



# USING RESEARCH FOR GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## BACKGROUND

The development impact of gender inequality is well established, and persistent and widening inequalities in important indicators of global development led the authors of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to add a critical objective: to “leave no one behind.” Women and girls have often been left behind by efforts to achieve global development goals, even though the development impact of gender inequality is considerable and well-established. One powerful indication of a systematic bias in global development research and data is the [gender data gap](#). The inherent biases, assumptions and world views in all research design have led to serious failures in how we see, count and value women, girls and other marginalized populations. A critical challenge is that national-level statistics are not sufficiently nuanced, disaggregated and local enough for us to know who is really being left behind and why. This invisibility crisis could be solved, in part, by research methodologies and methods that center on correcting for gender and other biases that shape what we know.

In recent years, the development community has increased dialogue about, and financial support of, research focused on gender-transformative change. Researchers have suggested that prior efforts to empower women around the globe have sometimes failed due to a lack of consideration of the gendered context of women’s lives, the intersectionality of discrimination against women, and the deeply ingrained nature of gender inequality at a structural and political level. One solution to this trenchant problem is gender-

### Gender-Transformative Change (GTC)

*Striving towards changes that address the root causes of gender inequality, moving beyond the individual to the structural*

### Gender-Transformative Research (GTR)

*Research that aims to promote gender equality and to empower women and girls—not just for individual self-improvement, but to transform gender power dynamics and structures at the community and societal levels*

transformative research (GTR)—including research methodologies and methods that are centered on correcting for gender and other biases, which shape what we know. GTR traditionally describes research that aims to promote gender equality and to empower women and girls—not just for individual self-improvement, but to transform gender power dynamics and structures at the community and societal levels.

The goal of the paper was to broadly unpack, in practical terms, what research for gender-transformative change means for organizations and to highlight actionable research practices that can be used to increase the impact of research on gender-transformative change. In order to unpack what constitutes best practices for GTR, this paper synthesizes research principles, approaches and techniques that are seen as increasing the likelihood of gender-transformative change. While this work was designed with attention to GTR, participants were allowed to self-define and describe their own research to address gender inequality.

### Gender-Transformative Research versus Feminist Research

It is critical to note that feminist and gender-transformative change approaches are discrete and have distinct historical

and practical underpinnings.<sup>1</sup> A definition of these concepts and practices as distinct has informed the research design and analysis. Both feminist and GTR research are concerned with gender as an axis of power; however, feminist research also closely examines the fundamental role of research in creating knowledge and power systems. Feminist methodologies seek to challenge traditional approaches to research in order to rebalance power, redefine the participants as experts, ensure a dedication to ethics and acknowledge all research as value-laden instead of objective. Therefore, GTR may or may not be feminist.

Recognizing the value of feminist research to advance gender-transformative change, this paper attempts to bridge the gap between feminist research, academic literature and organizational practices. The paper calls out best practices highlighted as being feminist because of their alignment with established feminist methodologies (how research should be conducted); epistemologies (understanding of knowledge); and research methods (tools to carry out the research). The paper also presents challenges to using feminist research to advance gender-transformative change in an effort to encourage dialogue, lesson-sharing and an appreciation of diverse approaches rather than one standard practice.

## Paper Aims and Methodology

This paper aims to provide an analysis of the promise of using research to reduce gender inequalities, along with lessons learned from practitioners. We interviewed experts at a range of organizations (n=17)—governmental, nongovernmental, foundations—that are known for leading research on women and girls' rights, and we reviewed the literature on research methodologies with gender change objectives. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide that explored how organizations conceptualize gender transformation and the role of research in reducing gender inequalities; the defining aspects of and best practices for research that leads to gender transformation; and best practices for supporting research with gender goals. The desk review included documents from multiple sources: peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational papers and webpages, grey literature research articles, and summative organizational papers on research best practices. The sampling framework included a convenience primarily of AJWS and IDRC colleagues, and the literature review started with known articles based on author expertise. Therefore, this paper should not be seen as a systematic, comprehensive review of all gender-transformative documentation and organizational practices, but a focused exploration.

*It was very common for interview participants to express both a genuine desire to do gender-transformative research and a strong sense of having limited ability to achieve this desire—due to organizational, financial and contextual constraints.*

## KEY FINDINGS

### Organizational Terminology and Definitions

The research identified a need for clarity and consensus when defining and operationalizing the many terms related to research for gender-transformative change. Currently, organizations use a range of terms to describe research efforts for gender-transformative change, even when describing common principles and research practices. Many participants were unclear about GTR specifically, and almost no organizations described themselves as doing GTR specifically. However, all interviewees described using their research to reduce gender inequality and improve the lives of women and girls. Given the backlash against certain relevant terms (e.g. feminist), organizations may be making decisions about terminology for political reasons. The importance of precision with language, however, cannot be underestimated, especially given the increasing development discourse around GTR. Vagueness and misuse of terms—especially when the concepts are difficult to define and the words are used interchangeably instead of with nuance—can lead to a loss of the original meaning and political intent behind the term.

To effectively increase the practice of GTR, it is important to recognize and respect organizations where they are and accompany them as they continue to improve their approaches to reducing gender inequalities. Similar to programmatic work, there is a continuum of how gender is integrated into research design, and development organizations and funders have a range of practices and approaches to prioritization. It was very common for interview participants to express both a genuine desire to do GTR and a strong sense of having limited ability to achieve this desire—due to organizational, financial and contextual constraints. For many, simply having gender in the research agenda and indicators disaggregated by sex has been a long struggle. Many of the interviewees are currently conceptualizing and planning research with gender-transformative goals but have yet to document best practices and lessons learned. Across the organizations, there was a clear need and desire for learning spaces on using research for gender-transformative change.

<sup>1</sup> For more on the difference between feminist and gender-transformative, we recommend [Feminist Evaluation and Gender Approaches: There's a Difference?](#) by Donna Podems.

## Impact and Efficacy of GTR

While GTR and feminist research might be challenging, the approach of using research to further the aim of gender equality clearly holds promise, both in the important questions it can answer and in how research functions as a social change tool in and of itself. For example, providing gendered data has proved powerful for galvanizing global responses that are demonstrating an impact on girls' primary school enrollment. Focusing a gender lens on seed breeding is increasing the supply of seeds that better meet women's needs (e.g., yield quick-cooking crops) while also increasing crop production. Feminist research on married girls has led to new community programming to meet the needs of this underserved group, and feminist research on child marriage laws is facilitating dialogue at a social movement and global level about dealing with difficult tensions related to adolescent sexuality. Feminist research methods have been proven to be a valuable tool for creating alliances and learning spaces. GTR has also informed policy conversations about rape laws and the governmental collection of data on the informal economy. These are just a few examples that emerged from the interviews about a growing body of literature on the power of research for gender-transformative change.

## Principles of Effective GTR

In both the interviews and the literature, best practices for GTR were rooted in research principles that align with traditional feminist research principles. This suggests that research integrating feminist principles is more likely to lead to gender-transformative change. Overall, there was a clear consensus that if the goal is gender equality, research institutions need to use a methodology that is consistent with that goal.

### Core Principles for Research Aimed at Gender-Transformative Change:

- Knowledge generation that is grounded in the lived experiences of women and girls—from start to finish
- complex and intersectional understanding of women and girls based on an understanding of context and history
- Dedication to revealing and challenging power at multiple levels—from the obvious to more subtle forms of inequality—in order to shift toward equality and justice
- Intentionality in research design and use, ensuring research is always leading to action

## Best Practices for Effective GTR

The paper highlights how these core feminist principles can be applied on the ground and describes best research practices for gender-transformative change at each stage: design, implementation and utilization. Not all research projects are suited to every best practice, but the examples help translate concepts into actionable practice. Overwhelmingly, the consensus was a need more for dedication in funding and practice than innovation in methodologies and approaches.

### Best Practices for Research Design:

- Incorporate gender analysis and feminist principles into research at the beginning of the project
- Build collaborations and partnerships, especially with local advocates and actors
- Define and measure gender empowerment based on participant input
- Base research design and measurement on a theory of change that focuses on assessing incremental progress toward gender-transformative change (e.g., progress markers that assess small incremental change instead of only endpoints)

### Best Practices for Research Implementation:

- Use collaborative, participatory and dialogical methodologies that reframe knowledge creation

### Best Practices for Research Dissemination and Utilization:

- Use research dissemination techniques that ethically and powerfully elevate marginalized voices and connect participants into important spaces of influence
- Focus on convincing audiences of the realities of gender inequality and communicating the potential avenues of gender-transformative change
- Create alliances and learning spaces to increase research utilization
- Use research to strengthen advocacy in order to effectively transform and influence policy

## Challenges to GTR

While there are common best practices and a variety of methods and techniques that can be applied to increase the impact of research for gender-transformative change, challenges remain when applying feminist principles to the research process. For example, while most interviewees spoke of the importance of collaborations, they also said it was very difficult to create successful and productive collaborations

that didn't reinforce existing power hierarchies. Experts increasingly aim to measure in ways that better assess gender-transformative change, but there is a need for better indicators related to relational and structural changes. For example, indicators related to women's individual mobility (e.g., ability to go out alone) doesn't capture structural and relational dynamics (e.g., men informing women about their movements and rates of harassment against women in public spaces). The prioritization of research for action was one of the most common interview themes, but it was also one tied to many challenges for communicating research findings. For example, no interview provided concrete guidelines and best practices for research communication that is nuanced, ethical and nonreductive. Researchers are struggling to make their work both digestible and sophisticated for target audiences, especially policy advocacy targets. These challenges need increased attention and dialogue in order to improve the potential of research for gender-transformative change.

### Best Practices for Supporting GTR

Most interviewees described the funding and institutional environments as important preconditions for promoting GTR. Organizations working toward deeper integration of gender frameworks into their research had clear institutional leadership prioritizing and incentivizing gender across the institution. A few organizations had developed, and others were developing, internal gender research frameworks and gender capacity-building tools to guide their work.

There was a clear gap in organization and funding practices to maximize the application of research, so that findings might lead to reducing gender inequality at multiple levels. Based on challenging experiences and lessons learned, interviewees described limitations that result from donor approaches to supporting research and described how donor practices might be improved. The funding priorities and institutional systems listed below do not necessarily represent the way interviewees' organizations are functioning but describe an organizational-level vision for better supporting research for gender-transformative change.

#### Funder Practices that Best Support GTR:

- Provide specific, sustained and substantial funding
- Offer more flexible funding, piloting new ideas and valuing the process of research itself as transformative
- Use funding to reshape knowledge creation norms and shift ownership of research to local communities
- Fund research utilization focused on action and change—from local to global levels
- Support, resource and train researchers to engage in collaborative, participatory and dialogical methodologies

#### Institutional Systems that Best Support GTR:

- Internal organizational systems and policies aligned with feminist principles (e.g., more democratic and collaborative, and less hierarchical)
- Institution-wide focus on gender-transformative work
- Relevant capacity building and training of staff
- Organizational frameworks that define, exemplify and provide guidance on GTR

### NEXT STEPS

#### Gaps and Opportunities in the Field

For more organizations to effectively use research as a social change tool, substantial gaps need to be filled via organizational field leadership and further research. This paper identifies three primary gaps and makes suggestions for potential solutions to inform programming, organizational and grantmaking practices. Field leadership opportunities are numerous and could be filled through the development of dialogical learning spaces, curricula and lessons-learned documents. This includes targeting funder spaces to create learning communities directed at internal organizational practices and at increasing understanding and appreciation of feminist research. Overall, there is a need to build communities and networks dedicated to GTR and to increase expertise in gender analytics and feminist research methods. It would be incredibly valuable to regularly convene a group of experts—including practitioners, advocates, academics and researchers—around methodologies and approaches. These conversations could center on improving incremental measurements, building stronger gender-focused evidence and measuring the transformational impact of the research process. To align with feminist values and achieve a greater impact, all funding, support systems and research agendas should better support research to be action-oriented—with the goal of social and structural change at both local and global levels.

