

# Innovative approaches to co-creating equitable policy environments

## From collective to co-creative: Experiences implementing gender-responsive local policies

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### Introduction

Approaches to gender-responsive policy design and implementation processes have largely focused on increasing women's participation in governance structures and building their political leadership capacity in parliamentary procedure, negotiation, networking, and public speaking. Using the Women in Development (WID) approach, gender policy advocates have historically sought to position women as active contributors to development and to draw attention to key issues in policy environments that do not fully embrace gender equality (Razavi & Miller 1995; Baden & Goetz 1998). While these efforts have increased the number of women in governance, it is difficult to discern whether they have resulted in laws and policies that are more responsive to women's priorities (World Bank 2011; Domingo et al. 2015; Evans & Nambiar 2013). By contrast, more recent approaches to policy design and implementation, illustrated by the examples in this note, emphasise the co-creation of equitable policy environments by engaging both men and women.

The agricultural development community has come a long way in the elaboration of policies that acknowledge and seek to remedy the disadvantages women face in agriculture. There are many recent examples of countries that have laid out gender equality outcomes or goals as part of their agricultural development plans.<sup>2</sup> However,

policy design processes and implementation are often underfunded, not fully implemented at the local level, and do not sufficiently engage with poor rural women. "Without concerted efforts to include the voices, interests, and needs of various interest groups, such as women's advocacy groups, an institutional bias is established that begins at the policy level and extends to the field, where services either overlook women's distinct needs or are supplied on the basis of assumed roles of men and women" (Manfre et al. 2013).

Efforts to create a local policy environment that enables women's access to agricultural resources have focused on women's collective action, through which women strengthen their agency, voice, and negotiating power. These **collective approaches** bring women together in groups around social bonds or common interests to use, and often strengthen, the power of the group to influence policymakers. **Co-creative approaches** engage women and men in working together to craft a cooperative environment (Box 1). The two approaches are not always intentionally combined. This note examines these two strategies: (1) strengthening women's collective action; and, (2) engaging men. Throughout the note, 'policy' is broadly defined as the written rules of national and local governments, including statutory instruments and agreements, and of non-governmental institutions such as cooperatives and credit institutions. We define co-creation as the interaction between women and men in a process to shape an equitable outcome, noting that, "In a co-creation effort, multiple stakeholders come together to develop new practices that traditionally would have emerged

<sup>1</sup> This publication expresses the views of the authors and does not represent the views of the United States government, Lutheran World Relief, or Cultural Practice LLC.

<sup>2</sup> Notable examples include: Rwanda's Agriculture Gender Strategy, 2010; Malawi's Agriculture Sector Gender, HIV and AIDS Strategy 2012–2017; Vietnam's Gender Strategy for Agriculture and Rural Development 2001–2010.

## Box 1

### Collective versus co-creative approaches

**Collective approaches**, synonymous with collective action, refer “both to the process by which voluntary institutions are created and maintained and to the groups that decide to act together” (Capri 2005). Collective approaches are characterised by the strengthening of social capital within a group around common interests, often to advocate or influence policy-makers or other decision-making stakeholders.

**Co-creative approaches** build on collective approaches but seek to bridge the links between groups with differing levels of power, for example, rural women and local government. Co-creative approaches bring together different groups to build and implement a common agenda.

only from a bureaucratic, top-down process (if, indeed, those practices would have emerged at all)” (Gouillart & Hallett 2015). A co-creative approach has the potential to generate additional opportunities to address cultural norms that, implicitly or explicitly, influence policy and to expand support for women’s policy priorities.

The approaches described below work with women as active citizens and problem solvers, and engage men to change the policies governing access to productive resources in rural areas. Box 2 provides background on the two approaches, which are analysed in more detail in the next section.

