Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

AT A GLANCE

Background

Since 2019, the United Nations Rome-based Agencies (RBAs) – the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – have been implementing the Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture (JP GTA) in collaboration with and through financial support from the European Union.

The JP GTA seeks to assist in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by supporting efforts to address the root causes of gender inequalities and trigger transformative change processes that lead to gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in their households, communities and society – and ultimately, the improvement of the livelihoods of all women and men. It supports the RBAs in adopting gender transformative approaches (see Box 1) in their policy dialogues, programmes, working modalities and institutional mechanisms, while enhancing their collaboration on Zero Hunger and Gender Equality.

Gender transformative approaches have been increasingly recognized as central in achieving sustained change towards gender equality. However, important knowledge gaps remain in how to appropriately measure gender transformative change within food security and nutrition programmatic interventions. This is partly due to the complex nature of the changes that are sought through gender transformative approaches, which may require the measurement of changes in deep-seated power relations and gender norms, as well as changes in individual and collective agency.

With the aim of enhancing the capacity of the RBAs, the European Union, CGIAR and other research and development partners to design, implement, monitor and evaluate gender transformative interventions, the JP GTA partnered with the CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform to develop the "Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture" (hereinafter "the Guidelines").

The intended audience of these Guidelines includes gender experts and programme specialists seeking to design, implement, monitor and evaluate gender transformative interventions in food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture programmes and initiatives. This abbreviated "At a glance" version has been developed as a reference tool to introduce experts and practitioners to key concepts and messages from the Guidelines in a condensed format.

BOX 1. What is a gender transformative approach?

A gender transformative approach seeks to actively examine, challenge and transform the underlying causes of gender inequalities rooted in discriminatory social institutions. As such, this approach aims to address the unequal and gendered power relations and discriminatory gender norms, attitudes, behaviours and practices, as well as discriminatory or gender-blind policies and laws, that create and perpetuate gender inequalities. By doing so, it seeks to eradicate the systemic forms of gender-based discrimination by creating or strengthening equitable gender relations and social institutions that support gender equality.

1 A framework for measuring gender transformative change

At the core of measuring gender transformative change is the understanding that discriminatory social institutions and unequal power relations need to change, and that there is value in assessing how deep and enduring any changes have been to date.[1,2,3,4,5]

Social institutions that embed and (re)produce unequal power relations between women and men in a circular reinforcing process are the root causes of gender inequality.[6] These institutions comprise formal and informal rules and norms that organize social, political and economic relations.[7]

The transformation of social institutions to make them more gender-equitable fosters more cooperative forms of power and relationships, affirming people's capabilities, aspirations, critical awareness and dignity.[4] These multiple forms of power are linked to individual and collective agency, which are at the heart of the empowerment process.[8,9]

Gender transformative change can therefore be conceptualized as a process comprising the following key dimensions:[10]
- agency
- power relations
- social institutions

FIGURE 1. Key dimensions of gender transformative change
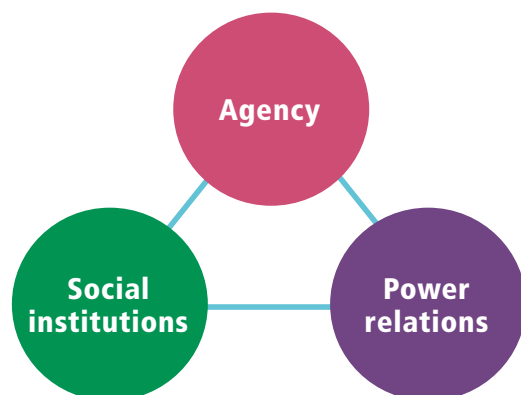
Building agency

Agency is the ability to define one's goals and act upon them.[9] Building agency entails building confidence, consciousness, aspirations and self-esteem, as well as improving knowledge, skills and capabilities.[10]

Agency is exercised at the individual and group levels via cooperative relations and collective action,[11] and can be expressed in positive and negative ways. It can include forms of negotiation, bargaining, manipulation, resistance and subversion,[9] and (according to Kabeer, pp. 14–15) encompasses "the meaning, motivation, and purpose that individuals bring to their actions" or their sense of agency.[12] There are several subdimensions of agency[13] that can be considered when measuring gender transformative change: self-image and self-esteem; legal rights; information and skills; educational attainment; employment and control of labour; mobility in public space; decision-making; group membership and activism; ownership of material assets; health and bodily integrity.

