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Using the Social Relations Approach to capture complexity in women's empowerment: using gender analysis in the Fish on Farms project in Cambodia

Emily Hillenbrand, Pardis Lakzadeh, Ly Sokhoin, Zaman Talukder, Timothy Green and Judy McLean¹

Gender-analysis frameworks and tools provide a pre-designed methodology which can be used for the purposes of monitoring, evaluation, and learning, as well as for research undertaken for other reasons by planners, practitioners, and academic researchers. This article focuses on the use of Naila Kabeer's concept, the Social Relations Approach, to frame a baseline gender analysis of a food security project undertaken in Cambodia. The Fish on Farms project was designed to establish evidence of the impact of homestead food production, which included fishponds, on nutritional status, food security, food intake, and livelihoods. Integral to the objectives was the need to understand how the project activities affect gender equality and the empowerment of women. The Social Relations Approach was chosen to explore gender relations in context, and to understand better the subjective meanings of empowerment and the pathways to it.

Los marcos analíticos y las herramientas basados en el género conforman una metodología prediseñada que puede ser útil tanto para fines de monitoreo, evaluación y aprendizaje (mea), como para la investigación realizada con otros fines por planeadores, operadores y académicos. El presente artículo se centra en el uso del concepto de Enfoque de Relaciones Sociales (ers) propuesto por Naila Kabeer, el cual proporciona un marco para el análisis de género que sirvió de punto de partida para un proyecto de seguridad alimentaria implementado en Camboya. El proyecto Peces en las Parcelas (pp) fue concebido con el fin de brindar evidencia en relación al impacto que tiene la producción de alimentos en parcelas que también contaban con estanques de peces, en términos del estado nutricional, de la seguridad alimentaria, del consumo de alimentos y de los medios de vida de los participantes en el proyecto. Un aspecto fundamental de los objetivos estuvo dado por la necesidad de comprender cómo las actividades del proyecto afectaron aspectos relacionados con la igualdad de género y el empoderamiento de las mujeres. Se optó por el uso del Enfoque de Relaciones Sociales para posibilitar el análisis de las relaciones de género en un contexto específico y comprender mejor los significados subjetivos del empoderamiento y de los métodos para alcanzarlo.

Les cadres et outils d'analyse du genre fournissent une méthodologie pré-conçue qui peut être utilisée aux fins du suivi, de l'évaluation et de l'apprentissage, ainsi que pour les recherches entreprises pour d'autres raisons par les planificateurs, les praticiens et les chercheurs universitaires. Cet article se concentre sur l'utilisation du concept de Naila Kabeer, l'approche des relations sociales (Social Relations Approach – SRA), pour formuler une analyse de genre de référence dans le cadre d'un projet de sécurité alimentaire entrepris au Cambodge. Le projet Fish on Farms (FoF) a été conçu pour établir des preuves de l'impact de la production alimentaire familiale, qui englobait des étangs à poissons, sur l'état nutritionnel, la sécurité alimentaire, la consommation d'aliments et les moyens de subsistance. Une partie intégrante des objectifs était la nécessité de comprendre l'incidence qu'ont les activités de projet sur l'égalité entre les sexes et l'autonomisation des femmes. L'approche des relations sociales a été choisie pour examiner les rapports entre les sexes dans leur contexte et pour mieux comprendre les significations subjectives de l'autonomisation et les voies permettant d'y parvenir.

Key words: gender analysis; Social Relations Approach; food security; homestead food production; gender planning

Introduction

Gender analysis is a critical element of development planning, policy, and practice. Many examples exist of projects which have foundered on lack of understanding of the gender division of labour and power relations. In response to growing awareness of the link between gender inequality and poverty, and in response to lobbying from feminists and women's movements in the global South and North, development organisations adopted gender-analysis frameworks and tools to help them undertake gender analysis as part of their project planning, implementation, and evaluation.²

It is essential to see the selection of a gender-analysis framework as a highly political decision – not as a mere technocratic choice. Different gender-analysis frameworks and tools have strengths and weaknesses, and reflect a particular understanding of the relationships between gender roles and gender inequality, and between gender inequality and the economic and social marginalisation of households and communities. This article focuses on the operationalisation of Naila Kabeer's (1994) Social Relations Approach (SRA) to carry out a baseline gender analysis of a livelihoods-based food security intervention, the Fish on Farms (FoF) research project in Cambodia.

