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Article *in* Development in Practice · August 2022

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To cite this article: Emily Hillenbrand, Pranati Mohanraj, Jemimah Njuki, Domitille Ntakobakinvuna & Abinet Tasew Sitotaw (2022): "There is still something missing": comparing a gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approach in Burundi, Development in Practice, DOI: 10.1080/09614524.2022.2107613

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2022.2107613

Published online: 11 Aug 2022.

DEVELOPMENT IN PRACTICE
https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2022.2107613

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

"There is still something missing": comparing a gender-sensitive and gender-transformative approach in Burundi

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a comparative perspective on a gender-transformative model for gender equality, versus a gender-sensitive approach, both of which were integrated into a gender and agriculture development intervention in Burundi. The gender-transformative approach followed an iterative cycle of critical reflection and action to analyze gender inequalities and build women's solidarity and collective action. It also engaged men equally in the processes of critical reflection and action. The participants found that the gender-sensitive approach initiated some important community discussions about gender, but participants in the gender-transformative approach spoke about farther-reaching and potentially more sustainable gender norm changes. This paper presents qualitative findings on participants' perceptions of change and discusses the implications for implementing community-led, gender-transformative approaches in the agriculture sector.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 5 November 2021
Accepted 26 July 2022

KEYWORDS
gender-transformative approaches; scaling gender norms change; engaging men; Burundi

Introduction: gender-transformative approaches in agriculture

In the agriculture sector, there is growing interest in applying gender-transformative approaches (GTA) to address the underlying gender norms and structural barriers that produce unequal outcomes (FAO et al 2020; Wong et al. 2019). Until recently, mainstream gender and agriculture development approaches have generally focused on "filling gaps" in women's access to knowledge, services, resources, and markets (Njuki, Kaler, and Parkins 2016). However, such approaches, which focus primarily on women's individual agency and access to resources, have failed to bring structural and social transformations because of their limited attention to institutions, power relations, and gender norms (Cornwall 2016; Cornwall and Rivas 2015).

Gender-transformative approaches (GTA) strive to correct for these shortcomings, by leveraging feminist theory and confronting the power relations that underpin gender inequality (Mullinax, Hart, and Garcia 2018; Kantor, Morgan, and Choudhury 2015). GTAs are organised around a few key principles: deeply understanding people in their context; engaging men and embracing intersectionality; committing to challenging oppressions; applying iterative cycles of critical reflection and action; and engaging with other actors in the political, economic, and social ecosystem (Galiè and Kantor 2016). Applying these principles means embracing the complexity and context-specificity of gender relations; treating empowerment as intrinsically rather than instrumentally valuable; and recognising the power relations and biases at play in research and development partnerships and structures (Tavenner and Crane 2022; Kantor, Morgan, and Choudhury 2015; Escobar and Puskur 2014).

Despite a growing interest, there is still limited application of gender-transformative approaches in the agriculture sector (FAO 2020; Cole et al. 2020). There remain strong perceptions that focusing on economic empowerment alone is sufficient to catalyse social equality outcomes (Kabeer 2015).

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Moreover, the capacity, effort, and human resources required for gender-transformative work are often in tension with the demands for scalable, replicable, and cost-efficient models (Mullinax, Hart, and Garcia 2018). As extension advisory services are chronically underfunded, arguments for lighter-touch, gender-sensitive approaches that can easily be delivered and scaled through existing extension services can be persuasive (Farnworth and Colverson 2015). This paper responds to some of these tensions, by examining how participants in a gender-transformative agriculture approach in Burundi perceived individual and collective empowerment and well-being changes, compared to participants in a "lighter-touch," gender-sensitive approach, such as is typically applied in agriculture interventions. This paper presents qualitative findings on the differential perceptions of change and the implications for development practice.

