

# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN EASTERN DRC

The impact of interventions addressing  
gender-based violence



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# Women's economic empowerment in Eastern DRC: the impact of interventions addressing gender-based violence

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**Abstract:** The report explores the current socio-economic situation of women in three villages in Ituri Province, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the degree to which interventions addressing gender-based violence have effected change on economic violence and women's economic empowerment. The research is based on primary data from focus group discussions.

**Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to thank Claire Hancock from Tearfund for commissioning this research and providing valuable inputs on the report. We are grateful to Uwezo Baghuma and Floribert Rekaba from HEAL Africa and the Tearfund DRC team for the invaluable support they gave to the data collection process for this study and in reviewing this report.

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## Acronyms

<b>DRC:</b> Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
<b>FGD:</b> focus group discussions
<b>GBV:</b> gender-based violence
<b>ICRW:</b> International Centre for Research on Women
<b>VAWG:</b> violence against women and girls

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report explores the key findings of a study undertaken in three villages in Ituri Province, Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in October 2017. The study examined the current socio-economic situation of women in these villages and the degree to which interventions designed to combat gender-based violence have impacted on their economic empowerment.

The study had its genesis in Tearfund and HEAL Africa's project, 'Engaging with Faith Groups to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-affected Communities' (2015–2018), which was implemented in 15 villages in Ituri Province, Eastern DRC. This project engages with faith leaders and gender champions to shift attitudes, behaviours and social norms that support gender inequality and enable violence against women and girls. It was assumed that changing social norms would also help to improve women's economic agency and power. To test this assumption, focus group discussions with both men and women were held in three of the 15 project villages in Ituri Province.

The findings show that positive changes in relation to women's economic empowerment have come out of these interventions. Study participants reported a reduced incidence of physical violence and a degree of willingness by men to engage in different behaviours, including being more open to discuss and consult on household decisions with their partners, being more transparent about their economic activities and reducing their alcohol consumption.

Overall, however, there has been limited progress on areas of equitable control over assets, especially land and harvests, and autonomy and decision-making. Women continue to bear the burden of unpaid work in the productive and domestic spheres. They have their prescribed areas of resource management that correspond with their reproductive roles and responsibilities, e.g. food, child health and education, and find themselves in a disadvantaged position vis-à-vis their partners when it comes to decision-making and control over resources.

In order to secure their own income and have more financial independence, women have resorted to finding their own land to farm. They are, however, acutely aware of the domestic conflict that this situation contributes to. Their economic autonomy is at odds with the household harmony they seek – a harmony which in practice often means accepting that they have to submit to their husband's perceived superiority and decision-making authority. This internal conflict and pressure is often reinforced by faith leaders and gender champions, who frequently emphasise harmony, at the same time as urging couples to work and make decisions together.

There are also strikingly few spaces where women can meet to express collective action and exercise leadership. There are no savings and/or support groups beyond 'social associations' that focus on financial support for funerals. Women seem to be more isolated than men as

far as sharing experiences and finding support is concerned, in part due to their heavy workload and their limited independent mobility.

The research concludes that social norms about gender roles and responsibilities continue to have a strong hold and that interventions addressing violence are successful at an individual level when they do not challenge the overall roles, status and power of men and women. Even though men and women recognise certain negative aspects of cultural norms (such as the unequal division of labour between them; and men's sense of 'owning' their wives once they have paid the bride price, as well as its financial burden), these norms are too ingrained to have begun to change significantly, and more reflection and engagement with both men and women is needed to address the underlying causes of continuing economic hardship and gender inequality.

For future interventions that are linked to women's economic empowerment, it is crucial to build in project components that address social norm processes and the agency of men and women alongside components for increasing income. For the specific DRC context, the following recommendations are made:

1. Skills development and training – provide livelihood training opportunities for women, coupled with mentoring support, both to alleviate their isolation and increase their economic power.
2. Collective action and leadership – facilitate spaces for networking and mutual support for women, to increase their self-confidence and improve their coping strategies.
3. Burden of unpaid care and work – address these issues to support increased livelihood activities and positive relationship dynamics in the family.
4. Access to property, assets and financial services – support access to livelihood opportunities and autonomy to pursue economic interventions.
5. Gender norms and discriminatory social norms – facilitate inclusive gender-specific support groups, reinforce faith leaders' and gender champions' capacities to positively influence changes to social norms and engage at the community and institutional levels for better conditions that promote gender equality.

# 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 2011, Tearfund has been implementing projects in 15 countries that tackle gender-based violence (GBV) by focusing on changing social norms around gender roles and responsibilities.

This study focuses on one particular project – ‘Engaging with Faith Groups to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-affected Communities’ – currently being implemented by Tearfund and HEAL Africa in Ituri Province in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This three-year project (April 2015–October 2018) is funded by the UK Government under the What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls Global Programme. It seeks to address the causes and consequences of violence against women and girls (VAWG) by engaging and equipping male and female faith leaders and community volunteers (gender champions) to be catalysts for change within their communities, by working to shift attitudes, behaviours and social norms that support gender inequality and enable VAWG. These norms also contribute to stigmatising survivors of violence and limiting their access to services and support. Faith leaders are encouraged to hold community dialogues within congregations to speak out against VAWG, promote perceptions of positive masculinity, and change attitudes towards gender equality from a faith perspective. In addition, interventions include referring survivors of GBV to medical services.<sup>1</sup>

Recently, GBV survivors in the project area expressed a strong interest in economic empowerment interventions. Economic empowerment not only depends on women having the skills, capacities and confidence to advance economically but also on men recognising and respecting women’s right to participate in productive activities and to share decision-making. This recognition and respect is based on norms around gender roles and responsibilities. It is therefore assumed that changes in social norms around GBV can prepare the ground for women’s economic empowerment and reduce the risk of a backlash against women who have their own income.

## 1.1. Purpose of the study

Research is available on the link between economic empowerment and GBV, especially domestic violence. Increased livelihood activities and resources can negatively or positively affect the relationship between men and women in the immediate and wider family, depending on a number of influencing factors.

For example, Action Against Hunger<sup>2</sup> and Oxfam<sup>3</sup> found that domestic violence increases when there is a scarcity of resources and when the ‘breadwinner’ concept of masculinity is threatened. In patriarchal societies and conservative cultural contexts that have restrictions on women’s status, mobility, and bargaining power, there are increased rates and

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<sup>1</sup> Sandilands, M., Jewkes, R. (2017) *Does faith matter? Faith engagement, gender norms and violence against women and girls in conflict-affected communities*, baseline research in Ituri Province, DRC, Tearfund.

<sup>2</sup> Angeles, M. B. (2012) *Combating gender-based violence and enhancing economic empowerment of women in Northern Uganda through cash transfers*, Action Against Hunger, ACF International.

<sup>3</sup> Bolis, M., Hughes, C. (2015) *Women’s economic empowerment and domestic violence – links and lessons for practitioners working with intersectional approaches*, Oxfam Intersectionality Series.

acceptance of domestic violence, with fewer opportunities for women to leave abusive relationships.

Additional factors, such as women marrying young, having more children, being indigenous or having a disability, increase the risk of financial insecurity and GBV. Tearfund's baseline research for the project 'Engaging with Faith Groups to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-affected Communities' found that contributing more to household income than their partners gave women a protective correlation with reduced intimate partner violence, suggesting the importance of women's economic empowerment.<sup>4</sup>

However, no research was found on how interventions to combat GBV and change social norms can influence economic empowerment. Bridging this gap, the purpose of this study is to explore the degree to which GBV-oriented interventions, which address masculinity and changing social norms, have provided or are providing a supportive environment for women's economic empowerment in Tearfund's project area in Eastern DRC. The study also explores the best social conditions and most effective design for Tearfund's future interventions on women's economic empowerment.

## 1.2. Women's economic empowerment

Women's economic empowerment is about human rights and social justice as much as it is about economic growth. In 2015, only 50 per cent of women participated in the global labour force compared with 77 per cent of men.<sup>5</sup> Women also make up the majority of the world's poor.

Investing in women's economic empowerment has been recognised as essential not only for realising women's rights but also as a precondition for sustainable development,<sup>6</sup> for example, in the areas of education, health and poverty reduction.<sup>7</sup> Women invest in their families, including their education and health, and thereby contribute to their society and their national economy not only in real time but also for the next generation.

