



Male and female community members from Sera Wildlife Conservancy discussing gender attitudes, norms and practices in their households and communities.
© Veronicah Lekopole

A theory of change linking gender equity with improved conservation governance and impact: a case study of two community conservancies in Kenya

Version 1.1
November 2025

Contents

Acknowledgements	3
Improved gender equity.....	9
Recognition	9
Participation	10
Distribution.....	11
Improved governance	12
Improved conservation outcomes	13
Because... ..	14
Other outcomes.....	16
Barriers	17
Harmful gender attitudes and norms	18
Enabling factors	19
Intersectionality.....	20
Conclusion	21
References.....	22

Acknowledgements

This document was authored by Helen Anthem (Fauna & Flora), Emily Woodhouse (University College London), Alejandra Pizarro Choy (Fauna & Flora), and Yara Moussa (Fauna & Flora).

The theory of change draws on data contained in reports prepared by consultants and Fauna & Flora staff during implementation of the Fauna & Flora led project *Promoting equitable gender norms to strengthen conservation governance and impact*.

We have labelled this document 'Version 1' because we plan to update it based on our ongoing analysis of the data, and collection and analysis of more data as we integrate gender transformative approaches into more projects in more sites.

We express our thanks to those individuals who were involved in the project and who shared their learning, including Fauna & Flora staff who worked closely with project participants and partner staff, consultants who facilitated the process in the conservancies, and our local partners with whom we closely collaborated throughout the project:

- Northern Rangelands Trust
- Sera Wildlife Conservancy
- Pate Marine Community Conservancy
- Kenya Wildlife Conservancies Association
- CARE Kenya

Thanks also to those colleagues and peers who reviewed previous drafts of this document, and to the UK Government Darwin Initiative Innovation who funded this work.

Most importantly, our heartfelt thanks go to the men and women, including board members, staff, and community members from Sera and Pate, who participated in the project and who shared their views, knowledge and experience so openly and honestly.

Suggested Citation:

Fauna & Flora (2025). A Theory of change linking gender equity with improved conservation governance and impact: a case study of two community conservancies in Kenya <https://www.fauna-flora.org/publications/a-theory-of-change-linking-gender-equity-with-improved-conservation-governance-and-impact>

Introduction

This working theory of change traces the causal pathways linking improvements in gender equity with improved natural resource governance, which in turn can lead to an improvement in conservation outcomes. It was inspired by and builds upon that developed by Leisher et al. (2017) which looks at how the **participation** of women in natural resource management groups can result in improved resource governance and conservation of local forests and fisheries. Here, we have added two further dimensions of equity: **recognition** of knowledge, rights, and values, and **distribution** of costs and benefits. Integrating recognition and distribution as dimensions of equity builds on wider conservation research and a growing body of work, particularly in relation to research on equitable governance (Franks and Schreckenber, 2016).

The data we have gathered shows that changes in participation, recognition, and distribution are mutually reinforcing. For example, recognising women's time burdens can shift household labour, freeing them to engage more in conservation and other activities. As their contributions are valued, women gain confidence to pursue leadership roles, further influencing how costs and benefits are shared.

We recognise and aim to increase understanding of the interlinkages between different aspects of equity. For example, how and the extent to which women's knowledge, skills and opinions are recognised and valued, or not, affects their participation in and the distribution of the costs and benefits from conservation, and society more broadly. The theory of change acknowledges the importance of wider factors that may enable or inhibit changes in equity, and links to improved governance (in principles such as legitimacy, transparency, and accountability). It emphasises the critical role of gender norms and the way in which they influence, and are reproduced in, power relations and formal structures such as land rights and policy. It also considers 'intersectionality' in that social strata based on, for example, sex, class, age, ethnicity, religion, and disability, 'intersect' to result in different manifestations and experiences of oppression and privilege.

The theory of change framework is supported by data from a Fauna & Flora led project titled *Promoting equitable gender norms to strengthen conservation governance and impact* which used an innovative process – Social Analysis and Action – to challenge harmful gender norms and promote more equitable alternatives. The project was implemented in two community conservancies in northern Kenya and was funded by the UK Government Darwin Initiative Innovation. Whilst the focus of the project was on promoting change at the two sites, this theory of change is an explicit output of the project. A skeleton framework for the theory of change was developed prior to the project but was revised during the project, informed by our analysis of the data. Further information on the project and the methodology used is below.

Who can use this theory of change framework?