Challenging unequal power relations

Unequal gender relations are the expression of inequitable power relations and are considered the primary underlying cause of the disempowerment of women and girls.[8] It is within these relations that women face systemic disadvantages in exercising choice and expressing their voice.[8] Gender relations are embedded in patriarchal societies, where women and girls routinely experience discrimination, marginalization and subordination. Within the institutional arenas of the family, community, market and state,[8] the choices and voices of women and girls are constrained by unequal power relations.

While power can be oppressive (i.e. power over another), it can also be a means of transforming one's own life and those of others.[14] Challenging unequal power

TABLE 1. Expressions of power

Power over	*Power over* involves using power to repress, force, coerce, discriminate against, corrupt or abuse others
Power within	*Power within* has to do with a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge.
Power to	*Power to* concerns the unique potential of every person to shape their lives and world.
Power with	*Power with* involves finding common ground among shared and different interests and building collective strength.

Source: Modified from VeneKlasen, L. & Miller, V. 2002. Power and empowerment. *PLA Notes*, 43: 39–41. https://pubs.iied.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/migrate/G01985.pdf.

relations involves developing strategies to move away from inequitable *power over* relationships among individuals and groups towards building more positive expressions of power, including *power within*, *power to*, and *power with* in ways that help to catalyse systemic change.[15,16,17,18,19,20]

Making social institutions more gender equitable

Social institutions consist of both formal and informal rules and norms[7] that are made and remade through people's practices,[21] and that change over time. These rules and norms structure how social relations play out in the institutional arenas of the family, community, market and state. Formal institutions comprise the written constitutions, policies and laws, and rights and regulations that are imposed by governmental and other authorities, while informal institutions comprise "unwritten" social norms, customs, values, traditions and sanctions.

Social institutions dictate how agricultural inputs or land get distributed or accessed/owned by women, often in ways that constrain their abilities to communicate and act upon their practical needs and strategic life goals. In this context, both formal and informal institutions frequently interact with each other. For instance, formal policies combined with discriminatory social norms can create barriers to women's involvement in leadership positions within farmers' associations, and can limit women's power to participate in key agricultural and other decisions within their households.

By developing their personal and collective agency, women can strengthen their decision-making and collective power – and their leadership capacities – to challenge informal and formal institutions to become more equitable,[10] thereby catalysing transformative change processes.[8]

There are several subdimensions of social institutions[13] that reflect the above-mentioned references to formal and informal institutions, such as marriage or kinship rules and roles, market accessibility, and allocation of state resources.

In sum, gender transformative change involves building agency, challenging unequal power relations that disfavour women and girls, and making formal and informal social institutions more gender equitable, which can ultimately lead to more equitable social structures (e.g. macroeconomic structures, governance structures). Changes in the three dimensions of gender transformative change are mutually reinforcing (Figure 1). Increases in individual and collective agency, for instance, can propel changes in power relations among individuals, groups and organizations. Concurrently, changes in power relations can promote changes in formal and informal social institutions and give impetus to individual and collective agency. Changes in social institutions can also create space for individual and collective agency, thereby leading to more equal gender relations. As such, gender transformative change is non-linear, but ultimately, changes in all three dimensions are required to empower women and achieve SDG 5 (Gender Equality).