### Strengthening women’s collective action for negotiating power

In situations where women have limited bargaining power in their households, communities, and political and other spheres, negotiating for change as an individual can be extremely difficult. Organising women into informal and formal groups and networks has been critical to the progress made in enhancing gender equality (WDR 2012). Women have long been organised, or have organised themselves, into groups. Among the approaches reviewed for this note, strengthening women’s collective action is the foundation upon which advocacy efforts rest and the primary means by which

women expand their involvement in policy development and actions on food security. Collective action also strengthens women’s relationship with and access to local government. Through the process of organising, women are able to draw strength and power from other women, allowing them to work together to advance common interests, increase their own confidence and agency, and create and maintain a visible and public role for women to negotiate and reshape the institutions that define men’s and women’s rights and access to resources. In interacting with each other, learning leadership and negotiating skills for daily use in their family and community, and creating allies through capacity building in their groups, women come to see power as dispersed and pervasive and coming “from everywhere” (Foucault 1991), as opposed to a decision-making authority held by a few people that can exclude others from participating (Gaventa 1980).

In Western Honduras, the foundation of Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice (GAPP) rests on Municipal Women’s Networks (Red Municipal de la Mujer, RMM), which consist of groups of women that advocate for change at the municipal level. These groups came about as a civil society response to the passing of the first Law for Equality of Opportunities for Women in 2000. Local nongovernmental organisations (NGO) unite women in formally recognised community-based organisations so that they can engage with the newly established Municipal Women’s Offices (Oficina Municipal de la Mujer, OMM) and can apply for government funding and services. The RMMs are the main locus for collective action and capacity building efforts for their members, who can participate in three different types of training programmes delivered by GAPP partners. The programmes focus on leadership, public speaking and advocacy, and political engagement. They aim to build women’s confidence in speaking in public, facilitating large groups, and advocating on behalf of other women around issues related to food security, agriculture, and gender-based violence. Women learn to write proposals, practice interview skills, and use a range of information and communication tools like cameras, microphones, email, and social media. The most intense of the workshops implemented through GAPP, the School of Political Engagement (Escuela de Incidencia Pública), covers a wide range of topics, including policy development and policy analysis, and equips women with the tools to participate in policy planning and implementation.

Building the capacity of women to be agents for the community and for themselves stretches through the first four phases of the L2L process (see below). Through a series of interactive exercises in their community, grassroots women meet to develop leadership practices, including public speaking, listening, respecting different

views, and arriving at and keeping to agreements about how they will interact with each other and with stakeholders. The curriculum expands the concept of power, from the notion that a person or institution has power over others to an understanding that different people have ‘power within’ themselves, ‘power to’ affect others ...

## Box 2

### Background to highlighted approaches

Rural women play a critical role in agricultural production and in maintaining the economic and social fabric of rural communities, yet in most countries, produce associations, as well as government institutions, are male-dominated. Below are descriptions of two approaches used throughout the note to illustrate practices that foster gender-responsive policy processes.

#### ***Local-to-Local Dialogues: Women’s collective power for community change***

The Local-to-Local Dialogue (L2L)<sup>3</sup> process, first developed by the Asian Women and Shelter Network, has been deepened and propagated through the Huairou Commission and applied by grassroots women’s organisations in many countries since 2002 (Goldenberg 2008). In the L2L process, grassroots women identify and address community needs through an ongoing partnership with local government. The L2L process has six phases: strengthening women’s leadership; organising at the community level; mapping needs, allies, and resources; preparing for dialogue with local government; leading the dialogue; and developing a plan for follow-up (Huairou Commission 2011). The phases may overlap or repeat as communities take action or identify new issues. The L2L process is not intended to emphasise agriculture or food security, but to create a space for communities to identify and present their priorities; however, several NGOs have used the L2L process to elevate the issue of women’s land access.

#### ***Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice (GAPP): Women and men co-creating local policy***

Between 2013 and 2016, a GAPP pilot project worked with women and men of nine municipalities<sup>5</sup> in Western Honduras to reshape traditional gender perceptions and push for the development and implementation of inclusive local policies and budgets. Implemented by Lutheran World Relief, GAPP focused specifically on the local implementation of national policies embodied in the Law of Equality for Opportunity for Women,<sup>6</sup> the Food and Nutrition Security Law,<sup>7</sup> and the Law of Municipalities,<sup>8</sup> as well as on changes to policies in rural credit institutions. With local partners, GAPP addressed these challenges using an approach that strengthened women’s leadership and worked with men to enhance collaboration between multiple stakeholders and secure equitable and sustainable access to resources for both women and men.