The theory of change framework demonstrates the ways in which the three dimensions of gender equity are interrelated and will be useful for both conservation and technical support staff, such as gender officers, aiming to strengthen gender equity within conservation programming.

Some ways in which this theory of change may be useful include:

- Moving beyond focusing on women's participation alone, to consider other dimensions of gender equity i.e. recognition and distribution.
- Exploring which aspects of gender equity can be addressed within projects.
- Reflecting upon how gender inequity may be inhibiting the achievement of project objectives.

- Identifying and exploring further action to strengthen or complement existing actions on gender.
- Identifying barriers and enabling factors within the project context and exploring possible ways to reduce and promote or utilise these respectively.
- Serving as an advocacy tool for gender equity within conservation projects and within organisations.

In these ways, this theory of change can potentially support conservation practitioners in designing interventions, including project specific theories of change, in developing monitoring systems, or in scaling or adapting gender approaches within their projects. It could also encourage critical thinking and help programme staff to incorporate gender more reflexively, responding to the specific conditions present in the contexts where their conservation projects operate.

The Social Analysis and Action process

Fauna & Flora's project adapted CARE's Social Analysis and Action (SAA) approach to encourage and support men and women to reflect and act upon harmful gender norms, attitudes and practices in their own lives and households, within their communities, and within their conservancies, with the aim of promoting more gender equitable governance and, ultimately, to improve conservation impact. The two-year project focused on Sera Wildlife Conservancy (SWC) in Samburu County in year one, and on Pate Marine Community Conservancy (PMCC) and 3 of its constituent Beach Management Units (BMUs) in Lamu County in year two.¹

Notably, both sites are considered challenging environments for gender-focused work due to deeply rooted patriarchal cultures, one in primarily Samburu pastoralist communities with a legacy of moranism (warriorhood) and historical conflicts between different communities over water and grazing land, and the other in largely Muslim Bajun fishing communities. As such, these sites were deemed suitable for testing the SAA approach in contexts where patriarchal norms and practices are strong and entrenched.

In both sites the adapted SAA process started with one week of training. At SWC one training targeted board and staff members and a second training targeted community members. At PMCC, there was just one training for PMCC board members and representatives from the 3 BMUs. Across both sites a total of 110 participants (38 female, 72 male) attended SAA training. Participants were selected by board members, in collaboration with conservancy staff and, in the case of Pate, with NRT and Fauna & Flora staff. A number of criteria were developed, including their position and various attributes such as being known and trusted within their communities, communication skills, and commitment to conservancy and community development. Attempts were made to involve equal numbers of men and women but in both sites the majority of office holders were men, so more men than women attended the training.

Following the training 'early adopters', who came to be known as 'champions', were supported through regular visits to continue the reflection and action process within their own spheres, at household, community, staff and board levels. In both sites around 163 people (77 female, 86 male) are now actively challenging harmful attitudes, norms and practices either within their own homes through their own actions or by having discussions and promoting change within their communities.

¹ Further information on the project, including how we adapted the SAA methodology and our learning from the process is in Fauna & Flora's *Guidance on Gender Transformative Approaches for Conservation Practitioners*. <https://www.fauna-flora.org/publications/guidance-on-gender-transformative-approaches-for-conservation-practitioners>

Although the process was externally facilitated the focus and direction of the discussions depended, to a great extent, on the participants. Participation in the SAA process is voluntary, and individuals can choose to share as much or as little information as they feel comfortable with. A key element of the SAA process is the use of participatory tools to encourage and facilitate reflection, dialogue and action, being informed and led by the participants themselves. These tools were used in the training, during follow up support visits, and the champions were encouraged to use them during dialogues within their own communities.

Data collection and analysis

Data was gathered during the initial training and subsequent support visits. These were facilitated by independent consultants in Sera and by two CARE Kenya staff members in Pate, all of whom were contracted by Fauna & Flora to implement the SAA process at site level.

The training and visits were documented in reports submitted to Fauna & Flora. The reports include issues raised by participants during participatory sessions, as well as details of the tools used, and discussions held. The consultants used a variety of approaches, including focus group discussions and participatory exercises with participants, using a variety of tools² to prompt critical reflection and discussion. Several semi-structured interviews were also conducted with conservancy staff.

These reports are the data sources for the theory of change and therefore the data collected was dependent on the quality and content of the reports, as well as the issues discussed and the participants willingness to engage and share their views and experiences. Formal permission was given by participants for the information they shared to be used in reports and other publications.

