



Participants present challenges that women traders face. During pregnancy the business stops. Participatory gender review by Poroporo, in Yumbe, Uganda. Photo: Thies Reemer, 2013

# EXAMINING PATHWAYS TOWARDS ENGENDERED CHANGE

INVOLVING MEN AND WOMEN IN CARE WORK  
IN WEST NILE, UGANDA



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# WE-CARE WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT AND CARE

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This case study was written by Thies Reemer, bringing together primary data from studies and reports by Josephine Kasande, Okaya John Bosco from CEFORD, and Maggie Mkanza and Janet Biira. The author is grateful for their valuable contributions.

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## SUMMARY

*Despite abundant evidence about their importance, unpaid care work and unequal division of labour between women and men are largely invisible in development policy and programmes.<sup>1</sup> This case study of a value chain development (VCD) programme in Uganda argues that it is possible to change gender norms and relations that have existed for generations, and that this improves development outcomes significantly – but it takes deliberate effort and planning.*

## INTRODUCTION

Development policy and practice has long considered caring for children, the sick and the elderly to be the natural responsibility of women<sup>2</sup>. Investing in women is therefore seen as a way to create more family welfare. However, the costs of providing care – which fall disproportionately on women – are not always considered. These costs include forgone opportunities for education, employment, earnings, political participation and leisure among others.

When projects aim to empower women, the focus is often on developing their business skills and access to finance. Without also addressing the underlying causes of unequal division of labour, however, this can result in heavier workloads on women, increased stress and diminished health<sup>3</sup>. There is a risk of increasing rather than decreasing women's workload, with adverse effects on children, elderly and the sick.

Supporting women to develop businesses often has other unintended consequences. Daughters may be withdrawn from school to assist their mothers with unpaid care work. Men may reduce their financial support to the household, leaving it up to women to use their increased income to pay the school fees and the hospital bills. Or men may take over the businesses developed by women as soon as they become profitable<sup>4</sup>.

Another common approach is to reduce the "drudgery" tasks of women in marginalised communities – tasks such as fetching water and firewood – through technological solutions such as fuel saving stoves and boreholes. While important, these address only the symptoms of why the main responsibility falls on women, not root causes such as social and gender norms, beliefs and values.

Efforts to get these root causes into development agendas and governments' economic policy<sup>5</sup> often founder on the perception that it is not up to development agencies to change culture or gender

roles, or that the responsibility lies with other government departments.

Value chain development (VCD) programmes tend to focus on crops, infrastructure and technologies rather than on the dynamics of interpersonal relationships. The lack of effective strategies to change gender norms, attitudes and behaviour limits their impact.

This case<sup>6</sup> of the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) explores how can we move towards programmes that value the importance of care work, and consciously change the norms and gender relations that underpin the unequal division of labour between women and men.

## CHANGING NORMS AND BEHAVIOUR: WEST NILE, UGANDA

Under Oxfam's WEMAN programme<sup>7</sup>, Poroporo Multipurpose Group ("Poroporo") – a farmers' association – combined agricultural livelihoods and market development with a gender transformative approach. Together with local NGO CEFORD, they adapted the Gender Action Learning System (GALS)<sup>8</sup> to their local context.

### Context and Gender Norms

Poroporo is located in Yumbe District, near the borders with South Sudan and DR Congo. It is a vulnerable region because rainfall is low and soils are over cultivated due to population pressure. Most farmers are trapped in low-value subsistence production, buying few inputs and selling only limited quantities.

Women play a major role in production, but men own the land and everything that is harvested from it. Women typically receive only a small percentage of profits and hardly have any decision making power. There are often conflicts in the household about what to sell and what to keep as food for the family.

When crops are sold, women carry them to local markets on their heads. Bulk buyers exist, and would pay higher prices, but crops need to be delivered to them on bicycle or motorbike – and gender norms dictate that women cannot ride bicycles, as they cannot wear trousers. Women also earn petty cash from weeding on other farms, though they are paid half of what men can earn for the same work; land owners claim "women come with their babies to the garden and waste time breastfeeding".