### Conclusion

This paper serves as an initial articulation of learning for using research to address gender inequality. The mandate to increase support and resources for GTR is clear, and many best practices exist to start guiding this work. Insights drawn from this paper can be used to improve research, organizational and grantmaking practices with great potential to advance gender-transformative change around the world. The community of researchers, practitioners and advocates dedicated to the power of GTR is growing rapidly—but not especially well organized. Organizations with substantial experience in GTR are well-poised to take a field-building leadership role moving forward.

# PROJECT BACKGROUND

*Gender-transformative change is broadly and variably defined, but commonly refers to striving toward changes that address the root causes of gender inequality, moving beyond the individual to the structural.*

## GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Persistent and widening inequalities in global development objectives led the authors of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to add a critical objective: “leave no one behind.” Women and girls are consistently a population that has been left behind. This is true despite the fact that the development impact of gender inequality is considerable and well-established. Societies in which women have fewer rights tend to be associated with poor health and educational outcomes, low economic growth from household to national levels, and lower labor productivity (Kabeer and Natali 2013). In contrast, where women have greater access to education, work and income, this translates to positive outcomes at household, community and national levels. Given this

increasing attention to gender inequality, organizations are increasingly committed to equitable social transformation, with a focus on reducing gender inequality. In 2017, the launch of Canada’s first Feminist International Assistance Policy set a strong political commitment by the government of Canada to advance women’s rights and gender equality in critical areas—including reducing sexual and gender-based violence and deepening its analysis of gender—so it can more effectively address inequality via its global investments.

While there is a well-established continuum of approaches for addressing gender inequality (see Figure 1), the development sector is increasingly promoting approaches dedicated to gender-transformative change for maximum impact on gender inequality (Dworkin, Fleming, Colvin 2014). Gender-transfor-

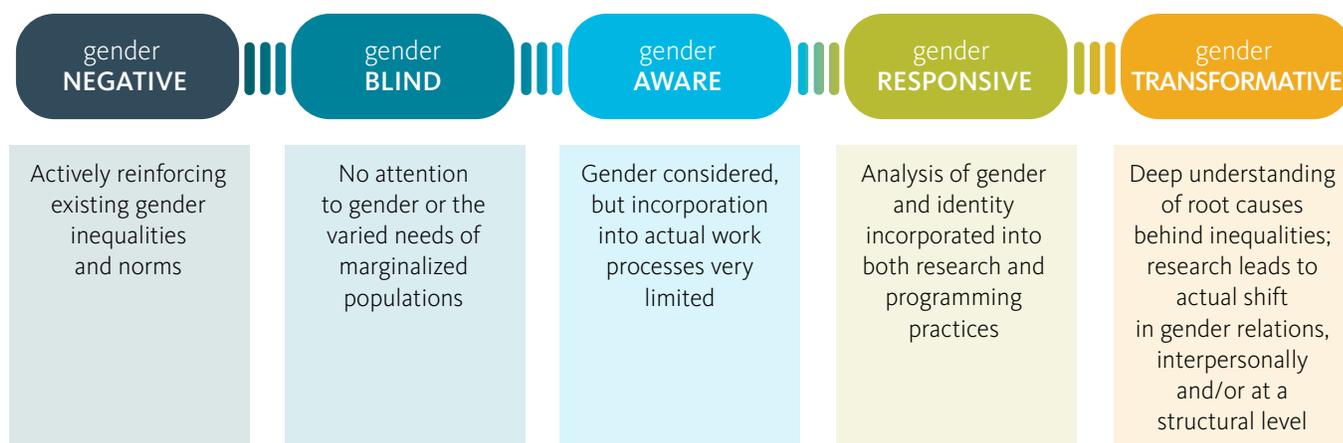


Figure 1: Continuum of Gender Integration

mative change is a response to critiques of traditional gender mainstreaming approaches, which have focused on instrumental views of empowerment centered on individual women and catalyzing particular outcomes desired by development experts (Kabeer 2005; Razavi and Miller 1995; Cornwall 2015). Gender-transformative change is broadly and variably defined, but commonly refers to striving toward structural changes that address the root causes of gender inequality, moving beyond the individual to the structural (Hillenbrand et al, 2015).

The World Health Organization found in a systematic review that gender-transformative health interventions were more efficacious than gender-neutral programs (Barker, Ricardo, Nascimento 2007), and Dworkin Treves-Kaga and Lippman (2013) found in a systematic review that gender-transformative programming is important for efficacy and impact. Gender-transformative change approaches build from Nabila Kabeer's (1999) early work—arguing that women's empowerment leads to transformation and that feminist strategies should change the structural power relations that produce inequality and oppression—and Greta Gupta's (2000) work, which argues that gender-transformative approaches are essential to addressing gender inequality. Gender-transformative change holds that interventions must empower women and girls and challenge the social norms, structures and power dynamics that contribute to gender inequality. This is not to say that gender-transformative change approaches do not engage men and boys. Evidence shows that violence prevention programs engaging men and boys that use a gender-transformative change approach are particularly promising (Casey, Carlson, Bulls, Yager 2016). Both the [promises and limitations of gender-transformative approaches](#) within health programming with men have been well documented (Dworkin, Fleming, Colvin 2015).

## GENDER DATA GAPS

In recent years, the development community has also increased dialogue about, and financial support of, research focused on gender-transformative change. The same barriers that lead to women and girls persistently being left behind, also lead to the invisibility and lack of knowledge about who among them is increasingly being left behind, why, and how best to reach them. The critical gap in knowledge about how best to reach those who are persistently left behind remains. One powerful indication of a systematic bias in global development research and data is the “[gender data gap](#).” The inherent biases, assumptions and world views in all research design have led to serious failures in how we see, count and value women, girls and other marginalized populations. Researchers have suggested

that prior efforts to empower women around the globe have sometimes failed due to a lack of consideration of the gendered context of women's lives, the intersectionality of discrimination against women and the deeply ingrained nature of gender inequality at a structural and political level. A critical challenge is that national-level statistics are not sufficiently nuanced, disaggregated and local enough for us to know who is really being left behind and why.

## GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

This invisibility crisis could be solved, in part, by research methodologies and methods that center on correcting for gender and other biases that shape what we know. Gender-transformative research (GTR) traditionally describes research that aims to promote gender equality and to empower women and girls—not just for individual self-improvement, but to transform gender power dynamics and structures at the community and societal levels. GTR asks research questions related to the social norms, attitudes, behaviors and social systems that support gender inequality. GTR promotes actively using research findings to engage groups in critically examining, challenging and questioning gender norms and power relations. The Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) has documented a number of [GTR studies in action](#) (McDougall et al, 2015).

## GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE VERSUS FEMINIST

It is critical to note that feminist and gender-transformative change approaches are discrete and have distinct historical and practical underpinnings.<sup>2</sup> A definition of these concepts and practices as distinct has informed the research design and paper analysis.

While feminist research is also GTR and concerned with gender as an axis of power, feminist research also closely examines the

### Gender-Transformative Research (GTR)

*Promotes gender equality; actively challenges and questions gender norms, structures and power relations; strives to make the invisible visible*

### Feminist and Critical Research (GTR+)

*Politically motivated to challenge patriarchy and overtly assumes that gendered power relations are grounded in historical contexts; committed to social change through a reflection of the role of research in knowledge and power systems*

2. For more on the difference between feminist and gender-transformative, we recommend [Feminist Evaluation and Gender Approaches: There's a Difference?](#) by Donna Podems.

fundamental role of research in creating knowledge and power systems. The classic explanation of feminist research is research done by, for and about women, and it has epistemological roots in calling into question the traditional norms for creation and ownership of knowledge and power. Feminist research is [more than “adding women and stirring”](#) and requires a dedicated shift in research approach. That said, there is no one feminist approach or method. Rather, feminist research is signified by the dedicated aims of the research and what it strives to achieve. Feminist research—as well as critical qualitative theory<sup>3</sup> and research, which has significant overlaps in approach—traditionally seeks to remove the power imbalances inherent in the research process and is politically motivated to reduce social inequality. Feminist and critical qualitative researchers engage in reflection to better understand how power is created and held, who benefits from society’s organization of power, and the role of research in systems of knowledge, truth and power creation. In turn, feminist methodologies seek to challenge traditional approaches to research in order to rebalance power, redefine the participants as experts, ensure a dedication to ethics and acknowledge all research as value-laden instead of objective. Therefore, GTR may or may not be feminist.

***The goal of the paper was to unpack, in practical terms, what research for gender-transformative change means for organizations and to highlight actionable practices recommended for increasing the impact of research on gender-transformative change.***

There is an in-depth and clear narrative around the power of critical feminist research to advance gender-transformative change. Across a number of sectors, literature documents best practices for feminist research and the necessity of using feminist research approaches to gender-transformative change. Research practices that are grounded in women’s empowerment, choice and agency support a shift from simply including women toward approaches that are much more transformative (Cornwall, 2015; Parpart, 2014). However, the literature on feminist and critical research oftentimes remains at a conceptual and academic level that has not moved into on-the-ground

research practice. For example, how can we better define feminist concepts and translate these concepts into research practices? Recognizing the value of feminist research to advance gender-transformative change, this paper attempts to bridge the gap between feminist research, academic literature and organizational practices. The paper calls out best practices highlighted as being feminist because of their alignment with established feminist methodologies (how research should be conducted); epistemologies (understanding of knowledge); and research methods (tools to carry out the research). The paper also highlights challenges to using feminist research to advance gender-transformative change in an effort to encourage dialogue, lesson-sharing and an appreciation of diverse approaches rather than one standard practice.

## RESEARCH AIMS

It is important to understand what contributes to or impedes the success of research for gender-transformative change. In order to unpack what constitutes best practices for GTR, this paper synthesizes research practices and principles that are seen as increasing the likelihood of gender-transformative change. This analysis was based on interviews with 17 nonprofit organizations and a scan of the literature on gender-transformative change-focused research (primarily found within the gender, development, agriculture and education sectors, and writing focused on research methodologies). The goal of the paper was to unpack, in practical terms, what research for gender-transformative change means for organizations and to highlight actionable practices recommended for increasing the impact of research on gender-transformative change. The paper provides examples of how organizations are conceptualizing and enacting research for gender-transformative change both at an institutional level—including internal frameworks, funding, reporting and working dynamics—and on the ground in practice, including the principles underlying their research and the research methods and methodologies used. This paper also highlights challenges and gaps in using research for gender-transformative change.

<sup>3</sup> For more on critical qualitative research, we recommend [Critical Ethnography in Educational Research](#) by Phil Carspecken. Critical qualitative research often starts with class, in addition to race and gender, as the analytical focal point.

# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## DATA COLLECTION

The research was composed of two parts: qualitative interviews and a desk review of grey and published literature.

Interviewees were solicited based on a comprehensive list (generated by AJWS and IDRC) of organizations and academics that are leaders in gender-transformative change and related research. The goal was to select organizations across sectors that a) align with IDRC's mission and work; b) can share concrete examples of GTR, not just principles; c) have leadership and expertise in their respective fields; and d) represent geographical diversity of headquarters and diversity in sectors of work. All interviewees did not describe themselves as doing GTR, specifically, and were provided with space to define in their own terms how they saw research related to changing gender inequalities. Interviews followed a semi-structured guide that explored how organizations conceptualize gender transformation and the role of research in reducing gender inequalities; the defining aspects of and best practices for research that leads to gender transformation; and best practices for supporting research with gender goals. Overall, the level of integration of feminist principles and research practice varies, but a dedication to reducing gender inequality and improving the lives of women and girls underlines all of the research included in this paper. A total of 19 participants from 17 organizations were interviewed between September and October 2018 (See Appendix A). Of these 17 organizations, six are headquartered and work primarily in the Global

South. The authors of the paper would like to express their immense gratitude for the participants who gave their time and shared their expertise during interviews. Quotes are provided by participants, with their permission.

