

Collaborative effort to operationalize the gender transformative approach in the Barotse Floodplain



RESEARCH
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COLLABORATIVE EFFORT TO OPERATIONALIZE THE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH IN THE BAROTSE FLOODPLAIN

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INTRODUCTION

It has become increasingly apparent that agricultural interventions that aim at alleviating rural poverty have important gender implications. Development organizations, through implementing narrow interventions that focused only on addressing the symptoms rather than the root causes of rural poverty and gender inequalities, risked widening the gap in development outcomes between women and men.¹ For decades, scholars and practitioners working at the front lines on gender and development issues have strongly advocated for analyses that both explore in-depth and help redress discriminatory social institutions including norms, practices, laws and interventions that constrain women's access to resources, opportunities and power and that perpetuate gender inequalities.² Gender analyses and approaches that aim to promote and achieve greater gender equality are thus not something new *per se*, but in the past, many mainstream development and research organizations saw women's improved well-being as a means of alleviating poverty. For example, in the agricultural sector the focus has largely been on bridging the 'gender gap' in access to technologies, knowledge and productive resources so that women could increase their agricultural productivity and contribute effectively to household food security. Such instrumentalist approaches to tackling poverty³ ignored the goal of achieving gender equality as a justified goal on its own.⁴ In addition, this has resulted in short-lived outcomes and the so-called gender gaps have continued to persist. Last but not least, there was limited collaboration between researchers working on science-based solutions and development actors such as governments, NGOs and other agents helping to facilitate change processes in poor people's lives. This, therefore, calls for more rigorous transformative approaches in which rural women and men, researchers and development organizations forge long-term collaboration, each bringing their strengths to the table and contributing to transforming gender relations at multiple scales.

The gender transformative approach (GTA) being pursued by the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) seeks to address the causes and consequences of gender inequalities. Aquatic agricultural systems are those in which production in natural freshwater and/or coastal ecosystems contribute substantially to people's food, nutrition and economic security. This CRP is implemented by WorldFish, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Bioversity International and a wide range of research and development partners. It operates in learning hubs in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Philippines, Solomon Islands and Zambia. In this brief, we highlight the conceptual and methodological approaches and the early implementation experiences of the GTA in the Barotse Floodplain hub in Zambia.

A RESEARCH-IN-DEVELOPMENT APPROACH

The GTA of AAS in Zambia and elsewhere is embedded in an overarching research-in-development (RinD) approach (see Figure 1). Committed to people and place, gender-transformative participatory action research (PAR) enables learning and networking through effective partnerships and strengthened capacities. The iterative learning loops include:

- assessing and diagnosing needs, opportunities and challenges through participatory social and gender analysis;
- envisioning a development goal and identifying a menu of technical and institutional solutions, informed by science;
- prioritizing and implementing replicable solutions with a range of stakeholders, often on a pilot basis;
- evaluating and up-scaling field-tested, science-based solutions across the relevant governmental and nongovernmental decision-making, financing and implementing partners.

Transformative change is a “deep, enduring change in which what emerges is fundamentally different from what went [on] before”.⁶ Such change can only be facilitated with a sound and in-depth understanding of the social and gender context and using participatory processes that embody communities’ visions and constant reflection and action and refinement. The development challenges that rural people face are multifaceted and complex. No one organization or sectoral approach can tackle

these effectively. Developing multi-sectoral partnerships and strengthening capacities of stakeholders is critical. Such profound and irreversible change that involves changes in people’s mind-sets, attitudes and behaviors and social and institutional structures happens slowly, and thus requires long-term engagement.

Stakeholders in the Barotse Floodplain identified the following hub development challenge (HDC): “to make more effective use of the seasonal flooding and natural resources in the Barotse Floodplain system through more productive and diversified aquatic agricultural management practices and technologies that improve lives and livelihoods of poor women and men”. They also identified major areas of intervention that would help them address this challenge. The challenge requires an interdisciplinary and multi-partner RinD 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 to lessen flood risks, sustainably increase farm productivity and diversification, and improve health, nutrition and food safety. All these processes are gendered; the GTA is at the core of achieving this vision.

