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# EXPLORING THE INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN POVERTY, GENDER INEQUALITY AND RURAL MASCULINITY: A CASE STUDY FROM AN AQUATIC AGRICULTURAL SYSTEM IN ZAMBIA

*Many Zambians rely on wetlands, lakes, and rivers for their livelihoods. Social norms and power relations restrict access to natural resources provided by these aquatic agricultural systems for certain social groups, thus differentially impacting livelihood security (especially for women). A gender transformative lens and the concept of the “masculine rural” helps exploring poverty in the Barotse Floodplain in western Zambia. We use qualitative data to investigate whether poverty is a consequence of women’s limited access to natural resources or a cause that further exacerbates gender inequalities. Sorting cause from consequence in such a context may help inform policies and research and development interventions that aim to facilitate equitable conditions for women who depend on resources provided by aquatic agricultural systems to secure their livelihoods.*

*Keywords:* aquatic agricultural systems, gender inequality, poverty, rural masculinity, Zambia

This article aims to contribute to ongoing discussions about the links between poverty and gender inequality. It uses qualitative data collected from rural areas in a complex ecosystem called the Barotse Floodplain in Western Province, Zambia that spans about 550,000 ha with a wetland cover of around 1.2 mi ha, which is home to roughly a quarter million people (IUCN, 2003). The floodplain is part of

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the Zambezi River Basin and is an aquatic agricultural system: a natural freshwater ecosystem where farming, fishing, and livestock rearing contribute substantially to women's and men's livelihoods (see [aas.cgiar.org](http://aas.cgiar.org)). The floodplain acts as a learning site for the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS), where the authors of this article are currently carrying out gender transformative research.

Gender transformative research is informed by conceptual frameworks that recognize the influence social institutions have on creating and perpetuating gender inequalities (e.g., see Kabeer, 1994; Locke & Okali, 2000; Kaufman, 2003). Okali (2011) maintained that more rigid "gender planning" frameworks (e.g., the Harvard Framework) tend to guide analyses of gender differences with a typical goal of filling "gender gaps." Research for development initiatives that focus "on the separate characteristics of women and men rather than on the way that social institutions work together to create and maintain advantages and disadvantages" are highly problematic and fail to sustainably reduce gaps in poverty between women and men (Okali, 2011, p. 2).

The current research builds on the Social Relations Approach put forth by Kabeer (1994) to analyze (a) existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities and power, and (b) relationships between people, their connection to resources and activities, and how they are reworked through institutions. This helps us better understand the complex social and gender relations and their relation to poverty in the Barotse Floodplain, for example, why certain social groups remain poor, why women have poorer access to natural resources or agricultural inputs, or why many girls fail to complete their schooling. Such insights can inform policies and programmatic investments to take a transformative stance to improve existing gender relations to achieve better developmental outcomes.

Engaging in gender transformative research is relevant in the Zambian context for a number of reasons. First, poverty rates in Zambia are high, particularly in rural areas. In 2010, the proportion of the rural population below the poverty line was 77.9% while for the urban population the poverty level was 29.7% (CSO, 2012a). In the Western and Luapula Provinces, overall poverty levels were the highest at 80.4% and 80.5%, respectively, while in Lusaka Province it was relatively low at 24.4%. Second, gender inequalities in Zambia are pervasive. Females make up 51% of the Zambian population, yet women comprise only 15% of those in parliament and 29.1% of those employed in administrative or managerial positions (CSO, 2012b). As in many low-income countries, women's access to land is poor in Zambia, especially in rural areas (Benschop, 2004; Chapoto, 2007; Chileshe, 2005; Jayne, & Mason, 2007; Mudenda, 2006). According to the Zambia 2013-14 Demographic Health Survey report (CSO, 2015), women aged 15-49 years old have a higher prevalence rate of HIV+ status than do men (15.1% versus 11.3%, respectively). While the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) primary education target of 100% was already attained in Zambia, a recent report noted the challenge of low secondary school completion rates for girls (UNDP, 2011). Third, gender transformative research and development programs have historically been carried out within the health but not the agricultural sector (Morgan, 2014). Given the high prevalence of both poverty and gender inequality in Zambia and the high percentage of women and men engaged in agriculture (78% of women, 69% of men: Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, 2013), there is great need for more gender transformative research in this context.

