LEGACY SERIES 5

Gender and Inclusion in the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE):
An End of Program Reflection and Evaluation

Deepa Joshi, Yngve Braaten, Arunima Hakhu, Rubina Pradhan and Bryce Gallant

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Front cover photo: Head of a Water Users' Association in southern Tajikistan meets with cotton farmers to discuss irrigation requirements; Neil Palmer / IWMI.

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Contents

Acronyms

AR4D   Agricultural Research for Development

EoPRE   End of Program Reflection and Evaluation

WLE   CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems

Abstract

The growing relevance of research on gender and social inclusion in agricultural research for development calls for systemic, transformative change processes. Transformative gender ambitions can stand at odds with personal biases and experiences that shape diverse understandings of gender, institutional values, structures and cultures that tend to reward technological quick-fix solutions, and other practical challenges to 'doing' gender on the ground. Very little is known about these challenges. How are these challenges navigated by (relatively small) teams of gender researchers, who are often caught between the demand for tangible fast gains on gender, and the intractable challenges of deep-rooted and complex, intersectional gender inequalities? This was the focus of the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) End of Program Reflection and Evaluation (EoPRE) to assess how gender and inclusion research is pursued, and the key barriers to knowing and doing gender in eight research projects. Adopting a reflexive, self-analytical feminist approach to evaluation, this EoPRE facilitated eight project teams, diverse and with an uneven focus on gender, to connect the dots between the processes of knowing and doing gender research. A key finding of this evaluation is that the need for change is foremost internal. We need to begin by fixing our personal biases and assumptions, and fixing institutional cultures, values and structures instead of just trying to fix things out there, including fixing poor and marginalized women. A key recommendation is to seek *more regular and open conversations* across researcher disciplines and hierarchies, and between CGIAR and external partners and stakeholders, including feminist grassroots actors and networks – on what works well (and does not) and why. This would allow us to grasp why we start with different meanings and conceptualizations of gender; how agile we are (or not) in adapting to changes on the ground; and how, through a culture of reflection and learning, we might shift pathways to more transformative change processes in a fast evolving and increasingly unequal world.

Introduction

The CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy states that "under resource scarcity and global connectivity, the challenges of food and nutrition insecurity, poverty, gender inequality, climate change, and environmental degradation are simply not separable" (CGIAR System Organization 2021: 14). In other words, the One CGIAR aim of a "radical realignment of food systems around the world" (CGIAR System Organization 2021: 8) to end hunger and malnutrition in all its forms, can only be ensured through innovations that also further gender equality and social inclusion, and opportunities for youth across agri-food systems.

"Most social science research over the past few decades has argued that agricultural innovations – whether technological, social or financial – end up reinforcing existing socio-economic hierarchies" (Najjar and Baruah 2019). A critical part of the realignment to transformative change process must, therefore, include a rigorous examination of how agricultural research for development (AR4D) impacts people of different "genders, economic classes, and generations" (Najjar and Baruah 2019).

Are our research systems and institutions designed to address the 'transformations' needed to eliminate persisting and deeply crosscutting gender inequalities?

EoPRE design and approach

The objective of the CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) End of Program Reflection and Evaluation (EoPRE) of gender and inclusion was to facilitate a selected number of project teams and individual researchers to reflect on, untangle and self-analyze successes, complexities and ground realities of **knowing and doing gender research** (Box 1). Our focus was not on analyzing research outputs and deliverables, but rather on mapping personal learning trajectories, institutional practices and other practical factors that shape gender knowledge and gender research in WLE projects.

Box 1: What do we mean by knowing and doing gender?

Past analysis of gender research in CGIAR pointed out unevenness in the understanding of gender among researchers, projects and CGIAR Research Programs (CGIAR-IEA 2017).

Gender knowing: Feminist analysis demonstrates that our knowing of 'gender' is intimately tied to our personal experiences, identities and worldviews, which both shape and are shaped by the institutional settings and cultures where we are situated as researchers. The EoPRE focus was mapping what shapes different understandings: *conceptualizations* of gender between and within projects.

Gender doing: How we conceptualize gender determines how we operationalize gender in research projects. Gender doing is about the design and implementation of research activities (the rationale behind these), and about how collaborations are established with partners and stakeholders.

"Research is always influenced by a number of factors, including those related to the research process as a whole and the researcher's position and influence in this context. Explicitly describing this, along with the intended and unintended consequences of these influences and assumptions, is the mark of a considered and reflexive approach to the research process." (Barrett et al. 2020: 10)

The increasingly complex challenges we encounter in AR4D are not experienced universally by a diverse group of local communities – the end users of our research. Attention to these pluralities requires our research to be deliberately transdisciplinary, through the application of more participatory methods and approaches that make the complexity of problems and challenges, particularly the deeply intersecting factors and forces of inequality, more visible.

As scientists, we tend to agree that the quality of research is relative to the quality of research tools and methods. This is because "objectivity is a value … most strongly associate[d] with science…. applying objective methodology would be a good strategy for generating an accurate (and thus objective) picture of the world" (Stemwedel 2013). A core rule of science is not to let "bias" influence "the production of scientific knowledge" (ibid).

As cited by Stemwedel (2013), Grinnell (1992) noted in his book *The Scientific Attitude* that in something as technical as observing cells under a microscope, there was a tendency among students to observe different things. This was not a technical problem; rather, it was a mix of personal factors, from conceptual background to training, which influenced what objects were seen by some and invisible to others.