The intervention took a co-creation approach in seeking to decrease food insecurity by strengthening participation, leadership, and management skills in women’s municipal networks and by working with men in local governmental institutions and rural financial organisations. In the former case, the project equipped women with the skills to develop and submit proposals and negotiate for funding earmarked for women’s activities. In the latter, the project engaged men in a process to become aware of the gender inequalities that constrain the development of their communities and families, and to advocate for women’s equitable economic and political participation.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://huairou.org/local-local-dialogue> for further information on the Local-to-Local Dialogues approach.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on the Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice project, supported through the Feed the Future initiative, please refer to the information listed on Lutheran World Relief’s website: <https://lwr.org/project/gapp> <sup>5</sup> The project is active in the following municipalities in the Department of Lempiras: Candelaria, Erandique, Gualcince, Piraera, Valladolid, Tambla, Tomala, Guarita, and San Juan Guarita.

<sup>6</sup> Passed in 2000 along with the National Plan for Women, this law legalised equal access to land titles for men and women and identifies priorities for programmes that promote the role of women in more intensive food production.

<sup>7</sup> Passed in 2011, this law established a legislative framework to standardise programming on food and nutrition security.

<sup>8</sup> Article 91 of the Law of Municipalities requires municipalities to allocate 2 percent of their annual budgets to women’s priorities. This was later revised to 5 percent.

[and] 'power with' [their] neighbors," (Huairou Commission 2011). Women in participating groups identify the different kinds of people in their community – including individuals of different sexes, age, partnership status, HIV status, and other characteristics – and discuss the 'powers' they hold. The women then lead their communities in sessions to identify issues that the community wants to address and to create a shared vision and set of principles for resolving them. They catalogue the resources (people, natural resources, schools, NGOs, etc.) needed to address community priorities through mapping, participatory rapid appraisals, and other methods, and begin to plan a community dialogue with local government officials. For many of the grassroots women, this meeting might be the first time they meet or speak with government officials. The L2L process includes practical exercises for planning the dialogues, including developing and practicing messages, holding mock meetings, suggestions for learning about the government leaders, drafting the agenda, compiling materials and information to present, facilitation strategies, and logistics for the meeting.

A primary aim of these capacity building efforts is to position and reveal women as legitimate and relevant actors capable of engaging with local government and other institutions and of holding them accountable. The ultimate goal of GAPP was to increase women's access to agricultural resources, either through negotiation with local government or with rural credit institutions. Women RMM members took advantage of legally mandated open town hall meetings to advance their agenda. While the original intent was for women to present projects to be funded under the 5% earmark available from the local government for women's projects, a change to the Law of Municipalities removed the earmark. To protect the budget allocation, the women's groups, and their allies, used town hall meetings to request that local governments sign agreements to secure the 5% designated for women.<sup>9</sup> Over the course of GAPP, 165 projects were approved and funded by the local governments. Of these, 99 were for agricultural initiatives, which included investments for plant nurseries (e.g., for coffee production), investments in maize and bean production, chicken coops, grain storage, dairy activities, and

<sup>9</sup> Information collected from the *Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice project reports* (October 1st, 2014 through September 30th, 2015), presented by Lutheran World Relief (LWR) to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Award AID-OAA-A-13-00054.

the purchase of irrigation equipment. The actual number of agriculture-related activities to receive funding is higher if small-scale milling operations and coffee roasting operations are included. The total amount of public funding approved over the life of project for women's agricultural initiatives came to approximately \$81 800 and the women's groups contributed an additional \$34 100 to the initiatives in cost-share.<sup>10</sup>

In the L2L process, grassroots women's groups invite members of their community and local government officials and customary leaders to a meeting where the women present a synthesis of their needs and the information collected from the community mapping and assessments of needs, resources, and allies that the women themselves have led. As part of or following the dialogue, the women's groups document the decisions made and create an action plan to identify resources to move forward on resolving agreed-upon issues, to monitor government progress, to create working groups to further engage with the local government, and to relay the action plan to the entire community. Although the L2L process ends with the dialogues and plans for follow-up action, it aims to create an ongoing partnership between grassroots women and local government.

