

How do positive changes in gender relations happen?

Evidence from the Zimbabwe Gender Equality and Change Study

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1. Purpose & method

2. Findings on changes in gender relations

3. Findings on what caused these changes

4. International comparisons (in brief)

5. Implications for “gender-transformative” programming



Men's research team moving flipcharts into the shade during a break in the focus group discussion with adult men in Vhelemu, Chiredzi district

1. What was the purpose of the Gender Equality and Change Study?

To better understand how changes in gender relations happen

- from the perspective of community members in poor and marginalised communities in rural areas

Premise: understanding the causes of change could improve the effectiveness of efforts to promote gender equality



4 data collection methods across 6 villages in 2 districts – selected for diversity



1. Focus group discussions
2. Key informant interviews
3. Oral history interviews
4. Equal rights questionnaire

260 participants: 100 men & 160 women

- adult women & men
- young women & men
- female & male community volunteers

“Give it a 5, it is a very strong factor!”

Adult women’s focus group in Chijiya, rating the strength of a factor that contributes to change towards gender equality, with research team member (front right)

Overview of data collection from focus groups and interviews

1. Changes in gender relations

- positive and negative

2. Causes/factors contributing to the changes

- positive and negative

3. Value of the changes

- who benefits, changes in power relations between women and men, how the community has responded to the changes

4. Aspirations

What type of changes did we talk about?

Changes in the way that women and men think and behave, **as women and men:**

- changes in the way women and girls enjoy their rights
- changes in how men and women and boys and girls treat each other
- changes that resulted in more power or freedom for women, girls, boys or men
- changes in decision making among women and men
- changes in knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that result in women or girls being treated better, or worse

What the study did not do

It was not a review of any Plan program or project

However, in 2 of the 6 villages there were **significant** differences:

- **more emergent transformative changes**
- **less opposition by men**

Due to the Promoting Rights and Accountabilities in African Communities (PRAAC) program



Mafunjwa female community volunteers with research team member (right), Chiredzi district

2. What were the main changes towards gender equality?

Almost everyone agreed on these changes:

- schooling for girls is now recognised as their right (all focus groups)
- many women are now “allowed” to work and earn an income (all focus groups)
- *girls are no longer forced into marriage – pledging, abduction, exchange*



Chijiya female community volunteers, Chipinge district (above) & Mashila male community volunteers (centre) with research team members (below), Chiredzi district

Also high levels of agreement that:

- more women, girls and boys can now voice opinions in the family
- many women are now “allowed” to get family planning and health services
- ***domestic violence is now seen as an issue and has reduced for many women***
- more women are involved in leadership positions and community meetings
- women and girls can now eat the same food as men

Some examples of what women and men said about changes towards gender equality

“Women used to live in fear with so many limitations, but today we are so free and I can say anything that I feel like to my husband without fear.”
(Village B adult woman)

*“Men used to go to work and you had to beg for money and **kneel down**, but now women are given money.”* (Village D young woman)

“Women are now seen as human beings unlike the old practice ... The children were not allowed to speak and were not counted as human beings either.”
(Village E male community volunteer)

*“The way my mother was treated by my father was very evil. **She was treated like an animal.** There was no love, she was like a piece of furniture that he bought.”*
(Village F adult man)

“Domestic violence was rife, but nowadays when a husband commits domestic violence he gets arrested, so they are afraid to beat us up.” (Village A young woman)

“Women are now willing to leave an abusive marriage and save their lives.” (Village E male community volunteer)



“The presence of the police is beneficial as it protects women and children from abusers. But violence is still happening in some households and going unreported.” (Village C adult man)

Photo: Chijiya adult men’s focus group, Chipinge district

Men and women had some very different views about changes

Changes **towards** equal rights that were **mainly** raised by WOMEN (but NOT by MEN) are about **women's new freedoms and opportunities to enjoy their human and legal rights**

- These are all areas where **men traditionally have great power and control over women**

In contrast, almost all the issues that MEN thought were **reducing** equal rights are **about their privileges (power, influence and status) as men being undermined**



Changes TOWARDS equal rights MENTIONED BY WOMEN - but rarely or not at all by men

- **More social freedoms** for women and girls
- Women and girls can now get a share of the **inheritance and own property**
- **Changes in marriage practices**
 - less wife inheritance, polygamy, virginity testing, less discrimination if women leave husbands due to violence and abuse, and laws to protect women and children from abuse
- **Increased decision making by women** over when to have children, how many to have, and access to family planning and health services

Changes that MEN said were REDUCING equal rights - rarely or not mentioned by women

- **Some men believe** women's rights clash with culture, because women are no longer as submissive as they were before
- Many men thought that changes in the way some women and girls dress were negative
- Marriage practices - increased divorce, and not getting bride price



Matunjwa adult men's focus group,
Chiredzi district

How widespread were the changes?

