Bridging Development Interventions and Women's Empowerment in Ghana: Reflections from Radical Feminist Perspectives

Loretta Baidoo

Abstract

The popularity of development interventions as a tool for women's empowerment, notwithstanding their ability to achieve targeted goals, has come under scrutiny. Some researchers point out that interventions targeting empowerment tend to address women's practical rather than their strategic needs, resulting in such interventions falling short in their attempts to transform unequal gender relations. This paper seeks to uncover the nuances of such outcomes through an autoethnographic account of two gender-specific interventions. The main findings reveal that, of the two interventions, one held the potential to transform gender relations, and the other set out to integrate women into the existing system. The paper concludes that interventions can realise the goal of empowerment if gender-sensitive tools and actors are integrated into their design and implementation, and if markers that target gender transformation and redistribution are employed.

Keywords: sustainable development; women's empowerment; development interventions; radical feminism; autoethnography; gender.

Introduction

Women play a critical role in smallholder agriculture in Ghana (Ankrah *et al.*, 2020). Okali (2011) explains that, relative to men, women make essential contributions to the agricultural economies in all developing countries. Yet within smallholder agriculture, some women are significantly challenged regarding access to secure land and other critical productive assets. This is due to multiple reasons, including their class, economic status, and position in land tenurial arrangements (Chigbu *et al.*, 2019; Baidoo, 2018).

Several international organisations assume that an increase in agricultural productivity correlates directly with progress in women's empowerment (FAO, 2011; World Bank, 2012). This argument is used to justify the intent of different interventions and programmes in rural agricultural livelihoods which target women as beneficiaries. Some development agencies move a step further by including empowerment as an objective and adding gender equality staff in the project implementation to guarantee their desired outcomes.

In all the actions taken to ensure women's empowerment, there are still indications that interventions are far from empowering women, as their outcomes are usually unsatisfactory or non-sustainable (Baidoo, 2018; Britwum *et al.*, 2019). Studies explaining the failure of interventions to empower women allude to factors such as inadequate access to productive resources justified by the low value placed on women's labour (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016; Britwum *et al.*, 2014; Olagunju and Adebayo, 2015). Another reason is the institutionalisation of social norms, where practices of male dominance and unbalanced relations between women and men are internalised and structuralised. Women act in adherence to societal expectations, often against their interests to avoid being sanctioned (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016).

The reasons advanced by various studies for the failure of interventions to empower women brings up the persisting question of the failure to adopt remedies that avoid the known flaws (Britwum and Akorsu, 2016; Britwum *et al.*, 2019; Byerlee *et al.*, 2009). Some believe that it is because interventions adopt an economic integrating outlook, as facilitated by the Women in Development (WID) approach, which ends up reinforcing women's disempowerment. The general observation is that the WID framework overlooks

the difference between women and men, and amongst women (Byerlee *et al.*, 2009). It is therefore theoretically pertinent to explore how interventions can be shaped by alternative feminist approaches, such as those from radical feminist perspectives, to realise more transformative outcomes. This article searches for a deeper understanding of the benefits and flaws in development interventions targeting women. The idea is to examine the formulation, implementation, and outcome of interventions, using personal lessons learned regarding gaps between interventions and empowerment in the project cycle. This provides an opportunity to explore how recent projects operate, especially ones that seek to address the non-transformative shortcomings of the WID approach.

Regarding methodology, most of the literature reviewed is produced from an outsider position as researchers study the reasons for the failure of interventions in achieving women's empowerment. From the positionality of a local implementer within development interventions, however, I use my experiences to carry out a comparative analysis of two interventions. I use gender analytical tools to document how a gender transformative intervention intended to empower its women participants should proceed. From this theoretical and methodological viewpoint, I respond to the question of why interventions continue to fail. I use a retrospective outlook assessed through transformative gender tools offered by radical feminist perspectives, and autoethnography to inform the significance of locally or co-conceived interventions based on personal observations and my experiences. The use of multiple frameworks, from an outsider-insider position as a researcher, but with relations as a local officer in international development interventions, and identifying as a third-world woman from Ghana, gives a different perspective to the discourse of non-sustainability of development interventions.

The two interventions were implemented within the space of the last five years (2018-2022). The interventions examined are targeted at the economic empowerment of women processors in the agricultural value chain. Although both interventions are gender-specific, the study interrogates their depth of empowerment, addressing the extent to which they seek to empower women, and how they target the dismantling of social norms that subjugate women's positioning. Based on the analysis, conclusions are made to propose working recommendations for intervention designs and project implementation.

