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A Social and Gender Analysis of Northern Province, Zambia:
Qualitative Evidence that supports the use of a Gender Transformative Approach

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Abstract

A qualitative social and gender analysis was carried out in June 2015 in Luwingu and Mbala Districts in Northern Province, Zambia. The research explored the norms and power relations at various institutional levels that constrain certain social groups from benefiting from programmatic investments aimed at improving livelihoods, health status, and food and nutrition security within the Irish Aid Local Development Programme (IALDP). This technical paper provides a summary of the research findings, lessons learned and suggests options for action the IALDP could consider to help bring about gender transformative change in the lives and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable people.

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Introduction

Interventions that focus on addressing only the symptoms rather than the underlying causes of rural poverty risk widening the gap in development outcomes between women and men (Kantor, 2013). In trying to address the underlying causes of rural poverty in the Northern Province of Zambia, Self Help Africa and WorldFish operating under the Irish Aid Local Development Programme (IALDP) partnered to carry out a social and gender analysis (SGA) in Luwingu and Mbala Districts in June 2015. The SGA explored the norms and power relations that constrain certain social groups from benefiting from programmatic investments aimed at improving livelihoods, health status, and food and nutrition security. Data were collected at different institutional levels including with staff from ministry departments and non-government organisations at district level and at the community level with sex-specific focus groups and traditional leaders in eight randomly-selected areas.

This technical brief presents key findings from the SGA and recommends some options for action the IALDP might consider to help bring about greater and more sustained change in the lives and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable people in Northern Province, Zambia. The brief also presents contextually-salient indicators the IALDP could use to monitor and evaluate its contribution to the goal of gender equality.

Key Findings

Gender trends

Marriage

Age of marriage: while early marriages are still prevalent in the two districts due in part to poverty and lack of support to children, there is a decrease in the practice as a result of sensitisation by government, traditional leaders and NGOs. Eloping is common in both districts, especially by youths.

Bride wealth (lobola): payment amounts have increased and more often are paid in installments. Non-payments are common. An increase in non-payments could be an indicator of changing (deteriorating) economic conditions or a shift in young people's views about paying cash or exchanging cattle (one form of payment in Mbala) for women. Importantly, non-payments mean women are not tied to bride wealth.

Residence during marriage: men spend a lesser amount of time living at their in-law's village in Luwingu District compared to the past. This is significant because Bemba of Luwingu are matrilineal and residence norms dictate that a man resides at his wife's natal village for an extended, but usually definite, period of time (or an uxorilocal pattern of residence). This has implications on women's access to or ownership of land and decisions about how to invest in agriculture and aquaculture-related activities as the land a woman has access to once she moves to her husband's village is not under her control.

Polygyny: relatively prevalent even in matrilineal Luwingu where the residence pattern seems to be changing from uxorilocal to virilocal. Examples were given of men abandoning their wives at their natal village and shifting to another woman's village to reside up to a certain period of time, while continuing the marriage with the first wife. This practice, although unknown how widespread, has implications on labor availability and could severely constrain women's abilities to cultivate food and cash crops and fish and rear livestock to meet their families' needs.

Access to formal education

There is greater value placed on educating girl children now as compared to in the past. School enrollment rates have increased for girls and boys, and it was highlighted that educated women are capable of taking up leadership positions in the country and can contribute effectively in national development.

Leadership positions

There has been an increase in the number of women taking up leadership positions, which can be attributed to an increase in gender equality sensitisation efforts by government and non-government organisations. There are still some stumbling blocks. Most notably, high levels of illiteracy and low levels of assertiveness, it was explained, hinder women from taking up leadership roles. Furthermore, in some instances husbands decide whether women can take on a leadership role in a group or club within their locale.

Gender-based violence

In Mbala District, women and men study participants confirmed that gender-based violence (GBV) in the form of "wife slapping" is common. The main causes of such violence were mainly substance abuse and disputes over the use of cash. In Luwingu, there were reported increased levels of GBV with desertion and economic deprivation being the main forms of GBV and wife battering also taking place. Few interventions to stop GBV in rural Luwingu District, unlike in Mbala District, appear to be taking place.

Involvement in agriculture and aquaculture

Agriculture and aquaculture: both women and men are involved in agriculture as their main livelihood activity. Deep-rooted norms dictate gendered divisions of labor. Women are often overburdened by heavy agriculture-based workloads coupled with home-based duties. This has implications for programmatic investments that aim to assist or empower women, yet further burden them with additional responsibilities/work. Generally, women tend to grow crops

Blandina Nkandu and Emmauel Musondo in their home in Malela village, Luwingu District, Northern Province, Zambia.

that are important for household food and nutrition security, while men are involved in cultivating cash crops (jointly with their wives). Men typically make the major agriculture-based decisions.