The 22-month FoF project began in June 2012.³ FoF is an intervention focusing on improving the food security, nutritional status, and the livelihoods of food-insecure households in Cambodia, by using homestead food production (HFP).⁴ FoF aims to generate rigorous scientific evidence demanded by the development community on whether a food-based, livelihoods intervention can have a measurable impact on food

security and nutrition, particularly for women and young children. But in addition, designers of the project anticipate that this livelihoods-based intervention could and should have wider impact on the lives of women in particular, furthering gender equality and the empowerment of women. A crucial second objective of the baseline research was therefore to assess the impact of FoF on women's empowerment, and to gain a greater understanding of gender relations in the Cambodian context. The hypothesis of the HFP model was that the principal routes to women's empowerment are through increased human capital (knowledge of sustainable food production and caregiving practices), and through increased control over income from sales of surplus fish or vegetables, which was thought to allow women greater potential influence over household decisions (primarily around food production and consumption).

The baseline gender analysis which we are discussing in this article offered an opportunity to explore gender relations in context, and to understand better the subjective meanings of empowerment and the likely pathways to it. The first section of this article briefly focuses on why we chose Naila Kabeer's SRA, reasoning that it offered a better way forward for monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) of projects aiming to support women's empowerment than other gender-analysis tools and frameworks. We then discuss the FoF project and its different research objectives. We share the FoF gender analysis, and highlight a few of the findings that emerged from this process that might not have surfaced through other methodologies. We discuss some of the practical challenges and methodological implications of applying this approach as a gender learning tool, both for the project and for development organisations.

Gender-analysis frameworks and the SRA

The range of gender-analysis frameworks developed over the decades have different characteristics reflecting the different organisational context in which each was developed; different attitudes to the role of women in development, and the role of development in the lives of women; and difference on the question of whether and how development agencies should engineer, or stimulate, change in gender relations. Categories and terms used in the different gender-analysis frameworks reflect very different understandings of women's interests and needs, the relationship between gender inequality and poverty, and understandings of poverty itself and its causes. Often there is a focus on women only, rather than on the social and economic dynamics of gender relations; a lack of focus on the underlying beliefs which enforce gender inequality; and lack of attention to the underlying unequal power relations which explain and perpetuate gendered roles and responsibilities. Much depends on the skill and motivation of the development planner; the use of some gender-roles analyses can reflect a 'tick-box' approach that shuts down the questioning and essentially political

lens which is needed when working towards gender inequality and the empowerment of women (Hochfeld and Bassadien 2007; MacDonald et al. 1999).

In addition, the fact that gender-analysis frameworks tend to focus on a 'snapshot' of gender issues can create a static understanding of gender roles and relations that may fail to capture the dynamic nature of gendered social relations (March et al. 1999). A focus on assessing gender roles and gender gaps suggests straightforward implementation solutions – through asset, skill, or social capital provision. However, failure to understand the dynamic nature of gendered relations and the subtleties and complexities of bargaining processes can lead planners to misinterpret the ways an intervention may affect men and women. These outcomes may not necessarily represent a step backwards for women; they may be an indication of positive bargaining processes in which women use the resources provided through the project to obtain a meaningful achievement (Okali 2012). However, MEL needs to be founded on more accurate information about women's interests, needs, and preferences in order to avoid women needing to subvert projects to gain outcomes that do not fit with the planners' theories of change and measures of empowerment.

In our baseline gender analysis of the FoF project, outlined in the next section, we sought to adapt and operationalise key concepts from the SRA. In contrast to many of the gender-analysis frameworks which focus on roles and responsibilities rather than power relations, Naila Kabeer's SRA is a consciously feminist approach. It aims to capture the complexity of gender–power relations, the gendered nature of institutions, and the interactions between policies and practices at different institutional locations. However, this approach is far less frequently used by practitioners than more conventional gender-analysis frameworks, which is likely to be partly due to that fact that it is less prescriptive, tries to challenge practitioners not to lose sight of complexity, and the fact that it focuses beyond the grassroots level of household and community to other structural systems that produce and reproduce inequality, including the state and the market.

We wanted to understand how women involved in FoF defined well-being, but in addition we aimed for a richer understanding of how social differences and inequalities (in roles, responsibilities, claims, power) are produced and reproduced in the Cambodian context, and to predict better how the availability of new livelihood resources directed to women through FoF might dislocate or challenge these institutions. In the SRA, Naila Kabeer 'challeng[es] the myth of ideological neutrality, [arguing] that institutions produce, reinforce, and reproduce social difference and inequalities' (March et al. 1999, 105). The SRA focuses on gender biases and norms at the institutional locations of the state, market, community, and family/household. It emphasises the need to focus on change over time, and encourages reflection on the immediate, intermediate, and structural causes of inequalities at the different institutional levels.

