Agenda setting brief - 2

HOW CGIAR INTERVENTIONS CAN ENABLE POLICIES AND INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS

For Gender-Equitable Food, Land and Water Systems

BY
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CGIAR GENDER EQUALITY AND INCLUSION

CGIAR POLICY INNOVATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

Agrifood systems are at the heart of climate crises (CGIAR System Organization 2021). On the one hand, climate crises are leading to unprecedented pressures on food, land and water (FLW) systems, which impact a growing world population, estimated to reach 9-10 billion by 2050. On the other hand, unsustainable agriculture is also a key driver of climate change.

In response to this polycrisis, the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy (CGIAR System Organization 2021) calls for a systemic transformation of FLW systems, including changes to policies, institutions and mechanisms. The CGIAR is committed to being a "champion of change" in leveraging science and innovation for a "radical realignment" of FLW systems.

Drawing on the significant complementarity between gender-transformative approaches and transformative policy and institutional change processes, the focus of this brief is to demonstrate how gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) principles can provide a framework for transforming FLW systems. In this context, this brief contributes to the CGIAR agenda of a radical realignment of FLW systems by introducing scientific, transdisciplinary methods designed to tackle gender inequality and social exclusion.

A (gender) transformative policy challenges the status quo of power (im)balances at the policy and institutional level, where systemic and structural inequalities are rooted (Harvey and Safier 2021). Transformation is achieved by changing top-down policymaking to one of co-creation with end users in all their diversity.

Institutional transformation is "a profound change within an institution which, therefore, also affects the outside environment. It encompasses changes in the basic values and beliefs that are dominant in a certain institution," -- i.e., the institutional logic -- "as well as changes in the rules and regulations that lead to certain working results" (EIGE 2016, 4).

Gender gaps in FLW systems are a key contributor to gaps in agricultural productivity and other economic indicators. It is pointed out that closing these gaps will increase production by 20-30 percent, which translates to urgently needed economic and social gains (FAO 2011). But why do these gaps exist and persist? Doss and Quisumbing (2019) note from research across sub-Saharan Africa that within the same agroecological locations, there are disparities in returns from agrifood systems managed by female and by male farmers. The consistently lower rates of agricultural productivity of female farmers are not because women farmers are less efficient (UN Women 2019). This gap persists because FLW policies and institutions have historically ignored the gendered dimensions of access to resources, inputs, technologies, capital, markets and necessary institutional support systems.

The UN's 2023 Gender Snapshot reveals uneven commitments to gender and social inclusion across sectors. This results in gender-blind policies and strategies, a lag in gender-equitable leadership and decision-making, and insufficient investments in gender equality initiatives. "Gender" has been included in food systems policy documents for decades. Nonetheless, a gender-equitable FLW landscape has failed to materialize in practice, in part because policy and institutions have been resilient to change, remaining patriarchal and colonial (Collins 2018; Moseley 2024). A "productivity first" paradigm in agricultural development has resulted in significant ecological impacts. It is reported that agrifood systems are collapsing under the weight of extractive and myopically "growth- first" agendas (Allaire and Daviron 2018; Larson 2016). Although inadequately issues related to inclusion – including and beyond gender – however, do lie at the core of the new paradigm for more sustainable agrifood systems. "Despite the enormous energy devoted to generating the right policy models in development, strangely little attention is given to the relationship between these [policy] models and the practices and events that they are expected to generate or legitimize" (Mosse 2004, 639). In the sections below, we discuss how these blind spots impact the implementation of policies resulting in outcomes contrary to policy intent.

Even when there are efforts to include women, multi-layered complexities, social norms and cultures make it hard to achieve change on the ground. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, efforts to include women in local land governance activities have proven ineffective, as local, patriarchal norms stymie change (Whitehead and Tsikata 2003). In India, a social protection scheme that hired rural female laborers on public works projects, resulted unfortunately in increased gender-based violence (Amaral et al. 2015). And, in the case of the Canadian International Development Policies, a focus on feminist principles failed to translate to practice due to existing gaps in organizational capacities, their cultures and values (Delorme and Rao 2024; Güezmes and Castelán 2024). There is also the case of «overoptimism» that international policies will be matched by national and subnational willingness to change (Hudson et al. 2019).

