



# Scaling up community dialogues on gender and land restoration

Lessons and insights from Laikipia County, Kenya



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## About this brief

This brief presents the gender transformative approach taken by the UK PACT funded project, 'Promoting nature-based solutions for land restoration while strengthening the national monitoring in Kenya' in Laikipia County, providing an overview of the training and lessons learned. It is aimed at restoration practitioners and initiatives invested in gender transformation, to assist in enhancing knowledge and sharing lessons on gender transformative approaches to land restoration.



Participants preparing for the bargaining role play activity of the community dialogue. (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)



Trainees and community facilitators after a village level training in Umande Ward.  
(Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)

# The project

The UK PACT-funded project, '**Promoting nature-based solutions for land restoration while strengthening the national monitoring in Kenya**' aimed to address issues of climate change poverty, and land degradation through promoting integrated water management, tree growing, and wood fuel systems and enhancing the capacity of County Environmental Committees in monitoring land restoration efforts.

A context analysis study in Laikipia County (Wakaba et al., 2024) identified **critical challenges to land restoration and tree-growing practices**. To address these challenges, the project delivered technical training tailored to the

specific contexts in Tigithi, Thingithu, and Umande, covering areas such as water management, tree seedling production, tree growing, and sustainable wood fuel management.

Alongside this technical training, the project took a gender-transformative approach, piloting and scaling the use of **community dialogues on gender and land restoration**<sup>1</sup>. The community dialogue approach was originally developed and implemented in Makueni County<sup>2</sup>.



## What are community dialogues?

Community Dialogues are an approach for fostering open and constructive conversations about gender roles, perceptions, challenges, and opportunities, particularly in relation to land restoration. These dialogues include various interactive activities that enable participants to:



**Explore gender roles and norms** within their community and examine how these influence their involvement in landscape restoration efforts.



**Consider how local gender norms may create barriers or opportunities** for engaging in restoration activities and discuss potential strategies to overcome these challenges.



**Gain insights into the role of gender in ensuring fair and inclusive land restoration outcomes**, while learning how to identify and address gender-related barriers in the planning, design, and implementation of restoration initiatives.



See [here](#) for a facilitator's manual for community dialogues on gender and land restoration: Crossland M, Adeyiga G, Paez Valencia A. 2023. *Breaking Ground: Conducting community dialogues on gender and land restoration*.

<sup>1</sup> Crossland et al. 2023. <https://www.cifor-icraf.org/knowledge/publication/18536/>

<sup>2</sup> Crossland et al. 2022 <https://www.worldagroforestry.org/output/gender-transformative-approaches-land-restorationlessons-learned-multi-stakeholder-co-design>



# The training

To pilot and scale the community dialogue approach, two training events took place in Laikipia East Sub-County in August 2024. These two-day trainings included community members from Tigithi, Thingithu, and Umande, who were trained by the project on integrated approaches for sustainable land restoration, and county staff from the Departments of Gender and Social Services and Water, Environment, and Natural Resources. These two-day trainings including community members from Tigithi, Thingithu, and Umande, and county staff from the Departments of Gender and Social Services and Water, Environment, and Natural Resources were trained by the project on gendered integrated approaches for sustainable land restoration.



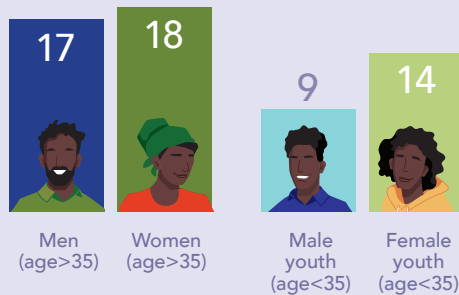
Goal

The main goal of the training was to introduce and build people's skills in the application of community dialogues. Participants were taught six activities (listed below) that could be used during a three- to four-hour community discussion on gender and land restoration taught using a "learning by doing" method.

