



*“Investing in women’s economic empowerment is a high-yield investment, with multiplier effects on productivity, efficiency and inclusive growth for the continent. This context presents a key opportunity for governments and business leaders to recognize and encourage women to be participants, beneficiaries and enablers of Africa’s growth.”*

Kathleen Lay, ONE<sup>1</sup>

Farmers who are working with GROOTS Kenya show off crops. © GROOTS Kenya

## 2 Developing Empowerment Pathways

In this book we provide ideas, methodologies and strategies for “empowerment pathways” to create permanent change in gender relations in the smallholder farming sector, in agricultural value chain development, and in climate-smart agricultural practices. The ultimate aim is to make these sectors work more effectively, unencumbered by gender norms that restrict effective, rational planning by men and women farmers and other actors.<sup>1</sup>

Combining strategies for change is vital. The World Bank-sponsored Women in Development (WID) project in the Gambia in the 1990s<sup>2</sup> taught us that empowering women through targeted projects does not mean that their new-won capacity will ripple out into more decision-making power overall, or into increased personal freedom and ownership of assets. It is clear that improving women’s business skills without working to ensure that they are able to form independent relationships with other value-chain actors – by freeing up their time, investing in mobile phone technologies, ensuring safe and accessible transport, etc. – will limit their business success.

We know that training women in good agricultural practices without working to strengthen their access to productive assets, to strengthen their participation in producer groups and community decision-making bodies, and to strengthen their voice in intra-household decision-making rarely has a long-term impact on productivity. For these reasons, creating empowerment pathways that go from the individual, to the community, to the wider world is vital to ensure that change cannot be undone, but rather is truly resilient over time. Empowerment pathways are not linear: they rely on mutually reinforcing feedback loops to help create virtuous, ever-expanding, circles for change.

When talking about “empowerment”, we find it helpful to distinguish between four forms of power:

- Power over refers to direct and indirect control by one person or group over another person or group;
- Power within describes self-confidence, a sense of personal strength;
- Power to expresses being able to decide something and then to do it; and
- Power with describes collective power, when people come together for change.

These differentiated concepts of power provide us with starting points for strategies to help create change.

All too often in development circles, work on gender is mistaken for a “power over” approach: there is a widespread perception that men will lose out as a consequence of women’s gains. This is due in part to approaches in the past that have singled out women (as opposed to gender relations) for special attention, including some WID activities. It is central to this book’s approach to empowerment that men and women understand that not only will both benefit from greater gender equality, but the community as a whole will be stronger when everyone’s skills and talents are used to promote development.

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1 Chapter 2 title page quotation: Lay, K. (2012). Why African women are the drivers of development. ONE Blog, 17 September. <http://www.one.org/us/2012/09/17/why-african-women-are-the-drivers-of-development/>.

2 See <http://www.worldbank.org/projects/P000822/women-development-wid-project?lang=en>.



The chair of the Ijendo Women Growers Association in their greenhouse. © USAID Tanzania, Wikimedia Commons

Research discussed in Chapter 5 also shows that when household decision-making processes are more equal, men's relationships with their children become closer. And all men have daughters, sisters, friends, mothers, co-workers or other women in their lives whose safety and well-being they care about; it is this recognition that has led many men, in Africa and around the world, to mobilize against sexual and gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup> Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), which works to “transform masculinities for women's empowerment” in Kenya, urges men to not only shun violence themselves, but to refuse to condone violence perpetrated by others, and to actively work to end sexual and gender-based violence and promote gender equality in their communities.<sup>4</sup> Programmes that reach out to men also emphasize how gender inequality and stereotypes negatively affect them as well. For example, gender norms that equate masculinity with toughness are known to reduce male health-seeking behaviours.<sup>5</sup> Retaining men's traditional role of breadwinners even as structural changes in the economy encourage higher rates of female participation can lead to friction, and has been associated with a significant loss of self-esteem and increases in self-harm among men, as well as with the abuse of women.<sup>6</sup>

3 See Greig, A. and Edstrom, J. (2012). *Mobilising Men in Practice: Challenging Sexual and Gender-based Violence in Institutional Settings*. Institute of Development Studies, Brighton, UK. <http://www.ids.ac.uk/publication/mobilising-men-in-practice-challenging-sexual-and-gender-based-violence-in-institutional-settings>. Also, Men for Gender Equality Now (MEGEN), in Kenya, <http://www.megen.org>, and the U.S.-based Men Stopping Violence, <http://www.menstoppingviolence.org>.

