

# Household methodologies: harnessing the family's potential for change



## Gender, targeting and social inclusion



Photographer: Clare Bishop-Sambrook  
A mentored household in the District  
Livelihoods Support Programme, Uganda

### Overview

IFAD is one of the leading development agencies innovating with household methodologies (HHMs) to improve intra-household gender relations, increase engagement with poor households and empower households to realize their development potential by creating stronger, more resilient and sustainable smallholder farming and other rural livelihood systems.

The toolkit, comprised of a teaser, a How To Do Note and nine case studies, focuses on HHMs: what they are, how they work, their benefits and the opportunities for integrating them within IFAD-supported operations. This teaser provides an overview of the methodologies and the companion How To Do Note presents a step-by-step guide on how to implement them and is supported by case studies from IFAD and other development agencies. The series is intended for country programme managers, design teams, project staff, development partners and the general public.

HHMs are participatory methodologies that enable family members to work together to improve relations and decision-making, and to achieve more equitable workloads. Their purpose is to strengthen the overall well-being of the household and all its members.

## The importance of working at the household level

HHMs build on a growing understanding that, in many parts of the world, households are not cohesive units with shared needs, resources, benefits and goals. Rather, women and men in the same household often pursue separate livelihoods and are responsible for different production and consumption activities.

Women usually have fewer productive assets than men and are less able to make independent economic decisions about their enterprises and the use of income they generate. They are usually overburdened with productive work, domestic chores and caring tasks, while men often feel burdened by their responsibility as heads of household. These inequalities hinder the general motivation of household members and their ability to make productivity gains and the development of good businesses, which adversely affect their ability to achieve food, nutrition and income security.

Many efforts to support women's empowerment focus on strengthening women's economic opportunities and decision-making capacities in groups or organizations. However, the same women often remain disempowered at the household level. They lack a voice in determining household priorities and spending patterns, and in addressing their own health care needs.

Consequently, HHMs are an exciting innovation in the development sector. These methodologies shift the chief focus of interventions from an attention on things – assets, infrastructure, value chains – to people: especially on who they want to be and what they want to do. These methodologies work within the “black box” of a household. They enable all household members to identify and overcome obstacles and to make the most of the available opportunities in order to improve their lives. In doing so, HHMs go beyond addressing the symptoms of gender inequality, by tackling the underlying social norms, attitudes, behaviours and systems.

As part of the HHM process, household members realize that inequalities in gender roles and relations can be part of the reason they stay poor. Hence, a household's ability to understand the causes of their current situation – and their willingness to act upon the findings – is crucial for unlocking a household's potential.

## Main features of household methodologies

There are several different HHMs, which vary in terms of type, cost and duration of the activities required to support their implementation. However, the methodologies share similar principles, with a focus on people, empowerment, self-generated solutions and equal opportunities. The most common feature is the involvement of all household members, who – through different strategies and tools – are encouraged to create a household vision, assess their current economic and social situation, participate in joint livelihood planning and share the benefits that arise from working towards common goals. Service providers and facilitators support the implementation of HHM activities, which need to be embedded within an enabling environment at community level (Figure 1).



**Figure 1: Key elements of household methodologies**

### Activities at the household level

Household visioning and planning lie at the heart of HHMs. The vision is created through contributions from all household members, which enables them to conceptualize and work towards shared and time-bound goals. In doing so, HHM bundle the often disparate and fragmented livelihood strategies pursued by women and men – youth, middle-aged and the elderly – in a household into one coherent livelihood

strategy. All household members take responsibility for the changes they want to happen and work closely with one another, their friends and the community to achieve their goals.

In some cases, women and men in a household wish to pursue different visions, particularly in societies where spouses tend to run their own businesses. In using HHMs, this difference in visions is now fully recognized, and supported, as contributing to overall household and individual well-being and livelihood improvement. Similarly, in polygamous households, each unit prepares its own vision and action plan, and the rights of co-wives are recognized.

The process at household level has four main steps (see Figure 2):

- (i) **creating a household vision**, which indicates where the household would like to be in two to three years' time. Visioning also involves identifying where the households are at present – in terms of their economic and social situation – and the reasons why they are there
- (ii) **preparing an action plan**, which requires the identification of opportunities that are available to help household members realize their vision and the challenges they may encounter, and the breaking of the vision journey into achievable time-bound steps
- (iii) **implementing the action plan** and monitoring progress
- (iv) **graduating** from the need for external support for implementing HHMs and ensuring **sustainability**.