The SRA is discussed in detail in Naila Kabeer's now classic text *Reversed Realities* (Kabeer 1994). It employs five key concepts to capture the complex power dynamics

between women and men, and analyses the gendered nature of social institutions. While poor people rely on networks of social relations to survive, social relationships can also reinforce inequality and unequal access to resources. The SRA encourages support to women to foster relationships of solidarity, and challenge and transform relationships which reproduce and maintain inequality. The end goal of the SRA is to help design programmes and policies that enable women to be agents of their own development (March *et al.* 1999). However, the SRA presents some methodological challenges for practitioners. The complexity and multiple levels of analysis, and the focus on gendered structures and institutions, are holistic and theoretically satisfactory but challenging to apply, particularly in a participatory manner.

The FoF project, and our gender baseline research

The FoF project uses a rigorous scientific design; it has been set up as a randomised control trial, and its primary purpose is to measure the impact of two models of HFPO reducing undernutrition among women and children. One is purely focusing on horticulture, while the other adds aquaculture (fish-farming). There is also a control group.

A total of 900 women farmers with children under five were randomly assigned to one of three equal-sized groups of 300 participants each. The first group of 300 participants is following a plant-based horticultural model, promoting home gardens and increased consumption of plant-based micronutrients. The second group is participating in an intervention promoting both home gardens and small-scale aquaculture, to increase access to and intake of animal-source foods. The third group is a control group. Within the two intervention arms, 30 demonstration farms and/or fish-ponds have been established, with one demonstration farm for every ten target beneficiaries. Technical information on aquaculture or horticulture production, nutrition, and infant and young child feeding practices (IYCF) are delivered to the target groups through on-site demonstrations, group sessions, or house-to-house counselling visits.

The baseline–endline survey instruments are designed to gather information on dietary intake and food security using standardised measures including a 24-hour food recall, food production, income, water and sanitation practices, as well as current knowledge, attitudes, and practices on nutrition, aquaculture, and home gardening. Also collected at the baseline stage were indicators of nutritional status of women and children, including biochemical markers for vitamin A and iron status, and anthropometric measures for women and children from which to assess change over time.

The project baseline gender analysis, using the SRA together with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools,⁵ was carried out within the first six months of the project. It was hoped that this would generate lessons for the project's behaviour-change communication (BCC) strategy, which aimed to support women to adopt better nutrition and caregiving practices. The idea was that the gender analysis would

identify entry points for contesting unequal norms and power relations at the household, market, and community levels. We sought to understand processes of symbolic and material renegotiation of gender norms and practices over time. We looked to understand how the project's livelihood intervention fitted into the broader livelihood strategy and economic context, to focus on men's and women's roles in both productive and reproductive work, and to examine the symbolic meanings attached to these roles. We sought to define women's strategic interests, including their own definitions of empowerment and improved well-being. We wanted to examine the conflict and co-operation inherent in gender relations, and to identify the driving forces and processes for positive change. Given that Cambodian women ostensibly control household finances, a particular area of interest was to see what it meant in terms of power relations for women to be in control of income, how and whether this was linked to decision-making control, and how it fitted into and influenced women's bargaining power and strategies. Did this income control have an impact on autonomy? What impact did it have on conflict and co-operation in intra-household relations?

Outside the scope of the project, we knew also that the findings could be reflected on, and insights applied to validate or refine some of the organisation's indicators of women's empowerment used in its standard baseline and endline instruments. In addition, because implementing staff had limited experience of working on gender issues, engaging them in this inquiry was seen as an opportunity to expand their capacity to understand gender relations and thus to implement a more gender-aware project.

In the next section, we focus on the methods we used in our gender analysis in some detail, showing how the SRA and PRA tools were the foundation of the methodology.

Gender analysis methodology and design

The gender analysis was designed and led by Helen Keller International's (HKI) Regional Gender Coordinator (the first author), and was carried out by a team of 11 staff from the FoF project (including both HKI and local NGO staff). Two University of British Columbia students participated in the fieldwork and also assisted in translation, analysis, and write-up of the report.

A four-day training workshop was held in Phnom Penh. The training covered gender analysis key concepts, and allowed participants to practise semi-structured interview skills and use of PRA tools. The fieldwork was carried out in two FonF districts in Prey Veng province,⁶ a highly food-insecure area with high rates of malnutrition.⁷

Three adjacent clusters, each consisting of ten women farmers from a given village model farm site, were selected at random and invited to participate in the research by staff from FoF. Participants came from each of the two operational arms of the project: horticulture-only and horticulture plus aquaculture. At each research site,

approximately 60 respondents took part in the research. Some of them participated in multiple interviews and exercises. Participatory discussions were held separately with groups of women involved in the project as beneficiaries, their husbands, and in some cases, grandmothers. All interviews were recorded, and respondents gave informed consent prior to the discussions.

Research tools and questions

The interview questions were structured around the use of PRA tools to encourage dialogue and involvement of the respondents in the research process. The research focused primarily on the family/household, while also looking at how gender norms and rules play out at the institutional level of the market and in selected community institutions (Table 1).