From a human rights and social justice perspective, women's economic empowerment is both a contributor to and a consequence of gender equality. Economic security increases life choices; economic empowerment provides women with a stronger position to participate in influencing development and shaping society.<sup>8</sup>

Tearfund's understanding of women's economic empowerment recognises and builds on the model introduced by the International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW).<sup>9</sup>

### Figure 1: Dimensions of women's economic empowerment

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<sup>4</sup> Sandilands and Jewkes (2017).

<sup>5</sup> UN, *The World's Women 2015* (2015) Chapter 4: Work, available at [https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015\\_chapter4\\_t.pdf](https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/downloads/WorldsWomen2015_chapter4_t.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 5: Gender Equality](#).

<sup>7</sup> Sida (2015) *Supporting women's economic empowerment: scope for Sida's engagement*.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Golla, A. M. et al. (2011) *Understanding and measuring women's economic empowerment – definition, framework and indicators*, International Centre for Research on Women.





*Contributors to Women's Economic Empowerment Addressing Resources, Institutions and Norms*

The ICRW defines a woman as economically empowered when she has both the ability to succeed and advance economically and the power to make economic decisions and act on them. To succeed and advance economically means to have resources and skills to compete in markets, access economic institutions equitably and increase income. To have power and agency means to be able to benefit from economic activities and gains by way of decision-making and having control over resources and income.

Both of these components are connected and influence each other. Both are necessary to attain economic empowerment and a better life for women and their families. In order to achieve this, it is important to acknowledge the underlying factors that contribute to it. On the one hand, there are resources on which women can build to succeed economically and/or ensure power and agency. Resources are not only financial or material but also include social capital, e.g. networks, mentors and human capital, such as skills development, training and education.

On the other hand, there are norms and institutions – systems that have a bearing on the relationship between individuals and their environments – which provide a framework of what is and is not acceptable within the rules of these social systems. Norms include gender roles and expectations – what is appropriate and what is not; institutions include legal and policy structures that influence economic systems, markets, marriage, inheritance and education systems.<sup>10</sup> The ICRW framework therefore looks at both individual and community/institutional levels.

Women's economic empowerment can also be seen as a 'process whereby women's and girls' lives are transformed from a situation where they have limited power and access to

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

economic assets to a situation where they experience economic advancement'.<sup>11</sup> This perspective is closely linked to VeneKlasen's Four Powers Framework (2002)<sup>12</sup>, which differentiates between 'power over', 'power to', 'power with' and 'power within'. In the context of economic empowerment, 'power to' refers to economic decision-making power within a household, community or local economy that extends beyond the traditional allocation of women's and men's areas. 'Power over' represents access to and control over financial, physical and knowledge/information-based assets, including income-generating activities and employment. 'Power within' refers to knowledge and individual capacities as well as self-esteem, the belief in one's ability to make changes in one's life and to have a sense of entitlement. Lastly, 'power with' is the ability to collaborate and work with others to increase and promote economic activities and rights.<sup>13</sup> The four powers are implicitly represented within the ICRW framework and reflected in the suggested indicators.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

The underpinning approach of this research is inclusive. This means that men and women from different age groups were asked to take part in the research, including women and men with disabilities, and with different levels of education/literacy. The methodology and corresponding tools were chosen to encourage open discussion in a safe environment and support participants to share personal experiences and ideas.

### 2.1. Data collection and sampling

Data collection focused on qualitative data. The project is being implemented in 15 villages in three health zones near Rethy, Ituri Province, Eastern DRC. The research team randomly selected one of these 15 villages from each health zone. Project partners visited beneficiaries at home to provide information about the study and encourage participants to come forward. Participants included female and male community members (including project beneficiaries) ranging in age from their early twenties to late seventies and with different types of marital status; as well as male and female faith leaders and gender champions.

#### Tools

Tools included focus group discussions (FGDs), supported by body mapping, a visualisation technique. Each FGD lasted approximately two hours.

#### *Body mapping*

Body mapping is the process of creating body maps to represent visually various aspects of people's lives. In the context of economic empowerment, different body parts represent knowledge, attitude and behaviour/practice, with a focus on the agency/decision-making side of economic empowerment. Because participants are illiterate, may not have had much

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<sup>11</sup> Taylor and Perezniето (2014), quoted in Hunt, A., Samman, E. (2016) *Women's economic empowerment – navigating enablers and constraints*, research report, ODI.

<sup>12</sup> VeneKlasen, L., and Miller, V. (2002) *A New Weave of People, Power and Politics: the Action Guide for Advocacy and Citizen Participation*, World Neighbors: Oklahoma City.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

experience of drawing and felt uncomfortable using pens or markers, the original idea of having participants draw on the body map did not work.<sup>14</sup> In this research, body mapping therefore functioned both as a checklist for the different factors and components of economic empowerment, and as a visual entry point for the discussion around norms and personal experience. See Annex 1 for a visual.

### *Focus group discussions*

Discussions (including the mapping exercise) took place with men and women in separate groups and further explored the extent to which the current status (knowledge, activities, confidence and control) was new or long-standing and what may have caused any changes.

FGDs with faith leaders and gender champions were in mixed groups, except in the village of Ngape. These interviews provided triangulation of data obtained through women's and men's FGDs on their perception of economic empowerment and any changes that contributed to it.

## **2.2. Data analysis**

Notes and transcripts were translated and given to the external consultant. Responses from the body mapping exercise and FGDs were slotted into a matrix based on the Tearfund baseline/ICRW framework table with overlapping domains and indicators to help determine trends across the knowledge, attitude and behaviour/practice cycle.

## **2.3. Ethics, safety and protection**

Tearfund adheres to the World Health Organization's Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Intervention Research on Violence Against Women and the UK Department for International Development's ethics and principles for research and evaluation. The research proposal received ethical clearance from Tearfund's internal ethics committee.

Informants gave their verbal consent after the purpose of the research was explained, with emphasis on voluntary and pressure-free participation as well as confidentiality and safety measures.

The venues and timing of data collection needed to be accessible (e.g. for persons with disabilities) and ensure the safety of participants, especially of women and girls. Discussions were held in locations where other project activities had taken place in the past. This meant that the locations had gone through a risk assessment to ensure physical safety during and after interviews, and a safety screening (risk of violence based on participation in the research), with plans to mitigate potential interruption. Provisions were made for a support mechanism during and following the interviews in case participants experienced emotional distress.

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<sup>14</sup> Due to time constraints, it was not possible to conduct the body mapping exercise differently, for example, using local material as symbols for activities and perceptions.

The timing of discussions took into account men's and women's roles, so that interviews didn't overlap with important (household) responsibilities, or put additional pressure on participants, especially women. Unfortunately, even though people were requested to come at different times of the day (e.g. to take part in women's FGDs, men's FGDs, faith leaders and gender champions FGDs), all of the participants arrived at the same time in the morning. With FGDs lasting longer than anticipated, this meant that most people had to wait quite a few hours.

## 2.4. Delimitations and limitations

This is an initial study based on a small sample of project areas/villages due to time constraints and distances between villages. Time and budget constraints permitted the research to explore only the key area of agency and power at the individual level. The study sought to confirm assumptions but they warrant further in-depth research. Gaps in the transcription and inaccuracies in translation have limited the possibility of analysis along intersectional factors such as age. The purposive sampling procedure and small sample size decreases the generalisability of the findings.

