



THINKING OUT OF THE BOX TO BE GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE IN OUR WORK

BUT WHAT IS A GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH...?

Achieving gender equality by 2030 requires urgent action to eliminate the many root causes of discrimination that still curtail women's rights in private and public spheres¹.



An ambitious agenda for gender equality and women's empowerment

With the Gender Action Plan III (GAP III), the EU has prioritised the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in all external policies and actions.

Therefore, in order to continue promoting gender equality as a key political objective of all its external actions and common foreign and security policy, the EU is adopting a **three-pronged approach**, combining gender mainstreaming, targeted actions and political dialogue with the new commitment that 85% of all new actions will have women and girls' empowerment as a significant or principal objective by 2025. At least one action with gender equality as a principal objective will be supported in each country.

The participation and leadership of women and girls is essential for democracy, justice, peace, security, prosperity and a greener planet.

With this new Gender Action Plan, we are pushing for more and faster progress towards gender equality.

Josep Borrell

High Representative and Vice-President

Beyond gender mainstreaming



Gender mainstreaming is the integration of the gender perspective into every stage of policy processes – design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation – with the aim of promoting equality between women and men. It assesses how policies impact the lives and positions of both women and men – and assumes the responsibility to re-address such policies if necessary.

While gender mainstreaming ensures that all policies and programmes maximise the benefits for everyone and contribute to stopping the perpetuation of inequality, GAP III goes a step further in recognising that to achieve gender equality we must further invest in **understanding and addressing deep-rooted inequalities** and contribute to **countering gender stereotypes and biases**.

What does this mean for our work?

It means building on our commitments to advance women's rights in political and policy dialogue, standalone interventions and internal and external communication, not only by further mainstreaming gender in all our external actions but also by applying three key principles:



A GENDER-TRANSFORMATIVE APPROACH



INTERSECTIONALITY




A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

What is a gender-transformative approach?

It is a framework designed to **target the underlying causes of gender inequality**.

This requires the understanding of the **power dynamics and structures that reinforce gender exclusion and inequality** in the specific contexts and sectors in which we work. It incorporates actions that aim to transform those dynamics and structures, thus **promoting change in social attitudes**.

To achieve this, we must expand our engagement in gender beyond interventions that focus primarily on the needs of individual women – for example, increasing access to education, improving health services, providing technical skills or encouraging women to bolster their power and agency – and **invest in actions that address deep-seated social norms and systems that reinforce gender inequalities**.



GTA is the process of “examining, questioning and changing rigid gender norms and imbalances of power which disadvantage women and girls and generate discriminations at all ages, starting from early childhood, in societies”

GAP III

Should we then **not address the practical needs** of women, girls and marginalised gender groups?



ABSOLUTELY NOT!

It is critical to continue to support these practical needs.

For example, supporting shelters for women survivors of violence; ensuring improved water sources close to women's homes; providing access to agricultural inputs; providing training on political and leadership skills and more.

However, this must be conducted with full awareness of which gender power relations promote interventions that i) do no harm and ii) contribute to a positive change in the circumstances and environments that produce discrimination and inequality.

For instance, in a program working to improve the sexual and reproductive health rights of girls and women by investing in access to health services and menstrual pads, adopting a GTA would mean: i) understanding if women and girls face barriers to visit health centres, notably due to mobility restrictions and lack of agency and ii) if girls are discouraged from attending school while menstruating. If that is the case, an intervention that focuses only on improving health clinics and distributing pads will fail to address the harmful norms that limit women's mobility and decision-making or the underlying taboos surrounding menstruation that limit the lives of girls and womenⁱⁱ.



ADOPTING A GTA means putting the spotlight on understanding the social position of girls and women, the existing power dynamics and the beliefs around roles and expectations in any given context, so that our actions address not only their practical needs but also the underlying root causes of gender inequality.

How do we **apply a gender transformative approach** in practice?

Adopting a GTA is a process.

All EU external actions should be guided by a gender transformative approach and use a GTA lens in determining priorities and actions in policy dialogue and all sector interventions.



The first step is to acknowledge that integrating gender in policies, programs and activities is a process and that GTA is a lens that enables us to identify the best strategies to implement an intervention across a gender continuum, towards transforming gender norms and power relations in each given context where we operate.