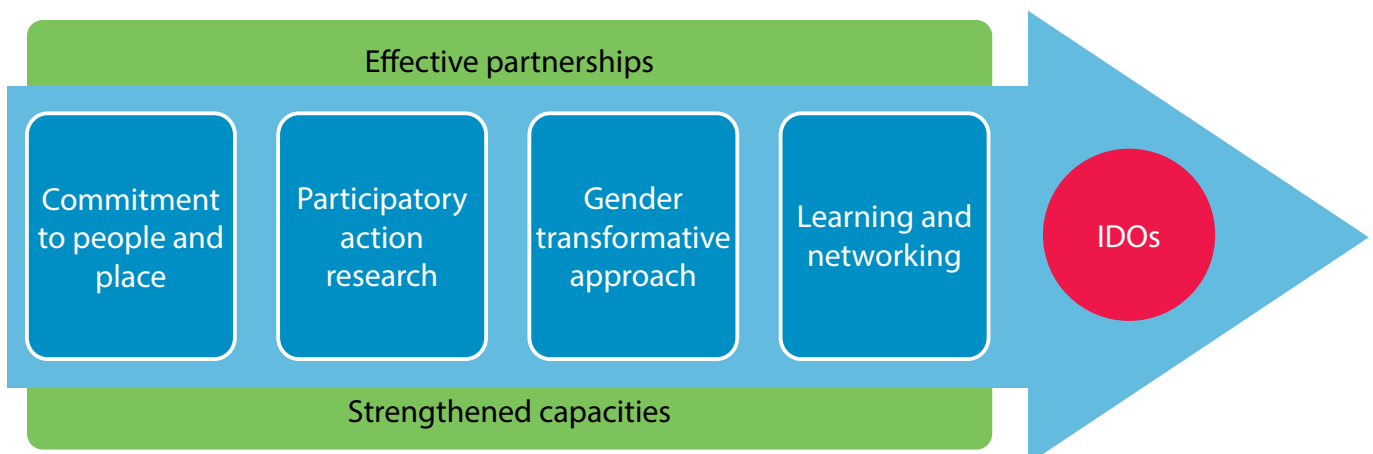


Figure 1. AAS research-in-development approach. IDOs: intermediate development outcomes.⁵

THE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH

Figure 2 details how the GTA is embedded in the RinD process. GTA uses PAR to create spaces for women and men to critically reflect *together*, question and redress the underlying social norms and power relations that exist and persist in their communities. This is the basis for more gender-equitable development outcomes that shift mind-sets and practices and facilitate institutional changes.⁷ These shifts need to span not just women and men in households but also a wide range of other stakeholders including community leaders and service providers, government and nongovernmental agencies, research organizations and the private sector operating in and outside the Barotse Floodplain.

The GTA addresses processes at higher scales to ensure an equitable allocation of public resources to both women and men and to help enable change at the community and household levels where: women and men live and farm together on a daily basis, children are raised, and elders and the sick are taken care of. Intra-household and community

relationships are characterized by cooperation and conflict.⁸ Dialogue and negotiations in the envisioning, planning and implementation of family members' activities and of their access to external support can generate sustainable win-win solutions that increase the well-being and productivity of all family members and transform gender relations to equitably improve health, food and nutrition security, and tackle poverty for all. There are a range of methods and tools that have been used by various agencies and efforts to facilitate this process. Oxfam Novib (working with Linda Mayoux) incorporated such dialogue as gender action learning systems (GALS) in their Women's Empowerment Mainstreaming and Networking (WEMAN) project to help facilitate gender justice in economic development.⁹ A similar 'household approach' has been developed in Zambia with support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA).¹⁰ The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) continues to support the household approach and is also synthesizing the lessons learned.¹¹

