

PRIORITISING GENDER INCLUSION AND AGENCY IN LAND RESTORATION



As a large scale, multi-country, multi-stakeholder restoration initiative, Regreening Africa offers a unique opportunity to generate actionable lessons on the cost-effectiveness and impact of local, national and global restoration efforts. As part of the Regreening Africa Insights Series, this brief shares key learnings and insights of different activities and interventions that have been carried out across the Regreening Africa countries, which aim to address gender issues and ensure more equitable engagement and benefit from restoration activities.

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KEY INSIGHTS



Enhancing women's inclusion and agency – that is their capabilities, choices and actions as full citizens and agents of development – is essential for land restoration and also benefits the community.



More than 70% of women participants in Regreening Africa's Ghana project reported that they feel **included in household decisions**.



Women should be acknowledged as active decision makers and drivers of restoration initiatives rather than passive beneficiaries.



Men's inputs in addressing gender inequality are also important. In a patriarchal society, where power dynamics are frequently prejudiced in favour of men, having men support gender transformative approaches can have a greater impact.



Gender needs differ in the context of multi-cultural diversity and should be addressed accordingly – gender transformative approaches must therefore understand context-specific gender and be aware of gendered roles and norms.



Increased focus is needed on **applying a gender transformative approach at different scales**, including at the village level across communities.

Why understanding and engaging a gender perspective is critical in land restoration

Countries across the globe are increasingly pledging to restore their degraded landscapes. More often than not, the targeted landscapes are inhabited by local communities and/or indigenous peoples who use and make claim to the land, even if they are often not officially recognized as landowners or land users. **If we are to delegate the responsibility of restoration efforts to these land users, we cannot continue to ignore their rights.** This is particularly the case when the unrecognised land owners are women, as women's rights are insecure under both customary and statutory regimes and their voices even less heard in key decision-making processes.¹

Previous restoration initiatives demonstrate that ignoring these groups and excluding their claims undermines the sustainability and success of

TO BUILD THE RESILIENCE OF HOUSEHOLDS, BOTH MEN AND WOMEN MUST BE ACTIVELY ENGAGED IN HOUSEHOLD DECISION MAKING. THIS BEGINS WITH AN APPRECIATION OF THE VARIOUS CONTRIBUTIONS EACH MAKE AND A RECOGNITION OF GENDERED ASPECTS OF WORKLOADS, ACCESS TO RESOURCES, AND HOUSEHOLD DECISIONS.

restoration efforts, while further marginalizing them.¹ A large number of examples from Africa demonstrate how integrating **a gender-responsive approach to ecological restoration is not only key to their restoration success, but also generates additional value** in supporting the livelihood activities of both women and men² and strengthening the community.

Regreening Africa implements programme activities across landscapes where structural gender-based constraints within cultural systems are prevalent, making land access and control challenging for women. Dominant patriarchal cultural norms and practices often mean that women's access to land is generally mediated by men (through marriage or male relatives) who determine which land uses women can have access to. This results in women having little opportunity to access fertile land and with having to travel longer distances to access degraded/communal/state land. Travelling long distances to access land whilst also performing many other household responsibilities can be overburdening for women.

Included in this brief is a detailed case study of gender inclusion and agency in land restoration in Regreening Africa focus country Ghana, providing evidence of how women can be meaningfully engaged in restoration, and the opportunities that derive from this inclusion.



THE VALUE OF ENGAGING WOMEN

- Rural women are more susceptible to losing access to land in restoration initiatives, given the legal and cultural barriers to women's land rights and ownership.
- Engaging with women enhances our understanding of local needs and interests, providing important opportunities to gain local knowledge of ecosystems and resource management.
- Constructed gender roles often influences women's and men's environmental knowledge and priorities for restoration – it is critical to understand both.
- The recognition within restoration initiatives of women as land managers and ecological knowledge holders can enhance the social standing and decision-making power within their communities.
- Equitable participation in restoration initiatives generates broader local buy-in and enhanced capacities, with improved prospects for both socio-economic development and environmental outcomes.