For instance, if we want to **promote women's economic empowerment** and identify that women are struggling to sell their products, an intervention might focus on seeking to promote business/sales training for women (i.e. through a quota system or incentives). This may increase the number of women trained and begin to achieve a shift in women's access to training opportunities, possibly in their skills levels.

However, women's economic participation is often limited by gender barriers that prevent them from accessing the market (i.e. discriminatory social norms that restrain their access to training opportunities or markets or laws and policies that prevent women from accessing resources).

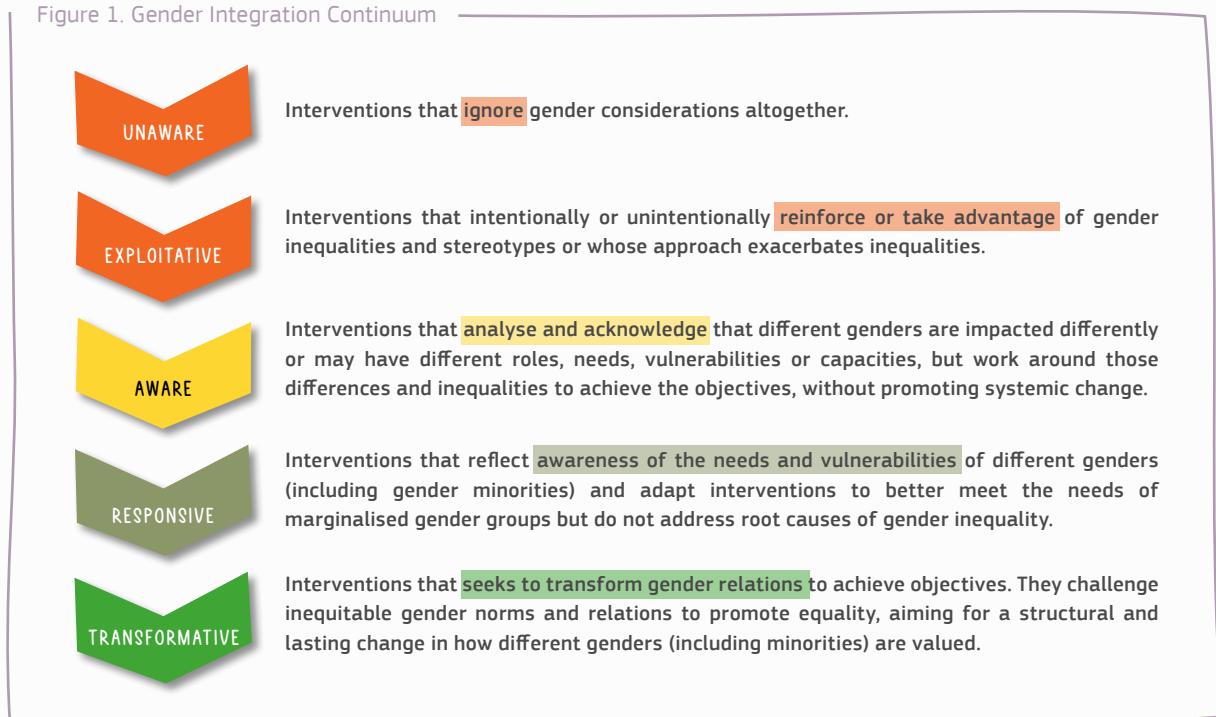
A gender transformative approach would examine this wider context and tackle those underlying root causes of inequality alongside the intervention of business promotion/sales trainingⁱⁱⁱ.



What is the gender integration continuum?

It is a framework that helps us to understand the process of integrating gendered approaches in policies, programmes and activities and to better identify strategies to set an intervention aiming for a gender transformative approach into motion^{iv}. For more details, [click this link](#) and learn about some practical examples on “how to navigate across the gender continuum”.

Figure 1. Gender Integration Continuum



How do intersectionality and a human rights-based approach connect with GTA?

The principle of intersectionality^v gives us a lens to look at “women” and “men” as non-homogenous categories. It gives us a framework to understand how power and privilege are structured for people at different intersectional positions – based on race, ethnic and religious background, age, disability, sexuality, socio-economic status, location, refugee or migrant status, among others.

The human rights-based approach^{vi} (HRBA) works as an umbrella for applying a GTA with an intersectionality lens, ensuring that actions focus on “how to address power imbalances, discrimination and the drivers of inequalities, especially in its most extreme forms”^{vii}.