Through GAPP and L2L women have taken on greater and more visible roles, both official and unofficial, in local governance. Women's participation has expanded to include collaboration on the development of municipal food security policies, budget monitoring, and participation in community watchdog groups.

## Engaging men as co-creators of gender-equitable policy

Achieving sustainable impact in agriculture is unlikely to happen without addressing both men's and women's roles. While strengthening women's leadership skills is necessary, it is insufficient to create equitable policies if the structures and individuals in positions of power remain committed to reinforcing gender inequalities. While both men and women are involved in shaping and sustaining gender inequalities, women remain the focus of most gender-responsive programming. This is despite a growing body of evidence, from the health

<sup>10</sup> Information collected from the *Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice project report* (October 1, 2013 through July 15th, 2016), presented by Lutheran World Relief (LWR) to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Award AID-OAA-A-13-00054.

sector in particular, that reveals how encouraging men to reflect upon their behaviors and attitudes can have significant impact on reshaping gender roles and relations (WHO 2010). Programmatic approaches that leverage, question, or transform norms around men's roles and behaviour are less prevalent in agriculture, although some efforts in this direction can be seen in methodologies that encourage men and women in the same household to work toward common goals (Bishop-Sambrook 2014).

Men's engagement with women in agricultural policy processes has tended to be from a perspective where men are in an established position of power. Men are often the government leaders being lobbied by women's organisations. Men may be the leaders of the farmer cooperative and/or make up the majority of its membership, and thus set the expectations of behavior and allocation of resources. In some programmes to foster women leaders, male champions serve as a link to traditional power structures and seek to increase the acceptability of women's organisations by men in power. The L2L process is one example of these indirect approaches, which engage men most often in their roles as community members and local leaders. Often, the women work with male leaders, who do not interact with them as peers, but rather as authorities from whom women need to seek approval to pursue their agenda. The capacity-building activities for women at the grassroots level prepare them to engage the men in their communities and in local leadership as partners. Space for co-creation exists both at the community level and with local leaders, even though the L2L approach does not view men as equal partners in the co-creation process. Nonetheless, it has led to interesting outcomes, including the following:

- In response to specific problems or requests, local leaders granted specific requests/proposals for women's access to land and animals in Ghana, Tanzania, and Zambia, sometimes with documentation (Brown et al. 2014; Kaloustian & Alhassan 2010; Huairou Commission 2009).
- In Cameroon, the relationship that women's grassroots groups built with local authorities through the dialogues "inspired these leaders to sensitise fellow men on will-writing and registration of property in the names of their wives and daughters", contributing to an environment that supports and promotes more equitable sharing of land and resources (Reade & Clark 2011).

- In Tanzania, dialogues organised by the Maasai Women Development Association led to women, men, and local leaders examining customary norms, especially those related to women's land access, and their effects on women and children in the community (Huairou Commission 2009). Traditional leaders and communities agreed to abandon some of the customs and practices that keep Maasai women from accessing land.
- A common follow-up action to L2L dialogues was the establishment of community watchdog groups to identify and respond to abuses of women's or children's property rights, evictions, or violence. Some of the groups expanded into legal education and legal aid.

However, these approaches neither engaged men that were not themselves leaders in the policy process nor directly addressed the questions around how women and men communicate and what their interests should be. GAPP was one of a limited number of projects in the agriculture sector that recognised the need to address men's role in supporting gender equality. Masculinity workshops<sup>11</sup> delivered in the intervention areas targeted male leaders in local government and credit institutions and focused on creating a space for men to explore the perceptions and images of masculinity. During these workshops, participants confronted and deconstructed these images in an effort to build a more positive and supportive image of what it is to be a man. Among the topics covered were the roles that men play in caregiving and the notion that achieving food security for all people should be a high priority. The methods were participatory and reflective, designed to tap into the men's physical and emotional perceptions of self. Initially, resistance from men was prevalent across the municipalities, however after the initial masculinity workshops took place, there was an increased demand from both women and men.