(Adapted from CIFOR Gender & Restoration¹)



Addressing gender through Regreening Africa

Each of the eight Regreening Africa focus countries implemented a series of transformative action activities to enhance women and youth inclusion³ over three dimensions:



Project-related decision making



Gender responsiveness in implementation



Labour and time impacts

GENDER, YOUTH AND INCLUSION OUTCOMES

Women, men, young farmers, and those from disempowered groups will participate meaningfully in decision making in all key components of the project.

Project activities are tailored to the needs, priorities, and interests of women, men, youth, and key disempowered groups. Critical discussion is facilitated of traditional gender roles that impede the achievement of equitable project benefits.

The benefits associated with practising EGA* amongst women, men, and key social groups either reduce workloads or outweigh any associated workload increases.

* EGA = Evergreen Agriculture

Table 1: Map of Regreening Africa gender, youth and inclusion activities

 PROJECT-RELATED DECISION MAKING	 GENDER RESPONSIVENESS IN IMPLEMENTATION	 LABOUR AND TIME IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Regreening projects actively promoted the meaningful and equal participation of men, women and youth in decision making at all stages of project implementation. The views of men, women and youth were considered while writing collaboration agreements with local farmers groups/cooperatives. Appropriate channels and platforms to engage men to support women empowerment and equality were identified. Women, men, and different social groups were involved in selecting priority tree species to be used for restoration. The decision-making capacities of women and men committee members were developed and follow-up technical support was provided. Gender Transformative Action training was also conducted to increase women's input in decisions and their perspectives in project outcomes. Women's skills and knowledge were developed by providing gender-related training. Women were empowered to exercise leadership roles in Evergreen Agriculture (EGA) practices (lead farmer, Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration (FMNR) group leader, conservation group leader). Youth and women formed a significant component of training for lead farmers and fire volunteers on pruning, bushfire prevention, and fire management. Engagement was supported through radio programmes to help impact hard-to-reach areas and scale up the successes of the EGA/FMNR beyond traditional project areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings were conducted at an appropriate time and place to enable the participation of women committee members in the decision-making process. All planned interventions were analysed to identify opportunities for gender mainstreaming. Extension and training approaches to be used were reviewed to ensure equitable access. A conducive training environment for women was created. Efforts were made to ensure that women's voices were heard during distribution and planting of tree seedlings. Project activities were revised to address and better respond to the needs, priorities and interests of women, men and other disempowered groups based on the findings of the gender analysis. Peer-facilitated workshops were conducted in order to support a sense of ownership. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members were mobilized so they understand how the adoption of evergreen practices will equally benefit men and women. During training, input provisions and other interventions, appropriate times and places were selected for women. EGA activities that reduce women's workloads (as well as those of other disadvantaged groups) were identified and implemented. Women participated in reseeded practices at FMNR sites and communal pasture lands. Women's saving groups were trained on making and using improved stoves to reduce the consumption of firewood. Male engagement was promoted through selection and recognition of male role models who exercise equitable access and control over resources at the household level. Women were capacitated to benefit from land and agroforestry products equally with men. Degraded lands to be recovered for women were identified, and the bio-reclamation of degraded lands was conducted for the benefit of women. Women were trained on land reclamation techniques and supported with agricultural inputs for the development of restored lands. The establishment of women and youth groups was supported to facilitate their access to land. Ongoing sensitisation and advocacy was undertaken with village and administrative authorities to promote women's access to productive resources (land, farm inputs etc.).



DISRUPTING THE DISPARITIES AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS WITH REGARDS TO WOMEN'S AND MEN'S ROLES IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR IN ACHIEVING GENDER TRANSFORMATION CHANGE.

Case study: Key successes in prioritising gender inclusion and agency in land restoration in Ghana



As part of Regreening Africa's effort to meaningfully integrate gender issues, an innovative study was set up to determine whether taking an explicitly gender transformative approach (GTA) to land restoration would not only foster changes in harmful gender norms and attitudes but also contribute to desirable environmental outcomes. A GTA strategically challenges the underlying causes of gender inequality — that is, exclusionary cultural norms and customs — rather than merely addressing some of the symptoms.

Three modules were developed, drawing from existing methods and tools that focused on gender awareness and sensitization, mapping desirable changes, and encouraging household visioning and cohesion. The modules were designed to include discussions, group activities and role play exercises and these were facilitated in 15 communities of the Bawku West District of the Upper East Region of Ghana. A prior baseline study informed intervention design, providing an understanding of the potential pathways

to achieving balanced workloads, access to resources and equitable decision-making dynamics.