This article is organised into five sections. This introductory section has set the scene by briefly presenting the existing discourses accounting for the failure of development aid to achieve women's empowerment and highlighting the issue further. The next section focuses on explanations of development interventions and women's empowerment from a radical feminist perspective. This is followed by a section explaining the choice of the research methodology and introducing the gender analytical tools that were employed in the study. Section four introduces the interventions through the researcher's reflections, after which the tools are used to assess gendered dimensions in the design, implementation, and outcome stages of the interventions. Conclusions and recommendations constitute the final section.

A radical feminist perspective on development interventions and women's empowerment

Theoretically, development programmes, mainly Western-driven, are underpinned by liberal feminist tenets, which seek to empower women economically by integrating them into development spaces without necessarily considering their social positioning (Baidoo, 2018). Such interventions, therefore, tend to isolate women from the social relations formed, losing sight of influencing factors like culture and class, and ignoring differences in the needs of women. Women's practical needs – comprising all material challenges like the lack of water, basic services, and opportunities for an income earning activity – are addressed without much attention to changing women's subordinate position (March *et al*., 1999).

In Africa, the WID theoretical framework, which has its origins in liberal feminism, dominates the framing of development interventions. Introduced in the 1970s, the WID approach called for the inclusion of women's issues in development projects (Parpart, 1993). The approach aims to integrate women into production by introducing women-oriented policies to increase project efficiency and enhance economic development (Parpart *et al*., 2000). Such policies derive from neoliberal tendencies that do not necessarily disrupt existing social relations. Although Western-driven, the WID approach to development planning is well embraced and adopted by African development workers, as well as governments, mainly to meet donor demands.

Gender inequalities and women's disempowerment still prevail after more than 25 years since the Beijing Declaration and numerous development strategies targeting gender equality and women's empowerment. Moser (2017) has noted the need to address the persistence of gender inequality with new approaches that target gender transformation. Alternative theoretical frameworks like the Gender and Development (GAD) framework, spearheaded within radical feminism, recommend that programmes respond to women's empowerment needs instead of reinforcing unequal relations. In Moser's (2017: 223) words, gender transformation "is widely recognized as…an inherently political act, and closely associated with changing social or gendered power relations…it questions the status quo and in so doing alters the underlying power dynamics that perpetuate gender inequality." Development programmes are therefore expected to recognise the differences in women's needs, as opposed to the general one size fits all approach adopted. They are expected to target resource reallocation to favour women and balance the unequal relations between women and men.

Radical feminists argue primarily that patriarchy is the main cause of women's subordination. They advocate an approach where both women's material conditions and class position, and the patriarchal structures and ideas that define and maintain women's subordination, form the focus of change (Hartmann, 2010). Radical feminists also stress the need to avoid treating women as a unit due to contextual or ideological differences in their material conditions, noting that patriarchal structures differ by geography and class. They advise a more critical approach to women's empowerment to avoid the situation where policies are designed for women without questioning the domination they suffer, or any chance of social redistribution.

Based on the above discussions, this article proceeds from the perspective that development interventions should increase women's capacity to think critically and act autonomously, independent of prescribed social norms and values (Britwum *et al*., 2019). The outcome of empowerment, therefore, should be an enhanced sense of self-efficacy where individual women and groups exercise agency to gain control over their lives and external resources. A development intervention that is essentially empowering should reflect transformation – challenging the existing social status, and targeting the inequities amongst women.

The research, methods used, and analytical framing

For this study, the choice was to focus on generating in-depth insight into why development interventions that usually accompany the discourse of empowerment, do not have a significant impact on women's empowerment. The study's research methodology, a qualitative design grounded in the epistemic interpretivist tradition, was chosen to explain how meanings are socially constructed, interpreted, understood, experienced, and redeveloped. The flexibility and sensitivity to contextual factors that the qualitative design provides, created a space for developing empirically supported new ideas using multiple methods. The article is broadly exploratory since it sought to provide alternative tools to address the question of why development interventions do not make the difference they promise, regarding the empowerment of women.