Spheres of influence

Gender influences social and power relations at different levels, putting women and men in complex relationships within social institutions, which determines their status, power, and the expression of their voice.[22] As such, gender transformative change should be measured across different levels (i.e. micro, meso and macro) or spheres of influence, as follows:

- individual (micro) sphere
- household (meso) sphere
- community (meso) sphere
- organizational (meso) sphere
- macroenvironmental (macro) sphere

Given that the spheres interact with each other, changes in one sphere influence and are reflected in other spheres. These can also be measured, provided a programme is able to clearly trace and attribute cause–effect relationships between interventions in one sphere and outcomes in another.

A framework for measuring gender transformative change is shown in Figure 3 (see pp. 6–7). This framework can be applied to any programme that wishes to assess gender transformative change within one or across multiple spheres of influence. Examples of certain topical areas of interest for the key dimensions of gender transformative change are provided within each sphere of influence.

2 Points to consider when developing gender transformative change indicators

✳ Identify the core area(s) of gender equality to be measured

The JP GTA highlights nine core areas of gender equality in relation to food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture where improvements in gender relations, and in the gender equality of social institutions, result in empowering women and increasing their choices, opportunities and rights:[23]
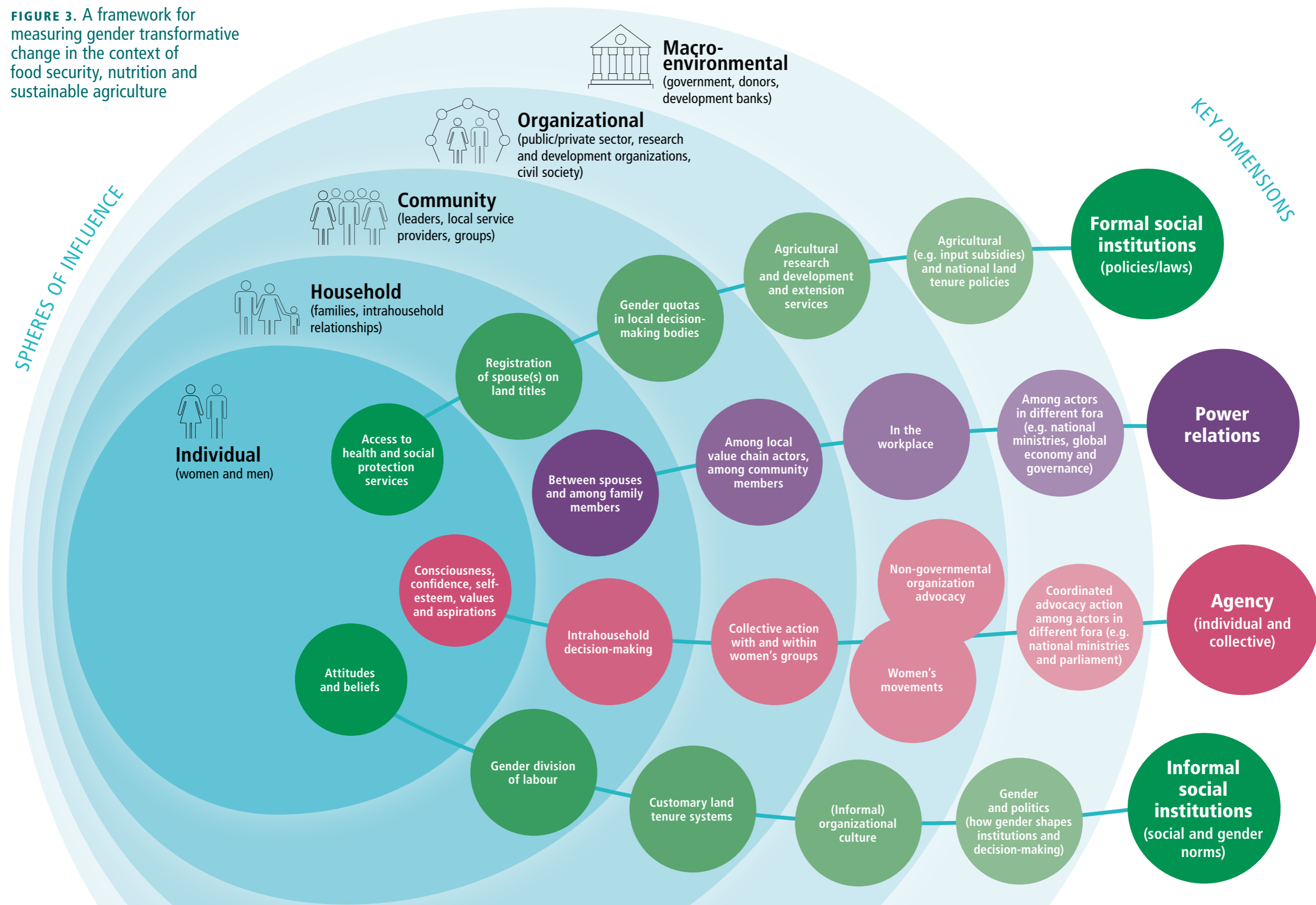
- knowledge, skills and access to information
- productive autonomy
- economic autonomy
- agency
- division of labour
- power, influence and decision-making
- participation, representation and leadership
- reproductive rights
- freedom from violence and coercion