- **Transformative changes**









- Only enjoyed by a few women
- mostly in the PRAAC study villages (Promoting Rights and Accountabilities in African Communities program)

- **Emergent transformational changes included**

- Financial autonomy
- Women's sexual and reproductive health & rights
- Marriage and property rights
- Men valuing increased engagement in the lives and care of their children
- Less male resistance to changes in gender power relations
- More male recognition of barriers faced by women (increased burden of women due to men not supporting the family)
- But reduced VAW was identified across all 6 villages



Voice, decision-making and financial independence in the family

The change	Percentage of discussion groups with women that mentioned the change	Number of villages
Women are now “allowed” to work and earn an income	 (100%)	All 6 villages
Women can now voice their opinions in the family	 (80%)	All 6 villages
Women are now involved in household decision making	 (67%)	5 villages
Women can hold money for the family and get some of their husband’s earnings	 (47%)	5 villages
Women are now allowed to own some property	 (47%) – mostly PRAAC	4 villages
Women can get a share of their husband’s or father’s inheritance	 (33%) – mostly PRAAC	3 villages
Some women are financially independent	 (20%)	3 villages
Women can have bank accounts	 (7%) – only PRAAC	1 village

3. What factors were most important in contributing to equal rights & treatment for women & girls?

- Awareness raising on women's and girls' human and legal rights - by many different agencies
- Increased knowledge and understanding of women's and girls' human and legal rights by community members
- Increased schooling for girls



Top: Vhelemu
young women's
focus group
discussion,
Chiredzi district

Left: Lea
Mapfumbifze,
Aged 61, Chijiya,
Oral history
interviewee

Other factors that contributed to changes towards gender equality

- **Changes in law, and implementation of law**
- **Modernisation** – people moving in and out of villages, exposure to other ethnic groups, new technology, and copying and learning new ways from others
- Impacts of the HIV and AIDS epidemic
- Women's paid work and income
- Church teachings - but there was strong disagreement on this

All the above factors *combined* to create a powerful momentum and *platform* for change

Many women feel like agents of change – but many men feel overtaken

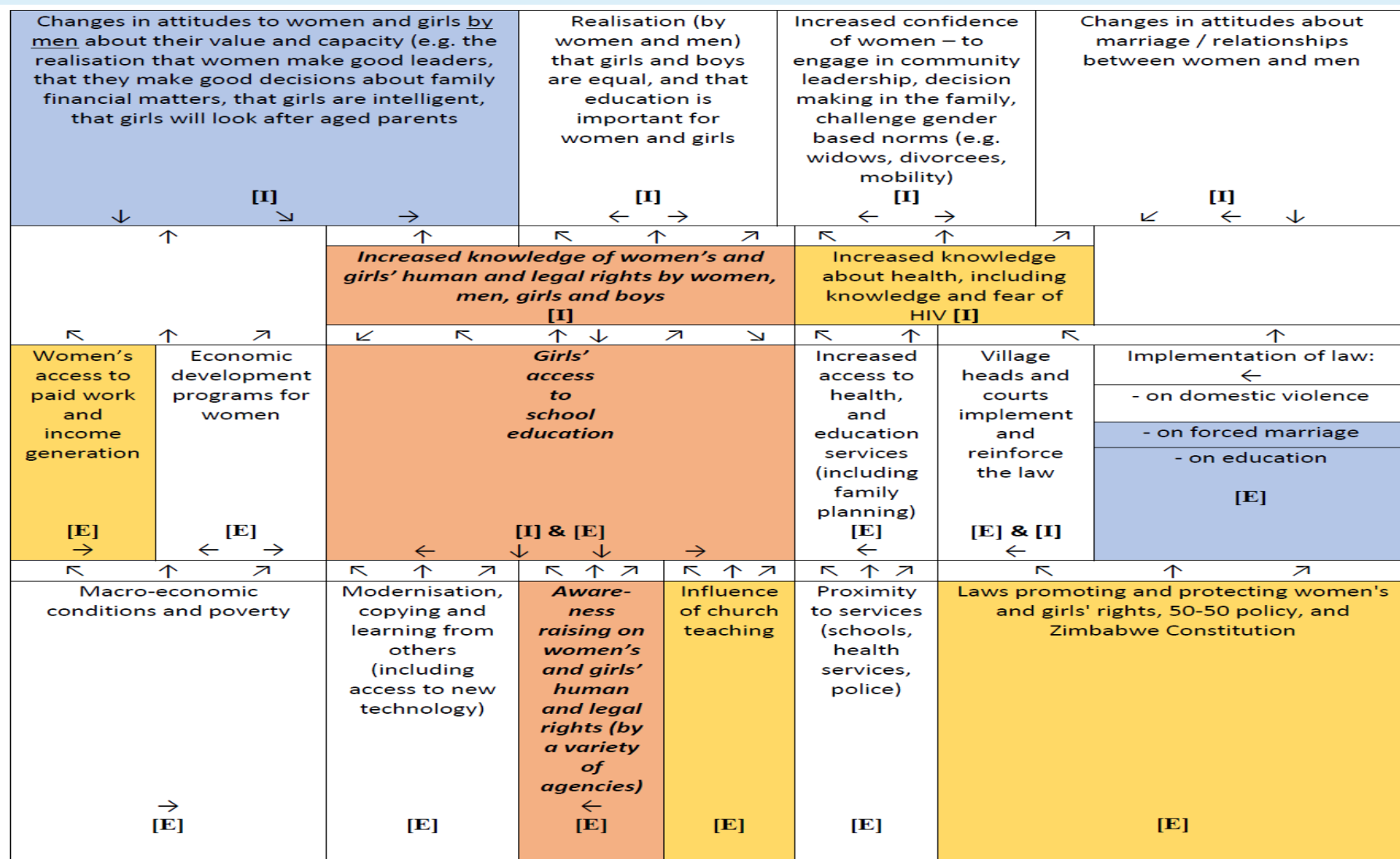
“It is difficult at first, but then you realise that change is happening everywhere around you. If you do not accept change, you will be left behind, just like some people watch the rains fall without going into their fields, only to realise that they failed to take advantage of the first rains. (Village B adult man)