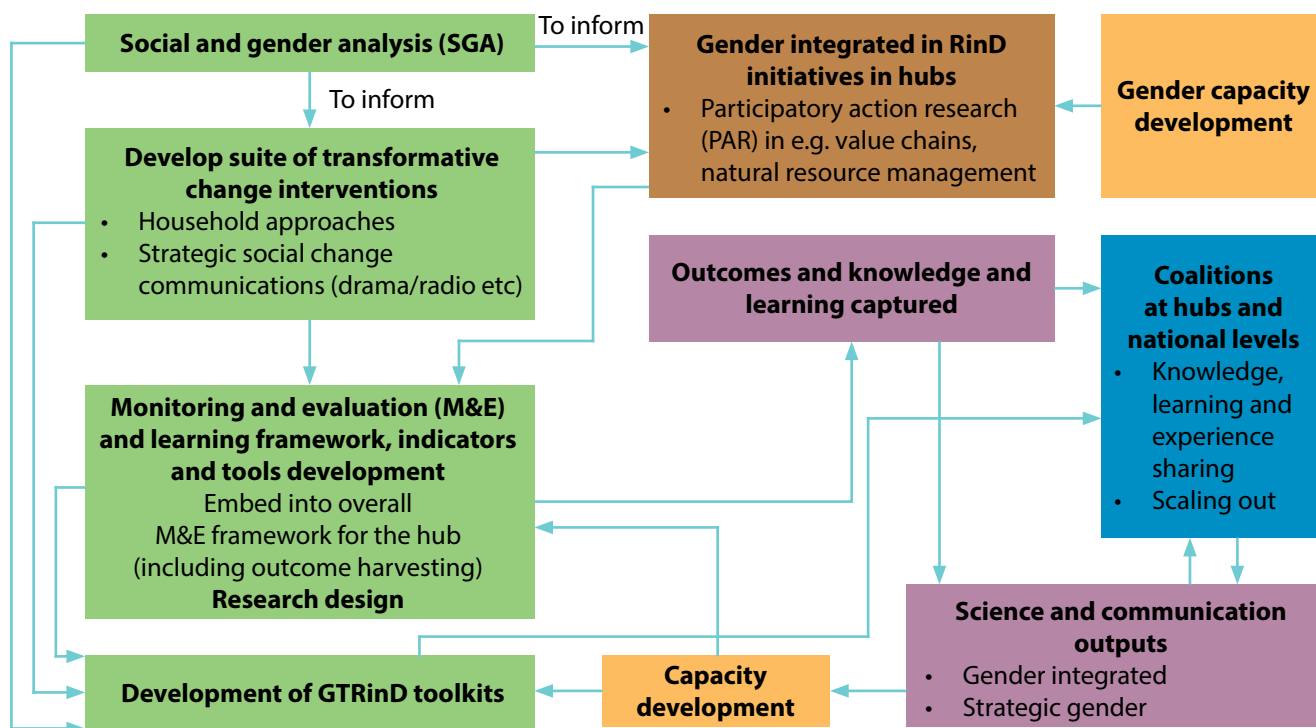


Figure 2. Gender transformative research-in-development.¹²

AAS in the Barotse Floodplain is being implemented by governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Barotse Royal Establishment (BRE, which is the traditional authority of Western Province, Zambia), CGIAR and other researchers. The stakeholders selected ten initial focal communities, bringing women, men and youth together at the community level and increasingly at household levels, to build capacity and identify locally-defined development challenges and carry out action plans to achieve community visions. AAS carried out a number of participatory diagnoses that utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods, including gender and nutrition scoping analyses, fish value chain (FVC) and agro-biodiversity (ABD) studies, a gendered agricultural water management scoping, a comprehensive social and gender analysis (SGA), a seasonal food availability assessment, and a mapping of ecosystem services. All the studies to a varying degree included an analysis of key social and gender issues such as land tenure and kinship, norms, attitudes and practices that create inequalities between and within certain social groups. These studies and process documentation enable the program (including women, men and youth living in the ten focal communities) to gain a better understanding of the existing situation or how things are (or are not) currently changing, and provide a benchmark for evaluation over time.

As depicted in Figure 2, these initial research-based activities are beginning to inform a number of RinD initiatives and a suite of transformative change interventions that aim to identify promising science-based solutions, pilot-test their implementation, and up- and out-scale as appropriate, with the ultimate goal of improving development outcomes and gender relations throughout the Barotse Floodplain.