Background: testing approaches to addressing key gender challenges in Burundi

Insecure rural livelihoods in post-conflict Burundi are marked by deep gender inequality and gender-based violence. During the conflict, women suffered extremely high rates of sexual violence, and many became *de facto* heads of household, with limited land control and livelihood resources (Fransen et al 2017). Rural men are largely unemployed or engaged in precarious migration strategies, while women do much of the agriculture labour alone (Okonya et al. 2019). Men often intervene at harvest time to sell the crop, or they take from household food stocks without women's consent – a practice that women in Burundi label "crop theft" and "harvest waste". Conflicts over harvest waste and men's alcohol use also exacerbate severe gender-based violence, including femicide. Informal marriages, social stigma against divorce, and biased traditional conflict resolution committees limit women's recourse to services or justice (ibid).

To address these deep-rooted challenges, CARE Burundi set out to develop and evaluate a gender-transformative agriculture intervention over four years, between 2016 and 2020. The study was a three-arm, quasi-experimental design, with reasonably matched comparison groups receiving either the **GTA** or the **Gender-Sensitive** interventions, respectively. The two treatment groups were compared against a matched **control group** who did not receive any gender input. Women in all arms were part of Village Savings and Loans (VLSA) groups as the entry point. All groups received identical packages of agriculture and livelihoods support, which included seed inputs, training on seed multiplication, and a participatory farmer field school approach to test system of rice intensification (SRI) technologies. Groups also received home gardening trainings and had frequent group-based meetings with an extension advisor to discuss priorities and challenges. The unique difference between the three groups was their respective gender approaches (see Table 1).

Design of the two gender approaches

CARE Burundi conceptualised the GTA approach based on the processes of the REFLECT model, which draws on the transformative education philosophy of Paulo Freire (Archer and Cottingham 1996), and consolidated the effective practices of community development and gender work that CARE Burundi and its community development partners have developed in concert with the communities over decades.[1] The development of the GTA approach focused on institutionalising the core *processes* through which community groups identify their own challenges related to gender, analyse the root causes of inequalities, and prioritise the solutions to address with local leadership. Each GTA women's group went through a six-month process of consciousness-raising and critical self-reflection (as described above), and in an action-planning phase, the GTA groups formalised and presented their gender action-plans with local administrative authorities, outlining their objectives for addressing gender issues and other development initiatives. In synergy with the GTA processes of the women's groups, spouses and men identified by the community as particularly violent went through a similar, single-sex reflection process over six months, in which they discuss

Table 1. Intervention design: comparing a gender light and GTA APPROACH.

	Control	Gender light	Gender-transformative
Staff	Agriculture experts	Agriculture experts	Community development experts
Staff training		3-day gender training	7-day formative training on GTA and personal gender attitudes
Group	VSLA group formation	VSLA group formation	VSLA group formation
Trainings	Agriculture training	Agriculture training	Agriculture training
	Market information and skills	Market information and skills	Market information and skills
	Nutrition education	Nutrition education	Nutrition education
		Flip-chart discussions and messaging around:	Group strengthening
		Workload sharing	Problem-tree analysis
		Decision-making	Resource-mapping
		Control over resources	Workload sharing
		Gender-based violence	Decision-making
			Control over resources
			Gender-based violence
			Empowerment drawing
			Gender action planning
Men's engagement	None	Participation of women's spouses in gender discussions	Men's VSLAs group's reflection on gender norms and community sensitisation with men change story
			Men's solidarity groups and personal transformations (6 weeks)

masculinity, gender-based violence, and power relations. Many then committed to role modelling positive masculinities and intervening against gender-based violence.[2]

The gender-sensitive approach was designed to replicate the typical, gender-sensitive approaches that are delivered through agriculture extension programs, in which extension advisors undergo basic gender training and subsequently integrate key messages or discussion points on gender into their agriculture trainings. CARE Burundi developed a toolkit of flip-chart images to illustrate problematic gender issues – namely, control over income, sharing decision-making, workload-sharing, gender-based violence, and control over assets. Staff used these job aids to facilitate group discussions around gender issues during agriculture, marketing, and nutrition training activities. Men were also invited to participate in the gender discussions and some formed male VSLA groups.

