

ENGAGING MEN IN GENDER-EQUITABLE PRACTICES IN MAIZE SYSTEMS OF SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



This Guidance Note is designed for researchers working in maize-based smallholder farming systems. It is useful to interventions planning community and household level action research with women and men farmers. This includes initiatives exploring the use of Gender-Transformative Approaches (GTAs) to improve farmer decision-making, strengthen women's and men's empowerment, and to ensure development gains are more equitably distributed. This Guidance Note will be of value to maize value chain actors (input suppliers, farmers, processors,

traders, etc.), facilitators (extension services, financial service providers), and policymakers.

Gender in maize-based farming systems

Smallholder farming systems are non-linear, interactive systems with many components. It is useful to

think of them as decision-making systems. Intra-household decision-making processes are **one site** where systemic factors – social norms, the ways in which value chain actors and facilitators operate, the overall legislative and policy environment, and other sources of change such as migration and the climate crisis – come together to influence how women and men smallholders decide what to do on their farms (Figure 1). The components themselves are subject to change, and interact with each other in hard-to-predict ways. Social norms, for example, are never static.



Figure 1. Simplified maize-based farming decision-making system

The various parts of the system, including private sector players, public extension services, policymakers and researchers, can come together to create gendered dichotomies in 'who decides', 'who does what', and 'who benefits' from maize. Despite decades of research proving women's strong involvement in the maize value chain, men are frequently still seen as the 'real farmer' and main decision-maker¹. It is common for men to be targeted for training events or sign contracts on maize out-grower schemes rather than women². There is a widely prevalent, but empirically unproven, assumption that women are 'not interested' in cash cropping and making money^{3,4}. A glance around almost any market – including the huge maize markets in Ghana – will show this is not the case. However, this assumption has been nurtured through decades of conceptualising men as modernising farmers and women as locked into subsistence farming and as homemakers. These views shape institutional thinking at different levels and contribute directly to widening gender productivity gaps⁵ and make it extremely difficult to move towards achieving improvements in people's lives.

In reality, men farmers are not the only ones making decisions, nor are they responsible for everything that happens on the farm. Men can be more powerful than women, however, in determining *priorities* on the farm: which plot gets the most attention, which crops are grown where and by whom, who works on which plots/crops, who sells in the market, and how money is spent or saved. Of course, women work hard to achieve positive outcomes from their work, and many men desire to secure benefits for the whole family. Studies show the benefits of collaboration. These can include increased adoption of new technologies, better mobilisation of assets, improved equity in the distribution of benefits between household members, an increase in women's standing and decision-making power at community level, among others⁶. It should be noted that not all of these effects are present in any one site, for example, adoption rates may be similar but the distribution of benefits may not. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that despite the potential benefits of collaboration, many farms are not managed as a holistic and coordinated system aiming to produce benefits for everyone in the family, but rather serve to maximise gains for certain members over others. Widely observed uncooperative outcomes such as low yields, gender gaps in maize productivity, sub-optimal adoption of technologies, and weak ability to adapt to climate change can be the consequence.

Research shows that:

- Adoption of improved maize varieties (IMVs) is often lower for women. In Malawi adoption of IMVs is 12% lower for wives in male-headed households, and 11% lower for female household heads than for male farmers⁷.
- Women can find it difficult to interact with buyers or get maize to market themselves. In Ghana, for example, this is due to lower average production volumes, weak links to other value chain actors, mobility constraints, and insufficient working and investment capital⁸.
- Women in male-headed households (MHH) faced several barriers to adopting and utilizing quality protein maize (QPM), including less access to agricultural extension, lower awareness of QPM, and less input into decisions around key aspects of adoption, production, and marketing. Women in MHH reported lower rates of adoption (2%) of QPM than their spouses (6%) suggesting that they did not know they were farming QPM⁹.

¹ Farnworth, C.R. and Colverson, K.E. (2015) <http://www.agrigender.net/views/Building-gender-transformative-extension-JGAFS-112015-2.php>

² https://www.agdevco.com/uploads/reports/SDU_Gender_Case%20Study_AW_digital_Jan%202018.pdf

³ Hill, R.V., and Vigneri, M. (2009) <http://www.fao.org/3/a-am313e.pdf>

⁴ Farnworth, C.R., and Jiggins, J. (2004) http://ciat-library.ciat.cgiar.org/articulos_ciat/books/Participatory_Plant_Breeding_and_Gender.pdf

⁵ World Bank, (2014) <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/579161468007198488/Levelling-the-field-improving-opportunities-for-women-farmers-in-Africa>