> *The concept of "relational epistemology", which has roots in feminist thinking, recognizes "the self (individuals, researchers) as porous and permeable, in interdependent co-relation … with the focus of research, theory, and practice"*
> *(Lange 2015: 29).*

This approach informs the Three Spheres of Transformation framework (Sharma 2007). Applied recently in analyzing the "roadmaps and pathways … consistent to the Paris Agreement," the analysis is evident: "deliberate social transformations" can only happen when we can look beyond "technical solutions and behavioral approaches" to acting on "three related and interacting 'spheres' of transformation: the practical, political, and personal" (O'Brien 2018: 153).

Attention to these overlapping dimensions is said to be crucial for understanding and addressing complex human-nature interrelations in operationalizing the "how" of climate transformations (Youngman 2021).

Adapting the Three Spheres of Transformation framework into the EoPRE design, our focus was to analyze key barriers and challenges to gender transformative research and outcomes by looking at these three interrelated spheres of influence:

- **Personal:** Do our individual experiences, biases and assumptions shape what and how we prioritize and make (in)visible in gender-related research?
- **Institutional/political:** How do the structures and cultures of our workplaces, and in turn, factors and forces shaping institutional mandates reward, recognize or diminish the value of different ways of doing gender research, and the types of gender knowledge produced?
- **Practical:** What other practical factors determine how we do research and what knowledge we can produce and advocate in the different locations and contexts of our projects?

The EoPRE design (Box 2) sought to facilitate eight WLE project teams to (i) **self-evaluate the quality of gender research** processes, outputs and outcomes; (ii) share relevant **project documents** (later) **analyzed** by the EoPRE team; and (iii) engage in two rounds of **reflective dialogues**. Put together this tiered analysis helped triangulate data and insights, and make visible the less well-known factors and forces that critically shape successes, challenges, complexities and realities of gender research.

Box 2: The EoPRE methodology.

The EoPRE methodology consisted of three interrelated steps. The evaluation team initially facilitated WLE Flagship leads and gender researchers to identify eight projects. The focus was: i) diversity – projects with varying degrees of gender focus and in different stages of completion; and ii) willingness of project teams to engage in a deep-dive, tiered, reflexive self-analysis process. These steps allowed triangulation of data, perceptions and insights:

- Project teams invited to self-evaluate the quality of their research process and outputs, using CGIAR's Quality of Research for Development framework, adapted for an explicit focus on gender.
- A thorough review of project documentation (53 documents from eight projects) by the evaluation team to analyze any changes in ways of knowing and doing gender during different stages of the project.
- Two rounds of facilitated reflective dialogues separately with each project team (31 researchers from the eight projects) to map the personal, institutional and practical dimensions of knowing and doing gender, and how these experiences relate to research quality (perceptions) and knowledge outputs (documentation).

The EoPRE of gender and inclusion in WLE projects is a qualitative, reflexive and participatory exploration of the processes of knowing and doing gender, and project results and outcomes (Figure 1).
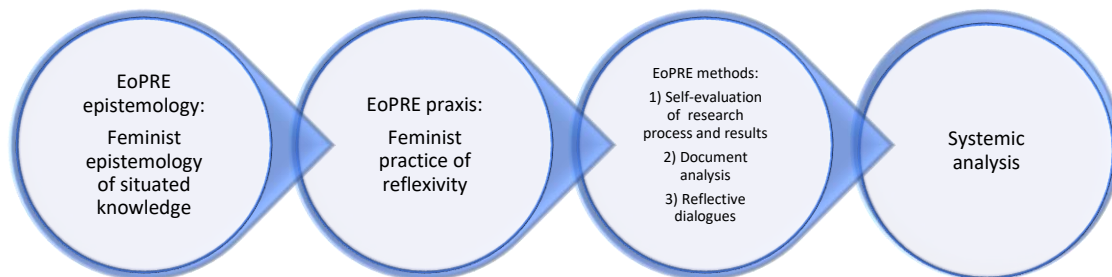
Figure 1: The four elements of the EoPRE design.

All knowledge is embodied, situated and political

> *"Feminist epistemology recognizes that our ideas of knowledge and methods of knowledge production, how we function as knowledge producers, the practices of inquiry we adopt, and what and how we present and justify as knowledge is not dissociated from our deeply personal, individual experiences, values and worldviews; as well as the structure, and cultures of the institutions in which we work, and the wider economic and political contexts of where our work is located."* (Anderson 2000)

The above reasons explain why feminist researchers recognize "knowledge as situated" and find claims of "science objectivity" problematic (Haraway 1988). Considering the value given to knowledge and science in policy decision making, knowledge processes and outcomes are often shaped by personal, political and institutional interests and mandates. Not paying attention to overlapping

personal, political and practical dimensions of knowledge impacts how we understand and address "wicked" development challenges (Rittel and Webber 1973). Complex challenges like climate change and food insecurity as well as gender transformative change are "wicked". An overview of Ramalingam's (2013) book *Aid on the Edge of Chaos* notes that "cutting edge" development innovations "that address complex challenges of overlapping social, economic, and political issues … require getting inside the [institutional] black box … to highlight critical flaws in the ways agencies learn, strategize, organize, and evaluate themselves."

