



World Vision 

**Committed to Gender Equality:**  
*Gender-Transformative Programming  
in Practice*

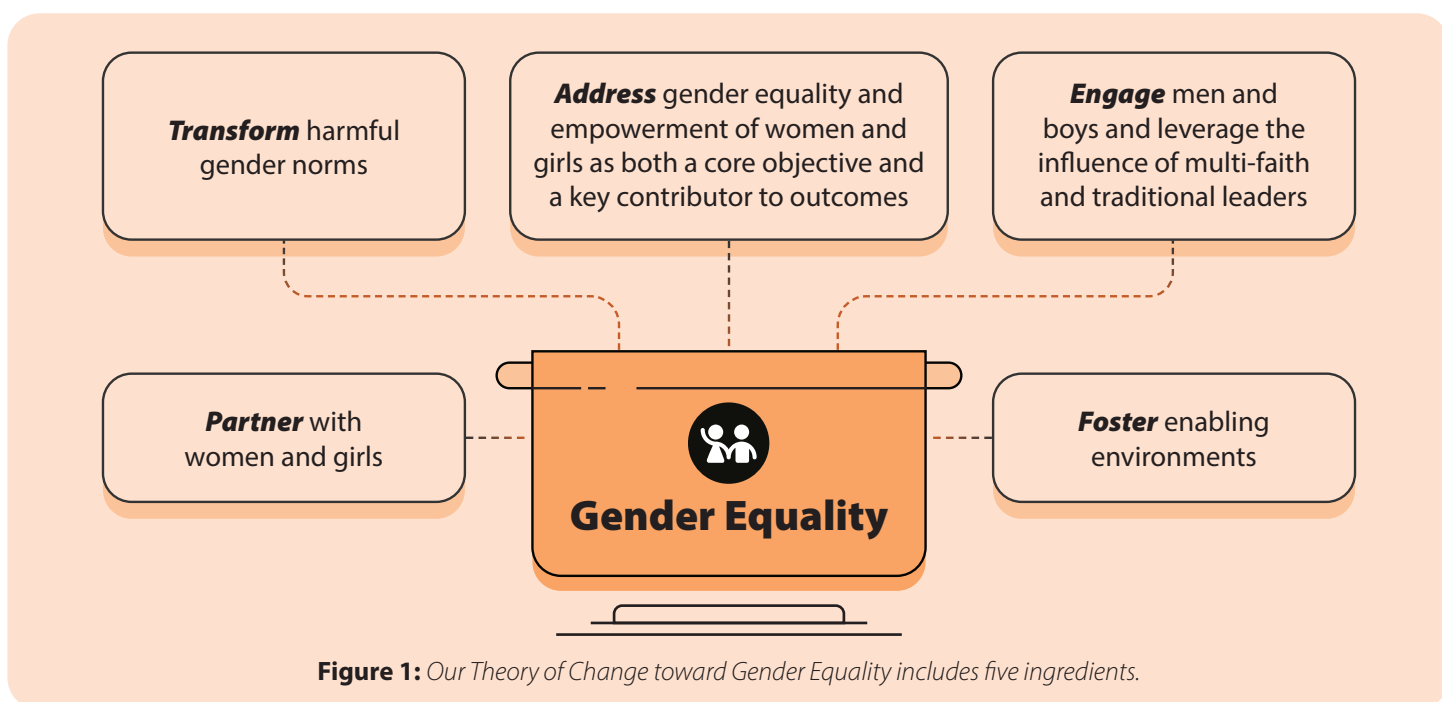
# Introduction

Gender equality is a core development objective for World Vision Canada. We take a rights-based approach to our gender equality programming. We firmly believe that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are fundamental to realizing human rights and the key to effective development. As a Christian and child-focused organization, we promote gender equality and meaningful inclusion of women and girls as a prerequisite for the sustained well-being of girls and boys within their families and communities and the achievement of our shared vision of 'life in all its fullness' for every child.<sup>1</sup> Meaningful progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals can only happen when rights, opportunities and resources for women and girls are expanded, affording individuals equal power and resources to shape their lives and contribute to their families and communities.

World Vision Canada works to redress power dynamics and structures that reinforce gendered inequalities at the individual, household, community and system levels. We do this by strengthening the agency of women and girls, and fostering an enabling environment by collaborating with community members. We work alongside relevant government entities, UN agencies, international and local NGOs, civil society, churches and multi-faith actors, where equitable social norms, relations, structures and policies can be built and sustained.