A fourth reason is that at its core the relationship between poverty and gender inequality embodies something quite profound to feminist scholars who, over the past decades, have argued that development and government agencies consistently espouse an instrumental approach to tackling poverty (e.g., Alsop & Healey, 2008; Bradshaw, Castellino & Diop, 2013; Jackson, 1996; Kabeer & Natali, 2013). Instrumental approaches tend to support investments in women as a means of achieving specific, often material, outcomes. Policies and programs attempt to increase Zambian women's access to land and other resources, or their involvement in aquaculture with the aim of improving household income or food and nutrition security. Programs using such an approach target women because it is perceived they distribute goods and services equitably within the household or put to good use money received from micro-credit institutions (see Bradshaw, Castellino & Diop, 2013), and are, thus, deemed efficient drivers of economic growth. Intrinsic approaches, on the other hand, promote gender equality simply because it is the right thing to do, and in contrast, do not use an economic growth "carrot" to justify programmatic investments. The two approaches are ideologically different and vary in the ways they inform policies and programs.

A fifth reason why engaging in gender transformative research is important in the agricultural context is the inordinate number of policies and development programs that argue that poverty reduction and "empowerment" programs will translate into welfare gains for women and consequent household well-being, backed up with little (or no) evidence that poverty is a root cause of gender inequality. Jackson (1996, p. 501) claimed almost twenty years ago that "poverty policies are not necessarily appropriate to tackling gender issues because the subordination of women is not caused by poverty.... Women who are not poor, of course, experience subordination of [many] different kinds." These same sentiments are still being echoed today. Kabeer and Natali (2013, p. 38) recently maintained that "gender inequality is not a purely scarcity-related phenomenon.... It is the product of historically established and structurally entrenched norms, values, and practices which determine the limits to women's advancement in different societies. Unless economic growth is of the kind that weakens these institutionalised constraints, we cannot expect a great deal of progress on gender equality." Similarly, Humphries and Classen (2012, p. 2081) argued that "conformity to particular femininities shaped by dominant representations of exaggerated masculinities, serves to undermine women's bargaining power within the household [in rural Honduras] and to jeopardize their long term sense of social security."

Social institutions that discriminate are the underlying causes of gender inequalities and violence against women and girls. As Cerise and Francavilla (2012, p. 3) pointed out, discriminatory social institutions were neglected in the MDG framework and "reflect and reproduce underlying gendered power relations", and as such are hard to transform. This does not suggest that they are immutable, but little change can be expected if policies and programs continue to ignore analyses that elucidate the links between poverty and gender inequality.

#### POVERTY, MASCULINITY, AND UNEQUAL OPPORTUNITY

The CRP on AAS takes a multi-dimensional view of poverty (Razavi, 1999; Sen, 1999; Kabeer, 2000) and its aspects (CRP AAS, 2012; see Figure 1). Income and asset poverty is when people do not have sufficient means to sustain a certain basic stan-

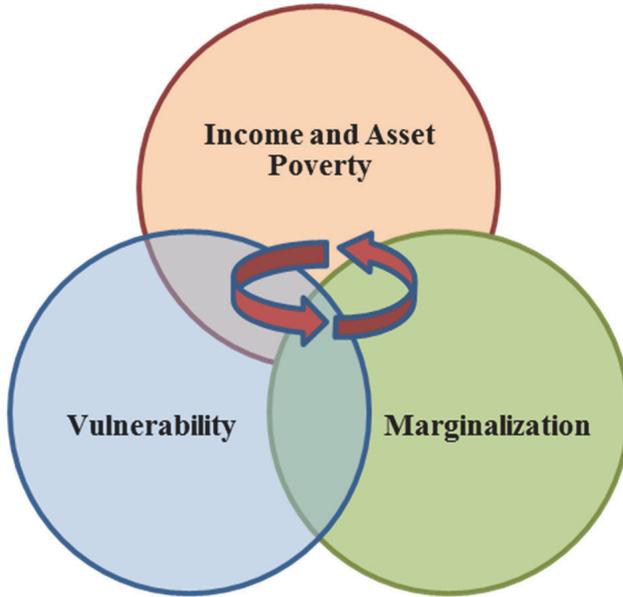


Figure 1. Three key overlapping and reinforcing dimensions of poverty (CRP AAS, 2012, p. 8).

dard of living. Vulnerability is when people are exposed to economic, institutional, and ecological shocks and stresses, the sensitivities of their livelihood systems to these risks, and their abilities to cope and adapt. The concept of marginalization articulates the view that certain groups are systematically disadvantaged or excluded based on their ethnicity, sex, age, educational status, class, HIV status, migrant status, skin color, disability, or religion. These conditions and processes overlap and may reinforce one another, so that people who are socially excluded or marginalized may become income and asset poor, and asset poverty reduces capacity to adapt, making people more vulnerable to external shocks and adverse trends. Often these conditions and processes are strongly gendered.