Analysing and applying the findings

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed from Khmer to English, and coded for cross-referencing. However, primary analysis of the data was conducted in the field with the research team. Each day of data collection was followed by a day of analysis, which involved team members consolidating and checking their notes and following structured analytical guidelines to summarise the critical content and trends, triangulating the perspectives of the different age and gender groups. Following the analysis in the field and the preliminary write-up, a core team of HKI and Organisation to Develop Our Village (ODOV) staff (who are responsible for implementation) participated in a group workshop to reflect on the consolidated gender issues that surfaced during the research. Together, they prioritised the norms and ways of behaving that they considered critical to address through the FoF communications strategy.

The analysis did not perfectly apply all levels of the Social Analysis framework. However, we primarily applied the Social Relations analysis (concept 2 in the SRA, see March *et al.* 1999) and Institutional analysis (concept 3, *ibid.*), examining the institution of the household/family through the interrelated dimensions of social relationships (rules, activities, resources, people, activities, and power). We also focused on the dynamic characteristics of gender relations of institutions – specifically their ability to adapt to changes in the external context through a process of bargaining and negotiation (*ibid.*). We looked at how changes in other institutions such as community and international NGOs, the state, and its education and gender policies as well as the market intersected with the institutional rules at the household and family level. It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss the findings in detail. While our analysis does not capture the level of detail and complexity and broader institutional scope of the framework, it brought out key relational aspects that that might otherwise have been missed in a roles analysis.

Table 1: *Tools and topics*

<p><i>Historical timeline of gender trends.</i> Administered to male and female elders, female beneficiaries, and male spouses, the historical timeline asked respondents to recall a chronological history of significant trends in gender relations and norms in their communities in their lifetimes.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i> Typically used in sustainable livelihoods assessments to look at environmental and natural resource management trends in a community, this timeline captured the processes by which gender norms change. It highlighted the role of institutions (state, NGOs) in promoting change; the power holders in the community who resist and/or promote change; and the consequences for gender 'rebels' or those who challenge gender norms.</p>
<p><i>Seasonal calendar.</i> Men and women created an agriculture calendar to describe agriculture practices, income-generating activities, food insecurity, peak labour periods, and challenges in agriculture.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i> While the project focuses on a single, women-focused livelihood activity (aquaculture, homestead food production), this tool situated that activity within its broader livelihoods context and looked at interactions and interrelations between the livelihood activities in which men and women engage. The questions probed how women and men valued and balanced income and consumption needs; how women and men got technical support for their activities; the labour intensity of different activities; and the importance of non-economic uses (gift-giving). By asking men as well as women about their priorities and challenges, the research sought to identify areas of co-operation and agreement, as well as specific areas where women wanted to negotiate change.</p>
<p><i>Fish-ranking exercise.</i> Using pictures of the fish species being promoted by the FoF project, the respondents (beneficiaries only) ranked the different species according to a number of factors, including taste, ease of rearing, marketability, and nutritional value.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i> While the primary purpose of this exercise was to identify potential barriers to the acceptability of the fish species provided by the project, the questioning also explored women's subjective notions of health and well-being, and surfaced their simultaneous interests in pursuing aquaculture as a market venture as well as subsistence and consumption activity. It explored intra-household food distribution and the gendered food taboos that might influence consumption or sale of different species.</p>
<p><i>Venn diagram on market access.</i> Men and women constructed a Venn diagram illustrating the institutions that they considered most important for marketing produce and purchasing inputs. The discussions covered their relative access to these institutions and illustrated differences between men's and women's marketing strategies and challenges.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i> Recognising institutions as gendered, the tools look specifically at how gender rules are at play in the relationships that men and women are able to form to get access to different livelihood and financial services.</p>
<p><i>Pocket chart on household responsibilities.</i> Respondents listed all of the productive and reproductive tasks carried out within the household and allocated each task to the 'pocket' of the person typically responsible for these tasks. The chart illustrated the gendered division of labour and disparities in workload distribution.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i> While this tool is used in gender trainings to highlight disparities in workloads and can emphasise an overly oppositional understanding of the relationship between men and women, the questioning also looked at</p>

Table 1 (Continued)