These core areas of gender equality are often interrelated and overlapping, with changes in one area sometimes reflecting changes in others.

✳ Consider intersectionality in the indicator design process

Intersectionality refers to how different social identities, such as gender, socioeconomic status, age, ethnicity, geographical location, marital status and physical abilities, intersect to shape experiences of discrimination and oppression.[24] Viewing gender equality through an intersectional lens acknowledges that women and men are not binary categories, nor are their experiences homogenous within a given gender. Their experiences will vary depending on their social position within their community (e.g. as a wealthy woman/man from a dominant caste or ethnic group, a poor or widowed woman/man, or a young wife/husband in an extended family). Thus, when developing indicators of gender transformative change and designing monitoring and evaluation systems, it is important to consider how gender intersects with other social identities and axes of power.

FIGURE 3. A framework for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition and sustainable agriculture

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

KEY DIMENSIONS

Macro-environmental
(government, donors, development banks)

Organizational
(public/private sector, research and development organizations, civil society)

Community
(leaders, local service providers, groups)

Household
(families, intrahousehold relationships)

Individual
(women and men)

Agricultural research and development and extension services

Agricultural (e.g. input subsidies) and national land tenure policies

Formal social institutions
(policies/laws)

Gender quotas in local decision-making bodies

Registration of spouse(s) on land titles

Access to health and social protection services

Between spouses and among family members

Among local value chain actors, among community members

In the workplace

Among actors in different fora (e.g. national ministries, global economy and governance)

Power relations

Consciousness, confidence, self-esteem, values and aspirations

Intrahousehold decision-making

Collective action with and within women's groups

Non-governmental organization advocacy

Women's movements

Coordinated advocacy action among actors in different fora (e.g. national ministries and parliament)

Agency
(individual and collective)

Attitudes and beliefs

Gender division of labour

Customary land tenure systems

(Informal) organizational culture

Gender and politics (how gender shapes institutions and decision-making)

Informal social institutions
(social and gender norms)

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

✳ Recognize insider perspectives when measuring gender transformative change

Indicators are frequently formulated by programme staff, or are selected from resources produced by past initiatives. As such, many indicators do not necessarily incorporate the perspectives of the target participants, such as individual women and men, community organizations and other stakeholders. It is important that monitoring and evaluation systems create opportunities for programme participants and other relevant stakeholders to define gender transformative change from their perspectives and inform the design of gender transformative change indicators based on the changes they wish to monitor.

✳ Develop outcome indicators and identify incremental changes to measure

Programmes should develop outcome indicators to showcase how certain activities or social change innovations can help build agency and support changes in unequal power relations and discriminatory social institutions. It is useful to develop "progress markers" to help identify the incremental changes that appear to be contributing to gender transformative change processes.

