

Gender Transformative Approaches

Transforming food systems to advance equality

Women and men are both critical to resilient food systems. Yet the aquatic food sector is not an even playing field: persistent gender inequalities mean **women face more barriers than men at every turn.**

Women, especially those with low incomes and from marginalized social groups have:



-  **Less voice in decision making from household to national scales**
-  **Fewer leadership roles**
-  **Are more often in informal, low paid work¹**
-  **Women are burdened by a heavy work load due to the triple role they play – productive, reproductive and community work**

Where are women in the seafood industry?



Women also face **tougher constraints** in accessing information, financial and technical services, and markets and have less access to and control over natural, financial and other assets. This includes information and communication technologies such as digital extension, climate information services and mobile banking.

The COVID-19 pandemic has both worsened gender inequalities and made them more visible, with women from marginalized groups hardest hit.^{2 3}

-  Stay-at-home orders have increased unpaid care workloads on women.⁴
-  Domestic violence has increased in frequency and severity.⁴
-  Job losses are particularly high in the informal economy where working women are concentrated.⁴
-  Women and marginalized people are being hardest hit by the pandemic due to pre-existing systemic inequalities and longstanding underlying barriers to equity in food systems.
-  Women's assets, like jewelry or chickens, are sold quicker than those of men as a coping response, which may lead to widening of the gender asset gap.

Why do gender inequalities in food systems matter?

Addressing intersectional gender inequalities is critical for both intrinsic and instrumental reasons. Gender equality and women's and girls' empowerment are globally recognized development goals in their own right, embodied by the UN Sustainable Development Goals. They are also essential for achieving productive, resilient and sustainable food systems.



135.6 years
 How long it will take to achieve gender equality at our current trajectory, which has been set back by a generation due to the COVID-19 pandemic.²

100-150 million
 The number of hungry people in the world who could be fed if rural women gain equal access to land, technology, financial services, education and markets for agriculture.⁵

Gender Transformative Approaches: Not just business-as-usual

Business-as-usual gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming in food systems has tended to take an 'accommodative' and often women-targeted approach that focusses on reaching women, improving their capacities, access to assets, and enabling benefits. **These approaches recognize that barriers exist, but try to work around them.** Approaches that have focused on surface-level issues have had a limited impact on closing gender gaps and reversing negative trends. Outcomes can re-bounce after projects end or have negative effects.

Gender transformative approaches

Gender transformative approaches overcome limitations by **addressing the underlying causes of gender inequalities** that limit the lives and livelihoods of fishers, farmers, and value chain actors. These structural constraints include:

- Formal (policies):** Policies fail to create enabling environments required for women to equitably benefit from resources.
- Semi-formal (systems):** Data systems fail to count women's contributions, and extension services often do not consider the needs of women as they are not recognized as 'real' farmers or fishers.
- Informal (norms):** The burden of unpaid, household work on women and the lack of support from their family, community, and government impede their ability to live healthy and productive lives.

Transformative approaches work on the **deep structural barriers** to engage with, reduce or overcome structural constraints, from household to national and even global.



Different but complementary outcomes

Accommodative approaches aim for changes or outcomes that relate to **how women are.**

- REACH**
Number of women and men who participate in activities.
- ACCESS**
Increased opportunities or abilities to use resources and/or benefits.
- EMPOWERMENT**
Strengthened abilities to make strategic life choices and voice concerns.

TRANSFORMATION

Deep enduring change towards gender equality including shifting longstanding gender norms.

Gender-transformative approaches seek changes or outcomes about **how society and its institutions are.**⁶

Gender Transformative Approaches in local scale aquatic food system programming

At the **local level**, a gender transformative approach engages men and women together in processes and through sessions that:

- Spark local awareness of existing gender norms and dynamics, which are often invisible.⁶
- Recognize how these influence and are influenced by other forms of social identity and power, such as age or ethnicity.
- Engage women and men in reflexive processes that identify how gender norms and dynamics shape relations, roles, opportunities, risks, and experiences. Also, how they affect the wellbeing of women and men, boys and girls and the ability of households and communities to achieve their own aspirations.
- Identify changes they would like to see.⁴
- Create a safe space to try new ways of being, aligned with identified constructive and equity-enabling gender norms, relations, dynamics and overall aspirations.⁴

Examples of Gender Transformative Approaches implemented within:

-  **Savings groups**
Facilitated sessions for spouses on gender norms, dynamics and financial decision making, and co-creating and trying out more equitable ways of being. **Learn more.**
-  **Technical aquaculture and nutrition training**
Facilitated exercises, embedded in technical training, with women and powerful household and community members on gender norms and dynamics and how these affect wellbeing. **Learn more.**
-  **Participatory technology development**
Using theatre to catalyze reflection and integrating that within participatory action research on testing and refining fish drying and processing technologies to reduce postharvest losses. **Learn more here and here.**

Citation

This publication should be cited as: McDougall C, Choudhury A, Adam RI, Haque SMF and Patel A. 2021. Gender Transformative Approaches: Transforming food systems to advance equality. Penang, Malaysia: WorldFish. Infographic.

Sources

¹ <https://fish.cgiar.org/gender-research-in-fish>
² <https://womeninseafood.org/why-using-a-gender-lens-to-analyse-covid-19-impacts-on-the-seafood-industry/>
³ <https://pim.cgiar.org/2020/05/29/safeguarding-gender-integration-in-research-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>
⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13545701.2021.1876906>
⁵ FISH Gender Strategy, p.5
⁶ Toward structural change: Gender transformative approaches (chapter)
⁷ Gender accommodative versus transformative approaches: a comparative assessment within a post-harvest fish loss reduction intervention, p.49-50
⁸ FISH Gender Integration guidelines (2021). Adapted from Kleiber et al (2019), Johnson et al (2018); Danielsen et al (2018 & 2019).

This research has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.