<p>situations in which gender responsibilities can and are being challenged or renegotiated. In particular, it explored the entry points for furthering positive engagement of men in caregiving.</p>
<p><i>Asset management diagram.</i> Men and women illustrated all of the productive assets owned by the household and drew lines depicting which household members had management responsibilities, control, and decision-making authority over the assets.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i></p> <p>Rather than focusing on who owns what, the inquiry focused on the meanings women assigned to equitable decision-making control, and it probed the hidden strategies by which they bargained over the use and control of assets. How are 'joint decisions' defined? What are the meanings of a satisfactory decision-making process for women? Do women really value <i>autonomous</i> control over assets? It highlighted the unequal power relationships in bargaining processes, but also the cultural norms and hidden negotiations that women draw on to place limitations on men's unilateral decision-making.</p>
<p><i>Body maps of gender norms.</i> Women and men illustrated a picture of the 'ideal woman' and 'ideal man', respectively. Through explanations of the drawings, they explored the customary and contemporary expectations for men and women and the ways in which they adhere to and renegotiate the traditional cultural codes.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i></p> <p>Often used in reproductive health analysis, the body maps sought to identify hegemonic gender norms and values, as well as the variations and spectrum of these norms. The inquiry probed the contemporary significance of the traditional behaviour codes for men and women (<i>chbab srey/chbab pro</i>^a); how these are reproduced by family and state institutions; and how individuals and groups renegotiate and reinterpret the codes to their own benefit and their own identity.</p>
<p><i>Focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews.</i> During the research process, three interviews were added to further probe some of the issues that arose in the discussions. These included FGDs with beneficiary women on <i>financial management</i>; an FGD with grandmothers on <i>childcare and perceptions of nutrition</i>; and an FGD and key informant interview with beneficiaries and community leaders on the <i>issue of domestic violence</i>.</p> <p><i>Social relations aspects:</i></p> <p>Women in Cambodia ostensibly and traditionally have control over household money-management, but in this analysis, we looked at what that means in terms of relative influence and status within the household. Rather than focusing on whose money buys what, the financial management interviews explored the grey areas behind women's traditional responsibility for controlling household finances. It looked at the limitations of that authority, when and where that responsibility may be overridden by the male head of household, and how they negotiate for outcomes. It explored how threats of gender-based violence related to decision-making control, but it also illustrated how men themselves sometimes rely on gender narratives to set spending limits with their peers in support of the household well-being.</p>

^aCambodia has a traditional moral code of conduct for women, the *chbab srey*, and a similar code for men, the *chbab pro*, which were written into verse in the late 19th century and are still promoted in the public schools. The codes prescribe a subordinate, shy, and subservient role for women, and a strong decision-making role for men. Women are told to remain silent and never challenge their husbands, no matter how he acts, which reinforces the high tolerance for violence against women.

Focusing on relationships between people and their relationship to resources and activities

The analysis focused on relationships and negotiations at the family/household level, and their engagement in the livelihood strategy (which encompasses caregiving). It revealed how institutionalised gender rules, in particular the *chbab srey* and *chbab ppro* shape the type of activities in which women engage and the resources and decisions that they control. The traditional codes of conduct for men and women, still transmitted through the state education system and through intergenerational cultural transfer, shape and reinforce power inequalities within the household and community, often limiting women's well-being, autonomy, and livelihood choices.

In general, the codes were seen as relevant and appropriate, particularly the division of labour and the expectation for the man to be the breadwinner. However, men's and women's understandings of these codes also revealed how these meanings are being renegotiated by women and men to accommodate modern identities and livelihood opportunities. Understanding these values and the process helped us identify entry points to challenge harmful norms through the BCC strategy. For example, the majority of respondents (both men and women) welcomed the 'sexy clothes' and modern styles, feeling that the traditional dress code and the imperative for women to walk slowly and speak softly were impractical and out of keeping with modern, working life. For women, codes related to modest dress, soft voice, and not visiting with the neighbours no longer seemed practical or modern in the context of women's income-earning role. As one woman noted:

Women can go far away from home now to make an income. The way of speaking has also changed. We don't speak as softly anymore ... We also need to know how to talk back with reason to other people. And we also walk faster now, because we need to catch up with other people. If they walk this way, we have to walk this way also.

Thanks to their income-earning role, women felt at liberty to disregard some of the gender rules about their mobility, patience, and unconditional reverence for the husbands. Before, as one group discussion explained, an ideal woman was expected to sit at home and never visit the neighbours, for fear of 'bringing the fire outside' (taking family problems outside). She was expected to be patient and always to accept the husband's behaviour, no matter what. Nowadays, though, women see the need to discuss business matters with other women and feel more comfortable asserting themselves when they believe they are in the right. One woman summarised it as follows:

When we are home, we get bored, we also need to [visit the neighbours to] discuss ways to make money. Being patient is also hard to do because if the husband keeps on creating conflict, like when he is drunk and angry ... then we need to fight back.

Women reported that they were also grateful for the social freedom to talk about previously taboo health topics, particularly around reproductive health.