The study findings underscore the importance of creating an **enabling environment for gender transformation** and having a well-formulated structure to tackle the gender and power relations through proactive and voluntary engagement of men and women.



IMPLEMENTING A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH IN GHANA

A series of three gender engagement dialogues were carried out amongst 15 communities (150 households) in Bawku West, Ghana. For each session, six trained facilitators worked in pairs to facilitate the dialogue series with groups of ten couples from the community. These dialogues were successful in:

- Breaking inhibitions around discussions of sensitive and unchallenged cultural norms
- Developing participatory gendered indicators for marking progress
- Identifying community gender champions
- Creating household gender balance tree books (which include assets, workloads, income and expenses).

Throughout the process, women demonstrated an enthusiasm for change and expressed an imbalance in household decision making favoured towards men. While men acknowledged their privilege, they also expressed frustration at the 'burden of privilege' that they carry – examples cited include the demands of family leadership, and cultural obligations for funeral and marriage rites that require men to provide livestock and cereals.



3 GENDER ENGAGEMENT DIALOGUES

1 Sex and gender

- ✓ Understanding the difference between gender and sex, roles and responsibilities
- ✓ Exploring gendered constraints and opportunities through role play

2 Family visioning

- ✓ Future visioning for the family in the next three years (well-being, assets, income generation, farm, relationship)

3 Gender indicators of change

- ✓ Exploring priority gender issues and developing common goals
- ✓ Discussing how social change can occur in a short time span
- ✓ Identifying participatory indicators that could be used to assess progress towards positive change



INDICATOR PROGRESS MARKERS

The **GTA approach involved the participatory formulation of markers to map the progress of participating households.** Indicators listed changes that are easier to attain ('like-to-see' changes) as well as changes requiring a deeper transformation following continuous engagement and action ('love-to-see' changes).

Indicators confirmed men's privilege, requiring them to make several concessions, but also revealed the weight of responsibility from holding many of the household's resources.

Both men and women agreed this imbalance of shared resources was indicative of the household's vulnerability and required the redistribution of resources to other household members as part of building the household's resilience.

The indicators reveal men's desire to include women in large household decisions, allocate fertile farmlands to women and share domestic chores. Women, on the other hand, desire to have joint control over income from the sale of farm produce, receive support from their husband to diversify their income, and discuss family planning with spouses without judgment.

"GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACHES ENCOURAGE ALL PARTICIPANTS TO ENGAGE IN REPEATED CYCLES OF CRITICAL REFLECTION AND ACTION, INCLUDING ENGAGEMENT WITH DIFFERENT ACTORS AT VARIOUS SCALES. TIME COMMITMENT, PASSION AND A FIRM BELIEF IN THE POSSIBILITY OF A POSITIVE CHANGE IN GENDER RELATIONS IS IMPORTANT."

—Ana Maria Paez Valencia, a gender social scientist at CIFOR-ICRAF

	WOMEN	MEN
LIKE TO SEE	Women have complete control over own livestock income	Women take care of livestock
	Women's farm given priority and ploughed after family farm before ploughing for other men	Women support the purchase of farm inputs for men's farms (family farms)
	Men help with taking sick children and older people to the hospital	Men actively participate in bringing up female children
	Men reduce alcohol intake	Men support and encourage women to attain leadership positions
	Discuss family planning with husband without judgement	Men concern themselves with women's general health (e.g. accompany to the hospital and supporting women on antenatal visits)
LOVE TO SEE	Women participate in key household decisions (e.g. income expenditure)	Men include women in key decisions (e.g. income expenditure)
	Women have access to fertile family land for farming	Men allocate fertile land to women for farming
	Women have control over their bodies in decisions of sex	Wives are accepting of additional wife
	Women are able to freely express grievances to husband without ridicule, shame or fear	Men and women apologise to spouse when wrong
	Men and women have joint control of family farm produce (e.g. what to sell, when to sell, quantity to sell, and use of cash from crop sale)	Family is more peaceful and united
EXPECT TO SEE	Men and sons help with washing clothes	Women provide money to buy condiments
	Men and sons help fetching water	Men give money to women for the grinding mill
	Men bathe children	Women pay for health insurance and medication for women and children
	Men take young children to school	Women pay children's school fees
	Women receive money from men for trading	Women weed their farm after man's farm (family farm)



STIMULATING THE ECONOMIC INCLUSION OF WOMEN IN GHANA

Case Study: Jafaru Azaratu⁴

Under the Regreening Africa Programme, **World Vision Ghana** supported the economic empowerment of women through **Savings for Transformation (S4T) interventions**, allowing women to participate meaningfully in economic and agroforestry practices. These interventions have also made it possible for women and men to access alternative income-generating activities that reduce pressure on forests and forest products, thereby allowing trees and shrubs to regenerate.