I use autoethnography, which Eliason (2016: 137) describes as a "… form of self-reflection used to explore the researcher's personal experience with the study..., and connects that experience to broader historical, cultural, and social tropes." As a comparatively recent method relative to other traditional qualitative methods, autoethnography provides a space for readers to reflect on and empathise with the narratives presented (Méndez, 2013). Through my positioning as a Ghanaian female development worker and young feminist, I draw from the tenets of autoethnography to present a self-reflection, highlighting the lessons I learned regarding gaps between interventions and empowerment. This was done through a gender analysis of the two livelihood interventions which I explored in my capacity as a development worker. Thus, I connected directly to the research topic, using my personal experiences to reflexively describe my experiences during the implementation of two interventions, outlining observations as well as the intervention outcome.

By reflecting on my experiences, I hope to reveal the realities that should serve as a starting point for development implementers, state actors, and international donor agencies to consider in their bid to tackle the actual needs and interests of the development participants they propose to empower. I expect to hone in on the valuable insights that autoethnography as a form of inquiry, offers to development practitioners, to bring their attention to realities hitherto not considered. In so doing, I aim to create a platform for women to "tell their truth

as experienced without waiting for others to express what they really want to be known and understood" (Méndez, 2013: 282). Highlighting women's voices, I believe will lead to the creation of a positive relationship between development interventions and women's empowerment. Since I recount certain periods in my life where I compare different organisational dimensions, names and key details are pseudonymised in the section on reflexivity, in keeping with ethical considerations. Although potentially emancipatory in nature, autoethnography is criticised as being self-indulgent, introspective, and individualised (Atkinson, 1997; Coffey, 1999). I address this challenge using specific gender analytical tools as a collective lens to interpret my observations.

The study used analytical tools derived from radical feminist perspectives located in the GAD theoretical framework, to reflect on how to fill the gaps in intervention design and implementation. The selection of tools was derived from three gender analytical frameworks: Moser, Social Relations Approach, and Women Empowerment Frameworks. The tools were used to examine the approach used in the two development interventions, and the extent to which these approaches addressed women's practical and strategic needs.

The first perspective, the Moser Framework, aims to set up gender planning to emancipate women from their subordination, and achieve equality, equity, and empowerment (Moser, 1993). It opposes the integrationist approach embedded in the welfare, anti-poverty, and efficiency approaches, which focus on women as a marginalised group (Jahan, 1995). Gender planning, in the Moser Framework, is not a technical exercise of dispensing resources to those who lack them but rather, one that ventures into political spaces to address systems and structures because empowerment and equality are political constructs that operate within political structures. Moser's Framework highlights the sense in which development interventions impinge on women's triple role and their time use constraints. It interrogates whether the adopted approaches are emancipatory or just directed at integrating women in the development sphere, irrespective of unequal relations.

The Social Relations Approach is used to analyse existing gender inequalities in the distribution of resources, responsibilities, and power for designing policies and programmes. Like the Moser Framework, it draws its concepts from

the GAD theoretical framework. The Social Relations Approach is useful for determining whether interventions provide women opportunities to be agents of their development. The framework also allows for determination of the levels of gender awareness of interventions. Thus, it provides tools for assessing whether development interventions were gender-blind (able to acknowledge gender differences in project design) or gender-aware (recognised the different roles played by women and men). The gender-aware categorisations further outline the levels of recognition of gender inequality: whether a strategy focuses on addressing practical needs only (gender-neutral); or practical needs of one sex alone (gender-specific); or was aimed at being redistributive by transforming existing resource allocations to create more equal gender relations.

The final analytical framework I employed was the Women Empowerment Framework advanced by Sara Hlupekile Longwe (1991), which provides tools for questioning what women empowerment means in practice. It allows a critical assessment of the extent to which a gender-aware development intervention supports empowerment. Longwe's framework directs attention to conditions that enable the resolution of inequality, discrimination, and subordination. According to Longwe, empowerment should extend beyond increasing the number of women relative to men in conventional spaces such as employment and education. Empowerment should involve measures that move women from a state of subjugation to a state of conscious decision-making and control over resources. In this respect, Longwe (1991) highlights five hierarchical stages characterising different levels of empowerment, beginning from the lowest which she calls welfare, through to access, conscientisation, participation and, the highest, control. An intervention is deemed ultimately empowering when it recognises women's issues and seeks to improve their position relative to men.

The first tool that I used in my analysis, derived from Moser's Framework, was the gender needs assessment, which highlights the identification and incorporation of women's time use burdens in intervention planning and design. I used it to interrogate how women's existing work and domestic responsibilities had been considered in the planning of the interventions and how women were involved in the planning process. The kind of approach used was also assessed to establish the intent of the intervention, whether it seeks to integrate or empower.