Gender transformative change takes time to achieve, with rapid progress in some spheres and dimensions, and slower changes in others. Measuring incremental changes allows programmes to see how successful they are in facilitating and supporting gender transformative change processes over time, instead of only examining end-points. Keep in mind that gender transformative change can occur in both negative and positive directions – even simultaneously, across different dimensions of change. Therefore, measures to examine unintended outcomes are additionally needed.
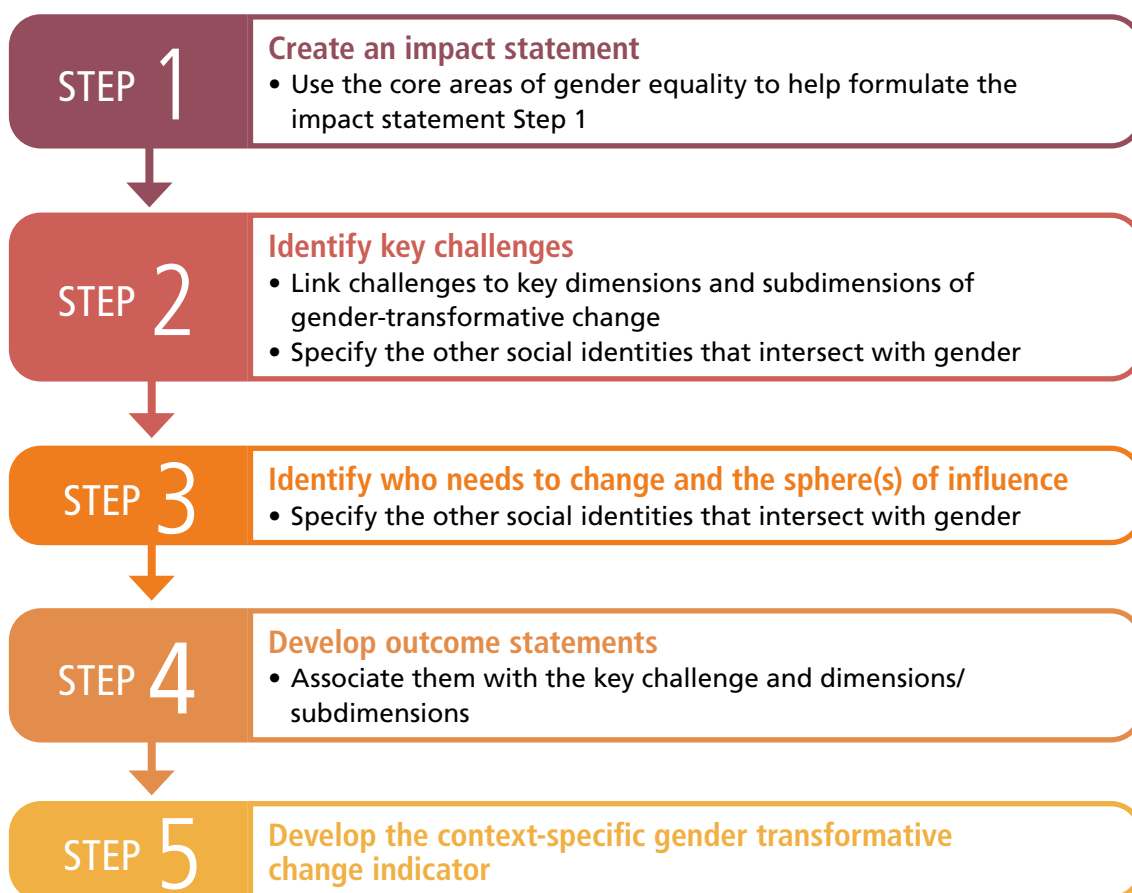
✳ Strike a balance between qualitative and quantitative indicators

Programmes should consider developing a mix of qualitative and quantitative indicators. Qualitative indicators, by gathering the views and perceptions of different people, can enable programmes to report on how and why gender norms have changed over the course of an intervention (i.e. to explain the "why" behind the *processes* of change). In turn, quantitative indicators can provide complementary information on changes in prevalence and patterns of gender norms over time.