Revealing how these relationships are reworked through institutions such as the state or the market

The analysis looked at how gender rules are produced and reinforced in the community and marketplace, shaping men's and women's production, livelihood, and caregiving choices and aspirations. It showed how the gendered institution of the market is offering new livelihood opportunities. In particular, trans-national migration for men and garment work opportunities for women. These gendered migration flows are shaped by traditional gender norms but also contain the seeds for renegotiating intra-household power relations. Gendered migration patterns offered physically risky transnational work opportunities (in Thailand) for men in the fishing sector, while the garment industry, in contrast, primarily recruited dexterous (and docile) young women. The women reported that they often reserved a part of their income for themselves, and could demand greater household support from spouses. In addition, these multi-local livelihood strategies were rapidly transforming nutrition and caregiving practices, as more and more children were left in the care of grandparents.

Showing change over time

Adding the historical dimension of the analysis illustrated the shifting power relationships between older and younger generations, and pulled out competing contemporary narratives of an 'ideal man', each of which has a different implication for women's well-being and autonomy. This perspective helped illustrate where the project could build on momentum towards equitable gender relations.

For example, alongside evidence of strictly hierarchical gender relationships, gender-based violence, and expectations that women should stay home as long as men have work, there was also a recurrent theme that 'women and men have equal rights', an idea that seems to have been promoted through NGOs, state policies, and by community-level authorities, some of who had received training on gender and on intervening in cases of domestic violence. Many associated this idea of women's rights with Cambodia's rapid economic development, and saw greater gender equality as a marker of modernity. One respondent challenged traditional views of women, explicitly equating this belief with lack of education:

Before, they said that having a daughter is like a having a pot of fish paste at home, but having a son is like having a piece of gold. If it is dropped in mud, it is still gold and has the same quality. But for the woman, she can drop from a ten karat gold to eight karat if she made a mistake. In the past, they always placed the man higher than women because they didn't know any better.

Through interactions at the macro-economic level, government initiatives, and NGO interventions, the cultural environment currently appears conducive to messages promoting gender equality, and even elders appeared to be receptive to such ideas.

Highlighting the nuances and complexities of gender relations

Looking beyond who typically 'does what' in the household, the analysis refined how women in the target groups define equitable and harmonious relationships. In addition to examining the power inequalities between men and women, the analysis showed how gendered beliefs and norms about masculinity and appropriate roles for men are reinforced and negotiated through social relationships between men.

For men, there was a notable struggle over the traditional social prohibitions on alcohol and gambling, which they knew to be inscribed in the *chhbap prro*. The men referred back to the *chhbap prro* and considered these prohibitions against alcohol to be appropriate rules for society:

Alcohol can make a person lose his consideration, leading to violence, wasting money, fighting with others and being unhealthy.

At the same time, drinking with male friends had become a common way to celebrate any event – a wedding, getting a job. Men explained that if they walked by a peer or neighbour drinking, they would be socially obligated to join in, and to take turns buying rounds among the peers. One man stated:

In the past, a man who drinks alcohol would not be accepted as a son-in-law by any family ... Now it is the way to show regard to others.

Many sought alternatives to this pressure, which challenged their financial responsibilities as heads of household. Some used their wives' traditional responsibility as money managers as a legitimate excuse to limit the amount of money that they could spend in a sitting. However, women noted that they had limited effective control; if men asked for money, women were obliged to give it.

This shared concern between men and women, though challenging to address, offers entry points for a communications strategy that draws on the appeal of a positive traditional masculinity that is in line with women's aspirations for more co-operative and respectful intra-household relations.

Listening to women's own aspirations and definitions of empowerment

One of the most frequently overlooked dimensions of development programmes is the need to define indices of change which are appropriate for the context. This involves listening closely – and responding to – what women (and men) themselves consider to

be empowering and positive indicators of change. The core concept of the SRA as conceptualised by Naila Kabeer is development as well-being (autonomy, human security, and dignity, and not simply economic development). The gender analysis identified priorities of women that were entirely absent from the project's measures of change or implementation strategy. For example, women identified a need for a reduction in gender-based violence and men's alcohol use. The respondents also offered workable and practical solutions to the problems, through existing state and NGO institutions. The analysis also identified that men as well as women saw this as a challenge of development and welcomed solutions.

Outcomes of the gender analysis

Following the gender analysis process, the core HKI and ODOV team spent a two-day workshop prioritising the key findings and identifying how they could be addressed and integrated within the nutrition and gender BCC strategy. The strategy, drawing from the gender analysis findings, identified the priority issues (as defined by the respondents and in line with the project goals), to be: unequal decision-making influence, unequal workload sharing, unequal responsibilities and knowledge around caregiving, and prevalence of alcohol misuse and gender-based violence. The strategy then identified the intermediate and underlying norms or beliefs (from the research) that were used to justify and uphold these inequalities and that the project could try to challenge (for instance, 'women's work is considered light, and women do not respect men's caregiving capacity', or 'women are expected to be docile. It is women's responsibility to create harmony, even in situations of violence').