The second analytical tool adopted was from the Social Relations Approach, which I used to examine the gender sensitivity of the two interventions in relation to unequal gender relations. After establishing the intent of the intervention, and the involvement of women and their needs, the social relations approach was used to assess whether the implementation of the intervention was gender neutral, specific or, redistributive. My objective was to highlight the recognition of women's different needs (practical or strategic), to point out the efforts at redistribution in the assessed interventions. I used this tool to explore the spaces that the two interventions granted, beyond enabling women to access productive resources such as credit, land, information, and knowledge, to increase women's awareness of their gendered situation.

Finally, using the Longwe Framework, I explored how the two interventions facilitated women's control over resources and decision-making in the development process. Were gender sensitive interventions negative (i.e. not recognising women's issues and leaving them worse off); neutral (i.e., recognising women's issues but leaving them either worse off or static); or positive (i.e., improving women's position relative to men). The Women Empowerment Framework was therefore used to critically assess the level of empowerment targeted by the intervention and the actual outcome of the intervention on the women it targets. Table one illustrates the preceding discussion.

Table 1. Analytical framework of the study

Operationalising selected gender tools in the paper			
Framework	**Moser**	**Social Relations**	**Longwe**
Stages Used	Goal Planning/ Design	Implementation	Outcome
Indicators	Focus on women's needs? *Practical/ strategic and time use?* Involving women? Gender planners? Goal intent - *integrating/ transformative?*	What is the orientation? *Gender-aware; specific or redistributive?*	Level of empowerment? *welfare; access; sensitisation; participation; control?* Depth of gender sensitivity – *negative, neutral or positive?*
Operationalising analytical outcome	Highlighting transformative goals and inclusive planning *(women and gender-aware planners.)*	Gender-aware processes Transformative approaches - *(standardised? gender specific? Or targeting resource redistribution?)*	Impact assessment Resolving vulnerability and inequality Level of transformation.

Source: (March, Smyth and Mukhopadhyay, 1999)

As elaborated in Table 1, I selected gender analytical tools from three different frameworks to assess my experiences with the two interventions. Each stage of the intervention was assessed from the perspective of a specific gender analytical framework. Despite the overlap of some specific tools, the Moser Framework was used to focus on project planning, the Social Relations Approach on implementation, and the Longwe Framework on the outcome (both realised and projected).

Researcher's reflexivity: an autoethnographic account

I use this section to introduce the projects, adopting pseudonyms to ensure anonymity. Experiences and observations made from the two projects are compared along the lines of gender planning in the design, gender awareness in the approach employed, and the extent to which empowerment is targeted. I also elaborate on the implementation and compare the outcomes and challenges. The interventions are named Project March and Project May.

Introduction to projects

Projects March and May were both agricultural development interventions targeting women in the processing value chain. The goal of Project March was to empower women through improved health, nutrition, and better economic living standards. At its planning stage, it involved both international and local experts located in nutrition, public health, climate change, and microcredit financing. A baseline study was conducted to ascertain women's conditions before project implementation. The implementation included training on nutrition, public health, climate change, microcredit financial skills, and gender awareness. Project participants were also introduced to ways of gaining access to updated market information and other forms of medical monitoring.

The goal of Project May was to improve the economic living conditions of targeted women by transferring more power to them in economic decision-making processes in their households, and along the agricultural value chain in businesses. Additional goals were to derive the support of traditional authorities for women's economic empowerment, promote agricultural post-harvest production adapted to climate change, and reduce women's time use burdens. Like Project March, this one also involved experts in gender equality, climate-friendly agriculture, and organisational development, at the planning stage. A baseline study conducted prior to project implementation included a gender analysis to design a gender strategy for the project. A women empowerment index was conducted to assess the needs of the women and ascertain their level of empowerment before the project. Indicators measured were decision-making, resource allocation, financial knowledge, time use, and control of income. The project's implementation reflects the expertise of the partners involved i.e.

regarding gender equality, the environment, and organisational development. It is an ongoing project, and therefore the outcome is projected based on project assessment of participation in the project (documents not disclosed due to the need to maintain anonymity). According to the project evaluation, most of its short-term goals had been achieved by May 2022. Testimonials gathered from both female and male participants indicate an improvement in the economic and living conditions of targeted women.

Women-targeting projects: design, implementation and outcomes

At the planning and design stage, Project March involved experts in nutrition, public health, climate change, and microcredit financial skills in the project formation. There was no indication of a conscious attempt to ensure that any one of these experts was gender-aware or came from institutions that were pursuing a gender agenda. The baseline study conducted showed no clarity of women's involvement in decision-making and project formulation; women only participated in the survey as respondents. The project planning did not highlight the need to transform existing unequal social gender structures.

