 2. Livelihood activities performed by men and women for income and food generation in study areas.

The high incidence of HIV/AIDS and related sickness and mortality is reported to be a major issue affecting labor availability and productivity across all types of households and social groups. There is also a high concern for decreasing natural resources, especially fish, which has implications for sustainability and viability of local livelihoods. Floods and changing climatic patterns are some of the factors affecting employment and incomes significantly in BFP for all social groups.

The differences in the livelihood activities that men and women pursue appear to be significantly influenced by social norms, beliefs and traditions. However, there is evidence that some of these are changing. It appears that rapidly changing economic and social environments and exposure through media is driving these changes. However, further insights are needed to understand the factors that are triggering these changes.

Men are regarded as superior to women in society and are the heads of their family. They are expected to provide shelter, food and income for their family through farming, cattle herding and fishing. They clear the fields and plough; herd and look after the cattle; train the bulls to plough; transport and sell agricultural produce and log big trees for fuelwood. They are also considered to be the leaders of the community. Women carry out household chores such as cooking, preserving food, cleaning, taking care of family members including the sick and disabled, collecting drinking water and fuelwood, washing clothes, bathing and feeding children. In addition, they also perform farming activities such as planting seeds, fertilizer application, weeding and harvesting in the main fields and in their own fields. They also engage in community activities such as cooking at funerals and weddings. They brew beer for home consumption and sale. In most of the focus group discussions there was consensus that men can also cook, fetch fuelwood, do weeding while women can herd cattle and plough with oxen. Women are culturally expected to attend to all of the household chores, to participate in farming in the family plot and in their own fields and to take part in community work.

Both the men and women who were interviewed did not associate women with certain roles and activities due to the lack of physical strength required to do the job (such as paddling boats and using fishing nets); security concerns (fishing

in deep waters, cattle herding in the bush etc.); knowledge/training which they received as children (“girls learn from their mothers and boys from their fathers”); remunerative nature of enterprises/activities – women engage in less profitable activities which men are not interested in, and religious beliefs.

Religious beliefs influence gender roles “Bible/God determined the roles”

“Ladies come from the rib of the man and cannot consider themselves to be equals of men”

“Even the bible says that what men are using for work should not be used by women. So men were created to use fishing nets, while women were created to use the fishing basket. And the same bible says something about dressing, in Deuteronomy 22: 5 that what a man puts on should not be put on by a woman and when women are pulling the nets with their husbands.”

Source: Focus Group Discussions

Men did not engage in much cultivation earlier. “It was believed that a man who was found digging or cultivating was not a normal man.” However, the extent of cultivation is increasing and men are engaging in this. This could be due to the increasingly profitable nature of the enterprise compared to other livelihood activities.

Brewing and selling local liquor is a substantial and significant source of women’s income. However increasing rates of alcoholism among young men and women has been highlighted in all study areas and by all the participants as a major factor that negatively affects their lives and future.

Gender roles in the brewing and selling of alcohol

“Men do not brew or sell liquor as men who buy liquor prefer to buy it from women and, women are more hygienic and patient.”

“It is less remunerative than fishing, if not men might brew and sell liquor.”

Source: Focus Group Discussions

Men in BFP communities rear and sell cattle, but women cannot own large livestock. This norm might have arisen due to the association of hardship associated with large animals and the security concerns when they herd cattle for grazing in the bush. Men are members of dairy cooperatives that operate in the area, and women sell the milk (see box for some interesting perceptions about why men do not sell milk).

Gender roles in the selling of milk

“The job of selling milk is not suitable for men; imagine going round from door to door shouting, Milk! Milk! It is not possible for men. Even some customers may find it hard to buy from a man. From sunrise to sunset just selling milk, No! No! That is not suitable for men; Men are shy to do that work. It is wasting time. It is much better to sell fish.”

“Mostly men seem to shy away from this activity because of the low income it generates, for example by selling sour milk; a woman can earn US\$ 11.50 in two days. But when a man goes fishing just for one day, he can fetch US\$ 57, US\$ 77 or even US\$ 96. Because of this men seem not to concentrate very much on selling milk.”

“Men sell milk wholesale to women while the women resell the milk on retail basis. In other words, men and women are selling milk together.”