War has influenced attitudes and social norms. While the taboo on men doing “women’s work” remains, the taboo on women doing “men’s work” – principally, heavy manual labour in the fields – began to break down when many men migrated to join the army or rebel groups from the 1970s to 1990s. As they returned home to find women doing both domestic and production work, many men just sat around. Some returned disabled or traumatised, adding to women’s care work.

**“A man needs to marry another woman to help the first wife”**

This situation creates difficulties for women as well as men. Some men who returned from the war to find their traditional roles taken over by women have found it difficult to fit into society. Some men feel burdened by the responsibility of being the decision-making head of the household and by peer pressure to “behave as a man”. Women face a disproportionate workload and are held responsible for family welfare, but at the same time have no decision making power over expenditures. Even for basic healthcare they need permission from men to spend money. This is why many women have secret savings.

Before the introduction of GALS in 2011, gender norms were reflected in statements such as:

- A strong man should not be seen doing women’s tasks. It is “lazy” and “time wasting”, and not work.
- Only women have the “soft” hands to carry water in a pot on the head. Men’s “tough” hands would break the pot.
- A man who sweeps the compound, fetches water or cooks is “cursed”. Such a man will never hunt an animal or have children.
- “Women come with nothing and so own nothing”, reflecting the custom of men paying “bride price” to their in-laws on marriage.
- “Anything called a machine is too hard for women”.

**“A man who cooks is cursed and will never have children”**

For women in this polygamous community, if a man tried to do ‘her’ work it was proof that she was “not good enough” or that soon he was about to marry a second wife. Fearing this, many women worked very hard. The reasons most men gave for marrying another woman were to “produce boys” or to help the first wife with work.



*Aletti Kubra, one of the group members and co-wife in a polygamous household, said that she and the other women in this household would spend from 6am to 11pm fetching water, preparing lunch for the children, working on far away farms and looking for food (cassava, sweet potatoes) and firewood. Nearby fields were controlled by their husbands to grow tobacco for sale. Photo: CEFORD, 2013*

## Intervention

Prior initiatives by NGOs and the local government to raise awareness about women’s economic rights mainly targeted women only, and lacked elements of personal analysis or follow-up. In 2009, Oxfam Novib involved CEFORD in GALS training, and from the end of 2011 the full GALS methodology was carried out, in the context of a three-year, multi-country project co-funded by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Unlike conventional approaches to VCD, the intervention took a livelihoods perspective and included non-commercial activities throughout. Unequal division of labour and unrewarded care work became a priority in the “life journey” of women and men, a process of analysis and action planning with personal visions for change. Such visions included:

- Women and men sharing productive, domestic and care work, to produce enough for both consumption and sale;
- Joint decision making about household expenditures, so women see a return from their work and men spend less on alcohol;
- Women having secure access to land, so male in-laws cannot grab the land if their husband dies.

While GALS builds on a range of other participatory methodologies, it is unique in the way it combines individual life planning with behaviour change at household level, organisational development and multi-stakeholder negotiation for engaging private sector and local authorities in supporting women's rights. Gender-based opportunities and constraints are analysed in relation to a vision for improved livelihoods, and behaviour change is triggered by voluntary peer to peer training by change "champions" from amongst the community. This was supported through role plays, songs and radio.

Among the diagramming tools<sup>9</sup> that respondents found most useful for behaviour change and planning were:

- **vision road journey** (planning the life journey of self development, gender relations at household level and changes in the wider community relationships and norms);
- **challenge-action tree** (analysing root causes of challenges and developing actions);
- **gender balance tree** (analysing division of labour between women and men, relative to household spending patterns, and defining desired changes); and
- **social empowerment map** (planning the peer training needed to change community norms and develop collective action).

As new norms were created, neighbours and family members were attracted to the group. It grew from an association of 25 members at the start of the project in 2011 to a farming co-operative group numbering 120 members by the project's end in 2014.

Individual and collective gender action learning enabled Poroporo to develop negotiation power and communication skills. Through a series of meetings, participatory market research and value chain events facilitated by CEFORD, Poroporo negotiated an arrangement to supply sesame to buyer Olam, benefiting both women and men.