Fish value chain (FVC) development. The FVC study showed how access to water bodies that contain fish primarily benefit men, given the gender norms that prohibit women from

catching larger fish in deeper waters. Women are relegated to perform tasks within less profitable nodes of the fish value chain, thereby missing out on opportunities to generate larger incomes. In late 2013, a fish value chain platform was developed comprising multiple stakeholders including traders and women and men from the Zambezi Fish Conservation Association (ZFCA). The primary aim of the platform was to improve fish conservation practices in the floodplain system,¹³ recognizing that fishing, post-harvest processing and trading are all gendered. The platform members recently began implementing a post-harvest fish processing intervention to test the feasibility of salting fish as an alternative processing technique for both women and men and to achieve better nutrition and food safety and more sustainable processing techniques. This pilot intervention will also engage women and men fishers and traders in critical reflection processes to examine and address the harmful norms and practices that limit women's participation in fishing and larger income-generating activities within the fish value chain. The learning from the pilot intervention will feed into a larger, 30-month RinD project that was recently funded. The project will deploy strategic communication products for social change led by Johns Hopkins University Center for Communication Programs (JHU•CCP) to address the norms and power relations that create gender inequalities in the fish value chain.

Lack of access to capital was highlighted as a main obstacle to engaging in agricultural and income-generating activities in the focal communities. As women are widely observed to be interested and perform well in micro-credit programs, such an intervention was started as a demand-driven and strength-based institutional entry point for community organizations. Global and local AAS partners, Catholic Relief Services and Caritas-Mongu, have begun to train community facilitators to form groups comprised mostly women called savings and internal lending communities (SILC). In the long-term, these groups will be linked to formal

lending institutions, the private sector and development organizations. As with any other activity, participation by women in economic empowerment activities affects intra-household dynamics. Women's empowerment may incite men to follow women's examples as the 'best case' scenario, but an almost exclusive involvement of women can also result in jealousies, obstruction, and even an increase in gender-based violence.¹⁴ Therefore, AAS is collaborating with Promundo-US¹⁵ to engage men in this RinD pilot activity. The main action-research question AAS aims to answer is: how can engaging men improve gender relations within and outside the household, reduce forms of violence against women and girls, increase men's involvement in caregiving practices, and improve the ways they support and collaborate with women to help them achieve their strategic life goals? In other words, can SILC+ groups (SILC + gender transformative programs) provide a 'safe space' to examine and address harmful masculinities that contribute to impoverishment (specifically women's) in the Barotse Floodplain?

Flood risk and canal management. An important component of the hub's development challenge is to take advantage of the seasonal flooding in a sustainable manner. A gender analysis on kinship relations, land tenure and water management and family farming was conducted that highlighted gendered control over land and water.¹⁶ The understanding of the roles of the male-dominated BRE and the Zambian Government's and others' interventions in canal maintenance and rehabilitation will help identify ways to begin transforming current institutional arrangements that lead to more equitable benefits for poor women and men. Participatory geographic information systems (GIS) maps of the flooding patterns will catalyze further dialogue and coordination between all parties by: ensuring scientific outputs are within the reach of community members and facilitating informed decision-making.

The flood risk and canal management initiative will collaborate with the *productivity* initiative to implement PAR activities that will generate science-based solutions to help people make better use of fertile land that is inundated most of the year for gardening, planting 'winter' wheat, rice or other food and cash crops. The research will help determine whether engaging in such practices enable women, men and their

families to increase productivity and avoid (or postpone) entry into a hungry season.

The agro-biodiversity baseline study carried out in 2013 found that certain social groups (e.g. older men, older women, women heads of households, and youth) focus on different crop species and that varieties differed across the varied segments of the 10 focal communities. Sex-disaggregated data collected at the household level captured the types of resources accessed by women and men, the investments they make in crop species and their varieties, and the different plants they collected from the local ecology for use as food. These data will be used to inform future PAR activities that will generate science-based solutions to enhance more equitable access to and use of crop species and their varieties.