Households move through the main steps several times as the situation changes; for example, updating action plans once targets have been met, new challenges have been encountered or new opportunities have arisen.



Figure 2: Household vision (Mayoux, L.)

### Service providers and facilitators

Service providers oversee the facilitator system, which is responsible for rolling out HHMs at group and household levels. Potential service providers include government (particularly agricultural extension and community development services), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations and others engaged in specific “thematic” activities, such as rural finance. Facilitators play a key role in the implementation of HHMs. They are the initial catalyst to the change process. They facilitate the development of household visions and action plans, and support their implementation. They also monitor progress to ensure that the change process is on track and sustainable over time. Facilitators, together with peers from the community, provide moral support and encouragement when household members are addressing difficult challenges.

## Implementation mechanisms

There are two principal approaches for implementing HHMs:

- **Approach 1:** This is a group-based approach whereby the group acts as the entry point for reaching individuals with the HHM tools. The groups include producers' organizations, self-help groups and affinity groups. The groups may also use the visioning and planning tools to achieve their own goals.
- **Approach 2:** This involves individual household mentoring by trained mentors, whereby the focus is specifically on vulnerable and poorer households. These households are often excluded from mainstream development initiatives, including group membership.

The selection of the approach depends on the purpose of HHMs in the project and their linkage to specific project activities. In turn, this influences the type of service providers to be involved.

## Role of the community

Actions are required at the community level to create a supportive environment in which households and individuals can undertake transformative changes. This is especially important for behaviours that step outside cultural norms, such as men playing a more prominent role in the care of young children or assisting with other household tasks, or women having a greater say in the use of household income or assets.

Supportive strategies and actions to enable transformative change include:

- gaining the support of village chiefs and other traditional leaders, who are often the gateway to rural communities. These leaders can be crucial in ensuring that HHMs are accepted by the communities, especially the non-participating households
- engaging with men as allies in addressing gender-based inequalities and as advocates for women's empowerment
- awareness-raising to discuss and reflect on attitudes and practices that traditionally discriminate against women and youth
- developing partnerships in the wider environment, including government, extension services, private-sector actors and development partners who engage in transformative processes.

## HHM implementation cycle

Different levels of engagement and supervision are required throughout the HHM cycle. The pace of implementation of the methodologies depends mostly on the willingness of households and communities to change, and the ability to adapt the methodology to local specificities and social structures. Throughout the process, households remain the powerhouse of change, although different actors are important at each stage. Traditional leaders are key in the initial stages for setting the appropriate climate for implementation of the methodologies at community level. Service providers and facilitators are fundamental in the initial stages of implementation, while peers and partners become key in ensuring the sustainability of positive changes and scaling up. The HHM implementation cycle typically takes between one and three years.

## Benefits of household methodologies

Although HHMs are relatively new, the experiences from various projects and programmes are promising. These include an IFAD grant project led by Oxfam Novib (under the Women's Empowerment Mainstreaming and Networking (WEMAN) Programme) to develop the Gender Action Learning System (GALS) in Nigeria, Rwanda and Uganda; IFAD-supported programmes in Malawi, Sierra Leone and Uganda; and Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency partners in Zambia and Ethiopia. The benefits from using HHMs include:

- **Motivation and empowerment from within the household.** One of the main reasons for the success of HHMs is that they stimulate critical positive change within the household. The benefits are visible, tangible and can be attained fairly quickly without dramatic changes in livelihood opportunities. Even negative cultural norms can be transformed within one or two years. This motivates household members to strive to achieve their productive potential for sustainable improvements in their livelihoods and the well-being of all household members. Household ownership of the visioning, monitoring and review processes empowers household members to reflect on their achievements and plan how they can sustain the process and progress together once they have graduated from requiring external support for the use of HHMs.
- **Addressing gender inequalities within households becomes part of the solution.** HHMs are not about empowering women and disempowering men. Rather, both women and men see that they benefit economically and personally from a more equal relationship with each other and with their children. The transformation in household dynamics enables household members to move beyond the traditional roles and relations assigned by societal norms.

### Cultural norms

*“It was taboo for men to carry a hoe. Women carried the two hoes – the husband’s and hers – and from the farm she also carried water, while the man walked freely, carrying nothing. Once at home, the man would wait for food, while the woman would rush to the kitchen to prepare it. With the household mentoring, our husbands now carry hoes, can fetch water and cook. This is a transformation for the better and I am no longer burdened. Planning together has made us more united and my relationship with my husband is very good.”* (Abigael, wife in a male-headed household, participating in the Irrigation, Rural Livelihoods and Agricultural Development Project, Malawi).