Source: Focus Group Discussions

Men fish using nets in deep waters. Women use baskets to fish in shallow waters and when the floodwater recedes. This has implications for the amount and quality of catch. Women mainly sell fish which their husbands bring or which they buy from other fishers who fish in the rivers. They often barter the cassava they grow for fish. The communities interviewed mentioned that women do not use nets as they are heavy and difficult for them to handle and, going into deep waters is dangerous. There are also some beliefs associated with women going into deep waters to fish. However, the focus group discussions highlighted significant changes in norms and acceptance of women going out fishing into deep waters and at nights with their husbands. “Women paddling is not a bad omen anymore”.

Gender roles in fishing

“If a women fishes with a net, she cannot give birth.”

“Men have a ‘right’ to fish. Women fish only if they are stubborn.”

Source: Focus Group Discussions

GENDERED ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER PRODUCTIVE RESOURCES TO SUPPORT LIVELIHOODS

The focus group discussions findings showed there are differences in access to and control over resources between women and men and within various groups of women.

Land. In Western province, customary systems of tenure determine access and use of land. The Barotse Royal Establishment, the traditional authority for the Lozi people administers land rights. The *litunga* is the owner of the land and grants land rights to his subjects via his representatives; the district chiefs, *indunas* (district councilors) and the elected village headman. As the province is sparsely populated, it is easy for both men and women to obtain land for cultivation and grazing, but there is localized competition for plots in the best and most accessible areas (Concern Worldwide 2011). Right to land is determined by residence and land is also granted to newcomers, whether or not they are Lozi. However, women are not granted land tenure in their own right, land is accessed through the male line through the father or husband (Concern Worldwide 2011). As in many African societies, in western Zambia a woman's status and her access to land and other resources is based on marriage, lineage and her ability to bear children.

Men have full access and control to family land; married women access land through their husbands, while single women, divorcees and widows have access to and control of land in their own right as heads of households. The majority of married women lack access to land and water rights. In addition, even when women are able to access land, lack of ownership creates a disincentive to invest time and resources in sustainable farming practices, which in turn lowers production and results in less income and food for the household. Most women in the focus group discussions complained that the land accessed through their husbands is not adequate as the husband decides on the size allocated to them. When asked who controls land, the majority of the women who had access to land either through inheritance, purchase or renting, said they

had full control of the land. Women's access to and control over land is determined by their relationships to men as daughters, wives and sisters, but particularly as wives, as every woman is expected to get married.

Labor. In this part of Zambia, the basic constraint to farm production is shortage of labor, particularly women's labor. Women make up the main agricultural workforce in Western province, and men and other family members usually can demand the use of women's labor. While some men help women to clear land for food cropping, men usually spend most of their time tending their cattle, fishing, looking after their food plots and cash crops. The women in the focus group discussions said that their work was light and routine but time-consuming, while the work of men was described by the women as heavy but one-off. For example, ploughing is seasonal and during the rest of the year men occasionally do various jobs such as cutting of logs for fuelwood and mending houses.

The unbalanced division of labor between women and men in food production relegates women to growing crops for home consumption and men focus on crops which generate cash and are for home consumption. Because of the need for cash to deal with many competing needs, women often sell some of the food crops that were meant for home consumption. Men rarely help women with their crops; women help men with their main crops as these are seen as being of benefit to the family. Men do the ploughing, but some married women plough their own fields or will pay for the labor to do so. Women in Senanga mentioned that they usually have a small field where they grow their own crops such as groundnuts and sweet potatoes; those with brothers or husbands get help from them, while single women sometimes pay for additional labor.

Farm inputs. Women smallholder farmers cannot afford to buy seeds and fertilizers. Even when poor smallholder farmers received input from the Government of Zambia, they still had

problems paying their share as they needed ZMW 30,000 in transport fees for the agricultural supplies which many poor farmers (especially women) could not afford. Women farmers said that many women work on other farmer's fields in order to earn money to pay their household share. In many cases, women reported that their husbands spend the saved money on alcohol. The Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) requires one to be a member of a cooperative and pay a deposit before accessing the subsidy, and as a consequence most women farmers are left out of the cooperatives. The FISP mainly focuses on maize, while other crops mainly grown by women (e.g. groundnuts) are not supported in terms of seed provision. Those who wait for the maize seed are forced to plant late and the fertilizer is also applied late. This results in low yields and poor food insecurity (SIDA 2009). Almost all the farmers and stakeholders interviewed mentioned the late delivery of inputs as a major problem which affected farmer productivity. The male and female leaders groups complained about the poor delivery of inputs. Farming implements form part of the asset base of the small-scale farmers. Our findings confirmed that most women do not have access to farming tools. Most of the women who participated in the focus group discussions did not own a plough and/or oxen. This was reported as a major constraint by most women, who said they use hand hoeing to prepare their fields.