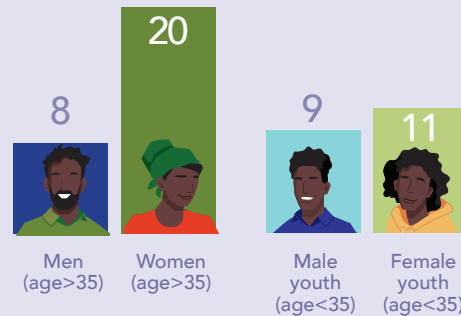
*These community dialogues engage communities in an open dialogue on a gender perspective, gender-related constraints, and opportunities and how these influence the landscape, their livelihood strategies, and their well-being. The participants reflected on gender roles and how they influenced their daily lives and their ability to restore land, and what they can do to see change.*

## Training sessions in numbers

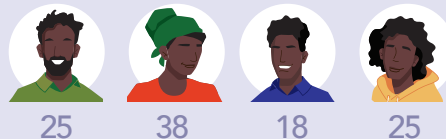
**22-23<sup>rd</sup> Aug 2024** 87 attendees:



**24-25<sup>th</sup> Aug 2024** 48 attendees:



Totals



## Activities to facilitate community dialogues



**Sex and gender**  
(adapted from Jost et al., 2014  
and Leder et al., 2016)



**Gender position bar**  
(adapted from  
Leder et al., 2016)



**Bargaining role play**  
(adapted from  
Leder et al., 2016)



**Progress markers**  
(adapted from Mohanraj  
and Hillenbrand, 2015)



**Vision Journey**  
(adapted from Reemer  
and Makanza, 2015)



**Gender balance tree**  
(adapted from Reemer  
and Makanza, 2015)



## Activity 1

## Sex and gender

Participants first explored the distinction between sex (biological traits) and gender (socially constructed roles) and how cultural norms shape expectations for men and women. Discussions highlighted shifting gender roles and how traditional expectations influence land restoration participation.



Reflect

Participants were asked to think about what words come to their minds when they hear “man” or “woman” (Table 1).



Discuss

After making their lists, the participants were asked to talk about whether any roles could be switched, like whether any of the roles in the “man” column could also apply to women, and how gender roles and responsibilities have changed in their community in terms of what men and women are responsible for.



Mary Nyaguthii facilitating a session on Gender and sex.  
(Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)

**Table 1.** Terms and roles that were said to define man and woman, and which traits from these initial lists were identified as being ‘switchable’ (or shared between both genders).

Man	Woman	Shared trait	
Football	Breasts	• Football	• Tall
Hunger	Giving birth	• Hunger	• Big shoes
Testis	Wearing dress	• Wearing dress	• Rough skin
Love	Menstruation	• Love	• Walking style
Wide chest	Hips	• Paying bills	• Quarrying
Tummy	Breastfeeding	• Tummy	• Provider
Construction	Pregnancy	• Construction	• Dominion
Authority	Vagina	• Authority	• Gossip
Sperms (siring)	Long hair	• Long hair	• Nurse
Paying bills	Smile	• Smile	• Prayerful
Shaving (short hair)	Beauty	• Beauty	• Helper
Muscles	Figure	• Figure	• Welcoming
Family head	Cooking	• Cooking	• Shaving (short hair)
Beards	Washing	• Washing	• Family head
Deep voice	Childcare	• Childcare	• Wearing trousers
Penis	boasting	• Boasting	
Wearing trousers	Gossip		
Tall	Nurse		
Big shoes	Prayerful		
Rough skin	Helper		
Walking style	Welcoming		
Quarrying			
Provider			
Dominion			



## Activity 2

# Gender position bar

In the second lesson, the trainees worked together in smaller groups and discussed the distribution of decision making, roles and responsibilities between men and women within the community in relation to land restoration activities.













Reflect

- The intention was to encourage participants to reflect on the labour burden of each gender and appreciate both men's and women's contribution toward household development.
- The gender position bar involves placing pictures representing various farm, household and restoration activities and decisions underneath pictures of a man and a woman standing in different positions next to each other representing their different labour contributions or involvement in decisions (Figure 1).
- In this activity we focused on landscape restoration strategies such as tree growing, water management, and gathering and sustainable use of bioenergy.



Discuss

- Participants were asked to discuss among themselves and agree who normally makes the decision or does the activity and then place them under the gender photos. Next, participants were asked to imagine an ideal situation and how they would like the distribution of labour and decisions to be.

Decision	X	X	X	X	X
Photos					
	Women only	The woman is supported by a man	Man and woman together	The man is supported by a woman	Men only
					

**Figure 2.** Example Gender position bar. In this exercise photos of different household and restoration activities and decisions were placed under the different gender cards to indicate who was involved. Decision cards were placed above the gender cards, while activity cards were placed below the gender card.