The desk review included documents from multiple sources: peer-reviewed journal articles, organizational papers and webpages, grey literature research articles, and summative organizational papers on research best practices (see Appendixes B and C). The goal of the desk review was not to create a systematic, comprehensive review of all gender-transformative documentation, but to focus on documents that yield the most insight with regard to the research questions while attempting to also represent literature across multiple disciplines. The sectors represented in the literature review are presented in Appendix C, and the largest quantity of literature emerged from agriculture, education, and gender and development sectors, and writing focused on research methodologies.

## ANALYSIS

Best practices and lessons learned, including key examples from AJWS and IDRC, are summarized across the literature and interviews. Numerical ranking does not reflect frequency or weight of comments. The goal of the analysis was to best answer the research questions and to represent both common and nuanced views of participants and researchers documenting their practices in the literature. Results are described thematically below.

# KEY FINDINGS

## PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE OF GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

### Organizational Research Terminology and Definitions

A range of words, terms and approaches are often lumped into the category of “gender research,” and this paper attempted to include a broad range of research related to gender. Interview participants were given space to define their own research practice and principles. Organization staff described themselves as working in varied places along the gender continuum (Figure 1) and used many different terms to describe their approach to research: “gender catalyzing,” “gender integrated,” “gender mainstreaming,” and “participatory.” During the interviews, a lot of organization representatives seemed hesitant to even label their research with a specific term, and many of the interviewees were not familiar with the term “GTR.”

Some organizations may be making decisions about terminology with a political lens. A couple of interview subjects suggested that the backlash against the terms “feminist” and even “gender” as being anti-male, non-inclusive, and therefore off-putting—among the general public but also among some researchers and practitioners—still needs to be overcome. There is also a strong critique that the term feminism is laden with power. Doing research grounded in feminist principles—and labeling it as such—can have substantial political implications for organizations. The importance of precision with language, however,

cannot be underestimated, especially given the increasing development discourse around GTR. Vagueness and overuse of terms—especially when the concepts are difficult to define and the words are used interchangeably instead of with nuance—can lead to a depoliticization of the terms. Participants’ lack of clarity on GTR specifically demonstrates the vital need to unpack what research striving for gender-transformative change entails. Christopher Kuonqui, Founder and Managing Partner of Zero Poverty Solutions, provided an insightful comparison to “leave no one behind” and explained how he has seen imprecise language reinforce a lack of meaningful action:

*Every UN speech closes with, “And we will leave no one behind.” But what on Earth does that mean? What does it mean to actually implement that? What programming concept do you have? What policies do you know? What do you know that countries are doing? ... People think that the hard thinking is done because we’re using these concepts.*

When terms are used in multiple ways and interchangeably, there is a lack of concentrated agreement on concrete strategies and best practices. It may become easier for people and organizations to engage in the discourse without concretely working to challenge power structures underlying gender inequality. In the case of research, this could be exemplified by research that focuses on women without engaging in a strong feminist analysis of why the issues persist. For example, we cannot allow researchers to suggest that they are taking a gender-focused approach to measuring the number of girls completing primary education simply

because that is the most appropriate method to measure a particular indicator, without at least acknowledging the limits of that approach for exploring whether the quality of the educational content and processes actually help girls create a feminist future.

## Continuum of Practice Across Organizations

Research that takes a root cause approach (i.e., identifies and targets underlying causes) to changing gender inequality at structural levels was overwhelmingly considered the gold standard by interview subjects. But for most organizations, the contextual realities of their work and partnerships were not at this level, and simply having gender in the research agenda and indicators disaggregated by gender had been a long struggle. (It is important to note that gendered data

***Not all research in a program needs to be gender transformative, but all research can be designed with attention to processes that are accessible and more equitable.***

alone is a powerful step toward gender-transformative change. Emily Courey Pryor, Executive Director of Data2X, said the start of disaggregated data collection on primary school enrollment ultimately motivated action in the form of Millennial Development Goals and galvanized global action for girls' school enrollment. Similarly, when clinical researchers started to include women as participants in health studies, they unveiled the issue of women's cardiovascular disease.) Not all research in a program needs to be GTR, but all research can be designed with attention to processes that are accessible and more equitable.

Many organizations describe their gender learning agenda as aspirational in nature more than in practice. The constraint of the organization's approach doesn't mean they do not value the deeper engagement that gender-transformative programming or research can have in addressing the root causes contributing or leading to the need for services or creating the concern that the research question is interrogating. For many, having gender in the research agenda at all is a huge victory. Susana Martínez-Restrepo, Managing Partner and Director of Research and Development at Core-Woman, described their organization's research framework:

*Sometimes, having gender in the agenda is exciting, particularly in Latin America. Even having indicators that are disaggregated by gender, it's like, "Yes! We made it." A gender-transformative approach is level ten. And we are all sitting at level one. So... when we can push, we push.*

Esther Njuguna-Mungai, Gender Specialist for CGIAR, described how her initial work in seed-breeding was helping staff understand why gender mainstreaming was important and could lead to meaningful improvements. For example, research demonstrated gender gaps in production of crops and gendered differences in use of particular seeds (e.g., women wanted seeds that result in quick-cooking beans). These findings resonated with the seed-breeding scientists and influenced their work. Research on the reduction and reorganization of gendered labor led to new interventions to prepare communities as new technologies were introduced.

It was very common for interview participants to express a genuine desire to do GTR along with a strong sense of their limited ability to achieve this desire—due to organizational, financial and contextual constraints. Across many organizations, the integration of gender-transformative approaches varies depending on the project. Given this, it is important to recognize and respect organizations where they are and accompany them as they continue to improve their approaches to reducing gender inequalities.

## Core Principles for Research Aimed at Gender-Transformative Change

Throughout the interviews and review of literature, core principles emerged as the foundation of building a research practice dedicated to transforming women and girls' lives (See Figure 2). These principles are rooted in epistemologies and gender theories that inform the research design, implementation and dissemination. Most of these principles, it could be argued, have been taken from feminist and critical theory approaches to research. The common agreement that these principles are necessary for research to be transformative suggests that research integrating feminist principles is more likely to lead to gender-transformative change. Overall, there was a clear consensus that if the goal is gender equality, research institutions should use a methodology that is consistent with the goal.

Concrete examples about best practices for putting these principles into action are provided in the section, "Effective Gender-Transformative Research Strategies."

## CORE FEMINIST RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

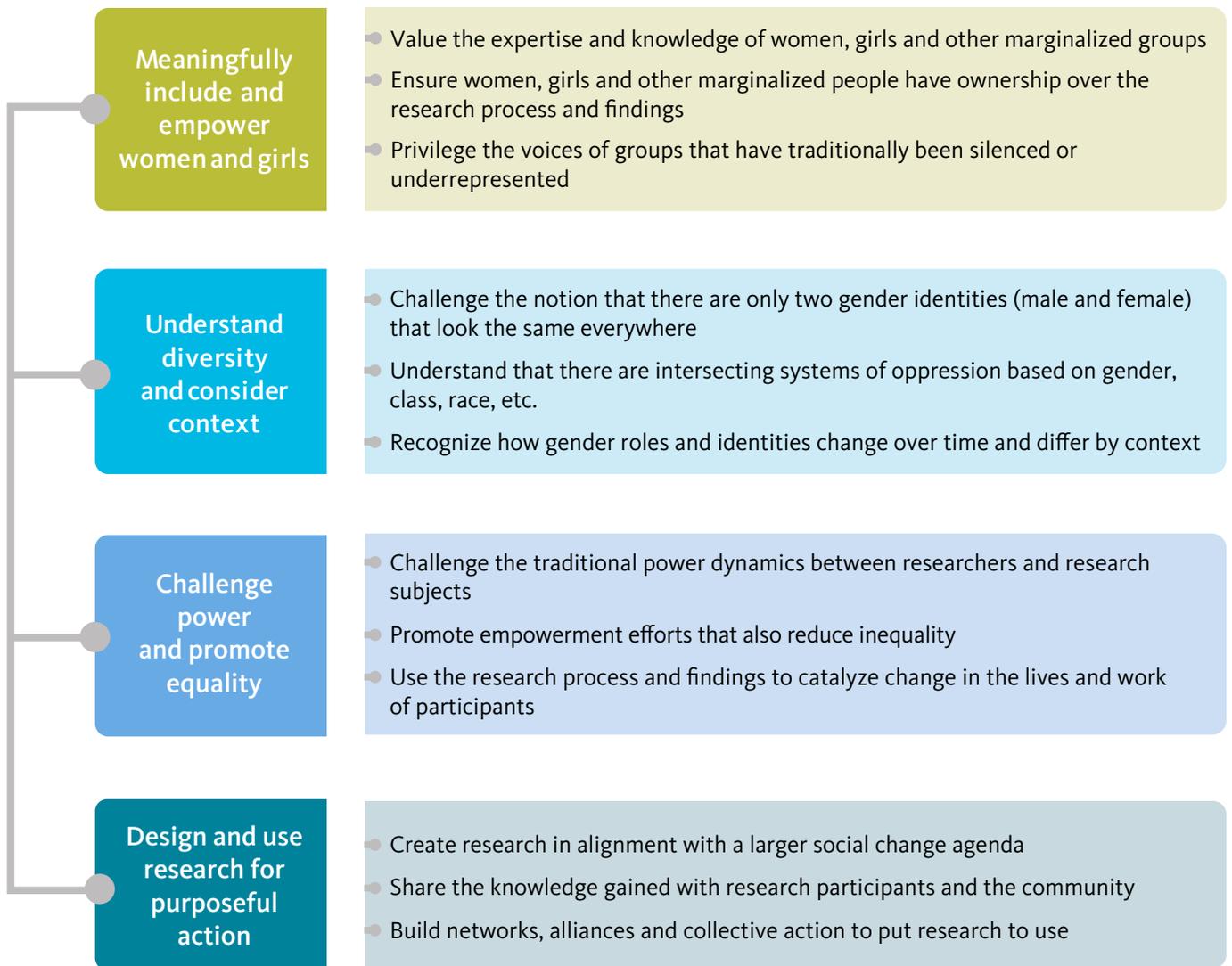


Figure 2: Core Feminist Principles that Emerged from Interviews

Core Principles:

**1. Knowledge generation that is grounded in the lived experiences of women and girls—from start to finish**

The *focus* of the research is important, and there needs to be a dedication to centering the research in the voices, lives, and experiences of women and girls. Whether or not data is prioritized conveys the values that society confers to the issue. For example, data on women’s unpaid domestic and caregiving labor, and data on violence against women and girls have important policy implications—but are often understudied. Starting the research with women and girls can be the first step to seeing and acting on important data that would otherwise be missed in a top-down research design. Mayssam Zaaroura, Women’s Rights Knowledge Specialist with Oxfam, describes the “nothing about me without me approach”:

*An approach that moves beyond understanding women as participants or beneficiaries, but actually recognizes that they are the holders of knowledge and are agents in their own lives.*

Marginalized groups are almost always systematically left out of important, influential decision-making due to structural inequalities that silence these groups and produce invisibility. Feminist research addresses this by valuing marginalized groups as the expert knowledge holders and using creative techniques that give privilege to the actual voices and experiences of groups that have traditionally been silenced or underrepresented, exemplified by the data gender gap.