Relatively few people in both districts participate in aquaculture as one means of securing their livelihoods. There is great scope to expand fish farming given the numerous sources of water in the two districts and especially in Luwingu District. Where there is involvement, men make up the majority of fish farmers. Reasons why there is gendered participation in aquaculture needs to be further explored. Land is sufficiently available for people to farm fish, but most (and especially women) have insufficient access to fish seed (fingerlings) and improved feeds to adequately farm fish (see Nsonga, 2015).

Market access: most rural areas of Luwingu and Mbala Districts have inadequate private and public-sector markets, which would imply that agriculture and aquaculture production and productivity is relatively low. The Food Reserve Agency (FRA) and small traders (sometimes referred to as "briefcase buyers") are the main purchasers of farm produce, but their reach and effectiveness of "bringing a market to the people" depends in part on the quality of roads in a particular area. The FRA system inadvertently disadvantages women as it requires several trips to urban centers to inquire about payments. Women do not have that amount of time at their disposal or are often prohibited from making such long-distance trips by their husbands.

Asset ownership and money management

There is a very poor productive asset/resource base for the average household in Mbala District, and it seems even more

pronounced for households in Luwingu District. Common assets include hoes, axes, bicycles, slashers, livestock, and canoes; the latter being owned by men in certain wards located near Lake Bangweulu in Luwingu District. Asset ownership appears to be gendered, with male household members owning the more valuable productive assets and also enjoying their unlimited use. The expression 'hand to mouth' plays out for many households in the two districts as few have cash at their disposal.

People living with HIV and AIDS and with disabilities

While there is some care provided to people living with HIV and AIDS and disabilities, they are often excluded from actively participating in development processes. The HIV status of people within a particular community is often unknown, hidden, or ignored. After many years of implementing sensitisation and education programs, stigma inflicted on those living with (or affected by) HIV and AIDS still exists and is widespread. The qualitative data collected at community and district levels suggests there is very little evidence that the conditions of people living with HIV and AIDS are factored into mainstream development projects to ensure they are provided a space to become actively involved (e.g., in farming activities) and a part of decision-making processes or assume leadership positions. In contrast, it appears that people living with HIV and AIDS are provided with some level of care or inputs (e.g., seed, blankets). Few (if any) rural health clinics have the capacity to supply regular antiretrovirals (ARVs). People living with HIV and AIDS must travel to district hospitals to obtain ARVs.

Few programs exist that address the challenges people with disabilities face. Only Mbala District comprises schools specifically designed for people with special needs. Many

cases occur whereby people living with severe disabilities are confined to or hidden in their homes. It appears that more can be done in rural settings to actively engage or design programs for people with disabilities so they become more visible, accepted, valued, and integrated into community and development activities. Disability mainstreaming "is the process of assessing the implications for disabled people of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making disabled people's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that disabled people benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated" (Miller and Albert, 2005: p. 10). As one example, the Food and Agriculture Organisation developed a guide to help programs create more opportunities in agriculture for people with disabilities (Steele, 2006).

Traditional authority's involvement in development processes

Traditional authorities reside in rural areas and therefore witness many of the challenges rural people face. They govern common properties such as land, forests, and local water bodies. Traditional authorities play a major role mobilising people for social and economic development. Chiefs and headpersons tend to occupy their positions for extended periods of time and therefore can be good agents for change within any longer-term development program. It appears that government departments and non-government organisations interact little with traditional authorities. The latter are mostly only involved at the startup of new projects or when carrying out government and non-government censuses or studies in their respective areas.

Traditional authorities interviewed believed the salient social and gender concerns prevalent in their areas include: 1) early marriages and pregnancies; 2) gender-based violence due to substance abuse and high poverty levels; and 3) poor road networks, access to schools and rural health clinics, and market access, and a lack of extension services. Traditional authorities attempt to address these concerns by:
- resolving GBV cases and prohibiting early marriages within their respective villages;
- lobby to government to improve rural roads or increase access to school and health clinics;
- mobilise labor and support when infrastructures are being constructed in their areas; and
- in some villages, committees have been formed to address challenges people face.

Nonetheless, without institutional changes in the ways government and non-government bodies interact, value, respect, and involve traditional authorities in development activities, many efforts will not have the kind of development impact required to lift rural people out of poverty. Traditional authorities are notoriously characterised as being difficult to work with and the like, yet numerous examples exist showcasing their strong commitment to tackling salient social and gender issues in their chiefdoms.

District-level engagement with and influence on improving development outcomes for rural people

A wide variety of development activities exist in the two districts that focus on issues from crop diversification and livestock, natural resource management (e.g., forests and fisheries), HIV and AIDS, to building new schools, economically empowering the poor and marginalised, promoting human rights, and increasing food and nutrition security. Budget constraints, human resource gaps, poor road networks, however, limit their reach and effectiveness in serving rural people, especially women and people living with HIV and AIDS and disabilities.