Discussions over the Gender Position Bar and the distribution of decisions and roles between men and women. (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)





## Activity 2 outcomes

From the activity it was revealed that:

- Most of the decision making was equally done by men and women, however, the decision on **which tree species to be planted and where they should be planted** were said to be male dominated.
- On **tree labor activities**, men were said to be involved in majority of the activities that were energy intensive activities, such felling of trees and clearing of bushes.
- **All the households' activities are done by women**, however some activities which had cultural underpinnings brought about debates, especially between older and young participants.
- In one group, older women expressed that all household activities like cleaning, cooking, and nursing children should exclusively be a woman's responsibility according to their cultural background. In contrast, the younger women felt that household activities should be shared between men and women, arguing that they jointly contribute to providing for the family alongside men, and should therefore share household responsibilities.

*"Cleaning of the compound was highly contested. The elder generation of men said that culturally it was the responsibility of men to clean the compound, to remove the bad omen that would have befallen in the compound at night. Others said that they have been doing so but not because of cultural beliefs but to groom the homestead. On the same women expressed dissatisfaction of men especially their husbands to clean the compound as it would attract societal uproar."*



Example of completed gender position bar (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)

- After a group discussion, the men expressed their willingness to help women with their household activities, whereas the elderly women were convinced that sharing household responsibilities would bring harmony within the household.
- It was also shown that **men were more involved in activities that generated income for the household and involved high-value productive assets** such as cattle.

Further discussions revealed that, while men may make decisions over activities such as which tree species to plant, **implementation of these decisions** often fall upon women. After re-arranging the photos to an ideal scenario, it was agreed that there was a need for men to provide more support to women in such activities.

*"I have realized that there were many good things that our culture had but have been lost over time, and if our husbands went back to doing them the young people would copy them, and the families would not have these petty fights."*

- Female participant





### Activity 3

## Bargaining role play

The next activity was for each group to prepare a brief (three to five minutes) role-play where participants assume and play the role of the other gender in a domestic or farming scenario.



Roleplay

- Participants were encouraged to dress like the opposite sex (i.e. men dressed to look like women and vice versa).
- The goal of the activity is to foster empathy for both genders to appreciate the difficulties faced by the other. Men and women accepted their new roles during the plays, displaying inventiveness, with many making custom props for their productions.



Discuss

- Thereafter, participants in the play were invited to share their experiences assuming the opposite gender's role. By putting themselves in each other's shoes, the participants gained an understanding of how the opposite sex experiences household negotiations and dynamics.
- After completing the exercise, participants were asked to share experiences and how it felt to play the role of a man or women.



Participants preparing a five-minute bargaining role play (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)



### Activity 3 outcomes

#### Through role reversals, participants gained insights into the challenges faced by the opposite gender.

- Men reflected that, when acting as a woman, it was difficult to follow instructions from men because some of the commands were ungrounded and from a point of ignorance.
- In one of the plays, a mother and her three daughters went for training on tree growing, and in return, they were issued with tree seedlings. When they got home, they met the father and the son (brother) who

insisted that they would not plant any trees there, the son urged that he was the rightful heir, and the two sisters would get married and leave. While discussing these plays, participants mentioned that this play was an exact depiction of one of the main hindrances to tree growing. It is the women who attend the training and meetings, however, they are denied or left out in land and tree decisions.

- The women who played the male roles said that it felt good to be the household head with all the authority, control the household resources,

make decisions and delegate to other household members. However, they did not want to give in to command, instructions, advice, and critiques from the household members because they thought it would reduce their authority.

- Nonetheless, some also acknowledged that being a man was not easy because men assumed difficult, masculine, and risky responsibilities such as spraying, pruning, and felling big trees.





#### Activity 4

## Developing progress markers

During the fourth activity, participants identified priority gender issues and developed shared goals for equitable household decision-making and restoration activities.



Group Work

During this activity, male and female participants were separated into groups. They were then prompted to have conversations about the good and bad traits of the opposite sex and the changes they would like to see in one another. The idea of separating men and women was to enable them to generate shared wish lists of desired changes and express their opinions without fear of repercussions.

#### Activity 4 outcomes

Group feedback highlighted imbalances in the household gender division of labor and workload sharing, communication and decision-making, ownership and control of productive assets and income, and self-confidence.