To minimise "contamination" between the groups, the GTA approach was rolled out by staff of one partner NGO, which specialises in community development processes. This organisation was selected precisely because their primary expertise is community development (rather than agriculture), recognising the importance of facilitation skills and deep engagement with and respect for community priorities. Building on their community development and facilitation skills, staff of the GTA component participated in an additional seven-day foundational gender training that included personal introspection on their own gender biases and practices. Ongoing monitoring was an important part of the GTA design; GTA staff received regular in-depth support and informal gender training from the feminist project lead, who could identify risks and offer guidance.

To reflect the reality of how gender-sensitive agriculture interventions are typically implemented, the staff who facilitated the gender-sensitive approach were from a second local NGO, whose primary expertise was in technical agriculture development. Replicating standard practices in the sector, agriculture staff of the gender-sensitive approach received a shorter (three-day) gender training, largely around the key themes of the flip-chart tools.[3]

Research design and theoretical framing: multidimensional power relations and pathways of change

This paper analyses qualitative data collected in January 2020 at the end of the program, using individual, semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of women and their spouses from each of the

Table 2. Sampling approach.

Study arm	Wives MHH Age > 45	Husbands MHH Age > 45	Wives MHH Age < 30	Husbands MHH Age < 30	Women FHH Age > 45	Women FHH Age < 30
GTA	2	2	2	2	2	2
Gender-light	2	2	2	2	2	2
Control	2	2	2	2	2	2
Total	6	6	6	6	6	6

treatment arms. Thirty-six respondents were purposively selected to reflect different age groups (< 30 or > 45), and male-headed (MHH) and female-headed households (FHH), as these characteristics can influence their perspectives and pre-conditions for empowerment. In addition, 12 focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out (two with women, two with men in each of three study arms) (Table 2).

The interview guide explored themes around the gendered division of labour, decision making, control over income, ownership of assets, nutrition, production, life satisfaction, perceptions of empowerment, autonomy, leadership and collective action, gender-based violence (GBV), and men's caregiving practices and behaviour changes. Following data collection, interviews were transcribed, de-identified, and coded according to predefined themes based on the theoretical framework as well as additional inductive codes that emerged. Transcripts were coded using an Excel template for analysis, display, and interpretation of findings (Ose 2016). Responses to each theme were compared between women and men, as well as among women across the different treatment groups, and among men across the different treatment groups. This study explored the differential (and shared) perceptions on empowerment and change as defined by the respondents who took part in different arms of the intervention.

Qualitative analysis does not make causality claims but is a method for deeply exploring perceptions of change, seeking interpretations of empowerment concepts that are salient in context, understanding interconnections, describing individual experiences, and exploring changes in social norms (Wasserman and Clair 2016; FHI 360 2005). Further, evaluations of community development processes state that overemphasis on numbers and statistics can overlook some easily observable and important descriptive changes (McCardle and Murray 2020). In this paper, we analyse the findings through feminist framings of empowerment to examine and interpret the subjective differences in perceived processes of change experienced by respondents in both the GTA and gender-sensitive group. In this framing, empowerment is understood as both a *process* and an *outcome* (Kabeer 1999). *Empowerment achievements* are seen as a factor of expanded agency (including internalised self-worth and aspirations), resources (including social, human, and collective), and changes in the normative and structural environment that challenge patriarchal constraints (Kabeer 1999, 2015). Empowerment is also a subjective and context-specific concept, one that cannot be bestowed but that women claim for themselves (Tavenner and Crane 2022). Critical consciousness and women's solidarity have been identified as key to building collective action for challenging patriarchal oppression (Cornwall 2016). By guiding groups through critical reflection on power relations and gender norms and building up skills and interest to take collective action to transform norms and structures, gender-transformative approaches aim to incorporate these multidimensional and intrinsically valuable aspects of empowerment. In this paper, we examine how women themselves define empowerment and make claims to shift power relations in their homes and communities. We analyse the findings in reference to multiple dimensions of power implicated in GTA approaches. This means looking at the different ways in which dominant power relationships (*power over*) may be transformed into more cooperative forms of association (*power with)*, through processes of critical consciousness (*power within*) and solidarity (*power with*) that enable expanded life choices and collective action (*power to*) (Cornwall 2016; Hillenbrand et al. 2015) (Table 3).