The data was analysed through inductive and deductive thematic analysis. Deductive analysis was applied to code within the broad categories within the theory of change framework (i.e. assumptions, recognition, distribution, etc.). Inductive analysis was then applied within those categories to identify the themes that emerged from the data. The thematic analysis was done by a team of three specialists³ to compare and refine the themes.

We present a small selection of the project data as evidence for the theory of change; that included here is just a snapshot of the wealth of data obtained. In deciding which data to present, we have considered representation from both sites and have tried to include what we feel is particularly representative or notable.

It is important to note that whilst some of the evidence presented relates to self-reported attitudes related to gender, as well as participants observations of gender norms change within their communities, much of the evidence related to improved conservation governance and outcomes is based on perceptions. Perceptions are an indispensable form of evidence (Bennet, 2016) which, in this case, help to understand individual interpretations and assessments of governance and conservation. These can also indicate and affect local support for the conservancies and the conservation activities they are undertaking.

Gender norms and the theory of change

² Further details on the approach and tools used are in Fauna & Flora's *Guidance on Gender Transformative Approaches for Conservation Practitioners*. Ibid.

³ Helen Anthem (Fauna & Flora), Alejandra Pizarro Choy (Fauna & Flora) and Emily Woodhouse (University College London)

The Fauna & Flora project was developed because gender norms are one of the biggest structural barriers to gender equity (Cookson et al., 2023), but there is limited attention to and understanding of how gender norms influence conservation governance and outcomes.

Harmful gender norms are 'patriarchal brakes' to social change but are seen as part of the natural order; people may not consciously choose to comply, they just 'are' (Harper et al. 2020). Even when their significance is recognised, addressing gender norms may be perceived to be beyond the scope or means of conservation programming where resources and capacity are stretched.

According to Harper et al. (2020), gender norms change is generally slow and unpredictable and it is difficult to measure the impact of specific actions. Similarly, it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify the direct pathways or links between specific changes in gender equity and specific governance outcomes. Our theory of change therefore does not follow the standard 'if / then / because' framing. This is because norms change typically does not follow a linear trajectory, but rather is negotiated over a period of time and is influenced by situational changes and other barriers and enabling factors. We have, however, attempted to identify how change in one aspect of gender equity reinforces changes in other aspects, as well as how other factors, including those relating to identity, can act as barriers or enablers.

Some of the data presented here reflects individual attitudes. Attitudes focus on individual beliefs whilst norms are socially motivated. Attitudes may or may not be aligned with prevailing norms but, as we have done here, commonly held and repeatedly expressed attitudes can serve as proxies for social norms.

The project has demonstrated that challenging and changing harmful attitudes, and their corresponding norms and practices, is possible within a conservation context, with benefits for the wellbeing of men and women, and for conservation governance. Whilst the project timeframe was short, the evidence generated by this project, as well as that documented elsewhere⁴, suggests that improvements in governance will ultimately lead to improved conservation outcomes.

