



## Gender transformative approaches for food security and nutrition



# GOOD PRACTICE Gender Action Learning System

### PREPARED BY

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## SECTION 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

**Name of the methodology****Gender Action Learning System (GALS)****Countries with implementation experience**

- **East and Southern Africa:** Burundi, Comoros, Ethiopia, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
- **West and Central Africa:** Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone
- **Central and South Asia:** Bangladesh, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan
- **South East Asia:** Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Viet Nam
- **Pacific:** Papua New Guinea

**Start/end date**

2008 – ongoing

**Lead organization sponsoring the development and implementation of the methodology**

GALS has been developed under the Oxfam Novib Women's Empowerment Mainstreaming and Networking (WEMAN) Programme with local partners and Linda Mayoux. The use of GALS in value chain development was piloted by Oxfam Novib and partners in Uganda through a small grant from IFAD (2009–2011). It was rolled out by Oxfam Novib with local partners in Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda with the support of a large grant from IFAD (2011–2014) and in other countries with cofunding from other donors.

Building on the experience with Oxfam Novib, a total of 51 ongoing IFAD-supported projects across 26 countries have some activities related to household methodologies (GALS being the most widely used and innovative household methodology), 37 of which are currently under implementation. They are most commonly found in projects working on value chains, agribusiness and enterprise development, agriculture and rural finance. GALS is also being used in the context of nutrition, youth engagement and climate change.

Other organizations that have worked with GALS include Hivos, Twin and Twin Trading, and SNV Ethiopia.

**Purpose of the methodology and the domains of gender inequality that are addressed**

The purpose of the GALS methodology is to enable women and men to gain more control over their lives, and catalyse and support a sustainable movement for gender justice. GALS promotes equality in rights and opportunities by:

- equipping women and men to develop individual visions for change that have achievable targets and road maps to move towards these visions; are based on analysis of their current situation, past achievements and opportunities/strengths and challenges; and are often aggregated into household visions;
- empowering the most vulnerable women and men to develop, negotiate, implement and monitor their own plans for improving productivity, raising the quality of produce, increasing incomes, reducing livelihood risks and increasing gender equality within households;
- bringing about significant changes in property rights, gender-based violence, participation in economic decision making and the performance of unpaid care and domestic work; and
- engaging with and gaining commitment of more powerful private-sector actors at the local and national levels to develop win-win strategies for value chain development that address gender issues and promote inclusion of the most vulnerable.

GALS is not a single methodology or set of tools. It is a change philosophy based on underlying principles of social and gender justice, inclusion and mutual respect. In particular, it promotes women's human rights based on the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

### Contribution of the methodology to wider development/organizational/project goals

The methodology aims at generating pro-poor wealth by addressing unequal gender and social relations, which are key constraints to achieving development goals. A key focus is breaking through gender-based barriers at the individual level and changing gender inequalities within the family, as these are the challenges that prevent both women and men from achieving their vision for gender equality and sustainable livelihoods.

GALS can be used in many different thematic areas of work including rural finance, value chain development, smallholder agriculture, rural enterprise development and community development. Consequently, GALS links directly to specific project objectives. The GALS process also facilitates project implementation by enhancing ownership of project activities by the target groups (i.e. women, men and youth), and the participatory design and monitoring of project interventions.

### Target group

The target group consists of extremely poor and food insecure women and men, including:

- smallholder farmers;
- young people, particularly unemployed youth;
- small-scale and micro entrepreneurs;
- people living with disabilities; and
- different community-based groups, depending on the nature of the project.

The poverty diamond tool for poverty ranking and profiling is used with the community to develop the targeting criteria.

## SECTION 2

## IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

### Key entry points for applying the methodology

GALS is used at multiple levels:

- individual: for individual life planning and strengthening agency;
- household: for changing gender and power relations;
- group and community: for collective action to change gender relations and norms, improve livelihoods and engage in policy advocacy;
- multi-stakeholder (e.g. in value chains): to create mutual respect, collaboration, equality and participatory decision making); and
- the private sector.

Entry points are often already existing community-based groups (e.g. producer organizations, local business associations, natural resource associations, village-level savings and credit groups) and private sector companies.

GALS is designed to be used at project/programme level. It is not primarily intended for organizational change processes. However, many of the tools of GALS can be adjusted and used at organizational levels by private sector groups and implementing partners for specific purposes.