*Who* does the research is important. Traditional research practices support the consolidation and use of power by those who already hold it. In contrast, feminist research asserts that knowledge generation about women and girls must start with research designs that focus on engaging women and girls. Feminist research works with participants to mutually define the problem and identify the research questions of relevance and interest. As Margaret Capelazo, Gender Advisor for CARE Canada, said, “*We don’t allow people to be their own researchers frequently enough.*”

*How* research gets done is also central to transformative change. There is no one specific methodology that is privileged, but there is most often a dedication to participatory and reflective research collection that allows the participants to not only be engaged in the knowledge, but to actively shape and maintain ownership over the research process. As Margaret Capelazo put it, “*The unofficial version is essentially overthrow[ing] the patriarchy, but not using the master’s tools to do it.*”

Throughout the research, the participants are empowered to become agents of change using the new knowledge generated by the study, and they are trained to use the research techniques to answer subsequent questions that arise in their lives and work (Sedgley 2011). The literature demonstrates the power of transformative research to increase participant willingness and ability to critically question how the social world works, and the roles of patriarchy, unequal distribution of wealth and gender inequality in their lives. Participants, in other words, begin a process of critical engagement that builds an understanding of structural and social constraints and increases a critical consciousness that can lead to change in their lives and work (Kantor, et al, 2015).

## **2. Complex and intersectional understanding of women and girls that is grounded in contextual and historical understanding**

Research must take a more intersectional approach to understanding women and girls’ lives that examines the root causes of gender inequality and the intersections between gender, class, race and other important determinants. Ratna Sudarshan, Trustee and Former Director of the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST), provided the example of the deep overlap between gender and poverty in India. Emily Pryor spoke to a need for a complicated gender analysis to understand the root causes of gendered data gaps, even when data is disaggregated. For example, disaggregated data

does not prevent the exclusion of poor and rural women or address the issue of women being unable to register their children or marriages. The intersectional approach is also common in gender analysis applied in the grey and academic literature. For example, research from women’s health uses feminist theories to analyze systems of power, including race, class, ethnicity, homophobia, ableism, ageism, etc. (Ponic, Reid and Frisby, 2010).

Additionally, a narrow de facto framing of a binary women-men construct approach to gender may constrain the development and implementation of a gender-transformative change approach (McDougal et al. 2015). The research focus is increasingly on approaches to gender that see neither men nor women as homogenous groups. The goal of the research, then, becomes creating a more just and equitable world for people of all genders and sexual orientations.

Many of the interview participants spoke to the absolute necessity of grounding the research in a contextual and historical understanding of gender—what gender has meant, currently means and could potentially mean (i.e., the gender-transformative change that is ideal and realistic) given the local context.<sup>4</sup> There are several guides for conducting a contextual gender analysis, such as the [guidance created for UNDP staff](#). Oftentimes, the key to integrating a contextual approach to research is in hiring locally situated researchers as part of the principle research team, ensuring they play a role in defining the research questions and scope.

There is a note of caution that gender specialists from different parts of the globe often have different epistemological backgrounds and can clash on conceptualization of gender without more open dialogue on what gender-transformative change means contextually. Esther Njuguna-Mungai recommended starting research planning with a conversation about what gender means to different stakeholders, to better understand the different lenses that people are using to think about gender and how this can lead to different research questions and units of measurement.

## **3. Dedication to revealing and challenging power at multiple levels—from the obvious to more subtle forms of inequality—in order to shift it toward equality and justice**

Feminist research starts with a critical understanding of power. For research to be truly transformative, it must

<sup>4</sup> For an example of research with a contextual and historical gender analysis, we recommend reading the work of Shanti Parikh, like [From Auntie to Disco: The Bifurcation of Risk and Pleasure in Sex Education in Uganda](#).

focus on changing power at multiple levels—including women’s agency, inner household relationship dynamics, and structural systems and policies (i.e., social ecological framework). Researchers are thinking more directly about the social and structural underpinnings of gender inequality, rather than simply researching women and girls themselves. This may include a range of facets for study: participation and access to spaces and opportunities, mobility, social norms, gender stereotypes, relationship power dynamics, etc.

Additionally, the focus of the research must be on comparative women’s empowerment within the local context. In other words, more than just improving the status of women, the research assesses the power and position of women in comparison to men. Susana Martínez-Restrepo argued for

the need to go beyond just focusing research and programs on empowering women in traditional roles and cautioned against reproducing gender norms.

Part of the dedication to gender-transformative change strategies includes encouraging men and women to reflect on the consequences of the inequalities embedded within gender roles, norms and the resulting distribution of resources, encouraging a challenging and changing of these power relations in the community (CGIAR, 2012).

#### **4. Intentionality in research design and use; research is always for action**

GTR needs to be designed with an analytic framework that includes exploring what research data is being collected

### **SPOTLIGHT**

#### **Bridging the Local to Global: The AJWS Feminist Research Model for Social Change**

AJWS prioritizes a feminist research framework for its research and grantmaking. Increasingly, AJWS has identified best practices for meaningfully bringing data, voices and recommendations to the global level through a local-to-global advocacy strategy that consists of using the findings to: create and support participation in dialogic spaces; expand critical perspective among key global experts; and form dynamic partnerships and networks.

For example, AJWS worked with Vikalp, a credible and committed organization that had been working on child marriage for years in an area where it is highly prevalent, on its research agenda focused on improving implementation practices (e.g., reaching a previously underserved population, married girls). To best support Vikalp, AJWS provided technical and financial resources for its collaboration with feminist researchers, including time, flexibility and tailored capacity building to finalize its research questions and design. In terms of gender-transformative change in response to the research findings, Vikalp has started a new intervention program with research participants after the study, aimed specifically at collectivizing married girls in its community, and re-enrolling them in the open school systems wherever possible to continue their education. At the local level, it is contributing to peer learning about programming for married girls. Additionally, it was able to contribute globally to the discourse on child marriage by presenting the voices of a previously invisible population and describing how engaging in feminist research practices has shifted how the organization monitors, reflects on and implements its work.

Beyond this one project, AJWS has supported and engaged Vikalp in a number of engagements to think through how it views, monitors, and assesses its own work, and to create spaces for Vikalp to share its research at local and global levels. For example, AJWS supported the organization’s participation in global conferences (e.g., jointly creating a panel at *Girls Not Brides Global*) and supported research dissemination products most appropriate for these spaces (e.g., designed a research summary), so Vikalp could bring global attention to the needs of this often-overlooked population. AJWS is also using the learning from Vikalp’s work to inform research and programming grantmaking strategies and for AJWS-led advocacy on the importance of resourcing the needs—and realizing the rights—of married girls.

and for what purpose. Mayssam Zaaroura described this as “active-facing” research that is intended for specific uses, dissemination and political lobbying. At the end of the project, the research should be assessed for progress related to the larger social change agenda to reduce gender inequality. As Margaret Capelazo said, *“Something needs to answer the question, so what for gender equality? Or if it is going to be in a feminist space, so what for political action and so what for women’s rights?”*

Feminist principles include a dedication to transferring knowledge and power back to the community level, with the intentionality of the research focused, at least in part, on the community level. This is the first step in rebalancing power inequalities and a powerful mechanism for starting social change within communities. With this in mind, a key component of the research becomes building networks, alliances and collective action.

Sarah Gammage, Director of Gender, Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW), described its best work as when research and technical assistance is provided to social movements with the coequal goal of supporting the social movement’s political agenda, while also using the leverage of ICRW to strengthen the advocacy at other levels. International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) also uses a joint research approach, which Bronwyn Tilbury, Senior Program Manager for IWDA’s Women’s Action for Voice and Empowerment (WAVE) program, explained as *“not us just doing the research on behalf of partners or by ourselves, but supporting our partner organizations [working] with us to undertake joint research. That has actually become a mechanism for that movement building at the same time as we’re researching the movement building itself.”* She also described the connection between social movements and gender-transformative change thus: *“A pillar of IWDA’s WAVE theory of change is that if you build a strong movement, you can create more transformative leadership, and then more future gender equality.”*

# BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

*To adhere to feminist principles, the people on the ground must drive the research agenda—not the people providing the funding.*

This section attempts to highlight how organizations can apply core feminist principles to research implementation and to describe best practices for GTR, from study design to research implementation and utilization. There is an extensive body of academic literature that highlights best practices for GTR, especially for feminist methods (tools for collecting data) and methodologies (rationale and lens for research approach)—in terms of both textbooks and case study documentation, and many interviewees provided examples of methodologies they found most likely to lead to GTR. As Margaret Capelazo described:

*We just need to do good gender equality and feminist research. Well, this is not an innovation, this is the desperate need. The agenda for how to do this well, it's been set out for years. I hate the word innovation because usually it means new ... what I would love to see are approaches that involve women themselves in being the researchers and the producers of knowledge, using their own epistemologies. And I would love to see those epistemologies broadcast in mainstream peer reviewed journals beside or in conversation with knowledge generated using Western scientific approaches. I would love to see us investing in feminist research and action-type research.*

The goal of this section is to facilitate application of best practices for GTR grounded in feminist principles and practice, while also highlighting challenges that need increased attention and dialogue. Concrete examples of both best practices and challenges are provided. Not all research projects will be able to integrate every best practice, but

these examples help translate the conceptual into action. Suggested practices are organized by the stage of research, with the caveat that the research should be iterative and seen as cyclical, not linear.

## RESEARCH PLANNING BEST PRACTICES

- **Incorporate gender analysis and feminist principles into research at the beginning of the project**

The incorporation of gender into research must start at the beginning of the project. Gender analysis informs *who* is doing the research and *how* they are designing the research. To adhere to feminist principles, the people on the ground must drive the research agenda—not the people providing the funding. Too many research projects are driven by financial interests in the development sphere instead of a complex gender analysis that prioritizes the views of women and girls. Incorporating a gender framework for design applies to both qualitative and quantitative research. For example, Emily Pryor described how a gender analysis should inform survey design, question wording and order, and operationalization of terms for data collection.

- **Build collaborations and partnerships, especially with local advocates and actors**

In order to ensure the principle of inclusion (i.e., generate research with women and girls), research planning includes intense collaboration and partnership building, especially with

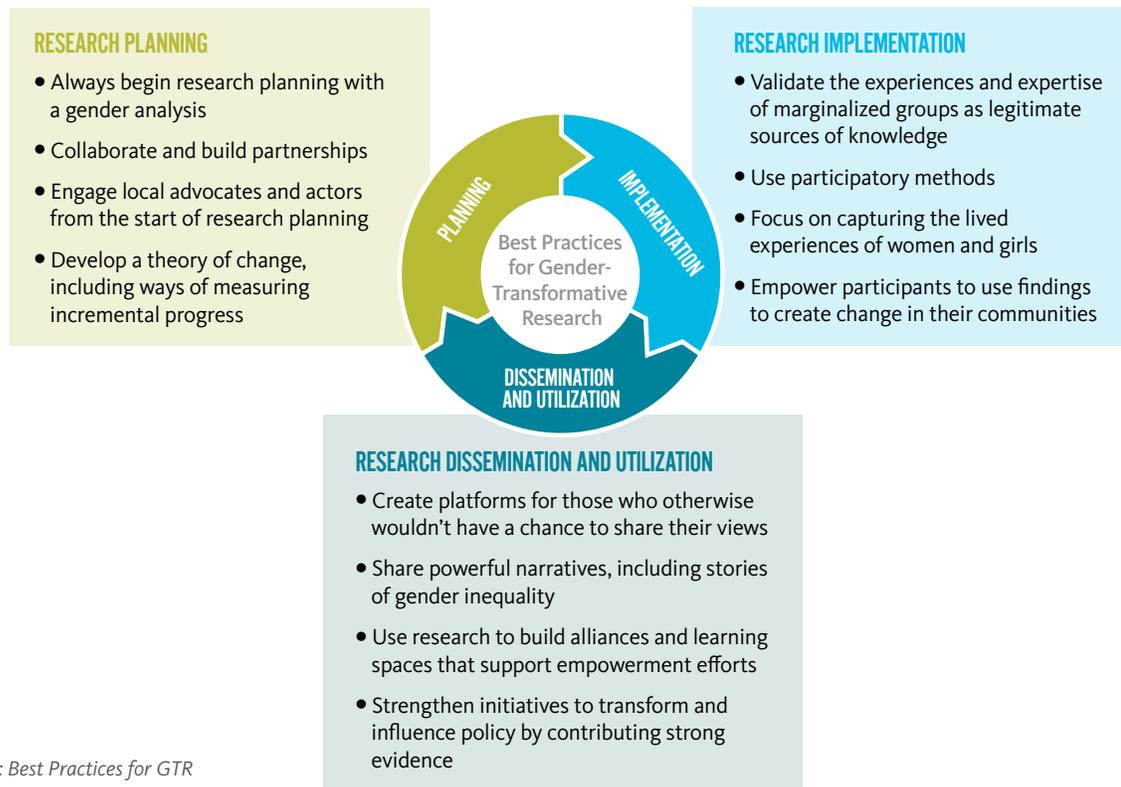


Figure 3: Best Practices for GTR

advocates. Knowledge is power, and working with communities to create and share knowledge increases their power for social change. There are many examples of how to engage local actors. When Oxfam drafts the terms of reference for consultants hired to do research, it builds in a required training workshop on how to work with participants to make sure knowledge of the methodology, data analysis and reporting is transferred. This also increases the project's sustainability and the ability of the local beneficiaries to transfer the research design to other projects. Participatory action research by the CGIAR research program on the aquatic agricultural system also uses a gender-transformative approach. It has a [program engagement cycle](#) (see Figure 3 in link) that describes how the community is engaged throughout the process in a way that leads to shared ownership; equitable participation; jointly-shared responsibilities for data collection and analysis; and results that are communicated back to participants for ongoing learning. Similarly, CGIAR has produced a case study on [co-production of knowledge](#) related to climate change through collaborations between different actors in the development, research and local communities; and case studies on six [partnership journeys](#) led to identifying learnings about strong partnership, and enabling and sustaining conditions for partnership. CGIAR identified the following elements of community engagement:

- start with a shared community vision;
- deepen engagement by building trust;

- respond to broad issues through networking and partnerships;
- enable adaptation via systematic reflection and documentation;
- expect the ongoing challenge of shifting dependency mindsets and managing expectations; and
- transform one's self as part of the process.

The goal of collaborations should be moving a shared agenda forward in a complementary fashion. To meet this goal, it is important to invest in research institutions that have historically been engaged in these research questions and have deep credibility in the communities being studied. The focus on including local consultation in the research design process extends to a dedication to early conversations about activities and advocacy work that can be done as a result of the research. Partners for Law and Development (PLD)—a legal resource center committed to putting people at the center of its investigation—examined how child marriage laws in India were being applied in practice. The process included consultations through which activists' concerns about laws affecting adolescents could be clarified, and provided much-needed space for organizations to discuss their own anxieties around adolescent sexuality and share with one another the fallout of teenage elopements (such as community-sanctioned violence against and the end of educational and livelihood opportunities for the runaway

## CHALLENGE

### Building Effective Collaborations

It can be difficult to create productive and meaningful collaborations. Christopher Kuonqui felt that part of the problem was the unequal nature of most partnerships. Where one dominant partner, often the funder, dictates the terms, the end result is often unusable. Large working groups can also create a complicated work process, in which feedback doesn't match the original scope of work because stakeholders are brought in at different stages and with very different expectations. Nidal Karim described a gap of expertise between academic understanding of methodologies and practitioner spaces versus development researchers and evaluators. Caroline Lambert, Director of Research, Policy and Advocacy at IWDA, described a tension between collaborating and generating institutional profile to attract funding.

A couple of participants had suggestions for overcoming this challenge. As a potential solution, Christopher suggested small changes in the structure of partnerships could increase the organizational output. Nidal said a lesson learned for her was the need to do a deep mapping to identify feminist researchers before starting collaborations: "Who are the ones who are having these conversations, pushing the envelope on methods, and critiquing methods and trying out different things?" Joanne Crawford, Knowledge Translation, Policy Advocacy and Strategic Engagement specialist with the IWDA Individual Deprivation Measure team, described her organization's participation in the [Research for Development Impact Network](#), a mechanism that brings inquiry, evidence, practice, policy, and people together to strengthen development outcomes. The network has developed "partnerships in practice," [tools and guidance](#) related to fostering cross-sector partnerships. One tool of particular interest may be "[How To Partner for Development Research](#)," a paper which explores why partnerships are important for transformational change for sustainable development and describes how to partner, including a checklist for research partnerships. Overall, there is a clear need for best practices and a community of dialogue around creating more successful partnerships and consultancies.

couple). The research process led to dialogue on ways of approaching this difficult issue.

- **Define and measure gender empowerment based on participant input**

Sophisticated feminist methods engage women and girls throughout the research process, starting with creating a space for them to ask the questions that are meaningful in their own lives while giving a voice to their individual and collective experiences (Ponic, Reid, and Frisby, 2010). Along these lines, most organizations are starting to ask their participants and partners on the ground what gender-transformative change looks like within their lived realities, and creating research and measurement based on this feedback. Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), not just research, must include gender indicators based on participant and programmatic staff input. For example, organizations can ask teams their definition of gender equality in their particular context and what it would ideally look like after the project closes. This can also help

avoid research that starts with questions or advocacy goals that are not realistic in context.

- **Base research design and measurement of a theory of change that focuses on assessing incremental progress toward gender-transformative change**

There is a clear recommendation that a theory of change, formulated based on gender theory, serves as the foundation of all research design. The theory of change must demonstrate a hypothesis that explains what actions will lead to gender-transformative change and include a very clear articulation of what is expected in terms of gender equality at the end of the project. The explanation of how gender is affecting the outcomes through a theory of change is very effective in persuading stakeholders to understand the importance of GTR.

The theory of change allows for measurement at incremental levels to assess progress toward truly gender-transformative change. Assessment of incremental change, based on the

## CHALLENGE

### Measure Change at the Relational and Structural Levels

If the aim is gender-transformative change, researchers need to better conceptualize and measure women's empowerment as being about changing power relationships and structures. Some researchers are starting to better capture what is truly transformational in women's lives. Susana Martínez-Restrepo provided the example of women having increased decision-making related to household management. She argues:

*We have to see what is really transforming gender relationships. And that is difficult to measure because what is really transforming gender relationships would be women making decisions over ... strategic aspects of the family business, and men getting more involved, hopefully equally involved in household duties. Otherwise there's no transformation.*

There is still a gap in good measurement of gender dynamics between couples at a household level; these types of measurements are delicate and need more attention. CARE USA has a 2015 review of literature on measuring gender-transformative change that could be updated with emerging measurement discourse. This review provides examples of indicators related to agency, relations and structures for different measurement categories. For example, indicators related to women's individual mobility (e.g., ability to go out alone) don't capture structural and relational dynamics (e.g., men informing women about their movements and rates of harassment against women in public spaces). A next research step might be a thorough investment into gender-transformative measurement specifically.

theory of change, provides benchmarks of success and allows for clarity on what data is needed for what purpose. The value of incremental change measurement, based on one's theory of change, should not be underestimated. Nidal Karim agreed with the ability and power to demonstrate incremental change and recommends measuring "catalytic" changes that, according to the theory of change, will eventually result in longer-term change. Sarah Gammage described the power of a theory of change and incremental measurement:

*I do think it's really helpful to have a pretty well-developed theory of change that your indicators flow from but that also indicates the pathways ... Find some indicators or proxies for the slower moving process of change that you can track even if the envelope of time that you have is smaller than the larger envelope of social transformation that you really want to be tracking.*

It was beyond the scope of this review to look at examples of theories of change, but an important next phase for the research would be to analyze commonalities across gender-transformative theories of change.

## RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION BEST PRACTICES

- **Use collaborative, participatory and dialogical methodologies that reframe knowledge creation**

A key part of feminist data collection is the engagement in reflexivity that opens negotiations over what knowledge claims can be made, by whom, for what purpose and within what frames of reference. The intention is to minimize the tendency in all research to transform those researched into objects of scrutiny and manipulation, and, instead, to create the conditions by which the object of research enters into the process as an active subject. To do this, the majority of research that is striving to be gender-transformative uses methodologies that are collaborative, participatory and in which dialogue is a central part of the data collection process. Appropriate participatory data collection and analysis methods are used, depending on the specific question being addressed. This is also an actionable way to ensure inclusion of women and girls in the research process, as women's experiences and voices become central to the research process (Chakma 2016).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has proven the benefits of gender-transformative change. For example, an IDRC-supported research project aimed at improving fishing processing and gender relations in Zambia and Malawi engaged a range of stakeholders in participatory action processes to uncover gendered social norm constraints. Women and men fishers, village committees, traditional leaders, transporters, boat builders, village savings and loans representatives, and representatives from the Fisheries Department and Ministry of Trade and Industry were all engaged to help identify gender barriers to fishing, processing and trading. The process led to increased dialogue and attitude change across actors

## SPOTLIGHT

### Feminist Participatory Action Research

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is one of the most common approaches and methodologies described in the literature. PAR is an approach and methodology built from the premise that all knowledge produced should be meaningful and relevant to the people involved in the research and the contexts in which it is being produced. It is grounded in a commitment to genuine collaboration between researchers and participants. Feminist PAR's most important tenets include: (1) centering gender and women's experiences while challenging patriarchy; (2) accounting for intersectionality; (3) honoring voice and difference through participatory research processes; (4) exploring new forms of representation; (5) reflexivity; and (6) honoring many forms of action. It is, in its essence, a form of critical feminist research.

Feminist PAR seeks to name and redress power inequalities, reveal diverse women's voices and experiences, and critically examine the socioeconomic and political context shaping women's lives in an effort to better facilitate action outcomes (Ponic, Reid, and Frisby, 2010). It applies the principles of "inclusion, participation, action, social change and researcher reflexivity throughout the research process" (Reid, C., Tom, A., & Frisby, W., 2006). Feminist participatory action researchers seek to facilitate building knowledge to change the conditions of women's lives, both individually and collectively, while reconstructing conceptions of power so that power can be used in a responsible manner.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Using Technology to Collect Community Stories: Video Volunteers

[Video Volunteers](#) focuses on building community action through community storytelling. It uses participatory methods combined with technologies such as video production. Video Volunteers is in a network called Video for Change. As Jessica Mayberry, Founding Director, describes:

The principle that's underlying all of it is the idea that people should speak directly, as opposed to being spoken for. And that for all these decades, you know, the poor have been spoken for, rather than speaking directly. ... The shift that we want to see is a shift from valuing learned experience, which means academic, expert knowledge. A shift from learned experience to lived experience, in terms of what we value.

Video Volunteers are provided with cameras and trained both to use the equipment and to use the stories they produce to mobilize their communities and pressure government officials to take action. Jessica estimates a 20-30% resolution rate; meaning over the last six or seven years, they have produced about 6,000 videos and 1,500 have managed to solve problems—like a village getting electrical connections or hand pumps, an extra teacher in the school, or exposing corruption. This action is a result of building participants' campaigning skills, helping them think through, "Who's the person who's most experiencing this problem? What is your call to action? What is the government official, the government agency that is responsible for solving this?" Video Volunteers then work to incorporate the videos into formats that are digestible to decision-makers, such as grievance letters or government helplines. Examining and revealing patriarchy plays a role in the work, as well. For two years, the organization has been running 60 gender discussion clubs that meet to watch videos and discuss topics related to gender.

Video Volunteers, it is important to note, does not identify as a research organization. In fact, it is interested in exploring research opportunities more, but have met with resistance from organizations devaluing and calling into question the validity of videography as a source of data.

that normally do not engage in conversation. By the end of the research, communities were already showing changes in attitudes about fishing gear ownership (toward shared ownership, instead of ownership only by men), and there was evidence of more participation by women in fishing and, more importantly, in decisions about fishing income.