World Vision Canada's focus and approach to advancing gender equality through its projects and programs is informed by local gender and human rights assessments before and during the program design phases. Over time, these assessments have revealed that the most significant and persistent barriers identified by women, girls, men, boys and community leaders when discussing gender equality and social and economic empowerment were: 1) unequal decision-making; 2) unequal access to resources; 3) gendered cultural norms and beliefs; 4) sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV); 5) early marriage and early pregnancy; and 6) poor menstrual hygiene management. These inequalities alone, and in combination, have a negative impact on every aspect of women and girls' lives, including access to and experiences of education, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) and economic empowerment.

Our research shows that the majority of projects that effectively address gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls contain several key elements combined as the foundation of their theory of change. Moreover, they all simultaneously address agency, relations and structures to achieve gender equality. These elements have influenced World Vision Canada's Gender Equality, Empowerment & Human Rights framework and are foundational to guiding our programming. We believe that the following are essential, complementary elements of effective, gender-transformative programming and will assist our staff and partners in conceptualizing, planning and assessing our gender equality work. As such, they are key to our theory of change toward gender equality:



**Figure 1:** Our Theory of Change toward Gender Equality includes five ingredients.

<sup>1</sup> World Vision Canada Gender Equality Policy, 2020.

## World Vision Canada's Gender Equality Programming

This review of World Vision Canada's gender equality programming highlights several programming strengths and best practices that characterize our approach and contribute to our success in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls. These programming strategies and approaches have allowed us to progress under each key ingredient. Examples from the following projects are drawn on to highlight how we are applying the key ingredients.

Program Name	Location	Description
<b>Accelerated Hope &amp; Development for Urban Adolescents in Tanzania (AHADI)</b>	Tanzania (Dodoma & Dar es Salam)	AHADI works with adolescent girls and youth to realize their SRHR in urban Tanzania.
<b>Every Girl Can (EGC)</b>	Mozambique (Monapo, Murrupula and Nacarua Districts of Nampula Province)	Every Girl Can works to advance gender equality and ensure adolescent girls and young women can live free from SGBV and discrimination.
<b>Fortifying Equality and Economic Diversification for Resilience (FEED II)</b>	South Sudan (seven states)	FEED II is a women's empowerment initiative that aims to reduce gender inequalities in access to and control over resources to enhance food security.
<b>Improving Adolescent Girls' Inclusive Education in Mali (IMAGINE)</b>	Mali (Ségou and Mopti)	IMAGINE, now closed, aimed to improve the realization of girls' and adolescents' right to inclusive, gender-sensitive and quality education.
<b>Realizing Gender Equality, Attitudinal Change and Transformative Systems in Nutrition (REACTS-IN)</b>	Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania	REACTS-IN brings together international and local partners to improve nutrition and gender equality for the marginalized, women, adolescent girls and children under five.
<b>Reducing Environmental Shocks, Improving Livelihoods and Inspiring Empowered Innovative and Thriving Women of Ethiopia (RESILIENT-WE)</b>	Ethiopia (Hararghe zones of Oromia Region)	RESILIENT-WE partners with women and men, girls and boys, women's rights organizations and other stakeholders to tackle gender inequality, empower women and strengthen their resilience to the impacts of climate change, environmental stresses and economic shocks.
<b>Youth Empowered (YE)</b>	Bangladesh (six upazilas under two districts)	Youth Empowered works to enhance the SRHR of adolescents and youth, particularly girls and young women, by addressing child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) as a barrier to SRHR attainment.

\*All projects listed are in partnership with the Government of Canada

## INGREDIENT #1

# *Address gender equality and empowerment of women and girls as both a core objective and a key contributor to outcomes*

World Vision Canada approaches its programming as an opportunity to advance gender equality. This approach has evolved through our experience. We know that equal rights, equitable access to opportunities and resources for women and men and equal decision-making power are the foundation for success in all our projects across all sectors. Unless gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is a core project objective, the achievement of all other project goals—food security, education, health, SRHR, child protection and more—are severely compromised.

### **FEED II Project - South Sudan**

FEED II addresses the disparities between women and men in accessing and controlling resources, which are crucial for boosting food security and building resilience against environmental and socio-economic challenges. Gender equality is essential for achieving FEED II's broader development outcomes. South Sudan is one of the most challenging places to be a woman. Empowering women and girls is pivotal for improving food security and sustainable development in this country. The project leverages a food security and livelihoods platform to enhance women's and girls' capacities to manage food security threats, use female-friendly agricultural practices and participate actively in leadership roles within their communities.

