MALE ENGAGEMENT IN WOMEN’S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT: MALE GENDER ACTIVISTS

GREATER RURAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN LEARNING SERIES

MEDA

Canada
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1.0 ABSTRACT

Gender equity programming typically focuses on gender mainstreaming, specifically mainstreaming women’s needs and constraints, into project operations and programmatic activities in order to address market failures and improve social inclusion. In order to create systemic change in gender equality, projects and gender equity programming need to focus on how to meaningfully engage men in gender equity. In the Greater Rural Opportunities for Women (GROW) project, MEDA explored how to engage men in gender equity efforts in order to support women’s economic empowerment. These men, called Male Gender Activists (MGAs), engaged with other men from the community in gender awareness, advocacy, and as co-beneficiaries in the project’s household-focused approach.

Gender is about the relationships and interactions between men and women. For a women-centric project, like GROW, it was essential for the project to understand the local context and gender dynamics. MGAs helped the project to understand the situation and gender dynamics facing both women and men at the village level. Through this male engagement initiative, MGAs were trained in gender concepts and oriented to the GROW project in order to educate and build awareness to male stakeholders in the local community. Prior to the MGA initiative, men from the local community were gatekeepers to women’s participation and involvement into the GROW project. MGAs served as positive deviants within the community, acting as allies and advocates for women’s economic empowerment. MGAs also served a role in soothing potential areas of friction as gender and social dynamics changed between GROW women clients and their male family members. This paper will discuss the process, undertaken by MEDA and its partners, to select, train, and work with MGAs in local communities to build community awareness to gender inequality and work toward improved gender equity.

This paper will also discuss the power dynamics and challenges which took place within the MGA initiative, as well as male capture and backlash to gender sensitization message. Lastly, this paper will highlight project results and lessons learned, and will provide recommendations to MEDA and other organizations who are planning to engage men in gender equity strategies.
2.0 CONTEXT

A. GROW Project Overview

Greater Rural Opportunities for Women (GROW) was made possible with the generous support of Global Affairs Canada and was implemented by Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA) with a total budget of CAD 20 million.¹ With support from five Key Facilitating Partners (KFPs) – PRONET North, TUDRIDEH, PRUDA, CARD, and CAPECS² – the GROW project operated in eight districts in the Upper West Region, empowering women farmers to create opportunities through the cultivation, utilization, and sale of soybeans, accessing extension services and markets to increase their household’s economic well-being.

GROW’s goal was to improve food security for 20,000 women farmers and their families in the Upper West Region (UWR) of Ghana. Project activities included helping women improve the availability, access to, and utilization of appropriate

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¹ The GROW budget of CAD 20 million was made up of CAD 18 million from the Government of Canada and CAD 2 million from MEDA. The project began in 2012 and closed at the end of 2018.

² MEDA’s KFPs are: CAPECS (Capacity Enhancement and Community Support), TUDRIDEH (Tumu Deanery Rural Integrated Development Program), CARD (Community Aid for Rural Development), ProNet (Professional Network North) and PRUDA (Partnerships for Rural Development Action).
and nutritious food by strengthening production, processing, and linkages to markets. To achieve this, Women Lead Farmers were identified to help train others in their communities on good agronomic practices to maximize crop yields, with a special focus on soybean cultivation. Entrepreneurial women farmers were trained and supported to become Sales Agents, buying and aggregating soy from other women and selling it to processors and markets. Women were linked to appropriate financial services, including Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) groups, financial institutions, and insurance providers. Another key component of the GROW project was advocacy for women’s increased agency, particularly as it relates to decision-making within the household and community.

During the 2017 harvest season, GROW supported 21,500 farmers, harvesting 13,643 hectares of soybean, and producing a yield of 14,632 metric tons. GROW farmers sold 11,169 tons of this soy at an average price of GHS 200 per 100kg, earning a total of over GHS 22.3 million, or approximately CAD 6.7 million (2017 harvest figures).

The GROW Learning Series

Over seven years of implementation, the GROW project learned a great deal about food security and women’s economic empowerment in northern Ghana. The project team is happy to share the lessons learned in the GROW Learning Series. The Learning Series papers focus on time use and women’s work, nutrition and food security, financial inclusion, women and technology, conservation agriculture and women’s economic empowerment.