From a gender perspective, a woman living in a non-poor household who does not enjoy the freedom to make financial decisions or seek emotional support from a friend or relative would be considered poor, or what Sylvia Chant (2006) calls “secondary poverty”. This highlights the “invisible” dimension of poverty and the need to assess poverty particularly within the home (see Chant, 2003). Related, unpaid labor (e.g., home-based work) and its relationship with the ways women become poor matters particularly when assessing poverty over a long period of time. As just one example, a woman’s involvement in domestic chores shapes her participation in paid labor activities and development of alternative skill sets and self-confidence, which are all critical if, say, she exits marriage after the death of her spouse or because of divorce and must begin engaging in both unpaid and paid labor activities. This is a particularly salient example for the context in which we are carrying out our research, as the proportion of women heading their households in

Western Province is the highest in Zambia at 33.0 percent, over ten percent higher than the proportion at the national level (CSO, 2012c).

Various studies worldwide have explored the association between masculinity<sup>1</sup> and poor health outcomes (Alston & Kent, 2008), conflict and violence (Carrington & Scott, 2008), HIV prevalence (Barker & Ricardo, 2006), among other topics. Many scholars argue that such relationships emerge out of changing social, economic, and political conditions (Alston & Kent, 2008; Barker & Ricardo, 2006; Carrington & Scott, 2008; Hunter, 2005). Identifying and unpacking the structural or social institutional forces that shape certain behaviors, practices, beliefs or norms has become more important than simply “blaming the victim” in a particular context where “hegemonic” masculinities (or the dominant ideas about being a man, see Connell, 1995) prevail.

Below we attempt to use the concept of masculinity (see Bederman, 2011, for an interesting discussion on its use as a “heuristic category, a conceptual placeholder” rather than as a “thing”) to enhance our understanding of the relationship between gender inequality and poverty, as a source of gendered power, in a rural western Zambian context that is in a state of constant change. Specifically, we use the notion of the “masculine rural” (Campbell & Bell, 2000) to help highlight one way masculinity is being constructed in the rural study setting and its implications for women’s lived experiences. Often, the masculine in the rural is associated with the value placed on hard physical labor, toughness, tenacity, dependability, strength, and the need to conquer or overcome nature and exert control over the machines or equipment that make this possible, as well as the ability to succeed as a farmer. A man is therefore valued for his capacity to do hard work and farming is seen primarily as a family commitment, dominated and controlled by men, that integrates concerns for work, family, and community (Nusbaumer, 2011). Take for example the notion “big man” in a rural, southern African setting (see Barker & Ricardo, 2006 for further insights). The term might describe a person who is powerful, chief-like, demands respect, is married (perhaps to multiple women) and head of a household, accumulates wealth through people (e.g., children, spouse), and owns or controls assets such as land, cattle, and farming equipment. In changing economic and natural resource contexts where farming provides fewer viable occupational choices and women are increasingly taking up household and farming responsibilities for a number of reasons, some men are experiencing identity discontinuities (Nusbaumer, 2011). When we consider factors that may characterize such a setting (such as high rates of HIV infection), failing to appreciate the link between what it means to be a big or “real man” and poor health outcomes deflates any kind of discussion on gender, power, poverty and inequality, substance abuse and multiple concurrent partners (see Ampofo, Okyerefo, & Pervarah, 2009).

People living in Western Province, in particular those in the Barotse Floodplain, are some of the poorest in Zambia. They are vulnerable to multiple forces of change, most notably demographic, socioeconomic and climate variability. Seasonal flooding necessitates many living in the floodplain to migrate to higher (upland)

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<sup>1</sup> Masculinity defined here as “simultaneously a place in gender relations, the practices through which men and women engage that place in gender, and the effects of these practices in bodily experience, personality, and culture” (Connell, 1995, p. 71).

grounds. Variable access to land and water affects people's livelihood options. People live in this aquatic agricultural system despite uncertainties because the floodplain is a highly productive system that provides an offset of diverse livelihood opportunities. The system comprises a number of intricate canals, rivers, lagoons, and lakes that enable fishers, farmers, and herders to pursue integrated livelihood strategies. People catch and sell fish, cultivate food and cash crops (e.g., rice, cassava, maize, groundnuts, and sweet potato), grow vegetables, rear livestock (cattle, donkeys, pigs, and chickens), harvest and add value to timber (e.g., building poles and fibers) and non-timber (e.g., wild fruits and mushrooms) products and aquatic plants (e.g., reeds and papyrus), and earn cash in a variety of ways by selling groceries or providing water transport.