## 3. FINDINGS

### 3.1. Overview of socio-economic conditions

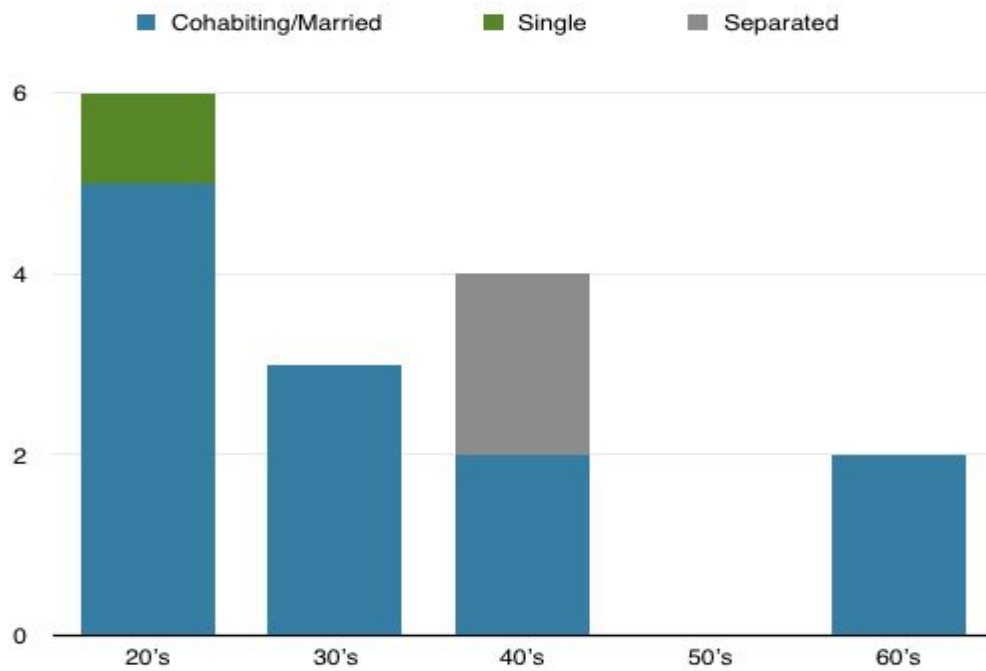
In total, 15 women and 15 men participated in the FGDs (five per village/focus group) between the ages of 24 and 74. In addition, one male and one female representative of faith leaders and gender champions per village between the ages of 24 and 68 took part in separate FGDs.

Female participants ranged from their early twenties to late sixties, with the majority either 'legally' married or cohabiting with their partners.<sup>15</sup>

### Figure 2: Women participants in FGDs across villages

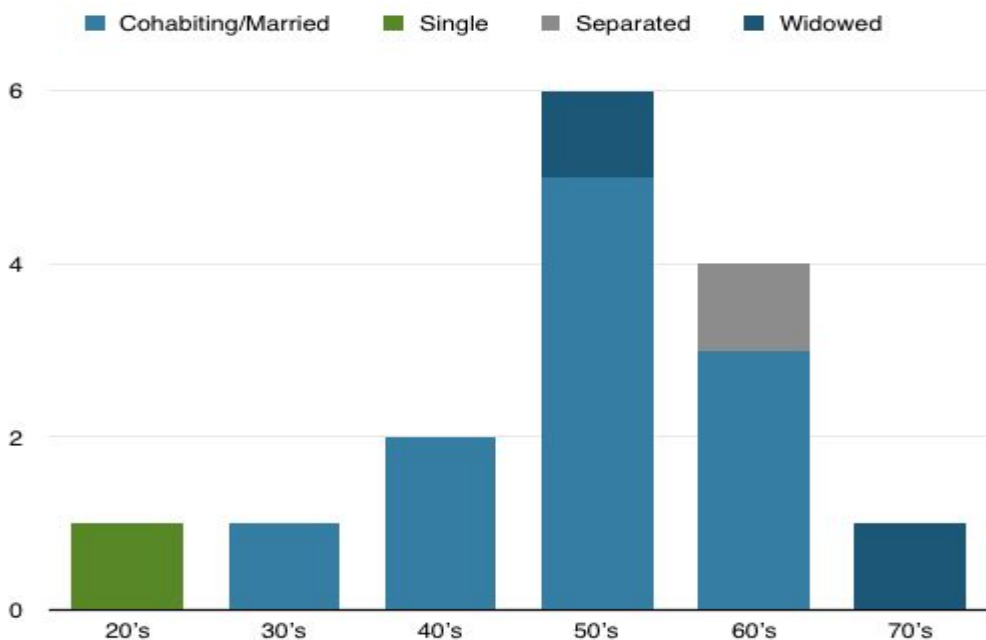
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<sup>15</sup> Note: the status of 'cohabiting' and 'married' were combined in Figures 2 and 3, as the definition of 'legal' marriage (after full payment of the bride price), and 'cohabitation' (where the bride price is not paid off, even after possibly decades of cohabiting) was not immediately clear, as people used the same term for both and this was only confirmed at the second village.



Male participants ranged from their mid-twenties to mid-seventies, with the majority in their fifties and sixties and married or cohabiting with their partners.

**Figure 3: Men participants in FGDs across villages**



In all three villages, the majority of people depend on farming for their livelihoods. The main cash crops are coffee and beans. In addition, field production provides food for the family, with any surplus sold at the market. Other economic activities include selling local beer,

livestock trading, day labouring (including working on other people's fields) or transporting goods. The most common examples given for how this income is used include household necessities, such as soap and salt, school fees and related costs, and bride price.

Respondents referred to environmental changes that negatively affect field productivity, such as poorer soil quality and changes in seasonal rain patterns, resulting in limited harvests. They also mentioned that they had more livestock (such as cattle and chickens) before the civil war. The combined consequences of civil war and climate change are considered to be responsible for the current dire local economic situation.

### 3.2 Understanding of women's economic empowerment

For women, 'economics' (or economic activities) refers to 'making money quickly in the fields or business', working and knowing how to make money, and everyday work such as buying goats and selling them at a profit. Women understand 'economic empowerment' as having the opportunity to cultivate land and, importantly, to make decisions about what to do with the money – something they usually do not have.

For men, 'economic activities' refers to what can be sold, such as produce from the fields, or cattle. Men explained 'economic empowerment' as having resources such as land and crops to plant, as well as having the knowledge and education to know what and how to plant. It is also making decisions and having the freedom to go where they want and 'managing well what they have'. In contrast to the women interviewed, men felt they had economic power.

Both men and women expressed the need for women to have some power to make sure the household is well run, by which they mean both having the power to make economic decisions and having power over resources and assets. Men, including faith leaders and gender champions, conceded that when a woman is smarter (i.e. is more knowledgeable and able) than her husband, it may 'bring the family a good life'. However, it seems that such an idea (that a woman can be smarter than her partner) was raised more as a theoretical possibility than a firm belief that this actually happens. There was also a clear understanding that a woman should never feel superior to her partner, even if she earns more money or is better able to manage the household.

*'If a wife is more powerful or has much more money than her husband, that wife is unsettled, so at that moment when the wife has more economic power, she will think that she is equal to the man, and that everything the man is doing, she can do.'*

Male respondent, village B<sup>16</sup>

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Men are considered the head of the household and therefore have a superior position. Having a superior position and being superior are seen as one and the same. Consequently, women behaving in a superior way would upset the balance of social norms. This is an area

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<sup>16</sup> The names of the three specific villages where the FGDs took place have been replaced with A, B and C for the purpose of confidentiality.

that reflects a social and theological/cultural understanding that is not necessarily aligned with the practical experience of day-to-day life. Women and men concurred that men are superior because God created women from man and ordained him to be the head of the household. Consequently, men are perceived as having a God-given greater ability and capacity to provide and make decisions. For a woman to think that she is cleverer and more able than a man would be seen as questioning God and going against his laws. However, on a practical and quotidian level, women openly expressed their frustration with men who drink, mistreat them and neglect their families, and emphasised their own capacities to take care of children and provide for the family even when men don't.

Faith leaders and gender champions interpret women's economic empowerment along similar lines: having the means and resources, such as tools and seeds, as well as having money, to pay for food, school fees and clothing. Decision-making power was seen as part of women's economic empowerment; however, it is limited to decisions that concern food, school-related costs, and health care for family members. There seems to be no doubt that economic empowerment for women goes only as far as clearly prescribed areas of responsibility within the family, of which the man remains the head, with the most important responsibilities and decision-making powers based on his perceived superiority.

### 3.3. Gender roles and responsibilities

Women's productive activities include farming land and selling produce such as potatoes, cassava, cabbages and other vegetables, making home-brewed beer for sale, transporting/carrying things for a fee, running small shops, and sometimes paid work as a labourer on someone else's land. Women are recognised as experienced traders and their access to markets both as buyers and sellers does not seem impeded compared to men.

Men also grow coffee, beans and vegetables. In addition, they buy and sell sheep and goats, or have small businesses. When wives and husbands work on the same piece of land, they do so from planting through to harvesting. Where men and women farm land separately, men might bring in their wives to help them with the harvest. Men said that they also invest money from their wives' activities in livestock or small enterprises – a decision that is not always consensual.