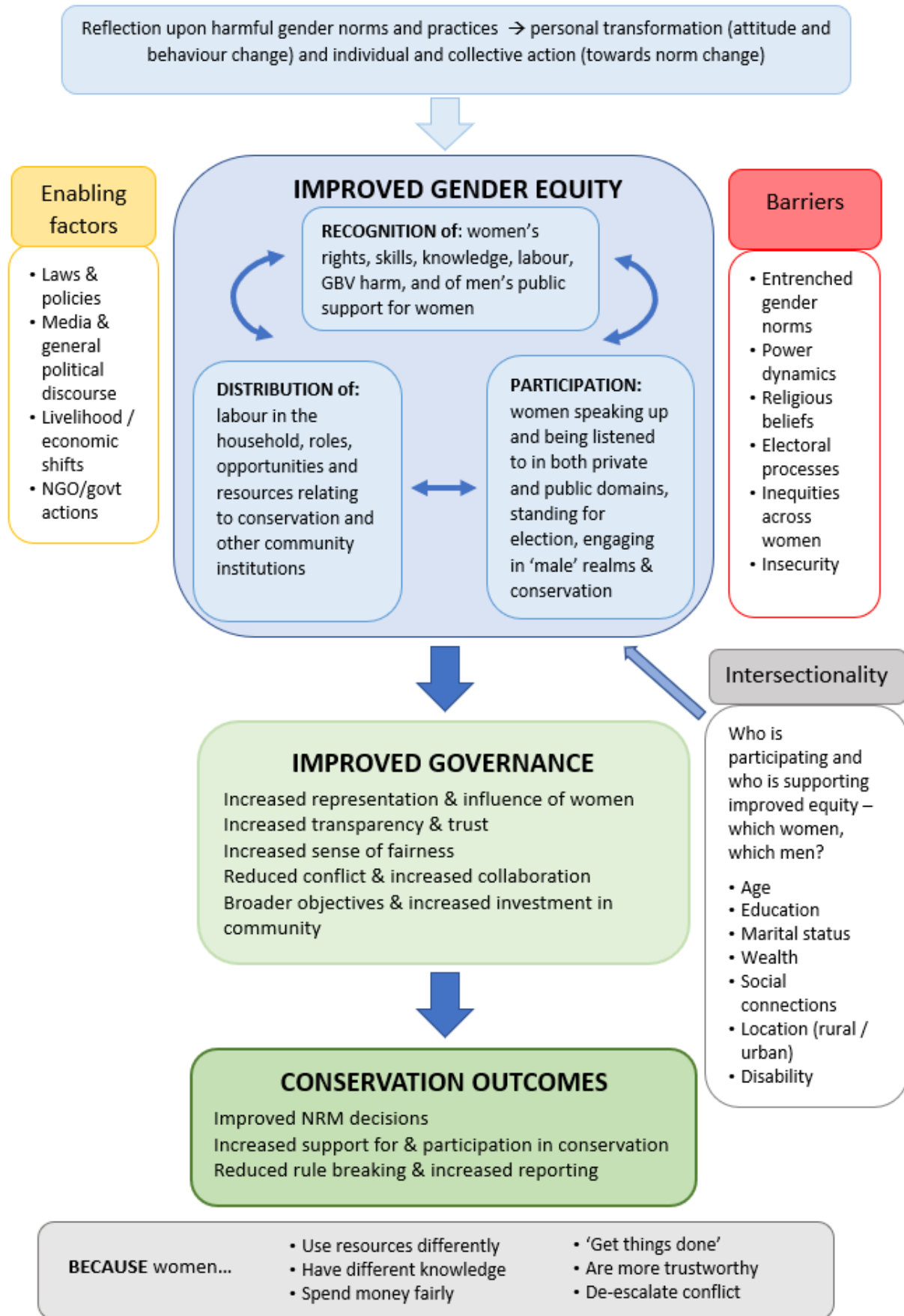
Theory of change structure

The framework for our theory of change is shown in Figure 1. Thereafter, we present the themes that we identified from our analysis of the data, organised according to the sections of the framework, along with some commentary based on this initial analysis. As noted above, these themes are interconnected and the evidence presented in one theme may also be relevant to another.

Within each section we have included a sample of quotes from project participants. In some cases we can attribute the quote to a specific person (although all quotes have been anonymised) but in some of the consultants reports this was not possible. The quotes presented here represent just a snapshot of the overall project data. Whilst additional data is available it has been excluded to keep the theory of change document to a manageable length, to aid clarity and readability

⁴ For example in Leisher, C et al. (2017) *A preliminary theory of change detailing how women's participation can improve the management of local forests and fisheries*.

Figure 1: Theory of change framework



Improved gender equity

Our implementation of an adapted SAA process to reflect and act upon harmful gender norms, attitudes and practices aimed to improve gender equity. We have categorised evidence of changes in gender equity into the three widely recognised dimensions of equity: recognition, participation (or procedure), and distribution (Franks and Schreckenber, 2016, Dawson et al., 2018). The themes presented below represent different aspects of the three dimensions of gender equity in these sites, based on our analysis of the data.

As noted above (in Gender norms and the theory of change), and as demonstrated by the evidence, changes in one aspect or dimension of equity has ripple effects, and there are clear links between changes in private and public spheres. Participants at both sites indicated that changes at household level are significant for women's participation in community leadership and decision making.

“If you see women who speak in meetings, they are those that know their husbands have no issue with them speaking in the meetings. Women therefore begin getting voices at household level before the voice is heard at the community level.”

Male community member, Sera

“[The most significant change has been] Changes in the home. Gender talks about rights for everyone. Now we are educated. There is sharing of roles in the household and the majority of men now help their wives. When the household is ok we can then implement [equitable] leadership and management, but first we have to look at the home. The project has brought to light all the issues in the house.”

Male leader, Pate

Recognition

There is evidence that the project is leading to increased recognition of the labour and skill women put into their roles, and the burden that is being put upon women. Increased recognition of women's knowledge leads to increasing recognition and value of their opinions. Both women and men are now recognising women's capabilities and knowledge as being broader than their current gendered roles and they are increasingly being respected when they do take on 'non-traditional' roles, such as rangers. Furthermore, women's rights to representation on boards and other committees, participation in decision-making and employment, and their leadership capabilities are being recognised. There is also increased recognition of the harm gender-based violence, including early marriage, causes.