Nutrition sensitive landscapes. Through a collaborative effort with the Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH) CRP on nutrition sensitive landscapes, AAS carried out farm interviews, participatory seasonal food availability assessments and mapping of ecosystem services. One goal of this research was to understand how landscape configuration (i.e. location, arrangement) and composition (i.e. land types and uses) determine how women and men benefit from and use their landscape and individual land types and land-use elements embedded within it. Additionally, the research assessed the capacity of the floodplain to provide a whole diet (nutritionally and culturally complete, within a context of environmental sustainability) and to create tools that help people bridge seasonal food gaps.

Map 1 below corroborates the findings from the FVC study and provides a more nuanced view of the fishing contexts of three AAS focal communities (Mapungu, Lealui and Nalitoya). Specifically, women tend to fish closer to their villages and canals, while men travel longer distances to fish in deeper waters such as rivers. This is particularly the case for Nalitoya, a permanent community located on the boundary of the floodplain. In Lealui, which is a permanent community located in the center of the floodplain, women fish in shallow water or ponds (northeast direction) and men fish in the Zambezi River or its tributaries. In Mapungu, fishing areas for men are located along the canal and towards the Zambezi River (east), while women fish in the southern and northern areas of the canal.

Local knowledge about land types is important for better understanding and planning crop improvement and diversification, while decreasing flood and drought risk. The land-use classification corresponds to particular hydrological processes and/or to a topographical location indicating crop suitability by flood and drought risk (e.g. how much time is available for cropping between flood cycles based on risk of the soil drying out or the risk of the crop becoming inundated). Therefore, the flood pulse drives the delivery of ecosystem services (water for irrigation, fishing, soil fertility), which is spatially and temporally differentiated by microtopography. The assessment of ecosystem services in a select number of AAS focal communities included women's and men's perspectives and diverse provisioning, regulating and cultural ecosystem services to identify which ones (and sources of services) were a priority for provisioning the whole of diet production and sustaining livelihoods. Interventions that provide science-based solutions to improve dietary diversity and the provision of ecosystem services will be piloted in the near future (e.g. flood pulse impact on water for irrigation, fishery sustainability, livestock rotation for soil fertility improvements, water quality and accessibility) and aim to benefit vulnerable groups during seasonal changes.