Men recognised that women have a far higher workload, as they are responsible for reproductive activities such as fetching water and firewood, cleaning, washing clothes and bathing the children, cooking, taking produce to market to sell, and buying food.

*'Wives have less time because when she comes home from the field around 3pm, she goes to look for firewood and vegetables and then when she comes home she fetches water and cooks. Surely they don't have time to rest.'*

Male respondent, village C

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When the project baseline survey was undertaken in July 2015, 58 per cent of men agreed that men should share household tasks, but only 31 per cent said they actually did.

In the current FGDs (undertaken in October 2017), men felt they had changed since project sensitisation<sup>17</sup> began. They acknowledged that their wives are busier than they are, and said they were helping with household chores much more than before.

*'Men understand that it is not women's work, they do it together. For example, if a man's wife went to the market and soon he is going to receive visitors, can he wait for the wife to come and sweep the house? No, no, he will do it by himself.'*

Male respondent, village C

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*'When my wife has gone to fetch water... I can help her to prepare by taking the baby when it cries.'*

Male respondent, village B

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Women, however, had a different perspective: they were adamant that not much had changed and that they still do all the household chores. Men only ever help if the woman is sick or pregnant.

*'You can be going to the field which is far away. But before you go, your husband has told you that when you come back, you must wash his clothes. Once you have come back from the field, you feel tired and when you tell your husband that you are tired, he will not understand and cannot accept it.'*

Female respondent, village A

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At the same time, there was a strong perception among men that it is not acceptable for men to do 'women's work'. While women were aware of this point of view, they did not agree with it; if a man is sweeping, they said women 'cannot laugh at him because they see that he has changed, you even have to thank him'. In the project's baseline survey, 47 per cent of women believed that men should share in work around the house.

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<sup>17</sup> As part of project sensitisation, faith leaders and gender champions were encouraged to hold community dialogues with their congregations to speak out against VAWG and promote perceptions of positive masculinity (see Introduction, p. 6).



*'If other men see your husband sweeping, they can ask him: why are you sweeping, you got married so that your wife can do that, so if you sweep the house, your wife has nothing to do.'*

Female respondent, village C

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In FGDs, some men said that now, women sometimes tell men to do 'women's work'. There seems to be shame attached to this, because it is perceived as men being dominated by women.

*'The majority of men don't do it because if you do, people will laugh at you, while... they'll also ask you, why did you marry that woman, then? That's her job... they can sweep the house if the woman is sick; but if she's in good health, no, they can't.'*

Male respondent, village A

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### 3.4. Power and agency

#### 3.4.1. Autonomy and mobility

For women to be economically empowered, they need to have autonomy and ability to move freely and safely. Only then can they access and benefit from economic and social spaces that can enhance their livelihoods.

Women in the villages studied usually go to the market to sell produce and buy food and other household needs. Markets are up to four hours away from home, which means significant travel time, often on foot. Women started frequenting markets more after the end of the conflict, as they began to trade. While their access to markets is not heavily impeded in general, they did raise concerns about safety issues around travel to and from markets, especially after dark.

*'Before, men were the ones to do the commerce, going far away to look for markets like Isiro, Kisangani, and Mamabasa etc. but now women are doing it and there is no shame or problem.'*

Male respondent, village C

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As part of their role in the community, women attend social association meetings. These associations were set up locally by groups of women as a form of insurance to cover funeral costs, although both men and women sit on social association committees. It is generally accepted, however, that women take the lead and hold leadership positions, as social

associations were founded by women and men joined only later. Because women are in a group and outnumber men, they feel more confident to speak than when they are at home and alone.

Men go to markets to sell livestock and cash crops. In contrast to women, they tend to have more transport options, such as pushcarts, bicycles, or mopeds. There are agricultural/farmers' groups which meet regularly and where men discuss their farming activities. It is not clear how these meetings were set up and for what exact purpose.

Both men and women go to church and attend funerals; there is the expectation that men will contribute something to the bereaved family.

In terms of autonomy, women are expected to ask permission from their partners to go to markets or visit parents, which men explained is for their own safety. Men are less required to tell their wives where they are or where they are going at any given time. However, they admitted that it is better to let their wives or a neighbour know, which seems to indicate that this could be a matter of security more than an issue of autonomy.

In terms of changes in this practice after the sensitisation training, one woman mentioned that her husband now lets her go to her small shop whenever she needs to, whereas before she had to ask his permission each time. Besides this, neither women nor men pointed to any significant changes.

### **3.4.2. Control over assets**

To achieve economic empowerment, it is not enough for women to have equitable access to assets, they also need to have control over them. It is this that offers them financial security and enables them to develop economically.

The main asset available to people is land, which is usually in the possession of men. Historically, by law, inheritance went to men only. While this has changed and the law gives inheritance rights to both women and men, culturally, it is still men who inherit land. Women, however, have their own farming tools, such as hoes, even if the land they cultivate belongs to their husbands or partners.

Usually, couples farm the land together. Men take the lion's share of the field produce, even though women often work longer hours both on and off the field, and therefore contribute more than men to earning the income that results from selling the harvest.

Control over assets is a fairly contested area, where men's and women's perceptions diverge. Some male respondents said that women are much better at managing money because they have to coordinate the needs of the entire family and have a better overview of what the children and the family as a whole need, as well as visitors.

*'The women are the ones with higher knowledge compared to men, because they are the ones with family management, which means that they are in charge of caring for children and family needs; and whatever they have harvested in the field, it is the wife who must look at how to manage it until the next season and also keep back a small quantity for seed. That's why they say that women have more knowledge of the economy.'*

Male respondent, village B

Many women, however, stated that often they only have access to food and it can even be difficult to get money from their husbands to buy clothes for themselves.

Women considered it important to hold back some money, either from their earnings or from what their husbands gave them, for medical treatment and other personal needs. In their opinion, men are less inclined than women to consider the needs of the whole family and tend to make unilateral decisions without their wives' consent, or change their minds about purchases that were previously agreed on.

*'That money, you have to hide it, we can't show it to our husbands because there will be a time that you have some personal needs, an illness, or your brothers want to announce that there is a new boy in the family and you have to contribute to that... we have to hide that money because when the husband sees it, he can ask me to give him the money so that he can go and drink alcohol with it and sometimes women hide it in their neighbour's house.'*

Female respondent, village C

With the income made from selling their produce, women usually buy items for the children, such as clothes and other necessities that men do not always provide for.

*'I don't show the money I get from selling beer because it helps me with little needs, like buying soap, salt... and the wife has no right as well to know about the husband's money.'*

Female respondent, village B

Men in the FGDs stated that women run small businesses and therefore contribute to meeting household expenditure, such as a solar panel or a radio, and investments such as a small shop. But they were also clear that they, as men, have the right to control all assets. In other words, men use their wives' income to invest further in economic activities such as

small businesses and livestock, as well as in household improvements, and not necessarily with their wives' consent.

Faith leaders and gender champions confirmed that sometimes, women don't even see the produce from their work in the fields, even though they worked alongside their husbands. They conceded that this is a source of sorrow and hardship for women and that partners should focus on how productivity can benefit the whole family rather than fight over harvest produce.

Conflict over resources and assets in the family often results in women renting their own plots of land from other members of the community. In many cases, this is a deliberate choice for women who feel they need to work on their own piece of land to be able to secure their own harvest, independent of their husbands, and to be able to use any profits from selling their produce for family needs. Farming separately from their husbands or partners gives them the opportunity not to declare to each other how much income they make from it. This increases women's control over their income – even though they still need to hide at least some of it from their husbands.

*'Even if the wife has farmed her piece of land separately and the husband has farmed his separately, it is the husband who must decide or take responsibility for all that the wife has produced, because she has produced it at home, hasn't she? She was at home. It is at home that she has produced it. So, it is the husband who will take responsibility for all of it.'*

Male respondent, village A

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Farming separately is seen as a public indicator that there is conflict between the couple. While this arrangement is not judged in itself and there is a certain understanding as to why women want to farm their own land separately, it is considered a bad practice that increases tension in the family and jeopardises the harmony of the household. Women struggle with the dilemma of having to make a choice between economic power and domestic harmony. Faith leaders and gender champions see it as a priority to bring men and women back together and farm their land jointly. Little to no consideration is given to the issue that this might, in some cases, be detrimental to women and reverse their economic autonomy.