While a number of livelihood opportunities exist for people living in and around the floodplain, not all people have equal access to natural resources nor have people equal opportunities to make choices to overcome the constraints they face and reduce their vulnerability to external shocks. Larger, structural forces no doubt play a role in shaping certain groups' experiences in this context, prohibiting some from escaping a life of poverty. Certain policies and programs ignore gender norms or intra-household power dynamics and can inadvertently create more opportunities for men than women. A recent report commissioned by the Ministry of Gender and Child Development (Mkandawire & Mbuta, 2013), for example, unambiguously showed that the Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP) in Zambia benefitted more men than women, with women making up only 29.3% of the beneficiaries of the program in the western part of Zambia. This is despite women being the main staple food producers in Zambia and responsible for ensuring food and nutrition security in their homes. Women who own land, the report showed, are more productive than men who own land. Yet in the rural context, few women have individual access to land, which is due in part because of residence norms followed by most ethnic groups in Zambia, including Lozi-speaking people in western Zambia.<sup>2</sup> The land many women cultivate is thus not their own, which disproportionately excludes them from participating in the FISP and improving their livelihoods.<sup>3</sup> This is just one of many examples of programs failing to consider how institutionalized norms might exacerbate gender inequalities in access to resources, thereby further entrenching women (and their families) in poverty.

Our current research in the floodplain has offered interesting findings that highlight the need for more qualitative analyses to complement quantitative ones as a means of exploring the relationship between poverty and gender inequality and appreciating it in all its complexity. Many households living in or along the floodplain are relatively poor when compared to their urban counterparts, although

<sup>2</sup> Virilocal residence, a residence type commonly followed by patrilineal societies but today followed also by matrilineal and bilateral societies, is when a woman leaves her natal village to reside at her husband's village.

<sup>3</sup> It should also be noted that although the Zambian Constitution and the 1995 Lands Act supports property rights and prohibits discrimination, customary rules/practices often discriminate against women regarding access to and control over land. Importantly, the Constitution explicitly excludes customary law from its prohibition on discriminatory practices. This is a major limitation given the vast amount of land held under customary land tenure.

there are noticeable inter- and intra-household differences in material and social wellbeing in the study areas. Quantitative analyses would enable an improved understanding of the differences in wellbeing outcomes between and within households, and to some degree, would help determine whether a statistically significant relationship between poverty and gender inequality exists.<sup>4</sup> They are unable to explore in-depth how and why gender inequalities in education or access to natural resources, agricultural inputs and larger cash-earning opportunities exist (see Chant, 2003). For decades, feminist scholars and practitioners working on gender and development issues have argued for more research that uncovers the underlying causes of gender inequality (e.g., see Alsop & Healey, 2008; Cerise & Francavilla, 2012; Chant, 2003; Kantor, 2013; Kabeer, 1994; Jackson, 1996). Our research attempts to demonstrate that it is with this understanding that we are better able to direct policy and programmatic investments to work with women *and* men to help facilitate more equitable wellbeing outcomes in this context.

## METHODS

Findings presented in this article derive from analysis of data collected from ten communities within four districts of Western Province (Mongu, Lukulu, Senanga, and Kalabo) that comprise part of the Barotse Floodplain system. Data were collected using focus group discussions conducted from late September to early November 2013. Guides were used to help facilitate discussions and were developed by the first author and contextualized by Lozi-speaking women and men on the research team. The guides were subsequently translated into *Silozi* by a woman publisher at the University of Barotseland. Informed consent was obtained from all research participants prior to conducting focus group discussions. Participants were informed about the focus of the research, the risks and benefits of participating in the research, and were assured that the personal information gathered (e.g., names and ages) would be kept confidential.