Staff from the Ministry of Gender and Child Development are not present at district levels, although gender focal people (the District Administrative Officers (DAOs) in each district) help fill this void. DAOs coordinate the Gender Sub-Committees (GSCs) that fall under the District Development Coordinating Committees (DDCCs). GSCs are rendered relatively ineffective due to budget and capacity limitations, which translates into gender not being adequately mainstreamed in government programs carried out at the district level.

A lack of collaboration, cooperation, coordination, networking and building alliances between government ministries and non-government organisations to address similar development challenges seems the norm. Other than the DDCC structure, it appears few platforms for stakeholders to share and learn from each other exist in either district. Moreover, most ministries and organi sations that were a part of the study do not have gender-sensitive or disability-responsive M&E systems to adequately measure outcomes and impact of their projects, although most collect sex-disaggregated data.

On the whole, non-government entities carry out what could be characterised as "women's empowerment" or "women-sensitive" programs. Some lack the use of any kind of social-inclusion lens altogether. Staff numbers in most departments and organisations that were a part of the study are overwhelmingly biased towards men. Few departments and organisations comprise staff who are trained on how to mainstream or integrate gender or social inclusion into their programs, and it seems that none have a full-time staff member working on gender.

Key lessons learned and options for action

Key lessons learned

Two main lessons learned were generated while conducting the SGA: 1) the value addition that research and development organisations bring to the table when they collaborate; and 2) there is need to investigate fewer topics in greater depth in future studies. Self Help Africa and WorldFish carried out the study together from start to finish (e.g., designing the discussion and interview guides to analysing the data and writing a report). The process helped develop capacities to carry out rigorous research and integrate gender in Self Help Africa program activities and ensured the research was "demand-driven" to address the needs of IALDP stakeholders. The collaboration continued when the two organisations developed and helped facilitate a workshop to integrate gender transformative approaches into program activities with other IALDP stakeholders. While the study highlighted a number of social and gender norms, practices and power relations that can be harmful to certain social groups, and in particular women and people living with HIV and AID and disabilities, delving deeper into a few key topics would have yielded an even better understanding to (re)formulate program activities. For example, while participation in aquaculture in Northern Province is male dominated, the underlying factors that create this bias need to be further explored.
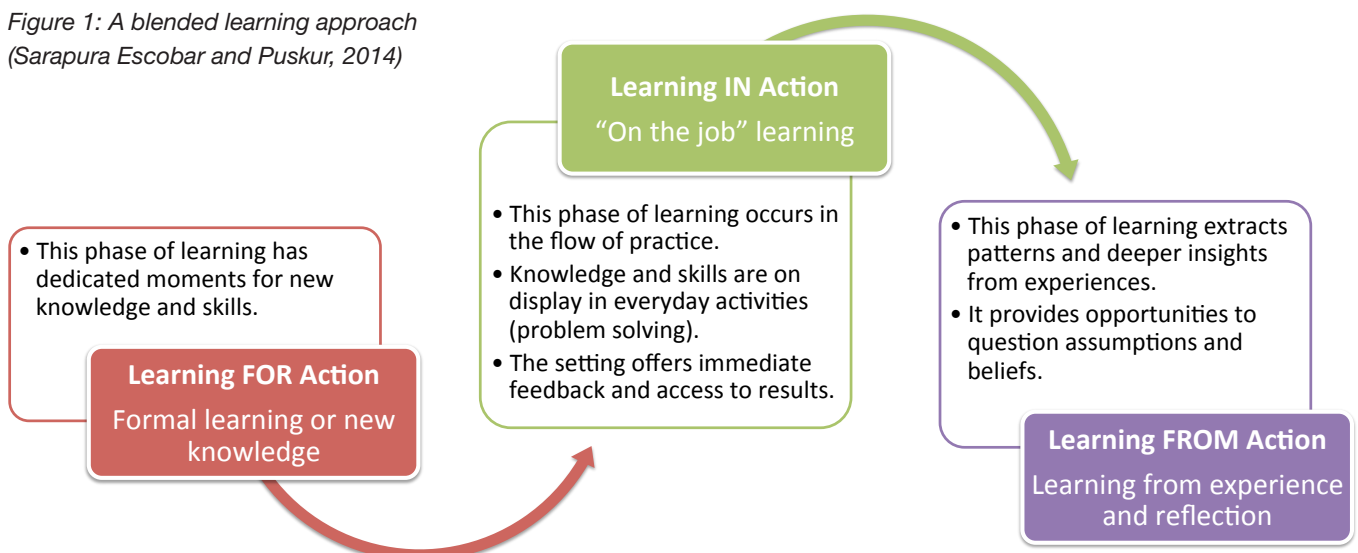
Options for action

Based on the key findings of the SGA, the following are some options for action that the IALDP could adopt to bring about greater and more sustained change in the lives and livelihoods of poor and vulnerable people in Northern Province, Zambia.