A critical gap in gender research for development, including in AR4D, is the tendency to simplify gender as women; and to simplify problems of gender equality as external, or out there in the field, among partners and in policies, and relatively easily addressed with new policies and interventions targeting women. According to the Three Spheres of Transformation framework, these simplifications are only partially true. Fundamentally, the gender problems we encounter and aim to tackle are also experienced and embodied by us as researchers, shaped by our own personal experiences, biases and assumptions, as well as by the structure and culture of the systems we live and work in (see Box 3).

> *"The crisis (of increasingly complex problems) is in our individual and shared (institutional) mindsets, where psychological and cultural factors and forces reign. This crisis challenges all of us."* (Sharma 2007: 31)

Box 3: Reflections as evaluators

By placing feminist epistemology at the center of the EoPRE, we acknowledge the following:

- The evaluation team's values, perceptions, worldviews and experiences shaped the EoPRE. In other words, 'we' are written into this evaluation process.
- We deliberately privileged perceptions, emotions and everyday lived experiences of the participants as individuals, as project teams and as staff of different institutions. Making situated and embodied experiences visible matters, as it brings to view often invisible and under-recognized opportunities and challenges that impact planned outputs and outcomes.
- We aimed to understand the process and not just results and outputs, recognizing that how knowledge is produced and presented is shaped by overlapping personal, political/institutional and practical factors and contexts.
- We recognized that the plurality of personal, political/institutional and practical challenges and opportunities meant that there are different starting points to knowing and doing gender for each researcher, and for different projects. Our focus was, therefore, not to grade and score all projects with a standard reference – but rather to make visible this plurality of not just where we start, but also where we can go, and what we can achieve or not as diverse teams working on different projects.

Key findings and recommendations

1. **Increasing institutional commitment to gender needs to be better operationalized in projects – key to which would be more honest and open conversations on gender and social inclusion among disciplinary researchers, and especially in projects with a core technical/biophysical focus.**

An independent review of WLE (CAS Secretariat 2020: 26-30) noted that across WLE Flagships, "Gender is considered in project approaches … with an emphasis on drivers of change and on equitable benefits. WLE is contributing to more comprehensive thinking about gender and inclusion at the program level and beyond." These changes are an outcome of a stronger programmatic focus on gender both within CGIAR and WLE.

One CGIAR advocates for systemic transformations through a gender transformative approach (Gadeberg 2021). WLE adopted a gender transformative focus even earlier, in its 2014 Gender Strategy, with commitment to its implementation in the 2017-2022 proposal.

> *"I would like to share one experience and I'm sure that [name of one of the evaluators] remembers this, the meeting that we had in London where gender was on the agenda, and we discussed gender transformative approaches and how to do 'gender' differently. We came together and said for the next two to three years, we have to really think about how to put gender as a topic.… this meeting led to more attention to the topic of gender, at least for me."*
> (EoPRE participant)

> *"I think that gender is gaining more attention [in CGIAR] and I think that people [in CGIAR] are engaging more with gender even though they don't [all] have a gender background. Policies are being developed for gender and contextualized. The lesson is that things are moving well, and it is a matter of capitalizing on the positives.… But still the lesson is also that gender is not something that can change overnight – it takes time."* (EoPRE participant)

Wong et al. (2019: 2) noted that adoption of new ideas often takes place in development agendas "without appreciation for the history of [these] ideas… this strips ideas of their transformative potential, … renders their implementation solely a technical exercise."

Organizational cultures hold great power over how gender is written into project intervention strategies, implemented and given value and importance. Several EoPRE project teams discussed that when the dominant focus is technical AR4D, unpacking complex ground realities and the politics of situated knowledge are not always encouraged, as they "slow down" the project's main ambitions.

"As researchers, we [already] take a stand [early in the project cycle], not really understanding the ground realities or the stark contrasts that [shape] people's [diverse] everyday lived experiences." (EoPRE participant)

"For all of our projects in [name of area], our entry point is technical and ecological issues and after that we add more activities. Without targeting ecological issues, we cannot target other [social] activities in a sustainable way …" (EoPRE participant)

During the dialogue sessions, we also heard stories of how qualitative, participatory gender research and researchers tend to be undervalued and under-resourced, relative to biophysical, technical research and interventions.

Institutions with a history of disciplinary, technocratic ways of knowing and doing science tend to encourage and reward "gender-lite" research and researchers who do not challenge underlying power structures of knowledge production (Dieltiens et al. 2009). This translates to a "kind of boundary making … as a way of keeping … gender work safe from [the politics of] feminism (Kunz et al. 2019, as cited in Resurrección and Elmhirst 2021: 9). But these are the very same reasons why "gender inequality is so hard to advance and, in places, retreat" (ODI 2020).

*"Sometimes when I have a point to [make], then the first reaction that would come is **'there is the gender scientist and now she will start asking about what happened to the women'**…. And it is not at all seen as … science initially … It took a lot of time for us as … gender researchers to bring people to understand that gender and intersectionality is science. And [in the context of our work] this is [as relevant as] not just science – it is equal to a **rocket science** … you know?"*
(EoPRE participant)

"…it was a bit of a revelation, how much [gender] was this kind of thorn in people's sides, in some instances, that was [the] way that [gender] was often positioned." (EoPRE participant)

These biases – both personal and institutional – persist because there are rarely open conversations on why and how gender matters and should be considered, between disciplinary project researchers and in projects where gender is not a primary focus.