The masculinity workshops prompted a discussion of the collective values that men and women hold and share, the changes they wish to achieve in their communities, how these changes can be achieved, and how they can improve their own accountability in the process. Men from local credit institutions who had participated in masculinity workshops led conversations in their institutions about opening membership to women

<sup>11</sup> Through the masculinity workshops, the GAPP Project implemented only the introductory phase of a more comprehensive masculinity approach. Information about the full approach implemented by Centro de las Casas in El Salvador, can be found at <http://www.escuelaequinoccio.org/>

and increasing lending to women to acknowledge and support their work in agriculture and small business. Typically, the organisational structure of rural credit institutions prevents women from becoming members, accessing credit, or becoming board members, only including them as indirect beneficiaries. One rural credit institution amended their institutional by-laws on membership, office-holding, and credit access to be more equitable. Municipal leaders and the executive committees of the rural credit institutions worked with women (primarily women in the RMM who had also attended GAPP's policy advocacy training) to redesign credit and food security policies. All nine municipalities in the GAPP project approved gender-integrated public policies on food security and nutrition, while one municipality developed and approved an institutional gender policy for their Budget Office.<sup>12</sup> These are clear examples of men and women defining and advancing towards an equitable vision of how to achieve positive outcomes in the economic and social lives of their communities. It required both women organising and advocating for their interests and men recognising the validity and social benefit of those interests.

## Lessons and recommendations

- **Men need to be engaged in meaningful and substantive ways to support gender equality.** Building co-creative spaces, especially at the grassroots level, can allow 'women's issues' to be revealed as 'community issues' and addressed as such. The importance of the co-creation process in GAPP was that the intervention implemented a methodology that emphasised the relationship between men and gender and that aimed to destabilise deeply embedded structures of gender inequality in the home, the labor market, and other institutions. GAPP challenged the underlying 'rules of the game' by empowering men to think – and act – in ways that increased the ability of women to negotiate greater gender equality in the systems where they operate. By being sensitive to the intersectionality of power, it is possible for development actors and agencies to empower women by influencing more equitable

and inclusive structural reforms and providing a more conducive environment for women's rights and the rights of any marginalised group.

- **While women do not always lack capacity, leadership, and skills, programmes targeting women remain important foundational elements of gender and policy projects.** The ability of women and men to productively co-create a gender-equitable policy environment should not be taken for granted. Women and men need a foundation in technical and advocacy skills and experience. Collective action appears to be an effective and consistent way to build those skills and experience among women. However, women and men also need guidance and practice working together to productively navigate gendered norms about roles and communications. Programming should consider approaches to improving women's policy advocacy capacity and the ability of women and men to work together.
- **The legal and policy environment matters.** In Honduras, GAPP benefitted from a legal and policy framework that supports gender equality and participatory processes. This provided the opportunity to conduct gender-responsive budgeting processes at the local level, although this was not actively or consistently conducted. However, this legal foundation provided legitimacy to the women's advocacy efforts.

Despite the successes of these approaches, it remains to be seen whether they are sustainable in the long-term. Policy environments change rapidly and are subject to the whims of political leaders and interests. Similarly, it is unknown how sustainable the changes in the attitudes of men and local leaders will be. The expectation however is that women who have been involved in co-creative approaches have the skills and the experience to navigate the changing environment. They have new relationships with the local government and with leaders that they can leverage. Community and government members also have a better understanding of gender equality and the value of participatory governance processes. These are positive gains and should serve women and men well in co-creating gender-responsive local policies in the future.

<sup>12</sup> Information collected from the *Gender in Agriculture: From Policy to Practice final project report* (October 1, 2013 through July 15th, 2016), presented by Lutheran World Relief (LWR) to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Award AID-OAA-A-13-00054.

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