⁶ Malapit et al. (2015) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00220388.2015.1018904>; Sheremenko et al. (2015) <https://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/205766/>; Farnworth et al.. (2018) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S014019631730191X>

⁷ Fisher, M. and Kandiwa, V. (2014) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306919214000219>

⁸ Farnworth, C.R. and Mahama, A. (2012) Gender Analysis of the Maize Value Chain, Ghana. MOAP/GIZ Ghana. <https://docplayer.net/62784717-Gender-analysis-of-the-maize-value-chain-ghana.html>

⁹ O'Brien, C., Gunaratna, N. S., Gebreselassie, K., Gitonga, Z. M., Tsegaye, M., & De Groot, H. (2016). <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/wmh3.198>

- Women can find it hard to invest in new technologies. For example, conservation agriculture (CA) interventions have implications for labour requirements and allocation, investment decisions with respect to mechanization and herbicide use, crop choice, and residue management. A literature review of CA interventions in maize-based systems in East and Southern Africa showed strong gender biases against women regarding their abilities to participate in CA and achieving CA-related outcomes¹⁰.
- In Mozambique, a study examined fertilizer application rates on plots managed individually by men, women, and jointly in dual adult households. Men managed the majority of plots: 62% of maize plots, 56% of fruit and vegetable plots, and 71% of non-staple cash crops plots. Twice as much inorganic fertilizer was applied to maize plots managed by men than by women. Men applied considerably more fertilizer to their other crops than do women. However, fertilizer use was highest on collaboratively-managed maize, fruit, and vegetable plots. Jointly-managed plots exhibited higher incidences of soil and water conservation structures and were more likely to have maize-legume intercropping, use manure, and to demonstrate improved agro-ecological practices¹¹.
- A Kenyan study showed that women plot managers are less likely to adopt minimum tillage and utilise animal manure for increasing soil fertility. Men and women are equally likely to adopt improved seed varieties, maize-legume rotations, maize-legume intercropping, soil and water conservation, and inorganic fertiliser. However, compared to male-managed plots, jointly-managed plots are more likely to adopt maize-legume intercropping, maize-legume rotations and improved seeds¹².

BOX 1: Insights into gender relations in maize in Nigeria

How do men and women farmers in Nigeria benefit from improved maize varieties (IMVs)? In what ways do gender norms affect the equity of benefit distribution? Despite many cultural, agro-ecological, market and other differences across the country, a study conducted in two communities in the North and two in the Southwest produced similar findings. Women find IMVs help to strengthen their income and household food security. Early ripening means that income flows start earlier, helping women to meet household expenditures on time. Women process maize into snack food products, which are sold in local markets. However, improved income does not mean that women are able to better express their agency, for example, by investing in other businesses or selling unprocessed maize at scale. Most men support their wives' selling maize in local markets provided women's income is allocated to household needs and is perceived within the household and by other people important to the family as secondary to men's income. In comparison, men benefit substantially and directly from IMVs. They take advantage of their greater mobility to sell large quantities of unprocessed improved maize in lucrative markets and tend to spend the income earned on their personal priorities. This stated, in the North securing sufficient maize for household food security is a key male responsibility and a reason for men to appreciate IMVs. No male respondents in the South mention maize in relation to food security. *Farnworth, C.R., Badstue, L., Williams, G., Tegbaru, A., Gaya, H.I.M. (2020). Unequal Partners: women and men maize farmers in Nigeria. Gender, Technology and Development.* <https://doi.org/10.1080/09718524.2020.1794607>

BOX 2: Insights into gender relations in maize in Tanzania

Tanzanian legislation for women's rights is a product of decades of indigenous women's struggles and is considered amongst the most progressive in Africa. However, policy implementation is difficult to achieve. A study in four maize-growing communities in different regions of Tanzania showed that many women and men agree with the principle of gender equality. Men strongly associate equality with higher production and productivity, and improved income generation. However, men want to remain lead decision-makers in the home and to retain control over women's income. Women have rights to land under national law, yet in practice almost all women in the study risked losing their rights to land and other assets – that they had helped build, sometimes over many years – upon separation or death of their husband. This is because implementation of the law is devolved to local institutions which often demonstrate strong gender biases. Furthermore, men find it hard to express a different kind of masculinity, for example, through doing housework. Even if they want to, community members are likely to condemn their efforts. The study finds that women are heavily burdened earning off-farm income, working in the fields, and doing housework, but receive limited benefits and have a restricted voice in decision-making, including in relation to maize. *Source: Badstue, L., Farnworth, C.R., Umantseva A., Kamanzi, A., Roeven, L. (2020). Continuity and Change: Performing gender in rural Tanzania. Journal of Development Studies.* <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2020.1790534>

¹⁰ Farnworth, C.R., Baudron, F., Andersson, J.A., Misiko, M., Badstue, L., & Stirling, C.M. (2015) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14735903.2015.1065602>

¹¹ Marenny P, Kassie M, Tostao E (2015) <https://agrigender.net/uploads/JGAFS-122015-4.pdf>

¹² Ndiritu et al., (2014) <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306919214001109>

Empowering women ...