Significantly, men are voicing their support of women in public arenas and amongst other men. There is evidence that changes happening in the domestic sphere, such as men sharing the household labour burden and listening to women's views, and those happening in public arenas, such as conservancy boards, are mutually reinforcing. Across the two sites we have seen increasing recognition, by both men and women, in the following areas.

- Women's rights
- Freedom from gender-based violence
- Women's capabilities and values
- Women's leadership skills
- Women's knowledge and opinions
- Women's labour
- Women's employment
- Men's willingness to openly support women

“I was unaware that women have equal rights with men, but now I know. I have also understood governance as a board member, and I can train others as well.”

Male leader, Pate

“Initially, women did not have opportunity to speak as per the cultural norms. Now at community peace meetings, they speak with confidence and community members listen to them and adopt their points. In peace meetings, women give suggestions that discourage escalation of conflict, while men sometimes tend to encourage the morans to stay brave and fight or even retaliate.”

Male staff member, Sera

“Being at the same workplace with my husband, I would experience some form of violence even at the workplace from him, but now that has changed for the better.”

Female, Sera

“Before the training, I used to think that having money was the only way to become a leader, but I realised that it's more about personal transformation, challenging your fears, and having humility. As a single mother, I reflected on my life and developed self-trust. I am now confident that I can be a good leader. I have encouraged many women to take up leadership positions, and I also plan to vie for a leadership position as a trustee in the conservancy.”

Female, Sera

“When I wanted to start a business, I decided to involve my wife, who provided ideas I hadn't considered. They worked out greatly.”

Male, Pate

“After the training, I realised I was burdening my wife like a donkey. I decided to help her with some roles. ... I have gone further to assign house chore roles to my male children so that as they grow, they can help women in their lives... The children are learning by example as they see me helping their mother doing roles that are believed to be for women.”

Male, Sera

“[My husband] freely allows me to attend meetings, run my business and engage in conservation work without complaining as in the past. Sometimes he supports me in some of the activities such as seaweed farming.”

Female, Pate

“For example, when a man and woman work together, we can generate more income. For this reason, let's collaborate and work as a team.”

Male leader, Pate

Participation

There is evidence that the project has positively affected not just women's attendance at conservancy and BMU meetings, and employment as rangers, for example, but also their active participation in leadership and decision-making including on conservation issues. Shifts in norms are leading to men listening to women and to women feeling more confident to speak up, with positive feedback loops between these. Women are more willing to stand for election and men are more willing to support them. We also have evidence that women are now participating in other activities beyond decision-making, that have traditionally been the realm of men, and activities that take them outside of the home.

The following areas have been identified from the data.

- Women’s participation and influence within conservancy and BMU fora
- Women’s participation and influence in (other) community fora
- Women standing and being elected within conservancy and other fora
- Women’s participation in traditionally male realms
- Women’s participation in conservation and other activities outside of the home

“More women have registered as members, leading to an increased female presence in the BMU assembly.”

Male, Pate

“I used to be shy but I am now more confident and freer to attend meetings for example peace meeting. I am motivated to engage in peace talks as peace is important for development. I attended a Turkana meeting on peace. I requested to talk and when they heard I am Samburu they were shocked but they listened to me. I requested to talk with Turkana men where I requested for peace. I was sent to also talk with Samburu men. In the next meeting there was a peace meeting between Turkana and Samburu youths.”

Female, Sera

“A record number of women vied and are now in the board; previously only one was actually forced [co-opted] to join.”

Male, Sera

“It’s...the first time we are seeing women being included in grazing committees.”

Male, Sera

“I faced challenges in my household since my husband denied me the opportunity to engage in activities such as mangrove planting and environmental cleaning. However, after the training, I imparted the knowledge to him well and to my surprise, he was transformed. He now supports me in most of the activities.”

Female leader, Pate

Distribution

With recognition of women’s labour burdens and shifts in gender norms around roles, there is evidence of redistribution of labour within the household and men taking on traditionally feminine jobs and instances of women taking a greater role in decision-making. This is not insignificant in communities where gendered roles have been very rigid. Couples report better relationships within the household, a pattern in Sera that is reflected in more harmonious relations between male and female conservancy staff. The visibility of men doing what was considered women’s jobs, such as collecting water or cooking, is likely to normalise this shift as well as freeing up women to participate in conservation activities. Women are now being considered more often for training and job and business opportunities both within and outside of the conservancies although there are still structural barriers (see below), and beyond this to decision-making bodies including in masculine domains such as livestock.