*Milestones for change on a vision road journey: sharing of productive and care work and decision making. Photo: Thies Reemer, 2013*



*Member of Poroporo presenting changes in the gender division of labour and the use of income at household level. Photo: Thies Reemer, 2013*

The District Council of Yumbe, seeing the benefits of gender equality for livelihoods improvement in the community, issued a resolution supporting GALS to be used in all 12 sub-counties in the District. Through uptake by local government staff trained by CEFORD, the methodology was introduced in 9 sub-counties during the project period.

## Changes

From the action research, participants learned that they themselves could change norms, just as circumstances had done before when male involvement in the war broke taboos about women doing men's work. Men were encouraged to reflect on the value of care services provided by their wives. As men who started to help with "female" work continued to hunt animals and father children, the belief that they were cursed began to be undermined. By the end of the project, gender norms had changed so much that women had not only started to ride bicycles, some had opened a bicycle repair shop.

An end of project review of 150 participants, comprising 88 women and 62 men, found:

- 1149 of the 150 said they were now working together, rather than separately, on their land
- 87 of the 88 women say their husbands are helping out with cooking, bathing children, farming, washing clothes, utensils among others

- 83 of the 88 women say they now participate in decisions about household spending
- 60 of the 62 men said they had stopped drinking alcohol
- 31 out of the 88 women now have joint legal title to their land by their husbands

These changes were confirmed in the group. An external evaluation<sup>10</sup> confirmed that Poroporo members were selling their crops for better prices and on better terms. Mid-way the project the group had accumulated over 20 million Uganda shillings (over 6,000 euros). By project end 58 out of the 88 women have increased weekly savings from 6000 Uganda shillings to 15,000. The others have had doubled or almost doubled their savings. Out of the 150 respondents, 34 said they had used their savings to buy land, 25 bought goats, 15 bought bicycles and eight bought motorcycles. The group also pooled capital to build a storage facility for sesame and rice.

A further field study in early 2015 found that many women had bought grinding machines to reduce time spent on grinding sesame and millet, while 11 of the 20 households surveyed had shifted from cooking on an open fire, to a fuel-saving stove.

Based on participatory reviews and self-monitoring by project participants in all the targeted communities in West Nile, CEFORD concluded that 11,840 people have applied GALS. Out of the total 6960 women, 80% indicate that they feel more supported by men through more equal sharing of labour. 58% indicate they now control assets and have equal decision making power in their households, where this was not the case before. 75% of the women reported more secure access to land, compared to the situation before the project where they could easily be chased away by male in-laws and relatives. Out of the total number of women and men, 70% reported direct effects of these changes on improved production and marketing. This shows the wider impact of GALS beyond Poroporo.

## WHAT IT MEANS

Earlier studies<sup>11</sup> had suggested that encouraging women and men farmers to cooperate and share resources and decision-making results in increased productivity. In this case, changes in the division of labour between women and men, including unpaid care work, also seem to have had a catalytic effect on improving community and value chain development – although other factors were also important, such as adult literacy training and the positive attitude of local authorities.

The project shows that marginalised women and men can be resourceful and creative in addressing



*Role-play on gender relations by men. Photo: CEFORD, 2014*

their challenges, and can create new social norms that reverse the direction of peer pressure. Enabling marginalised groups to define their own priorities based on their analysis creates ownership for change, whereas predetermining the agenda for change can create the impression that change depends on the project activities. The project suggests the limitations of efforts to support women's empowerment through increasing access to services, information and economic opportunities, without directly addressing the root causes of inequality and poverty.

The approach of this intervention, grounded in transforming gender relations and norms, will make it more costly than purely agro-technological interventions. The results suggest though that the increased cost is compensated by the higher pro-poor impact and the peer to peer replication in communities. Quantifying this requires further studies.