> *"There needs to be [more] discussions about how we understand gender in our research. We need to reintroduce that element into our own institution. This also goes for the organizations that we're working with, especially the partner organizations that we see lacking a focus on gender. How do we understand gender and where do we intervene? I see this as an important dimension that has emerged from our experiences [of doing gender research]. We understand the challenges that exist in the communities [where we work], but we have not seen on the other side of the coin – what are the gender challenges in the institutions in which we are working?… We are working in multidisciplinary teams so it's natural that not everybody will have a gender understanding or orientation, so that is why it is so important to engage with institutions for us to have a common understanding of what gender is."* (EoPRE participant)

Regardless of these challenges, individual gender researchers as well as project teams show significant commitment to gender. Gender research and success tends to happen against a tide of constraints and challenges. A way forward would be to engender the CGIAR Quality of Research for Development framework and to make this a hands-on planning and implementation as well as robust monitoring, evaluation and learning tool.

2. **Unevenness in gender research and outputs has been noted in CGIAR gender research. The EoPRE shows the overlapping personal, institutional and practical dimensions of this challenge, and how tackling this requires deliberately and periodically making time to reflect.**

An independent review of gender in CGIAR (CGIAR-IEA 2017: 10) noted an "unevenness" in the quality of gender research and capacity of gender researchers. In our evaluation of eight projects, this unevenness was visible. Most projects are gender integrative – focusing on the symptoms of women's inequality (interpreting gender as women, and inequality as a simplistic binary between women and men). A much smaller number of projects adopt gender transformative approaches – focusing on unpacking and tackling systemic, core factors of gender inequality and social inclusion (relational and intersectional). In projects where the primary focus is not gender, there is significant unevenness in capacity and knowledge on gender.

> *"I have been struggling with the definition of gender and have sometimes been demotivated by the overall vague talk about gender, but doing something very concrete about gender is what motivates [my work] moving forward."* (EoPRE participant)

Our intention was not to score the projects on their gender understanding and outcomes. Rather, our focus was to analyze if these differences are shaped by personal biases, assumptions or experiences as well as institutional or other practical contexts.

In sum, where does our gender bias come from? Using the "River of Life" method (Mercer 2008), we facilitated EoPRE participants to reflect on how their life experiences shape the ways in which they understood and operationalized gender professionally in their work. For many young women, personal experiences as women of color, working at the lower rungs of the institutional hierarchy or in cultures of patriarchy with project partners and/or in the research locations, help make gender and intersectionality prominently visible and relevant. Those who do not face the same challenges in their

lives and work might find these issues less visible, unless specifically trained to look out for inequalities.

> *"When I go out, for example, in [name of country], we meet a lot of people. Like municipalities or local government officials. And when we introduce each other, I go with my male co-workers like this is Doctor X…. They call him Doctor, but they call me Madam. They can never bring themselves to say Doctor – I don't know why this happens a lot, even though I introduce myself with my title most of the time…. People put value on those titles, and they will listen if they see that title…. We are all young and they may not take us seriously, so it's important that you put that title so that they know that you come with that – you know, knowledge and experience, but still [even] that does not work."* (EoPRE participant)

These symmetries and hierarchies are often deeply institutionalized and experienced across career paths.

> *"… earlier in my career, I was appointed as a research graduate assistant in a university … in a big study led by an all-male team. One of the **requirements** from the donor side was that they must [include] a female researcher … I never knew if I was hired because of my merit or because I was a woman (and supposed to know gender). As I started to understand more about who's doing the research, and who is getting more of the funding … I could understand there is politics around that. Who gets to lead a big research grant and so on? One thing was clear. **I was a box to tick in that research project**."* (EoPRE participant)

Often gender-aware researchers make conscious choices to do less, because the context – their own institutions, the project timeline, partners, project locations, resources – will only allow so much.

> *"Differences in institutional narratives on gender and social inclusion matters as each framing shapes the questions that are asked, prioritizes the production of different types of knowledge and emphasizes different types of AR4D interventions related to gender and social inclusion."* (EoPRE participant)

> *"[The project] is gender sensitive, rather than aiming for transformative change. And that's because, **we only have three years**. We don't have anywhere near enough time or money to do even the level of investigation of the social and cultural issues. That would be really terrific [but] we framed our goals in a way that is achievable, and therefore we're actually doing what we said we were going to do."* (EoPRE participant)

Yet, as we discuss below, simplifying gender or adopting a fixed, unchangeable lens to doing gender in a project cycle is a missed opportunity to unpack the complexity of gender issues and situated knowledge (see Box 4).

Box 4: EoPRE participants reflecting on one project during the dialogue sessions

"[Gender knowing and doing] can become very disembodied, then it's very kind of dry and top down. And, you know, it's not very interesting as well … being with people [in the field] and learning from [lived] gender, social inclusion experiences … that's really where the magic happens …"

"In facilitating women to play 'the game', I expected they would play more conservatively … explaining … the classic narrative that men are exploiters and women are the keepers of the Earth kind of thing.… I was really surprised that women were not more conservative in their water consumption … they might even be more willing to deplete resources in order to earn an income. I went into this project with … my own assumptions on gender [women] and water.… two key takeaways for me out of that was that the framing of the game matters and that the timing and details of the game matter."