In Sera, employment by the conservancy is one of the main benefits available but there are a number of other benefits available to members of the conservancy, such as employment in the privately managed tourist lodges, school bursaries, and cash payments from a carbon project.

In both sites the (re)distribution of labour within households appears to be the most significant change identified, but changes in other domains have also been identified.

- Labour in the household
- Employment and other opportunities within the conservancy / BMU

- Other community roles and resources

“The men in the community never fetched water and firewood. After the training... men are helping with the household work like lighting fire, cooking food, washing the young children, and are also walking the young children to school, which was the work of the women.”

Female, Sera

“This SAA approach has helped women take on leadership roles in the BMU, such as managing the octopus and crab businesses, which are now thriving and have positively impacted BMU revenue generation.”

Male leader, Pate

“I believe people are slowly transforming as evidenced by employment of 4 women chiefs in our community”

Male, Sera

Improved governance

There is some evidence of improved governance, with examples given of women’s more active engagement in meetings and decision making, both in the conservancy and BMUs and in other community fora. Amongst the participants there is a strong perception that improved gender equity, and women’s active involvement in leadership and decision-making, will strengthen governance and that governance has indeed improved.

Some of the examples shared by participants are at household level, given with the rationale that these can and will result in improvements at board level. Changes in attitudes, norms and practices at different levels (e.g. household, community, conservancy) and in different spheres (e.g. division of household labour, increased support for women and women’s rights by men) can create virtuous circles that help to shift gender norms.

The project has increased motivation and commitment to change amongst community, staff and board members. The Sera conservancy manager has noted that project participants are now more engaged in conservancy activities and mobilise their fellow community members to attend conservancy meetings (personal communication, 2024). Also at Sera, one of the male community participants has been elected as a board member, noting that had he not been involved in the project he would not have been elected and would not have even seen the need to stand for election (personal communication, 2025). His presence on the board will influence the making of more gender equitable decisions.

Across the two sites, the following governance related changes have been identified.

- Increased representation of women
- Increased influence of women on decision-making
- Increased transparency and sharing of information
- Increased trust and accountability
- Increased sense of fairness
- Reduced conflict
- Increased collaboration and aligned objectives
- Changed investment
- Increased attention to other marginalised groups

“The BMU now follows the 2/3 gender rule. Before there were only 2 women.”

Female, Pate

“Women were there but not given the chance to make decisions, but nowadays they do and men listen.”

Female, Pate

“There is more transparency because women like sharing what they know with other women and nothing can be hidden.”

Female, Sera

“Having women in the board has helped in passing of information and agendas that concern the community and that has helped to build trust because community members do not feel that something is hidden by the board.”

Male, Sera

The governance of the conservancy has also seen a positive transformation. With 30% of board members now women, there's an increased sense of fairness and inclusivity.”

Female, Pate

“Women are [more] gentle in taking action when in contact with the lawbreakers than men. They take the initiative to correct instead of punishing first or being arrogant.”

Male, Pate

“The women who are better than men in leadership, for example [former female chair] increased salaries of rangers and it has never been increased again”

Sera

“I have also trained and counselled 3 men and 6 youths in my village who engaged in drug abuse to abandon the bad habit and be useful in their families. They have successfully abandoned it and most of them engage in fishing activity to provide for their families”.

Female, Pate

Improved conservation outcomes

The project was over too short a time frame to see direct conservation outcomes, the SAA process being implemented over just (or less than) one year at each site. However, as with improved governance, there are perceptions amongst participants that more gender equitable governance, and women's increased and equitable involvement in conservancy and conservation activities more generally, will result in better natural resource management and conservation.

Participants have noted an increased interest in both community issues and the conservancy, and, in Sera, several conservancy staff have noted that the community participants are supporting the mobilisation of community members for meetings and so on.

Whilst there is no direct evidence, in this case, that women's equitable involvement in governance leads to reduced rule breaking there is again the perception that women are more likely to adhere to the rules and that more women on the board would reduce rule breaking and increase reporting when rules are broken.

We have categorised the outcomes that participants identified as follows.