Numerous creative data collection tools exist to help create dialogical spaces across diverse populations. Barbara Dennis has written methodological reflections about the practice of using drama in ethnography for data collection and analysis, and provided examples from her work with [Theater of the Oppressed as Critical Ethnography](#). Mayssam Zaaroura and Nidal Karim both described using [photovoice](#) and other visual and digital participatory methods. These tools not only create rich, meaningful data, but give the participants a sense of ownership over the research and serve to elevate the actual voices of participants during dissemination. Ratna Sudarshan recommended methodologies that create space for conversations and dialogue, focusing more on listening than action. Examples of methodologies from the literature include: transformative household methodology, gender action learning systems, community conversation, storytelling, oral histories and life stories (Chakma, 2016). Most researchers recommend collecting mixed methodology data and collecting data at more than one point in time (Oxfam, 2012).

## RESEARCH DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION BEST PRACTICES

- **Use research dissemination techniques that ethically and powerfully elevate marginalized voices and connect participants with important spaces of influence**

Capturing, consolidating and supporting marginalized voices—creating space for those who wouldn't otherwise have a platform—is what makes research transformative, according to Simel Esim. For example, Simel works to bring the research and the voices of the research partners into important advocacy spaces, providing them with space online and in-person at meetings to help them be a part of the conversations. Elevating women and girls' voices is at the center of feminist research principles, as well. To be feminist, the goal of the research data collection and dissemination should be to capture marginalized voices (best done through participatory methods described above) and the dissemination efforts should focus on elevation of these voices. Ratna Sudarshan describes the power of using women and girls' voices instead of just translating:

## SPOTLIGHT

### Crowd-Sourcing Sexual Violence Reporting in Egypt: Harass Map

The potential for citizen-generated data—data that people or their organizations produce to directly monitor, demand or drive change on issues that affect them—to be integrated into GTR models needs further exploration. Research supported by IDRC suggests potential gender-transformative change impact. For example, in Egypt, use of a Harass Map—a crowdsourcing tool for women to anonymously report harassment without needing to meet legal requirements—helped break stereotypes related to sexual harassment (e.g., promoted understanding that it doesn't just happen at night and it exists across religious, socio-economic, age and gender categories). The dissemination of the results from the map through TV and social media was an important strategy for influence that helped spur activism among 20 anti-harassment groups and agencies. As a result, dozens of safe zones appeared, with the government deploying police vans to these areas, and Cairo University implemented its own sexual harassment policy. While the quality of data through citizen-generated techniques remains a question, the ability of this data to lead to gender-transformative change deserves attention.

So let's listen to what people are saying, in their own words, and not always try and make it sound neater ... Let's just listen and hear that. And if at all we are helping them with change or trying to facilitate change or whatever, do it in ways that make sense to them.

The principle of "do no harm" is key during this stage, as well as others.

In the previously-mentioned research by PLD, the organization found that the child marriage law, instead of protecting adolescent rights as intended, was being used primarily by parents of runaway couples to punish and incarcerate them for choosing their own partner and bringing "shame and dishonor" to the family. PLD presented these findings in various policy spaces. In a discourse fixated on seeing child marriage laws as a solution, PLD's voice—carrying the voices of the girls its researchers had interviewed—stood out for its focus on adolescent sexuality, fresh ideas of consent and the evolving capacities of adolescents.

Many feminist methodologies include reflection components that encourage the participants themselves to envision social change and take up the findings to create it. The literature has numerous examples of research projects that ended in a workshop with participants to reflect on the findings and think through next steps for applying the research in their lives and work. Even online surveys can add questions asking participants to envision how the research findings may be used to create social change (Wagaman & Sanchez, 2017). Still, there is a need to work with and teach community members about the power of research and the usage of research in their work so that they understand the value and can actively engage with research.

- **Research utilization should focus on communicating and convincing audiences of the realities of gender inequality and the potential avenues of gender-transformative change**

Data and research can be powerful for helping people see that gender inequality is a real, an ongoing issue, and there is still a need for more research examples to provide clarity concerning women's empowerment and to strengthen the data narrative on the importance of gender. Building an expert board for review can help strengthen consensus building and credibility of arguments. Christopher Kuonqui

provided an example of his work on a UNDP paper and the power of data perspective to be transformative in itself: "We're digging into some gender issues ... and once we got the data, he's just like, 'I had no idea.' It's that 'Oh, wow.'" Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú, Director of Research and Statistic Center with the Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES), described how her organization's research shifted the conversation about poverty away from land ownership to mobility and access to markets and schools—a more gendered analysis that better responds to the felt needs of women and girls.

- **Create alliances and learning spaces through research utilization**

Building solidarity and strengthened networks is a key attribute of feminist research processes. They lead to the strengthening of social movements and create communities of practice and learning that feed on groundwork, and also feed back into it. Research methods and research utilization are both powerful tools for creating alliances and learning spaces. Participatory processes that paid attention to girls' voices and local contexts and involved multiple stakeholders in conceptualizing and implementing the research, as well as analyzing its "meaning" and practical applications, became powerful ways of building activists' capacities. Simel Esim

## SPOTLIGHT

### Audiovisual Sharing of Findings in Girls' Voices by India Researchers, Dipta and Disha

Traditional ideas about how findings should be communicated are limiting. Supporting innovative and creative ways of utilizing findings is critical to the effective use of feminist research for social change. AJWS supported researchers Dipta Bhog and Disha Mullick with artist Baaraan Ijlal and young artist collaborators to showcase new evidence through girls' own voices. A graphic book called *Beauty, Bebo and Friends Pick a Fight and Other Stories* told real stories of the power of girls' collective action.

An art installation called Bird Box—a unique bioscope<sup>5</sup>—allowed one to listen to girls' uncensored voices as they speak about their experiences of and perspectives on representation, sexuality, body, pleasure and violence. These innovative methods, arising from the research, found media acclaim and moved the focus away from individual girls' stories to those of girls' collectives. As the subheading in [one of the media stories](#) read: "A graphic novel and an art installation redirect the conversation from the girl child to girls' collectives." Two program partners who viewed Bird Box took the installation to their field villages in Rajasthan and showed it in their communities to begin a conversation on adolescent sexuality, something they had struggled with initiating. The installation generated discussion with adolescent girls that had not taken place before on perceptions of so-called "good" and "bad" girls, sexuality-related taboos, questions of desire and the implications in their own lives. Bird Box was also featured in three art exhibitions that focused on challenging ideas around gender. This led to new audiences of artists, the general public and intellectuals learning firsthand how gender and sexuality norms limited girls' lives.

<sup>5</sup> An early movie projector in the form of a box

## CHALLENGE

### Building Data that Supports the Power of Gender-Transformative Work to Improve Lives

In order to reveal and challenge power at multiple levels, there is a need to continue building data that supports the argument that gender is important and that gender-transformative work has wide potential for improving lives and society. Araba Sey, Principal Research Fellow at United Nations University, describes this need for concrete data:

*But because there's no real concrete data to support [the importance of transforming gender norms], you have to keep trying to make the argument that the problem even exists... Most people say, 'Prove it, where's the data that support these assertions?' And these are issues that are difficult to research and document in the ways that are necessarily internationally comparable and so on. And so it definitely is always a challenge, trying to convince people that one, there's a problem of inequality.*

showcased examples of initiatives that lend themselves to the development of international cooperative alliances:

*When the same group of workers come together from different countries to hear of their experiences [and] challenges, they know and understand each other immediately. If you bring [together] the Argentinian waste pickers with the Turkish waste pickers, they have the same problems of the municipal harassment and occupational safety and health issues. And then there are all the differences as to the gender dynamics or the support institutions that may be out there ... So I guess that kind of cross-fertilization, cross-pollination is something that's important to do.*

It is important to show both individual experiences and the collective power of marginalized groups. In other words, the most effective research utilization techniques demonstrate that the needs of one group are not isolated, but rather part of a larger issue—thereby creating bridges across topics and among groups.

- Use research to strengthen advocacy in order to effectively transform and influence policy

Interviewees demonstrated the benefit of using research to influence policy and highlighted the need to find the best ways to disseminate evidence to governments and movements. For example, Chantal Umuhoza described her organization's research, which presented stories of young girls who experienced pregnancy resulting from rape. The research showed that the law has few provisions for these situations. As a result of this research being used in a court case, the related abortion laws are now under revision. Ratna Sudarshan provided the example of her organization's research on the informal economy that has been used by policy makers in planning conversations.

Government and decision-making stakeholders must be involved from research design to dissemination. For example, ISST research, done in partnership with the government, shed light on productive activities that were not previously counted as work. This led to statistical agencies changing their questions about domestic duties in the national survey and adding questions on location of work. In both of these examples, Ratna attributes the success to working “very closely right from the start with someone in a position to make change.” This example also highlights a pathway to change involving new insights from research influencing government data capture, which in turn influences policymaking. Emily Pryor described the Data 2X “data chain,” in which the organization keeps the policy audience in mind from the start of the project; this model is based on case studies in 18 countries that demonstrated a greater likelihood of policy change occurring if policy makers were engaged at the earliest stages. The data chain also involves engaging communications staff early in the process instead of after the paper is written. For example, Data 2X is working to understand the scope and scale of a problem by collaborating with the ILO and World Bank to pilot data questions and definitions, which can produce a better picture of how women participate in economies. Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú described how FUSADES is increasingly starting the research design with policy makers as collaborators, building research that aligns with FUSADES' goals, and is grounded in an understanding of what policy makers need to know.

**Research methods and research utilization are both powerful tools for creating alliances and learning spaces.**

Interviewees described the need to translate evidence for policy action. Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú recommended combining research with data that is already collected by governments in order to increase the credibility: “It’s very powerful when you put the numbers [from their research] in the same graph as the official GDP data, and our surveys correlate very well.” In other words, her organization presents the data from the government survey, shows their own similar data, but also provides additional data that goes deeper and is more specific. This packaging strategy demonstrates that the new research is providing additional evidence and insight into the problems.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the design, implementation and dissemination are all part of an ongoing iterative process, in which each stage informs and shapes the others, rather than working in a linear fashion. At any given stage, researchers might revise a previous stage and modify it based upon new information. To achieve gender-transformative change, a feminist lens must be applied to all stages.

## CHALLENGE

### Translating and Communicating Research

Interview participants called for more attention to the ethics of using and communicating research. For example, some interview participants pointed out the role research dissemination can play in elevating marginalized participants’ quotes and stories and avoiding reinforcement of stereotypes that portray research subjects as victims. Emily Pryor cautions that talking about issues in nonreductive ways can make the dissemination process take longer because you need to be careful and reflective, and this additional time might require a financial commitment. Learning spaces on this topic that engage research and nonprofit communications/journalist professionals could be valuable for improving attempts to share research in empowering ways. Alejandra Vargas Garcia, senior Program Officer for IDRC, reflected on some of the challenges and critical importance of nuance in showcasing work around gender equality.

*People recognize the power of the story of one. The problem is that often stories of empowerment are too sanitized and neglect gender-transformative research findings that are not ‘straightforward.’ Donors and some audiences want to hear how one specific intervention sponsored by X addressed all structural barriers. This is simply not true, and reductive storytelling can not only be exploitative, it can be dangerous. We reduce human stories to either full-on success or full-on challenges, but humans are complex; life even in abject poverty has a full spectrum. Showcasing that complexity helps us make the case for long-lasting sustainable investments, for participatory methods and for allowing women’s voices to guide our communication efforts.*

One challenge to influencing policy makers that was raised in interviews was the increasing demand from donor and policy makers to oversimplify and condense research. There is a need to think about increasing stakeholders’ abilities to digest research in more sophisticated forms than a fact sheet. That said, interviewees did see the value in being able to concisely describe their work.

A few possible examples of solutions were mentioned. Some interviewees suggested infographics as one technique for presenting nuance. For example, AJWS recently created a data visualization project on [advancing gender equality in India](#) that merges quantitative and qualitative data into concise take-aways for advocacy purposes. As part of the Growth and Economic Opportunities for Women Program (GrOW), IDRC worked for a year alongside women in local communities, research partners, and documentary filmmakers to jointly design and capture three stories of women told and produced by women. These stories showcase their [daily realities around childcare access](#) in the Korogocho slum in Nairobi; [mobility challenges for women](#) in Pakistan; and [child, early and forced marriage](#) in Bangladesh. Both of these examples grow from an organizational dedication to producing quality tools, not just research papers, and are backed by incentivizing structures like funding mechanisms.