"[The] game was not only entangled in the social dynamics 'out there', but also entangled in our [researcher] biases and subjectification processes."

"We started the project thinking that women would have the greatest interest in maintaining groundwater levels, and be less interested than men in using groundwater for more water consumptive crops … but we discovered a very complex intersection of water consumption, gender and economic status."

"The context of this project cast the discussion on gender in a different light. It made me throw out a lot of assumptions that I usually make about gender … it gave me new insights into how women interact with their environment."

"As we dug deep … a lesson I draw is that … human–nature interactions are a very complicated story, and do not fit with a linear narrative that women are more ecologically conscious and more likely to be stewards of the environment …"

When project teams have resources and commitment, as well as agency to cyclically look back and critically learn, the outcomes lead to significant gains in gender doing – even for projects where gender is an add-on to an initial technical design.

"We have specifically, consciously created more space for gender in these new learning modules. It comes perhaps a little bit late in the process, but it has been a little bit of a searching process – building on both our previous experiences and the interest that we see for work on gender. We have been thinking about how best to focus on gender in a project …" (EoPRE participant)

However, projects do not always allow for reflection, or there is a reluctance to share stories of 'failures' because this is regarded as negative; projects are rewarded when successful in meeting planned deliverables.

"… reflexivity is difficult because we [as researchers] are not accustomed to examining our engagement with our work with the same intensity as we regard our research subjects." (Dowling 2016: 35)

"… we came to this project with the idea of how this project could be transformative. But we came across several constraints to doing that. And that's just a reminder about how this is all a process, it's not like you go from 0 to 100 (through one project). It's really a process of bringing the thinking together, of bringing the capacities together, of having the right timeframe, the right partners, the right everything, to be able to do that. And that takes time. And there's only so much that you can do, with the many shortcuts that you need to take. So that was a reality check and something that we really have to be aware of as we work on – and depending on what we promise to do as well in different projects." (EoPRE participant)

"… multidisciplinary teams, where not everybody has a gender understanding or orientation, partner organizations who lack a focus on gender ... gender challenges in the institutions in which we are working, which are just as prominent as challenges that exist in the field, in communities we are working with … there needs to be more discussions about how we understand gender in our research … and where we intervene … we need to reintroduce this need for building a common understanding of what gender is – first and foremost into our own institutions ..." (EoPRE participant)

3. **Regardless of how gender is written into project proposals, there is change during the course of a project. Incremental gender gains in a project are often the outcome of collaboration between disciplinary researchers and innovative interventions, but above all, enabling and encouraging project teams and leaders, which helps capacitate younger gender researchers.**

Often, critical gaps emerge between including 'the right gender words' in proposals and project designs and implementing these ambitious goals in diverse local contexts, or in the face of unpredictable shocks and changes.

In one of the projects, the core project team recalled how they realized early on that they were all "outsiders," not even from the same country of the research, and in that sense, unaware of the deeper nuances of social norms, relations and ways of life of the community. In the reflective dialogue, the team recognized that as outsiders, it would be challenging to engage with and address social relations of power that are so often hidden from view, both from the researchers and from the research participants themselves. Quite by accident, COVID-19 allowed the "outsider experts" to take a back seat, and literally "hand over" the pen to local researchers.

COVID-19 and civil strife also impacted another project, which had taken on an ambitious gender transformative approach. Here, the project team innovatively built collaborations with other gender

researchers, and used different methods and approaches, including digital text mining, to critically review the relative inattention to gender in restoration initiatives.

"Yes, the gender transformative approach was new and unique, and it was beyond binary ... it was more a process and focused on different stages of inclusion and this was the part that clicked the most for me … also brought to the table a lot of literature and I was willing to learn. This is important because setting aside time to learn requires extra time, resources and energy. It took longer and it was more difficult to bring all these pieces together – compared to just publishing something. The effort in building these bridges and developing methodologies that [allowed] answered the multiple research questions [in spite of the practical challenges] was very important." (EoPRE participant)

Meaningful, respectful collaborations went a long way in helping to tackle challenges.

[The team] has never worked in refugee camps, this is our first project. So, it was important that … our project partner was co-leading this project. I had to rely on … her guidance … to set a meeting, organize a workshop, exchange ideas … [this] has gone from professional to some small level of a personal relationship …" (EoPRE participant)

This is especially true when keeping a focus on gender requires navigating stiff institutional biases.

*"Sometimes we have some [what we call] hard talks … where we are trying to explain to each other, what needs to be done.… gender discussions can really be, you know, [difficult] for natural scientists and I don't know how [name of researcher] manages.… **But it requires patience**.… The person doing gender can think her role is being undermined and not appreciated when natural scientists are asking questions, why should we do that? Why not just leave it out, you know? It requires a lot of patience to do what she is doing in a project like this – working with natural scientists."* (EoPRE participant)

One of the project teams elaborated on the difficulties faced by junior female researchers in navigating asymmetrical relationships in interview settings, where key informants are often men in senior positions of power who can be dismissive of both young women researchers and gender research.