Participant presenting their groups progress markers to the wider group (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)



Group discussions on progress markers (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)

**Table 2.** Issues and changes raised by men and women participants.



	Men	Women
 Gender division of labour and workload sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women to assist in farming activities, e.g., tree management practices such as pruning, weeding, chemical spraying, and land preparations.</li> <li>• Women to help in land restoration activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men to help in various domestic chores like washing, babysitting</li> <li>• Men to assist women in farming activities like weeding, terrace making, fencing</li> <li>• Men to help in household activities to enable women to create time for farm activities and childcare</li> </ul>
 Household negotiation, communication, and decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women to be respectful and submissive to their husbands</li> <li>• Embrace men's inclusion in various household decision-making</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men to listen and respect their spouses and children's opinions</li> <li>• Men to involve women in decision making, especially the tough decisions like when selling family land, dowry function planning</li> <li>• Men to be encouraged to engage in household dialogues</li> </ul>
 Control of income and productive assets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women to contribute their income to family expenses. Should not consider their income as purely theirs and their husband's as for the family</li> <li>• Reduce luxurious and impulse expenditure</li> <li>• Transparency in income earnings and expenditures</li> <li>• Women to contribute to farm activities' expenses and improve farm management practices</li> <li>• Ensure transparency in family resource distribution</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men to freely ensure access to vital family documents like land title deeds, vehicle logbooks, and family property agreements</li> <li>• Men to promote joint ownership of respective family assets</li> <li>• Men to stop misuse of money with side-chicks, drugs, friends</li> </ul>
 Self-confidence and harmony in their relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To treat family members from both sides equally</li> <li>• Women to consider themselves worthy and especially useful in the family</li> <li>• Women to avoid ego</li> <li>• To avoid petty issues for the sake of family peace</li> <li>• To maintain family privacy and not share their families with outsiders or friends</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Men to be transparent and accountable to other family members</li> <li>• Be faithful and dump side-chicks, if any.</li> <li>• To encourage and support us mentally</li> <li>• Men to ensure healthy relationships with their daughters</li> <li>• To respect, love, and care for their spouses and children</li> <li>• To appreciate little efforts from their spouses</li> <li>• Reduce drug abuse; miraa, alcohol</li> <li>• Embrace dialogue before family affairs escalate to other people</li> <li>• Men be encouraged to attend workshops and school parental days</li> <li>• Men should strive to be present fathers to their children</li> </ul>





## Activity 5

## Vision journey

The fifth activity involved participants sketching their current and ideal farm layouts, and discussing steps needed to achieve their visions. This exercise reinforced the importance of planning and gender-equitable decision-making in sustainable land restoration.



Visualise

Younger participants were encouraged to sketch fictitious farm in the future that they would like to reside in.

### Activity 5 outcomes

Through this process, participants gained valuable insights into how to plan for their visions and what possibilities or problems could impact the realization of those aspirations. Participants in the training were strongly urged to discuss the vision journey with their spouses and other members of their families. Agriculture, soil water management, and structure improvements were the primary areas farmers cited as interested in the vision journey.



## Activity 6

## Gender balance tree

The final activity was the gender balance tree. Participants examined gender disparities in work participation, income generation and control, and household asset distribution. Discussions emphasized the need to shift traditionally female responsibilities, such as childcare and food preparation, toward shared duties and to increase women's involvement in financial decision-making. The activity involves identifying the contribution that each gender brings to the household and spending share of household resources.



Draw

Participants drew a tree representing their household and highlighted the balance of various jobs, spending contributions, and decisions made within the household. The 'roots' of the tree represent the generating activities led by each gender; the 'stem' of the tree the pool of household resources; and the 'branches' representing the share of expenditure by each gender, with the aim of identifying imbalances and ways to balance the tree.



Analyse

Next, the participants analysed the opportunities and restrictions their trees present to reaching their visions from the previous activity (Vision Journey).

