



## Gender transformative approaches for food security and nutrition



# GOOD PRACTICE Individual Household Mentoring

PREPARED BY

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## SECTION 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

**Name of the methodology****Individual household mentoring incorporating Gender Action Learning System (GALS) tools****Countries with implementation experience****East Africa:** Uganda (13 districts in the Northern Region and the Kalangala islands in the Central Region)**Start/end date**

December 2010 – ongoing

**Lead organization sponsoring the development and implementation of the methodology**

Projects supported by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) identify individual household mentoring as a project activity and provide funding to the Ministry of Local Government for implementation. Bioversity International is providing technical support in mainstreaming nutrition into this work.

Current programmes include the Project for the Restoration of Livelihoods in Northern Uganda (PRELNOR) and the Vegetable Oil Development Project 2 (VODP2). They build on experiences on household mentoring gained in an earlier IFAD-supported District Livelihoods Support Programme.

**Purpose of the methodology and the domains of gender inequality that are addressed**

The focus of individual household mentoring is on social inclusion and reaching households that are often excluded from mainstream development initiatives.

With support of a mentor, household members self-diagnose their own situations, identify opportunities and barriers. With support from the mentor, they find ways of going through their own vision journey towards a better livelihood. Awareness raising activities support women's engagement in the decision-making process. Men's understanding of underlying factors that influence key outcomes, such as household nutrition, and their role in addressing these factors is also addressed.

**Contribution of methodology to wider development/organizational/project goals**

Individual household mentoring supports the better realization of project outputs and outcomes by encouraging the active participation of all household members. In addition, household decision making about the use of household resources and its impact on the livelihoods of vulnerable household members is better understood.

**Target group**

Poor smallholder farmers with limited assets and restricted livelihood options who do not currently participate in community activities and development initiatives, including men, women and their children (household-oriented). See Step 1 in section below for the criteria used to identify these households.

## SECTION 2

## IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

**Key entry points for applying the methodology**

Individual poor households identified by the community

**Implementing partners**

The Ministry of Local Government provides the overall general direction for implementation and coordination with other relevant ministries and agencies. It also chairs the Project Policy Committee.

The staff of the district local government, including sub-county staff of Gulu and Adjumani, lead the implementation, and are responsible for the monitoring and supervision of activities at the district level. The District Community Development Officer (DCDO) is responsible for household mentoring and is supported by Community Development Officers (CDOs) at the sub-county level. The DCDO supervises the CDOs who work directly with the household mentors. Bioversity International works within the same framework (DCDO-CDO-household mentor) to mainstream nutrition throughout the household mentoring approach.

**Process of and criteria for selecting facilitators/champions/mentors**

The household mentors are selected by the CDO, with the support of the local leaders (e.g. local council leaders at the parish and village levels and parish chiefs).

A sub-county CDO oversees about 30 mentors and meets with them every three months.

In each parish there is one male and one female mentor. Initially, each mentor works with 10 households, with the possibility of having an additional 10 households after 12 months. In subsequent years, the frequency of visits to the initial households declines and most are weaned off into farmer groups.

The criteria for selecting the mentors include:

- readiness to volunteer and able to create change/influence;
- ability to communicate well in English (writing and reading);
- ability to communicate in the local language with the target households;
- ability to generate simple reports, and search for and collect other information when needed by the households;
- experience in working with communities and doing community development work;
- residency of the parish and known and respected;
- ability to mobilize and organize others;
- ability to work with individual households in a supportive manner;
- support of gender and youth inclusiveness; and
- not overloaded with other responsibilities.

**Training of facilitators/champions/mentors**

The initial training of trainers of DCOs and CDOs was conducted in 2010 by Resource Project Kenya from Kenya. This team developed the original household mentoring handbook/manual in Uganda. Currently the training of trainers for DCOs and CDOs is done by staff (rural sociologist) from the IFAD-supported project management unit.

After 10 days of training, community development staff at the district level are responsible for training the household mentors in different locations. Topics covered in the training of mentors are:

- household mentoring process (going through the handbook);
- appropriate communication techniques and how to gain trust of households being mentored;
- coaching mentoring, leadership and management skills; and
- basic concepts in nutrition and basic nutrition-related indicators to monitor (recently added).