# SUPPORTING GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH

*Most interviewees described the funding and institutional environment as important preconditions for promoting gender-transformative research.*

Most interviewees described the funding and institutional environment as important preconditions for promoting GTR. Organizations working toward deeper integration of gender frameworks into their research had clear institutional leadership prioritizing and incentivizing prioritization of gender across the institution. A few organizations had developed, and others were developing, internal gender research frameworks and gender capacity building tools to guide their work.

In contrast, there was a clear gap between organizational and funding practices aimed at maximizing the potential of research to reduce gender inequality at multiple levels. Based on challenging experiences and lessons learned, interviewees described limitations that result from donor approaches to supporting research and described what they had learned about improving donor practices.

## FUNDER PRACTICES THAT BEST SUPPORT GTR

### 1. Specific, sustained and substantial funding

Sustained and substantial funding is essential to supporting transformative research. Ximena Echeverría Magariños, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator for CARE International, identified donor interest, level of resources and capacity as the three main factors that predict whether research at the organization becomes more gender-transformative and incorporates new ways of collecting data. Organizations with robust and stable funding are more likely to be able to conduct research grounded in gender and fem-

inist thinking. Along with creating specific calls for feminist, transformative research, it can be helpful for gender to be integrated into all grantmaking proposals. Funder proposals and guidelines must be sophisticatedly created rather than just asking for an additive paragraph on gender at the end of the proposal. Increased funding amounts dedicated to feminist research will go far to ensure the prioritization of this approach—but most important is the need to create sustained funding over time.

### 2. Flexible funding, willingness to pilot new ideas, and valuing the process of research, itself, as transformative

Quality, not just quantity, of funding is important. Feminist research is an iterative process that requires thoughtful and open engagement over time. Longer-term grants, open-ended funding and dynamic reporting processes contribute to making the research a gender-transformative experience. Because feminist research is by nature iterative and flexible, it is also unpredictable. To avoid challenges in terms of budget, planning for staff time, donor reporting, and expectations of results, funders need to take the iterative and flexible nature of feminist research into consideration.

To engage in this work, organizations must be willing to fail and to pilot new ideas. For example, a study may reveal negative results or results different from those expected based on the original research question. In response, organizations can create more spaces for sharing negative-result research and support the publication of these research studies.

Alongside a willingness to pilot and fail, the value of research as a learning process needs to be understood. Many organizations spoke of the power of research itself to be transformative for the researchers engaged in the data collection facilitation. Participatory methods can shape the norms of the researchers themselves and change the way they see gender in their communities. Nidal Karim describes an ideal learning-centered funder approach:

*I think having a learning mindset really means... metrics for success of the funding are not just based on outcome metrics, but are actually based on metrics around: are you producing, learning from it and doing things differently, or being able to contribute to the broader discourse? Often... it is the engagement and the process that was important, and sometimes it's like, maybe we should have spent more, put thinking into how we documented the process itself, or the effect of the process on who we're working with.*

### 3. Using funding to shift knowledge-creation and ownership to local communities

**Many local researchers are located in capital cities and are themselves educated and privileged compared to average residents, and therefore may not actually be able to represent local communities.**

It is important to fund researchers with local expertise and to shift the authority of knowledge creation to local communities. This doesn't just mean shifting resources to lower-middle income countries and funding local researchers, but actually working to build out research capacities in-country. Many local researchers are located in capital cities and are themselves educated and privileged compared to average residents, and therefore may not actually be able to represent local communities. In order for the research to not be donor-directed, it is important for funding to be arranged in a manner that builds up the target community of researchers—who have historically engaged on gender-transformative change and have credibility within the communities being studied—or to support research institutes that are open to questioning their processes. In order to ensure the research is robust and rigorous, feminist and social movement actors might need support from global

researchers. Researchers that understand the local context and are credible in their communities are more likely to conduct robust and usable research. Additionally, to make sure participants ultimately gain knowledge of the methodologies and data analysis and reporting, researchers and facilitators may need training workshops on how to work with beneficiaries. The goal is for partners to be able to use the methodologies independently to inform their own work as needed.

### 4. Funding research utilization focused on action and change—from the local to global levels

Ideally, funding for GTR supports not just the process from design to implementation, but also research utilization. Research can be nebulous and ultimately have limited impact if it is produced without any consideration of how the knowledge generated relates to policy change or social change. Funding for making research *action-oriented* is key to starting gender-transformative change.

Funders should seek proposals that include concrete plans to engage research participants in understanding the evidence and utilizing it for their own social change goals. Research focused on the local level can also catalyze change at the national and global levels—and it is worth funders' time to seek out this potential in proposals. For example, as the result of land rights research in Nepal, led by the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development (Chakma, 2016; APWLD, 2017), the participants articulated that they could improve their narrative on women and land rights in a way that allowed for the expansion of the campaign at the national level (APWLD, 2017). The research has also led to the establishment of a women's cultural committee and campaign to raise awareness about workplace violence.

### 5. Supporting, resourcing and training researchers to engage in collaborative, participatory and dialogical methodologies

Researchers may need additional training on how to use qualitative methods, as well as training on engaging in reflexivity about their own biases and power differentials (Drucza and Wondimu, 2017). Susana Martínez-Restrepo described the need for extensive trainings and possibly even a bias selection instrument for locating experienced researchers, explaining how hard it is to address deeply ingrained biases in a short training (e.g., overriding homophobia in a 12-hour LGBTQ sensitization training).

A focus on participatory methods also increases the costs of conducting research, in which you might incorporate playing games and pictorial expositions with non-literate populations to ensure all participants are included in creating knowledge. These types of methodologies often require more time-intensive data collection periods. For example, there is a clear need for the researchers to build rapport with communities, and this takes time and dedication.

## INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEMS THAT BEST SUPPORT GTR

Funding alone is far from sufficient for promoting GTR. Interviewees described institutional challenges that impeded research for gender-transformative change and described ways to improve organizational systems in an effort to maximize its impact. The institutional systems described below do not necessarily represent the way interviewees' organizations are functioning, but describe an institutional-level vision for better supporting research for gender-transformative change.

### 1. Internal organizational systems and policies align with feminist principles

There is a need for organizations themselves to be less hierarchal internally and more collaborative with external partners. Making this happen was seen as creating a supportive environment and creating a sense that the organizations were doing themselves what they asked of others. Sarah Gammage explained:

*We've all got this sort of embedded patriarchal view of meritocracies and hierarchies, and if we can actually confront that in our own day-to-day [way] we organize our work, how we remunerate people, how we work flexibly with people, how we accommodate their care needs, [that's important] because you can't have some guiding principles that drive your research that you're not applying internally.*

Chantal Umuhoza described, similarly:

*I've met women's rights organizations that preach and talk about gender equality, but when you go to their own organizational policies, you realize that what they talk about and what they practice is completely different .... So that is also something that needs to be integrated ... as an organization to transform your practices and the way you do things and the way you approach things in your different contexts.*

While this was a clear broad best practice identified by interviewees, they did not describe concrete lessons learned or implementation practices. Some organizations were starting to think through processes more aligned with feminist principles, but there was a clear gap in established recommendations for organizations looking to align their internal systems with feminist principles. [Freedman \(1970\)](#) offered seven suggestions to increase democracy within organizations: responsible delegation, distribution of authority, rotation of tasks, allocation of tasks along rational criteria, diffusion of information, and equal access to resources.

There are examples of organizations leading the shift away from strict hierarchical decision-making to more flexible and open models. For example, Second Chance Programme is run by a committee of 10 and has achieved impressive results. Some larger organizations have declared themselves to be shifting toward [holacracy models](#)—the basic goal of this structure is to allow for distributed decision-making while giving everyone the opportunity to work on what they do best. The challenges and best practices are still emerging and deserve specialized focus in subsequent research.

### 2. Institution-wide focus on gender-transformative work

Organizations that are dedicated to supporting, resourcing or enacting GTR need to develop an institution-wide focus on gender-transformative change. Within many organizations, there is often one person or a small group tasked with leading the gender framing and research, instead of having organization-wide initiatives. This leads to gender staff being overworked while facing institutional barriers to successfully achieving GTR. As a result, the gender component of research may be a small component or afterthought instead of being fully integrated and action-oriented. Institutions must have a clear policy about, and prioritization of, gender, including allocating staff and resources across divisions. Staff across the institution need to be held accountable to gender indicators, instead of a few technical experts being solely responsible for the knowledge and work.

Alongside this prioritization, internal communication, especially from leadership, about the importance of gender and feminist principles of research and the creation of institution-wide platforms for dialogue is essential. Katherine Hay, Deputy Director of Gender Equality at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, attributed that organization's dedication to supporting research to the effect of strong leadership that understands the value of research

and evidence. The leadership incentivizing the production of evidence and use of feminist research transforms the organizational approach. Leadership asking questions about making sure work is transformative and probing to learn how research is feminist is a powerful incentive for staff.

## SPOTLIGHT

### CGIAR's Institutional Gender Directive and Programs

Esther Njuguna-Mungai, Gender Specialist for CGIAR, described how policy guidance from donors and systems management from the board, which clearly articulated gender as part of the monitoring and reporting framework across all work, was incredibly helpful for bringing everyone at CGIAR into the gender conversation. It led to a massive recruitment exercise for gender scientists. (CGIAR has a [gender strategy](#) and decided all research must include gender components. It allocates 10% of resources to this and provides guidelines on the gender section of proposals. The reporting includes providing a CV of the gender scientist working on the research.) Even more importantly for Esther, the organization-wide priority of gender in the research provided her with protection and opportunity for growth in her role as gender specialist and allowed her to work more systematically to develop long-term, higher-level research goals.

In order to support this work across the entire institution, CGIAR developed an online [gender platform](#) representing researchers across all divisions and guided by a leading gender advisor who maintained joint programs and designed topical learning meetings. The goal of the platform was to create an opportunity to learn how gender researchers were programming their work and to discuss across topics. The platform also provided funding for hiring a postdoc to support the work and to support gender integration workshops at different levels outside the main platform.

### 3. Internal capacity building and training of staff

The move toward an organization-wide gender-transformative focus includes capacity building and training for all staff on institutional gender frameworks and what they mean to their work. Specifically, organizations identified gaps in technical training with regard to gender theory and feminist research methodologies. To promote GTR, staff capacity building should be designed as a bottom up, re-informing learning agenda that gets everyone talking to each other. CGIAR work on GTR has indicated two major insights related to capacity building through formal trainings (Escobar and Puskur 2014; McDougall et al 2015): 1) conceptual training is not enough, and training initiatives need to directly connect with the specific plans, activities and issues of the program; 2) focused capacity development should start early. Additionally, CGIAR recommends sharing responsibility for capacity building across teams and seeking partners outside the sector to engage in specific capacity building like GTR and gender-transformative communications.

CARE USA has a gender cohort training which is a seven-to-10 months skill-building course designed to increase skills in developing a gender-transformative program, and staff across CARE can apply to participate.<sup>6</sup> The cohort has a commitment to provide technical training to other countries upon graduation, with the idea of making capacities available for different countries in the long-run. There is also a gender network to support colleagues that are gender specialists or enthusiasts; it meets once a year remotely to dialogue on gender topics and maintains a conversation online to exchange learning. There are deeper aspects to gender training; it is a process, not a one-time event. It is not enough to do just one gender training and think the work is done.