FEED II's commitment to gender equality permeates every layer of its programming—from immediate actions such as enhancing nutritional practices and equitable resource management skills, to intermediate strategies to improve income generation and sustainable livelihoods for women. This holistic approach ensures that gender equality is not merely a standalone goal but also a driver for all other project objectives, thus ensuring that the empowerment of women and girls remains long after the project is finished.



### **AHADI Project - Tanzania**

At its core, AHADI recognizes that achieving gender equality is essential for improving adolescents' health and well-being. The project addresses the unique obstacles girls face, employing targeted strategies that acknowledge and empower their diverse needs. AHADI's model is built to empower adolescent girls, enabling them to make informed decisions about their SRHR and to create an environment free from gender-based violence (GBV).

AHADI's commitment to gender equality is not just a standalone aim but also a catalyst for all other project objectives, ensuring that the empowerment of women and girls is an intrinsic part of AHADI's enduring legacy. All outcomes of the AHADI project are gender equality-focused and intended to advance gender equality by addressing root causes contributing to harmful practices, beliefs and systemic gaps undermining women and girls' social status, decision-making power and access to resources.

## INGREDIENT #2

# Partner with women and girls

Our programming and advocacy work empowers women and girls to exercise their individual and collective agency, fostering their participation, leadership and decision-making abilities. In development and humanitarian contexts, we help women and girls build confidence, negotiation skills and leadership capabilities, encouraging them to define and pursue personal and collective goals. Central to our approach is engaging mothers, grandmothers, peers and female leaders to support and advocate for women's equal participation in decision-making. Localization is a key priority for World Vision Canada, rooted in its strength of understanding local contexts, including relationships, power dynamics and key influencers. This approach ensures meaningful community engagement to address the factors that shape women's and girls' lives, decision-making, vulnerabilities and contributions.

### RESILIENT-WE Project - Ethiopia

RESILIENT-WE increases women's participation in leadership roles within Community-Based Environmental Management Committees (CEMC) and Disaster Risk Management Committees (DRMC), addressing gender inequality in resource management and climate risk responses. The project equips women with climate-smart agricultural skills, entrepreneurship training, mentorship and financial management. Additionally, it pilots a childcare model in partnership with Kidogo Early Years, alleviating the childcare burden for mothers of children under five, enabling them to engage more effectively in training and income-generating activities.

RESILIENT-WE collaborates with the Network of Ethiopian Women's Associations (NEWA) and local women's rights organizations to assess and address capacity gaps in women-led, community-based organizations (CBOs). Seven women's rights organizations are conducting assessments to identify areas for capacity development, enhancing the effectiveness of CBOs in promoting gender equality and women's rights. Addressing GBV, the project has partnered with NEWA and the Ethiopian Women Lawyers Association to create a technology-based referral system for GBV case reporting, enabling survivors to access free legal assistance.



### Every Girl Can Project - Mozambique

Every Girl Can strengthens girls' collective agency through girl clubs, local advocacy groups and connections to women's rights organizations. The project engages girls with age-appropriate information on SRHR, gender equality and the prevention of SGBV. These initiatives empower girls as change agents within their communities, enabling them to educate peers, advocate for rights and challenge discriminatory norms.

Every Girl Can integrates life skills and employability training into its programming, contributing to the long-term social and economic empowerment of girls and young women. Adolescent girls are trained as members of an Adolescent Steering Committee, where they lead community dialogues addressing barriers to gender equality and collaborate on local advocacy action plans to advance SRHR and economic rights. These gender-transformative initiatives build girls' leadership, advocacy and collaboration skills, fostering confidence and resilience to overcome future challenges while driving systemic change for gender equality.

## INGREDIENT #3

### *Foster enabling environments*

World Vision Canada situates our programming within the context of locally interrelated and interdependent structures and practices, including policies, laws, institutional mechanisms, resources, norms, beliefs, attitudes and practices that impact gender equality. To deepen impact and ensure the sustainability of results, our projects are strategically designed to address equal rights, equitable access to opportunities and resources for women and men and equal decision-making power. To do this, our programming deliberately challenges discriminatory gender norms at multiple levels simultaneously, including at the individual, family, community and system levels, acknowledging all the factors that influence the ability of women and girls to exercise control over their lives.