A refresher training was organized for mentors and CDOs in order to integrate the GALS methodology into the mentoring process. This was facilitated by the project sociologist.

## SECTION 3

## IMPLEMENTATION CYCLE

**Key steps in the implementation cycle****— Step 1: Selection of mentee households**

The selection of the mentee households is the responsibility of the whole community (usually a village). The process is facilitated by the CDOs, using wealth-ranking tools through a participatory rural appraisal exercise. The community can redefine the selection criteria to match the situation on ground. Targeting criteria include vulnerable households with some or all of the following:

- access to land and or other natural resources that are not being used productively;
- no or few household assets;
- limited or no income-generating activities;
- poor nutrition, poor shelter and malnourished children;
- people who are socially isolated from the community and development activities;
- many dependents, including the care of orphans, the chronically ill or the elderly;
- women or children acting as the head of the household;
- children or wives as the main source of family labour;
- someone who dropped out of school before reaching primary seven acting as the head of the household; and
- the willingness, and physical and mental capacity to respond to mentoring and other development opportunities.

**— Step 2: Mentors work with the mentee household and a vision is developed**

Planning at the household level is facilitated by the household mentor. It requires establishing a rapport and trust with household members and building their confidence.

- The household undertakes a situational analysis to identify the causes of their exclusion and the reasons for their lack of assets and limited livelihood activities using the GALS Challenge Tree.
- Baseline data are collected (see indicators in section below).
- The household undertakes household resource mapping.
- The household selects and prioritizes near-nil investments, initially based on the household's resource base and capacity, without the need for external support.
- The household, with the guidance of the mentor, develops a household vision that includes a food security plan, asset formation, improved sanitation, better child health and improved gender relations. Mentee households draw their own vision journey using the GALS methodology.
- The household prepares an action plan, based on the vision, with targets and indicators. The use of locally available resources for start-up activities to promote self-reliance is encouraged.

In the first 4 months, a mentor visits a household once every week. The number of visits decreases to every two weeks for a further four to six months, depending on the progress made by the household. Eventually visits take place once a month until the end of the mentoring cycle (12 to 24 months).

**— Step 3: Supporting early implementation of household action plan**

- The mentoring process always emphasizes food security, sanitation and hygiene as the first steps towards achieving good health, and generates energy and morale for moving into bigger activities in the action plan.
- Implementation of food security and improved household sanitation plans, and child health activities is supported through the provision of agricultural-related inputs, seeds of selected enterprises and capacity building/knowledge acquisition covering production, post-harvest handling, and safety and hygiene. No money is given at this initial stage.
- Once households have realized some basic achievements and their confidence increases, the mentor encourages household members to begin interacting with their neighbours and other mentored households. This exposes them to information about marketing produce and where to obtain other basic services, which further develops their confidence.
- Achieving food security also usually means generating some surplus for sale. The cash is used to buy non-farm items (e.g. paraffin, soap and salt). In this way, interactions outside the household become automatic.

- The process of asset accumulation is initiated by selling produce and saving income.
- Households are encouraged to develop self-reliance by monitoring and reviewing progress with their action plans with their mentors.
- **Step 4: Building functional partnerships**
  - When households have improved their ability to generate income, they are assisted in identifying and joining viable common interest groups, such as Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), producer organizations, marketing groups and Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs).
  - The mentor, with support of the District Commercial Officer, introduces households to the concepts of credit and marketing.
  - Linking households to other services depends on the vulnerabilities that have been identified. However, significant vulnerabilities, such as health needs and school attendance, are handled as soon as they have been identified.
  - Linkage to support services, such as Functional Adult Literacy (FAL), depends on the literacy level of the household members and their interest. If the level is low, the mentoring sessions will emphasise the importance of literacy.
  - Households that are not able to join common interest groups are clustered into small groups of up to seven to initiate the process of group formation. They perform tasks together (e.g. land preparation) to achieve their vision more quickly. Some of the household clusters are guided to become VSLAs.
  - Monitoring and reporting of household progress continues.
- **Step 5: Supporting household's active participation in development initiatives (pre-exit)**
  - In preparation for concluding the mentoring process, households and their groups are supported to improve their investments, manage their credit and actively participate in produce marketing processes. Many households join project-supported farmer groups, which act as a loose form of graduation into other project activities.
  - Households receive a food security grant after nine months of mentoring to purchase inputs that will enhance productivity in crop production enterprises (e.g. quality seed, fertilizer, implements) when they are weaned off the mentoring process and join a farmers' group.
  - Monitoring and reporting on progress of households and their groups continues.
- **Step 6: Official ending of the mentoring process**
  - A final household mentoring progress report based on the household mentoring methodology logframe is prepared and shared with stakeholders, including the project coordination team and district-level staff.