In terms of changes in this area as a result of the project, women have had a mixed experience. Some changes are positive:

*'... when the wife was working her own land over there, the husband did not know about his wife's income. At that time, he had his own separate land as well. So, there is a place where he keeps the harvest from the field, he had a key to it that his wife could never touch. He would not even let his wife get in and see the harvest. So, since the wife has*

*changed, he has changed as well. He has given his wife the key to the store. So the wife is managing everything.'*

Male respondent, village B

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*'Before the sensitisation, I could not get anything I asked for from my husband. But for now, whenever I ask, he gives me. He even shows me the money he has got from his different jobs.'*

Female respondent, village B

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Others said there had been no change:

*'I don't see any change because until now, my husband can leave the house, spend two years wherever he went and come back whenever he wants. During his absence, all the responsibilities are on my shoulders.'*

Female respondent, village C

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It is not possible to draw conclusions on the proportion of couples that have seen positive or negative changes in this area because of the project. What is clear, however, is that despite the positive examples provided (one or two per FGD), this area is still very problematic.

### **3.4.3. Agency/decision-making**

For women to be economically empowered they need to be able to have equitable power over economic decisions that impact both themselves and their families. Influencing and making decisions implies that women have choices and that they are able to voice their wishes, and as a result can assume control over their lives.

Both men and women agreed that men are the head of the household and therefore responsible for most decision-making. Men are the ones who plan and decide what to grow and on which field. Women are then expected to execute these plans.

One woman expressed a certain weariness about how difficult it is to change men's attitudes, and how their husbands treat them differently at various stages of field production.

*'It is difficult to change men because during planting time your husband will cherish you too much, but when it comes to harvest time, then the problems occur.'*

Female respondent, village B

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Decisions that were made together can be easily discarded. Women gave the example of how, at planting time, a wife and husband decide together on a course of action and how the income would be used. However, after harvest, the man changes his mind and decides to buy something else, for example, a bicycle, without consulting or even informing his wife. Women said this was typical of men but women would not be allowed to act similarly. For this reason, many women decided to find and farm land separately from their partners, from which they could draw their own income, have sole control over it and use it as they saw fit. As mentioned in the previous section, women described holding back money to buy household necessities. However, alcohol is mentioned repeatedly as an 'illicit' reason for both men and women to sell produce without their partner's knowledge.

In principle, everyone seemed to agree that decisions should be made together, and usually there is a hierarchy of priorities, starting with food and household expenditure, and including education and bride price payments.

The project's baseline research showed that between 63 and 73 per cent of men felt that they and their wives made joint decision on expenditure, health care and visits to family/parents. An average of 56 per cent of women said they made joint decisions on these issues.

In terms of changes as a result of the project, some women in the FGDs pointed to positive transformations. They felt they could speak more openly and that men asked for their opinions. Overall, however, it is not clear what 'joint decision' means, exactly. From the FGDs, it seems that the process of discussion around expenditure constitutes joint decision-making, even if it is the man who has the final word. Sensitisation activities led by gender champions and faith leaders promote couples talking to each other, working together rather than on separate land, and focusing on harmony, based on discussing decisions together. However, the final word is still the man's privilege.

*'... the woman is the one to keep quiet because it is the man who has the right to decide.'*

Female gender champion, village B

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In that sense, if men have the final word, making decisions together is more a matter of convincing women that their husband's decision is the correct one, rather than a dialogue.

*'Sometimes, you can tell your wife [your thoughts] and then you will decide with your wife what you're going to do. And the wife has to listen to all that you say.'*

Male respondent, village A

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Women interviewed confirmed that the situation varies from house to house. In some families, it is only the husband who decides what should be done and what expenses should be undertaken; in others, decisions are made together.

*'Sometimes I decide and other times my husband decides. For example, if we did not have much of a harvest, I suggest selling a portion to buy clothes and pay the children's school fees; the rest can stay in the house for us to eat. And my husband accepts that.'*

*'When we farmed before, I could not make any decisions over the harvest. But after the sensitisation, my husband has changed a lot. He can't decide any more if he doesn't consult me. For now, he is running a small shop, he always consults me when it comes to selling things from it.'*

Female respondents, village B

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#### 3.4.4. Self-esteem

In order for women to achieve economic empowerment, they need to be able to value themselves, to believe that they can affect their personal situation and their relationships. Self-esteem is the key ingredient to achieve agency, to feeling that one has a right to control decisions that impact their lives.

Accounts from women varied on the subject of self-confidence. Those who farm their own land appreciate the increased economic freedom it brings but they also suffer because of the resulting tense relationship with their partners. Some women felt they didn't have a choice but to put up with economic hardship and the resulting conflict with their partners, however unpleasant.

*'It is not a good situation but the problem is that I can't leave because we have children. That is why I just stand it.'*

Female respondent, village B

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It was hard to gauge whether there was any change in women's levels of self-confidence as a result of the project, as respondents were not familiar with the concepts.

However, most women felt that even though they may be less knowledgeable than, and inferior to men, they were very clear about their area of expertise and had confidence in their skills, especially in regard to managing family resources. Older couples in particular have well-defined areas in which they take responsibility for managing resources. Therefore, conflict around expenditure, according to them, does not arise as much, or is not as severe, as with younger couples.

*'This never happens for me. I have ten kids already so I'm mature enough to manage those kinds of situations.'*

Female respondent, village B

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### 3.5 Resources

There are limited opportunities for men and women to network to find social, economic or technical support. None of the villages have saving groups or access to microfinance that could encourage more diverse economic activities. The majority of income is derived from farming. Due to past conflict and changes in weather patterns (probably linked in part to climate change), harvests have declined, and there are fewer livestock to bring in extra money.

Women have very few opportunities to come together and share experiences and/or support each other. The only social groups that were mentioned are social associations, which exclusively provide support around the cost of funerals. They were set up by women but have not developed into women's groups dealing with broader issues. Women seemed to ascribe this situation to their status, education and lack of time.

*'God has given women many chores. So when we are busy doing those chores, men are busy increasing their knowledge. If we could have less work, we could have the same knowledge as men.'*

Female respondent, village B

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Women are less educated. When resources are scarce, girls do not go to school. One woman mentioned how her father was of the opinion that as girls marry into other families and possibly other villages, there is no point in investing in them. Faced with issues such as these, women seek advice from friends and, sometimes, family members, but there are no established women's groups to discuss and address the problems they face. It is considered a bad habit to discuss private matters in public, or criticise what is not going well in the community. So, most women deal with problems on their own. Nonetheless,



some women expressed gratitude that participation in the FGDs gave them a chance to talk about their lives and share experiences.

Men seem to have a few more occasions to network, in the form of agricultural or farming groups that meet regularly. In some villages, men work together on some form of collective farming, which gives them the opportunity to exchange ideas and discuss issues. Women don't see these occasions very positively, as these groups seem to provide men with the opportunity to reinforce the male perspective of their roles and of the relationship between men and women, to women's disadvantage.

*'Here in the area, people have a habit of farming in groups. There are groups of men, they go into this field or that or another. So, it seems that during their meeting, if someone comes up with a bad idea, everyone copies it in their household because they are together and their behaviours are all the same.'*

Female respondent, village C

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In general, people only learned how to farm the land and raise livestock from their parents, as well as how to manage their social lives and relationships. In terms of technical skills and knowledge, only one village remembered having had 'agricultural gatherings', with training from agricultural engineers (for men and women) who were teaching new methods of cultivation. However, in other villages, people have no access to new information unless someone has left and returned with new ideas. Linking with knowledge sources outside their villages is also impeded by language barriers.

Men tend to look to friends or mature community members for advice. Agricultural engineers are known to exist, but there is no money available in the villages to bring someone in and pay them to give advice on more effective practices.

No changes were reported in any of these areas in recent history. The project did not look specifically into any of these aspects and also did not have an indirect impact on them.

### 3.6. Social norms (and institutions)

Social norms dictate which attitudes, knowledge and behaviour is appropriate for men and women in a certain group or society. They shape gender relations and institutions. Norms are an expression of power and shape behaviour in implicit or explicit ways, in all segments of social life, and as such they have a strong influence on women's economic empowerment.