B. Socio-economic Overview

Ghana ranked 139th out of 177 nations in the United Nation Development Program’s 2015 Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a value of 0.547. The GII quantifies the level of a country’s inequality and if there is unequal distribution of human development. Ghana’s rank indicates that much work still needs to be accomplished to achieve gender equality. This is especially true for women’s access to resources and control over the assets (OECD, 2014) and benefits of

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3 In 2017, the average exchange rate was 1 GHS (Ghanaian cedi) to 0.30 CAD (Canadian dollars).
development. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women states that women and men in Ghana have equal legal rights in relation to the access to and management of non-land assets, and women have the same rights as men to conclude contracts. However, customary law considers property as a family asset to be administered by the family head, who is usually a man.

In the case of the Upper West Region (UWR), gendered power relations and socio-cultural ideas about gender define dynamics that favour men as heads of households, providers, leaders, and guardians of females. The norms of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity are socialized and become the accepted standard of the behaviours and attitudes of appropriate masculine and feminine behaviour, which ultimately lead to power and gender inequality. In understanding power relations and manifestations of power, gender is not only a cause, but also a consequence, instrument and embodiment of power-over relations.

In other words, gender is often used as a tool to divide or reinforce power by differentiating men and women by their gender roles, which are roles, task, and responsibilities determined by the social norms of their community. Power over is the most common expression of power, often associated with repression, corruption, coercion, discrimination, and abuse. As Koester states, “Gender roles are power relations” as they are the key mechanism through which power not only constrains but constitutes individuals and is perhaps the most persistent form of ‘invisible power’ in our world. Unless gender dynamics and existing norms are challenged, hegemonic masculinity and patriarchy will be reinforced, reproduced, and perpetuated as seen in the graphic below.

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Gendered power relations: the ways in which gender shapes the distribution of power at all levels of society.

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![Hegemonic Masculinity Graphic (Wikiwand)](image)
During GROW’s 2013 gender analysis, the project identified gender roles as a constraint. Women served as informal labour to their husband or family’s farm, in addition to their roles in the household. For their contribution to productive work, women’s roles continue to be ignored. Women are regarded as “home producers or assistants on the farm,” and not as farmers or economic agents on their own merit. Moreover, women’s critical role in agriculture remains invisible. Women dominate in food crop production as opposed to cash crops, which are more visible in the public sphere. Women also remain indebted (culturally) first to provide free labour on the family’s farm, rather than focusing on their own plot of land. Women are also obligated to conduct all of their domestic responsibilities (cleaning, cooking, collecting firewood and water, and child care), along with their work on their own farms, family farms, and other income generating activities. This reproductive work is also less visible and valued than men’s productive labour. To gain a better understanding on the time poverty faced by women in the UWR, please see the GROW Learning paper on Women’s Time Use.  

The 2013 gender analysis also highlighted the challenge of men’s control over women in terms of information, resources (land and non-land assets), and services. This control often extended into:

- limiting women’s access to land, especially long-term usage of quality land or adding land to that already under cultivation;
- limiting access to women’s access to inputs, such as tilling services, and agro-chemicals;
- socio-norms and attitudes that hindering women’s operational environment and ability to interact with male market actors, which will ultimately impact women’s control over crops, and revenue.

Male control was identified as a high risk for the GROW project, as the analysis identified the potential of men taking over women’s assets, such as land and resources, and productive work. This was especially true if men began to see the financial value of soya. As a result, the project identified two mitigating strategies: gender sensitizations at the household and community level and the inclusion of men in some programming, which will be discussed in the Implementation Section, III C.

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9 See this and other learning papers on the MEDA website, at www.meda.org
3.0 DESCRIPTION OF METHODOLOGY

A. Male Engagement in Women’s Economic Empowerment

As noted above, gender is the socially constructed roles and responsibilities of women and men. The concept of gender includes the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviours of both women and men.\(^\text{10}\) Social institutions — like family, school, religion, and other groups — influence and teach the expectations of what constitutes “feminine” and “masculine” behaviour. At its core, gender analysis is about understanding the differing roles between men and women, and the interaction between the two (gendered power relations).

Often in international development, we focus on the expectations put upon women. However, men are not spared from gender roles and norms. In the graphic below, Promundo\(^\text{11}\) highlights the different norms and constraints that are most commonly faced by women and girls and men and boys.

