



4.19 Integrate Gender Transformative Approaches for Equity and Justice in Food Systems

1. What, in brief, is the solution?

The solution is the systematic integration of gender transformative approaches (GTAs) in food systems interventions. Gender-transformative approaches challenge all development actors (including the private sector) to avoid exclusive focus on the self-improvement of individual women, and rather to transform power dynamics and structures that reinforce inequality. When applied to food systems and considering the roles and responsibilities that women and men are ascribed or assume, the potential for positive change through gender transformation is unparalleled.

2. What was/were the source(s) from which this solution emerged?

This solution emerged from the many consultations and discussions that AT4 has convened. It also emerged from evidence presented in both the AT4 Science Paper and the Gender Lever Discussion note. Other sources from which this solution emerged include extensive primary literature, international human rights frameworks, and documented case studies.

3. What problem is it trying to address within food systems?

The problem this solution addresses is pervasive gender-based inequality in food systems. Despite the significant roles and responsibilities that women assume and are ascribed in food systems, often unpaid, and in ensuring food security and nutrition at household, community, national and transnational levels, they face systemic disadvantage in accessing productive resources, services and information. There is overwhelming evidence that gender-based discrimination, or the denial of women's human rights, is one of a major cause of poverty and food and nutrition insecurity.¹ Though technical, political, financial and other challenges to equality are many and varied, evidence illustrates that social norms and structural barriers are primary impediments. Discriminatory social norms, practices and roles shape the gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work; limit women's access to assets, productive resources and markets; and undermine the self-confidence and leadership potential of women.² They also facilitate exploitation and violence. But the denial of rights and entitlements, through formal and informal institutions and laws, is also central to the problem. There is widespread and systematic institutional discrimination and bias against women in access to assets and services such as – land, credit, education, extension, employment opportunities, mobility, climate and market information, and inputs and technologies. This dual problem of harmful socio-cultural norms and practices and rights denial (now with the amplifying threat of COVID-19 and its differential impact on women from a food security perspective) is global.

4. Why is addressing that problem important for achieving the goal of your working group?

Changing the harmful social relations and transforming unjust structures represents a response to the deep and stubborn barriers that women face in food systems and is necessary to truly advance towards equitable livelihoods. GTAs interpret gender as an issue of social relations as opposed to focusing solely on gender roles and considers that women and men experience different levels of vulnerability for different reasons. This implies that solutions cannot simply target women and ignore more complex and intimate relations and socio-political dynamics.

¹ FAO, 2019, the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World

² CFS, 2017, Forum on Women's Empowerment in the context of Food Security and Nutrition



5. How can this solution address that problem (theory of change)?

A framework that addresses the agency, structures and relations that occupy women's lives assists in understanding the rationale and need for transformative approaches. By building agency (confidence, self-esteem, knowledge, skills and capabilities), changing relations (the power relations through which people live their lives through intimate relations and social networks and through group membership, activism, and market negotiations) and transforming structures

(the discriminatory social norms, customs, values and exclusionary practices, laws, policies, procedures and services), progress towards gender equality can be made. Our theory of change requires a move beyond the treatment of gender

as an issue between women and men, to address gender as relational, and therefore, dynamic and something that can be transformed. Gender relations and the structures that underpin these, can adjust in response to changes in policy contexts, in labour market signals, in inter- and intra-household understanding, and in household- and community-level needs. Moreover, gender relations involve the exercise of agency, and this tells us that we should focus much more on analysis of contextual factors that mediate gender relations and food and nutrition security.

6. Why does this solution align to the definition and criteria for a 'game changing solution' developed by the Summit?

This solution is game changing because women's ability to participate on equal terms in food systems has preconditions. Globally, women face enormous gender gaps in literacy, labour, nutrition, healthcare, inheritance and other areas where rights are protected. These disadvantages are manifested in women's inability to engage fully with food systems. For example, women's access to finance is a critical for growing economic potential and improving food security and nutrition. Access to financial services allows women to procure the inputs, labour and equipment they need for productive activities and is associated with increased confidence and entrepreneurship. Critically, while this solution has multiple models and approaches, it is underpinned by the Right to Food – which protects the right of all human beings to live in dignity, free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Evidence shows that when women are empowered through education, economic opportunities, access to justice and political participation, they are better able to claim their right to food. Systems, processes, norms or even laws that restrict women's participation or voice in decision-making diminishes their potential and productivity in food systems. This solution is game changing because amplifying voice increases political representation and drives more responsive governance and accountability.

7. Existing evidence supporting the argument that this solution will work, or at least achieve the initial outcomes described above?