Project March sought to empower women through behavioural change communication and improved technology use in agricultural processing. It also aimed to strengthen women's engagement with markets through a group-based microcredit scheme, providing training in entrepreneurship and financial skills and facilitating enhanced access to market price information. Project March presented itself as empowering as it sought to foster women's self-reliance by introducing various life skills to economically empower them. Thus, it focused on integrating women into economic spaces and capacities and did not aim to transform their subordinated position. It did not set out to address the implications of women's triple role for their participation in the project. The project targeted women's practical needs by introducing them to financial and entrepreneurial skills, with no strategies targeting their social positioning or unequal gender relations.

Project May, as part of its planning, identified the different roles played by women and men in the project area. It also assessed the needs of women during post-harvest processing; it attempted to highlight and disaggregate the control of resources and decision-making at the household level. Women and gender-aware planners were drafted to assist in the project design. Women's triple role was also recognised, especially regarding their time use, and technologies that reduced processing time were introduced.

Project May acknowledged the social positioning of women and paid attention to the unequal relations between women and men. This was done by first engaging in activities to sensitise both women and men in the project communities in order to deal with male resistance to female participation in the project. This can be interpreted as dealing with women's strategic gender needs. Project May adopted the empowerment approach by first undertaking an assessment of women's existing levels of empowerment, using indicators to measure inclusion in decision-making, income, access and control of resources, and time use. The process, therefore, went beyond integrating women into the development sphere. This was addressed by building women's capacities to form a producers' cooperative so as to have better access to the market, while strenghtening their governing skills in decision-making and resource allocation. The intervention paid attention to the political context of the beneficiaries, planning within which specific space to address unequal gender relations.

Gendering interventions: inclusion of a gender lens

Here I employ the Social Relations Approach as an analytical lens to determine the projects' ability to recognise differences in the gender needs of the targeted beneficiaries. During the implementation, I observed that Project March was not context-specific and made no attempt to distinguish between the specific needs of the beneficiaries in small and large-scale producing communities. There was, as a result, a persistent refusal of project beneficiaries in a particular large-scale producing community to use the improved technology, and this stance did not change until the project's completion. The main reason was that the new processors required more energy; in addition, there were complaints that operating these processors took more time rather than reducing the time

use burden. The rejection of the improved processors was also reflected in participation in training programmes, an important aspect of the project. I observed a blunt refusal of uptake as they did not see the relevance and perceived the intervention as a nuisance. In communities where there was some level of uptake of the new technologies, a few women were reverting to the existing processing technology. Regarding financial skills, a few other women resisted by refusing to access financial institutions due to their apathy. They preferred to keep their monies at home, a method which was significantly unsafe and presented the tendency of mixing business and personal monies. Project March was gender-specific, but it only addressed women's practical needs; it was not gender-transformational.

Applying the Social Relations Approach to Project May, I discerned some levels of gender-aware and redistributive potential. The project, in its implementation, recognised the differences in women's and men's gender roles. It included activities that targeted women's strategic needs with discourses on shared decision-making, income control, asset ownership, and power-sharing at the household and community levels. Thus, even though the targeted beneficiaries were women, training on gender equality was held with both women, as the primary participants, and men, as secondary beneficiaries. The logic behind this was to address systemic inequality by sensitising both genders and introducing them to the importance of positive masculinities and joint decision-making. The implementation was also done involving women at every point of decision-making, building their confidence and leadership strategies through fortnightly engagement in developing a cooperative and field school training.

Level of women's empowerment and depth of gender-sensitive interventions

Here my interest was to examine the levels of empowerment addressed by each project using the Longwe Framework. My observations revealed that Project March attained the welfare and access levels of the Women Empowerment Framework. In the main, the project set out to improve beneficiaries' economic status by providing them with market access and information, financial and entrepreneurial skills, and knowledge. This was done through the provision of

supporting facilities like soft loans. The immediate outcome was an improvement in beneficiaries' welfare regarding basic needs like feeding and clothing. The project defined women's empowerment mainly as access to resources like health, financial access, market and entrepreneurial skills, and climate-friendly processing practices. The intervention is gender-neutral according to the Longwe Framework since it targeted women's practical needs and neglected to address their strategic needs. There was no attempt to make women aware of their social positioning and how that could be addressed. The women beneficiaries blamed their resistance on their lack of ownership of the intervention and the absence of opportunities to discuss the project context. Thus, even though project activities served women's practical needs they were not necessarily emancipatory and reinforced women's subordinate position.

