

Gender Transformative Work in the MFS-SI Initiative

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The [Sustainable Intensification of Mixed Farming Systems Initiative](#) aims to provide equitable, transformative pathways for improved livelihoods of actors in mixed farming systems through sustainable intensification within target agroecologies and socio-economic settings.

Through action research and development partnerships, the Initiative will improve smallholder farmers' resilience to weather-induced shocks, provide a more stable income and significant benefits in welfare, and enhance social justice and inclusion for 13 million people by 2030.


Activities will be implemented in six focus countries globally representing diverse mixed farming systems as follows: Ghana (cereal–root crop mixed), Ethiopia (highland mixed), Malawi: (maize mixed), Bangladesh (rice mixed), Nepal (highland mixed), and Lao People's Democratic Republic (upland intensive mixed/ highland extensive mixed).

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Contents

Abbreviations and acronyms	iv
Overview of Complexities in Gender Transformative Approaches	1
Agency	3
How can individual agency be measured?	3
Key areas in which interventions can have an impact and which need to consider gender	5
Knowledge, skills and access to information.....	5
Productive autonomy.....	5
Economic autonomy.....	5
Power, influence and decision-making.....	5
Participation, representation, and leadership:.....	5
Research steps	7
Research Methods For Each Step.....	7

Abbreviations and acronyms

CGIAR	Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research
ELMO	Evaluation of Land management Options
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IITA	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SI-MFS	Sustainable Intensification of Mixed Farming Systems Initiative
WFP	World Food Programme
WP	Work Package

Overview of Complexities in Gender Transformative Approaches

“One of the core principles underlying the use of a gender transformative approach is that gender transformative change must come from within the communities and societies where this change occurs and cannot be imposed from the outside, including by development or research actors. This requires setting up processes to obtain insider perspectives to ensure that these are used to inform the design of qualitative and quantitative indicators as well as tools and methods. Here, the role of **the research or development actor is to help support ongoing gender transformative change processes, or to stimulate and facilitate – together with local women and men and relevant stakeholders – these processes. This requires a nuanced understanding of people and place and an appreciation that the precise process, and associated indicators, will always differ by location.**” (FAO, IFAD, WFP & CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform. 2023. *Guidelines for measuring gender transformative change in the context of food security, nutrition, and sustainable agriculture*. Rome, FAO, IFAD, WFP and CGIAR. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc7940en>)

In sum, **gender transformative change involves building agency, challenging unequal power relations that disfavor women and girls, and making formal and informal social institutions more gender equitable** (ibid 11)

A recent chapter on gender transformative work in the CG (Lopez & Ludwig 'A transdisciplinary perspective on gender mainstreaming in international development: The case of the CGIAR' in the book *Politics of Knowledge in Inclusive Development - [The Politics of Knowledge in Inclusive Development and Innovation - Is \(routledge.com\)](https://www.routledge.com/The-Politics-of-Knowledge-in-Inclusive-Development-and-Innovation-Is/routledge.com)* makes a number of important observations. First, within the CG (the researchers interviewed gender specialists in the CG), there are varying views on how gender is approached. Global North gender specialists often push more strongly for gender transformation, while Global South researchers assert that a more context-specific approach needs to be undertaken. Researchers who stress gender sensitive approaches see themselves as acting together with local communities and organizations. One quote is particularly illuminating on the position of gender researchers in the CG and from the Global South:

I don't think we have to transform everything. We need to find the things that work well in the communities without necessarily transforming their culture [...] so I think it's both approaches, but I mean, these white people in those senior positions, oh, they are all about 'we have to transform and to use transformative approaches.' I say that if you go to the communities and talk about transforming structures and forget to see what is good and works there you just confuse the community members. So no, I don't think it should be fully transformative but I think we have to be strategic and know which

approach to use in different cases [...] Honestly, I don't think even gender people [in the CGIAR] really understand what it is that we want to transform for sure and I worry that if we try to push something that we don't know, it would just back-fire. So, is transformation the best way for the CGIAR to go? That's exactly what we should be asking ourselves now (2022: 54).

Agency

How can the MFS initiative improve the agency of women and men? While there are many dimensions to agency, for practical purposes given the timeline and capacity available, a focus on improving knowledge, skills and capabilities is a reasonable target to aim for. It is unlikely that a project that focuses on technical agronomic interventions is going to be able to make a significant impact on unequal power relations within households and within the sites, however improving individual agency in terms of knowledge and confidence to implement new innovations would be an important contribution.

How can individual agency be measured?

Assessing change in how women and men from different social groups have built their confidence, self-esteem, aspirations, agricultural knowledge, skills, and capabilities through participating in the design and implementation of interventions and measuring outcomes.

Assessing how this new knowledge and skills has been put into action and where it has led to individuals taking on new roles.

Agency within households

Assess changes in the involvement of household members in making agricultural and other land-use or economic decisions.

Community level

Formation and improved functioning of women's and men's groups that focus on agriculture, natural resources management and marketing. These groups can improve individual agency but also the representation of women and men's farmers interests within the wider community and with institutions relevant to the sector. Here, it is essential to identify local organizations working on these issues and topics for more effective action and collaboration.