Table 3. Definition and examples of gender power relations.

Power dimension	Definition	Examples
Power over	Dominant power/control over others	Gender-based violence, mobility restrictions, financial control
Power to	Individual capacities and ability to take actions	Skills, knowledge, technical abilities, ability to act, control over resources and decisions
Power within	Internal recognition of self-worth and rights, critical consciousness	Self-confidence, self-efficacy, awareness of rights
Power with	Collective action and solidarity	Group capacities, collective actions, group solidarity

Findings: power within

Women study participants were asked to define empowerment in their own terms, by describing an empowered woman. They were then asked to subjectively self-assess their own empowerment levels on a scale of 1–10, using the ladder of life tool. Nearly all of the women in both gender-sensitive and GTA groups evaluated themselves as "empowered", suggesting that empowerment was a desired social characteristic. However, there were notable differences in how the two groups defined and explained their own empowerment.

Gender-sensitive empowerment: "there is still something missing"

In the gender-sensitive (GS) group, women described an empowered woman as one who has the capacity to think and act for herself, "who is able to meet her needs, who has freedom to do what she thinks is appropriate and who is part of associations" (GS, F Age 50). While women in the gender-sensitive group saw themselves as highly empowered, their answers revealed a limited scope of change. A 20-year-old considered herself empowered because she managed her family assets and didn't waste money or steal from her husband (GS, F Age 20). Another considered herself empowered because she had bought a cow, although she retained no control over the cow or the main banana income. Moreover, because she had access to loans, her husband had started to relegate more of the financial responsibilities to her; she had to borrow from the savings group to cover school fees and household needs (GS, F Age 51). Another young married woman claimed she was fully empowered, because her husband permitted her to join the savings group, but she was tentative about it, saying,

> There is still something missing, I hope that I will be fully empowered with time. (GS, Female Age 27)

Most of the respondents in the GS group had some sort of community advisory role; most were comfortable expressing themselves in public, saying they can speak without fear with their spouse or in public. However, they also expressed a pervasive worry that positive changes would disappear if the trainings were not reinforced. One woman, who was active in disseminating trainings, anticipated backsliding when the project ended:

> We have spread out those sessions based on images all over this [village] and change was happening slowly as the sessions were going on; however, there are those who have backslidden when those sessions ceased. I hope that the change would be greater if they resumed. (GS, Female, Age 41)

Gender-transformative empowerment: autonomy and aspirations

In the GTA group, women used the phrases "we became conscious" and "our eyes were opened" to describe their process of empowerment. They also referred to project staff as role models who "woke them up" to their own potential. In conceptualising empowerment, they placed stronger emphasis on asset management and planning, for instance, investing in businesses or house-construction projects with their husbands. Their vision of an empowered woman was significantly more expansive, and their future aspirations higher: they were confident that if they continued to participate in

savings groups and had good health, they would be able to acquire material assets, such as a motorbike or bricks for their homes. They described empowerment as autonomy, self-reliance, and group-reliance, and they valued the independence of not having to wait for their husband to make critical decisions or take their own actions:

> An empowered woman is the one who will not wait for her husband to tell her what she is supposed to do and who is able to make decisions without any obstacles for the good of the family. I can now decide to give some food to a friend, like some bunches of bananas or some kilograms of rice or beans without any hindrances and I have freedom to join any association. (GTA, Female, Age 24)