Next, we outlined women's definitions of well-being and their aspirations for the project. We transformed these into a set of gender goals, to transform the priority challenges and promote more equitable practices. Finally, we identified a series of specific gender actions that could be integrated into the nutrition and BCC activities (these included a joint budgeting exercise, including grandmothers in cooking demonstrations, encouraging men's caregiving support, linking to gender-based violence organisations, developing a nutrition game that also included costs of healthy foods, snack foods, and alcohol). Using data from the field research, we also crafted tentative 'messages' derived from the communities that could be tested and used to transform the harmful or limiting norms and promote some of the equitable alternatives that already exist in the communities.

Conclusion: limitations and implications for future work

Conducting this process at an early stage in the project implementation, and with the participation of implementing staff, provided an opportunity to orient the project in a gender-transformative direction. The direct output of the analysis was a gender-informed

BCC strategy for the project. Participation in the gender analysis was considered to be a valuable experience for the investigators involved in the process and was seen by the project implementers as an important complement to the baseline survey. As an HKI participant explained in a personal communication with the first author in December 2013:

The critical point of the process is that all strategies to solve problems from research findings are developed by enumerators, which is feasible and adoptable by community members at research area. We learnt many useful tools such as pocket chart, venn diagram, seasonal calendar and body map. Those tools have been used with target beneficiaries. For instance, during the monthly meeting with both wife and husband of all target households in the village, we introduced them with the pocket chart of household chore, then husbands realized that their wife have done much more works than themselves. Based on the mapping conducted in every two weeks, we can see that the household works of women are being shared by other family members, especially husbands.

She added that some of the drawback to the process and methodology were that it was time-consuming and took enumerators – who are project staff – away from other start-up activities. Another challenge that was noted was that the field staff need to have good skills in facilitating and probing if respondents are to participate actively in the discussions.

Using the SRA in this way presented practical, methodological, and political choices for the organisation. First, in contrast to roles analysis, this approach requires extensive and skilful probing to capture the meanings and subtleties of bargaining strategies. It also entails a solid understanding of gender to analyse interrelations and processes of change. Working with field staff as researchers in this exercise had important payoffs in terms of expanding their own understandings of gender relations and the processes of (dis)empowerment, but particularly for staff of the same cultural upbringing as the respondents and with limited gender training background, it may have been challenging to take note of intra-household transactions that seem obvious or normal. Some richness of detail has been lost in translation and in observation. Moreover, because the research was carried out and analysed by field staff and not researchers, the quality of the data are less rigorous and hence less acceptable in the research community.

An analysis approach such as this that emphasises *processes* of gender change and the dynamic nature of gender relations and institutional changes also requires effective process-monitoring and learning tools that facilitate introspection and interpretation of changes over time. In the short duration of this project, it is not clear what changes can be expected in terms of social norms. From an organisational perspective, applying social relations concepts would entail a cultural shift from monitoring surveys focused more on adoption of production practices to a more process-oriented set of learning

tools for monitoring gender change. This would also entail ongoing investment in capacity building of analytical and observation skills.

Our experience suggests the need to fine-tune some of the outcome indicators or response choices around joint decision-making that are commonly used in the survey, as well as the particular decisions included in the module. Measuring the actual meanings of decision-making, and the degree of individuals' autonomy *within* co-operative decisions, is notoriously challenging. While this analysis alone is not sufficient to reword those instruments, it does suggest a need for further analysis to fine-tune and revalidate these variables in context, so that they accurately capture progress towards women's empowerment on their own cultural terms.

We aimed to disaggregate views by generational group (interviewing grandmothers, mothers, and husbands separately). However, given that the mothers selected to participate were of similar wealth-status and age cohort, the gender analysis did not capture the intersections of class or other factors. Staff invited mothers to participate voluntarily, but self-selection may have favoured those individuals with more time, education, curiosity, or interest in gaining from the intervention. Male respondents, spouses of participants, or others who were available in the village at the time may not be representative of those who were absent and engaged in outside work. Because the researchers were new to the process, it was clear that in some sessions they failed to separate men from women or to isolate influential power holders, which resulted in a few dominant voices speaking for an entire group. Finally, although it used participatory tools and processes, the participation could best be classified as consultative, rather than co-operative. Although the results were shared back with the groups, the power to incorporate the findings and address the priorities rests unilaterally with the HKI and NGO staff implementing the project and designing the strategy – a point which has been made in the wider literature on participation in development project planning and MEL (Johnson *et al.* 2004).