### Implementing partners

The implementing partners vary according to the context and nature of the project.

Oxfam Novib and Hivos work through national and local civil society organizations.

In IFAD-supported projects, staff in the project management unit take the lead in overseeing the implementation of GALS activities, usually linking with the project line ministry responsible for agricultural extension, land and water development or community development.

Service providers and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) with a commitment to participatory development, human rights and gender equality may be hired to support GALS implementation at the community level. For example, GALS coordination committees comprising different stakeholders may be established at the district level to coordinate, monitor and support GALS community facilitators.

### Process of and criteria for selecting facilitators/champions/mentors

Community facilitators should have the following qualities:

- able to listen to others;
- willing to share their own process of change;
- open to learning from others;
- adept at communication;
- respectful of other people's views;
- proactive; and
- responsible for their actions.

Women and men from participating groups or communities who have already used GALS to change their situation 'emerge' as facilitators for others. Implementing organizations need to have the skill to recognize and support these change makers.

### Training of facilitators/champions/mentors

The initial training of trainers, who are usually staff from implementing partners, is provided during a five- to ten-day practical workshop led by an international GALS practitioner to ensure quality and correct understanding of the methodology. This is best done 'outside the classroom' with a pilot community. In these settings, staff learn more readily since poor people usually grasp the use of the visual diagramming tools quickly. Those who have learned GALS from or with the community are usually more successful in their role of supporting the community facilitators. They learn that they can step aside and give space to community members to do the training rather than perpetuate top-down systems of transferring knowledge. The international practitioner undertakes periodic follow-up visits, especially during the early stages, to backstop the trainers and facilitators, provide additional training, and support the adaptation of the GALS tools to local contexts, if necessary. Over time, the community facilitators build up their own network of peer facilitators, who emerge from their group members.

In some settings, a distinction is drawn between 'basic' GALS tools that focus on gender inequalities, and 'advanced' tools that address specific thematic areas, such as natural resource management or savings and financial inclusion.

## SECTION 3

## IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

### Key steps in the implementation cycle

GALS can be adjusted and applied in many ways. GALS as a gender transformative approach involves using the full methodology in a comprehensive and staged process that is embedded and linked with other activities and interventions across the project or programme. The steps outlined below are those used by Oxfam Novib. The approach is highly participatory. It operates by facilitating from the back, and making extensive use of visualization, role playing, songs and drama, all of which increase local ownership.

#### — Phase 1: Catalysing change and action

- **Step 1: Adaptation workshop with representatives of the target groups and staff of the implementing partner(s)**

Staff are introduced to GALS together with a majority of participants from marginalized communities. Community elders and leaders are also included, if manageable, to immediately start addressing power differences. The introduction is followed by capacity building for staff and implementing partners to demonstrate that gender injustice is a key cause of poverty and important to the men and women in the communities where they work. This strengthens their motivation and commitment to the process.

- **Step 2: Change catalyst workshops in each of the pilot communities**

Participants of the adaptation workshop implement what they have learned with their respective groups. Separate workshops can be held for young people.

- **Step 3: Individual life planning and community action learning** (approximately three to four months)

Participants and community facilitators introduce family members, peers and group members to the GALS tools, such as vision journeys, circle maps, trees and diamonds. These tools are used for (i) envisioning and planning change; (ii) analysing, negotiating and changing gender relations and norms; and (iii) monitoring change at the individual, household and collective levels. This process is done one step at a time. Participants then share these tools and the key gender principles with their family members and others. Participants give feedback on their experiences and are introduced to a new set of GALS tools, which they then share with their households and others.

This process continues with various tools, taking individuals, households and groups through the following steps:

- creating a long-term vision and time-bound milestones, including a business and livelihood vision, family and gender vision, and personal development vision;
- analysing and learning from past achievements, constraints and opportunities, and developing key action points;
- mapping opportunities and challenges, examining relationships, resources and power in the household and community, and developing key action points;
- sharing strategies and identifying possible solutions and actions that are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART) for individuals and groups;
- assessing the impact of achievements and addressing remaining issues; and
- aggregating activities at the household level to make a collective action strategy for the group.

Addressing the issues that are most immediately under peoples' own control at the outset forms the basis for identifying priorities and strategies for longer-term change in the wider community and institutions, and at macro levels.