Applying a GTA and using an intersectional lens under the HRBA framework enables us to operationalise the EU commitments to advance the realisation of women's rights, reduce gender inequality and fight gender-based discrimination and exclusion.

Should we really follow these principles?



GAP III provides a mandatory policy framework for the EU to boost its engagement in gender equality which includes adopting these principles, in addition to gender mainstreaming.

This is not optional because adopting a gender transformative approach – with an intersectional lens under the HRBA umbrella – contributes to ensuring the respect and full enjoyment of all women and girls' human rights and has the potential to achieve lasting change, representing more effective and sustainable development spending.

The progress made on moving towards a gender transformative approach in EU external actions will be monitored in the mid-term and final evaluation of GAP III implementation.

How can this be reflected in our daily work?



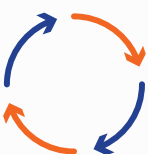
Ensure that the gender analysis we conduct – as the main tool informing programming and policy and political dialogue – incorporates a **power analysis**. This looks at the ways in which gender shapes the distributions of power at all levels of society to better understand the complexity of gender relations and their interconnectedness with multiple forms of gender discrimination^{viii}.

Pay particular attention, for instance, to the gendered division of labour and time use; community and household decision-making behaviour; access to public spaces and services; access to and control over resources; right to access to information and meaningful participation in public decision-making spaces; levels of confidence and aspirations amongst men and women.



Use **policy and political dialogue** as an entry point to set up the basis for EC gender transformative interventions, promoting culturally appropriate dialogue on the structural root causes of gender inequality and the revision of discriminatory norms.

The [InterCultural Approach Programme \(InCA\)](#) interdisciplinary action-research programme of DG INTPA is an excellent platform to support the advancement of a GTA. It aims at increasing the effectiveness and the results of the EU external policies and interventions through an intercultural sensitive partnership with countries and organisations implementing them.

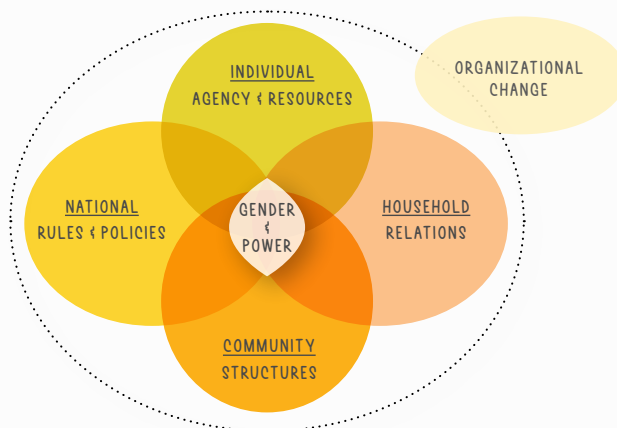


Integrate this approach throughout the entire intervention cycle. In the case of existing (targeted or mainstreamed) interventions, build on what is in place and take it a progressive step forward by identifying and challenging discriminatory norms and unequal relations. For new interventions, start with the Identification of Priorities, integrate this in the Formulation of Interventions and incorporate it in the Implementation and Evaluation. For more details, discover some [practical tips on how to incorporate a GTA into the intervention cycle](#).

What specific actions get us there?

1. **USE A MULTI-LAYERED APPROACH** Achieving transformational change requires acting:

- Within multiple dimensions – personal, household, community and national – while also investing in organisational culture change;
- Across different spheres – building women's agency and resources, addressing discriminatory power relations, transforming exclusionary social structures and changing institutional rules and policies that perpetuate inequality.



2. **INVEST IN BEING “THE CHANGE WE WISH TO SEE”** Adopting a GTA requires investing in our own organisational cultural change. This includes:

- Leadership buy-in and engagement, strengthening a “supportive gender transformative leadership”;
- Promoting stronger accountability, integrating gender as a stronger performance criterion;
- Continue creating opportunities for the public recognition of individuals and Delegations/Units that champion the implementation of a GTA;
- Leveraging Member States and other donors/actors with a strong interest in furthering the implementation of a GTA.

In the OXFAM [Guide on Transformative Leadership for Women's Rights](#), you will find helpful tips on how leadership can create sustainable change that promotes women's rights and gender equality.