Credit/Finance. Women have less access to credit and other financial resources compared to men. Most of the women interviewed had never accessed credit in their individual right but have only done so as members of a women's group. There appears to be a high dependency on the fertilizer subsidy by female and male small-scale farmers and have since neglected some of the other important ways of financing their inputs. Some of them confessed that they had bad experience with loans and vowed never to get loans. Very few had ever attempted to access loans. Some said they lacked information while others confessed that they were afraid to get loans because of high interest rates and that farming, especially of maize, was not profitable.

This is a common problem, not only for women in Western province but in Zambia as a whole.

Appropriate rural credit and financial services for the poor especially in the study area are insufficient and do not cater for the needs of poor farmers especially women. If this was available, the women could be encouraged to save cash earned from sale of farm produce during bumper harvests and use it to buy food during scarcity. Household members lack knowledge or simply do not qualify for loans from conventional financial institutions. If credit could be made available at the right time (for example during planting seasons), then poor farmers, especially women, could utilize it to improve their farming activities and effectively deal with the problem of hunger. There are no outlets within the villages that sell inputs and people have to travel long distances on foot to buy these inputs from trading areas which are all located within urban areas and these traders sometimes sell inputs that might not be suitable within the soils in their areas.

Access to cooperatives/collectives. As noted by Maal (2011), farmers need to own their land in order to be eligible for membership of the farmers associations and cooperatives. As a member of a cooperative they can receive support from government programs. Since female farmers usually do not own the land they cultivate, they also fail to access support from Government of Zambia's different support schemes for their food security. A farmer needs to pay about US\$10–20 to join a farmer's association.

Knowledge, information and advisory services. Women often lack access to information about various methods of agriculture and about resources from which they could benefit. Many female farmers are illiterate and they find it difficult to understand and adopt the new information they get. Most information and resources is received through one affiliating themselves to a group such as a farmer's association or cooperative.

Women farmers have generally been excluded from the target audience of agricultural extension education programs, although the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock's extension service is currently implementing programs targeted at both female and male-headed households. In the areas under study, both women and men were equally denied

access to extension services in villages where there were no extension agents. In certain communities such as Mwandi (Kalabo) no extension services were provided. In many other places in Senanga, Kalabo and Mongu, the extension officer lived in the urban area and visited the communities infrequently. The accessibility of extension services to women farmers was restricted overall, as most women could not attend meetings because of their heavy workload. From the discussions held with men and women groups, it was revealed that women's participation was low at meetings, particularly in the contact group meetings adopted by the current approach of the extension services. If extension agents were more gender sensitive they would be aware of the need to hold these meetings at times when women were likely to be less busy with household chores.

Access to extension and training services by both women and men in the four villages was described as insufficient. There are few institutions that train women and men to be more productive in agriculture. The area to be covered by one extension is usually vast with very limited resources. Moreover, extension services target mainly farmers that grow cash crops such as maize, cotton and sunflowers. Women who focus on growing groundnuts, sweet potatoes and beans received little

attention from the extension officers. Most women in the focus group discussions said that they did not have access to extension services for their crops and had no knowledge of the varieties they were supposed to plant. The extension officers interviewed said they faced a number of challenges in reaching all of the farmers in their area, such as understaffing, lack of transport and huge areas to cover. Priority was given to farmers who grew cash crops.

Most women said that their daily heavy workloads did not usually allow them to be absent from home to attend residential training. Since culturally men are not expected to cook for their families, most men do not have skills in food preparation. Thus, men have difficulties preparing food for the children when the mother is away. Although some men can prepare food for their families, the quality does not usually match that of their wives.

Markets. The lack of markets situated close to villages is another issue that was identified for both men and women who need to cover large distances to sell their products (rice, fish, timber, fuel and cassava). In the focus group discussions, it was highlighted that the lack of nearby markets had led to exploitation by 'briefcase buyers' who arrive in the village and buy their produce at very low prices.