Building on the behaviour change that they are able to make in their own lives, the participants in the community then train others on how to analyse the issues affecting them and to plan change. Thus, the change scales up through peer-to-peer training and sharing. The implementing partner catalyses and continuously enforces human rights in the peer-sharing process, and develops a localized GALS guide based on practice.

Key GALS tools include:

- Vision Journey: the basic GALS change planning framework where people plan how to achieve their vision, set SMART 'milestones', analyse opportunities and constraints, commit to actions and track progress over time.
- Gender Balance Tree: initiates discussion of gender issues and identifies action commitments.
- Empowerment Leadership Map: looks at the relationship network and opportunities for pyramid peer upscaling as the basis for subsequent collective action and gender justice mainstreaming.
- Challenge Action Tree: for exploring gender issues that arise (e.g. alcohol consumption) or other community issues.

- **Step 4: Participatory gender review (PGR)**

The purpose of the PGR is for participants to (i) appreciate the changes in livelihoods and gender relations; (ii) deepen their understanding of gender (in)equality and link to laws and conventions; and (iii) evaluate peer learning and map the way forward for scaling up.

At the end of the catalyst phase GALS is localized in the context and the project. There are pools of champions with stories of change who can train others, and there is a localized GALS guide.

## — Phase 2: GALS mainstreaming in interventions

During the mainstreaming phase, participatory decision-making and action learning are integrated into groups, interventions, decision spaces and organizations. In parallel, a more advanced use of participatory tools and processes is introduced. The steps depend on the thematic focus. Below is a summary example for GALS mainstreaming in value chain development.

- **Step 1: Mapping and scoping**

Based on the PGR, a coordination team is formed for scaling up GALS. Value chain analysis is done to mobilize marginalized stakeholders and address issues of unpaid labour and invisible contributions, and the complexity of livelihoods of the marginalized households involved.

- **Step 2: Negotiating the win-win**

Participatory market research enables marginalized value chain stakeholders to define their offers to and requests from powerful actors. This is followed by events between farmers, traders, buyers, input dealers and service providers to identify win-win strategies to collaborate on gender, production and marketing issues. Multi-stakeholder platforms are established for regular review and planning meetings to support collaboration that is based on equality, respect and mutually advantageous relationships.

- **Phase 3: Movement building**

The movement building phase of GALS is still under development. It aims to create a movement for gender equality for networking and advocacy, to influence policies and decision-making processes at higher levels.

### Average length of the implementation cycle

- Catalyst phase: approximately six months
- Mainstreaming phase: one to three years, depending on the scope
- Movement building phase: parallel to mainstreaming phase, period not yet defined.

### Graduation from the methodology

The community-based organizations usually develop a simple mechanism for graduating GALS ‘champions’ who have successfully applied GALS in their own lives and have influenced others to change. GALS champions who have skills in creating cohesion and are trusted by community members, voluntarily reach out to others close to them. The implementing organization also involves them in training people in other communities. Individuals ‘graduate’ when they have the ability to comprehend and apply the tools in their daily lives and their businesses.

## SECTION 4

## MONITORING

### Monitoring system

- **Internal by participants**

GALS fosters community participatory reviews and impact assessments on livelihood improvement, with a focus on poverty and gender issues. The GALS participants and groups develop a culture of ongoing monitoring. They document change through visual tools, which also provide a baseline to assess change. Progress is systematically tracked, first at the individual level for individual learning and further progress, and then shared and quantified at the group level for mutual support and exchanging experiences. Selected information is then aggregated and analysed by the group/organization and supplemented by a more qualitative investigation of issues that have arisen. Communities also use the information to track peer learning. The PGR is offered as a community-led monitoring and evaluation method.

- **External**

The project monitoring and evaluation unit consolidates quantitative and qualitative outputs and outcomes across the project. Ideally the information is verified externally. Qualitative documentation can be linked to a project’s communication and advocacy strategy. For documentation and learning purposes, staff members develop success stories and profiles. Social media networks can be used to collect, share and give support to the participants and staff by the GALS expert.

### Indicators

Indicators are developed by the participants using GALS tools, including the poverty diamond and identity diamond, gender balance tree, income tree, challenge action tree and empowerment map.