3 A step-by-step process to develop gender transformative change indicators

A five-step process (Figure 4) to develop context-specific gender transformative change indicators is presented and described below. This is intended to help users tease out elements of gender transformative change, and then develop indicators to measure such change.

FIGURE 4. Five-step process to develop gender transformative change indicators*

STEP 1
Create an impact statement
• Use the core areas of gender equality to help formulate the impact statement Step 1

STEP 2
Identify key challenges
• Link challenges to key dimensions and subdimensions of gender-transformative change
• Specify the other social identities that intersect with gender

STEP 3
Identify who needs to change and the sphere(s) of influence
• Specify the other social identities that intersect with gender

STEP 4
Develop outcome statements
• Associate them with the key challenge and dimensions/subdimensions

STEP 5
Develop the context-specific gender transformative change indicator

Note: *When determining the specific changes that are needed to achieve positive outcomes and the associated indicators, obtain insider perspectives as necessary from potential target groups and other local stakeholders at each step, especially for Step 4 and Step 5.
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Importantly, gender transformative change is better understood when various indicators and dimensions are considered, as no single indicator in isolation should be taken as evidence of gender transformative change.
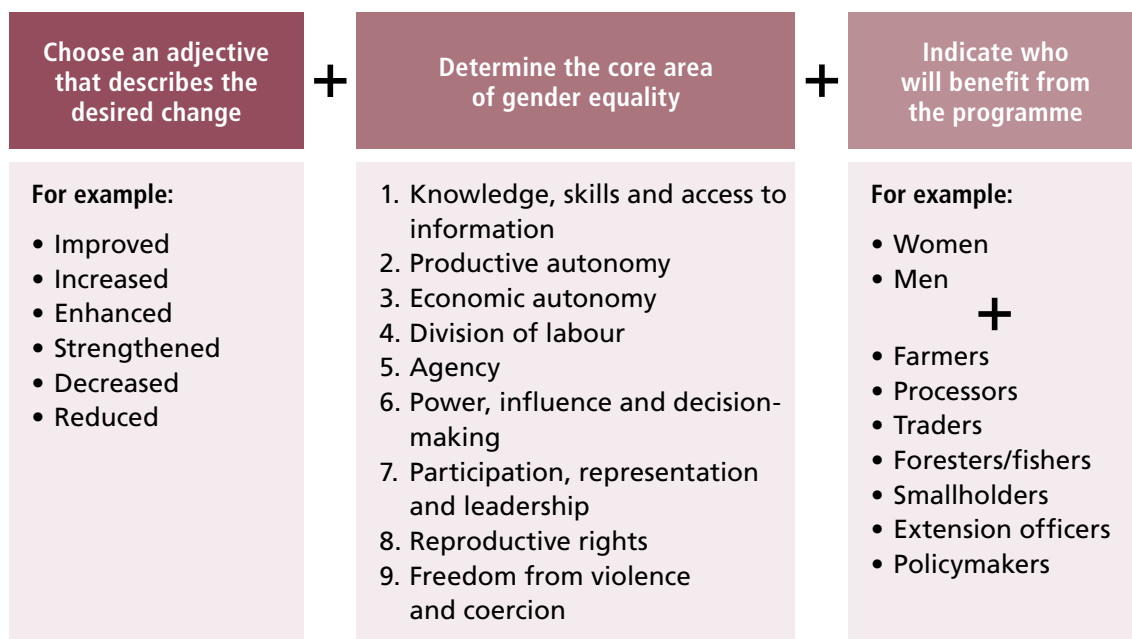
STEP 1 Create an impact statement

Determine the longer-term impacts that your gender transformative research or development programme are expected to contribute to, clearly identifying who is intended to benefit from your programme and in what way. Make sure to pay attention also to other social identities that intersect with gender. Thinking about the gender transformative change you wish to contribute to in the longer term will help you to identify and formulate related indicators of shorter-term change in subsequent steps.