4 See <http://www.megen.org/>.

5 See, for example, McEvoy, R. and Richardson, N. (2004). *Men's Health in Ireland Report*. Men's Health Forum in Ireland, Belfast. <http://www.mhfi.org/mhfireport.htm>.

6 The World Bank (2011). *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development*. Washington, DC. <http://go.worldbank.org/6R2KGVEXPO>. Spread 2 (pp.194–196): “The decline of the breadwinner: Men in the 21st century”.

## The conceptual framework

In order to build our concept of “empowerment pathways”, we build upon an idea developed by CARE, of three interconnected “empowerment dimensions”.<sup>7</sup> These are **agency** – the ability to make our own choices and act upon them; **relations** – our ability to create, participate in, and benefit from networks; and **structure**, which itself has two dimensions. First, structure includes the organizational forms everyone can see, such as producer cooperatives and marketing boards, the ministry of agriculture, as well as the laws and the policies that determine people’s rights. Second, structure refers to the invisible norms that underlie and “justify” the way organizations are set up, and how laws are formed. In many agrarian societies, for instance, sons rather than daughters tend to inherit land (an “invisible” norm); the laws may support this practice by acknowledging customary law (a more visible expression of the norm). It is important to appreciate that unequal power relations shape each of these dimensions.

Figure 2.1 provides an overview of the three empowerment dimensions and presents the “ideal case” of empowered women and men. Sample activities to empower women and men in each dimension are then discussed.

### Agency

Agency is the ability to define one’s goals and act upon them. Promoting agency as a programme goal is about recognizing the right of people to have choices in how they provide for themselves and to determine the course of their lives. Examples of agency in the sense of “power to” include:

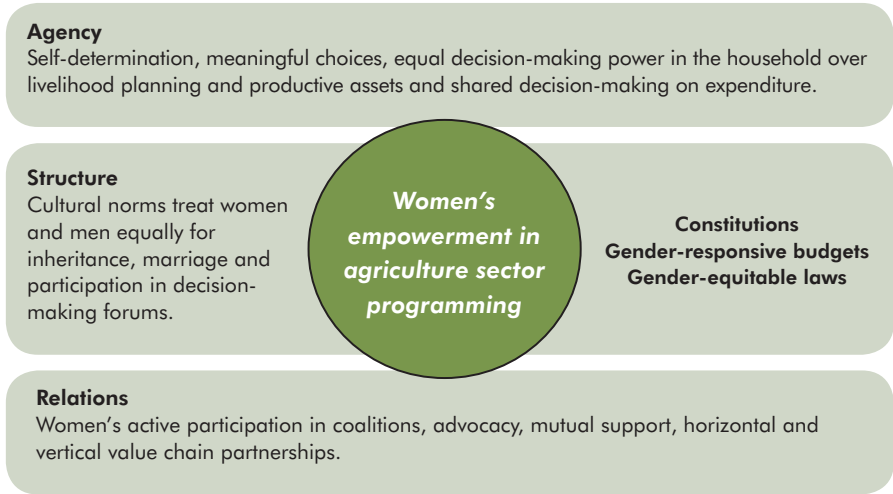
- Accessing information freely;
- Setting and realizing goals;
- Deciding how to use one’s own labour;
- Directing benefiting from one’s work;
- Participating in education and extension programmes;
- Implementing lessons learned from training courses;
- Claiming one’s legal and customary rights;
- Joining groups, collectives, and producer and marketing boards;
- Taking on decision-making positions;
- Speaking out and being listened to.

Examples of agency in the sense of “power with” include:

- Women and men working together and making decisions together within households, in groups, and in communities;
- Working together to develop and share productive assets equitably;
- Sharing domestic and caring tasks equitably between men and women;
- Men and women working together to identify and address their respective needs with relation to gender roles and personal development.

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7 Lawson-Lartego, L., Kamp, K. and Hill, C. (2009). *A Place to Grow: Empowering Women in CARE’s Agriculture Programming*. S. Bell (ed.). CARE briefing paper. Economic Development Unit, CARE USA, Atlanta, GA. Available at <http://bit.ly/CARE-APG>. At pp.7–9.



**FIGURE 2.1 Three empowerment dimensions**

Whilst it is possible to increase agency through education and other types of initiatives, in many situations, agency effectively depends on access to resources, for without them it can be impossible to realize one's business and personal goals, or determine how to live one's life. Meaningful choice requires being truly able to pursue different options: you may have the right to send your children to school next door, but if you cannot pay the fees, you do not really have that choice. Thus, it is the combination of both agency and resources that yields achievements (outcomes).<sup>8</sup>

In agriculture, productive assets are clearly critical for effective participation in market-led programmes. However, as a consequence of unequal gender relations – which arise from cultural norms perpetuated in “structure” – the assets that women control tend to have weak income generation potential and are rarely sufficient to serve as collateral for value chain investments. Women-owned assets often include small livestock, kitchen equipment, firewood, jewellery and savings. Women tend to invest in such assets because they can control them in most societies. Often women's assets also depend on the ability to access and maintain social capital, such as group-based micro-credit schemes. The assets controlled by men, by contrast, tend to be of higher value and contribute more directly to farm productivity, such as land, the ability to command and pay for labour, and farming technologies such as ploughs and sprayers. Women's access to productive resources like these is often mediated by male kin and may be withdrawn in the event of a marital breakdown or the husband's death.

<sup>8</sup> See Kabeer, N. (1999). *What Colour is the Wind: Feminists, Development Agencies and the Empowerment of Third World Women. Gender, Poverty and Well-being: Indicators and Strategies : Report of the UNRISD, UNDP and CDS International Workshop, Kerala, 24–27 November 1997.* United Nations Research Institute for Social Development. Also: Kabeer, N. (2000). *Resources, Agency, Achievement: reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Power, Resources and Culture in a Gender Perspective.* Uppsala Universitet, Uppsala, Sweden.



A couple in Tanzania show off their produce. Photo by Fimret, Inc. ©USAID Tanzania, Flickr

This said, having more resources does not *automatically* mean having more agency and voice – and vice-versa. Reciprocal, causal relationships between asset control and increased agency in all aspects of life do not necessarily exist. For example, in Saudi Arabia, a woman may be wealthy yet have almost no freedom of movement or association. Conversely, a woman who attends a Farmer Field School, for instance, may come to be recognized as an expert by her community, but see no improvement in her physical assets,<sup>9</sup> and still own no land because

customary norms allocate land to men. In such a case, the woman might be unable to realize her business plans, and might lose her house and land if her husband dies. It is thus essential to develop coordinated strategies to strengthen both women’s agency, and their resources.

### Structure

As noted above, the term structure covers two interrelated concepts. First, structure refers to the political, cultural, economic and social structures within which women and men live. Structure can have recognizable forms, such as how households are organized (monogamous, polygamous, etc.), producer groups, development agencies, government institutions, laws, and so forth. Second, structure refers to the values, assumptions and ideologies that perpetuate and legitimize these visible entities. There are strong associations between visible and invisible structures, and any given visible structure, such as a producer organization, is likely to be strongly shaped by the society’s underlying cultural norms. The way gender relations operate in any society will have a strong impact on the structures that bring people together and how they support their interests – though they may not fully match, as norms evolve over time. When considering how to transform structures to help obtain gender equality, the following areas should be analysed:

- The willingness of organizations to work for gender equality;
- The openness of the political system to women’s representatives;
- Women’s participation in value chains at all levels, as producers, transporters, processors, aggregators, buyers, retailers, etc.;
- Budgeting practices at all levels to address gender issues;
- Civil society willingness to identify and work for women’s rights;
- Equal access to justice for men and women;
- The flexibility of marriage and kinship rules, norms and processes to accommodate women’s rights to land and other productive assets;

9 Mancini, F., Van Bruggen, A. H. C. and Jiggins, J. L. S. (2007). Evaluating Cotton Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Farmer Field School Outcomes Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach in India. *Experimental Agriculture*, 43(01). 97–112. DOI:10.1017/S001447970600425X. At p.110.

- The willingness of indigenous authorities to increase women’s rights within their systems;
- The ability of private-sector players to recognize and respond to gender issues.

As with agency, work on transforming structures requires explicit work to strengthen women’s rights at all levels of society, from legislatures, to customary decision-making bodies, to producer and trader organizations. Development partners need to critically examine their own ways of working – gender transformative approaches to organizational change should be a starting point for development actors truly committed to achieving gender transformative change in society at large.

## Relations

The concept of “relations” describes the relationships inside our own communities and between communities and external agencies. We can ask, for example: To what extent can women participate in value chain platforms, or forge their own relationships to suppliers and buyers? Are women able to participate actively in women’s groups, and can they independently approach government representatives to pursue their rights? Relations are clearly linked to structure and agency, and likewise reflect – and continue to recreate – power relations in a particular society.

In our work, it is essential to identify how actors in the agricultural sector can promote more interdependent and accountable relationships between women and men, and the key people and institutions they engage with. This includes understanding how women organize themselves to access and control key productive assets; the quality of the relationships they have with partners such as development agencies, government representatives, and



Miyoba Women's Club meeting, Central Province, Zambia. ©Heifer International, Flickr

the private sector; and the way in which indigenous and other decision-makers support and work with women.

Thus, relations are about:

- Women’s freedom to participate in women’s groups;
- Women’s freedom to take part in coalitions to claim their rights to land and other resources;
- Women being directly acknowledged and worked with by development partners (as opposed to focusing only on household heads, for example, who are often men, yet may not be the key farmers);
- Women participating actively in value chain partnerships, such as in producer and marketing groups, and in value chain platforms;
- Institutions interacting with women to support their “gender interests” to land, decision-making positions, etc.

Relations are different from structure. Structure is about the political, cultural, economic and social formations within which farming operates, and the underlying values, assumptions and ideologies. By understanding the norms embedded in political, cultural, economic and social structures, we can develop strategies to challenge harmful values and norms and create an enabling environment for empowerment.

Relations, meanwhile, are about the connections people have both within and outside their communities. Those relationships – in the form of value chain partnerships, coalitions amongst actors working for women’s empowerment, civil society organizations, and government/development partner relationships, for example – represent a critical step between increasing individual women’s agency, and developing the collective agency needed to bring about large-scale change. Thus, relations are about “power with”: how collective action at different scales – from membership in a cooperative, to the women’s movement more generally – can augment an individual’s power.



Jikraza Self-Help Group in Kenya has a small fish farm. ©McKoy Swagge



## Ways forward

Power lies at the heart of inequitable gender relations. Transforming gender relations requires explicit attention to power dynamics, away from “power over” and towards “power with”, “power to” and “power within”. The three elements of agency, structure and relations are closely interrelated. Visible and invisible structures (cultural norms, laws) can isolate women, prevent them from building crucial relations, and then legitimize their isolation as culturally appropriate. Those structures also limit women’s agency, and women’s weak agency can make it very hard for them to build relations. Improving women’s agency through capacity-building and assertiveness training may have some effect on structures and relations, but it will only go so far if women’s access to resources is limited, and the benefits may erode over time because cultural norms and laws are so pervasive. This is why action across all levels is so vital: individually, within households, at the community level, and across the enabling environment.

Here it is important to return to the point that women’s empowerment is not about “power over”, but about “power with” men. It is essential to develop strategies that enlist men as change agents, to emphasize that the goal of transforming gender relations is to empower both women and men, and ensure that men see the benefits of collaboration. Case studies in this book show that men can quickly be engaged through approaches that focus on behavioural change at the household level, because they see the benefits right away. Transforming higher-level decision-making structures and laws can be much harder, because that involves multiple layers of inequitable power structures, not just between men and women, but between powerful elites and disempowered poor and rural communities. In order to achieve and secure change, strong links must be built between grassroots women and men and higher-level advocacy networks. In all this, work on agency, structure and relations needs to be fused together to help people become effective change agents. Men’s groups working to empower women are part of this story, as are powerful men in customary systems who work to empower women in decision-making bodies.

The thematic chapters that follow all use the “empowerment pathways” framework to analyse key issues, all illustrated with case studies, with a synthesis of lessons learnt at the end. The core message of the book is that far-reaching, sustainable change requires engaging a broad array of actors and institutions at all levels, and the diversity of strategies we discuss reflects this. The overall aim is to ensure better, more resilient agricultural production and marketing systems by developing women’s capacity to learn, speak and maximize their decision-making potential.