Beatrice Mwala stands in her vegetable garden in the Barotse Floodplain, Zambia

Table 3 presents the division of roles in the household amongst girls, boys, men and women. It was gathered from the study areas where there are certain activities in the household or community that women are expected to do. Cultural norms and ethnicity play a key role in stipulating specific roles for women.

Food preparation takes a lot of women’s time. The staple food (maize, millet, sorghum or cassava) is pounded into flour and then consumed as a thick porridge. Hammer mills are rare and hand pounding is arduous so whenever possible, households prefer to sell their crops and buy milled breakfast meal (refined maize flour). Because of the time required for processing by hand, rice is generally processed using grinding mills. But for those with limited access to mills due to lack of cash, they rely on their traditional way of processing by pounding using a pestle and mortar. Generally most of the rice produced is sold. Women also devote their time to other domestic chores, such as collecting water and child care.

Decision-making in households

In the focus group discussions, it was revealed that decision-making at household

level continues to be male-dominated in all economic activities, even in those where women contribute most of the labor such as agriculture. Some women in Senanga expressed the desire for bylaws that would prevent men from risking household food security by selling food reserves. The process of decision-making in a family has an important bearing on the intra-household dynamics and welfare of the household, especially with regard to food security and nutrition. The husbands as heads of households make decisions in consultation with their wives. However, the findings confirm that men dominate the decisions and women are regarded as subordinate to men. Women’s voices are rarely heard, although in some cases men use the ideas that had been earlier proposed to them by their wives and claim credit for them (FGD in Lukulu). The decision-making processes within the household also impacts on the distribution and allocation of resources and responsibilities between household members, which has profound implications for the welfare of the household.

Most (88%) of the women indicated that they had access to income, but not full control of it. A total of 94% of the women reported that their husbands had full control of the income from agricultural outputs.

Girls	Boys	Women	Men
Cooking	Herding cattle	Cooking	Cutting down trees for land preparation
Washing dishes	Hunting	Farming	Hunting
Sweeping	Making drums for music	Collecting grass for thatching	Building houses and fences
Fetching water	Farming	Caring for children, the sick and the aged	Fishing
Fetching fuelwood		Pounding	Paddling a boat
Farming		Washing and bathing children	Clearing virgin land (cutting down trees)
Pounding maize		Collecting wild fruits and green vegetables	

Table 3. Gender roles and division of labor among boys, girls, women and men in a household.

Relaxing norms

Traditional African cultural beliefs and practices colluded in many instances with religion to cause, maintain and perpetuate gender inequity and the disempowerment of women, and the rejection of many aspects of gender equality. Although traditional identities, norms, roles and behaviors exist and continue to “be a determinant in the cultural and social perpetuation of poverty”, the participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) show clearly that tradition is not static. Economic hardship is forcing poor people to adapt to new environments and, in turn, these adaptive actions are causing change in gender roles in households in both subtle and obvious ways. Under increasing economic pressure, men in many parts of the world have lost their traditional occupations and jobs, and women have been forced to take on additional income earning tasks while continuing their domestic tasks. These changes have touched core values about gender identity, gender power and gender relations within poor households, and anxiety about what is a “good woman” or a “good man” seems pervasive. Values and relations are being broken, tested, contested and renegotiated in silence, pain and violence. What is striking is that despite widespread changes in gender roles, traditional gender norms have shown remarkable tenacity, leaving families struggling to meet the often contradictory demands (World Bank 2000).

Men and women in the village of Lealui in Mongu district, where multiple NGOs operate seemed to be more open and accepting of changes in social norms. Interestingly, everyone talked about how roles were changing or needed to change due to ‘gender’, demonstrating the engagement of communities by NGOs and other programs to raise their awareness.

Ashby et al. (2008) state that “women who are confident in their ability to assert their rights are better placed to successfully negotiate new roles—and having assumed those roles, are more likely to find the incentive to invest their time and assets in productive, income generating activities”. Women who have marketable skills and access to resources and services that relate to their livelihoods are better placed to respond to economic opportunity

and are more likely to command a sufficient proportion of household income to give them leverage in their household’s economic decisions. Yet experience shows that gender norms are not immutable and that they are indeed subject to negotiation—particularly as economies change and some traditional roles no longer provide workable sources of livelihoods. In such situations, new roles have to be defined.