3. **ENGAGE WITH CIVIL SOCIETY (CS) ACTORS WHICH PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY WITH A FOCUS ON WORKING WITH WOMEN'S RIGHTS ORGANISATIONS (WROS)**

These are key actors in achieving transformational change for gender equality and pushing the women's rights agenda forward, so interventions should:

- Go beyond the “usual suspects” and build alliances across WROs, between WROs and other CS actors advancing GEWE, avoiding silos and adopting a multi-sectoral approach;
- Create and support safe spaces for dialogue between the authorities and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), particularly WROs;
- Pay special attention to young women's organisations (and other organisations representing vulnerable groups and the voices of those most left behind) from an intersectionality approach;
- Promote networks and partnerships in order to reach out to smaller/grass roots organisations;
- Provide specific support and funding to enable local CSOs, notably WROs, and to actively participate in intervention as well as policy and political dialogue.

4. IDENTIFY AND ENGAGE OTHER EMERGING ACTORS WORKING ON GENDER EQUALITY, INCLUDING RELIGIOUS ACTORS

- Identify actors beyond the “usual suspects” that can support longer-term transformative change, including local and grassroots organisations representing groups facing intersecting forms of discrimination, religious and faith-based organisations, men’s organisations, cooperatives, social entrepreneurs or women’s funds, among others.

The [EU-UN Spotlight Initiative](#) has multiple examples that showcase how faith-based and religious actors are key drivers for a GTA.

5. ACTIVELY ENGAGING MEN AND BOYS

- Work with and support boys, young men and men to embrace positive masculinities and to promote gender equality, while also achieving meaningful results for themselves. But this is not always an easy task. For some detailed examples^{ix}, visit the section ‘[When engaging with men and boys, remember....](#)’

Promundo and its [Journeys of Transformation methodology](#) or MenEngage Alliance and its [Policy Analysis Toolkit](#) are good examples to explore further.

6. FOCUSING ON YOUNG PEOPLE AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE.

Create space to listen to the voices of children and young people, include them in decision-making with local government and in communities and secure their participation at the policy-making level by:

- Engaging with CSOs working on gender and youth organisations through strategic, inclusive and participatory communication/consultation processes;
- Empowering, supporting and funding them in order to build resilient organisations and alliances as well as encouraging strong leadership capabilities among women and youth leaders.

For a more specific knowledge, consult the study “[Working better together with CSOs to address gender inequality and champion women and girls’ voice and agency](#)”.



if you want to know more...

(See below)

Have a look at some practical examples on “how to navigate across the gender continuum”

GENDER UNAWARE

A project aiming to increase women's income through horticulture activities in Gambia failed because husbands felt so threatened by their wives' increased incomes that they drove their cattle through the women's gardens and let them graze on the fruit and vegetables^x.

GENDER EXPLOITATIVE

The goal of a social marketing campaign in a Latin American country was to increase condom sales. The campaign capitalised on social and cultural values that focus on male virility, sexual conquest and control in order to sell condoms. It depicted macho men having multiple female partners and using different coloured condoms with them^{xi}.

GENDER AWARE

A project in Asia set an objective to provide mobile phones and mobile reproductive health services to women with limited mobility in their communities. These women had to have their husband's permission to leave their compound. The project helped women access services without leaving the compound^{xii}.

GENDER RESPONSIVE

A project used role model activities to raise community awareness of women in non-traditional and leadership roles. It facilitated interactive discussions with women leaders addressing:

- 1) the impact of women's new roles on household dynamics;
- 2) the challenges facing women and how different actors overcame them – including their male family members^{xiii}.

GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE

A project for strengthening inclusive democratic governance in Ecuador's higher education institutions to prevent gender-based violence developed a national communication campaign that emphasised the transformation of imagery, stereotypes and sociocultural patterns that sustained discriminatory practices and violent behaviour towards women^{xiv}.