- Improved natural resource management decisions
- Increased participation of women in conservation activities
- Increased community support for conservation
- Reduced rule breaking
- Increased reporting

“In a community meeting...[she] gave a suggestion that has changed the way grazing committee works. She suggested that elders from the community be appointed in rotational basis to ensure the core conservation area is protected. Now there are village elders who deal with the herders and because they know cows from each of the families around, the herders no longer drive the cattle to the core areas.”

Male, Sera

“Before the training women were not coming but now they are more active. Women can now help in collecting fishing data and deterring the fishing of juveniles.... Women being more involved has helped solve problems in the BMU.”

Male leader, Pate

“Information sharing has increased to create sense of ownership and always when communities are informed properly, and facts shared, the community always support conservation.”

Male staff member, Sera

“Women are now active in preventing breaking of rules because they own grass paddocks and they work with men to protect the grass.”

Male, Sera

“[There has been] Increased reporting of illegal activities like fire. When recently the Rendille herders started fire, the community members reported, took charge and fined the herders 4 goats, then called rangers to pick the goats.”

Male staff member, Sera

Because...

The following are ‘because’ statements or underlying assumptions in the theory of change that, if held, mean that more effective governance and improved conservation outcomes will be realised as a result of improved gender equity. The assumptions listed reflect the project participant’s perspectives on the differences between men and women. Rather than essentialising women – that is, characterising specific traits as intrinsic to women - they reflect the gendered roles and social dynamics in these contexts.

Environmental and community knowledge and priorities is clearly gendered. Incorporating different types and sources of knowledge into decision making is important for effective management decisions, and is also important for ensuring legitimacy and equitable sharing of benefits.

Because opportunities are relatively rare for women, they tend to be enthusiastic and take greater advantage when they have them, which leads to more efficient and effective actions. Due to their enthusiasm in making the most of the opportunities that are available to them, women tend to share any knowledge and information they do gain with their peers.

Several participants mentioned perceiving women as less corrupt. Rather than being an intrinsic quality of women, it may be that women are less prone to corruption due to a combination of being new to leadership roles, having less social capital and networks, and their gendered social role. This has implications for the efficient use of resources, legitimacy and accountability of conservancy governance.

Due to their social roles as caregivers women appear to be more attuned to wider community needs and those of the most marginalised, with implications for benefit sharing and assessing the implications of decision-making.

Social roles and community mindedness shape how women manage money and make decisions. When women control or have influence over household funds, they are more likely to be efficiently and equitably spent, benefiting family wellbeing, a trend that is well evidenced in the global development literature. This has implications for accountability, legitimacy and fairness of conservancies. Women are also believed to consider longer term horizons, with implications for decision-making that prioritises sustainable management of resources.

The following are assumptions that we have identified based on the perceptions of participants.

- Women and men have different kinds of knowledge
- Women share their knowledge and information
- Women are dedicated and 'get things done'
- Women are more consistent, trustworthy, transparent and less corrupt
- Women are fairer
- Women de-escalate conflict
- Women spend money more wisely
- Women make decisions based on the longer term

“The women know trees like Laishimi that women use for milking gourds, men do not know these trees and may not conserve it.”

Female, Sera

“Men get information from the conservancy, share with few people and that is it. For women, they are reflective and try to balance issues. They will not stop spreading the information until everybody has received it. Because of this, they gained trust of community hence have influence.”

Female, Sera

“If you assign a duty to a woman, she is doing it with passion but men they are doing just what they want to do.”

Male, Pate

“Women leaders are less corrupt and greedy and demonstrate a greater sense of integrity (“haya” - shame/humility), which deters corruption, and they tend to perform their duties perfectly.”

Male, Pate

“In employment, when the vacancies are fewer, the community members want to scramble for the few employment slots; women have also been peace makers, and advise that the vacancies should be rotated, such that a village that did not succeed to have their person employed will get their turn next. And this has always been accepted because men feel embarrassed to have a war of words in presence of women.”

Male, Sera

“Many retaliatory attacks have been thwarted by women through talking and making their sons see the danger of imminent death they might suffer if they proceed to fight. The way women speak with valuable reasoning makes the morans to listen to them.”

Male, Sera

“Women are the best in planning and are aware of the quantity needed at a time; what is there and what is not there. But both can play their part”

Male, Pate

“Women think further into the future in supporting conservation work.”