Institutions

Research projects do not have the ability to change formal or informal local institutions that may perpetuate unequal gender relations. However, by ensuring that men and women and less powerful members of the community are included in project design and activities, and thus modeling more transformative approaches, members of these institutions may work for change within them. The most effective way to work for transformation within institutions is for research projects to work with local partners who are working for change already and have the mandate and legitimacy in the community and beyond. Often, this may require CG institutions bringing in organizations that do not normally focus on agriculture or NRM, but may be oriented towards rights-based approaches, governance and gender equity more broadly. In addition, researchers can provide evidence of the importance of gender

transformation for meeting the objectives and goals that institutions have – such as improving livelihoods, nutrition, food security, etc. Researchers themselves, or the projects they work on, are not in a position to transform gender relations in the sites we work on. However, we can provide evidence and work in such a way as to make improvements in the lives of women and men community members.

Key areas in which interventions can have an impact and which need to consider gender.

Knowledge, skills and access to information

As above under agency, this should be an easy objective to achieve in which improvements in individual agency of women and men can be made through training and engagement in the field trials research process. For example, at the farm level women should be included in evaluation of the trials as well as in identifying bottlenecks to adoption and development of complementary innovations.

Productive autonomy

Access to and control over natural productive resources and services, such as land, water, livestock, fisheries, forestry resources, seeds, fertilizers, tools and technology (including information and communication technologies, or infrastructure and advisory/extension services). First, is the assessment of what constrains access and control followed then by co-design of ways in which to overcome limitations of access and control.

Economic autonomy

Access to the means of earning an income; engaging in markets and value chains; financial services; social protection; informal employment; ownership of and control over assets (financial, housing, etc.). For example, at the value chain level, analysis and design of interventions should enable women farmers to have better access to input and output markets to benefit from the proposed agronomic solutions. Including women from the outset in ways to overcome their constraints to more effective participation in value chains is essential.

Power, influence and decision-making

Improved participation for women in decision-making at household level – over issues such as mobility, economic activity, income, production and nutrition. Here, it is important to engage with women and other less powerful community members early to support their decision-making around production and nutrition around proposed interventions. Concerning mobility, income and other economic activity, it is critical to collaborate with other local partners working on these issues as these may be outside the scope of what is possible for the initiative.

Participation, representation, and leadership:

Capacity to organize; improved capacity of women to negotiate, lead, express opinions and voice demands. Improved capacity for all farmers to engage with decision-makers and officials to shape agricultural development processes. Improving participation and representation can take place in a variety of ways and through various methods. Ensuring equity in the design of training, in implementation but also in possible multistakeholder fora. If these fora do not exist,

other methods such as participatory video or digital stories can be carried out to communicate local perspectives to a wider audience of decision-makers.

Research steps

An understanding of social systems and how they relate to agricultural production (division of labor, control over assets like land and livestock, decision-making, and farm composition) is the foundation upon which interventions can be assessed.

- Step 1: Understand the local context, issues, barriers and opportunities for change by drawing on knowledge of local stakeholders, women and men farmers, extension personnel, etc.
- Step 2: Co-design A - Select farmer/land user participants to include in participatory trials of interventions using an inclusive process to ensure gender and other social criteria representation.
- Step 3: Co-design B - Co-identify and decide upon social change impacts and indicators that focus on areas of gender transformative change. Co-design indicators for measurement of impact – preferably using the SIAF pillars.
- Step 4: Co-analysis of results with participants.
- Step 5: Feedback results to farmers and other stakeholders

Research Methods For Each Step

Step 1: Diagnostics of farming practices, knowledge and constraints

Qualitative methods (depending on context): Interviews, focus groups, and participatory methods such as ELMO/netmap/participatory landscape mapping to get an overview of essential farming practices, value chains and constraints (costs, access, etc).

To measure changes in agency, a focus on knowledge can be an indicator of improved agency (a bit more depth than just counting how many women participated). Important step is to design and implement a simple questionnaire to gather information on relevant agricultural knowledge that affects intervention design, implementation and evaluation and then implement it again after interventions have been implemented. This questionnaire can be used to measure change in knowledge of participating farmers and how it may differ according to gender and other social criteria.

Quantitative survey for characterization of households/gender and farming system within the sites. The survey can be used to decide upon criteria for farmer selection but also to measure any changes in income or production patterns that came about through project interventions. This data can map the impact on men, women and other community members.

Value chain analysis: of the specific crops/commodities targeted in the interventions to identify challenges/opportunities for farmers.

Step 2: Co-design A

Based on criteria decided upon by the team, selection of farmers and farm types. Important to select across wealth/gender/social inclusion criteria. Survey results can provide the data needed for selection. Ultimately however, building upon this criteria, selection should be done through an inclusive process that allows self-selection of interested farmers but also is also transparent so that some farmers do not feel they are being marginalized.

Step 3: Co-design B

Co-design between researchers and farmers of design, piloting and measuring trials and the criteria for measuring impact – around the SIAF pillars. Establish a protocol for regularly tracking the progress and responses of participants (capturing gender and other differences) to their experiences in the trials. This should be done periodically, not simply at the beginning and the end as it needs to capture participants' views as the trial progresses in order to capture the most data. Farmer response and reflection is essential and its analysis will also be informed by the qualitative methods in earlier steps.

Step 4: Feedback

Analysis of results and feedback to farmers and other stakeholders. Decide upon accessible and easily communicated means for feedback. For men and women farmers, engage them to do the feedback to the wider farming community. Additionally, a simple video could be made by farmers to feedback to wider decision-makers.



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