### — Quantitative

Number of women, men and youth engaging in GALS and changing behaviour in different areas, for example:

- Division of labour among household members
- Income generation and control over income by women and men
- Property/assets ownership by women and men
- Reduction in domestic violence
- Diversification of livelihoods
- Number of children being sent to school and payment of fees
- Participation of women in decision making in the home, producer groups, community and value chain platforms
- Participation of women in accessing project and other services

### — Qualitative

Stories of change from participants, household members, members of the community and private sector companies, backed by photographic records demonstrating key aspects of change.

## SECTION 5

## BUDGET

### Main items of expenditure

- Field-based exposure and workshops for the different steps and phases
- Fees of GALS experts and staff contributions
- Peer exchanges between champions
- Exchange visits between communities
- Development of localized guide and documentation of stories
- Review meetings

In some contexts, the private sector bears the costs of training the champions and staff.

### Total budget

The budget depends on the targeted outreach numbers, the number of local organizations targeted, the phases chosen, and the pre-existing experience with gender, social inclusion and participatory approaches.

## SECTION 6

## RESULTS

### Number of beneficiaries reached

Oxfam and Hivos estimate that as part of their projects with civil society partners, more than 200 000 women and men, mainly in Africa and Asia, have already used the GALS methodology to improve their livelihoods and change gender relations.

### Main changes attributed to the methodology

GALS brings about powerful, positive changes in gender and social norms and relations for both men and women, including youth, at the household and group levels.

- There is increased awareness and understanding about the underlying causes of gender inequality and their negative impacts on productivity, and individual and household well-being.
- Community members are equipped with practical tools to analyse and drive changes in their households and their communities for gender equality and sustainable livelihoods.
- A direct relationship has been found between behaviour change at the household level and livelihood improvement, including higher productivity; better access to services and markets; increases in household assets (e.g. livestock, cattle, bicycles, motorcycles, farm equipment, radios and home improvements); improved food and nutrition security; increased investments in education for boys and girls; and a reduction in the number of food-insecure months. Increased incomes and savings are used to rent land for farming, hire casual farm labour, buy improved seeds and boost small trade.

- Key areas of change that make this possible include reduced alcohol abuse, gambling and domestic violence; and men taking up domestic chores (e.g. fetching water and firewood, and cooking food), which reduces women's workload and enables them to spend more time on business or leisure.
- Within families, women can openly discuss key issues with men, such as family planning, and make decisions about expenditures and new enterprises. Women also take up leadership positions and increasingly acquire, own and control property. Young people can become more motivated by seeing a positive future for themselves. Planning and tracking income and expenditure flows and the use of resources is important for the poorest households to cope better during long periods of food insecurity and other crises.
- The common visions developed at the group and cooperative levels lead to collective businesses, stronger community organizations and better links with buyers and input suppliers.
- In the workplace, GALS contributes to achieving the fair and equitable treatment of the labour force, and overcoming the marginalization of female workers.

In addition, the communication, analytical and participatory skills of staff from the project and implementing partners are strengthened, which enables them to work better with women and men from poor households.

### Key success factors and strengths of the methodology

The key elements responsible for the successes of the methodology are:

- GALS ensures social justice is non-negotiable.
- GALS enables a deeper level of analysis to demonstrate links between gender-based constraints and poverty reduction/wealth creation for both women and men, which results in positive change in sensitive gender-related behaviours and norms that are often considered to be unchangeable.
- The vision journey motivates women and men to gather information, analyse it and then look for solutions by developing their own objectives and strategies. Motivation is created by undertaking action from day one and seeing that some change can happen quickly, as well as in the longer term.
- Starting with an analysis of personal life dynamics helps people realize that they are part of the solution to any challenge they may be facing and that benefits that can be reaped by all if the negative impacts of gender inequalities are addressed.
- GALS facilitation, known as 'facilitating from the back', gives everyone the space to explore, contribute to and develop their own plans of change.
- Constructive communication at the household, group, enterprise and community levels is improved by facilitating dialogue and using practical approaches based on visual tools that can be adapted to different contexts. The pictorial tools help clarify thoughts and concepts, and ground visions in reality.
- Moving from individual to collective actions can become a strong voice to advocate for addressing local issues.
- When GALS is applied at the level of producer organization, as well as with individual members, there are shared interests in improving the productivity of the value chain and the quality of produce to help everyone achieve their visions.
- Rather than perpetuating existing power structures, giving support to new leaders emerging from the vulnerable participants enables behaviour change and livelihoods improvement to scale up quickly.
- Peer mentoring is driven by the enthusiasm of champions to share the GALS tools because of the profound life-changing experiences they have experienced themselves.
- Creating a pyramid outreach network by community facilitators through peer sharing and learning in their communities and associations develops a community-level movement to change gender norms.
- Organizing learning events in a country fosters peer learning and motivates community facilitators and GALS champions.