Several women spoke of the transformative effect of joining the VSLA group and seeing the world beyond their own household. This changed their perception of their capacities, but it also gave them access to financial capital and mutual aid from the other group members. This seemed to be especially true for widows and female-heads of household, who felt powerful because they were able to provide for their children, buy land, pay school fees on their own without financial support from any other family members:

> I am an empowered woman because if I have difficulties in my household, I am able to resolve them effectively. And actually, I am empowered, I am intelligent, and I even see what I can do. … With [**GTA**], I got rid of fear and learnt to do business. Before, I could not even put a foot where there are people. (GTA, FHH, Age 27)

When asked if they could speak up in public even knowing that their spouse might disagree, women in the GTA group were emphatic that they could and did speak out on topics of gender-based violence, polygamy, and even femicide: "Now, no woman can be raped or beaten during the night and stay like that, with arms crossed; that has stopped" (GTA, Female, Age 42). They felt that the process had "woken them up" to their potential and to their right to be represented at the community level.

Importantly, husbands of women in the GTA groups saw women's empowerment as vital to their own and their family's happiness. As the husband of a 33-year-old entrepreneur put it, "Her freedom is very advantageous to me and to our family"; he drew on his own experiences to counsel other men to "do your best to communicate with your wife on everything" (GTA, Male, Age 36).

Power to: agency to take decisions and share domestic tasks

In both GS and GTA groups, equitable decision-making and workload-sharing were key themes of discussion throughout the program. At end-line, there were marked changes between how families in the GS and GTA groups shared decisions and household work.

Decision-making

Women in all treatment groups describe their decision-making process as "joint", but there were clear differences in the influence that women had over decision-making processes, particularly in control over income. In the gender-sensitive group, women described positive changes in "mutual discussion", improved communication, and reduced conflict. There was a significant reduction in "crop theft" or harvest mismanagement, and it was categorically agreed that joint consultation at the end of harvest was essential: "With this project, there's no one who would dare sell the harvest without his wife's consent" (GS FGD, Male, Age 58). However, the limits of GS women's decision-making influence were clear. One woman could not use her loan without her spouse's approval, another was expected to contribute her savings to her husband's projects, and a third could make suggestions about what to do with her loan "but if he said no, I wouldn't oppose him" (GS, Female, Age 27). Moreover, some women in the gender-sensitive group complained of the humiliation of having to ask for money from their husband; they specifically requested further training from the project for their spouses:

> My husband still believes that all money is his. He is convinced that a woman has no right to touch money. [but] No, I can't agree with him [on that]. For example, when I travel, I may be hungry or thirsty; I should not always beg from him, I should have some money on my own. (GS, F Age 67)

In contrast, women in the GTA group said that they were making some decisions independently. They could buy their own clothes and give gifts to others; they could sell small livestock and inform their husband after the fact; several had their own bank account or had opened one with their spouse. They also described a genuine transformation in the *jointness* of their shared enterprises: each spouse might have their own individual business, but they had ambitious, shared visions for their household, with women contributing substantially to these goals with their own money, which gave them greater influence in household affairs. Women in the GTA group were acutely aware of the amount they had contributed financially to joint "development" plans, as illustrated by this respondent, who used her savings to purchase land with her husband:

> I gave him 500,000 francs and he added 100,000 francs. We bought it at 600,000 francs. After, we sold it at 800,000 francs and then bought where we want to build at 2,400,000 francs. In total, I contributed 1,100,000 francs, the rest was given by him. […] You can ask any person you meet here; he can tell you that [I have] that capital. (GTA, Female, Age 33)

Workload-sharing

Participants in both gender approaches discussed issues of unequal workloads and encouraged men to share in domestic work. As the table below illustrates, women in the GS Group reflected on changes in men's domestic task-sharing practices, but also that men's support was largely limited to helping when women were sick. Women indicated that there were some tasks that men categorically would not do (sweeping, cleaning the house, washing clothes, cooking, or doing childcare in the presence of their wife); they stated that men were afraid of being laughed at for being bewitched with traditional medicines or love potions. In contrast, women in the GTA Group described a new gender norm emerging whereby men helping their spouses was perceived as an indicator of a positive marital relationship and community development (Table 4).