A focus on gender transformative change is not simply about adding in women and stirring, nor is it only about addressing gender inequalities at household and community levels or integrating a gender paragraph to agricultural policies or interventions. But transformative approaches are about addressing inequalities in the complexity of policy processes, institutional structures and cultures which are entrenched in social norms and behaviors. Transforming FLW systems requires intervening in the logic of policies (i.e., the underlying beliefs, assumptions and values that shape policy processes), second on the policies themselves, and third on the institutions and organizations that implement the policies. A GESI-centered transformative approach can offer guidance to the CGIAR Science Programs, particularly the following issues in the Policies Innovations Program:

- **state of knowledge on (gender-) transformative approaches for FLW policies and institutions**
- **gaps and challenges in conceptualizing, implementing and scaling gender-transformative approaches for FLW policies and institutions, and**
- **forward-thinking research reimagining FLW systems.**

Cassava starch processing in Colombia's southwestern Cauca department © Neil Palmer (CIAT)

STATE OF KNOWLEDGE: THEORETICAL GROUNDING AND PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

Intersecting challenges of climate change, income inequality, economic and political shifts result in multifaceted ecological and social problems, still there is little evidence on how to tackle these challenges at scale.

Popular understanding of these challenges, including proposed solutions, are mostly "underpinned by explicit or implicit ideology of [a select few] actors driving the debate" on "what should be done, how and why" (Salmivaara and Kibler 2020). In this brief, these explicit and implicit ideologies are referred to as the "Spirit of Policy", drawing from French philosopher Montesquieu's ideas around "Spirit of Law."

"Spirit of Policy" refers to the cultures, values and norms embodied by organizations and key decision-making actors. These social currents underpin, enable, and/or disable policies and their actions, influencing what is deemed important and what is deemed peripheral (Bicchieri 2005). In a real-world example, an assessment of public policies and organizations in Nepal's water sector (Shrestha and Clement 2019) found that Nepal's public water sector faces a critical implementation gap despite decades of gender mainstreaming in policies, due to a prevailing masculine culture, institutional barriers, professional norms, and gendered workspaces.

This example highlights how the "Spirit of Policy" concept lies at the heart of systemic transformations – which can translate to intentionally acting on values and beliefs that are dominant in a certain institution, as well as changes in institutional rules and regulations that lead to (un)desired outcomes (EIGE 2016). In sum, if we want to achieve transformative change, the focus must shift to structural transformations.

Transformative change thus requires a critical examination of organizational policies, practices and procedures. This need is recognized in Principle 3 of the CGIAR Workplaces Framework for Gender, Diversity and Inclusion: "We recognize that society's structural inequalities can be unconsciously reproduced in the workplace and may be due to many factors" (CGIAR System Organization 2020).

Naila Kabeer's Social Relations Approach (SRA) provides an institutional analysis framework that allows for such a critical examination. Kabeer explains how institutions at varying scales – from the household, local communities, markets, official and other organizations – reinforce and reproduce social differences and inequalities. This is why well-intentioned gender and social inclusion policies get diluted, re-interpreted and depoliticized over time and space.

SRA also highlights the importance of clarity of intention in development policy. In the context of FLW policy, this means recognizing that productivism is the intention – or the spirit – behind the vast majority of agrifood systems policy and institutional spaces. Transforming this root spirit is paramount to inclusive and sustainable FLW transformation. "Production-first" priorities impact ecological resilience (Steffen et al. 2015) and disallow focusing on GESI. Food systems innovations across value chains, as well as climate-mitigating interventions are shaped by an overt economic focus for increasing productivity, which disallows tackling poverty and social inequalities (Coles and Mitchell 2011; Njuki et al. 2011; Barrientos 2014; Allaire and Daviron, 2018; Larson 2016). Policies that enable inclusive and sustainable food systems will need to have a core focus on socio-ecological resilience (Löw 2020).