Discover some practical tips on how to incorporate a GTA into the intervention cycle

DESIGN PHASE

- Rely on the gender analysis (including a human rights and intersectionality approach, as well as analysis of unequal power dynamics). Do not forget to check the available GAP III Brief on Gender country profile and gender sector analysis.
 - ▶ For instance, in the case of [Lebanon](#), the 2021 gender analysis has a specific section on patriarchal social and cultural norms.
 - Conduct inclusive, gender responsive and participatory consultations by ensuring that women's rights organisations are fully involved, engaging alongside men for gender equality organisations, youth activists, cooperatives, social enterprises or religious actors, among others.
 - ▶ If you want to know more, we invite you to consult the study "[Working better together with CSOs to address gender inequality and champion women and girls' voice and agency](#)" (pages 23-27).
 - Assess the GTA willingness and capacity of the implementing partner/s, and, if necessary, plan for training or technical assistance during the implementation of the intervention.
 - ▶ This PowerPoint can serve as a starting point to help you.
 - Focus on long-term changes or gender transformative outcomes in addition to outputs.
 - Explore multiple ways to reinforce a gender transformative approach in order to reach the desired outcomes.
 - ▶ A targeted intervention (G2 marker ¹) can have gender transformative change as the main goal, for example, to transform gender relations to promote equity as a means to reach healthcare-related outcomes.
 - ▶ GTA can be incorporated as part of specific interventions under the programme, for example, to engage men and boys in a programme to end gender-based violence.
 - ▶ It can be an approach embedded in how activities are delivered, for example, by involving women in the design of a workshop, engaging families and communities in women's economic activities or consulting traditional and community leaders in the planning phases.
- In the [EU Compilation Transformative Promising Practices in Mainstreaming Gender into European External Action](#)^{xv}, you can find interesting experiences for inspiration.
- Identify strategies to enable the rights of women in all their diversity and to promote not only their participation but their meaningful engagement
 - ▶ For instance, [Oxfam's Raising Her Voice](#) programme aims at ensuring that women's voices influence decision-making on services, public spending, policies and legal frameworks.
 - Include practical ways of recognising, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and household responsibilities more equally.

1. For more info, included a footnote referring to the <https://www.oecd.org/dac/gender-development/Handbook-OECD-DAC-Gender-Equality-Policy-Marker.pdf>

- Define gender indicators that capture changes in gender norms, attitudes and behaviours, – measuring participation is not enough.
- Allocate appropriate budget and technical expertise to promote this transformative change within the intervention.
 - ▶ The [Gender Action Learning System](#) and the [Social Analysis and Action](#) methodologies can be very useful tools for promoting a GTA within the intervention.
- Define specific risks linked to empowerment and transformative changes and the related mitigation measures.
- Be aware that change at the individual level is unsustainable without positive change at other levels such as in community/institutions as well as legal and policy frameworks.
 - ▶ For example, the pathway a girl who joins a girls' club may take depends in part on whether her family, wider community and institutions support her or not.
- And remember: when the intervention tackles several areas of change and a multistakeholder and inclusive approach at the same time, gender transformative change will come about more quickly and will be more sustainable.
 - ▶ We invite you to have a look at the [SASA! Programme](#) which has contributed to building a critical mass of support by using multiple reinforcing strategies designed to reach community members at different levels within the circles of influence.

IMPLEMENTATION

- Continuously ask how the intervention can improve the full enjoyment of the rights of people of all genders.
- Ensure gender expertise and meaningful consultation and accountability during the full implementation for Women's Rights Organisations and other "gender actors".
- Monitor the participation and impact on rights holders regularly.
 - ▶ For example, the burden of unpaid care, relational changes at home, active involvement in decision-making, etc.
- Track and record negative impacts and reactions, resistance, and unexpected outcomes and adopt measures to mitigate them.
 - ▶ For instance, the possibility of increasing gender-based violence if men and boys are not properly involved in an intervention aimed at women's empowerment, or the shift of care responsibilities to the younger (or older) women when an intervention provides training for women without care services or promoting a redistribution of unpaid care and household responsibilities.
- Set up a range of accessible feedback and complaint mechanisms for unintended negative consequences (i.e. increase of domestic and gender-based violence).

EVALUATION

- Go beyond measuring women and girls' participation in activities to gauge programme success. Participation is important but indicators must enable implementation measures if the programme contributes to the transformation of gendered power relations and, if so, to what extent.
- Rely on qualitative indicators and use gender-transformative methodologies that note how and by whom the learning process and post-evaluation was conducted.
 - *For instance, by going beyond disaggregated data based on sex and age, ensuring a gender-balanced and expert team, breaking down the units of analysis (household, community) in a gender-differentiated way and/or using intersectional lens on data collection and analysis. In the [Guide on Measuring gender-transformative change](#), you can discover more about monitoring, evaluation and learning systems that facilitate gender-transformative processes.*
- Generate knowledge that is relevant for advancing gender transformation in the particular country/sectoral context.