! PLEASE NOTE

Use the *core areas of gender equality* to help formulate an impact statement.
See Figure 5 for assistance with the key elements to include in an impact statement.

FIGURE 5. Developing an impact statement

Choose an adjective that describes the desired change	+	Determine the core area of gender equality	+	Indicate who will benefit from the programme
For example: • Improved • Increased • Enhanced • Strengthened • Decreased • Reduced		1. Knowledge, skills and access to information 2. Productive autonomy 3. Economic autonomy 4. Division of labour 5. Agency 6. Power, influence and decision-making 7. Participation, representation and leadership 8. Reproductive rights 9. Freedom from violence and coercion		**For example:** • Women • Men **+** • Farmers • Processors • Traders • Foresters/fishers • Smallholders • Extension officers • Policymakers

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Example:

| Increased | participation in decision-making on crop production and sales | for women farmers |

STEP 2 | Identify key challenges

Identify the underlying (or root) causes of gender inequality (i.e. the key challenge or problem) that your programme wishes to address to achieve the intended impacts.

! **PLEASE NOTE**

Link the key challenge to the *dimensions of gender transformative change* (i.e. agency, power relations, and formal and informal social institutions) that the programme should focus on.

Thereafter, determine the *subdimensions* of agency and formal and informal social institutions and the *important relationships* on which the programme will focus (see Section 1).

Specify the *other social identities that intersect with gender* (e.g. age, educational level, marital status, wealth status, ethnicity, race, religion, geographic location, disability).

Example:

STEP 1	Impact statement	
STEP 2	**Key challenge(s)**	Resource-poor married women lack voice and bargaining power on crop production and sales within the household.
	Dimensions and subdimensions or important relationships of gender transformative change	Dimension: agency – Subdimensions: decision-making, self-image/esteem, information and skills Dimension: power relations – Important relationships: spouses or domestic partners Dimension: informal social institutions – Subdimension: social norms

STEP 3 Identify who needs to change and the sphere(s) of influence

Determine whose behaviours, attitudes or beliefs create the key challenge to bringing about women's empowerment and gender equality outcomes. These groups become the focus (target) of the gender transformative research or development programme. They may (or may not) include the people or groups identified in your impact statement (Step 1), but also others who contribute to sustaining gender inequalities. In addition, identify which sphere(s) of influence these groups operate within.

! PLEASE NOTE

Choose the specific *groups whose behaviours, attitudes and beliefs will be targeted by the programme, and which sphere(s) of influence* (i.e. individual, household, community, organizational and macroenvironmental) the groups primarily operate in.

Specify the *other social identities that intersect with gende*r.

Example:

STEP 1	Impact statement	
STEP 2	Key challenge(s)	
	Dimensions and subdimensions or important relationships of gender transformative change	
STEP 3	Target groups	Resource-poor married women and their spouses/partners
	Sphere(s) of influence	Individual, household and community

STEP 4 Develop outcome statements

Develop outcome statements specifying what each target group could do differently to overcome the key challenge identified in Step 2. Remember to focus on the key dimensions (agency, power relations, and formal and informal social institutions) and their subdimensions when defining each statement. Indicate the time frame and possible incremental changes that could lead to achieving the outcomes.

! PLEASE NOTE

The use of participatory methods to obtain *insider perspectives* of target groups and other local stakeholders are critical here when determining the specific changes required to achieve each desired outcome.