Grass Pea Production in Odisha © IRRI

CANADA'S FEMINIST INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE POLICY (FIAP) DILUTED IN ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Launched in 2017, Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) aims to empower women and girls by enabling protection and promotion of their rights as a core focus of Canada's international assistance. The policy recognized that achieving this aim would require a significant shift across institutions. However, there was no complementary strategy, one which supports and triggers changes in institutions and relationships, to achieve intended outcomes.

Delorme and Rao (2024) identify several gaps in the FIAP intention and outcomes:

Organizational capacity to implement this policy was uneven in terms of knowledge, skills, experience, and resources available to meet their commitments to gender equality –both internally and amongst partners. The organizational culture and values, including on operations and restructuring, were not enabling for feminist policies.

An increase in internal investments towards gender equality did not necessarily transform organizational climates. Due to limited staff capacity for gender equality analysis, its integration across programs resulted in additional burdens on the program's implementation team, and increased dependence on short-term external consultations.

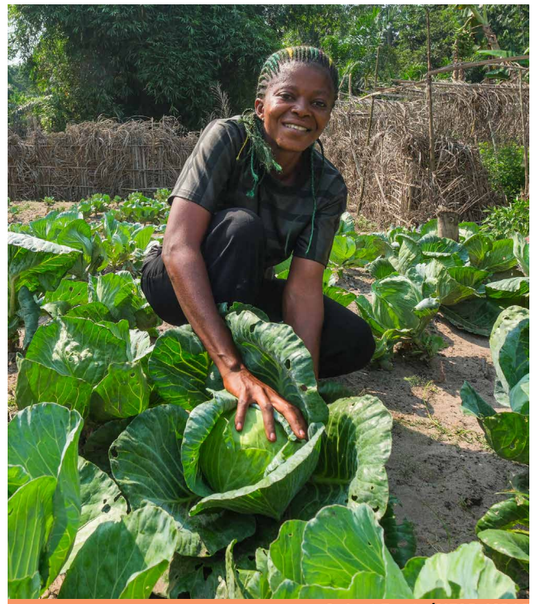
Developing long-term partnerships with organizations in the Global South to address these goals remained a challenge under the existing funding modalities. Funding for building new, innovative partnerships was limited.

Closing gaps between FIAP's intention and outcomes will require a transformation in organizational culture, climate, and value commitments to create a more enabling environment for gender transformation.

This analysis, while robust, does not adequately consider the complexity of the landscape of how policies translate (or not) to practice. Especially in relation to international development, there is significant ambiguity on how strategic national and sub-national policy actors "stand to gain or to lose… (or how policy goals) incentivize (them) to strategically change their behavior" (Mueller 2020; 311). Mueller (ibid) explains that many policies fail because of lack of capacity, resources, governance gaps, lack of good will, but more simply put – because of the lack of a shared policy vision and collaborative design processes. David Mosse (2004) points out that, "Despite the enormous energy devoted to generating the right policy models in development, strangely little attention is given to the relationship between these models and the practices and events that they are expected to generate or legitimize".

Canada's FIAP is a clear example of how policy outcomes are shaped by whether institutions at scale are responsive to gender equality (Kardam 1995) – but it is far from the only example. Similarly ambitious changes were made to water policies in South Africa, aimed to reform formalized racial injustice that impaired water access and control under the apartheid regime. Recognizing discriminatory laws and practices of the past, the National Water Act (1998) declared water a natural resource belonging to all. Unfortunately, these policy intentions did not have a complementary spirit and leadership, and staff did not necessarily share this transformative political vision (Schreiner 2013).

The above examples provide insight into how gender equality and social inclusion objectives are often diluted because institutional social norms, values and practices tend to align to the status quo. There is "bending, stretching, fixing and shrinking [of] the meaning of gender equality redirected towards alternative ends (e.g., fostering economic growth or national branding) and [the outcomes] no longer promote gender equality" (Myyry and Siivonen 2024, 3). The same can be said of current visions for sustainable intensification of food systems. Increasing attention to sustainable intensification is limited to apolitical techno-economic prescriptions, with little integration of social and political contexts (White 2014).