![Gendered World of Girlhood and Boyhood](image)

As the image highlights, women’s and girls’ bodies, movement, sexuality, and voices are restricted by gender and patriarchal norms, whereas men and boys’ emotions are restricted. Men and boys are seen to hold the responsibility for policing norms by castigating male and


\(^{11}\) From Promundo presentation during the Gender 360 Conference, Washington, D.C., May 2018.
female behaviour through shame and blame. This power over cultural construction of “appropriate behaviour” for males and females in society is a means by which men hold the invisible power over gender roles, especially men’s roles as head of household, providers, and decision-makers or leaders. The cultural construction of what is “masculine” is to be self-reliant, powerful, competitive, and unemotional, where often the only appropriate emotion is anger. Research\(^\text{12}\) links suppressed emotions with aggression and violence, hence recent discussions about “toxic masculinity” suggesting that the cultural construction of “masculine” is detrimental for both men and women. For men, the stress and pressure of being providers, protectors, and leaders may lead to negative mental health outcomes, such as alcoholism or suicide. For women, changes in social dynamics may cause men to lash out, either in the form of gender-based violence (emotional or physical violence, sexual harassment or abuse, and rape) or even through male capture, where men take or steal earnings or assets from the women around them. As the Promundo diagram above, Gendered world of girlhood and boyhood, notes that women, girls, men, and boys must think critically about these gendered expectations and become their own agents of change. ICRW echoes this sentiment, in *Gender Equity and Male Engagement: It only Works When Everyone Plays*, stating that both women and men live within patriarchal power structures, uphold these structures, are harmed by these structures, and are responsible for transforming them.\(^\text{13}\)

Development implementers increasingly see the need to engage men, as stakeholders and co-beneficiaries, in programming around gender equity. Engaging men (male family members and members of the community) in improving their own gender awareness can improve the enabling environment so women can participate in the economy, increase their access to resources, and improve their overall agency. MEDA is increasingly engaging with men in our gender equity strategies, similar to other implementing organizations like CARE, MenEngage Alliance, and Promundo. As MEDA seeks to increase women’s engagement and participation in markets, we recognize that men and women live interdependent lives. Changes in women’s lives affect and change the lives of those around them (e.g., their sons and daughters, partners, mothers, fathers and siblings). Including men in the process helps facilitate positive change.\(^\text{14}\)


Through the implementation of the GROW project, we have seen the important role that men play as gatekeepers, partners, and stakeholders. GROW also experienced the need to include men to ensure that men did not feel “left behind” by development efforts. Engaging men ensures that “newly empowered women and girls are stepping into a world that is ready to receive them.” In 2015, GROW piloted the Male Gender Advocates (MGAs) initiative, in which men were trained to serve as allies to GROW women clients and advocates for gender equality and equity within their communities. The purpose of the MGAs was threefold: to assist with the recruitment of project clients by speaking with family members to encourage women’s participation in project; to raise awareness of gender issues by facilitating dialogues with men in the community on gender constraints; and to be advocates for changes in socio cultural norms that hinder women’s access to productive resources to improve livelihoods of women and households. This initiative was a way to engage men into GROW activities beyond simply inviting husbands and male family members to participation in GROW’s trainings, such as nutritional awareness and agronomy at demonstration plots. MGAs are trained and supported by the GROW’s gender team, including KFP gender focal persons (GFPs), to support men to serve these roles and build awareness. Most importantly, MGAs’ voices helped to highlight and communicate that gender equality is good for everyone, especially the family, which benefits when women and girls are able to participate in economic activities.

B. Description of MGAs

MGAs are male volunteers from the communities where the GROW project mobilizes the support of GROW community men (family members, other male farmers, aggregators and market actors, and community) for our female clients. The target group of the MGA intervention is men (family members, other male farmers, aggregators and market actors, and community) and the women smallholder farmers. Initially, GROW started this activity as a pilot with only five MGAs and increased that number to 27 MGAs that serve in the communities of GROW’s five KFP partners.

C. Implementation Process

The MGAs serve as volunteers of gender equality champions, social influencers, and advocates, who work to change socio-cultural norms in the communities.

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16 In other projects, MEDA has also called men engaged in women’s economic empowerment activities as male gender champions. For the purposes of this paper, we will refer to these men as male gender activists or MGAs.
where KFPs operate in order to improve the operating environment for GROW women entrepreneurs. In order to implement the MGA activity, GROW worked with partners in a participatory process that identified the qualities and profile of the MGAs, and identified men in the KFP operating area that fit that profile. Below is a description of the process that the GROW project underwent to establish the initial MGA pilot period (2014-2015), which would be eventually scaled up until the end of the project (2016-2018).