Project May appears to respond to all five empowerment requirements and attained the highest level in the hierarchy of equality, which is control. Project May can be said to be gender positive as it sought to improve women's position relative to men, promoting their control over decision-making processes. It increased women's access to productive resources, conscientising and mobilising them through field schools and other community engagements. Women were enabled to participate in, and lead, all the organisational development processes to build their confidence and self-worth, and validate the essence of the campaign for equality. The process established a sense of commitment and responsibility of women to the project. Women gained some measure of space to display agency in project implementation.

Although Project May was empowering, I observed a few challenges. For instance, involving the women in decision-making at every stage in the project lengthened the project life. There was also a challenge where the project failed to conduct intersectional analysis to distinguish the differences among women beneficiaries, such as when addressing the practical needs of post-harvest processors. I realised that women of different age groups had different needs, even though they operated under the overall umbrella of post-harvest processors. Seasonal and full-time processors also had different needs, and therefore an intersectional lens would have sharpened the gender transformative potential of the intervention.

Project May appeared to be comparatively more gender transformational than Project March. Employing the various gender analytical tools to assess the projects, Project May was gender-inclusive i.e. involving women and gender-aware organisations and planners in the planning and implementation process; gender aware, and redistributive, as it sought to transform existing resource allocations to create a more balanced relationship between women and men. In the end, although Project March purported to realise its goal of empowering women based on their health and economic status, its intent was only to integrate women into the economic space, and therefore was not transformative. This did not do much to actualise a transformative outcome for women, which according to Moser (2017) seeks to address unequal gender relations.

Conclusion

This study sought to respond to the question of why interventions continue to fail in empowering women. With this in mind, the gap between women's empowerment and the intent and implementation of development intentions was explored. A comparative gender analysis of the selected interventions showed how an intervention targeting empowerment may not necessarily be empowering, but rather reinforce women's subordinated position. Whilst both interventions examined were gender-sensitive, Project May was found to be more potentially transformative as it sought to disrupt the existing unequal gender relations and build the autonomy of participants.

A reflection on my experience highlights a few important details that will serve as a backdrop for recommendations to development practitioners and state actors in designing and implementing interventions. The comparative experiential narrative indicates the flaws and strengths of the two distinct but similar experiences. They were distinct because of the approaches used, and similar because they targeted processors in different agricultural economies. Based on all the discussions, particularly the experience from Project May, the study recommends that even before designing any intervention that targets women as beneficiaries, policymakers and development workers should go through the processes of involving gender experts and the potential women

beneficiaries, right at the project planning stage. This initiative serves as a useful starting point for successful project implementation.

All stakeholders, including the targeted participants, should agree on what indicators of empowerment should look like. With this, a clear picture and distinctive road map are created. The success of an intervention will then not be measured by the number of people accessing the programme but rather, the changes that have occurred based on the assessment of the conditions of beneficiaries before interaction with the project.

Empowerment aims at building capabilities, having access to resources, being able to make important decisions; development workers should be able to build these qualities during their encounters with women. Even if the intervention is economic-centred, inclusive participation and efforts to conscientise both women and men would go a long way to ensure intervention uptake and sustainability. Interventions may be gender specific, in that they target women. However, women do not live in isolation and so it is important to sensitise men, who are favoured by the patriarchal systems, to understand the need for empowerment. Tackling interventions in that manner reduces the challenges that men who are in contact with the women beneficiaries may pose, along with other actors who safeguard existing unequal structures. Such sensitisation also takes care of resistance to uptake as there is a social understanding that an equal society is beneficial to both genders and not just women. The elimination of resistance, therefore, facilitates both uptake and ownership of the intervention. Although Project May is a gender-specific initiative, men were involved as secondary beneficiaries. Women in this project recounted a change in the attitude of their partners and a willingness to assist in reproductive work, living up to the messages received during conscientisation sessions.

An intervention that seeks to be gender transformative may have its challenges, like process delay, as was the case with Project May. The involvement of women at every point of decision-making slows down the length of time that the project is expected to take. But this delay is worthwhile, as beneficiaries subsequently make personal and communal efforts in ensuring their empowerment, exhibiting autonomy rather than dependence on project staff. This growth of autonomy and other remarkable qualities is not restricted to the project but also appears in other aspects of the lives of beneficiaries.

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