Men and women in the focus group discussions stated that now both men and women have now become more business minded with most men taking on lucrative businesses such as making poles and fiber, logging and fishing while women are more involved in selling brooms, reed mats, fish and beer. Women were less involved in household chores as they were most of the time away from their homes selling things. This has contributed positively to most women being less dependent on men for their livelihoods. Rice is a crop that has helped both men and women who are growing it in places such as Mongu and Senanga, to increase their household income. Married women are still disadvantaged, as they cannot take on certain lucrative businesses such as fishing using a net, paddling and ferrying goods for business, thus making them more dependent on their husbands.

Usually when a man is seen to be doing women’s tasks, other members of society regard him as a coward, docile or stupid. When a woman does what is presumed to be a man’s task, such a woman is regarded as too tough or being “more than a woman”. The gender roles within a given social context can be flexible or rigid, similar or different, or complementary or conflicting. Both women and men are involved to differing degrees and in different ways in reproductive, productive and community management activities and play roles within social and political groups. Their involvement in each activity reflects the gender division of labor in a particular place at a particular time.

In BFP, there are mixed perceptions about whether men and women can or should change their socially determined roles. While a single woman doing men’s activities is viewed as someone who wants to make a living and sustain herself, a married woman doing roofing, fishing using nets or building a house is perceived as a victim, mentally ill or married

to a weak man. A married man doing women's activities such as cooking is seen as someone who has been secretly given some concoction by a woman or is a greedy man (*wa mango*).

Changing views on gender roles

"Men and women are exchanging roles these days as a result of gender."

"The Bible stipulates the different roles of men and women and there is no need for change in gender division of labor."

"Unlike in the past, both men and women have now become more business minded with most men taking on lucrative businesses."

"A good wife these days is someone who can earn some money to take care of the family."

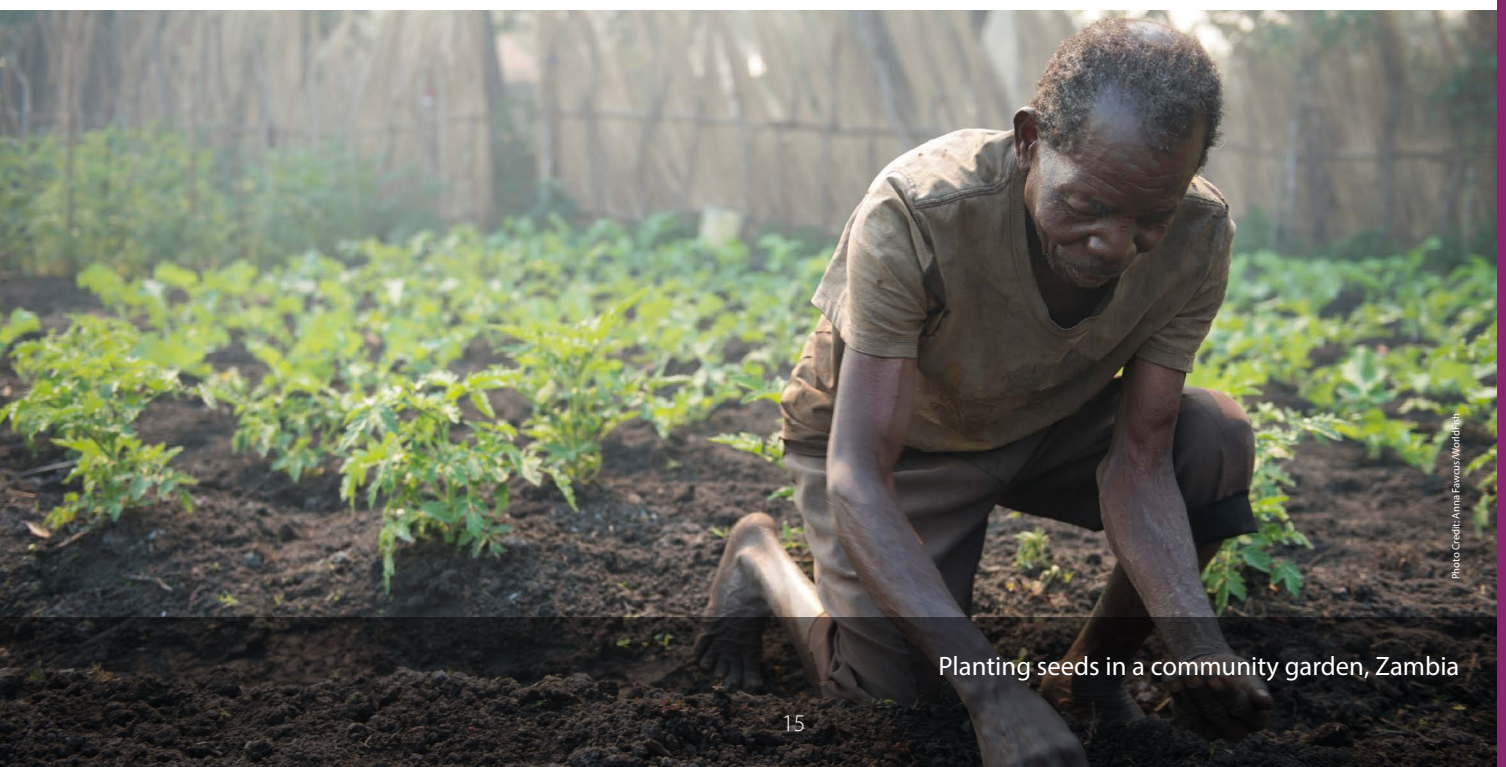
"It is just that people don't see such things happening but when one starts doing that, others will follow doing it."