MEDA’s role was to co-create the profile with the KFP, to engage with the KFP to identify potential MGAs, and provide training for MGAs with the KFPs on gender awareness and community mobilization. MEDA also provides administrative and logistical support once the scale-up is underway, and coordinates and facilitates the evaluation of the MGA activities. KFPs roles were to identify and verify the nominated MGA, monitor their activities in quarterly reports, which were required by MEDA, and provided day-to-day support to the MGAs, which included sharing emerging gender issues with MEDA, if necessary. Women Lead Farmers were also encouraged to use MGAs as a resource, leveraging their power and privilege to advocate on their behalf, especially as they relate to women’s
Within the MGA activity, GROW also worked with community leaders and government officials, specifically District Gender Officers. The community leaders recognize and promote MGA activities within the community and even attend meetings, listening openly and encouraging other men to attend gender awareness sessions and dialogues. In the past, MGAs have hosted meetings for the village chiefs and elders to discuss gender issues taking place in the community. MGAs ensured that opinion and community leaders were aware of the MGAs and their activities. During the evaluation, key informants shared that the MGAs were individuals with high moral standing whose views are widely respected in their communities. GROW linked MGAs and their gender sensitization activities to District Gender Officers, who had the responsibility of reporting on gender activities within the community to the government.

As stated above, MGAs reside in the community where GROW smallholder farmers operate and volunteer an average of five to six hours a month. MGAs are committed to gender equity and are interested in being involved in the project. They are encouraged to serve as role models by promoting gender equitable behaviour in their own lives, along with advocating for women to take on leadership roles within the community, permitting women to attend and take part in community meetings and decision-making processes. MGAs engage with other men in the community in gender awareness dialogues and in the facilitation of community forums to discuss identified gender constraints. MGAs also meet with families and couples at the household level to discuss and resolve gender issues. This role as neutral ear or counselor will be discussed in section IV.

MGAs regularly hold one-one-one gender awareness meetings with just men from the community or forums that include both women and men in the community. These meetings and forums were generally held on days that were the easiest to gather the largest number of people together, such as market days (Friday and Saturday), or other times when community members were likely to be in town rather than working on their farms. Locations for meetings, dialogues, and forums include the following: traditional ceremonies, in messages at church or mosque and other community gatherings, and during rotating community meetings that allow for sensitizing at all levels, when children and community members are listening in. MGAs reported that it was often difficult to bring together both men and women for one joint meeting, and therefore frequently held separate sessions.

Gender awareness sessions highlight the differences between sex and gender, the importance of gender equality, and the benefits of long-term and secure land tenure for women. These sessions also begin dialogues within the community around gender roles and responsibilities. MGAs advocate to other men in the community to support women’s involvement in the GROW project, and more
broadly encourage activities to increase women's economic empowerment and food security. MGAs encourage men to learn and support good nutrition practices and encourage and advocate for women to participate and take up leadership positions in the communities. MGAs also encourage men to become involved in family and household decision-making and that men should support their wives in reproductive labour, such as child care, cleaning, and cooking. Explicit outreach and education to men helps to improve women's operating environment, especially considering men's roles as gatekeepers and allies. Considering that project outcomes were to improve women's economic empowerment, it was necessary to engage men on gender equity and social norms. Within the outreach and education, MGAs answered questions about the project so that all members of a family unit understand the importance of reinvesting earnings, how best to grow a business, the economic capacities of women, and how to maximize the benefits of working together.

MGAs receive training in gender concepts to explore roots of their own gender norms, biases, and ideas of masculinity. The aim of the initial gender awareness training sessions is to build the capacity of MGAs to work within their communities to overcome gender stereotypes tied to tradition and culture, as well as provide tangible skills in improved communication and facilitation for discussions with community members. Specifically, training sessions encourage MGAs to conduct their own gender awareness dialogues and educate other men about the GROW project and its different activities. MGAs are also encouraged to highlight gender-based constraints or norms that cause inequality in women's roles in society or their ability to benefit from development. GROW encouraged MGAs to highlight and stand up against gender inequality in gender awareness sharing events. By taking a stand and speaking out against gender-based constraints, such as women's reproductive burden, MGAs are using their power and privilege to begin influencing positive masculinities and market the benefits of how women's economic participation can stabilize and improve relations within the household. MGAs highlight the importance of involving women in productive activities and share how women can contribute to their families and communities, especially in decision-making and income generation. During the MGA pilot, GROW educated MGAs in land management practices and agronomy to serve as additional assistance to women smallholder farmers. MGAs also were provided training around family diet and nutrition. Finally, MGAs encourage other men to take on more reproductive roles, by highlighting women's time burden, and share how men can support their wives or family members by taking on some of the reproductive tasks, such as childcare, cooking or cleaning.