### 4. Organizational frameworks that define, exemplify and provide guidance on GTR

During the interviews, participants had recommendations for supporting organizational internal systems including creation of: a gender policy, a gender strategy, gender-sensitive budget guidelines, a gender equality action plan, and gender equality theory of change or approach that guides the entire organization. It was recommended that organizations clearly define one or two overarching gender equality questions, which would be the basis for the overarching frameworks and guidance documents. Additionally, these documents

<sup>6</sup> To learn more, see the [example modules](#) CARE USA provides from its Gender Cohort 2017.

would articulate what is expected by organizations, especially funders, in terms of gender-transformative change, with examples of research questions and outcomes provided. Overall, the goal of the documents is to be as explicit as possible, while also creating flexible guidelines that could be applicable across sectors.

A few examples of documents are spotlighted below, but many organizations are in the process of developing these types of tools. Oxfam, for example, is creating a “feminist

knowledge system” with feminist principles for knowledge generation that include MEL, knowledge translation and communication. It may be valuable for future research to do a more thorough investigation of existing organizational and theoretical frameworks. Comparing organizations that have varying degrees of success with frameworks can help identify what preconditions are necessary for a policy or framework to be truly utilized. For example, it would be useful to compare differing ways leadership signaled a true commitment to gender across divisions.

## SPOTLIGHT

### International Women’s Development Agency (IWDA) Feminist Research Framework

IWDA’s Feminist Research Framework sets out IWDA’s approach to feminist research and provides guidance for designing ethical, feminist PAR. Developed primarily as an internal document to support staff and consultants in considering all aspects of ethical, feminist PAR, the Framework brings together contemporary best practice and draws on over three decades of experience in working with women in communities to produce and present research that can contribute to greater gender equality.

The IWDA research framework outlines the organization’s values (feminist, accountable, collaborative and transformative) and describes the expectation for research to be feminist, not simply gender sensitive: “Feminist research tries to capture the diversity of women’s experience, explore the gendered manifestation of power (both in the topic for research and the way in which the research is conducted), and interrogate the operation of gender norms.” The framework lists four elements which must underpin all research conducted or supported by IWDA (each element has a longer definition and is operationalized):

1. Our research builds feminist knowledge of women’s lives
2. We are accountable for how our research is conducted
3. Our collaboration is ethical
4. Our recommendations transform the root causes of gender inequality

IWDA’s framework includes processes and criteria for the approval of research. For example, the framework sets out questions that should be considered for each of the four elements, such as asking proposal writers to reflect on: Are researchers interested in exploring how ideas of gender and gender identity are formed, and the negative and positive impacts of gender-based stereotypes? Does the research explore how power is gendered, and how it operates and affects individuals and communities? Will identified research priorities have a transformative impact on the causes of gender inequality? How will the findings be used to inform advocacy work and to improve policy and practice? How will the findings be taken back to participants in the study?

The research proposal is also integrated into the ethics application process, which includes sharing lessons learned related to feminist construction of knowledge and the transformative potential of knowledge.

## CARE Global's Gender Framework for Programs and Research

CARE Global has a global gender framework that is the basis of an integrated gender marker for all programs worldwide and a gender toolkit to guide evaluations; all tools are publicly available. The program gender marker tool is used as a programmatic self-assessment, and the evaluation toolkit harmonizes gender integration into research questions and analysis and connects to gender indicators that have been agreed upon at the global CARE level (a subset of 25 global indicators have a gender component). For example, a program may select a gender indicator, depending on the work, that relates to gender and sexual-based violence, women meaningfully participating in household or other decision-making spaces, women voicing their labor rights, etc. Ximena Echeverria Magariños describes how the global frameworks and tools allow for “*harmonized evaluations and then data that can tell the story of the extent to which we are changing gender relationships or creating a more equal space for different types of populations.*” In other words, the approach is designed to support a confederation-wide annual aggregation of data, a global database, and a more nuanced look at certain programs and regions. The tools also frame the basis of peer exchanges at a regional level. Ximena also describes the power of this approach in “*bringing people to a common conversation.*” Ximena sees the conversation as the important, but also difficult part:

*The constant challenge is that you need a capacity in place to keep this dialogue advancing so it's not about deciding indicators and putting guidance forward but rather just keeping [going] the conversation, training, and technical assistance to colleagues that would be implementing these indicators ... We launched the markers, and colleagues came back with questions, “How do I understand the markers, there are some parts that I don't get?” So we had some colleagues available that could provide that support and I think that was also a good thing to do.*

Ximena attributes the high level of commitment from the leadership of the organization—demonstrated through repeated communication and concentrated investment—alongside the policies, to the success of the gender framework and tools, as well as the application of mandatory indicators that are now proving useful and insightful after the first couple of years. In other words, as staff have increasingly used the framework and tools, they have also begun to see the value in the approach.

# NEXT STEPS

For more organizations to effectively use research as a social change tool, substantial gaps need to be filled via organizational field leadership and further research. This paper identifies three primary gaps and makes suggestions for action steps that can inform programming, organizational and grantmaking practices.

## GAPS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

### 1. Building organizational field leadership on supporting GTR and feminist research

**Gap:** Many organizations are just starting to think through gender-transformative and feminist research practices, and there remains a lack of clear leadership and support for implementing gender-transformative and feminist research. There is limited documentation on lessons learned from attempting to engage in GTR, especially institution-wide. Of organizations working to integrate feminist principles into their practices, few have publicly shared their efforts to make their organizations less hierarchical internally and more collaborative externally.

#### Opportunities for Action:

- Develop a curriculum or share internal guidelines for staff trainings on gender-transformative or feminist research.
- Create networks for information sharing, either through newsletters or in-person coalitions. Facilitate cross-organizational dialogue and public-facing documents outlining concrete strategies, practices and lessons learned.
- Utilize existing funder spaces to create learning

communities directed at internal organizational and grantmaking practices that better support and embody gender-transformative change.

### 2. Increasing and improving GTR and feminist research practice

**Gap:** There is a lack of collaborative, dialogical spaces to build community, networks and social movements dedicated to social change and reducing gender inequality, and a deficit in qualified, well-trained researchers with expertise on gender analytics and feminist research methods. To build community resilience and have a lasting effect, there is a need to leverage the strengths of leaders in the GTR field through peer and other lateral exposure and learning spaces, strengthening local community access to GTR resources. This would help sustain a GTR agenda with a commitment that isn't primarily driven by the funding available.

#### Opportunities for Action:

- Create a network or dialogical space to support and facilitate practical learning about the application of feminist methodologies for change at the local and global levels. Regularly convene a group of experts, including practitioners, advocates, academics and researchers, around GTR methodologies and approaches.
- Build a network of international researchers that have demonstrated expertise and experience with feminist methodologies in local on-the-ground contexts.
- Promote documentation and sharing of lessons learned for the research process to be transformative, in and of itself.

- Offer workshops that train donors and stakeholders on the broad uses of research (rather than the traditional training for researchers on translating research documents into policy documents)—a potential first step in increasing the value and credibility of GTR in policy debates.
- Support—both financially and in terms of capacity building—organizations to conduct action-oriented research that brings local expertise and voices into national and global advocacy spaces.

### 3. Refining data, evidence and measurement related to gender

**Gap:** There is a need for data and evidence on gender issues and the power of a gender focus across sectors. There is a need for better incremental level measurement and measures that capture the relational and structural nature of gender-transformative change.

#### Opportunities for Action:

- Build evidence to support ways in which gender empowerment can end other issues (e.g., poverty).
- Work internally with organization staff to better articulate a clear understanding of what increased gender equality would realistically look like in the relevant context if the project were successful—and use this to

inform monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

- Create feminist measurement tools related to the SDGs that make inequalities visible and have the potential to direct more resources to the most effective interventions.
- Value and support diverse methods and methodologies that maintain a focus on feminist principles of redistributing power through the research process.

## CONCLUSION

This paper serves as an initial articulation of learning for using research to address gender inequality. The mandate to increase support and resources for GTR is clear, and many best practices exist to start guiding this work.

Insights drawn from this paper can be used to improve research, organizational and grantmaking practices with great potential to advance gender-transformative change around the world. The community of researchers, practitioners and advocates dedicated to the power of GTR is growing rapidly, but is not especially well-organized. Organizations with substantial experience in GTR are well-poised to take a field-building leadership role moving forward.

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PARTICIPANTS

Interviewee	Organization
Margaret Capelazo, Gender Advisor	<b>CARE Canada:</b> CARE is a global humanitarian organization providing disaster relief to areas in crisis, while providing long-term solutions to poverty around the world.
Joanne Crawford, Senior Research and Policy Advisor Caroline Lambert, Director, Research, Policy and Advocacy Bronwyn Tilbury, Senior Program Manager	<b>International Women's Development Agency Inc. (IWDA):</b> IWDA is an Australian non-profit organization that works to support women's rights in Asia and the Pacific. They exist to advance and protect the rights of women and girls, in all their diversities.
Simel Esim, Head of Cooperative Unit	<b>International Labour Organization (ILO):</b> The ILO is a United Nations agency dealing with labor issues, particularly international labor standards, social protection and work opportunities for all.
Sarah Gammage, Director of Gender, Economic Empowerment and Livelihoods	<b>International Center for Research on Women (ICRW):</b> ICRW is a global research institute whose mission is to empower women, advance gender equality and fight poverty.
Katherine Hay, Deputy Director of Gender Equality	<b>Bill &amp; Melinda Gates Foundation:</b> Also known as the Gates Foundation, this organization is dedicated to improving the quality of life for individuals around the world.
Nidal Karim, Senior Advisor for Gender and Empowerment Impact	<b>CARE USA:</b> CARE is a global humanitarian organization providing disaster relief to areas in crisis, while providing long-term solutions to poverty around the world.
Christopher Kuonqui, Founder and Managing Partner	<b>Zero Poverty Solutions:</b> Zero Poverty Solutions supports international organizations, the United Nations system, NGOs and government agencies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
Ximena Echeverria Magariños, Monitoring and Evaluation Coordinator	<b>CARE International:</b> CARE International is a global confederation of 14 members working together to fight poverty in 94 countries.
Emily Courey Pryor, Executive Director	<b>Data 2X:</b> Data2X is named for the power women have to multiply progress in their societies. Its mission is to improve the quality, availability and use of gender data in order to make a practical difference in the lives of women and girls worldwide.
Susana Martínez-Restrepo, Managing Partner and Director of Research and Development	<b>Core Women:</b> Core Women aims at achieving women's economic empowerment and gender equality for women who want to develop the necessary skills to reach their potential. Core Women is based in the U.S. and Colombia.
Jessica Mayberry, Founder and Executive Director	<b>Video Volunteers:</b> Video Volunteers is an international media and human rights NGO that promotes community media to enable citizen participation in marginalized and poor communities around the world.
Esther Njuguna-Mungai, Gender Specialist	<b>Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research (CGIAR):</b> CGIAR is a global partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for a food-secured future. Esther is based in the Kenya office of the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).
Margarita Beneke de Sanfeliú, Director of Research and Investigation	<b>Salvadoran Foundation for Economic and Social Development (FUSADES):</b> FUSADES is an independent center of thought and development, committed to the progress and well-being of all Salvadorans.
Araba Sey, Principal Research Fellow	<b>United Nations University (UNU):</b> The mission of UNU is to contribute, through collaborative research and education, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems of human survival, development and welfare that are the concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States.
Ratna Sudarshan, Trustee and Former Director	<b>Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST):</b> ISST is dedicated to conducting research and action programs to promote social justice and equity for the underprivileged with a focus on women. ISST is a nonprofit NGO located in India.
Chantal Umuhoza, Founder and Executive Director	<b>SPECTRA:</b> SPECTRA is a young-feminist organization based in Rwanda that promotes feminist perspectives in research, advocacy and policy that focus on women and girls' lives.
Mayssam Zaaroura, Women's Rights Knowledge Specialist	<b>Oxfam Canada:</b> Oxfam is a confederation of 20 independent charitable organizations focusing on the alleviation of global poverty. Oxfam is led by Oxfam International, based in Oxford, England.

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# APPENDIX C: LITERATURE REVIEWED BY SECTOR

## Gender and Development

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