### Average length of the implementation cycle

- 12 to 24 months depending on the capacity and interest of the individual household

Despite the official end of cycle, there have been reports of mentors and some of their households continuing to follow up with each other, but at a very reduced frequency.

### Graduation from the methodology

Households graduate from the mentoring process. The pathway is: food security and good sanitation; preliminary interaction with the outside world when marketing produce; forming or joining common interest groups; joining a VSLA; participating in community leadership; and accessing information about other activities and government programmes.

It takes one to three years for a household to move significantly towards realizing its initial vision. The graduation period is between 12 to 24 months. In most cases, there is still contact with the mentor after graduation, and households receive a food security grant and transition into farmer groups.

Criteria for graduation:

- Household members have self-confidence, skills and motivation to continue the process of vision setting.
- Household dynamics have progressed with regard to gender and inclusion.
- Household is integrated into larger mainstream development activities.

Indicators for graduation:

- Household reports an increase in production.
- Household is visibly food secure.
- Household has implemented a large percentage of activities in their action plan.
- Some adult members have joined several development groups.
- Visibly improved gender relations in the household (e.g. joint planning and decision making, joint marketing).

## SECTION 4

## MONITORING

### Monitoring system

#### — Internal by participants

Following the development of their own action plans and setting their own vision journey, households monitor and assess their own progress, with the mentor providing backstopping support and advice.

#### — External

Using the household mentor visit/activity log sheet, mentors record progress at the household level. Monitoring of household mentoring is carried out by local government staff, particularly the district and sub-county CDOs.

### Indicators

There are general indicators covering seven basic output areas that are set out in the mentoring handbook. In addition, each household is expected to have its own indicators arising from their situational analysis and action plan. To be able to measure progress, a baseline is obtained during the initial encounter with households using the household baseline form, which serves as a reference point.

#### — Quantitative

Quantitative information is collected at the household level. Bioversity International has recommended that these data be disaggregated (e.g. by sex of household head).

Output 1: Improved food security

- Number of meals per day
- Number of hungry months in a year, which is defined as the number of months in which the household experiences the most food insecurity (i.e. unable to access enough food to have at least three meals per day)
- Dietary intake diversity (measured by the intake of foods containing different nutrients, such as proteins, carbohydrates and vitamins)

Output 2: Increased asset ownership

- Types and number of assets owned at the beginning and acquired during the mentoring period

Output 3: Improved household sanitation

- Number of bath shelters constructed
- Number of latrines constructed
- Number of drying racks constructed
- Number of rainwater tanks constructed

Output 4: Households participate in groups and other development initiatives

- Number of household members (by sex, age) joining FAL classes
- Number of household members (by sex, age) joining producer and marketing groups
- Number of household members (by sex, age) joining savings and credit groups

Output 5: Improved child health

- Number of children within the normal growth curve (progressive growth), measured using a standard WHO growth curve, derived from the child immunization card
- Number of malnourished children in households, measured using standard parameters, such as wasting, oedema, stunting and scaly skin (these are visible signs of malnutrition in children that mentors can use to determine the number of malnourished children in the household)

Output 6: Construction of improved dwellings

- Types of walls/roofs/floors

#### — Qualitative

Output 7: Improved household gender relations

- Less domestic conflict in the household
- Evidence of joint planning and decision making as a household (this is evident when a household member – especially the wife – talks competently about the household plans and activities)
- Changes in workload by gender
- Equitable access to resources (e.g. land for cultivation), and access to benefits (e.g. the proceeds from the sale of produce)