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GAPS AND CHALLENGES IN EXISTING APPROACHES AND METHODS

The CGIAR Strategic Results Framework (2016-2030) frames CGIAR's core business as: "[delivering] science and innovation that advances the transformation of FLW systems in a climate crisis".

Aligning to this goal, the Strategic Results Framework places the transformation of institutional culture high on the list of priorities. In practice, however, the focus is primarily on transformative thinking as relating to science impact, innovations and outcomes, and not to the transformation of institutional cultures, which – as demonstrated above – are an essential complement if systemic transformation is to be achieved. Moreover, detailed strategies for responding to issues of inclusive cultures, values, and conscious and unconscious bias, are still rudimentary in their framing and application.

The framework and approach we outline in this brief suggest that the science of transformative thinking is shaped by institutional values, cultures and norms. These institutional values, in turn, are a lever on individual and institutional outcomes (PWC 2016). Applying a feminist analytical framework, Menon Sen et al. 2021 identify that institutions reflect and replicate social hierarchies of power and privilege (see Figure 1).

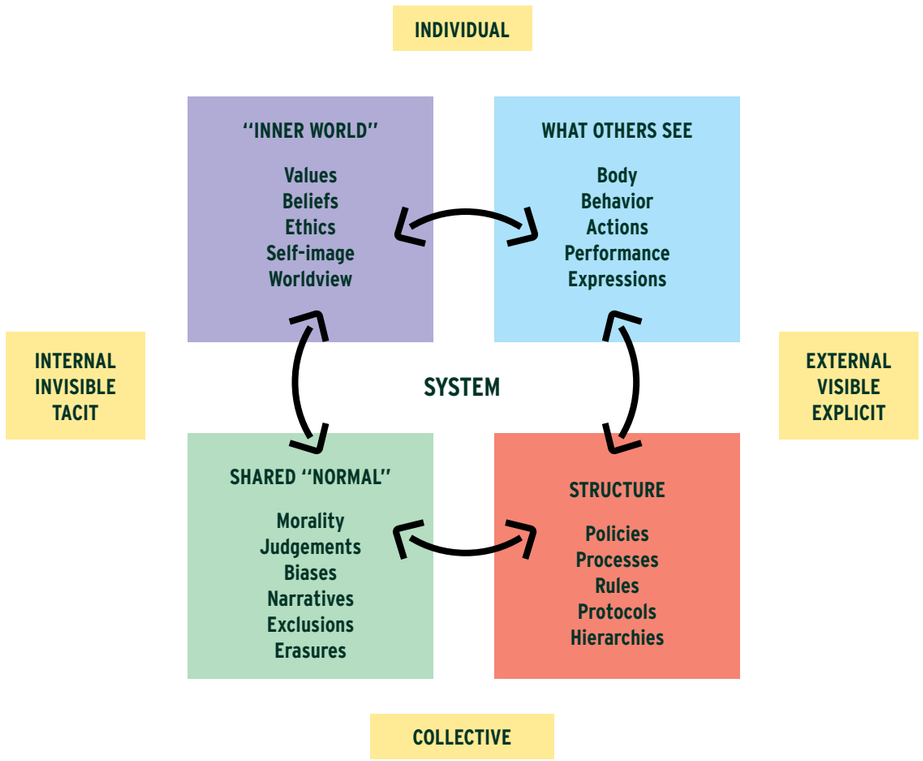

Figure 1: The Four Quadrant Lens Analytical Framework (Menon Sen et al. 2021)

The four quadrants explain what we imply as the "Spirit of Policy" - how institutions regulate formal and informal spaces. This matrix explains how and why policy outcomes vary widely from the intended policy (Menon Sen et al. 2021). This framework has been applied in two different types of analyses within the CGIAR. Figure 2 outlines an exercise with climate science researchers to assess the "invisible facts and unasked questions" shaping climate science research. The analysis shows how individual biases and values, as well as power and hierarchy shape "coalition of knowledges", and what is prioritized (Leeuwis et al. 2017).

Figure 2: Exercise with CGIAR Climate Science Researchers (2017)

Applying the same framework, Menon Sen and colleagues (2021) map some of the reasons why, despite robust research and evidence, gender transformative research has not permeated across centers, programs and initiatives within the CGIAR (Figure 3).