Option 1: (Re)design program activities to make them gender transformative, using multi-stakeholder, multi-scaled participatory processes. Gender transformative approaches "encourage critical awareness among men and women of gender roles and norms; promote the position of women; challenge the distribution of resources and allocation of duties between men and women; and/or address the power relationships between women and others in the community" (Rottach et al. 2009, 8; see also Cole et al., 2014a, 2014b; Rajaratnam et al., 2015). As one example, Catholic Relief Services, Caritas-Mongu, Promundo-US, WorldFish and community facilitators partnered to design and implement gender transformative sessions together with savings group facilitation in a research and development pilot project in western Zambia. The sessions took place alongside savings group facilitation to provoke critical reflection, action planning and learning with women and men, with the aim to transform harmful social norms and improve gender relations, decision making processes, and increase spousal support in the home. Sessions focused on a number of gender-related topics and typically occurred bi-monthly during normal savings group meetings. Early evidence suggests the pilot is having a positive impact on improving gender attitudes and relations of group members, men are beginning to appreciate savings groups and the gender transformative sessions, and groups receiving the sessions are functioning better (e.g., greater cumulative savings) than regular savings groups who did not receive the sessions.

Option 2: Develop capacities of IALDP stakeholders to implement gender transformative approaches in their activities using a blended learning strategy that enables all stakeholders to learn for action, in action, and from action (see Figure 1). Learning for action entails, for example, developing gender capacities of staff to integrate gender transformative approaches in their project activities. Learning in action enables people to gain knowledge and skills by implementing themselves gender transformative approaches or "learning by

Figure 1: A blended learning approach
(Sarapura Escobar and Puskur, 2014)

Learning IN Action
"On the job" learning

- This phase of learning occurs in the flow of practice.
- Knowledge and skills are on display in everyday activities (problem solving).
- The setting offers immediate feedback and access to results.

Learning FOR Action
Formal learning or new knowledge

- This phase of learning has dedicated moments for new knowledge and skills.

Learning FROM Action
Learning from experience and reflection

- This phase of learning extracts patterns and deeper insights from experiences.
- It provides opportunities to question assumptions and beliefs.

Elizabeth Namfukwe and Showthem Sikombe, married farmers living in Nsunda village, Mbala District, Northern Province, Zambia.

doing." In so doing, people receive immediate feedback on whether something they tried worked or not. Learning from action requires people to take a step back and reflect on their experiences, question assumptions and beliefs, and figure out better ways to implement or engage with women and men in future. It is the blend of all three approaches to learning that helps people gain more knowledge and further develop their capacities to innovate.

Option 3: Reflect upon and implement strategies to begin transforming the organisational culture within development and research organisations at district and provincial levels. Pathways to transformation include (Sarapura Escobar and Puskur, 2014: 16-19):

- Individual transformation: emphasises self-consciousness and self-awareness to process and communicate ideas and outcomes related to gender equality.
- Organisational transformation: to promote, sustain, support, and reproduce changes within the organisation. Collective learning and transformative leadership are critical to achieving this type of change.
- System transformation: individual understandings in relation to gender identity facilitate the emergence of shared understandings, which transcend an institutionalised reality to become a social reality.

Option 4: Develop or strengthen networks, coalitions and platforms for sharing and learning and to achieve development impact at scale. Such coalitions should build on preexisting structures and where needed, strengthen them to enable stakeholders to share knowledge, approaches and technologies more effectively and help address the persistent challenge of gender inequality at a wider scale (Kato-Wallace et al., 2016).

Option 5: Refine current M&E systems to enable the IALDP to measure its contribution to the goal of gender equality. Change processes involved in achieving gender equality are complex and multi-scalar, which requires measuring change in individual knowledge, behavior and attitudes, in interpersonal relationships within and beyond the household and in larger social norms and structures (see Morgan, 2014).

Examples of contextually-salient indicators of gender transformative change identified during the study include:
Changes at the individual level
- Change in women and men's attitudes or beliefs about women's involvement as fish farmers or men's participation carrying out home-based chores
Changes in relationships at the household level
- A decrease in the number of couple conflicts recorded
- An increase in the number of couple dialogues conducted
Changes in relationships beyond the household
- An increase in the number of GBV dialogues held in the community
- An increase in the number of marriages of persons above 18 years
Changes in norms and structures
- An increase in the number of gender sub-committee meetings conducted or district-level staff trained on GTA

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