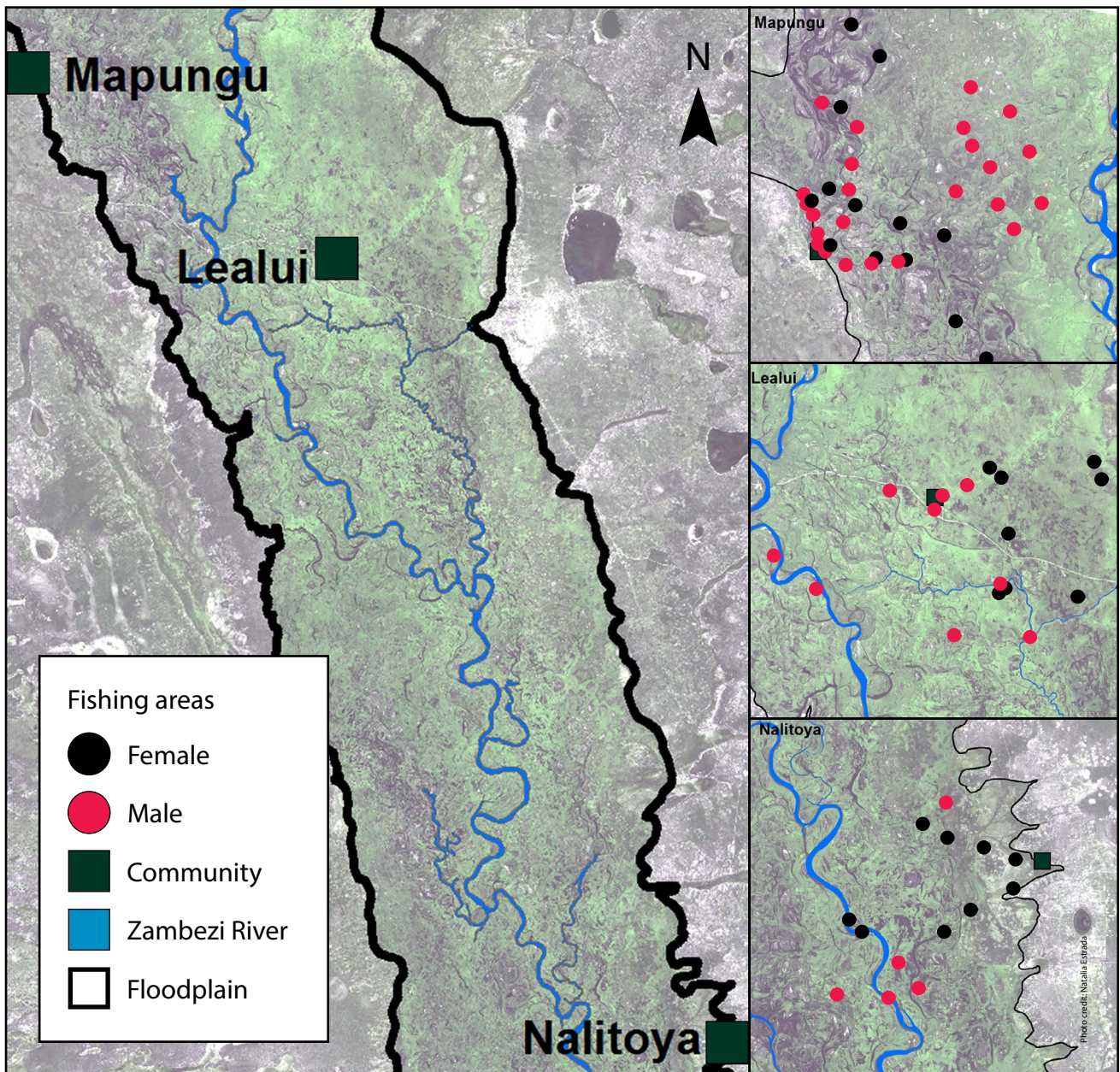
Strategies for transformation at community and hub scales

Coalitions. The successful implementation of science-based solutions prioritized by women, men and youth in the ten focal communities will often depend on the support and advocacy from a range of development and governance organizations, such as the BRE, ministries that make up the central government, local and international NGOs and the private sector. AAS has started brokering relationships around such solutions. Through strategic coalition formation and continued reflection and evaluation, a model of how to facilitate such demand-driven and science-based GTAs will crystallize within partners and other organizations; this model can be replicated, institutionalized and applied beyond the 10 focal communities.

AAS is supporting the BRE in compiling a strategic development plan. This highlights the vital role that BRE can play in catalyzing

local development, via potential funding agencies. Capacity building on how to include women in the development process will further overcome any stereotypes that traditional authorities are barriers to development. AAS is also supporting the establishment and/or strengthening of platforms (e.g. on flood risk, fish value chains, gender) at different scales. The program will work with preexisting gender development and coordinating subcommittees at district and provincial levels to give a wide variety of stakeholders opportunities to share knowledge, approaches and technologies to help build people's capacities to innovate. Linking such a platform to other platforms that are more technical-based presents yet another opportunity to embed GTA and scale the approach beyond the provincial level.

Strategic communication for social change. GTA and RinD are complex processes that require transformation at multiple scales to have a deeper and sustainable change. JHU-CCP is partnering with AAS to identify and understand pathways to change within these complex systems and develop effective communication strategies grounded in the local context to address behavioral change drawing on their vast experience in the health sector. They use a socio-ecological model to target change, which includes enabling environments, service-delivery systems, communities, husbands and wives, family members and individuals. JHU-CCP mobilizes an array of communication strategies such as digital media, broadcast media, community mobilization, interpersonal communication, advocacy and capacity building to catalyze change and develop evidence-based tools. A theory-based approach is used to inform their research activities to identify the underlying causal mechanisms and the contextual programmatic elements that generate the observed effects, rather than simply quantifying change. Their research focuses on the sources and barriers to behavior change at individual, household, community and environmental levels, and most importantly, it helps identify why programs have an impact and how they can be improved.