There is extensive and compelling evidence that gender transformative approaches contribute to improved food security, nutrition, equity and other outcomes. A project in Burundi examined the impacts of GTAs, testing a model ('EKATA') against a conventional gender approach ('Gender Light'). The Gender Light model is premised on the capacity of women to take individual actions, without addressing key consciousness-raising and collective action, considered crucial to transformation of social norms and unequal power relations. EKATA, on the other hand, aimed at transforming power relations by fully engaging men in sharing caregiving responsibilities and enabling women to gain control over productive assets and to participate in household decisions. A benefit-cost ratio for EKATA was calculated at 5:1 as



opposed to 3:1 for the Gender Light model.³ There was improved participation of women and men in community activities, and women were more confident speaking in public, and experienced less gender-based violence (and when they did, they had more options for reporting outside of their families). EKATA group members reported shorter periods of food deficit during lean seasons, and women reported greater satisfaction with division of both domestic and agricultural tasks and with access to extension services and inputs. All the women in the EKATA groups considered themselves leaders and rated spousal support as significant. Research in Tanzania supports this evidence, demonstrating that participatory gender analysis and integration, that builds empowerment pathways from the bottom up – while simultaneously working to influence the social environment in which movement along those pathways can be realized – has positive impact.⁴ Further, increases in GDP, crop production, as well as accelerated poverty alleviation associated with closing the gender gap, are accompanied by other social and economic benefits. Women spend a larger share of their income on children’s nutrition, health and education than men, for example.⁵ A cluster-randomized controlled trial conducted in Burkina Faso on the effect of women’s empowerment on reducing wasting and improving anemia among children 3-12 months, showed that interventions, particularly spousal communication, contributed to reductions in stunting.⁶ A study in Nepal, measuring outcomes against three of the 10 Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) indicators, found significant associations between women’s empowerment and increased child nutrition.⁷ Women gaining equal access to land, technology, financial services, education and markets in rural areas leads to increases in agricultural production and improved food security⁸ and there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that equitable engagement of women and men in adaptation to climate change and natural resource governance enhances environmental outcomes, soil and water conservation, and productivity.⁹ There is also extensive evidence that gender transformative approaches addressing land tenure result in income growth and greater bargaining power for women, and better child nutrition and higher educational attainment for girls.¹⁰ Biodiversity and conservation interventions that adopt gender and social inclusion strategies are associated with increases in dietary diversity.¹¹

8. What is the current and/or likely political support for this idea?

³ Africa Center for Gender, Social Research and Impact Assessment, 2021, Costs and Benefits of Applying a Gender-Transformative Approach in Agriculture Programming: Evaluation of the EKATA Model in Burundi

⁴ Galie, A. and Kantor, P., in Njuki, J., *et al*, 2016, Transforming gender and food security in the Global South

⁵ UN Women, World Bank, UNEP and UNDP, 2015, The Cost of the Gender Gap in Agricultural Productivity in Malawi, Tanzania, and Uganda. See also WFP, 2020, The power of gender equality for food security: Closing another gender data gap with a new quantitative measure

⁶ Heckert, J., *et al*, 2019, Is women’s empowerment a pathway to improving child nutrition outcomes in a nutrition-sensitive agriculture program? Evidence from a randomized controlled trial in Burkina Faso

⁷ Cunningham, K., *et al*, 2015, Women’s empowerment in agriculture and child nutritional status in rural Nepal

⁸ FAO, 2011, The State of Food and Agriculture: Closing the Gender Gap for Development

⁹ CARE, 2019, Gender-Transformative Adaptation: From Good Practice to better policy

¹⁰ Markham, S., 2015, The Four Things You Need to Know about Women’s Land Rights

¹¹ Skinner, A., *et al*, 2019, Social Outcomes of the CARE-WWF Alliance in Mozambique: Research Findings from a Decade of Integrated Conservation and Development Programming



There is significant, long standing political support for this solution, as evidenced by commitments within the UN Committee on Food Security. The CFS ongoing workstream on gender is the policy convergence process in this area. There is widespread support among governments and development actors in the private and voluntary sector arenas and within the research community that this solution is fundamental both for the realization of rights and for the achievement of the SDGs. The recent CFS-HLPE report (2020) calls to recognise the importance of “agency” for food security and nutrition.

9. Are there certain contexts for which this solution is particularly well suited, or, not well-suited.

Considering that the prevalence of inequity in food systems differs across countries, types of households and within households, between women and men, old and young, there is no specific context for which this solution is well suited. The Right to Food and women’s rights are universal and indivisible and transformative approaches that drive towards the realization of these rights are thus applicable and important in all contexts.. Gender norms are often resistant to change, partly because they are widely held and practised in daily life (because they benefit the gender that already holds the balance of social and economic power). For example, family members, particularly spouses, can facilitate or constrain the expansion of women’s opportunities in food systems, depending on their willingness to share domestic work and free women’s time for value chain activities, while leaders or institutions can uphold norms and attitudes that limit women’s access to market opportunities, information and technologies.¹² Enabling people to understand and challenge the social norms and institutional barriers that create or sustain inequalities between men and women is at the heart of this solution and though this is universal, each context will require differing approaches. The need for contextual understanding is critical, thus making sex- and age-related data management key to success.

¹² Njuki, J., et al, 2016, Transforming gender and food security in the Global South