"Maybe when we meet like this, men also listen and afterwards when you see that he is beginning to change, then you remind him that we have just been taught this and you are changing already. How can we work together if there is no unity in us."

Source: Focus Group Discussions

Some quote examples of changing norms that they have observed in other places and see them as being positive. Training is perceived to help in bringing about these changes.

The use of the word gender quite frequently reflected the level of sensitization efforts in the communities. However, it also came across that they equate it to being influenced to play nontraditional roles. However, it was felt that if men and women work together, household earnings could be increased and the time spent to earn this money could be reduced.



Planting seeds in a community garden, Zambia

GENDER ROLES IN THE COMMUNITY

In all of the four villages, there was poor participation of women in leadership and decision-making. Most of the women interviewed explained that women participated at the community level through meetings and community work. However, when queried on how they participated in the meetings, most of them said very few women spoke out or made decisions. Women and especially young women, rarely spoke or raised their voices in the presence of men. Most leadership positions at the community level were held by men. In the cooperatives, men took on the leadership roles and took charge of all administrative processes whereas the women were just members and paid membership fees. Most committees were dominated by men and women's participation in decision-making in most committees at community level was minimal. Most women are socialized not to speak in front of men or to be confident, hence very few women participated in leadership and decision-making positions at any level. It was common practice for most community meetings to be chaired by men while women sat in as listeners. The women were mostly the last to arrive at meetings and sat in a group far away from the person chairing and at a distance from men.

The presence of community organizations such as women's clubs under Ministry of Community Development, women groups in churches, farmer's associations and cooperatives in some places was mentioned during the focus group discussions. It was noted that very few men participated in organizations that are self-sustaining such as savings groups. Most men are active in the cooperatives and other organizations especially when there is direct financial or material gain; the voluntary work is left to the women and children.

Women hold traditional leadership position only when there is no male available to take up this role. In Senanga, two villages are being led by women. In the male and female focus group discussions it was cited that women can be village heads, but only because they are the 'oldest' caretakers who remain after their male relatives passed away. They are in essence 'leading' a few households that are

related. These villages are typically comprised of a few households which are mainly made up of women and children. In this case they have very little influence other than being 'consulted' by their family members out of regard for their age.

However, women are very involved in voluntary activities at community level to ensure the provision and maintenance of collective resources and infrastructure e.g. water points, roads and health services. This is because deficient public goods and services affect them to a greater extent. Yet, they often have less access to decision-making. The roles of women, girls, boys and men at household are also reflected in the community in which they live.