S4T has been life-changing for 43-year-old Jafaru Azaratu, from Asomnre community in Zebilla, Bawku West District of the Upper East Region of Ghana. A trained baker, Azaratu could not put her skills to use due to financial constraints.

When she joined the S4T project, Jafaru borrowed GHC 300 (50 USD) to start a baking business. She quickly repaid the money and took another loan of GHC 500 (84 USD), which she used to construct her bakery. Through the baking business, Azaratu and her husband have put all their children in school. Azaratu is now a full-time baker, supplying other retailers. From the business, she purchased three vehicles to serve as distribution vans. She has also hired nine workers, six of whom are women, thereby creating employment for women and youth.



Addressing gender dimensions of the shea value chain⁵

The women of the Sahel regions of Ghana depend on land and tree resources for their livelihoods, in particular, the shea tree (*Vitellaria paradoxa*), which provides vital income to many women. The oil-rich nuts of the tree are traditionally a women's resource, providing a cash income that women control and granting them a level of financial independence.

However, in recent years, men have asserted greater ownership over shea parklands and extended their control over shea-nut resources, driven by the growing market value of the nuts and the butter made from them. This has been facilitated by customary law that assigns men control over land, and has deprived many women of a vital source of income.

Through discussions facilitated by the Regreening Africa Programme, men have highlighted their need for cash from shea nuts to buy farm inputs due to a lack of cash flow at the beginning of the farming

season. They explained that shea nuts were a low-investment product and increasingly poor agricultural yields had forced them into this traditionally female domain.

This is a classic example of how cultural norms and customs hinder access to and control over land, as well as undermining fair participation and equal enjoyment of

opportunities in northern Ghana. Such challenges are a major barrier to land restoration and must be uncovered and addressed by interventions targeted to deliver gender equity in projects. Land-restoration projects need to address these dynamics to deliver inclusive and sustainable outcomes.





SHIFTING LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OVER WOMEN'S LAND OWNERSHIP IN GHANA

Accomplishments in tree product value chains and land restoration by members of the women's groups have elevated their social standing, allowing them to express their concerns and advocate for their land rights. Secure land tenure rights not only promote sustainable land management, which improves the effectiveness of efforts to combat and adapt to climate change, but are also critical for women's social and economic empowerment.

An enabling policy and legal environment boosts the scaling process for both land restoration and women's agency. Land inheritance rights for women in Ghana could potentially set the stage for deeper transformations in the future, but it remains a sensitive topic and men struggled to make a stronger commitment in support of such changes.

“MEN HAD 57.3% MORE ACCESS TO AGRICULTURAL LAND THAN WOMEN, WHO HAVE 39%. ALTHOUGH 71% OF MALE RESPONDENTS INDICATED THAT THEY DID NOT DISCUSS LAND RESTORATION WITH WOMEN, 59% AGREED THAT WOMEN WERE BETTER AT NURTURING TREES. HOWEVER, ONLY 2% OF FEMALE RESPONDENTS HAD INPUT INTO FARM DECISIONS ON THE TYPES OF TREES TO PLANT, COMPARED TO 47% OF MEN.”

—Gloria Adeyiga, a researcher with the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, a PhD candidate with Bangor University and the Ghana focal point for Regreening Africa.



MORE THAN HALF OF MALE PARTICIPANTS ARE NOW CONTRIBUTING TO HOUSEHOLD CHORES, SUCH AS FETCHING WATER FROM LONGER DISTANCES USING BICYCLES

Key project successes in Ghana

The first round of monitoring of the project has already revealed positive changes, with men increasingly:

- **participating in household chores** (such as fetching water, childcare and taking children to school);
- **supporting women to take leadership positions** in mixed-gender savings groups; and
- **including women in larger household decisions**, such as marriage arrangements for children and funeral planning.