Map 1. Fishing areas in three AAS focal communities (Mapungu, Lealui and Nalitoya). The participatory mapping activity was disaggregated by sex. A Landsat image was printed on a 42" by 42" poster overlain with transparencies to allow women and men participants to directly indicate the location of the fishing areas. Distances and proportion were corroborated with people in all three communities.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING

AAS acknowledges that integrating a GTA into agriculture and food security research and development programs can be challenging, particularly when skills, capacities, knowledge and institutional processes have not yet caught up with an organization's gender-integration intentions. Integrating a GTA within AAS demands deep attitudinal and behavioral changes, or shifts in social and gendered "habits of mind"¹⁷ and hearts, from all involved. Achieving buy-in and engagement in gender transformative change requires: a constant and sustained investment in strengthening gender capacities; skills and fostering of new gender-aware ways of viewing the world among staff and partners, and among women and men from the communities where AAS operates; and nurturing of an organizational culture in which principles of gender equality and diversity are valued and embedded in everyday operating

practices. AAS is therefore aspiring to invest in continuous gender capacity development and organizational culture change (GCDOCC). An action plan is being developed to strengthen the capacities of various groups based on assessments of the respective competencies needed and using blended learning approaches (formal learning of new concepts and skills, practical application and learning by doing).



A woman returning to her village after collecting bananas from her field.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this brief was to highlight the conceptual and methodological approaches used by AAS and to share some of the initial lessons the program has generated in operationalizing the GTA in the Barotse hub. It also aimed to demonstrate how important collaboration between the three CGIAR centers and partners who are implementing AAS is working and is moving from concept to action phase. As additional partners and centers involved in implementing other CRPs come onboard, such collaboration will decide

how successful AAS will be in facilitating and supporting multi-scale, gender transformative research in development activities. This is no easy task and will require the constant development of capacities to operationalize the GTA, to generate a robust evidence base to share and learn from, and ultimately, to help all stakeholders achieve the Barotse hub development challenge.



A woman making a sleeping mat from papyrus plants for sale.

- ¹ Kantor 2013
- ² Kabeer 1994; Locke and Okali 2001; van Koppen 2002; Cornwall et al. 2007; Eyben and Napier-Moore 2009; Cornwall and Edwards 2010; Chant and Sweetman 2012
- ³ See Jackson 1996; Bradshaw et al. 2013; Kabeer and Natali 2013
- ⁴ The United Nations adopted this goal in 1979 in the Convention of Elimination of All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).
- ⁵ Source: Dugan, Apgar and Douthwaite 2013
- ⁶ Brookfield 2012 (p. 131) *in* Kantor and Apgar 2013
- ⁷ Kantor and Apgar 2013
- ⁸ Sen 1990
- ⁹ <http://www.wemanglobal.org/>
- ¹⁰ Bishop-Sambrook and Wonani 2009; Farnworth et al. 2013
- ¹¹ http://www.ifad.org/gender/learning/household/Household_methodologies_e.pdf; Farnworth 2012
- ¹² Source: Puskur (In press)
- ¹³ The vision of the platform is “to have a sustainably managed fishery in which there is effective control of destructive fishing methods, improved post-harvest processing, and a cordial relationship between fishers and traders, leading to equitable benefits for men and women, promoting improved food security and incomes for those living in the Barotse Floodplain.”
- ¹⁴ Slegh et al. 2013
- ¹⁵ See www.promundo.org.br/en/
- ¹⁶ van Koppen et al. 2013
- ¹⁷ Mezirow 2000

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About the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems

Approximately 500 million people in Africa, Asia and the Pacific depend on aquatic agricultural systems for their livelihoods; 138 million of these people live in poverty. Occurring along the world's floodplains, deltas and coasts, these systems provide multiple opportunities for growing food and generating income. However, factors like population growth, environmental degradation and climate change are affecting these systems, threatening the livelihoods and well-being of millions of people.

The CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS) seeks to reduce poverty and improve food security for many small-scale fishers and farmers depending on aquatic agriculture systems by partnering with local, national and international partners to achieve large-scale development impact.

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