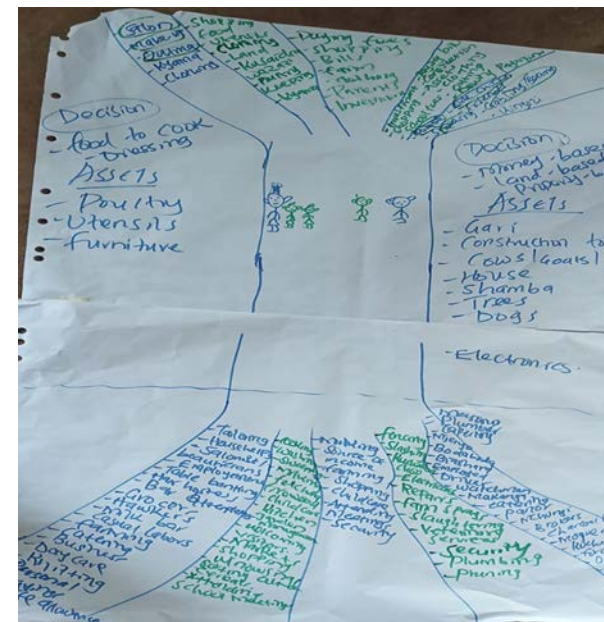


Discuss

Finally, participants came together and discussed how to balance their trees, such that all genders contribute and benefit equitably for sustainable development.



Discussion about balancing the gender tree  
(Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)



Example of the gender balance tree  
(Photo by Mwende/CIFOR-ICRAF)

### Activity 6 outcomes

From the discussion, participants said that women normally contribute to cooking and cleaning while controlling small assets such as poultry, utensils, and furniture. While men generated more income, owned land, and controlled major household assets such as electronics, land, trees, and structures in the homesteads. It was agreed that all activities that used to be women's such as milking, income generation, farming, shopping, childcare, attending meetings, and security should be gender neutral. Further, what used to be men's responsibilities such as expenditure on school fees, household bills, farms, clothing, parents, and investments were to be undertaken jointly.

# Reflections & lessons for scaling

At the end of each training event, participants provided feedback on each of the activities. They highlighted the Vision Journey as particularly impactful in shifting mindsets about gender and land restoration and reported that the activity resonates well with the real-life scenarios, had a direct connection with land restoration with immediate applicability.

Overall, the participants saw the training and community dialogues as a way to promote inclusivity, ownership, and mutual respect within communities. Participants committed to applying the training insights in their households, emphasizing the importance of decentralizing decision-making and role-sharing. They expressed a strong desire to extend these lessons to their wider communities, believing that transformation must start at the individual and family levels.



At the end of the training participants expressed a desire to extend these lessons to their wider communities (Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)

*"I know why I failed to realize my vision of having trees in the farm. I never shared my vision with family members, as the head of the household I always ordered them to do what I wanted. However, whenever I was away, they would not attend to my trees and would end up drying. From today, I will share my vision journey with my family and invite them to make decisions together, otherwise, the efforts will be in vain."*

— Male participant —



*"In my many years in marriage, I have always thought that I do more than my husband. I have realized that yes, they are many, but men carry the weighty responsibility. I will not be complaining to him."*

— Female participant —



*"The training contributes to sustainable land restoration by promoting honesty and transparency between the genders, diverting some leisure time to land restoration when men and women share labor could reduce the amount of time spent by women on restoration activities."*

— Male participant —







Participants received a certificate upon completion of the training (Photo by Denis Wakaba/CIFOR-ICRAF)

*"I have been attending agricultural training for the last twenty years, the approach has been the same; sit, listen, then go home. However, this gender training was different from what we are used to, we have all participated and enjoyed learning. The first topic was uncomfortable, but in the end, I saw the importance of men and women learning together. I would be happy to see more men in such training because it will bring change."*

— Male participant —



*"I now understand that men and women are the same but not equal. Once we understand that, then life will be easy for us. I never thought that domestic affairs would affect tree growing, because we always blamed rain, soil, and livestock"*

— Female participant —



*A key takeaway was the recognition that reforms in gender dynamics must be community-led and culturally sensitive. Participants suggested that future training sessions should engage more community members, including men and elders, to foster collective progress toward gender-inclusive land restoration.*



# Conclusion

The piloting and scaling of in community dialogues has demonstrated that they are a valuable tool for integrating gender perspectives into land restoration across different local contexts in Kenya. By fostering open discussions on gender norms, power dynamics, and shared responsibilities, the project empowered participants to drive inclusive and sustainable restoration efforts. Scaling up these dialogues will be crucial for achieving long-term, gender-equitable outcomes in landscape restoration in Laikipia and beyond.

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## CIFOR-ICRAF

The Center for International Forestry Research and World Agroforestry (CIFOR-ICRAF) harnesses the power of trees, forests and agroforestry landscapes to address the most pressing global challenges of our time – biodiversity loss, climate change, food security, livelihoods and inequity. CIFOR and ICRAF are CGIAR Research Centers.



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