Five focus group discussions were conducted with women and men separately in each community, except for one community where the same numbers of focus group discussions were held both in the upland and lowland areas of the community given the significant distances between the two places. Women and men were separated during discussions so as to enable both groups the opportunities to freely express their views, beliefs, attitudes, and concerns pertaining to particular topics. The composition of the focus groups reflected to the greatest extent possible a range of lived experiences common among adults roughly 20 to 60 years of age residing in the floodplain. Discussions were facilitated in private spaces (e.g., in unoccupied homes or local churches or meeting shelters) by two single-sex research teams that consisted of people who spoke fluent *Silozi*. Such teams were designed to help facilitate richer discussions and enable focus group participants to feel at ease when

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<sup>4</sup> There are a number of econometric issues such as reverse causality and unobserved variable bias that make establishing a relationship between poverty (or economic growth) and gender inequality highly unlikely (Kabeer & Natali, 2013; Morrison, Raju & Sinha, 2008; Rodriguez & Rodrik, 2001). Kabeer and Natali (2013, p. 8) called "for more detailed analysis of [such relationships] on the basis of country case studies that draw on more historically located and locally contextualised data."

discussing sometimes sensitive topics. Discussions focused on five thematic areas: village history, wellbeing, social and gender norms and trends, seasonality, and resource availability and usage. A range of tools were used to help facilitate discussions and generate data including seasonal calendars, village resource and social mapping, wellbeing ladders, and village timelines. On average, focus group discussions lasted 2 to 2.5 hours in length.

A total of 111 focus group discussions were conducted (56 with women, 55 with men), yielding a large amount of data for analysis. Not all data, however, were relevant for inclusion in the analysis for this article because of the wide variety of topics explored. Data were analyzed for their content by the first author. Principles from the abductive research strategy were used to guide the analysis. The strategy suits and fulfils the objective of the article which is to understand complex social relations based on the explanation that “people can give of their own actions and actions of others” (Blaikie, 2000, p. 16). Open and axial coding from Corbin and Strauss’s (1990) grounded theory method was adapted to generate the themes and sub-themes. The results from the analysis presented are not per se generalizable to each and every community or village within the floodplain, but rather seek to incite discussion and reflection on women’s and men’s different experiences of poverty (see Bradshaw, 2002). It is also recognized that the description of perceptions and experiences of women and men in the communities using a social scientific language may reflect authors’ preconceptions and own experiences.

Basic demographic data on all households in each of the ten communities were also collected. These data were cleaned and analyzed using STATA (version 13). The quantitative findings, while few, complement some of the qualitative findings presented in this article.

## RESULTS

Gendered access to ecosystem services that enable larger cash-earning potential is evident in the study areas, as men overwhelmingly comprise the fisher folk, harvest timber products for sale, and herd cattle for grazing in and outside the plain. Privileged access by men to these resource bases (fish, timber, and grassland) is due in part because of how males are socialized during childhood, with normative attitudes and beliefs being that boys/men are more physically capable (“stronger”), and thus can carry out tasks that involve fishing in deeper waters, heavy cutting, and transporting material over long distances (see also Kwashimbisa & Puskur, 2015). One woman highlighted this, stating,

Women and men do not have similar access to [natural] resources, especially reeds [for making sleeping mats] and lagoons [for fishing], because men have [more physical] power than women. (Mongu District, Zambia, October 2013)

During a focus group discussion on strategies women employ to make a living, one woman explained,

Men cut big trees, we clear small bushes [when preparing our fields], because we women cannot cut big trees. (Senanga District, Zambia, November 2013)

A middle-aged woman felt men achieve a better life than women because,

Some are fishermen and they raise more money. Boys achieve a better life than girls because they do what the men do: they also go fishing and have money. (Kalabo District, Zambia, November 2013)

This is not to say that women (or girls) do not fish or that fish are not an important source of essential nutrients for women and their household members. However, women tend to fish seasonally using baskets (sometimes spears), in shallow waters, and do so less frequently given their gendered role as caretakers of their homes and perceived dangers associated with fishing in deeper waters. This means women typically catch smaller fish in smaller quantities, and only when time permits (see also Farnworth et al., forthcoming).