In order to conduct gender awareness dialogues and forums, all MGAs were provided with information, education and communication materials (such as gender sensitization cards), and additional refresher trainings. These refreshers were held annually to review gender concepts, discuss the project gender strategy, and discuss lessons learned from hosting gender awareness dialogues, sessions,
or forums. Communication aids included tip sheets, 24-hour activity workload banners, and gender sensitization cards (see photo, left) to help generate discussion and share key messages with clients, or serve as helpful guidance on how to facilitate a community dialogue. The gender sensitization cards display local images and key message on gender equity, such as: “Sharing household responsibilities strengthens family bonds and guarantees a happy and stress-free family” or “A child’s health and safety is a shared responsibility.” The role of the cards is to reinforce MEDA's gender sensitization training and messages. The 24-hour activity banners are illustrations highlighting the workloads of both men and women in harvest and dry season. This banner is used to raise awareness of women’s heavy care burden and opens a dialogue around the different kinds of work and decision-making, encouraging recipients to think about strategies for creating an equal gender balance in decision-making and workloads. These banners support the MGAs and GFPs in sensitizing community men on the different roles of men and women, assisting men to appreciate the invisible work that women do daily, and to probe men on how they can support their wives with reproductive tasks at home.

Within GROW’s broader gender sensitization strategy, GROW also uses its KFP partners to conduct community gender sensitization. Like the MGA sensitization sessions, KFP sessions focused on gender concepts. The project engaged with technology to further gender equality sensitization by using the Talking Book, an inexpensive mass communications technology tool, to share pre-recorded messages about gender equity to women farmer groups. Women farmer groups can listen to the pre-recorded messages on a variety of topics, such as best agriculture practices, gender equitable behaviour and core concepts, nutrition, finance, and information related to the market (regarding buyers and suppliers, who the women farmers work with). Messages are updated quarterly by MEDA technical staff, who put together the content along with our partner, Literacy Bridge, a local NGO. Literacy Bridge translates the messages into seven local languages, which are then transmitted to the device. Women farmers shared that the pre-recorded messages were helpful and provoked dialogue and would remind family members of gender equitable behaviour.
D. Measuring Results

The initial MGA concept was a pilot conducted with five MGAs during the fourth year of the GROW project (2014-2015). The project conducted an internal qualitative evaluation of the pilot, holding focus group discussions and key informant interviews with GROW stakeholders. The stakeholder groups included five chiefs and opinion leaders, five MGAs, 10 lead farmers and women smallholder farmer clients, and the five GROW KFPs. The evaluation focused on perceptions of MGA relevance, the suitability of the individuals who served as MGAs and their GROW project and their gender knowledge, and their activities in the communities. The findings, based on the initial pilot, provided the project team with feedback and recommendations. GROW scaled up the pilot from five MGAs to 13 in 2016 and would add 10 additional MGAs in 2017. In total, GROW trained, supported, and monitored a total of 27 MGAs until the end of the project in 2018. Following the first qualitative evaluation, the project conducted smaller evaluations with each round of new MGAs through project staff, MGAs, and stakeholders, such as Women Lead Farmers and their corresponding village chiefs. Like the first evaluation, the subsequent evaluations focused on how to better understand the impact of the MGAs in building gender awareness and advocacy.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following section summarizes findings from the MGA initiative. The work of the MGAs brought a deeper understanding of the local context and the social dynamics within the village. It revealed the need for further gender sensitization at the village level. The project also identified the need for a space for men to make alternative forms of “masculine” roles and claims on power.

Deeper understanding of the local context and the need for gender sensitization

The MGA initiative gave GROW another gendered lens into the local community — including the gender dynamics and further insight into gender-based constraints — beyond the quarterly reporting that the project received from KFPs. The project additionally gained deeper understanding of the gender dynamics at the village level. GROW was able to see and hear the concerns and issues surrounding the inclusion of women into economic participation and the household decision-making process through the meetings that men had with other men and with other community members. GROW and the male allies were also able to gain awareness to the barriers that women faced in their gendered roles and power relations. MGAs shared with the project that some men on the village level were often not ready to accept the gender-related changes that the project was striving for. These men often saw women’s expanding roles in
soybean production as a burden because the labour requirements conflict with family needs.17 MGAs also reported that some men would create inconveniences for some women, such as delaying women’s ability to plant soya by making them work on the man’s farm (“family farm”). These men did this because they knew that women had weak or no control over their own time and labour, as it was obligatory for women to first work as laborers on men’s farms. The income from this “family farm” was controlled by men. The MGAs shared that men did not have the same obligation as women to work on the woman’s farm.