"I just got this feeling [in] most of my interviews … that there are, quote, unquote, more important things to do, than gender … only once was I regarded as a person who [had] her own knowledge [and] there was a certain amount of respect involved there." (EoPRE participant)

The findings we discussed above show that a complex mix of personal, political/institutional and practical factors and forces (Figure 2) can "render technical" gender agendas and ambitions (Li 2007: 7). The focus of this EoPRE was in mapping processes of change and understanding what enables certain projects to build on these challenges for innovative approaches and pathways to change.
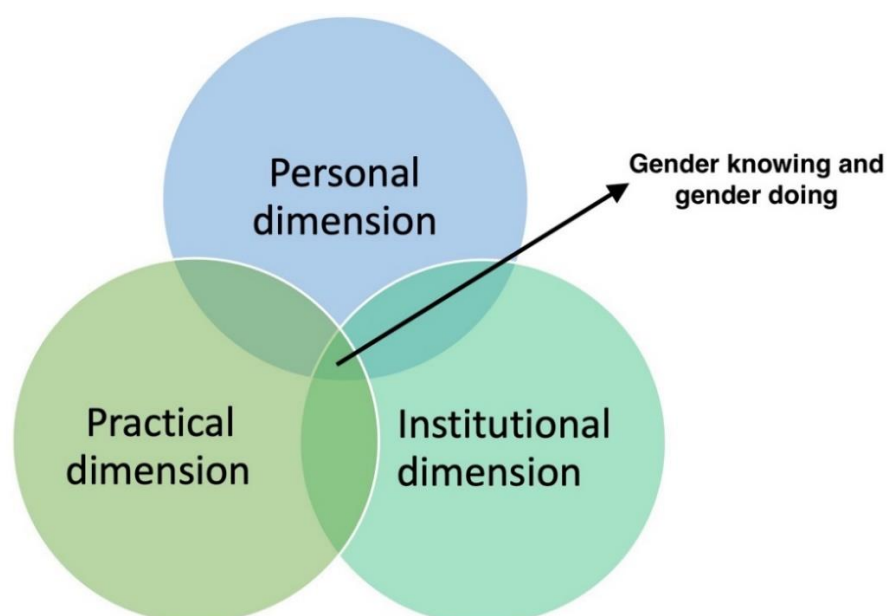
Figure 2: The three dimensions of gender knowing and doing.

In Table 1 below we summarize key lessons emerging from these three dimensions at the intersection of gender knowing and doing.

Table 1: Summary of key findings.

Dimension	Theme	Summary of lessons learned
Personal dimension	Researcher bias	Subjective values, worldviews and individual experiences influence how we understand gender at a personal level. In the reflective dialogues, several research teams reflected on both conscious and unconscious biases, and how these biases can shape the way that we understand gender, as well as how gender research is conducted, its outcomes and results.
	Personal learning trajectories	Both the document analysis and the reflective dialogues made evident that gender knowing and doing are not static endeavors. On the contrary, several EoPRE participants reflected on the ways in which their understanding of gender is essentially learning in action. Small (sometimes big), messy, fragmented challenges can result in success or failure to address gender goals; the difference lies in whether the project and its team members are poised and agile to grasp the possibilities and choices of "doing things differently" (O'Brien 2012).

Dimension	Theme	Summary of lessons learned
Institutional dimension	Organizational cultures	Our findings show that *organizational cultures* hold great power over how research teams conceptualize gender and write this knowing into project goals, activities and strategies. In other words, the rationale and theory of change of AR4D projects are shaped by different organizational cultures – which are a mix of norms, values, practices, relevance and credibility of some ideas and approaches over others. Regardless of the commitment to diversity and equality, there are conscious and unconscious biases in organizations, which shape differential privileging of skills, capacities and social identities.
	Social hierarchies	Several project teams discussed the challenges that arise as they (as researchers) enter different institutional arenas where they must navigate complex *social hierarchies* and a myriad of social relations of power. In some project teams, there were honest discussions on the emotionality and difficulties of being a young woman researcher from the Global South when conducting research in the field, especially in patriarchal societies, and with senior male colleagues from other institutions. These discussions point to asymmetrical relationships in the research domain, and how these can result in diverse consequences for the quality of gender outputs.
Practical dimension	Time and resources	The theme *time and resources* demonstrates that while many project teams recognize the importance of transformative change and intersectionality, they don't have sufficient time and resources to move from, for example, an intersectional framing of gender to an intersectional doing of gender. Project teams commonly expressed a genuine desire to do both intersectional and gender transformative research – but time and resource constraints can often make this an impossible task.
	Collaboration	The theme *collaboration* emerged in several of the reflective dialogues. This type of learning, as explained by the different project teams, sparks changes in our gender knowing/doing, including how we see and experience our gendered selves and in terms of which activities researchers might deem appropriate to achieve different types of gender outcomes. The theme brings into focus the significance of multidisciplinary teams. The reflective dialogues demonstrated that collaboration between biophysical scientists and gender experts triggered new research directions, as well as personal growth. The reflective dialogues also highlighted the importance of celebrating individual strengths that interdisciplinary teams bring to the table, all the while also pushing team members to learn new ways of knowing and doing gender. We, therefore, find that multidisciplinarity has been a key element enabling several EoPRE participants to identify new and innovative ways of framing and operationalizing gender.

Conclusion

The processes of self-evaluation and carefully guided discussions allowed the EoPRE participants to deeply reflect on their experiences as individuals as well as professionals. This allowed us, the evaluation team, to triangulate data related to perceptions of the quality of research, document analysis and reflective dialogues. The findings summarized in Table 1 are an outcome of connecting the dots between research processes, outputs and outcomes. These findings show that perceptions of the quality of gender research, and what emerges as knowledge outputs with scope and relevance for impact and change, are shaped by researcher positionality and experience as well as institutional and other practical factors. More attention to these factors would help enhance the quality of gender and inclusion research – including who benefits and who does not among the end users of AR4D.