Considerable effort has been devoted to empowering women in maize. This includes identifying varietal traits preferred by women, for example, cookability, taste and low N requirements, and breeding for them¹³. Other work includes opening up seed markets to women through identifying and reducing obstacles to women's participation, and as part of this, working closely with private sector players to help them see women as a viable market segment¹⁴. Analysing women's barriers to accessing farm power is another example¹⁵. A large and global research effort is dedicated to identifying barriers to women's participation in innovation around maize and outlining ways to strengthen women's involvement¹⁶.

... and engaging men

'Men are the gatekeepers of current gender orders and are potential resistors of change. If we do not effectively reach men and boys, many of our efforts will be either thwarted or simply ignored'¹⁷.

Sometimes, when efforts are made to empower women, men may feel ignored or slighted. The wider community may judge men with empowered wives as ineffective household heads who have lost control. This may lead, in some cases, to increased violence in the home, the marginalization of men in community meetings, or men simply leaving



an increasing number of household expenses to their wives to pay. Men may perceive women's empowerment as a zero sum game. When women get empowered some men worry they will get disempowered¹⁸.

By virtue of their power and privilege, many men are in a prime position to tackle gender inequalities, for example, in their own homes, on the farm, and in agricultural extension. Men can be key to ensuring that the challenges facing women – and men – in maize are successfully overcome. They are essential partners to women in ensuring the farm system functions for everyone. It is vital to continue working with women to support them in their own pathways to empowerment, and it is also important to get men on board as supporters of women, and in their own right.

¹³ Christinck, A., Weltzien, E., Rattunde, F., and Ashby, J. (2017). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/322790907_Gender_Differentiation_of_Farmer_Preferences_for_Varietal_Traits_in_Crop_Improvement_Evidence_and_Issues. See also Farnworth, C.R. & Jiggins, J. (2003) http://ciat-library.ciat.cgiar.org/articulos_ciati/books/Participatory_Plant_Breeding_and_Gender.pdf

¹⁴ Adam, R. I., Kandiwa, V., David, S. and Muindi, P. (2019). <https://repository.cimmyt.org/bitstream/handle/10883/20138/60522.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹⁵ https://www.kit.nl/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/551bcea41f1f2_Gender-Matters-in-Farm-Power-final-150227-AE-KD.pdf

¹⁶ Gender norms, agency and innovation in agriculture and natural resource management - <https://gennovate.org>. See also: Integrating "gender" in research for development: How you interpret the term can shape project achievements, <https://repository.cimmyt.org/bitstream/handle/10883/20359/60984.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

¹⁷ Kaufman (2004:20) cited in Ruxton, Sandy. (2004). https://www.researchgate.net/publication/296196956_Gender_Equality_and_Men_Learning_from_Practice

¹⁸ Promundo-US; CRP AAS (2016) http://pubs.iclarinet/resource_centre/Promundo-AAS-Promoting-gender-transformative-change.pdf; MenEngage and UNFPA (2013) https://menengage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Advocacy_Brief_Engaging_Men_Changing_Gender_Norms_GTA.pdf

Gender transformative approaches – working with Men

The purpose of GTAs is to promote better decisionmaking and to facilitate a wider range of choices for individual women and men. They aim to catalyse change in the capacities, attitudes, agency, and actions of individuals. GTAs also seek to transform the expectations that define organisational norms – the rules and practices – within institutions. Taken together these actions are expected to expand the potential of people to contribute to, and benefit from, development efforts¹⁹.

Whilst GTAs involve working with both women and men, some GTAs make special efforts to engage men as an integral part of their methodology. They are unique in that they create



specific opportunities for men to critically reflect and act on harmful masculinities that perpetuate poverty and negatively impact on their own lives as men as well as harm women and girls²⁰. It is important for such methodologies to highlight gender equality as a 'win-win' for men as well as women – rather than as a 'zero sum game'. They need to motivate men to promote gender equality in and outside their homes, encourage positive thinking about sharing responsibilities in the home, and being more open to joint decision-making processes. GTA programmes that explicitly include opportunities for discussions about harmful masculinities and the means to transform these into more positive norms of manhood are more effective than programmes that simply recognize or mention gender norms and roles²¹.