### Challenges and measures to overcome them

- To have an impact, the mindset of extension staff needs to shift from ‘sensitization’ and ‘teaching’, to facilitating a community-led empowerment process.
- When engaging with private-sector stakeholders to negotiate win-win strategies, addressing gender issues can slip off the agenda if not well facilitated.
- Buy-in from project staff to mainstream the GALS methodology in existing work requires creativity to adapt to the priorities and pace of participating communities.
- There is a need to develop comprehensive and continuous follow-up at the project level.
- Inadequate resource allocation to GALS-related activities in project design and annual workplan and budgets is a challenge that can be addressed by conducting basic GALS awareness sessions for staff from various project components.
- There can be an initial reluctance among community members to address ‘gender’ and engage through drawing.
- A reliance on GALS champions to work as volunteers in supporting the sharing process among peers can be recognized through certificates that provide added motivation.

### Potential for upscaling

- If well facilitated and structured (and if the socio-political context allows it), peer scaling up happens spontaneously, with little effort required from organizations beyond monitoring and ensuring that the gender and human rights’ perspectives are not lost.
- Pyramid sharing is an integral part of the GALS process. Each champion is a catalyst for upscaling. They can start with ‘easy people’ to work with, track their own progress, brainstorm on further ways of upscaling and identify ways of working with those who are more difficult to reach.
- Requirements to support upscaling include buy-in from government, donors, private sector and implementing agencies.
- Developing an international network of GALS practitioners and South-South events across Africa has been a powerful way for exchanging information and fostering peer learning among practitioners.

### Potential for replication

- **Key enablers**
  - Choose an appropriate entry point
  - Invest in facilitation skills to create a pool of good facilitators
  - Support GALS champions (a key resource is the community member who has grasped the methodology and can support other individuals and groups as they go through the process of change)
  - Embed GALS within relevant organizations (e.g. local governments, farmer organizations, private sector actors, donors)
  - Challenge hierarchies in organizations and power relations between marginalized women and men and development professionals

### Sustainability of the methodology once project/external input is complete

- Once the benefits to be gained from using GALS have been demonstrated, groups often pay allowances to community facilitators from their own resources.
- The integration of GALS into project activities strengthens the culture of long-term planning and visioning in the areas of business and livelihoods development, family and gender, and personal development.
- Uptake by local governments and businesses improves their planning and supply chains.

## SECTION 7

## RESOURCES

**Publications**

- Mayoux, L. and Oxfam Novib (2014) *GALS Phase 1 manual*  
[https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/140701\\_RRDD\\_manual\\_July\\_small\(1\).pdf](https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/140701_RRDD_manual_July_small(1).pdf)
- Reemer, T. and Makanza, M. (2014) *Practical Guide For Transforming Gender And Unequal Power Relations In Value Chains, Oxfam Novib*  
[https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/150115\\_Practical%20guide%20GALS%20summary%20Phase%201-2%20lr.pdf](https://www.oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/150115_Practical%20guide%20GALS%20summary%20Phase%201-2%20lr.pdf)
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[https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41377902/hhm\\_stocktake.pdf/d64f0301-19d5-b210-3ace-765ba0b5f527](https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/41377902/hhm_stocktake.pdf/d64f0301-19d5-b210-3ace-765ba0b5f527)

**Websites**

- GAMEchange Network website  
<https://gamechangenetwork.org/>
- GAMEchange Network on Facebook  
<https://www.facebook.com/GAMEchangeNetwork/>
- Oxfam Novib website  
[www.oxfamnovib.nl/weman](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/weman)

**Cover photo:** Family members show their GALs vision journey for gender equality and a better livelihood as part of a project by CAMKID and Oxfam in BOKEO Province Lao PDR

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This good practice is part of the publication '*Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices*' prepared in the framework of the *Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture (JP GTA)*. The Joint Programme is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme and funded by the European Union.



Joint Programme on

Gender  
Transformative  
Approaches

for Food Security and Nutrition

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Funded by  
the European Union



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