Power with: collective actions and men's solidarity

Perhaps the most significant difference between the two gender treatment groups was in their discussions of collective action and gender-based violence. For all respondents, solidarity and mutual support with other women was identified as extremely important. However, whereas women in the gender-sensitive group spoke about individual counseling (neighbor-to-neighbor), women in the

Table 4. Views on gender division of labour.

Women's views: men's support with household tasks	
Gender sensitive	GTA
"He can fetch water, but what he refused is to clean the house and the compound … He is ashamed of being laughed at by other men … We still need more awareness raising sessions so that he can be convinced … " (Age 67)	"At evening, we arrive home all tired. So, he tells me to do the cooking and he washes the children … He feeds them while I am dealing with other activities". (Age 33)
"There is still something missing. By the time the training sessions were going on, there was a change underway. Unfortunately, they lasted a shorter time. If those sessions resumed, people would completely change". (Age 49)	"There used to be activities my husband could not assist me in … There are some [who make fun] but he does not care, because he knows that he is working for the welfare of his family". (Age 23)
"I would feel ashamed [to see a man fetching water] … I don't know what happens in other households, but I can't let my husband do them when I am not ill". (Age 20)	"There are some things he can do and some others that I can do … I am very satisfied because we agree on everything and there is no injustice". (Age 37)
"I get extremely tired … I do almost all activities alone. … I wish he helped me with agricultural activities. They require much effort … I wish we had mutual understanding and he helped me since I am aging". (Age 50)	"In the past, he would leave in the morning and return at night. Nonetheless, he can now be at home during the day and assist me with some activities like [starting the fire] or fetching water". (Age 24)

GTA groups stated that they were intervening collectively to mediate conflicts and take community action against gender-based violence. As part of their gender action plans, women in the GTA groups participated in conflict-resolution, took public actions against violence, and worked with the local authorities to set up development projects. Some village authorities declared their villages violence-free. There was a notable change in public perception about the acceptability of violence:

> Before, a woman would be beaten and nobody would intervene, but now that there are those committees, that violence is decreasing. […] Women used to be treated as worthless and incapable. But now, everything a man does, a woman can do that as well. (GTA, F Age 24)

Respondents from the *Abatangamuco* groups stated that their public testimonials and profound personal transformations played an important role in the community denunciation of gender-based violence. Men in the *Abatangamuco* groups stated that they were previously known as the most "hopeless" perpetrators of extreme violence. They felt that their personal transformations had an inspiring effect on others, and they expressed passion about sharing their lessons with other men:

> My household lived badly, at my place you could not find a cow there, I had never bought a property. I was a drunkard and a brawler. My great pleasure was drunkenness. But after the training, now the [village] is very calm. So far there are very few conflicts on our [village]. Our greatest wish is to show the other [villages] the fruits of our changes […]. Currently if we ever learn that there are conflicts in households, we are the first to go there to resolve them. In short, an Abatangamuco is a person who tells the truth, is incorruptible, correct or just. (Abatangamuco Male, Age 45)

As part of their gender action planning, women in the GTA groups stated that they were engaged with local authorities for funds for "communitarian works", such as restoring communal buildings, lobbying for support to out-of-school children, starting a small night market, and outlawing gender-based violence. Moreover, despite the geographical separations of the research treatment groups, staff observed that there was spontaneous dissemination going on between villages: Word about the GTA intervention had spread in the marketplaces, and women from Control group communities were seeking out the GTA women and *Abatangamuco* men to learn from them. This organic dissemination process holds promise for the sustainability of the intervention and suggests that, where levels of violence and poverty are so extreme and intertwined, improving household relations was very much a felt need in these communities.