### 3.6.1. Gender equality

This is an ambiguous subject, which seems to pit theory – apparently learned by gender champions and faith leaders in the project’s training<sup>18</sup> and by respondents through subsequent sensitisation campaigns as part of the intervention – against deeply held beliefs about one’s place in society.

In the project’s baseline study (July 2015), 45.8 per cent of men and 54 per cent of women said they believed God had created men and women equally, while at the same time, 89.9 per cent of men and 81.7 per cent of women believed men to be superior to women. In this study (October 2017), men and women agreed that there should be equality between the sexes and that they should also have the same economic power, for the benefit of the family and community. However, cultural and religious beliefs, in which men are superior to women, still hold; so, too, do perceptions about women’s mindset, and their inclination to forget their traditional role and status.

*‘Normally men and women should have same amount of economic power, but because of women’s way of thinking around here, if they have same amount of economic power, it always causes problems because of the wife’s... rebelliousness. They don’t respect their husband again.’*

Male respondent, faith leaders and gender champions, village B

There was a certain amount of recognition that women have the intellectual capacity to manage family resources well, but there was also concern that women who have more money than their husbands will take over decision-making responsibility, become dominant and make men look weak and powerless.

Male faith leaders and gender champions across the villages confirmed that harmony is important and that equality in decision-making and access to resources and assets should be equal. However, they also confirmed the risk of women developing a sense of superiority, which would cause disharmony and violence in the family.

*‘If the woman has more economic power, it’s her moment now to show how powerful she is to the man. It’s an opportunity she finds for herself to show how inferior the man is and how to build equality in the family.’*

Male respondent, faith leaders and gender champions, village A

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<sup>18</sup>Tearfund (2016) *Analysis of Faith Leader Panel Visit 2 and Gender Champion Panel Visit 2*, Internal Research Report, Unpublished.

While male and female faith leaders attested to the importance of working together and respecting each other's opinions, it seems there is a rather clear expectation that, in the end, the goal of harmony will best be reached when women listen to and follow their husbands. It suggests that there is a recognition of equality principles that contribute to a decrease in economic and other forms of violence, but there is a persistent resistance to tackling deeply held beliefs on gender roles. This is consistent with previous internal research<sup>19</sup> by Tearfund on faith leaders' and gender champions' attitudes following the training of trainers sensitisation. It found that they 'prefer to train on violence rather than gender equality' (p. 32) and that despite encouraging couples to decide on things together, 'it does appear as though, at a deeper level, beliefs about the appropriate gender roles exist that are contrary to gender equality principles' (p. 32).

Male participants repeatedly explained that the source of conflict in the family is wives 'misunderstanding', that is, not agreeing with their husband's reasons for taking a particular decision, or not following that decision.

*'If she has an opinion, she gives it so that it can be approved by the husband, and also, she has to listen to what her husband says and if she refuses, that's where misunderstandings come from, conflicts, and it can even cause the wife to leave her household.'*

Male respondent, village C

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A number of men across the villages gave examples of how they had changed their own behaviour after women had also changed, following Tearfund/HEAL Africa's sensitisation campaigns. While the campaigns discussed various forms of violence and how positive masculinity can provide alternative behaviour strategies to decrease violence and promote better understanding between men and women, there was mixed feedback from men and woman on the overall results. The majority of respondents did, however, agree that the incidence of physical violence specifically has decreased.

*'Because of the sensitisation, it has really decreased the number of people who used to insult others on the street, people fought on the street, now all of that has decreased; also, the number of people who used to get drunk publicly has decreased.'*

Male respondent, village B

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There was also recognition that economic hardship is the cause of many relationship problems, often exacerbated by alcohol. The project's sensitisation has had some positive effects on this.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

*'... at the beginning when we got married, we did everything together... but later, I was drinking alcohol... because of that, my wife decided to farm her own land. So finally, when I tried to analyse, I saw others who are not drinking and who are together with their wives doing good things, good achievements; I said no, I have to stop this.'*

Male respondent, village B

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Women are encouraged to put harmony above anything else and in some cases, have been pressured to go back to working with their husbands, which does not necessarily improve women's situation.

*'We were farming separate pieces of land before but that led to conflict, then we decided to work together. Even then it doesn't bring any solutions.'*

Female respondent, village C

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Overall, responsibility for change seems to lie first with women, and then with men.

*'Before I was discouraged because when I wanted to do this, my wife did the contrary, but now, after the sensitisation, when I want to do something, my wife agrees, and now she has changed, we understand each other's opinion.'*

Male respondent, village B

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### **3.6.2. The bride price system**

The bride price system – when money and/or assets are given to the bride's family by the groom – is deeply entrenched in the traditions of the area and a consistent part of life. A marriage can receive legal and religious recognition only when the bride price has been paid in full. With payment of the bride price comes legal rights; for example, in the case of divorce, possessions are split equally between husband and wife. Many of the respondents are cohabiting and have been paying off the bride price to their partner's families over many years. It is a factor contributing to economic hardship that poses a challenge at both a financial and an emotional level. Respondents said that stable marriages didn't exist anymore in the form they used to before the war. The continuous conflict, with the associated insecurity and poverty, have made it more difficult to find the resources for the bride price. While the bride price is being paid off, men and women are said to move in and

out of relationships more than they would within a legal marriage. Once women have children, they try to stay in the relationship, in marriage or cohabitation.

For both women and men, paying the bride price is akin to taking possession of the woman. Because of this, some women thought they were more likely to be treated poorly by their husbands, and not protected by the justice system (even though, by law, a legal marriage would give women more rights than if she were cohabiting).

*'The bride price just increases a man's bad behaviour because he knows that he has given everything they have asked of him, so he can treat you as he likes. And if you want to leave, justice will judge you since he gave the bride price to your family.'*

Female respondent, village B

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Men see the bride price system as a confirmation of their ownership of their wives, which not only confers a sense of superiority, but also implies a responsibility to take care of them.

*'When you marry a woman, you have to pay the bride price. So when you have given the bride price, you think of that woman as a bought thing, a thing you have bought for yourself. So this is why you feel superior and responsible for that person.'*

Male respondent, village A

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Despite the likelihood of a long-term financial burden, it is unthinkable for people that this custom would change or be abolished. For men, it was clear that the bride price system preserves a certain order. Women learn from their mothers how to cook, clean, wash clothes, and this is what the husband pays for. In men's eyes, women want the bride price system as proof of their husband's commitment. Without it, men worry that women will not respect their partners and leave them for someone else. According to male respondents, giving up the bride price system would lead to moral disaster.

*'It can change people like animals, so their wives could be very anxious because they are taken for granted.'*

Male respondent, village B

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For women, the bride price system gave them some hope that they would be taken care of both while the bride price is being paid off and when it has been paid – even though this is by no means guaranteed.

*'If you marry, and he didn't pay the bride price, the husband will undermine you. You can't ask for anything from him.'*

*'You are asking us how we want things to be. What are our dreams? We don't want to live like free women. That is why we always stand all those mistakes from men.'*

*'The man's behaviour is just difficult. If there is the bride price but there is not good behaviour, you will suffer. If you marry, it means you will give him children, so he must pay for it.'*

Female respondents, village B

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## 4. CONCLUSION

This research has been too limited in scope to reach firm conclusions about the extent to which the positive masculinity interventions have paved the way for women's economic empowerment, encompassing agency and power at the individual and community/institutional levels. However, there are indications of progress as well as obvious barriers to economic empowerment, which need further exploration.

The project on positive masculinity has touched on women's economic empowerment in the context of economic violence. But there is still limited understanding of the underlying causes of economic violence by faith leaders and gender champions. In discussions with all the respondents, the term sometimes seemed to be used interchangeably with economic hardship. Economic hardship often leads men and women to compete fiercely against each other for control over resources and assets. Economic violence is not just the withholding or control of income and produce because of different priorities and interests. It is also an expression of how power is positioned in a relationship, based on values and understanding of one's place in society.