Scarce resources made available to engage men need to be utilized efficiently and effectively and they must not diminish ongoing work to empower women and girls²². A good understanding is needed of when it is best to work with only men, or only women, or with both together. A further consideration is on how to scale initiatives that engage men as few programmes go beyond the pilot phase and tend to be short in duration²³. Ensuring that smallholder participation is genuine is key. Empowerment happens when individuals and groups imagine the world differently, stand on their own feet and take their destiny into their own hands. With a vision for the future, they challenge and change the power relations which keep them in poverty. An equal voice in decision-making mobilizes people to collectively improve their situation.

¹⁹ Cole et al. (2014) <https://www.worldfishcenter.org/content/gender-transformative-approaches-address-inequalities-food-nutrition-and-economic-outcomes-0>

²⁰ Cole et al. (2015) https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283118569_Exploring_the_Intricate_Relationship_Between_Poverty_Gender_Inequality_and_Rural_Masculinity_A_Case_Study_from_an_Aquatic_Agricultural_System_in_Zambia; Promundo-US; CRP AAS (2016)

²¹ WHO (2007) https://www.who.int/gender/documents/Engaging_men_boys.pdf

²² MenEngage and UNFPA (2013) https://menengage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/Advocacy_Brief_Engaging_Men_Changing_Gender_Norms_GTA.pdf

²³ WHO (2007)

Philosophy and principles for working with men

Move from personal to political	It is important to move beyond interventions that focus on men's individual responsibility. It is essential to ensure that men do not feel blamed, or negatively targeted. Men are embedded in wider structures that condition their behaviour. They need to be supported as they begin to confront and question norms at home, in the community, at work, and those presented through media and advertising. All of these help shape men's psychological and social identities: what it means to be a man in that particular community. Women are likewise embedded in normative structures - when men change, women's expectations of men (and of themselves) are likely to change too.
Start early	Focus on boys in schools, in sport, in clubs to help them develop alternative models of what being a boy and a man can mean.
Build trust	Take time to engage with men. It takes time to win their trust and to develop their confidence to do things differently. Trust is the basis for changing behaviour and men's attitudes for the good of their families and communities. Be patient - change doesn't happen overnight. Work towards slow but sure change.
Go to where men are	Find men where they work and socialize rather than expect them to come to you. Enter and build positively upon male spaces. Use existing community structures to conduct training sessions in open spaces, schools, religious institutions, maize markets or taxi ranks. Locate men through farmer groups as well.
Make gender equality everyone's responsibility	Encourage men and women, young women and men, and children in the home, to plan their farm and work together. Stimulate discussions on how maize fits into their plans for a better life. Gender equality is about cooperating with each other to share the burdens and the benefits.
Understand that women, as well as men, will change	Getting men on board requires changed behaviours from everyone. Men as well as women will change: prioritizing ways to help women and men, and other family members, including the extended family, cooperate and support change processes together are vital.
Make sure the benefits of change are seen quickly	If action research or development projects are to succeed, the benefits of change must be recognized relatively quickly by men during implementation. Identify behavioural change indicators together with men and women to see what is changing, and report quickly on progress towards achievements. Encourage the development of short- and longer-term goals and associated indicators to track.
Be inclusive	Encourage men to think positively and with pride about their responsibilities to improve the lives of everyone in the home. This may include better and more nutritious food, and making sure there is enough money from sales to spend on necessities like school fees and medical fees as well as to invest in more secure livelihoods.
Walk the talk	Work on involving men is more effective when backed up with changes throughout partner institutions. This is not just about securing technical changes but – critically – about demonstrating through everyday interactions that partners – and particularly men in those organizations - take gender equality seriously, are serious about supporting men in change processes, and that they themselves are personally walking the talk.
Get women's movements on board	It is critical to be inclusive of women's movements and to get their guidance and support. Remember the saying "Nothing about us (women) without us".

Examples of organizations and researchers engaging men

1. The Global MenEngage Alliance²⁴

The MenEngage Alliance envisions a world where all people are equal and free from discrimination – a world in which gender justice and human rights are promoted and protected. This means:

- **Men and boys must act.** In order to achieve gender justice for all, men and boys need to be part of the solution as allies to women's rights and other social justice movements. Equality is only possible if everyone works together.
- **Taking a feminist informed approach.** Advocating for approaches that are grounded firmly in feminist, human rights-based principles, and build on the work of women's rights organizations and movements.
- **Transforming masculinities.** Advocating for approaches that critically challenge and transform patriarchal gender norms and power inequalities across all levels of society.