World Vision identifies and leverages multiple strategic entry points for gender-transformative change in the communities where we work. This involves opening up space to collaborate with those who play an important role as power holders and gatekeepers in their communities, including faith-based, cultural and community leaders, mothers-in-law, grandmothers, men and boys. This strategy allows World Vision to explore and challenge discriminatory gender norms and harmful practices at multiple levels simultaneously with the support and partnership of critical community-level change agents.

#### **Youth Empowered Project - Bangladesh**

Youth Empowered focuses on empowering girls and young women to understand, exercise and advocate for their SRHR and protection rights. Using World Vision's Citizen, Voice and Action (CVA) model, the project builds their knowledge, confidence and advocacy skills to improve SRHR service delivery and hold duty-bearers accountable. Youth-led peer groups, composed of two-thirds female and one-third male members, are established to challenge traditional gender norms and promote gender transformation in the communities. Through the Savings 4 Transformation model, women and girls gain financial literacy, leadership skills and access to financial resources. The project works with service providers and government institutions to promote gender equality, deliver adolescent-friendly SRHR services and prevent SGBV and CEFM. It also engages men, boys and faith leaders as allies in fighting harmful practices and promoting gender equality, using the Channels of Hope model to address socio-cultural barriers and the MenCare model to encourage shared decision-making and healthier relationships.



#### **IMAGINE Project - Mali**

IMAGINE demonstrated how education programming can foster enabling environments by addressing interconnected barriers to gender equality in Mali. The project implemented a comprehensive gender strategy working through multiple channels - from institutional mechanisms to community attitudes. At the institutional level, IMAGINE strengthened education systems by supporting municipalities in developing gender-responsive plans and building the capacity of education officials. The project strategically engaged religious and traditional leaders as champions while partnering with women's organizations to mentor girls and advocate for education rights. Through life skills training, peer networks,

and intergenerational dialogues led by adolescent girls themselves, IMAGINE built both individual and collective agency. This combination of system strengthening, community engagement and youth empowerment helped create an environment where girls could exercise a greater voice in their education. The project's effectiveness is evidenced by improvements in institutional practices, shifted community attitudes and increased girls' participation in education, demonstrating how addressing multiple levels simultaneously can create conditions for sustained transformation in how communities view and support girls' education.

## INGREDIENT #4

# Transform harmful gender norms

World Vision Canada works to challenge harmful traditional practices and prevailing gender norms that result in gendered power imbalances. These manifest in multiple ways – such as women’s and adolescent girls’ lack of access to and control over financial and other resources, low literacy rates, lack of decision-making power over their own lives and those of their children, as well as restrictions on their movements, their diet, their voice and their autonomy. Our work involves building an understanding, acceptance, practice and appreciation among women and girls and among power holders of the value of women’s knowledge, capabilities and contributions at all levels of society and the benefits experienced by all when gender-based barriers are dismantled.

### FEED II Project - South Sudan

South Sudan’s gender norms have been shaped by traditional practices, civil war and new nationhood, creating unique challenges for women, men and adolescents in achieving gender equality and freedom from SGBV. FEED II uses Social Analysis and Action (SAA) to eliminate barriers preventing women from assuming leadership roles. The project creates opportunities for women to lead gender-transformative dialogues, fostering community discussions on harmful gender norms. These forums include women, men and youth, and they involve farmers, businesspeople, community leaders and faith leaders, culminating in community-driven action plans. Recognizing the importance of engaging men in these discussions, FEED II focuses on promoting shared responsibility in gender equality.

Social Analysis and Action begins with transformative dialogues that challenge staff attitudes, followed by work with communities. Farmers reflect on gender norms affecting land access, production control and household decision-making. Participants plan and implement behaviour changes and social change through collective action. The project emphasizes the role of social connections in transforming attitudes and working with families to increase influence within the community. Community gender champions serve as role models, advocating for gender equality through home visits and community accountability in preventing SGBV at the household level.



### REACTS-IN Project - Multi-country

In Bangladesh, Cambodia, Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania, deep-rooted gender inequalities limit women’s and girls’ decision-making power, as well as their access to resources necessary for food and nutrition security. The REACTS-IN project addresses these challenges by focusing on four key strategies.

First, it supports Care Groups, Adolescent Girl Power Groups and school clubs targeting marginalized women and girls, promoting peer-to-peer health and nutrition education while building confidence to advocate for equitable access to nutrition, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and SRHR services.

Second, the project establishes men’s groups to reflect on traditional gender norms and encourage shared caregiving responsibilities.