Assessments have shown that men hoped these changes encourage women to support them financially in purchasing farm inputs and caring for livestock. Women confirmed receiving financial support from men to start small businesses and feeling included in decisions about the use of income from the sale of produce from the family farm.

However, men expressed a wish for **greater access to homesteads** for cultivation, preferring this land because the soil was more fertile and closer to the home, where women also have to attend to several domestic chores.

The project team anticipates that the project interventions will continue to empower women to:

- negotiate secure access to land and shea-nut resources on farmlands (where shea-nut yields are higher);
- claim more input into farming decisions and practices (including restoring practices that could improve land productivity); and
- have more equitable work burdens.

The expectation is also that positive changes in how men and women work together will be reflected in the adoption of more sustainable farming practices, enhanced collaboration, improved household cohesion and resilience.

SUCCESS IN NUMBERS



Community gender champions have been trained and supported to continue engagement with individual participating couples (or households in the case of some polygamous families)



Inter-community gender champions workshops have been established. Every 5 months all champions and facilitators have met to review progress, discuss challenges and find strategies to address emerging or continuous problems (e.g. land ownership for women)



Monthly visits to individual households and community dialogues to **monitor progress on gendered indicators** have been undertaken.



80% of women in 15 communities are now able to access about ≤ 0.5 acres to plant groundnuts/Bambara beans/bean/vegetables.



Women's work burdens have been lessened with more than half of male participants now contributing to household chores such as fetching water from longer distances using bicycles or motorbikes, washing clothes and childcare.



Women have greater access to decision-making platforms, with more than 70% of women participants feeling included in household decisions.



Twelve development workers (6 men and 6 women) were trained and empowered in gender transformative action and participatory learning and action in Bawku West, Ghana.



In 2022, the GTA approach was refined and adopted by World Vision and **scaled out to 30 village saving groups** across other communities in Ghana. Within participating communities, there is also a high interest from non-participating households.

Assessing the future

Over and above Regreening Africa's interventions, change is already happening across the landscape: a more educated younger generation has encountered gender sensitizing or capacity development and have been encouraged to dispel gender stereotypes. GTAs support and enrich this process by equipping men and women with concepts and tools to discuss sensitive topics, set collective visions and map desired changes that benefit them and the wellbeing of their households.

A key strength of the gender transformative approach lies in simulating change scenarios, which are helpful in appraising people's reactions and giving them the opportunity to reflect, react and adjust accordingly. This avoids hostile situations where people feel estranged because of changes in the community.

The gender transformative approach has also provided a better appreciation of the responsibility that researchers and practitioners need to assume to be able to deliver on gender equality goals, as well as the need to strengthen the capacity of project staff and implementing partners. This is a key precondition to successfully deploy context-specific gender tools and approaches that are tailored to the needs and conditions of different communities.



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ABOUT REGREENING AFRICA

Regreening Africa is an ambitious five and a half-year programme that seeks to reverse land degradation among 500,000 households, and across 1 million hectares in eight countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. By incorporating trees into croplands, communal lands and pastoral areas, regreening efforts make it possible to reclaim Africa's degraded landscapes with complimentary soil and water conservation.

As part of a larger global and regional effort to halt and reverse land degradation, the European Union-funded programme, Regreening Africa, aims to improve smallholder livelihoods, food security and resilience to climate change. It also seeks to catalyse an even larger scaling effort to restore tens of millions of hectares of degraded land across Africa.

With an initial phase over 2017-2023, this unique research in development is led by World Agroforestry (ICRAF) and implemented by a consortium of international NGOs. This includes World Vision, Catholic Relief Services, Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, and Oxfam, as well as national NGO Sahel Eco. The eight countries that Regreening Africa is active in are Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Senegal, with a light touch in Burkina Faso.

Regreening Africa focuses on the incorporation of trees into many land-use types, including croplands, communal lands and pastoral areas, with complementary soil and water conservation and soil improvement practices. It leverages science and research to track the impact of implementation and enhance concurrent social inclusion and livelihood-enhancing efforts as well as creating a sustainable enabling policy environment for land restoration at national and sub-national levels.

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