2. Research on men and masculinities at Institute of Development Studies (IDS), Sussex, UK

Men and Masculinities research in the Gender, Power and Sexuality programme at IDS challenges stereotyped binary narratives and works to develop a transformative agenda for gender justice work with men and boys, that engages with the politics of addressing patriarchal power and promoting more positive masculinities. The programme aims to influence policy discourses on gender justice and sexual rights. Its work is shaped by learning and debate between masculinity theorists, feminist movements, sexuality activists and human rights organizations. Men and boys are central within these gender dynamics, and therefore essential in transforming gender relations.

3. MenEngage - Africa (MEA)²⁵

MEA is made up of 22 country networks spread across East, South, West and Central Africa, with over 300 NGOs at grass-root, national and regional levels. It has accumulated considerable experience of working with men from many walks of life, and has developed a wide range of innovative methodologies. Two examples of men's organizations for gender equality in Kenya and Zambia are presented below.

Advocates for Social Change - Kenya (ADSOCK)²⁶, formerly Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), was formed in 2001 as an initiative to engage with men and boys for the promotion of gender equality and human

rights. ADSOCK is a membership organization and currently has 122 member organizations as well as a large pool of trainers and facilitators. Over time, ADSOCK has developed a powerful toolkit of effective methods for working with farmer organizations on promoting positive masculinities and empowering women. ADSOCK's theory of change is based on its experience of influencing policy and practice and its participation in advocacy networks. ADSOCK understands there are multiple, contextually specific pathways to change. Efforts to identify and disrupt, adapt or dismantle policies, structures and systems that reinforce negative norms and stereotypes is necessary to achieve equality and the realization of equal human rights.

The Zambia National Men's Network for Gender and Development (Men's Network) is a non-profit organisation. Its mission is to engage men as allies in gender equality and socio-economic empowerment of women in Zambia and sub-Saharan Africa. The Men's Network vision is "A global village where men and women are equal partners in social, cultural and economic activities of their lives and are active participants of environmental stewardship to benefit future generations." The Men's Network works closely with traditional and religious leaders because they are very influential in communities. Getting them to speak out against negative cultural norms and to advocate for change helps to change harmful practices rapidly. The Men's Network works to help men see how they lose from negative practices, and helps them to develop positive practices from a man's perspective. Increasingly, the Men's Network is working with boys in schools and in their communities to help them to develop positive masculinities from a young age. Boys Network Clubs in schools and communities enable boys to become role models and to reach out to others with positive messages. The Men's Network has developed a range of participatory low cost methodologies, such as "Campfire", where men in villages gather and discuss gender issues. The Men's Network works closely with the Zambian women's movement as well as stakeholders such as the Zambia Police Service and the Ministry of Gender.

²⁴ <http://menengage.org/>

²⁵ <http://menengage.org/regions/africa>

²⁶ www.adsock.org

Box 3: Engaging men in Zambia using a GTA embedded in action research.

A research project that developed and piloted improved fish processing technologies to reduce post-harvest losses in a floodplain fishery in western Zambia engaged men to address and change unequal norms and attitudes that constrain value chain actors from fully participating in and benefiting from fishery activities. The project worked with men and women fishers, processors, and traders using participatory action research methods. These aimed to build trust between researchers and project participants. In addition to capturing the extent of post-harvest losses, the project carried out baseline research with participants to explore gender differences in their involvement in value chain activities, asset ownership, income generation, and attitudes about gender roles and responsibilities in the value chain. It used this information to develop and test improved fish processing technologies while at the same implementing a GTA with participants and other stakeholders. The GTA used a variety of skits that were acted out by a local drama group in fishing camps. After each skit, questions were asked to spark critical reflection by participants on the unequal norms and attitudes highlighted by the skits. Project participants further reflected on these issues in group sessions. They developed personal action plans to address these issues in their own time. The project documented the behavioral and attitudinal changes that occurred over the course of the project and other learning. Men's attitudes to gender equality were markedly strengthened and a number of significant women's empowerment outcomes were achieved. For more information about the project, see: Cole et al. (2018) <https://www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol23/iss2/art18/>; Kaminski and Cole (2018: p. 48–57) <http://www.fao.org/3/CA0374B/ca0374b.pdf>; Cole et al. (2020) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09718524.2020.1729480>.

Resources

Toolkits

- A wide and valuable range of resources, particularly toolkits, for working with men can be found on this website: <https://www.alignplatform.org/resources/toolkits-programmes-gender-norms-and-masculinities>.
- <http://blog.worldfishcenter.org/2017/03/video-stories-to-help-families-overcome-gender-based-challenges-in-zambia/>
- http://pubs.iclarm.net/resource_centre/Promundo-AAS-Promoting-gender-transformative-change.pdf
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Suggested reading

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