Discussion: GTA as catalyst for deep and sustainable change

The findings from the qualitative study deepened our understanding of social change and empowerment processes. Women from across the respondent groups found that VSLA group solidarity and loans gave them a sense of social support and greater financial and food security. Comparing the reflections of respondents in the gender-sensitive and GTA groups, we observe that women in the gender-sensitive approach felt that they had experienced a promising start toward empowerment. They had held important community discussions that raised their awareness about gender inequality and harmful gender norms, and they described positive changes in "mutual discussion," improved communication, and reduced domestic conflict. However, there were limits to women's decision-making and to men's household support in the gender-sensitive group. In fact, the refrain from women in the gender-sensitive group was that there was "something missing" in the lighter-touch approach. Their repeated requests for additional support and training from the project – especially with men – reflected a fear that any positive changes they had experienced would not outlive the project.

In contrast, respondents in the GTA group spoke of more far-reaching and potentially sustainable changes. They jointly pooled resources with their spouses, were transparent about their earnings, felt comfortable borrowing from one another, and had ambitious plans for joint household "development" projects, such as building a house, buying land, or expanding a business. Women in the GTA group were keenly aware of how much of their own funds they had contributed to joint

household projects, and they could make some independent decisions, including giving gifts of support to others – a subjective indicator of empowerment that was very important to them. Respondents in the GTA group also expressed their opinions with self-confidence and were eager to take on their own agendas and to share their successes with other communities. Rather than look to the project staff for help, they expected local authorities to support their community development plans.

Significantly, the respondents in the GTA group identified some discriminatory gender norms that were changing in their communities, particularly among men. The men and women in the GTA group described a profound transformation in men's attitudes and practices about sharing decisions, labour, and money. They spoke about collective actions that men had taken, particularly toward reducing gender-based violence, sharing reproductive work, and valuing women's views, political representation, and contributions. GTA respondents found that men were capable of ignoring social stigma against doing "women's work," sharing decisions, and publicly showing support for women's leadership. Men in the GTA groups stated that practice of joint decisions and supporting women's empowerment were important for the "development" of the family and community. Men in the GTA group also provided greater labour support to their wives, in the fields as well as in the household. They referenced the revenue from increased agricultural yields and women's access to loans as important factors underlying their support for women's empowerment, confirming that the material interventions can be important entry points for securing men's solidarity (Cole et al. 2020).

Many women's empowerment interventions focus on improving women's access to resources as the key pathway to empowerment. However, this study found that even though all participants received the same livelihoods and resource-transfer package (access to loans, agriculture training and inputs, and social capital), women in the GTA households reported more aspirational visions and expansive enterprises (including hiring labour, building houses, buying transportation, and employing others in the community). Women in the GTA groups mentioned critical reflection tools such as drawing an empowered woman, discussions on women's rights, and resource maps of the livelihoods resources available in the community shaped their empowerment visions, their entrepreneurial ambitions, and their self-confidence to make changes. This supports other research that shows critical consciousness remains a vital step in women's empowerment (Cole et al. 2020; Cornwall 2016).

Can social transformation processes be scaled?

The perceptions of participants suggest investing in deep, community-led reflection and action processes, women's solidarity groups, and men's engagement can catalyse deeper changes in gender norms and collective empowerment than a gender-sensitive approach. The respondents from this study distinctly challenge the tendency among funders and NGOs to want to "lighten" successful models when taking them to scale. In fact, a "lighter" approach may in fact lose the very elements that make the intervention transformative. As participants in the gender-sensitive approach repeatedly stated, there is "something missing" in a lighter-touch approach (Goldmann et al. 2019). The findings also suggest the potential for greater sustainability and even replicability, as the GTA intervention produced spontaneous diffusion to other communities, by word of mouth. In sum, investing in deep approaches in ways that build critical consciousness and collective agency may produce more sustainable impact, deeper social and economic change, and respond more effectively to community needs and interests than more "scaleable" gender-sensitive approaches (Goldmann et al. 2019).