Women harvest other natural resources from the floodplain and upland areas, for example grass, reeds and papyrus, mushrooms, firewood, and wild fruits (e.g., *muzauli* [*Guibourtia coleosperma*] and *mahuluhulu* [*Strychnos cocculoides*]). The ecosystem provides these resources seasonally, yet they afford women with an immediate (albeit rather small) cash-earning opportunity compared to, say, cultivating cassava or rice, which requires heavy labor, time, and financial investments to achieve economic or other gains.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, wild fruits are used to brew *kachasu* (a distilled spirit).<sup>6</sup> According to many discussions with women focus group participants, women's involvement in *kachasu* brewing is conflicting. Alcohol brewing and consumption in rural areas throughout Zambia are extremely gendered and, perhaps more significantly, widespread (Cole, 2012). Women are forced into such conflicting recourse to supplement household food stocks or to buy clothing or pay school fees for their children given the norms that govern their access to natural resources (among other things) that would enable them to earn larger sums of cash. The paradox is that a large portion of the "big" money men earn selling fish or timber products, it was explained, is spent on personal consumption (e.g., on alcohol). This means cash essentially gets transferred outside their homes and further increases many women's burdens of engaging in piecework (casual labor) or other poorly-remunerated activities (see Chant, 2003; Kabeer, 2012 for additional insights). A brief dialogue that occurred during a woman focus group discussion on why men are less impoverished than women encapsulates this very point,

[Men] do work that gives them a lot of money.  
They are strong, they do jobs that require strength.  
They do their own work. (Mongu District, Zambia, October 2013)

The dialogue suggests that men not only make bigger money engaging in different livelihood strategies compared to women but that the paid work they do is *for* them (for their individual benefit), which may explain why so many focus group participants (regardless of their sex) highlighted men's tendency to spend their earnings from such work on personal consumption. As one young unmarried man put it,

<sup>5</sup> It should also be noted that these are all common pool resources, which means their sustainability and availability is (or will become) an issue of great importance.

<sup>6</sup> *Kachasu* is also brewed using ingredients other than wild fruits (e.g., maize) during other times of the year.

Women are able to use their money wisely and prudently while men mostly waste money on paying for sex, drinking, and smoking. (Lukulu District, Zambia, September 2013)

A married man from Mongu District agreed:

[Men] spend money on beers and on girls, which is a big problem among rural people. (Mongu District, Zambia, October 2013)

Such behavior, according to one woman, actually makes women “better off” than men “because we women work very hard and we know how to safeguard or manage our things [resources, earnings, etc.]” (Senanga District, Zambia, November 2013).

Men’s discretionary (but rather indiscriminate) spending goes beyond expenditures on alcohol, as was just mentioned. Many women and men voiced their concerns during focus group discussions about men’s strong propensity to engage in extra-marital sex, which has more than just economic costs as men typically target unmarried women. Focus group participants in all districts believed that the number of women heading their households is on the rise. The demographic data collected, while cross-sectional in nature and thus not reflecting changes over time, unambiguously highlight the more than typical number of woman-headed households in the study areas. Of the 1,200 households comprising the 10 communities, 45.0% are headed by women.<sup>7</sup> What is not entirely clear is the cause of an increase in woman-headed households. While the reasons are no doubt complex and inter-related, many focus group members attributed the increase to men’s drinking and engagement with multiple-sex partners. This has resulted in more women divorcing their husbands<sup>8</sup>, reflecting in part “their unwillingness to continue accepting the injustice of their situation” (Kabeer, 2008, p. 5). One middle-aged woman who is no longer married explained,

The trend in divorce is increasing because men are very much out-going. Extra-marital affairs are destroying a lot of marriages. (Lukulu District, Zambia, September 2013)

Others are widows because of natural or premature (including HIV/AIDS-related) deaths of their husbands, while it seems other women head their households

<sup>7</sup> It is important to note that this figure is abnormally high when compared to the figure presented in the Central Statistics Office (CSO, 2012c) report (see Section 2) for the percentage of women heading their households in Western Province (33.0%). Their study and ours used the same criteria to identify household heads. Additionally, two CSO officers (both men) were part of our research team and were in charge of data collecting.

<sup>8</sup> According to women and men focus group participants, women divorcing their husbands is also a function of men’s inability to pay bride wealth (typically paid using cattle) these days, which makes it easier to divorce as some women are never tied to this payment when negotiating for divorce. Men’s lack of ability to pay bride wealth is no doubt due in part to deteriorating economic conditions along with diseases that have wiped out a considerable number of cattle in the floodplain over the past decade.

not by choice, but rather because of pregnancies induced by men who promised marriage but failed to deliver on their word. For example, one married man from Kalabo District said,

Some [women head their households] because men are not good. They are busy impregnating women, they are busy making sex with unmarried women. Hence, some avoid responsibility of taking care of a wife. (Kalabo District, Zambia, October 2013)