Individual, internal
Self - "Inner world"

- Patriarchal conditioning
- Notions of self-worth: "Am I scientific enough?"
- Insecurities about gender / sexuality / ethnicity / class, etc.: "How do colleagues see me?"
- Perceptions of one's own power and privileges: "Do I have the right to ask this question?"

Individual, external
Self - "Body, behavior"

- Eagerness to fit in leads to self-imposed silence on sticky issues (e.g., for women, people from the global South)
- Finding "safe space" only with similar others (language, ethnicity, discipline, research interests)
- Social scientists under pressure to prove scientific credentials
- Lack of diversity (gender, race, ethnicity) in the workplace
- Competitive professional relationship
- Rigid boundaries between work/life

Collective, internal
Culture

- Professionalism understood as apolitical, dispassionate, detached from outcomes
- Hierarchy of disciplines - social sciences, gender seen as "soft"
- Real science = "facts", not stories
- Political correctness, lip service to gender, inclusion - no real dialogue
- Questioning of scientific shibboleths (e.g., "objectivity") discouraged
- Unconscious biases (in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, etc.) condoned and ignored
- "Systems approach", "transformation" are buzzwords - no common understanding

Collective, external
Structure - "rules of the game"

- Assumptions underlying in the Mission statement:
  - "Science can provide solutions to hunger"
  - People must fall in line with scientific solutions
- Structures based on silos (e.g., crops, disciplines, regions)
- Hierarchy based on professional credentials
- Advancement based on technical outputs (e.g., publications) rather than outcomes (e.g., change on the ground)
- Weak accountability mechanisms
- Outcome tracking is reductive and superficial
- Bureaucratic control of resources undermines researchers' agency

Figure 3: **Biases and assumptions that can underlie GESI research culture within the CGIAR**

Dairy entrepreneur John Ngasha with Lydia Kimachas from the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, Nakuru, Kenya
© ILRI/Georgina Smith

FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

Going forward, within the CGIAR, there is need first and foremost for consensus on what makes for transformative outcomes. What mechanisms within FLW systems will enable institutional cultures to focus on, tackle and assess gender equality and social inclusion?

A GESI lens will require changing the "Spirit of Policy" – changing deeply rooted social norms, behaviors, cultures, values and priorities, including atypical ways of knowing, doing and learning.

The CGIAR Science Program for Policy Innovations aims to achieve "policies and institutions for FLW systems that drive rapid, inclusive transformation, fostering futures where people and the planet thrive" (CGIAR 2024). This bold ambition will be served well if a transformative gender and social inclusion agenda lies at the core of this program.

This would translate to a commitment to transform systems that reproduce the business-as-usual relations of power, privilege and discrimination, and a shift towards institutional practices that support long-term partnerships based on mutual respect, with honest, and open communication. Working through transformative partnerships means knowledge and action cooperation with organizations and grassroots movements (Delorme and Rao 2024).

The Policy Innovations SP agenda focuses on changing attitudes and policy processes. However, gender and social inclusion receive only cursory mention in current SP documentation. There is also very little in writing that shows how "intentional" change in institutional structures and cultures will be pursued. We know well that a lack of explicit attention to these issues can result in well-meaning but ineffective outcomes.

The ideas we propose below are not prescriptive but meant to enable reflection on how a GESI focus can help operationalize transformative change.

BUILDING KNOW-HOW AND CAPACITY FOR TRANSFORMATIVE SYSTEMS THINKING

Well-intentioned FLW policies will not result in transformative outcomes if actors and institutions tasked with implementing these policies do not understand and commit to transformative change processes. The way forward is not simply by technical training and capacity strengthening, but by changing policy processes (Leeuwis et al. 2014). Such changes are often resisted, sometimes with a backlash (Hillenbrand et al. 2022). Acting on these challenges will require enabling institutions (and institutional actors) to understand complexities of change processes, how things happen in dynamic contexts, and why co-design and collaboration is part of the innovation challenge (Leeuwis et al. 2014).