Example:

STEP 1	Impact statement	
STEP 2	Key challenge(s)	
	Dimensions and subdimensions or important relationships of gender transformative change	
STEP 3	Target groups	
	Sphere(s) of influence	
STEP 4	Desired outcomes	Outcome 1 – Resource-poor married women gain the skills and confidence to make decisions on crop production and sales within the household. Outcome 2 – Men in resource-poor women´s households recognize women´s skills and value their contribution in decisions about crop production and sales.
	Incremental changes (progress towards achieving outcomes)	Outcome 1 – At month 6: Resource-poor married women increase their knowledge on good agricultural practices, marketing their produce, negotiations and bargaining, as well as overall confidence-building skills. – At year 1: Resource-poor married women are beginning to use good agricultural practices, better understand potential output markets and how to engage with traders, and practice their negotiation/bargaining skills. Outcome 2 – At year 1: Men in resource-poor women´s households acknowledge women's market knowledge and their contributions to the implementation of good agricultural practices. – At year 2: Men in resource-poor women´s households recognize the value of women´s capacities and contributions and involve their spouses in production and marketing decisions.

STEP 5 Develop context-specific gender transformative change indicators

Develop qualitative and quantitative indicators of gender transformative change using the information in Steps 1–4.

! **PLEASE NOTE**

Qualitative and quantitative indicators to measure gender transformative change should be context-specific.

Example:

STEP 1	Impact statement	
STEP 2	Key challenge(s)	
	Dimensions and subdimensions or important relationships of gender transformative change	
STEP 3	Target groups	
	Sphere(s) of influence	
STEP 4	Desired outcomes	
	Incremental changes (progress towards achieving outcomes)	
STEP 5	Quantitative outcome indicators	Outcome 1 – Percentage of resource-poor married women who actively participate in decisions on crop production and sales within their household – Percentage of resource-poor married women who think that women should take decisions on crop production and sales (descriptive norm*) – Percentage of resource-poor married women who think that people in the community would approve of women taking decisions on crop production and sales (injunctive norm*) Outcome 2 – Percentage of men in resource-poor households who involve their spouses in decisions about crop production and sales – Percentage of men in resource-poor households who think that women should take decisions on crop production and sales on their own (descriptive norm*) – Percentage of men in resource-poor households who agree that most people in the community would speak positively of men who involve their spouses in decisions about production and marketing of crops (injunctive norm*)
	Qualitative outcome indicators	Outcome 1 – Resource-poor married women's perspectives on the skills learned and confidence gained, and how these have influenced their decision-making capacities Outcome 2 – Resource-poor men's views on the importance of involving their spouses in decisions about crop production and sales

*As explained by the Social Norms Learning Collaborative (p. 7), descriptive norms are "perceptions about what people in the community typically do" and injunctive norms are "perceptions of what other community members typically approve or disapprove of".[25] Additional sample indicators of social and gender norm changes and guidance on how to formulate them are available in the JP GTA *Guide to formulating gendered social norms indicators in the context of food security and nutrition.*[23]

Endnotes

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Read the full Guidelines for more detail and additional resources: Link

GENDER Impact Platform — CGIAR

INITIATIVE ON Gender Equality — CGIAR

GENDER (Generating Evidence and New Directions
for Equitable Results) is a CGIAR impact platform that
synthesizes and amplifies research, fills gaps, builds
capacity and sets directions to enable CGIAR to have
maximum impact on gender equality, opportunities
for youth and social inclusion in agriculture and
food systems.

Gender Equality (HER+) is a CGIAR research
initiative working to achieve climate resilience by
strengthening gender equality and social inclusion
across food systems in the Global South.

The CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform and CGIAR
Gender Equality Initiative would like to thank
all funders that globally support their work
through contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund:
https://www.cgiar.org/funders/

Joint Programme on
Gender
Transformative
Approaches
for Food Security and Nutrition

The Joint Programme on Gender Transformative
Approaches for Food Security, Improved Nutrition
and Sustainable Agriculture (JP GTA) is implemented
by FAO, IFAD and WFP in collaboration with and
through financial support from the European Union.
https://www.fao.org/joint-programme-gender-
transformative-approaches/en

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