As is now well known, gender norms are the unwritten rules of behavior which determine what are considered appropriate ways of being and doing for women and men. These norms are crosscut by underlying factors like poverty, age, religion and different social cultures. What is less well known or considered is that these norms, as well as other crosscutting power relations, function as the unwritten rules of behavior in institutions across scale. Institutionalizing gender in AR4D would require paying attention to these issues.

The transformative changes we aim to achieve require – as we often say – doing business as unusual. In terms of gender knowing and doing, this implies paying explicit attention to: i) what types of knowledge are valued and why; ii) how research is defined and implemented; iii) the relationships between researchers in any given project and/or within an institution; and iv) the nature of relationships and engagements between researchers, the researched and a wider subset of other stakeholders in any project or program (Gender at Work 2021).

> *"Rather than focusing exclusively on the self-improvement of individual women, Gender Transformative Approaches work towards transforming power dynamics and structures that reinforce gender inequity with the wider purpose of promoting gender equality and improving development outcomes. This more systemic understanding implicates those **doing** the development – development agencies and professionals – and requires their reflection, change and transformation. This has far-reaching implications for how development is done, as [gender transformative approaches] are intentionally reflexive: they recognize that norms are not necessarily 'out there' and beyond the purview of certain development actors. Norms are, in fact, subsumed in and (re)produced by all development actors."* (Wong et al. 2019: i)

At the heart of gender transformative change lies critical questions like: why do we research, what do we do with our knowledge outputs, and what is considered as outreach and impact? As pointed out in a report on Institutional Change Initiative (Gender at Work 2021), CGIAR social scientists are slowly but surely questioning the invisibility of power in the process of knowledge production.

> *"… the one-way dissemination of knowledge which is often found in science, when practiced in any social context or institution with existing hierarchies can exacerbate or increase knowledge 'monopolies'. Without addressing power, in other words, the means of producing, controlling, and using knowledge stays in the hands of the privileged few and in fact, prompts bias."* (Ferdous et al. 2015: 10, as cited in Gender at Work 2021: 14)

Building on the EoPRE findings and linking these to other change initiatives within CGIAR, we highlight three key conceptual issues for consideration going forward.

1. **External facilitation can enable critical reflection for transformative change, but pathways to achieving these can only surface from within the institution, and from rethinking new ways of knowing, learning and doing.**

There has been significant progress in enhancing gender equality, diversity and inclusion in CGIAR workplaces. The goal is to design and sustain workplaces that are "inclusive and enabling" (CGIAR 2021).

In this context, the EoPRE sees a critical need for infusing this emerging culture of gender equality, diversity and inclusion within CGIAR into research domains – in the design of research initiatives; in project management; in our partnerships for research, communication and advocacy; and essentially in the fabric of our everyday 'research doing' and decision making. At a very basic level, these changes would help contextualize research – allowing better insight on what needs to and can be changed, where and how – to achieve greater inclusion and equality.

> *"The last two decades of studies and research in gender equality in science and technology show that if we want to implement change, the focus must shift from individual support measures to the structural transformations of institutions – from 'fixing the women' and 'fixing the numbers', to 'fixing institutions'."* (UNESCO 2018: 16, as cited in Gender at Work 2021: 17)

In many development institutions, reflection, while encouraged on an individual basis as part of personal evaluations, is rarely practiced as a systemic, methodological issue in projects or at an institutional scale.

Our design of a reflexive EoPRE was initially met with some skepticism about who we were doing it for. Our answer, "for ourselves", raised both caution and surprise. The culture we work in requires us to deliver, mostly to those above in the hierarchy of development. How can a reflexive, inward-looking evaluation possibly be useful, for those who matter most, including funders and donors? It took effort and time for the evaluation team to both explain and implement this process.

A historic gap in research for development has been the tendency to understand problems as being linear and external – out there among partners, in local communities, in policies and outdated technologies – and thus relatively easily addressed with new policies, technologies, tools and interventions deemed appropriate by expert researchers. This, according to the Three Spheres of Transformation framework, is only partially true (O'Brien and Sygna 2013; O'Brien 2018). The problems we encounter are often shaped by personal biases and assumptions, and in turn by the structure and culture of the systems we live and work in.

Looking deep, getting a full insight of the complexity of challenges, can only happen from within. Until then, what happens inside the institutions we work in, the processes of how we work and collaborate (or not), remain a proverbial 'black box', even though these are precisely the spaces where policy and institutional intent get diluted and reinterpreted or misinterpreted (Mosse 2011).

The practice of reflexivity opens the door to meaningfully investigate issues and considerations that can be "intense, surprising, or upsetting" (Probst 2015: 43) in the process of doing research, and how these can impact the quality of science. According to Probst (2015: 43), reflexivity can be used as a "framework for processing, sustaining, renewing and gaining insight both into the research and oneself." It is thus "a tool not only for managing the research experience" but also to avoid "becoming side-tracked or emotionally depleted" (ibid).

Personal learning trajectories built into project and program theories of change can enable researchers to reflect on mapping change and exploring solutions to small or large, potential and unpredictable challenges and changes.