Not surprisingly, social norms are slow to change. Gender champions and faith leaders are a product of their society and part of their community – and therefore adhere to the established social norms. While the project introduced a certain theoretical understanding of gender equality and economic empowerment, these concepts are framed by what is acceptable in their society. Harmony is a dominant thread in their narrative of economic empowerment, which influences the interaction between couples and the choices and sacrifices that women make to achieve it. There is a question around how much change to the status of men and women faith leaders and gender champions are prepared to promote. Change in the dynamics of relationships at an individual level is desirable to achieve harmony, which is defined as listening to each other and working together, but is clearly built on the fundamental belief that men are the responsible, and superior, head of the family to whom, ultimately, women have to submit. However, the project's baseline survey

found that correlating decision-making with faith engagement showed that men who were not engaged with a faith group (of unspecified religion) were more likely to be controlling, and those who were more engaged were more likely to make joint decisions. Women actively engaged in faith groups were more likely to make their own financial decisions. In the FGDs, some respondents referred to better relationships and more joint decision-making in Christian households. This was not confirmed by the overall discussions and it is not clear if the emphasis on Christianity should be seen as a comparison between religions or more an expression of active participation in services and faith groups.

Important positive changes have come out of the project 'Engaging with Faith Groups to Prevent Violence Against Women and Girls in Conflict-affected Communities' in relation to women's economic empowerment, such as a reduced incidence of physical violence, and a certain willingness by men to engage in different behaviours, such as drinking less alcohol, consulting their partners and being open to shared decision-making. Overall, there is an opening space for reflection and discussion, which is an essential precondition for allowing change to happen at all.

Though the majority of women did not see any changes in their work/rest balance, or a significant uptake of domestic chores by their partners, many of the male respondents admitted to performing some of the chores that are traditionally assigned to women. Even if their participation in such chores is, from the point of view of female respondents, rather exaggerated, it points to the beginnings of change in an individual's attitude towards and understanding of the benefits of sharing tasks. This would be an important indicator for women's economic empowerment interventions, especially in the context of unpaid care. The main hindrance, it seems, is the perceived (and real) threat of men being seen by others as weak and dominated by women. That, of course, is part of the definition of a social norm – being wary of social disapproval and the repercussions when a person deviates from behaviour that is considered normal and acceptable. Similarly, the subject of bride price has shown that there are diverging perceptions between men and women on its purpose and the kind of behaviour that abolishing it would invite from both men and women. Even though it is clearly a large financial burden and further confirms the precarious status women, it is too strong a norm for either men or women to consider it something that can or should be changed.

The lack of a strong support network when faced with domestic and economic challenges leaves women relatively isolated. Whereas men have more opportunities to meet, e.g. in agricultural groups, and to work together and therefore exchange ideas and support each other, women are hampered by time-consuming workloads and responsibilities consistent with the burden of unpaid care.

Taking the initiative to secure their own income (through farming a piece of land separately) speaks to both resourcefulness and determination. However, this resourcefulness is not able to reach its full potential because mistrust within couples and perceptions of power (im)balances put the focus on competition and loss of control, especially when economic hardship persists. Women are therefore encouraged to give up farming separately, thus

risking loss of control over their assets, as harmony is prized above women's agency and autonomy.

The project on positive masculinity seems to have initiated some important changes in trying to find peaceful solutions to challenging living conditions. However, poverty remains a challenge, even though women perceive the unequal distribution of income as a more important issue than the level of income itself. In line with the research by Oxfam and Action Contre La Faim, the situation in the three sample villages confirms the challenge of making a real impact on violence, especially economic violence, when scarcity of resources, poverty and patriarchal values persist. In terms of agency and power, there isn't more significant progress because of enduring gender norms. However, easing economic pressures through targeted livelihood interventions, combined with continuing discussions around women's status and agency, may open space for further reflection and begin to contribute to women's economic empowerment and transformative change.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Money and assets are closely associated with power and responsibility, and status. **It is therefore important for future interventions that are linked to women's economic empowerment to build in project components that address social norm processes and the agency of men and women alongside components to increase income, and vice versa.** Even if it is not always possible to address power and agency and economic advancement equally and comprehensively, it will be necessary to combine opportunities for increasing income with attitude and behaviour change strategies, to avoid or minimise the risk of violent backlashes against women.

ODI published a research report outlining enablers and constraints connected to women's economic empowerment and presented ten factors that affect it either directly or indirectly.

<sup>20</sup> The factors that would apply to Tearfund's work in DRC relate to:

1. Education, skills development and training
2. Collective action and leadership
3. Addressing unpaid care and work burdens
4. Access to property, assets and financial resources
5. Gender norms and discriminatory social norms

The first four factors directly link to the individual or collective lived experience; the last is an indirect underlying structural factor that affects everything else and is therefore an essential component for all projects on women's economic empowerment and the elimination of VAWG.

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<sup>20</sup> Hunt and Samman (2016).



1. *Education, skills development and training:* it is important to provide an ongoing link with skills development and training for women in a wider age range, consistent with lifelong learning. The recommendation is therefore to:
  - 1.1. combine vocational training, or technical agricultural training, with life skills that increase women's knowledge of coping mechanisms and managing challenges, as well as their knowledge of rights and sexual and reproductive health.
  
2. *Collective action and leadership:* women's ability and opportunity to connect with others, not only to enhance productivity and economic activity but also to give mutual support and address rights, is key to women's economic empowerment. This relates strongly to 'power with' but also 'power within', as it promotes increased self-confidence and self-belief; and 'power to' through developing leadership skills. The recommendation is therefore to:
  - 2.1. set up village savings and loan/income generation groups and support groups, in which increased productivity is promoted alongside mentoring, and building practical/technical skills and confidence in changing relationship dynamics. For example, the social associations set up as a form of insurance to cover costs for funerals could be built upon or replicated to enable women to save money for revolving loans to invest in livelihood initiatives and/or provide a broader basis for social and emotional support. Ideally, income-generating activities would not necessarily be gender stereotypical, such as knitting and tailoring for women, and mechanics for men, but would aim to include the process of transformational change at this level, too.
  
3. *Unpaid care and work burdens:* there is some recognition of women's unpaid care work but reducing it is difficult in an environment where there is no public provision for child care or care of sick and elderly family members. However, more can be done on the redistribution of labour within the family. While initiatives to pool child/family care as an extension of support groups' activities could be explored with a short-term perspective, it would need to build on men's (and women's) commitment to share household tasks and responsibilities. Promoting positive masculinity is therefore an important component that is relevant not only in regard to GBV but also in regard to women's economic empowerment. The recommendations are therefore to:
  - 3.1. build on the support groups above that have a particular focus on child/family care
  - 3.2. establish groups for men to provide a safe space and privacy to discuss what changes in attitude and behaviour may mean for men and women at the individual and the community level within the context of social norms (for example, the distribution of labour and (re)productive roles). This could explore what is normal and accepted within that society and how the worry of social repercussions can be mitigated.

4. *Access to property, assets and financial resources*: this is essential for women's financial security and is likely to contribute to individual and household economic improvements. Land ownership, inheritance and access to microcredit must therefore be addressed so that women have the opportunity to advance economically. The bride price system, with its implication for the legal or cohabitation status of a relationship/marriage and legal rights over assets, is closely related. A project on women's economic empowerment would need to investigate carefully the legal and policy situation and mechanisms to enforce the same, and include components of advocacy for policy change and implementation to ensure equal opportunities for women; or to partner with organisations who lead on advocacy for policy change. The recommendation is therefore to:
  - 4.1. conduct in-depth research on perceptions of bride price and its legal implications, to understand how it affects power relations and economic development in general, and women in particular
  - 4.2. raise awareness of women property and inheritance legal rights.
  
5. *Gender norms and discriminatory social norms*: these are connected to and interlink with all other factors and provide a basis for how men and women behave, engage and experience life. They influence the type of work and income-generating activities that men and women perceive as appropriate for their gender; they affect the distribution and burden of labour; and they determine access to and control over resources, status and power, both at an individual and an interpersonal level. Faith is a strong influence that provides direction and support in communities and engaging with faith leaders is therefore essential for promoting change. The recommendations are therefore to:
  - 5.1. further develop and strengthen faith leaders' and gender champions' understanding of economic empowerment and gender equality by getting them to reflect on their own values and perceptions, and how they can nuance their messages in support of gender equality. It will be important to increase understanding of how closely economic hardship and economic violence are linked with gender norms and gender inequality
  - 5.2. consider including the power framework in future training interventions to help primary actors understand the link between gender inequality and power dynamics and put new knowledge and transformed attitudes into positive practice
  - 5.3. implement interventions that increase the focus at the community and institutional levels to bring women and men together and consolidate their progress, so that increases in women's agency and power at the family level are confirmed and replicated by the community. This will help to reinforce changes in gender relations
  - 5.4. ensure that any interventions around economic empowerment are inclusive, i.e. accessible to people who are marginalised because of age, disability or other factors, including survivors of sexual violence. Attitude and behaviour change interventions for equality must include everyone, and interventions must be designed so that everyone can participate.