GESI GOES HAND IN HAND WITH TRANSFORMATIVE SYSTEMS THINKING

Gender-impact assessments can serve to identify strategic pathways for scaling, avoiding unintended outcomes of FLW policies, and strategies (Himmelweit 2002). For example, accountability mechanisms which require systematic engagement with all key stakeholders, including marginalized groups, can improve communication, transparency and contribute towards better assessments of intervention feasibility (Mechkova and Carlitz 2021). Likewise, synthesis approaches can be used to assess positive incremental changes, as well as build long-term pathways to transformative change (Holderness et al. 2021). A synthesis of evidence on social and ecological resilience from micro to macro institutional levels across FLW interventions can facilitate the Science Program's ability to ensure that actions are aligned with One CGIAR goals.

Taking these issues into account, we identify the following questions as critical to thinking about pathways to transformative FLW systems:

1. How can nuanced and plural evidence on policies and policy processes inform FLW agenda setting?

A growing number of countries, including CGIAR core donors, have adopted or are adopting more inclusive policies: reversing unequal rights to resources, work, technology, capital, and basic services, and acknowledging caregiving as work in local, national and global economies. These countries are revising the scope for transformative partnerships with grassroots actors and informed citizens, shaped by norms of accountability and transparency. A critical question to ask is how can the CGIAR transformative agenda use high-quality and plural evidence to intentionally apply principles of accountability and transparency in FLW settings?

CGIAR should be at the vanguard of research to generate evidence that captures the diverse needs of FLW actors through participatory and multidisciplinary methods and synthesize this evidence for FLW policies and institutions at scale. This robust evidence will need to be leveraged with external and internal champions of transformative and systems-thinking approaches, to rethink socially- and ecologically-resilient FLW policies and outcomes.

2. How can CGIAR catalyze clarity and consensus on (gender) transformative change in FLW policies and institutions?

Transformation, an ambiguous term, has become a development buzz word without a clear operational definition. There is a need to develop guidelines on what constitutes (gender) transformative FLW systems, and the CGIAR is uniquely positioned to take on this challenge. Upon developing guidelines for what constitutes gender-transformative FLW systems, CGIAR can guide institutions to address the question: How can a particular policy/project be gender transformative? CGIAR should recommend all policies and programs to explicitly ask the above question in their design phase.

At its heart, "transformative change" requires an "orchestration of interaction, exploration, learning and experimentation at various interconnected levels. Together… these coherent combinations of 'hardware' or technical innovations, 'orgware' or social innovations, and 'software' or adapted mindsets… enable an institution's capacity to innovate" (Leeuwis et al. 2014, 8). A very important part of this change process is system-wide "change in mindset among interdependent actors in terms of their knowledge, understanding, discourse, vision, attitudes, etc." (ibid., 10).

An actionable pathway towards transformative change requires embedding gender equality and social inclusion into FLW systems science, practice and innovation. In a recent review of more than 100,000 research articles on agriculture, fewer than 5 percent were concerned with problems faced by smallholder farmers (Nature 2020). Tackling this oversight will require organization-wide conversations on institutional cultures by creating opportunities for dialogue across disciplinary, hierarchical, and geographical divides. The CGIAR needs to spell out a powerful shared narrative on why systemic transformation is necessary, and how actions are being taken internally and with partners, to help advance more socially and ecologically resilient FLW systems.

Laos cattle keeping © ILRI/Stevie Mann

3. How can we start systemic change in policy processes and institutions to spark structural change for more inclusive and sustainable FLW systems?

In translating theory to praxis, there is often confusion about where or how to begin. Guidelines and entry points codesigned with institutional partners can help move toward more systemic transformation processes. As discussed above, FLW policies and institutions have historically pursued "production-first" agendas. Moving toward more ecological and human-centered models can result in disincentives, destabilization, and backlash. Overcoming these challenges can start with identifying what has not worked, why, and how. This should be used as a guideline for policy makers so that we do not repeat the past mistakes of policy interventions (Lopez et al. 2023). For example, most food systems projects and research focus on new technologies with limited consideration of their end users. "Every year, food rots in the field, or later on, because of inadequate storage. But nearly 90% of interventions aiming to reduce these losses looked at how well a particular tool, such as a pesticide or a storage container, worked in isolation. Only around 10% compared the many existing agricultural practices to evaluate what works and what doesn't" (Nature 2020, para. 9). This signals a clear need for "changing priorities of international agricultural-research funding" (ibid., para. 12).