*“The same things that we have seen improving the treatment of women and girls are the ones that contribute to the negative developments we are talking about. **Girls and women are doing as they want with their rights and freedoms.**” (Village B male community volunteer)*

*“**Women no longer respect men.** They now talk back and even interrupt the man in the middle of a discussion, without paying any deference to the man at all.” (Village E young man)*

*“Before I got exposed to Musasa, **I did not know what it is to love.** All along I just thought that bearing children was love. ... I learned how to make a happy home.” (Village B adult man)*

Factors contributing to positive change – and how they interact



Key:

Factors that were mentioned significantly more often by women:	
Factors that were mentioned significantly more often by men:	
Factors that were mentioned by both women and men:	
Factors that were mentioned by 75% or more of FGDs with both women and men	
Factors that were mainly internal [I]; Factors that were mainly external [E]	

Factors only/mainly identified by community members in PRAAC villages

- **Role of village heads and village courts**
 - Inclusion of women on village courts
 - Village heads and other traditional cultural leaders as role models for change
 - Implementation of the law on domestic violence
- **Increased access to and availability of services**
- **A greater shift in beliefs/change of attitudes about women's and girls' value and capacity – which directly contributed to the greater transformational changes seen in these villages**

4. What evidence does the Zimbabwe study add to international learning on the causes of change?

Reinforces other learning that knowledge of rights is an essential ingredient, & that earning income is not sufficient by itself

Factors not given as much attention in the international literature that were highlighted in the study:

- The role of traditional leaders & structures - village heads & village courts – to lead & reinforce transformative change
- The role of broader national economic & social forces – poverty, unemployment, the HIV epidemic & what participants called “modernisation” or copying & learning from role models
- **Stepping stone/platform effect:** the more emergent transformational changes were built on the platform of the more widespread changes in gender relations observed in the study

5. So what are the implications for supporting transformational change?

- (a) focus on human rights
- (b) engage men and boys in dialogue
- (c) change how we do development
- (d) partnerships



Mafunjwa adult women's focus group with research team members (left and back), Chiredzi district

Some overall conclusions

- Widespread opposition **by men** to the erosion of male privilege – **but widespread enjoyment by women of their rights and new freedoms**
- Men are not receiving the same messages about rights as women
- **Communities are diverse in their interpretations of culture**
 - **men & women have very different views** about what changes have happened, their value & benefits
- Gender relations are evolving towards equality –
 - cultural norms/practices that damage women/girls are under challenge from a range of different forces

(a) How effective is awareness-raising on rights?