Most roles such as digging and removing mud during communal canal clearing work are mainly left for the men and boys, while the women concentrate on preparing food for the people working and the cut weeds on the edges and throwing away the debris excavated by men. It was interesting to note that during our community meetings, men equally participated in preparation of meals and their major role was preparation of *nshima* in big pots and fetching fuelwood while the women's role was mainly preparing *relish*, fetching water and cleaning up cooking utensils. This is typical of most work that involves the community at large.

When asked in the focus group discussions why there were very few women in many decision-making bodies or key institution such as teaching and health, both men and women stated that most girl children were dropping out of school due to pregnancies and early marriage, thus increasing the literacy gap between men and women. In addition, they reported low self-esteem and confidence amongst women (see box).

Low confidence among women

- “Women’s leadership potential is undermined by men and they have no confidence in themselves.”
- “She does a good job as a leader, but the first people to discourage her are the fellow women.”
- “Men generally think that women are not wise.”

Source: Focus Group Discussions

women and men not only provides a better quality of life for women and their daughters, but also enhances their opportunities to shape and design public policy, practice and expenditure so that their interests are recognized and addressed (IISD 2011).

Inequality in the public arena can often start within the family when power relations between men and women are unbalanced due to discriminatory attitudes and practices within the family spheres. The unequal division of labor and responsibilities within households based on unequal power relations also limits women’s potential to find the time and develop the skills required to participate in decision-making in wider public forums. A more equal sharing of those responsibilities between



Community meeting of canal clearers, Zambia

In terms of their outlook in relation to livelihoods, the men and women in focus group discussions mentioned that improved infrastructure, transport and connectivity (communication) in recent times is expanding their opportunities and horizons. There is generally a more positive attitude towards small businesses. The aspirations of young men and women (age group 18–24) are presented in Table 4. Young women do not see farming as a livelihood activity. This could be due to the current risky and nonprofitable nature of farming, the limited opportunities that exist and the challenges women face in accessing and controlling productive resources and their use. It was also mentioned by men and women in the older age groups that, “young men and women of these days do not like to do labor intensive jobs”.

Young women	Young men
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Small businesses and trade • Jobs in towns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More farming and fishing • More small businesses (shops) and linked to urban areas • Employment in urban areas

Table 4. Aspirations of young women and men in BFP.

In the FGD for adult men and women, it was reported that most young girls and boys were taking on household and livelihood roles that are less intensive and do not demand so much of people’s time such as selling air time, casual labor, or beer and abandoned agriculture related activities, canal clearing and making baskets, reed mats, etc. which take much time and are labor intensive. This changing pattern is mainly seen among young people, (both male and females). During the focus group discussions for young women in Lukulu, they shared that most young men in the village even opt to walk a distance of 90 km (to and from village) to buy air time and diesel for a margin as low as US\$ 3–4 as they prefer faster moneymaking ventures.

This was verified by the focus group discussions for young people who attested that that very few boys knew how to prepare bulls for ploughing, and few girls knew how to make clay pots. The men perceived women as wanting too much leisure time at the expense of producing food. This perceived change in roles, especially among females, is seen to be putting more pressure on the men to use the resources they make to help the women look clean and attractive. It is interesting to note that most of the new income generating activities were for nonfarm activities and that one respondent reduced his agricultural related activities rather than expanding. Of those who started new activities, the majority started small businesses that require relatively little capital investment. Since lack of capital was cited as one of the major constraints that inhibited expansion of income generating activities among women, investment in other income generating activities could be promoted if access to credit is improved.

The focus group discussions for male and female adults viewed the future of female children as being bleak due to the traditional values and norms such as initiation ceremonies, marital counseling and girls having children outside of marriage. Others held the view that girls and boys who are serious about education will have a bright future. The men in the focus group discussions in Kalabo highlighted the fear that the life expectancy of women would reduce to 30 years because of the practice of prostitution that increased their risk of contracting HIV. Almost all participants in the focus group discussions attributed improved technology, promotion of human rights, high unemployment levels and abuse of alcohol and drugs as negatively affecting the future of the youth.

A women’s focus group discussions in Senanga highlighted the concern about gradual depletion of natural resources such as fish and timber and how this portrayed a bleak future for the youth in BFP. This focus group discussions added that their children’s livelihood options would be limited as a result of the depletion of resources and they will have to find alternative sources of living. The use of illegal fishing gears and unsustainable harvesting of natural resources

such as trees and grass are worrying both adult males and fears as their children will find it hard to find resources close to their villages and will have to travel long distances to search for these resources.