Ultimately, a framework's usefulness is only as good as the analysis of the findings and the commitment to the processes of change it highlights. The challenge of any gender analysis poses an inherent dilemma, in that priorities identified may not align with the measures of success by which the project is evaluated and for which it is funded. For example, in the FoF analysis, gender-based violence (a marker of systemic gender injustice) and gendered alcohol use emerged as the participants' priorities and as indicators of empowerment. While these issues were incorporated into the FoF communications strategy, there was limited capacity to modify designs and integrate women's concerns into the programming. Addressing them effectively in future project designs could yet be perceived as mission drift (not directly enough linked to food security) or as beyond the capacity of the organisation to address.

Yet the SRA challenges the notion of gender-neutrality in all institutions, including that of the gendered implementing organisations, and by raising some

gender-justice issues to be considered in future designs, using it presents opportunities for organisational reflection on the approach and the positioning of the organisation in the development space. For this reason, the SRA seems to us to present the most comprehensive framework available to us to use, and one that is most closely aligned with a notion of transformation of gendered institutions and redistribution of power.

Emily Hillenbrand is currently Gender and Livelihoods Advisor for CARE USA. She designed and led the Fish on Farms gender analysis, in her previous capacity as Regional Gender Coordinator for Helen Keller International Asia-Pacific. Postal address: 151 Ellis Street, Atlanta, GA 30303, USA. Corresponding author email: ehillenbrand@care.org

Pardis Lakzadeh is Master of Science student in the School of Public Health at the University of British Columbia, Canada.

Zaman Talukder is the Country Director in Cambodia and Regional Food Security Advisor, Asia-Pacific, for Helen Keller International. He is a Principal Investigator on the Fish on Farms Project.

Timothy Green PhD is an Associate Professor of Human Nutrition in the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia, Canada. He is a Principal Investigator on the Fish on Farms Project.

Judy McLean is Assistant Professor of Human Nutrition at the Faculty of Land and Food Systems at the University of British Columbia, Canada. She is a Co-Principal Investigator on the Fish on Farms Project.

Notes

- 1 Emily Hillenbrand led the FoF baseline gender analysis together with Ly Sokhoin, Deputy Program Manager at HKI, and Pardis Lakzadeh and Hellene Sarin from UBC. The FoF research is led by Judy McLean PhD, Assistant Professor UBC, Timothy Green PhD, Associate Professor, UBC; implementation is led by Zaman Talukder and Hou Kroeun of HKI.
- 2 For an account of this process and an introduction to some of the best known and earliest frameworks, see March *et al.* (1999).
- 3 FoF is led by Helen Keller International in partnership with researchers from the University of British Columbia, with WorldFish Center, Organisation to Develop Our Village, and the Cambodian Fisheries Administration of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forests, and Fisheries. The project is supported by IDRC and the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs Trade and Development, through the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund.
- 4 Homestead food production (HFP) is a food-based intervention designed to promote nutrition and food security through increased availability and affordability of nutritious

foods. Helen Keller International's HFP model supports home-based food production through a package of technical agriculture and small livestock support and nutrition and gender education. HKI's models in Asia have been shown to increase dietary diversity, increase women's income and control over income, and in some cases reduce anaemia.

- 5 Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) is a process of engagement with rural people to investigate, analyse, and evaluate constraints and opportunities from their perspective, and using indigenous knowledge. In livelihoods programming, commonly used PRA tools include the seasonal calendar, transect walk, Venn diagram, farm resource maps, wealth-ranking, mobility map, historical timeline of livelihood trends, preference ranking. These participatory tools validate indigenous knowledge and enable low literacy participants to analyse development challenges and opportunities.
- 6 Prey Veng Province in central Cambodia is categorised as chronically high food-insecure (WFP 2007). An area with currently low practices of pond-based fish-culture, it models the consequences of the impending damming of the Mekong and its potential devastation of the Tonle Sap and those who depend on it for capture fishing.
- 7 Food security is defined as having adequate access to, availability, and utilisation of food at all times. Most provinces in Cambodia are considered chronically food-insecure, and malnutrition rates are severe. Nearly 10 per cent of children die before their fifth birthday, with over 30 per cent of these deaths attributed to undernutrition. Food insecurity and malnutrition in Cambodia stem, in part, from low productivity and a lack of crop diversification beyond rice. As such, poor households subsist on a diet consisting mainly of rice, which provides an estimated 70 per cent of food energy, but is low in fat, essential amino acids, and micronutrients. Animal source foods, which provide high-quality protein, essential fatty acids, and bioavailable iron and vitamin A, make up less than 9 per cent of total energy intake. Lack of dietary diversity indicates micronutrient malnutrition, contributing to anaemia and weak immune systems, and limiting child growth and cognitive development. Low fat consumption limits absorption of fat-soluble vitamins, exacerbating the problem of micronutrient malnutrition.

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