Female, Sera

Other outcomes

The SAA process has not only improved gender equity but has also led to various related outcomes some of which will continue to shift gender norms to promote greater equity, improve conservancy governance and, in the longer term, improve conservation outcomes. For example, women's increased confidence is encouraging them to speak out more and even to stand for election, and improved relations at both household and community levels is likely to shift the attitudes of men towards women. Harper et al (2020) identify improved critical thinking skills as a key factor in shifting norms regardless of the extent to which gender was a focus during those skills being developed. Significantly, the project has increased motivation to promote change amongst both men and women.

The following outcomes have been identified.

- Women's increased confidence
- Improved wellbeing especially for women
- Improved household relations
- Improved community relations
- Improved critical thinking and analytical skills
- Increased motivation to change

“Previously women were shy, they would not stand and speak and organisers of meetings knew a particular woman who speaks and she is the only one given opportunity, others would scold her that by speaking in meetings she embarrasses the fellow women. But after the training, many women now volunteer to speak. It seems they have been bottling up issues, now they are free.”

Female board member, Sera

“The women have more time to rest. Previously their work would look like a river with tributaries or a tree with branches. She would do so many things in a day and now they can actually get time to breath.”

Female, Sera

“Husbands and wives are now planning their issues together at the household level.”

Female, Pate

In a school meeting, [her] proposal was picked and implemented. The men, women and children commended her for the good idea, and her neighbours related her courage to the SAA training because she never used to speak in meetings.

Female, Sera

“Through SAA training, I analysed the need for water to be nearer. I wrote proposal to... request for funding through carbon credit project. The proposal was accepted and community is currently digging trenches as community contribution for pipes to be laid in the coming weeks. This access to water could not have happened if I did not attend the training that transformed me to start looking at women burden as family and community burden.”

Male, Sera

“Our conversations and discussions are great opportunities to promote the importance of women in leadership roles. As an SAA champion, I am committed to taking the lead in engaging with members of our community to promote gender transformation.”

Male, Sera

Barriers

Despite evidenced improvements to gender equity in both Sera and Pate, there remain barriers to change. Some of these barriers are outside of the control of the project and of conservancy board and staff or of community members. Most of the barriers are related to inequitable gender and power norms some of which contribute to others, resulting in multiple interconnected barriers to gender equity.

The wider Sera landscape has historically experienced conflicts in extremely dry periods due to competition for scarce pasture and water and incidences of cattle theft are higher after dry periods as communities try to restock. Insecurity is not a barrier to gender equity per se, but does inhibit women's participation in certain activities because traditionally men have been the ones involved in warfare and conflict, and men are believed to be better equipped to deal with insecurity.

There is lack of funding to promote women's participation and gender issues specifically, but lack of funds also inhibits the conservancy managements' ability to address other related pressing issues such as distribution of membership cards, how information is communicated to conservancy members, and the way elections are carried out.

In both sites, despite a redistribution of domestic labour among men and women in some households, women's labour burdens remain high and there are entrenched norms that tie women to domestic duties and the homestead. Women's mobility is severely limited not only by lack of funds but primarily by their roles being focused on and around the home, and norms around what is considered appropriate.

In Sera in particular, power dynamics within the board appear to significantly affect equity. Some board members, including some men as well as women, have not completed formal education and some are more comfortable speaking in Samburu. This puts them at a disadvantage to their peers who have attended school and can speak Kiswahili or English. At both sites there appears to be a lack of trust and faith in certain leaders and organisations which, according to some participants, inhibits change.

In Pate, the majority of the population are Muslim and religious beliefs, or rather misinterpretation of religious texts, are used as a justification for inequitable practices. Here, the project engaged with religious leaders and it is interesting to note that similar statements were made by both Christian and Muslim leaders. However, through discourse it emerged that many of the statements made by participants were countered by others, including religious leaders, so whilst religion is cited to justify inequitable beliefs and practices it can also be an enabling factor.

The following are the main barriers identified.

- Religion
- Insecurity
- Mistrust and lack of faith in leaders and organisations
- Electoral processes
- Power dynamics within boards
- Lack of funding
- Lack of awareness of women's rights
- Women's domestic work burden
- Women's restricted mobility

“Religion mentions qualities of a righteous woman; obedient and men as head of the family. Therefore, women should be obedient and respect their husbands.”

Male, Pate

“There is however meetings that women do not attend, for example when community men meet to discuss the rituals in the community, sometimes when security situation is tough and fear that fighting can erupt during meeting, the women are not invited.”

Male staff member, Sera

“Some people have stayed in leadership for too long here in our conservancy, that is why we can't have the desired changes.”

Male, Sera

“Some board members have more influence like the educated board members understand signed agreements and any paper work and hence make key decisions.”

Male staff member, