

Cooperation for Change:

We Effect on Gender Transformative Approach



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Gender Transformative Cooperatives

We Effect's vision in applying gender transformative approach is to sustain gender equality and women's rights in our ambition for the right to food for all. Cooperatives play a crucial role in advancing gender equality in this, by promoting economic participation, democratic processes, and leadership opportunities for women in all their diversityⁱ. This by challenging unequal power relations and traditional notions of gender roles, contributing to improved nutrition, sustainable agricultural development, and overall food securityⁱⁱ. Also, joining cooperatives increases women's decision-making power within households and empower them in community affairs, as cooperatives focus on inclusive employment and address multi-faceted inequalitiesⁱⁱⁱ.

Likeminded organisations experience and research show that applying gender transformative approach leads to increased sustainability of any achieved changes. By applying gender transformative approach, We Effect wants to contribute to an increasingly sustained future of gender equality and women's rights.

The added value^{iv} of having cooperatives apply – in collaboration with women's rights organisations - a gender-transformative approach is multifaceted. By adopting this approach, cooperatives, and women's rights organisations, gain mutual learning to better understand and address the barriers, strengthening their work and promoting gender equality^v:

1. Equity and Inclusion: By prioritising gender equality, cooperatives create an inclusive environment where women in all their diversity and gender diverse groups actively can participate in decision-making processes that leads to fairer resource distribution and more representative leadership.

2. Economic Rights: Gender-transformative cooperatives enhance economic opportunities for the women and gender diverse persons by providing collective actions such as training, access to credit, and support for income-generating activities, that ultimately improve livelihoods and economic independence that further contribute to community development.

3. Social Change: Cooperatives, together with women's rights organisations, can challenge harmful and constraining gender norms and practises. By promoting female leadership and recognising diverse contributions, the actors can contribute to broader societal shifts toward gender equality.

4. Democratic Governance: Cooperatives serve as spaces where females engage in decision making and power sharing. By enabling economic democracy and (collective and individual) agency the diverse groups shape cooperative policies and practises.

5. Sustainable Development: Gender-transformative cooperatives address the specific needs of women in their diversity and gender diverse groups. The focus on inclusivity ensures that development initiatives are sustainable, benefitting the entire community.

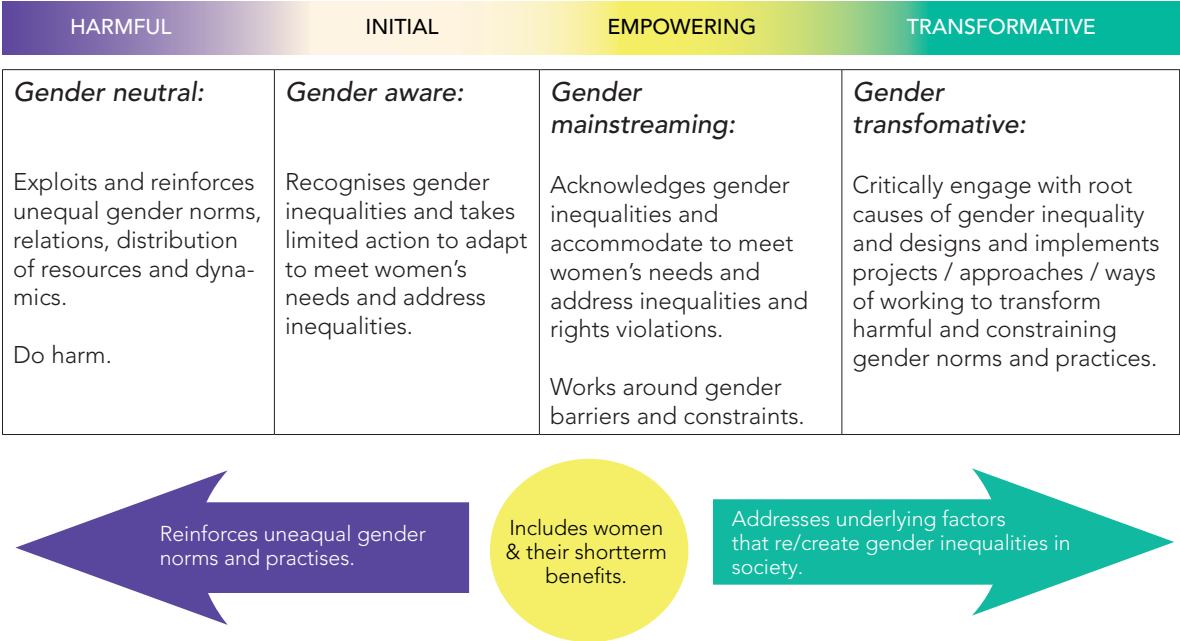


“Adopting gender transformative approach entails of an enduring commitment to address the root causes of gender inequality, requiring institutional commitment to medium and long-term processes, increased collaboration with women’s rights and feminist organisations, and dedication from mixed organisations to truly engage.”

Damaris Ruiz, Director Central America team, We Effect.

Defining Gender Transformation

The ambition for We Effect with gender transformative programming is to realise power re-distribution for women in all their diversity and gender diverse persons. Gender transformation is in the spectrum of a so-called gender continuum. The continuum ranges from gender neutral, to gender aware, gender mainstreaming and gender transformative (see figure below). In a gender transformative approach, We Effect together with partner organisation seek to constructively, and in a context-driven way, transform harmful or constraining norms and practises. In this way, We Effect is aiming to go deeper than common gender integration (such as awareness and mainstreaming) and tackle the root causes of gender inequalities instead of addressing its symptoms^{vi}. We Effect acknowledges that gender transformative approach requires commitments starting at the highest level of the organisation and all the way through. This means going beyond capacity strengthening and internal organisational learning, to changing mindsets, shifting mental models, values, and beliefs, and committing to standards and actions outlined in this paper regarding programming.



We Effect defines gender transformation as a type of gender integration that aims to challenge and change the root causes of gender inequality. This by identifying, addressing, and subsequently transforming constraining and harmful gender norms and practises, by redistributing resources, services, and power more equally. Power^{vii} that exists at all levels, are expressed in different ways (hidden, visible, or invisible), and exists at various spaces (closed, invited, or claimed).

Inclusive & Participatory Programmes

Gender norms and practises are often subconscious and largely maintained by everyday social interactions, and psychological processes that come to define power relations^{viii}. These norms and practises are tied to deeply rooted, albeit context-related and dynamic, value systems that inform day-to-day practice in varied and sometimes seemingly contradictory ways. By transforming the power relations between for instance man and woman, or patriarchal institutions with power holders (traditional and religious leaders, policy makers and private sector), gendered divisions of labour and resources related to food, can successfully be reshaped in ways which will benefit not only individuals, but families and communities^x. Case in point, studies show that, even after women acquire e.g. land — through purchase, redistribution, or other means — a plethora of complex structural factors may subsequently erode their control of the land, due to local patriarchal norms and practices^x.

Applying gender transformative programming for We Effect involves defining contextual changes – programme goals – and formulating process goals for local ownership throughout the programme cycle.

1. Transformation of what?

Gender transformation is aiming for a *profound* contextual change. What profound is shifts from one place to another. Subsequently, a transformative change in one place may not be so in another. Also, it is important to recognise that change is non-linear and may include resistance to gender equality and women's rights.

2. Transformation to what? Applying the approach is to reflect *how* to carry out the process in a co-creating and inclusive manner. In this sense We Effect considers how to centralise peoples' knowledge and lived experiences of discrimination, based on their intersecting gender, by ensuring co-creation and their ownership throughout the programme cycle. This involves mutual learning, and inclusive and participatory programme planning, implementation, and evaluation.



*“Setting an inclusive
planning structure
is key for building a
results-oriented
agenda for gender
transformation”*

Samir Memedov, Environment, climate change and resilience programme officer,
Europe, We Effect.

The Gender Transformative Process

There are six steps in a gender transformative programme cycle; planning the programme and the programme management, conduct an intersectional gender analysis, formulate profound changes, tangible change areas, and change pathways, ensure inclusive and participatory monitor and evaluation, and mutual learning. For each step We Effect has identified some key actions that are central to take that somewhat alters from more traditional programme application.



Set up programme design and implementation team for a gender transformative programme that goes beyond having women in all their diversity and gender diverse persons informing the programme design to co-creating and having ownership of the content and process.

#Key Actions:

1. Secure long-term and flexible resources that allow focusing on gaining leadership, ownership, and mutual learning.
 2. Assess the capacity of We Effect and partner organisations to implement a gender transformative programme in terms of working on changing gender norms and practises, knowledge of hands-on methods, and to be fully equipped with aspects such as masculinities, intersectionality, inclusion, and unconscious bias. Plan for self-defined capacity support for the groups to take on leadership.
 3. Identify and establish local groups exposed to intersectional gender discrimination who have little or no influence in decision making. Also, identify grassroots within membership organisations, and women's rights- or women-led organisations to uncover and map power relations and possible exclusion.
 4. Create spaces and build in processes of self-reflection, mutual learning and accountability, and transformative leadership.
 5. Establish programme strategies to counter resistance and backlash towards gender equality and women's rights, ideally together with the local groups and women's rights organisation who know how resistance can be mitigated and/or countered. Also, planning for protective measures for women human rights defenders is pivotal.
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Gender transformative programmes explicitly challenge unequal power relations, and questions assumptions about gender identities and roles. An intersectional gender context analysis aims to capture the unequal power distribution manifested in contextual harmful and constraining norms and practises.

#Key Actions:

1. Collect data through an intersectional gender analysis. Power is core to analyse to identify barriers. Engage discriminated groups in the data collection and use both qualitative and quantitative data. Numbers will give an indication of the prevalence, and the qualitative data will create an understanding of how the power dynamics and barrier plays out.
2. Identify power dynamics through an intersectional gender analysis. How are intersecting identities exposed to marginalisation, violence, and lack of power. When different forms of discrimination overlap, exclusion tends to increase. Let groups analyse how the lack of powers create marginalisation. Pinpoint the most prevalent and constraining ones together with the groups.
3. Keep important power holders who normalise barriers accountable, identify their strategies and relations and develop strategies to mitigate or counter their impact.
4. Strengthen and support power holders who positively contribute to change and ensure their safety.



Define change areas, and pathways of change that support a profound change. Choices and decisions taken at households, within the communities, organisations, institutions, and legislation are inevitably shaped by gender and power dynamics^{xi, xii}, and visible in relations at various levels, capacities, and doings (agency), and in the structures of informal and formal institutions.

#Key actions

1. A profound transformative overall change statement is contextual and needs to be explored and developed in an inclusive and participatory manner.
2. Aim for change in multiple areas and spheres (see table for examples) and unpack the change pathway. Changes of gender norms and practises that are visible in agency, relations, and/or structures.
3. Balance qualitative and quantitative indicators to track positive change and resistance. Quantitative indicators shed light on barriers such as intentions, practices, and perceptions of prevailing norms^{xiii}. Qualitative indicators provide a thicker description of the change process itself; what went well, where did the resistance emerge from, and how was it countered.



Strengthening Individual and Collective Agency:
Agency is exercised by people and groups through individual and collective actions^{xiv}. By strengthening people and groups capacities (knowledge and skills), attitudes, critical reflection, assets, actions, and access to services, women, men and gender diverse persons will gain power to challenge current systems, and act and engage for transformative changes.

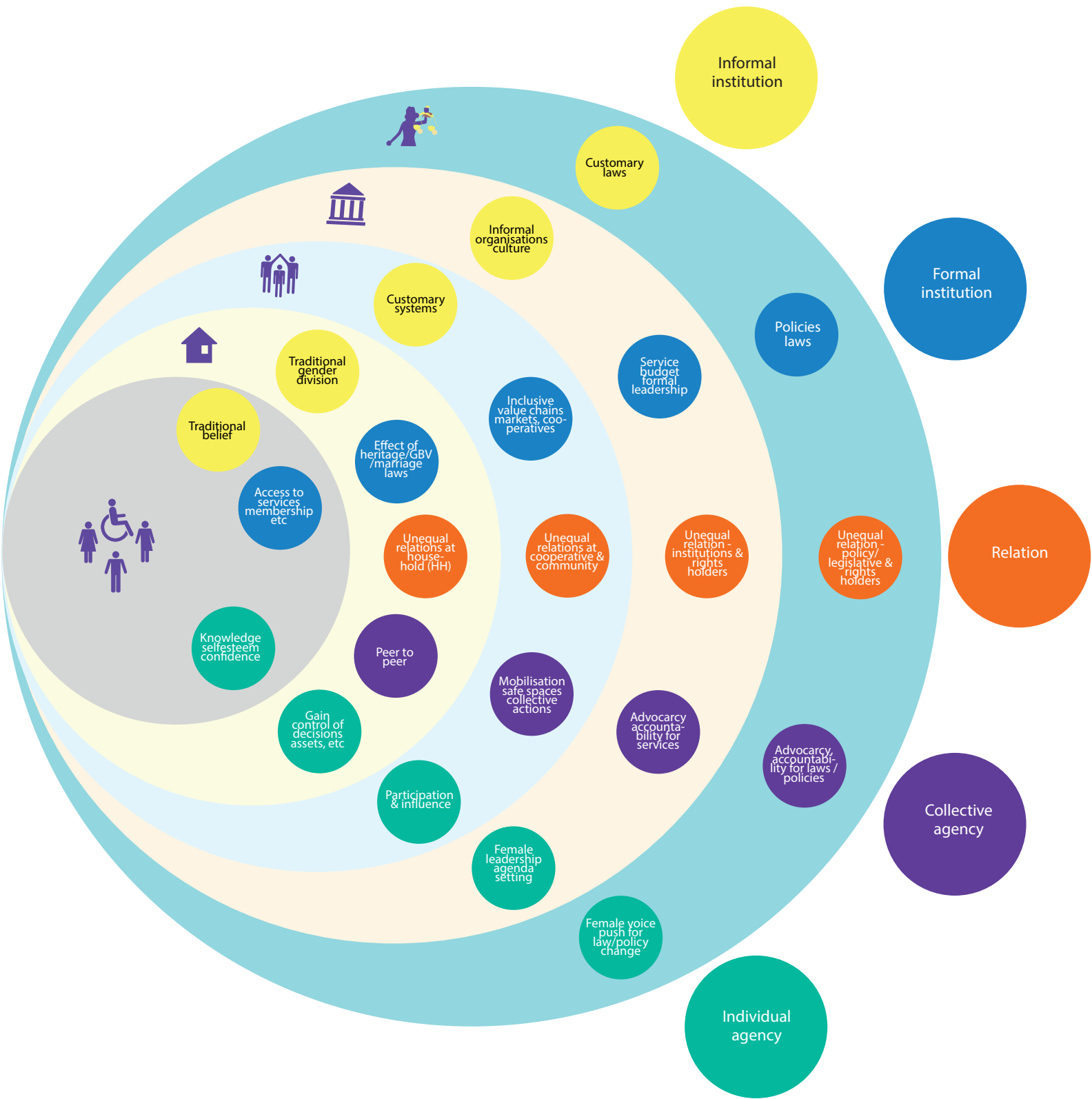


Challenging Unequal Relations:
Unequal gender relations are embedded into the social fabrics of patriarchal societies where groups routinely experience discrimination, marginalisation, and subordination^{xv}. This dynamic is the expression of inequitable power relations to be considered the primary underlying cause of the disempowerment of women in all their diversity and gender diverse persons.



Expanding Gender Equitable In/formal Institutions:
Discriminatory gender norms and practises are manifested both formally (in laws, policies, guidelines), and informally (in the willingness to adapt to the laws etc, and gender bias of staff) through traditional systems and their 'unwritten' customary laws.

TABLE. AREAS AND SPHERES OF CHANGE



“Through the gender transformative initiatives many women and men now share equal opportunities generated from the sale of farm produce and have joint decision-making in the household and community. Also, they have started to share the domestic responsibilities. A shift that has enhanced individual lives and strengthened the collective social fabric, fostering a more equitable and supportive environment for all.”

Faith Wayua, Programme officer gender equality Eastern Africa, We Effect.



Sylvia and Ibrahim Muhindo with their child in Uganda.
Photo: Robert Englund



Monitoring progress of profound change includes monitoring the processes 'to what', a nonlinear process where resistance to changes can result in setbacks, and where any achievements could be re-negotiated at any point, as well as the process 'of what' that involves having timely support to ensure ownership and co-creation.

#Key actions:

1. Inclusive and participatory monitoring processes aim to redistribute hierarchical power through technically accessible monitoring frameworks and demand driven capacity support for the women and gender groups.
2. Apply user-friendly tools to track non-linear changes including gendered resistance or backlash and strengthened ownership of the groups.
3. Monitor resistance and backlash throughout the programme implementation and ensure support and protective measures to women human rights actors.



Evaluating transformative change can be perceived as a way of thinking about evaluation^{xvi} where some dimensions should be reflected; assess the two stream changes 'of what' in the programme as well as the transformative processes – the 'what to'; have an inclusive and participatory process; choose evaluation methods that challenge power hierarchies; and ensure mutual learning that capture resistance.

#Key actions:

1. Empower groups through an inclusive and participatory evaluation process by them taking part in the formulation of the evaluation and gaining capacity to carrying out interactive evaluation assessments.
2. Analyse intersectional and transformative power re-distribution that surpass the conventional hierarchies present in traditional evaluation methods, such as those between the 'subjective-objective,' and the 'quantitative-qualitative' divide.
3. Reflect successful mitigation and counter strategies to any resistance as part of the evaluation.



Learning is viewed as the process when we use and respond to the data and evidence that has been produced, bringing it out and disseminate any results and best practises. In each stage of the programme cycle learning comes as an important step where it supports to develop and revisit the programme at all levels together with all actors involved from staff to, the local groups and participants.

#Key actions:

1. Apply a learning process that re-distribute power using guiding questions that reflects learning during the process and on the outcome.
2. Learning processes is knowledge building and power moments to feedback to the communities. Utilise interactive methods to celebrate achievements, reflect challenges and building collective knowledge for gender transformation.

Endnotes

- ⁱ <https://www.ilo.org/media/418111/download>
- ⁱⁱ <https://www.wecf.org/towards-a-gender-transformative-organisation-toolkit/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.wecf.org/towards-a-gender-transformative-organisation-toolkit/>
- ^{iv} International Labour Organization (ILO), Cooperatives and Gender Equality: A Global Perspective; Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), 2018; 'Gender-Transformative Approaches in Agriculture, Food Security, and Nutrition', 2019; and United Nations. 'Cooperatives and the Empowerment of Women', 2019.
- ^v <https://www.fao.org/joint-programme-gender-transformative-approaches/overview/gender-transformative-approaches/en> and <https://knowledgehub.unsse.org/knowledge-hub/transforming-our-world-a-cooperative-2030-cooperative-contributions-to-sdg-5/>
- ^{vi} C. McDougall, et al, Towards structural change: gender transformative approaches, 2021.
- ^{vii} <https://www.powercube.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/powerpack-web-version-2011.pdf>
- ^{viii} C. L. Ridgeway, 'Framed before we know it: How gender shapes social relations', 2009, Vol 23, No. 2, Sage Publication.
- ^{ix} Jemimah Njuki, John Parkins, Amy Kaler edited; Transforming Gender and Food Security in the Global South, 2016, Routledge
- ^x See for instance 'Gender and Asset Ownership in Old and New Lands of Egypt', D. Najjar et al, 2020, or 'Perceived Impact of a Land and Property Rights Program on Violence Against Women in Rural Kenya: A Qualitative Investigation', S. Hilliard et al, 2016.
- ^{xi} Applying feminist principles to program monitoring, evaluation, accountability, and learning, Oxfam International, 2017:7
- ^{xii} R. K.Murthy, Towards Gender-transformative and Feminist Evaluations, 2018:1
- ^{xiii} Changing gender norms: monitoring and evaluating programmes and projects, ODI, 2015:9
- ^{xiv} <https://ebrary.ifpri.org/digital/collection/p15738coll2/id/134684>
- ^{xv} https://www.researchgate.net/publication/315516870_White_Paper_a_Conceptual_Model_on_Women_and_Girls'_Empowerment
- ^{xvi} This phrase is coined by feminist research.



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