Third, income-generating activities like poultry rearing, tailoring and gardening help women and girls improve their livelihoods and social standing.

Lastly, REACTS-IN uses the CVA model to elevate the social value of women and girls, enhancing advocacy skills among women-led groups and other community stakeholders. This model promotes their involvement in governance, ensuring accountability in upholding women’s rights, including access to land, education, healthcare and decision-making.



## INGREDIENT #5

# Engage men and boys and leverage the influence of multi-faith and traditional leaders

World Vision Canada believes that empowering women and girls to realize their rights requires challenging and transforming the discriminatory gender norms that drive inequalities, poor health and economic and social outcomes. While women and girls are advocates and change agents for their rights and well-being, men and boys, as well as faith leaders, have distinct and crucial roles to play as allies and drivers of gender-transformative change.

**Engaging Men and Boys:** Engaging men and boys in promoting gender equality can lead to improved relationships and healthier communities. By challenging harmful gender norms and promoting positive masculinity, men can become advocates for gender equality, supporting respectful power dynamics between men and women. As key perpetrators of GBV, men must actively work to end violence and harmful practices, such as child marriage.

Research highlights that deeply ingrained cultural norms discourage men from sharing domestic and childcare responsibilities, negatively impacting both health and social outcomes. These norms also contribute to GBV, including sexual abuse, female genital mutilation and CEFM, which threaten the well-being of women and children. Challenging these harmful norms is essential for improving women's health rights and achieving lasting change.

World Vision Canada uses the MenCare approach to engage men in reducing gender inequalities and promoting the health of women and girls. MenCare, an initiative by Equimundo (formerly Promundo), was founded to promote men's involvement as equitable, non-violent caregivers. Established as a global fatherhood campaign, it advances gender equality by transforming harmful gender norms and fostering shared caregiving responsibilities. By redefining masculinity, men can break free from rigid gender roles, reject violence, respect women and girls and share decision-making power in households. As fathers, men benefit from closer relationships with their children, and they learn to raise sons who reject traditional masculine norms, supporting gender equality.



### Leveraging the Influence of Multi-Faith and Traditional

**Leaders:** Faith-based and traditional leaders can also play a pivotal role in transforming communities. With over 80 per cent of the global population affiliated with religious institutions, faith leaders have significant influence. As a faith-based organization, World Vision partners with religious communities to address gender inequality, leveraging the credibility and trust these leaders have within their communities. Through engagement with faith leaders, World Vision fosters reflection on religious texts to promote gender equality and women's rights.

Faith-based approaches are particularly effective in fragile states, where local institutions may be weak. Here, faith communities are often the primary institutions that remain active, offering an opportunity to drive change. World Vision's Channels of Hope for Gender program challenges faith leaders to address gender injustices and use their influence to promote gender equality. Through this initiative, faith leaders engage their congregations in discussions about local gender norms, fostering healthier and more equitable relationships.

World Vision's projects, such as AHADI, YE and EGC, involve men and faith leaders in transforming attitudes toward GBV, caregiving and sexual and reproductive health. This includes discussions on gender equality, shared responsibility of caregiving and household tasks, ending SGBV, including CEFM and supporting adolescents in accessing SRH services.



## Conclusion

World Vision's commitment to prioritizing the voices and rights of women and girls is instrumental in identifying and refining the key ingredients of our gender-transformative approach. This intentional process has validated the strength of World Vision Canada's Gender Equality, Empowerment and Human Rights framework, grounded in proven strategies to challenge and dismantle systemic barriers to gender equality.

The combination of twin-track programming, transformative partnerships, fostering an enabling environment, addressing harmful gender norms and the active engagement of men, boys, faith leaders and local communities remain foundational to our work. These strategies amplify the voices and agency of women and girls and challenge harmful norms and power dynamics, driving sustainable and equitable change. Gender equality is critical to fulfilling World Vision's mission of ensuring that the most vulnerable children thrive and realize their God-given potential. World Vision Canada remains steadfast in breaking cycles of inequality, empowering women and girls and building inclusive societies where the most vulnerable can overcome poverty and experience life in all its fullness.



To learn more about how World Vision Canada works to address gender inequality and improve the lives of girls and boys, please contact: Merydth Holte-McKenzie, Senior Gender Advisor, World Vision Canada at: [merydth\\_holte-mckenzie@worldvision.ca](mailto:merydth_holte-mckenzie@worldvision.ca)

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