## SECTION 5

## BUDGET

### Main items of expenditure

- Funds to support capacity building of the mentors (training of trainers and refresher training)
- Facilitation of household mentors to ensure they can carry out the regular visits by having bicycles or finances to enable mobility (each mentor gets USD 40 per month and a bicycle)
- Facilitation allowance for household mentors to ensure they have job aids and monitoring tools
- Facilitation allowance for local government development staff (district and sub-county) to enable them to supervise the household mentors
- Funds to provide seeds, farm inputs, livestock to mentee households
- Funds to provide the food security grant and improved cooking stoves (total grant USD 120 per household) provided at the final stage of mentoring process

### Total budget

Not available

## SECTION 6

## RESULTS

### Number of beneficiaries reached

PRELNOR currently has 200 household mentors, who have reached 4 000 households (in two rounds from 2017 to date). The target is to reach 10 000 households.

Under VODP2, implemented in Kalangala, currently 30 household mentors have been recruited and are undergoing capacity building. The target is 1 000 farmer households.

### Main changes attributed to the methodology

#### — Gender-related changes

- Social empowerment and social inclusion of vulnerable groups, especially women, in development activities
- Development in households of a spirit of self-reliance and the ability to handle household issues together as a unit
- Capacity to discuss sensitive household problems together, such as HIV/AIDS-related issues, gender inequalities in asset ownership and access to benefits of household enterprises
- Improved gender relations including joint decision making, especially on household resource use; sharing of responsibilities (not yet very significant) and productive work; and less domestic conflict because of joint planning. It was found that one of the key causes of domestic conflict was the fact that household members hid their plans and productive activities (e.g. proceeds from marketing produce, keeping of assets secretly outside the household setting) from each other. This has changed because of the mentoring.

#### — Other changes for mentee households

- Access to a support system during critical stages of household transition from dependence to self-sufficiency and becoming an active player in local marketing value chains
- Conscious effort by household members to come out of poverty and address their vulnerabilities by using their own locally available resources, possibly with little outside help
- Clear understanding and enhancement of their household development plans
- Improved sanitation and hygiene
- Improved food security and household incomes
- Improved self-esteem and self-worth
- Insider perspective on navigating their socio-economic development pathways
- Ability to develop mentoring relationships in different settings (e.g. within family with older family members and younger ones, or religious groups) where mentoring is not readily available, and gain opportunities to become future mentors

#### — Other changes for household mentors

- Exposure to practical household mentoring process and pathways out of poverty
- Satisfaction from imparting wisdom and experience to poorer households without making a huge time commitment
- Ongoing attention to own career development through enhancing skills related to coaching, mentoring, leadership and management
- Interactions with different households that enable all household members to deal with different dynamics and gain exposure to different ways of thinking, styles, personalities and culture, which help them also to grow as individuals
- Recognition and enhanced self-esteem in the community, which is beyond financial reward

### Key success factors and strengths of the methodology

- The participatory approach involves the community in identifying households in need of mentoring. This strengthens targeting, enhances ownership and ensures that the community represents a safe environment to support the mentored households.
- The household approach considers a household as one unit. This contributes to the creation of a generational household memory and support system that extends beyond the life of the head of the household.
- The use of locally known volunteers as household mentors enhances trust between household members and mentors. This relationship often continues informally even after the project is closed.
- The self-diagnosis approach for target households ensures greater ownership of the process, and the vision remains the focus of the household for many years, which makes the approach a powerful tool for sustainability.
- The visioning process is backed by (i) a focused analysis of relationships, resources, power, challenges and opportunities; (ii) systematic planning; and (iii) a systematic assessment of progress made.
- A framework to ensure the mentored household can be traced even after graduation contributes to the transitioning of the households into farmer groups with the support of a mentor from their locality, and ensures continued follow up, growth and sustainability.
- The provision of the food security grant towards the end of the mentoring process is a major motivator for households to complete the mentoring cycle.

### Challenges and measures to overcome them

#### — Volunteer fatigue

Mentors receive about USD 40 per month plus a bicycle to facilitate their movement and interaction with households but, in reality, have many competing tasks and incur expenditures that are often higher than the facilitation allowance provided.

#### — Reluctance of households to graduate from mentoring

Households wish to continue the ongoing relationship with their mentor, which contributes to making the mentor's workload excessive.

#### — Household capacity

Some households are not able to read and write, which made written action plans a challenge. For this reason, GALS methodologies based on pictorials were introduced.