A mixed group of married and unmarried women had the following dialogue on why the number of woman-headed households is increasing,

Getting married is a talent. You can be impregnated by men and [they] don't marry you. As a result you remain head of the house for years. He can just impregnate you and go without marrying you. Even when those fish mongers<sup>9</sup> come with a lot of money, the [fisher]man shifts from his home and goes to stay with the female fish mongers leaving the wife and children. That adds to the number of woman-headed households. (Kalabo District, Zambia, September 2013)

While these data do not explain why woman-headed households have increased in prevalence, they do to some extent support the claim that engaging in extra-marital sex is gendered and embodies the power dynamics at play in the Barotse Floodplain study areas.<sup>10</sup> We stress that this is not a phenomenon unique to this context (Smith, 2008; see also Stephenson, 2010), however.

In summary, the norms and power relations that make it possible for men to withhold earnings for personal consumption (be it on alcohol, extra-marital sex, or other commodities not highlighted in this article) are ripping the social fabric in these floodplain communities as more and more women (both married and unmarried) have additional obligations and responsibilities, let alone the psychosocial stress many women endure dealing with such burdens. Seconding Sylvia Chant's (2008, p. 27) argument that the "onus of dealing with poverty is becoming progressively feminized ... as an increasing proportion of men seem to be stepping out of the shoes of 'chief breadwinner' into those of 'chief spender'", our research findings in many ways show that the "feminization of poverty"<sup>11</sup> is becoming more and more

<sup>9</sup> Fish mongers are women (but also men) who typically come from outside the village to purchase large quantities of fish to sell at a distant market (e.g., in the capital, Lusaka).

<sup>10</sup> According to an analysis conducted by Kimuna and Djamba (2005) using 2001-02 Zambia Health and Demographic Survey (DHS) data, men residing in Western Province were 3.5 times more likely to engage in extra-marital sex in the year prior to the survey. The 2013-14 DHS report (CSO, 2015) found that 26.8% of men (aged 15-49 years) from Western Province had sexual intercourse with more than one partner in the past 12 months (ranking highest of all provinces in Zambia). Only 1.2% of women in the same age range indicated engaging in such practice.

<sup>11</sup> See Medeiros and Costa (2008) for insights. See Chant (2003, 2006) for a problematization of the concept.

a product of a change in personal expenditure levels that is biased toward men or what we refer to as the “masculinization of spending”. In this case, norms that restrict women’s access to natural resources force some women to engage in economic activities that, given the importance of drinking and engaging in sex with multiple partners to men’s masculine identities, create spaces for a great number of men to consume and cement their families (and communities) in poverty.

## CONCLUSION

Zambia has had a decade of rapid economic growth, with a real Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate of 6.7% during 2013-14 (Rasmussen, 2015). The Global Gender Gap Report (World Economic Forum, 2014) ranks Zambia as one of the most gender unequal countries in the world (119<sup>th</sup> of 142), while gender gaps in all countries located near Zambia were much lower including those ranked poorer than Zambia (income wise) by the World Bank. Madagascar, Mozambique, and Malawi, for example, are some of the poorest nations in the world yet ranked 41, 27, and 34, respectively. These figures suggest that traditional economic growth or poverty reduction programs may not bring about more gender-equitable outcomes in Zambia.

The research findings reinforce the argument that gender inequality does not result from poverty, but actually leads to poverty and its perpetuation. It is imperative that development programs move away from “business as usual” strategies and begin designing and implementing their interventions and actions using a gender transformative approach (see Kantor, 2013). Such approaches appreciate, understand and explicitly address the underlying causes of gender inequalities, which include norms, beliefs, practices, and power relations. Some of the harmful norms, behaviors and relationships are underpinned by and result from reinforcing masculine identities. Understanding these is critical to develop meaningful programs that can tackle inequalities to address the persistent challenge of rural poverty in Zambia.

Figure 2 depicts a path toward increasing income and assets, enhancing resilience/adaptive capacity, and improving social, economic, and political rights through promoting gender equality. Progress toward gender equality can be made by:

- 1) changing retrogressive social institutions through the promotion of more equitable practices and attitudes toward women at all levels, their leadership opportunities, and control of decision-making. Working directly with men and boys is particularly important in this context to “make masculinities visible to men, who have most commonly embodied masculinity but often without recognizing it and the privileges it entails, and to women, who have been most commonly disadvantaged by those privileges” (Campbell & Bell, 2000, p. 543).
- 2) designing and implementing policies and institutional arrangements based on a sound understanding of the impinging social norms that provide an enabling environment for women and marginalized groups to improve their rights.

