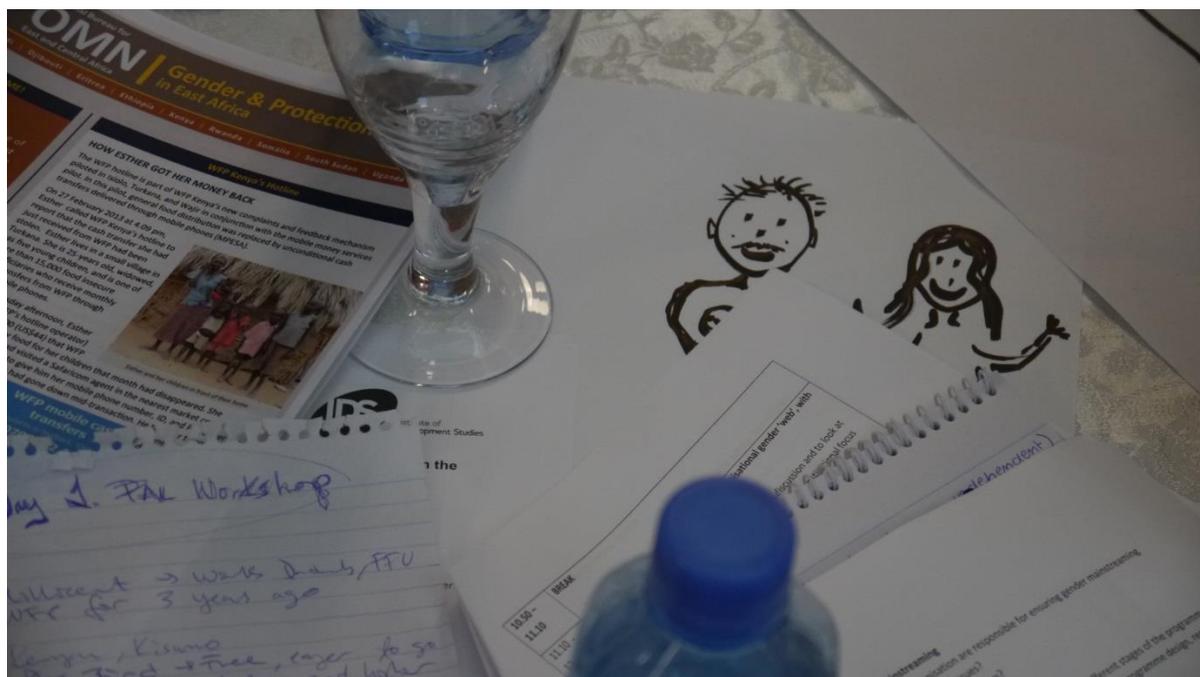


Achieving food security by mainstreaming gender

Lessons from an action-learning partnership



Zero hunger requires gender equality

Global food security and gender equality are closely linked. Women and girls are often the hardest hit by hunger and food crises. This is why achieving Zero Hunger means transforming unequal gender relations. Since 2013, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been working with the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) to identify and share gender equality innovations of country office staff. Innovations from the Field, funded by USAID, was a participatory action learning (PAL) programme involving the Benin, Cambodia, Guatemala, Kenya, Lebanon, Lesotho, Malawi and Senegal WFP Country Offices. WFP staff explored gender-related themes with IDS researchers and knowledge specialists. They learned about why and how gender matters in their everyday work, changed their behaviour and work practices, and influenced changes in WFP practice. This brief summarizes the key lessons from the partnership.

Key lessons

1. Care is central

Globally, women and girls undertake the vast majority of unpaid care and domestic work. The often undervalued domestic labour of cooking, cleaning, and caring for children, the sick and the elderly is time-consuming. Food security programmes can empower women by recognizing, reducing and redistributing unpaid care and domestic work – and by avoiding adding to their burdens. WFP staff reflected on ways of designing and implementing programmes to respond to women's responsibilities, for example, by ensuring travel required to collect food assistance is safe and not time-consuming. There is now design guidance about this. The Malawi School Meals Programme has pioneered ways of recognizing the efforts of school cooks through public ceremonies to respect and value their efforts, as well as by procuring safe cooking equipment.

2. Men matter too

Food security programming needs to work with men to encourage the sharing of caring responsibilities associated with food security and nutrition. In Lesotho, the Early Care Child and Childhood (ECCD) programme, where WFP supplies snacks and lunch for children at nurseries and preschools, provided an opportunity to transform men's and women's attitudes to care work, feeding and nutrition. Community leaders, district authorities and parliamentarians took the opportunities to encourage more men to contribute to care work.

3. Gender is mission-critical

Attention to gender is always important and relevant, even under stressful or emergency conditions. Starting with gender analysis helps ensure effective targeting and efficient programme delivery. This means dedicating financial and human resources. Programme budgets must include the true costs of gender mainstreaming, and financing for gender must be reliable and predictable, to build capacity across programmes and the organization. In Guatemala, country office staff are looking into integrating gender analysis in vulnerability assessments, reporting, procurement and governance, at all levels of the organization.

4. Gender is personal

Staff cannot design or deliver gender-transformative programmes if they are unaware of their own beliefs. The PAL process enabled staff to reflect on their personal views and behaviours regarding gender. This was neither easy nor comfortable, but many were inspired to challenge their own assumptions. In Senegal, for example, women had been given cash vouchers on the premise that men would spend the money on themselves. When asked, men challenged this stereotype; women agreed it could help if men could collect food vouchers, as security, time and travel pressures meant women usually brought their husbands along, meaning they both lost a day's work.

5. Plan, learn and adapt

Food security programmes are often delivered in volatile and complex environments, with new challenges and trends emerging with little warning. Staff and volunteers need the skills, tools and inclination to understand and address gender, from the roles of men and women in feeding their families, to relationships and household and community dynamics. Being smarter about gender will help organizations adapt to a rapidly changing context by encouraging experimentation grounded in local solutions. Gender mainstreaming worked best when WFP staff had space to reflect, listen, learn – and apply their learning.

6. Gender counts in emergencies

Taking gender into account is vital in emergency or humanitarian settings. Each year, WFP assists millions of people displaced or deprived of basic resources by disasters. If humanitarian interventions are not planned with gender in mind, the needs of those under most severe threat may not be adequately met, and an opportunity to support positive change will be lost. In response to the Syrian refugee crisis, in 2013 WFP Lebanon launched an electronic voucher programme to allow hundreds of thousands of Syrian refugees to meet their food needs. WFP staff in Beirut examined whether e-cards empowered women by reducing gender-based violence as women travelled to/from food distribution points. Gender was not the only factor: the elderly and individuals unable to work stood to gain a great deal from these cards.

Innovations from the Field is a collaboration between IDS and WFP. It is funded through USAID.

[Read more about the programme and view the gender mainstreaming toolkit.](#)