Transformative policies must meaningfully integrate the knowledge and worldviews of all, and particularly end users, in all their diversity. Unfortunately, social and cultural barriers and local knowledge(s) are rarely sufficiently included in expert-led designs of transformative change (Saxer 2017). Closing this loop requires a shift towards experiential knowledge (from women, indigenous peoples, and other marginalized communities) alongside academic and scientific knowledge. CGIAR can and must move the needle on this essential component of transforming FLW systems.

4. What approaches can CGIAR develop and test to promote policy relevance and accountability?

There is a need for a broader range of tools and methods to monitor transformative, i.e. sustainable and inclusive change outcomes of FLW systems. CGIAR gender researchers have made notable progress through the development of innovative tools such as the WEAI, WELI, and WEAGov, as well as guidelines to support their meaningful implementation. However, very few innovations within the CGIAR apply these tools. This is in line with evidence showing that the gender data gap in agriculture research for development (AR4D) stems from a lack of political will and systemic biases regarding gender equality, rather than a lack of practical approaches (Collantes et al. 2018; Mullinax et al. 2018). This lack of will manifests in funding priorities and knowledge demand or lack thereof amongst national governments. These are areas that require further work within the CGIAR, so that evidence is generated on new frontiers of more inclusive and sustainable FLW systems, so this data can be used to transform the rules of the game.

The CGIAR cannot rewrite the course of global FLW policy on its own. Building transformative FLW policy necessitates collaboration with institutions and actors representing diverse stakeholder voices, needs and concerns. Much of the theoretical work on codesign and collaboration has already been outlined by researchers, and civil society actors. Forming strategic alliances will be critical in a changing climate, to enable a "Spirit of Transformative Policy" towards more sustainable, equitable, and resilient FLW systems.

Products based on local grains are prepared with devices such as this processing unit © Stephan Gladieu / World Bank

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Citation: Deepa Joshi, Ezaboo Beniwal, Haley Zaremba, Emily Myers, Meseret Tsige, Faustina Obeng Adomaa and Sanju Koirala. 2025. *How CGIAR interventions can enable policies and institutional mechanisms for gender-equitable food, land and water systems.* Agenda Setting Brief - 2. Nairobi, Kenya: CGIAR Gender Equality and Inclusion, CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The authors gratefully acknowledge Alan Nicol (IWMI), Lyla Mehta (IDS Sussex) and Abhishek Das (ICRISAT) for their critical review and thoughtful inputs to the draft brief. We would also like to thank all the participants of the CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform Science Exchange 2024 who provided inputs at the initial stages of document development.

The CGIAR Gender Equality and Inclusion Accelerator is also grateful for the support of CGIAR Trust Fund Contributors: www.cgiar.org/funders.

ABOUT THIS SERIES

This brief produced jointly by the CGIAR Gender Equality and Inclusion Accelerator and the CGIAR Science Programs, is one in a series of agenda-setting briefs that aim to further develop an agenda for strategic areas of gender and social inclusion research within the new portfolio of CGIAR Science Programs and Accelerators, and inform the development of gender and inclusion strategies for these moving forward. The briefs are the culmination of a collabora- tive work that started during the CGIAR GENDER Science Exchange 2024 that convened 72 gender researchers from across the CGIAR to bring together experiences, ideas and insights from across centres, that can help in developing a gender strategy for the SP in the future.

About CGIAR Gender Equality and Inclusion (GENDER Accelerator)

CGIAR Gender Equality and Inclusion is CGIAR's Accelerator working to put equality and inclusion at the heart of food systems research and development. The Accelerator leads strategic and innovative research that advances gender equality, opportunities for youth, and social inclusion across CGIAR's Food, Land and Water Systems portfolio.

Cover: A woman uses a rice grinding machine to produce rice meal outside Siem Reap - Cambodia
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