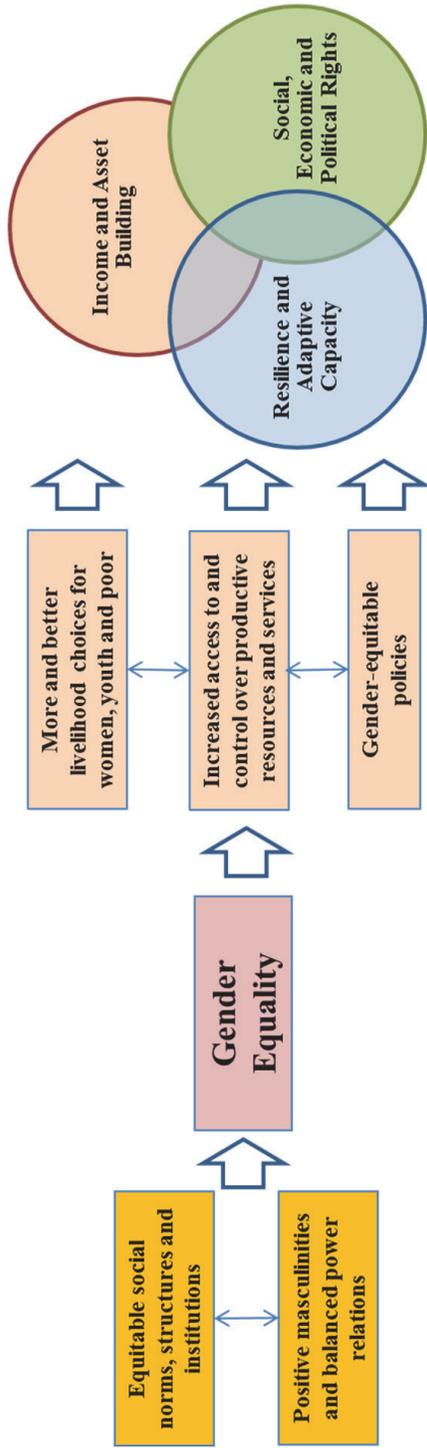


Figure 2. Pathway toward gender equality and enhanced wellbeing through equitable structures, social norms, positive masculinities and balanced power relations.

One without the other will not reduce poverty or equitably enhance the wellbeing of poor women and men, which is precisely why men, and boys, need to be part of the solution rather than being excluded because of their adherence to often very exaggerated masculinities (Farre, 2013; Greig, Kimmel, & Lang, 2000; Kaufman, 2003).

Practically, development practitioners could consider integrating the following interventions as part of their actions:

- Engage men, women, girls, boys and opinion leaders in rural communities in critical reflection on social and gender norms regarding masculinities, and how they affect livelihoods and wellbeing. Such reflections should help all to reconstruct versions of masculinities in the light of realities and their own context.
- Expose men and women to more equitable ideals of gender roles and expectations building on the widespread prevalence of international media.
- Make masculinities and the role of men more visible in the discussions about gender equality and engage men as advocates, rather than leaving women to champion their cause of empowerment on their own, and also understand the perspectives, needs and vulnerabilities of men to obtain a more holistic view. There is an emerging positive trend in this direction that should be built upon.

Research and development organizations should make more concerted efforts to understand people in their context to help facilitate the design of policies and programs to improve gender relations and development outcomes. The results presented in this article confirm that the relationship between poverty and gender inequality is complex and requires the use of approaches and frameworks that guide analyses to better understand the underlying causes of gender inequalities and how these perpetuate poverty for certain social groups (primarily women). The results highlight the need for more research and development organizations working in such settings to untangle or make more visible rural power relations between women and men; specifically how men are differentially empowered as well as women's disempowered position in rural settings (Campbell & Bell, 2000). As Campbell and Bell pointed out, such inquiries on the "masculine rural" are uncomfortable, sometime disturbing, and often overlooked. This article has highlighted this conundrum and encourages future research and development organizations to continue these efforts, particularly in aquatic agricultural system contexts that are diverse in the natural resources they provide for livelihood security, experience constant change, present challenging conditions to carry out research and development, and are therefore marginalized or excluded as a result.

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