**Finally, to consider:**

Women's economic empowerment suggests a focus on women in terms of providing an enabling environment in which conditions are set to support them to develop agency and power, as much as economic advancement. However, social gender norms (such as men's perceived superiority over and ownership of women) influence decision-making and power relations in domestic and economic life. In this context, as a project focusing only on women could actually lead to family disharmony and for this reason, offering income-generating activities to men as well as to women should also be considered.

Should the focus be on women, it will be all the more important to have accompanying interventions that specifically work with men to ensure their understanding and support, and provide a positive outlook on how women's economic empowerment affects men's own well-being.

So far, there is more evidence on how gender equality positively affects women's economic empowerment. Further research might be helpful in understanding how and under which circumstances women's economic empowerment can lead to gender equality. Tearfund may want to consider:

- action research to choose the most promising approach; or
- a project that deliberately includes both approaches for comparative analysis on process and results, i.e. a project focusing on income-generating activities for women only, but including activities that target gender and social norm changes; and a project that has income-generating interventions for men and women together.

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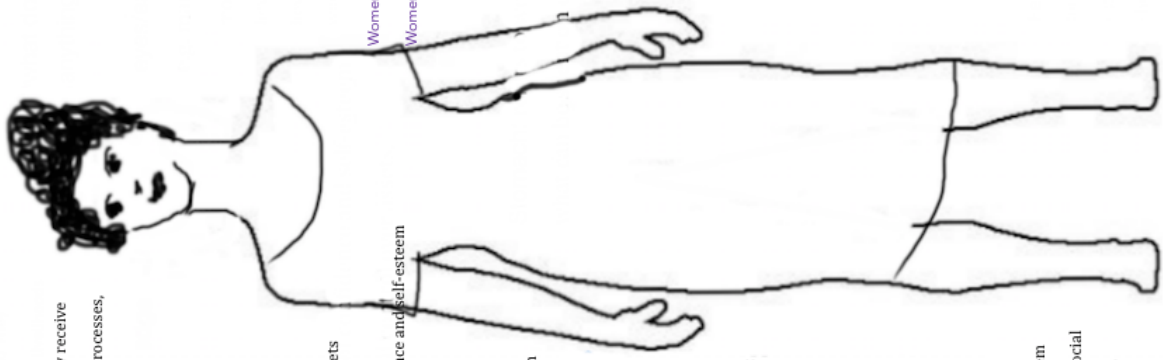
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Head: what do they know about everything related to livelihood



Eyes/ears: what information do they receive  
e.g. markets, training, micro-credit processes,  
networking with others

Mouth: how much do they express their economic  
needs and wants in the family; how much can they  
negotiate about expenditure, type of expenditure;  
when do they have sole, joint or no decision-making  
about livelihood options/processes and control over assets

Heart: what is the level of confidence and self-esteem

Stomach: refers to well-being; what is the  
work/leisure balance; what can be spent on  
oneself in regard to health, nutrition, time

Hands: what do they do, i.e. what are their  
(re)productive activities incl household  
chores, caring, livelihood activities/production;  
how much time is allocated to each activity

Feet: what are activities that take them  
away from home for economic and social  
participation, e.g. selling on markets,  
saving group meetings/activities;  
church/community meetings; how

knowledge on farming and working the land  
is transferred for generation to generation  
by watching and working with parents and others  
visitors bring knowledge and news, school (Ngapa)

Women can express their needs  
but men have usually final say  
Mixed experiences over control over assets and resources,  
and joint decision-making: more discussion between  
couples but men still have the final say

Women often manage expenditure  
related to their reproductive roles  
Women can express ideas but man has to approve  
Women accept that men are superior to them and are head of HH

Women have high work load and hardly time to rest  
Sometimes don't get enough resources to cover  
own expenses (clothes, health)

cultivating land,  
selling produce, brew/sell beer,  
transport for others,  
small shops/business  
all household chores and care for children  
and extended family members

there are no groups from the outside teaching them new things or information  
they are used to be agronomists who shared information  
about what to plant in what season but if they are around  
they are jobless, i.e. the expect to be paid and seems the community can't afford it

Men know more (must know more) because they are responsible for HH  
Some women are traders and have money to lend to other women in the village

Women know that they are capable of managing the family well  
Express frustration with the men who don't support the family well

spend significantly more hours than men  
on both productive and reproductive work

# Annex 1: Women's responses

Markets: to both buy household provisions  
and sell produce  
Church  
Social Associations: support for funerals  
Household chores like fetching firewood/water

Head: what do they know about everything related to livelihood

Eyes/ears: what information do they receive  
e.g. markets, training, micro-credit processes,  
networking with others

Mouth: how much do they express their economic  
needs and wants in the family; how much can they  
negotiate about expenditure, type of expenditure;  
when do they have sole, joint or no decision-making  
about livelihood options/processes and control over assets

Heart: self-esteem and self-confidence

Stomach: refers to well-being; what is the  
work/leisure balance; what can be spent on  
oneself in regard to health, nutrition, time

Hands: what do they do, i.e. what are their  
(re)productive activities incl household  
chores, caring, livelihood activities/production;  
how much time is allocated to each activity

Feet: what are activities that take them  
away from home for economic and social  
participation, e.g. selling on markets,  
saving group meetings/activities;  
church/community meetings; how

copied from parents, community members;

possibly training from agricultural engineers

about how to plant, sell things etc

agricultural meetings with other men

sometimes people come from outside

and teach, or friends from outside share knowledge

overall little information based on language problems

*When my wife doesn't agree with me*

*I tell her firstly school fees is necessary,*

*second dowry are necessary and our*

*house also is necessary so we need to*

*decrease. I do my best in order that*

*she can agree and get harmony*

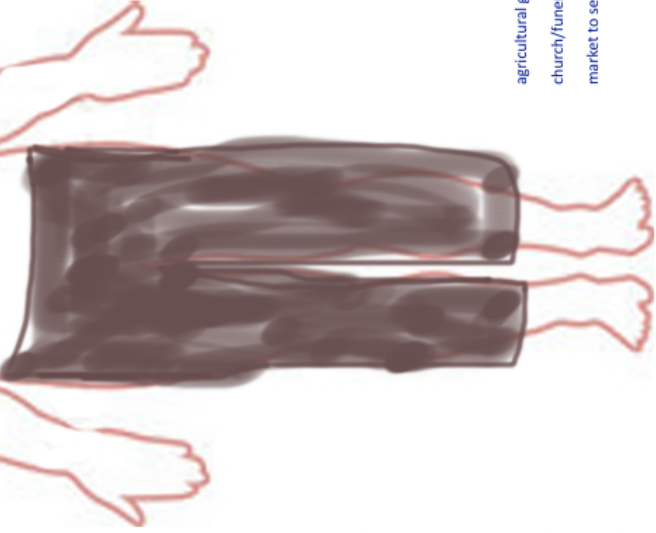
women now sometimes tell men

to do work that normally woman does

- there seems to be some shame attached

to a man doing woman's work

and that the wife dominates the man



*the responsible of the house is the husband.*

*And then the last word, a decision...*

*it can also be bad...sometimes there are*

*also bad decisions but the good decision*

*they can take, the one who can take the*

*good decision is the husband.*

before only men were involved

in business but now women too

and that helps household investment

cultivate land, buy goats/sheep

bring wife to help with harvest

commerce - small business,

if investment money is available

men invest money from their wives'

activities into cows and goats for more

household building

majority of men don't do household

chores like washing, cooking,

bathing children

He said that they can sweep

the house if the woman is sick;

but if she is in good health, no they can't.

don't need anyone's permission

but may inform wife or neighbour

but wives need permissions by husband

because he has the responsibility for her

agricultural group meetings to discuss

church/funeral

market to sell produce (and buy)



# WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN EASTERN DRC

The impact of interventions addressing gender-based violence



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