*“After attending training on the GALS, I opened up with my wife and we discussed our issues together. We are managing to solve our problems and we are much better off. Even the productivity of our activities has increased tremendously.”* (Eria, male GALS champion participating in the IFAD-Oxfam Novib grant project, Rwanda).

- **Improved livelihoods and well-being of participating households.** Participants using HHMs report that their livelihoods are becoming more sustainable and resilient to various shocks. Agricultural productivity has increased through participatory farm decision-making and shared workloads, and better engagement in value chains by both male and female household members. Men participate more in household tasks, women have a greater voice in decision-making in the household, and there is more transparency in how resources and benefits are used. Food security and incomes are improved, joint investments in land and businesses are undertaken and the capacities of household members are strengthened. More girls and boys attend school and go on to tertiary education. Individuals are happier with themselves and other household members, including co-wives. And, as indicators of profound behaviour change, many report a reduction in gender-based violence and excessive alcohol consumption. The box below gives an example of improved livelihoods as a result of using one of the HHMs.

### Improved livelihoods

The lives of Natal and Magret have been transformed by participating in GALS events supported by the IFAD-Oxfam Novib grant in western Uganda. Natal inherited about 20 acres from his elderly parents but for many years failed to use the land productively. Leaving his wife to work alone, she was able to cultivate about 1 acre of land. The family ate one or two meals a day. There was no cooperation or agreement in the family and this led to misunderstanding.

*“GALS has enabled us to realize the potential of the assets we inherited from my parents. We joined the village savings group and followed the GALS lessons together. Now we work together, following our individual and family visions. Loans from the savings group have also helped us grow.”*

Working together, Natal and Magret now cultivate about 15 acres and own 16 modern beehives. Natal exports honey to Juba. They have also increased their livestock from three to seven goats and own one cow. The family eats three meals a day and Natal now helps with the cooking. They have a new brick-built house, with an iron sheet roof, and have bought a motorbike.

- **Social inclusion of poorer and vulnerable households.** Household mentoring is a powerful vehicle to reach members of the community who are often left out of mainstream development, partly because of their apathy and lack of self-esteem and partly because of discrimination by development partners. Poorer and vulnerable households do not usually belong to farmers' groups or participate in community meetings and, as a result, their views are not reflected in planning activities. Through individual household mentoring, these households are supported to develop a vision and identify their own pathways out of poverty, starting with small achievable steps and then linking up with other development interventions. Working with them not only exposes them to the outside world but also helps them to see their own potential. The box below gives an example of the benefits of household mentoring with poorer households in Uganda.

### Engaging with poorer households

In the District Livelihoods Support Programme in Uganda, poorer households are selected by the community to participate in household mentoring. After one or two years of mentoring by a community-based mentor, poorer households turn their lives around in many ways. Household sanitation and hygiene are improved, households undertake extremely modest investments to make use of their resources – including underutilized or unutilized land – and gradually food security improves. Household members start to connect with ongoing initiatives – such as adult literacy classes – and access other services, in particular health services. Household mentors also benefit from the methodology by gaining status in the community.

*“Since I joined this programme, I am confident and can now speak in public. I have joined a savings group and started running a grocery shop. My vision is to finish building my house. Before, I had a grass-thatched house. My main sources of income are crop and livestock farming. In the past, I used to sell all of my produce without planning and, as a result, most of the time my family didn’t have enough food. Now we have enough food for the family to eat.”* (Kusaiima Scovia, female head of household, District Livelihoods Support Programme, Uganda).

*“I have worked as a Country Programme Manager for a number of years and have struggled to find mechanisms through which we can reach out to the really poor households and allow them to benefit from the different activities and investments of the various projects that IFAD is financing. Household mentoring is enabling us to do that and I am very committed to making increasing use of this in future activities in Uganda as the main tool of our country programme for targeting and social inclusion.”* (Alessandro Marini, IFAD Country Programme Manager, Uganda).

- **Engaging with female and male youth.** Female and male youth face age- and gender-specific challenges, yet their needs are often subordinated by adults or parents. The visioning process can enable young people to gain a voice at the household level by identifying their own visions and sharing them with other household members. This can provide the basis for redefining intra-household relations and identifying opportunities where youths can play a role in achieving the household vision (for example, bookkeeping). It is important to understand that it is not just adults and youths working together to shape the family vision and committing to working towards shared goals but also the entire household rallying to support the visions of their younger members.
- **Willingness to share the HHMs.** The often remarkable improvements in intra-household relations motivate many participants not only to improve their own livelihoods but also to share the methodology with others. The GALS deliberately uses “pyramid peer training” to reach new groups and households. Community members who embrace the methodology commit to train others and this generates a cascade effect, quickly spreading the GALS methodology throughout a community.