The gender dynamics within the village showed the barriers that women face, especially related to women’s control of their time and the division of labour. This revealed a need to increase gender awareness at the village level. The MGAs’ one-on-one gender dialogues and larger gender awareness forums allowed the project to educate men on gender concepts: that gender roles and gendered divisions of labour are not fixed, and that there were ways for men to be more supportive of their wives or female family members, especially through supporting care work. During MGA awareness sessions, men from the community often acknowledge that they were unaware of the reality that women work longer hours than men. Men also acknowledged that women are capable of participating in any economic activity, and can contribute financially and towards decision-making, both in the household and the broader community. Each MGA received daily clock banners, a learning aid that highlighted women and men’s workloads, to facilitate community discussions on gendered division of labour in productive, reproductive, and community work. The banner also emphasizes women and men’s workloads in dry season and harvest season. The learning aid encourages equal gender balance in decision-making and workload through facilitated discussion. Husbands have gone ahead to provide support to their partners in the areas of financial support, land, and labour.18 MGAs also used these sessions to advocate for women to be part of joint decision-making, and to share that women should be permitted to attend and take on leadership roles at the community level, as noted in feedback from the MGA evaluation (as seen in the textbox, right) from a GROW client. These sensitization and awareness raising activities, led by MGAs, gave men the space to question, vent, and discuss the changing dynamics within their household and at the community level. During the Summative Evaluation, the evaluators shared that most men recognize that soybean production and participation in Village Savings and Loans has empowered their wives, who now make significant contributions to household income and expenditures. The evaluation also highlighted the need for further education and sensitization of husbands, opinion leaders, and assemblymen on the project approach of targeting women, in order to ensure system support and sustainability that would be a tremendous benefit to rural households.19

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The need for changes in masculine roles, claims on power, and greater reflection among men

As noted above, gender sensitization sessions allowed men the time to become aware of gender concepts and provided them a space to openly discuss the changing social dynamics taking place in their households and community stemming from the GROW project. Since MGAs were allies to women, it created the opportunity for MGAs to defuse tension, to facilitate productive dialogue on “masculine” roles and claims on power, and articulate how these changes are starting to benefit men and their families. As the Summative Evaluation stated: “Drawing on their social capital and newly-found voice and respect, women were able to gain bodily integrity as they exercised power with one another and on their own in their decision-making and entitlement claims. However, such gains which challenge traditional male power could potentially lead to violence if not anticipated and managed. This is important as the women’s power gain could be misconstrued as a loss to male power, especially husbands’ power.”

Therefore, it was important to have men serve as allies and advocates within the project, especially during this transitional period where women were finding their own agency, voices, and confidence, while changing their roles within their household.

MGAs played an important role as facilitators through relationship smoothing between couples. MGAs often played the role of marriage counselor, providing suggestions to couples on positive behaviour and ways to defuse arguments and ensure “peace among families.” MGAs engaged men in the community in dialogues about restrictive constructions of “masculinity” and “femininity” with the goal to shift behaviours and roles away from hegemonic masculinity. The role of MGAs in relationship smoothing also allowed men to gain help and support in building a better relationship from a trusted male member from their community. During the MGA evaluation, a female GROW stakeholder shared that prior to the role of MGAs, “Men used to beat women or threaten to divorce them, but the MGA has really sensitized men to live peacefully with their wives and now men are actively supporting us.”

Gender-based violence is a risk of economic development projects, especially projects involving changing social structures and dynamics. The MGA initiative allowed men to become aware of their power and privilege, to begin to question “masculine” roles, and provided men from the community with a safe space for dialogue and transformative change taking place in the community.

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5.0 CLIENT STORY

Salamatu is a smallholder farmer from the Dasima community in the Sissala West district. As a wife and mother, she struggles with her household chores and farm work. She has to do her house chores, and then move to her husband's farm to work before making time for her own farm. This is time-consuming and often caused her own farm to be less productive.

Since joining the GROW project in 2013, Salamatu benefitted from a plethora of trainings, such as good agronomics practices, soya utilization, and dry season farming. However, the most significant change from the project is the ‘Male Gender Activist’ (MGA), who organize routine sensitization within her community to build awareness and campaign for men to support their wives in household by doing household chores during farming season. Salamatu’s husband took part in one of the sensitizations organized by the local MGAs serving the Dasama community. This is where he had the opportunity to learn about the need for men to support their wives by doing household chores.