Some trends in the institution of marriage and the deteriorating social fabric were mentioned during the focus group discussions that were thought to affect the future of the youth. There has been a significant reduction in the age of marriage for both boys and girls in the communities in BFP. There is a very high incidence of teenage pregnancies and very young single mothers. Even though there is increasing awareness of the importance of education for girls and most girls go to school now, the dropout rate is also high due to pregnancies. The tradition of initiation ceremonies and premarital counseling is slowly being lost. Increasingly parents are not consulted before marriage. There is a widely held perception (especially among girls and women) that marriage rates will be lower in the future and marriage will lose its significance. It was felt that marriage is becoming more of a contractual agreement than a lifetime commitment.

Changing perceptions of marriage

“The importance of marriage just like God created it is that men and women should live together so that they help one another. A woman cannot live alone because she cannot do a man’s job and men cannot do women’s jobs.”

Source: Focus Group Discussions

The importance of marriage among women and men is viewed differently, with both young and old women seeing marriage as not being important anymore because most men have become unfaithful to their partners and less responsible. High education levels and women’s involvement in different moneymaking ventures are now being attributed as the other reasons why marriage is considered as not important anymore. Most women we talked to said that they are now accessing education services, are enlightened about human rights and have access to capital which has made them self-supporting and less dependent on men and reduced their need for marital relationship.

The men felt that women are now getting married without any bride price and are the ones who are now initiating sexual relationships with men in exchange for money. The men mentioned that “women are only looking for money – they will sleep with anyone who can buy them cosmetics!” Both the men and women’s groups mentioned that marriages broke down often these days because there is “no mutual respect among couples”. Overall, a very bleak and pessimistic outlook about future of girls (prostitution) and boys (criminalization) was painted by the men and women who participated in the focus group discussions.

There is a strong perception of increasing alcoholism, immorality and promiscuous behavior amongst young men and women. It was mentioned that the “Bible allows men to marry as many women as they can”. Women’s dressing in Western attire and in indecent clothing was mentioned by men of all age groups as a negative trend. Strong sentiments were also expressed about the negative influence of television, movies and cell phones.

According to the participants in the focus group discussions, generally poverty is not related to ethnicity or tribe in the BFP. However, it might be positively correlated to family size. Some felt that young men are generally the worse off as they are not gainfully employed or spend their money on alcohol and smoking (Mapungu). It was mentioned that old people and large families (*kapanda*), single women (widows and divorcees), women-headed households, orphans, sick and drunkards (*lealui*) are the most vulnerable groups due to lack of resources and lack of capacity to use the available resources. These groups cannot meet their basic needs and amenities such as shelter, clothing and adequate food (Mapungu). Most of the individuals in these groups in Mbanga and Liangati are food insecure and are malnourished. The number of meals people eat in a day is an indicator of their vulnerability (Mapungu).

These groups are characterized by limited ownership or access to productive assets such as oxen, ploughs and implements (Mapungu). They might own land, but do not have access to inputs and might not till their land (Mapungu, Lealui). Wealthier households own chickens, cattle, shops, larger landholdings and hammer mills (Mbanga). They also used to own pigs, but they were sold or stolen after people became aware of swine fever (Liangati).

CONCLUSION

Given the extensive participation of women in all aspects of agricultural production and the significant contributions they make, understanding gender and social relations in which they are embedded is critical. While the fact that productivity of farms operated by women is lower due to their limited access to productive resources and services is well known and acknowledged, much less is known about the underlying causes in the form of social and gender relations that lead to this situation. Gender analysis is necessary to understand the relationship between gender, agricultural production, persistent poverty, social exclusion and vulnerability. This analysis, based on information gathered from both female and male farmers of different age groups, attempts to provide a glimpse into aspects that have not been widely studied in agricultural research.

The knowledge generated here is expected to shape the planned research interventions in AAS that aim to reduce gender disparities in access to resources, but also address social and behavioural change at various levels to tackle the causes of these inequities.

NOTES

- ¹ Ramsar sites are wetlands that are deemed to be of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (international treaty for the conservation).
- ² Silalo is an administrative area under the traditional administrative system and is headed by the Silalo *induna*.
- ³ Air time is equivalent to call credit for mobile phones.

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