### The motivation to share

*“The benefit from the GALS training was so extraordinary for us that we couldn’t sit down without informing our neighbours.”* (Female GALS champion participating in the IFAD-Oxfam Novib grant project, Rwanda).

## Opportunities for IFAD

HHMs represent a good return on investment because they deepen the impact and enhance the sustainability of conventional development initiatives. They can be integrated into a range of development interventions and implemented in different cultural and social contexts. There are two ways of integrating HHMs in IFAD-funded operations:

- HHMs may be integrated into specific technical interventions – such as value chain development, rural finance or agricultural extension – in order to facilitate the achievement of the intervention’s goals and to ensure gender and social inclusion objectives.
- HHMs may be included in their own right in order to boost gender equality, women’s empowerment and social inclusion, regardless of the technical focus of the project.

HHMs are highly relevant for many of IFAD’s core activities:

- **Promoting pro-poor value chain development.** HHMs can support joint planning and mapping of value chain opportunities that reflect the different interests of household members. Visioning activities can also be used to engage various stakeholders along the value chain by identifying unequal power relations and negotiating and planning win-win strategies. This process can result in increased trust and collaboration, a more equal distribution of benefits, and opportunities for poorer stakeholders to move up the chain.
- **Strengthening producers’ organizations.** When an organization plans a strategy through an inclusive and participatory visioning and planning process, the activities and services become relevant to members’ priorities and interests. The analysis of challenges and opportunities within an organization helps to identify and address gender issues and the balance of power among different actors. This reduces the chance of “elite capture” and strengthens mechanisms for dialogue.
- **Deepening the benefits generated by rural finance.** Household visioning and planning provides an excellent entry point for engaging in discussions on how to develop an investment plan, improve risk assessment and identify the knowledge and skills needed to move towards financial goals – for example, increasing savings, purchasing agricultural inputs, paying debts. HHMs are also an ideal mechanism to complement financial graduation models. They can support the progression of a household from safety-net programmes to income-generating activities and village-level savings and credit associations, and eventually to regular microfinance programmes.
- **Improving natural resource management and climate change adaptation/mitigation.** HHMs can contribute to improved decision-making on the use and management of natural resources at both community and household levels. They can also help household members and the community to understand and build on the distinct rights of access to natural resources and differentiated tenure arrangements for women and men. Community livelihood planning can help female and male smallholders understand the effect of their interactions with other people, landscapes and ecosystems. They can be supported to develop more relevant and climate-smart livelihood strategies.
- **Securing land tenure.** Within a household, HHMs can facilitate planning for more secure tenure with equitable access for different household members. Discussions may address joint titling of land in the names of both husband and wife, transferring of land to children (including girls) and other aspects of inheritance.
- **Achieving food and nutrition security.** Analysing individual access to and use of food can provide the basis for developing a household commitment to achieving food and nutrition security for all household members. During the HHM action planning process, this commitment would be built on an understanding of the nutritional needs of household members based on their age and special circumstances, such as pregnancy or breast-feeding.
- **Complementing community empowerment processes.** HHMs can complement other community empowerment and capacity-building processes, such as adult literacy classes, community-driven development approaches, farmer field schools, community listeners’ clubs and initiatives to promote women’s leadership.

## About the toolkit

The toolkit on HHMs has three parts.

- Teaser** provides an overview of HHMs – what they are and how they work – and demonstrates their relevance in different types of development interventions.
- How To Do Note** provides a step-by-step guide on how to implement HHMs. It describes activities at the household level, different approaches for implementing HHMs, service providers and the facilitator system, and the role of the community and the wider environment. The main points to consider when incorporating HHMs in project design and implementation are noted.
- Case studies** illustrate the kinds of interventions (by IFAD and other development agencies) that have used HHMs effectively, highlighting the way each methodology has worked in a particular context. Links are provided to resources and online materials.

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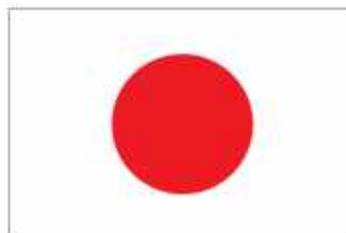
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