Using the right approach with appropriate resources, it is possible to change gender dynamics such as division of labour and related social norms within project time frames. A vibrant GALS-driven movement can help communities to reach the 'tipping point' where broader social norm change becomes acceptable<sup>10</sup>.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMME DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Oxfam argues that the unequal division of labour and unpaid care work are not marginal issues within donor policies and investment programmes. Addressing these issues strengthens the pro-poor impact of economic interventions such as value chain development, rural finance and agricultural extension.

### **1. Challenge the assumption that households are cohesive units**

Often, when interventions say they target households, they in fact target only individual members of households – typically the male heads of households – on the assumption that benefits will naturally be felt by all other household members, because households are a cohesive unit, sharing goals, production factors and benefits. This assumption can be dangerously misguided.

### **2. Understand the internal dynamics of household decision-making**

Only by first understanding the norms, attitudes and behaviours that prevail within the household – on issues such as division of labour and making decisions about how and where to sell crops and what to do with the income – can programme designers hope to design interventions that will have the desired effect.

### **3. Aim to put decision-making power in the hands of those who do the work**

Production and marketing function better when decision-making is in the hands of those most knowledgeable about the production process, and investments are more effective when based on the judgement of those most involved and knowledgeable. When the women do the work and have the knowledge, it is important to target them explicitly. If programmes reach less than 50% women, they should be more ambitious.

### **4. View gender as a strategic issue, not as an add-on**

Often, VCD programmes are primarily designed to focus on crops, technology and infrastructure rather than household dynamics – then, to satisfy gender experts, additional elements such as labour-saving technologies for women are introduced. While the importance of these elements is not to be discounted, gender considerations should be much more fundamental to project design.

For pro-poor impact and sustainable inclusion of smallholders in agricultural value chains, programme design and implementation should include deliberate analysis and social change strategies such as GALS or Rapid Care Analysis<sup>12</sup>.

This requires including objectives and indicators for behaviour change without undermining community ownership, and specific activities and budgets to work towards achieving these.

This case study confirms decades of research stating that developing gender-centred policies will generate social benefits and ensure higher production and productivity in agriculture. Markets

and value chains improve when the factors of production are used more effectively and in optimal proportions at household level, paying attention to gender issues. Together with the social justice case for gender equality, this justifies a more strategic gender approach including care issues in VCD programmes.

<sup>1</sup> IDS, 2013. “Getting Unpaid Care onto development agendas”. In Focus Policy Briefing.

<sup>2</sup> Esquivel, V., 2013. Care in households and communities. Background Paper on Conceptual Issues. Oxfam Research Reports, Oxfam International

<sup>3</sup> Mayoux, L., and Hartl, M., 2009. “Gender and rural microfinance: Reaching and empowering women”. Guide for practitioners, IFAD.

<sup>4</sup> See: Mayoux, 2009. “Engendering benefits for all”. The Broker.; KIT and Agri-Profocus, 2010. “Challenging Chains to Change”.

<sup>5</sup> Oxfam, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> This case study is based on information gathered during a field study by an independent consultant early 2015 (about 3 months after CEFORD closed down the project), and during a community-led mid-term project review in 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See [www.oxfamnovib.nl/weman](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/weman)

<sup>8</sup> A methodology initially developed by Linda Mayoux as part of Oxfam Novib’s WEMAN programme

<sup>9</sup> See GALS manual Phase 1 on [www.oxfamnovib.nl/weman](http://www.oxfamnovib.nl/weman) under “approach”.

<sup>10</sup> Raab, M. and Stuppert, W., 2015. External evaluation of IFAD GENVAD 2011-2014.

<sup>11</sup> Ashby and Hartl *et al.* 2010. Investing in Women as Drivers of Agricultural Growth. Gender in Agriculture Sourcebook, World Bank, FAO and IFAD.

<sup>12</sup> <http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/participatory-methodology-rapid-care-analysis-302415>



*Fragment from a sesame market map: men access far away markets on the bicycle selling for high prices. Women carry small quantities to the local market for low prices. Photo: Lieuwe de Jong, 2013*

This case study was written by Thies Reemer. It is part of a series of papers and reports written to inform public debate on development and humanitarian policy issues.

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