When engaging with men and boys, remember...

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- ✓ Find and amplify voices of men who support gender equity and those who are positively making changes.
- ✓ Promote men's engagement in caregiving as a powerful entry point for transforming gender relations and norms.
- ✓ Engage men and boys in ways that acknowledge and meet their unique needs – as rights holders, i.e. with access to health services, and as agents of change.
- ✓ Engage men and boys in recognising how restrictive masculine norms negatively affect them as well as that of their partners, children, and families – and how moving away from these norms can benefit everyone.
- ✓ Consider implementing male-only groups as spaces for men to consider harmful gender norms and the benefits of change.
- ✓ Seek to build skills around positive communication and shared decision-making among genders within couples and families.
- ✓ Seek to build effective male engagement strategies into policies, institutions and systems – for example in healthcare, education, the workplace and government.

PLEASE DON'T:

- ✗ Engage men at the expense of women.
- ✗ Compromise women's safety and ability to make decisions and access services.
- ✗ Underestimate potential increase in gender-based violence.
- ✗ Hold negative assumptions about men as a group.
- ✗ Overlook the diversity of men and boys in the population (such as gender identity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, fatherhood, class, religion/faith, and age, among others).

Endnotes

- i SDG 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, UN Women, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/women-and-the-sdgs/sdg-5-gender-equality>
- ii Adapted from Plan International, Transform Education, UNGEI and UNICEF Education (2021) "Gender transformation education. Reimagining education for a more just and inclusive world" Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/media/113166/file/Gender%20Transformative%20Education.pdf>
- iii Adapted from OXFAM (2021) "Transforming gender inequalities: Practical guidance for achieving gender transformation in resilient development". Available at: <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/transforming-gender-inequalities-practical-guidance-for-achieving-gender-transf-621183/>
- iv Figure 1 is a framework that combines the models used by the Interagency Gender Working Group, Care International and Oxfam
- v Intersectionality is the framework that is used to study, understand and respond to the ways in which sex and gender intersect with other personal characteristics/identities, recognizing that these intersections contribute to unique experiences of power and privilege or discrimination and exclusion (adapted from the EIGE definition).
- vi HRBA is a working methodology that supports putting the focus of policy dialogue and sectoral interventions in building the capacities of states/duty-bearers to fulfil human rights obligations and gender equality commitments as well as the capacities of women and girls in all their diversity, as rights holders, to be aware of and empowered to claim and enjoy their human rights.
- vii Applying the Human Rights Based Approach to international partnerships: An updated Toolbox for placing rights-holders at the center of EU's Neighborhood, Development and International Cooperation, EC, 2021, https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/swd-2021-human-right-based-approach_en.pdf
- viii Pay particular attention, for instance, to the gendered division of labour and time use; community and household decision-making behaviour; access to public spaces and services; access to and control over resources; right to access to information and meaningful participation in public decision making spaces; levels of confidence and aspirations amongst men and women.
- ix Adapted from IGWG (2019) "Do's and don'ts for engaging men & boys."
- x <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0010/001003/100310E.pdf>, p. 36
- xi Adapted from the IGWG The Gender Integration Continuum Training Session User's Guide, available at https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/17-418-GenderContTraining-2017-12-12-1633_FINAL.pdf
- xii Adapted from the IGWG The Gender Integration Continuum Training Session User's Guide, available at https://www.igwg.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/17-418-GenderContTraining-2017-12-12-1633_FINAL.pdf
- xiii Adapted from Care International's Bringing Gender Equality Closer to Women's Economic Empowerment, https://www.care.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/bringing_gender_equality_closer_to_womens_economic_empowerment_final.pdf
- xiv EU co-financed 'Mujeres con voz' ('Women with a voice'), Extracted from Transformative promising practices in Mainstreaming Gender into European, External Action. 2019 Annual Implementation Report of the EU Gender Action Plan II. Available online at: https://ec.europa.eu/international-partnerships/system/files/eu_gap_2019_web_0.pdf
- xv In addition, you can find more inspiring examples on the [Compendium "Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture"](#)