After the sensitization, Salamatu noticed some changes in her husband, where he started to be very supportive in the household chores. Salamatu was very happy, when she shared: “Sometimes before I return from the farm, he has already set fire and heat water to bathe our daughter while I prepare supper. We eat early now and I also have time to focus on my soybeans farming, unlike the days when I used to do every work in the house.”

“At long last, my burden has been reduced, which has enabled me to focus on my farming activities. I never believed a day will come when before I returned from farm, food will be ready for me to eat and also rest until my husband surprised me. Initially I thought it was one day activity, but it continued subsequently. Mostly he likes bathing our daughter and cooking food for them,” exclaims Salamatu.
6.0 CHALLENGES, LESSONS LEARNED AND CONCLUSIONS

In implementing a family approach for a project, it was fundamental for GROW to determine the appropriate amount of engagement for men as stakeholders, while also ensuring that women maintain control of project benefits and gains in women’s leadership roles within the project. Engaging men into the project was a delicate balancing act, especially since we wanted to ensure that men did not overshadow or overstep in these leadership and control gains by GROW women clients. We also wanted to ensure that male allies did not speak for women but rather with women clients.

How do you engage men in gender equity in ways that support women’s existing efforts and leadership? This question was key to the GROW project and the MGA initiative. This need for balance was reflected in our Summative Evaluation Report:

GROW targeted women as a collective, the benefit was not just personal but also social. The space that they gained as GROW beneficiaries and the contributions that they were able to make helped to increase their

Four Expressions of Power

**Power over** = negative association for people, where having power involves taking it from someone else, and then, using it to dominate and prevent others from gaining it.

**Power to** = agency and decision-making. It refers to the unique potential of every person to shape his or her life and world.

**Power within** = self-confidence, self-worth, and self-knowledge; and

**Power with** = collective power of people coming together for a common goal.
visibility in their households, families and communities. The women said they earned the respect of their families and communities. The attention that such positive discrimination offered gave the women a sense of recognition and appreciation of not just their marginalization and impoverishment but also their collective ability to improve their capabilities. Drawing on their social capital and newly-found voice and respect, the women were able to gain bodily integrity as they exercised power with one another and on their own in their decision-making and entitlement claims. However, such gains which challenge traditional male power could potentially lead to violence if not anticipated and managed. This is important as the women’s power gain could be misconstrued as a loss to male power, especially husbands’ power.21

GROW was designed as a women-centric project, functioning similarly to gender quotas, to provide a “positive discrimination” to allow women access to women-targeted training, resources, and services that improve not only the capabilities, gain agency and opportunities that were not previously available to them. Using

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21 Summative Evaluation (December 2018)
VeneKlasen & Miller’s forms of power, GROW women clients were able to find the power within (self-confidence), power with (collective power when people come together with the Women Lead Farmer and Women Sales agent model) and power to (agency or decision-making).

This positive discrimination shifted power structures for GROW women clients, but many men in the community did not experience that same shift in power structures. Social norms in women’s operating environment were slowly shifting, and during the project, GROW saw some male backlash as a reaction to changes in men’s perceived loss of power over women in the community. As noted above, male family and community members sometimes used their power over women’s labour and time to delay women’s ability to tend to their farms. Related to resources, GROW only received one case of an asset (motorized tricycle, or Motorking, featured in the Putting Technology into the Hands of Women paper as a time and labour saving technology) being stolen from one of the GROW women clients. GROW recognizes that more could have been done through the MGA initiative to engage men in dialogues during awareness and sensitization sessions to address power structures.

Early in the project, men in communities where GROW operated expressed a desire to be involved in the project. The MGA pilot was created to target men by engaging them directly in gender awareness and as allies in addressing harmful gender norms. While the project saw benefits in male engagement in awareness, advocacy, and smoothing of changing social dynamics through MGA facilitators, GROW also saw challenges with the MGA initiative. The main challenge was that men, who were part of the MGAs initiative, wanted to expand their roles and influence beyond that of awareness raising and advocacy.