Moreover, from a pure value-for-money perspective, other endline project data found that the GTA model had a return on investment ratio of 5:1, or a value generation of 410%.[4] The cost per person of the GTA approach was about $50 greater than in the gender sensitive and control groups, yet the Gender Parity Index (GPI) improved by 51% in the GTA group, compared to less than 10 % improvement in the gender-sensitive and control groups.

Nonetheless, while this study suggests the potential impact, value, and demand for GTA approaches, socialising such approaches – especially within the agriculture sector – demands critical and realistic reflection on the fundamental tensions between the objectives (and evaluation metrics) of community development and social transformation processes and those of agriculture development, which tends to focus on linear processes and uptake of technologies. Scaling successful social norms change models can be slow, incremental, and fluid (Goldmann et al. 2019). If truly community-led, the priorities and therefore outcomes of interventions may also vary. This variability and fluidity is in tension with the short-term funding cycles and results-based management (RBM) principles that dominate development practice (McCardle and Murray 2020). Thus "scaling" in the GTA context may mean replicating community development and principles rather than particular models or pre-defined theories of change. In addition, as demonstrated in this case study, the skillsets of agriculture advisors are not the same as those required to effectively lead community development processes and facilitate gender discussions. Committing to feminist change and community-led development entails longer-term investment in the communities, feminist organisations, and skillsets that support gender-transformative social change (Njuki, Kaler, and Parkins 2016).

Beyond that, gender inequality remains a fundamentally political, cultural, and local struggle, rather than a technical problem. Structural transformation also depends on how willing actors involved in GTA change – including donors, government structures, CBOs, and development organisations themselves – are to critically evaluate their own systems, values, and structures. In Burundi, involvement of the Ministry of National Solidarity, Human Rights and Gender, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the Ministry of Communal Development may be powerful agents for achieving scale, but those institutions may not be immediately receptive to challenging the gender biases and power relations within their own organisations. Supporting local feminist organisations and men's engagement movements can help align donor-driven support for gender equality objectives to local activism and national priorities (Goldmann et al. 2019).

Finally, the reflections above indicate the need to valorise measurement, evaluation, and research approaches that capture the iterative, context-specific, and non-linear nature of gender-transformative change. Empowerment is an iterative process with many potential pathways toward locally meaningful change (Cornwall 2016). Social change may unfold over a time and with unintended outcomes, both positive and negative (Kantor, Morgan, and Choudhury 2015, 296). It is unclear what new social tensions or backlash may emerge in the aftermath of the Burundi intervention and in response to the changing social status of those who participated in the GTA component. For example, while men in the GTA communities seemed to intrinsically value the more cooperative spousal partnership (*power with*) that emerged from the GTA processes, it is unclear whether the gender reflections alone (without the agriculture improvements) would as effectively secure men's support. It also remains to be seen whether the improvements in couples' relationships will be sustained in the face of new livelihoods shocks. Follow-up research is needed to understand the evolving social consequences of GTA approaches.

Notes

1. These practices included the SASA! model to address GBV, as well as a Burundian, community-led approach to engaging men against gender-based violence, called the Abatangamuco model.
2. For more on CARE Burundi's "Abatangamuco" approach to men's engagement, see: Wallacher, Hilde. 2012. *Engaging Men – The Abatangamuco and Women's Empowerment in Burundi.* Oslo: PRIO.
3. At the end of the intervention, staff of all of the implementing partners were provided with the full training on the GTA approach and reflected on their own observations of changes and personal changes. While the analysis of staff personal transformations is not the core of this study, findings from a focus group discussion with staff are included at the end of this analysis.
4. Source: Costs and Benefits of Applying a Gender-Transformative Approach in Agriculture Programming: Evaluating the Ekata Model in Burundi, CARE 2021.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Funding

This work was supported by Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

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