2. Potential gender-power imbalances in the research process and in research institutions need to be unpacked, acknowledged and addressed.

Power is a core element of knowledge and science domains. It exists in all social relations, including in relations between researchers and the researched and among researchers themselves (Dowling 2016). Mapping how power operates requires looking from the inside out and from the outside in. These processes will be transformative only when actors across power hierarchies are part of the exercise.

To deliver relevant and gender transformative science, which is the aim of One CGIAR, we need to better map asymmetrical relationships at scale between processes and outputs, within our institutions, with our partners and stakeholders, and in the contexts of our planned research. This would allow, for one, reversals in accountability of our knowledge and science to our end users – marginalized women, men and youth. This what feminist researchers argue will add value to science.

At a more fundamental level, unpacking gender-power asymmetries would allow mapping and tackling key barriers to gender equality and social inclusion in projects, programs and institutions, as well as in policy advocacy and impact. This would allow asking questions like the following at the start of any research initiative:

- Whose logic and mandates define research agendas and initiatives?
- How do we make visible organizational cultures that sidestep tackling systemic, structural inequalities?
- How do we ensure that gender, inclusion and intersectionality lie at the core of our research design, and then how do we operationalize these concepts in our research process?

AR4D institutions can help achieve transformative change at local, national and global levels by engaging with grassroots and feminist organizations and actors, who are often driving radical social change (DFID 2018). This will require significantly new ways of working, including encouraging and rewarding gender transformative research that can unpack and challenge underlying power structures across institutions (Dieltiens et al. 2009).

3. Transformative ideas require proportionate financing, and much more.

We make the case here for improved financing of gender and social inclusion in the new One CGIAR initiatives, because the EoPRE discussions reveal that resource constraints are a key practical challenge to institutional aspirations to gender transformative change. This is not simply a practical challenge –

the lack of adequate finances to support gender and inclusion can be embedded in deeper institutional and political issues.

Our findings show that the practical context of any given project varies significantly, and it is often difficult, if not impossible, to know up front the extent or magnitude of contextual barriers to achieving gender equality and social inclusion. This calls for buffers of time and other resources, including budgets, to help navigate challenges with diverse partners and in complex situations.

There are also fears that the COVID-19 pandemic could potentially disrupt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with cutbacks in financial commitment to gender research (UN n.d.). In 2017 and 2018, 42% of bilateral aid was targeted to gender equality and women's empowerment, and 4% of this overall to projects with an explicit, primary gender focus. This was the highest ever commitment of funds to gender equality (OECD 2020).

There is good reason to believe this will not now be the case. First, recent shocks have most impacted marginalized women, men and children across the Global South and North. Second, COVID-19 has made visible the invisibility of the care economy – whose unpaid workers are largely women. This pandemic has reminded us of the true scale of the distorted assumption that care work of children and the elderly can be soaked up by private citizens who are mostly always women – effectively providing a huge subsidy to the paid economy (Lewis 2020). This has led many development actors and organizations to prioritize a "feminist, human rights-based approach to economic development" amid other pressures that have arisen during this global pandemic (Denomy et al. 2020).

In conclusion, transforming the system will require "new perspectives, new norms of behavior, and a new culture" (Gender at Work 2021: 28). We recommend simple first steps to enabling more open discussions; collaborative critical reflection on what works well and what does not; and encouraging new ways of thinking, doing and learning gender.

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Annex 1. Glossary.

Embodied experience: Embodied experience consists of a person's biological (somatic), intellectual, emotional, bodily, social, gendered, artistic and spiritual experience, within their cultural and geographical location.

Epistemology: Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with knowledge.

Gender: Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.

Gender transformative change: Defined as a significant change in the norms, structures and/or institutions that produce and sustain unequal gender relations.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality can be understood as an analytical concept used to understand how different social markers of difference, together with a person's social and political identities, combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

Organizational cultures: Organizational culture is the collection of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behavior and actions of individuals and groups belonging to the organization in question.

Reflexivity: Refers to the examination of one's own beliefs, judgments and practices during the research process and how these may have influenced the research. Reflexivity involves questioning one's own taken-for-granted assumptions.

Researcher bias: The term researcher bias is used to capture the ways in which our own situated knowledge and ways of viewing the world influences our relationship to our research and its intended participants and audiences. Researchers' prejudices (unintended bias too), for example, might lead to unintended errors in the research process or the interpretation of its results.

Situated knowledge: The epistemology of situated knowledge states that all forms of knowledge (and knowledge production) reflect the social identities and subject positions of knowledge holders/producers, as well the conditions in which these identities and locations are produced. Knowledge about the world is always situated, partial, embodied and grounded in people's lived experiences.

Social inclusion: Defined as improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of people disadvantaged based on their identity to take part in society. This is achieved through increasing opportunities, voice and decision making as well as equal access to assets and services, and to social, political and physical spaces.

Photo: S. Samuel / CCAFS

CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE)

The **CGIAR Research Program on Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE)** is a global research-for-development program connecting partners to deliver sustainable agriculture solutions that enhance our natural resources – and the lives of people that rely on them. WLE brings together 11 CGIAR centers, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the RUAF Global Partnership and national, regional and international partners to deliver solutions that change agriculture from a driver of environmental degradation to part of the solution. WLE is led by the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) and partners as part of CGIAR, a global research partnership for a food-secure future.

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