In the initial pilot, MGAs were trained in all aspects of the project, beyond the gender awareness curriculum and community facilitation. Part of the role of the MGAs was to educate men in the community about the project and to answer questions about the GROW project – its activities from informal financial services (VSLAs) to how to cultivate soybeans and negotiate prices for market – but this also caused some MGAs to become actively involved in activities that were beyond their scope. It was noted in the first evaluation of the MGA evaluation that some MGAs expanded their roles to include helping women sell their soy beans, that men would collaborate with Women Sales Agents to decide good market prices for GROW women clients, and men would educate GROW women clients about agronomy, which they had learned from the orientation. While MGAs’ roles were to support and advocate for women, GROW did not want MGAs and their activities to overshadow or overstep the progress made by the project in supporting women’s leadership, mentorship, and decision-making. As noted in the Women’s Economic Empowerment learning paper, GROW used models like the

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23 See this and other learning papers on the MEDA website, at www.meda.org
Women Lead Farmers and Women Sales Agents to serve as leaders and mentors to women smallholder farmers. These women would support other women in agronomy and with market linkages by serving as an intermediary that would sell and negotiate soya bean prices. If left unchecked, MGA overreach could render the role of Women Lead Farmers and Sales agents as less active. These Women Lead Farmers and Women Sales Agents disrupt the tradition market system and actors, who have traditionally not served women and other marginalized groups.

In one instance, KFP GFPs and field officers shared that communities in one MGA area were less likely to meet and that men were less likely to participate if the MGA was not in attendance. Gender awareness and dialogue should not be dependent on one individual, in this case an MGA. If unchecked, MGAs risk re-creating a male-dominated paradigm, where women continue to be dependent on men for market access and knowledge. The project team held a meeting for current and new MGAs, focusing on the specific role the MGAs should play, as GROW ultimately decided that despite these challenges, MGAs served a good purpose. This role was to host men-to-men gender dialogues and facilitation of community forums on gender awareness by highlighting the effects of gender bias and discrimination on both men and women. Beside outlining the roles and responsibilities, the training guided the MGAs in discussions around masculinity and forming alternative forms of positive masculinity. The project also spoke to MGAs that their role was not to speak for GROW women clients, but with them. GROW women needed the space to embrace their expressions of power, as noted above, and to internalize that only women can empower themselves. MGAs could support by working with men in the community to shift socio-cultural norms and begin to develop new alternative definitions of masculinity.

GROW provided further support and guidance to the KFPs and MGAs to reemphasize their roles and address this concern of expanding MGA roles and responsibilities. This shift to encourage MGAs to speak about alternative forms of “masculinity” occurred during the last year and half of the project. GROW already encouraged MGAs to model inclusive behaviour and share with men in the community how they can support their wives in productive activities by assuming reproductive tasks. The project always discussed harmful stereotypes and challenging harmful and restrictive constructions of “masculinity” and “femininity.” GROW gender messaging also expressed the need for men to engage in care work, but more support by providing more concrete examples of male engagement in reproductive work and training could have been provided to KFP GFPs and MGAs to support this work.

MGAs were positive deviants, individuals with uncommon behaviours or strategies compared to community norms, within their community. MGAs faced resistance from some community men during their gender sensitization about the teachings of the training. MGAs reported that community members were afraid that women will no longer afford them respect if men begin to take up some of women’s
Male community members address the benefits that they have seen from women’s engagement in GROW activities during the 2018 Canadian High Commissioner’s Visit.

reproductive duties. There were criticisms by men toward MGAs, who were modeling positive behaviour, accusing men of doing women’s work. While some of the men were receptive to the MGAs, others argued, “do we want to give all the power to the women so they [women] can overtake the men?” MGAs took the opportunity to speak with men and the community about the GROW project and its benefit to the family. The social changes that they were beginning to see was not about overtaking men, but in providing equal economic opportunities to women that would help improve and stabilize the overall household. MGAs would share how the increased income could be spent on children’s’ health, nutrition and education. MGAs also emphasized that family relationships are harmonious when men and women work together, which is noted in the MGA gender sensitization cards.

In the future, projects like GROW that conduct community gender sensitizations and awareness-raising sessions should include more dialogue and discussion around toxic masculinity and extension of the definition of power. Discussions of power should include other expressions of power, beyond the negative definition of power, that is a positive force, where both women and men can be agents of change. This way, the roles that MGAs play as allies is not about speaking for women, but to speak out to other men about how greater gender equity
could help the lives of men; this can only be done when men examine their own
gendered roles and constraints. MGAs and men in the community could then
reflect on the negative impacts of patriarchy on their own lives, which would
help men in the community to better empathize, relate, and work with women
in the fight against harmful social norms. ICRW echoes this need to engage
men as stakeholders, co-beneficiaries, and change agents in Gender Equity and
Male Engagement: It only Works When Everyone Plays as it emphasizes the
responsibility that men have in promoting gender equity and also the benefits that
they gain from more equitable families and societies.24

only works when everyone plays. Washington, D.C.: ICRW.