Targeting women & providing information about rights, can be effective for advancing gender equality, even in highly patriarchal contexts

- Reinforcing messages on women's and girls' rights from a **variety of sources increased the pace of change**
- It provided some women and men with space and opportunities to consider other ways of relating –
 - Because knowledge of rights is essential to see the possibility of changes in gender relations
 - And because other macro social & economic forces were reinforcing change
 - **It linked women's rights and gender equality to perceptions about modernisation and progress**, & thus helped to build a momentum for change

But awareness-raising on rights was not sufficient by itself to enable **transformational** attitudinal and behavioural change for the **majority** of women and men

So what else is needed? How did PRAAC achieve those transformational results?

- By addressing gender based violence (GBV) as essential to effectively address other aspects of gender inequality – and by addressing gender inequality as essential to address GBV
- By implementing an ***intensive*** rights-based approach
 - focused on **enabling women and men to *claim*** their human and legal rights
 - Explicit focus on implementing laws on GBV & other laws that protect women's and girls' rights – by enabling community members to hold duty-bearers and service-providers to account
 - **based on *dialogue*** about gender equality and human rights
 - with ongoing mentoring and training of **community volunteers and traditional cultural leaders *including male champions for gender equality***
- A strength-based and ***highly responsive*** approach to implementation (NOT a “one size fits all approach”)

(b) What *type* of engagement is needed with men and boys?

There needs to be dialogue about gender & culture

- This needs to be based on a clear understanding of the ***difference between male privilege and human rights***
- Take messages to the places where men gather, & use innovative approaches
 - PRAAC used a “culture in development” approach
- Need to focus on ***young*** men & women too
- Focus on the **value and benefits of changes** to individual women, men, boys and girls – and to families and communities
 - As well as on the **tensions** between gender equality, culture and region
- Be clear about WHY we are engaging men and boys

We also need dialogue between women and men

Women's and men's very different perspectives need to be shared, discussed, and interrogated – for example:

- Why and how are community expectations about boys and girls changing?
- What is the role and responsibility of men and boys to promote, protect and advocate for women's and girls' rights?

But not at the expense of safe women-only spaces

***“Men
should
get the
same
education
on rights,
just like
us
women.”***
(Village A
adult
woman)



Mafunjwa adult women's focus group with research team members (left and back), Chiredzi district

(c) How important were development projects in contributing to gender equality?

Important role through awareness-raising/promotion of women's/girls' rights

- **But this was due to MANY agencies doing so concurrently, over MANY years**
- Livelihood projects played a role
 - because awareness on rights was often part of the “package”, & the promotion of women's leadership
 - and because it helped widowed and divorced women to transform their lives in some cases
 - but no evidence that livelihood activities by themselves will promote transformative change for the majority of women

Implications for design, monitoring and evaluation

A ***combination*** of strategies is needed to bring about a transformation in gender relations

The findings challenge the ways that development agencies work in design, monitoring and evaluation:

- The process of change in gender relations is messy, because it is relational in nature and requires renegotiation of power dynamics
- It is not linear, and not conducive to short-term, time-bound and rather narrowly focused “technical fix” approaches that still have currency in development practice
- Not conducive to M&E approaches focused on quantitative measures of progress towards medium-term and long-term outcomes

More implications for how we do development ...

- Need for **in-depth social and gender power analysis** that explores why some women benefit less or not at all
 - by understanding **layers of marginalisation and exclusion**
- Need to support women and men who are **emergent change agents and change leaders** on gender equality
 - and understand what supports & consolidates these changes in different contexts
- **Need to engage communities in deeper dialogue on gender issues across all programs**
- Need to intensify efforts to consolidate changes towards gender equality that have already occurred
 - because the study shows that **transformational change builds on other changes**

(d) What are the implications for the type and duration of partnerships that donor agencies make with development agencies in-country, and with communities?

→ Study findings reinforce the need for LONG-TERM engagement with partners AND COMMUNITIES to **consolidate** changes towards gender equality, and to bring about TRANSFORMATIONAL change

What are the implications for individual development workers?

- Development workers, traditional leaders and other duty bearers need to **understand the linkages between human rights and gender equality, and the distinction between rights and male privileges.**
- **Need knowledge and skills to feel comfortable and confident to negotiate the conflicts and challenges between women's rights, culture and religion, in ways that reinforce human rights for all.**

Thank you for the opportunity to share the findings of this study!



Chijiya adult men's focus group discussion with research team members (front), Chipinge district



- Vhelemu adult women's focus group with research team members (standing and left)

Vhelemu adult women's focus group with research team members (standing and left), Chiredzi district

Potential questions for discussion

- How do these changes in gender relations resonate with your own experiences?
 - Is there an evolution towards gender equality in other places, as suggested by these findings?
- How do the causal factors contributing to positive changes in gender relations resonate with your own experiences?
- What are the implications of the findings for development workers, and for the way that we do development?