### — Mentor capacity

Recruiting well-educated mentors is a challenge, as the facilitation allowance is not an incentive to keep them engaged for long. Consequently, most mentors have received limited education and this compromises their capacity to understand and interpret the guidelines, apply and demonstrate key messages and practices, and accurately monitor progress in the households.

### — Poor targeting

Instances of 'poor identification' of beneficiaries occur because of the lack of participatory rural appraisal skills by community development staff.

### — Lack of motivation and misunderstanding about the purpose of mentoring from the mentees' perspective

Some households are motivated to participate in mentoring to access the food security grant. This can jeopardize the 'near nil investment' approach of the methodology, which should be based only on a household's existing resources.

## Potential for upscaling

### — Requirements to support upscaling

- Greater visibility through the sharing and dissemination of the outputs and outcomes attributable to the approach

### — Potential improvements

- Greater use of tools that are visual and require drawing rather than writing will address the problem of illiteracy among mentors and their target households.
- To overcome the low facilitation allowance, develop a modality where household mentors can be drawn from existing extension service providers (e.g. village health teams), so that the tasks of mentoring can be included in their current terms of reference.
- Review the target group and the definition of vulnerable households to ensure that the intervention works with households who are in a position to effectively respond to and use the resources provided, make significant improvements in their livelihoods and ensure continuity. For example, working with a household in which an elderly woman (over 80 years old) is living with her grandchildren aged between 6 and 15 years old could make it difficult to achieve a positive change in livelihoods unless the household is linked to other supportive and productive members of the community.

### — Adaptation

The approach has great potential for adaptation in different contexts. Currently the household mentoring approach is being used as entry point for mainstreaming nutrition into PRELNOR and VODP2.

## Potential for replication

### — Key enablers

- A household is a universal unit that is applicable in all settings, be it urban or rural, and low or high social economic conditions.
- The approach can be applied and used to address diverse thematic areas based on the challenges in specific regions.
- Continued improvements in the guidelines and accompanying tools based on lessons learnt throughout the many years of its use, creates extensive opportunities for making the current version replicable.

## Sustainability of the methodology once project/external input is complete

Household mentoring activities have been mainstreamed into the local government system where the IFAD-supported PRELNOR project operates, using the Community Development Department to oversee its implementation through refresher training of the mentors.

Having household mentors from the target community creates opportunities for continued informal follow up. The transitioning of the graduated households to farmer groups ensures they are in a context where their progress can still be monitored, and they can continue to receive support with regards to skills, knowledge and inputs.

## SECTION 7

## RESOURCES

**Publications**

- Ministry of Local Government (2017) Household mentoring handbook for household mentors, prepared for Project for the Restoration of Livelihoods in the Northern Region (PRELNOR)  
<https://www.ifad.org/en/web/knowledge/publication/asset/41455209>
- Ekesa, B.; Nabuuma, D.; Namukose, S.; Upenyitho, G. (2020) Nutrition Social Behavior Change and Communication (SBCC) guidance. Kampala (Uganda): Bioversity International. 32 p.  
<https://hdl.handle.net/10568/107925>
- Ekesa, B.; Nabuuma, D.; Namukose, S.; Upenyitho, G. (2019) Behavior communication: nutrition key message booklet for extension service providers. 32 p.  
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<https://cgspace.cgiar.org/handle/10568/107212> or <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/107212>
- IFAD Case study: Household mentoring, Uganda (2014)  
<https://www.ifad.org/documents/38714170/40205133/Household+Mentoring%2C+Uganda.pdf/fb332ae7-77ce-441c-9841-ac464d34ebf0>

**Cover photo:** Mentee household sharing their vision journey with their mentor Omiya Anyima. Sub-Country, Kitgum District, Uganda

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This good practice is part of the publication '*Gender transformative approaches for food security, improved nutrition and sustainable agriculture – A compendium of fifteen good practices*' prepared in the framework of the *Joint Programme on Gender Transformative Approaches for Food Security, Improved Nutrition and Sustainable Agriculture (JP GTA)*. The Joint Programme is implemented by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Food Programme and funded by the European Union.



Joint Programme on

Gender  
Transformative  
Approaches

for Food Security and Nutrition

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Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Funded by  
the European Union



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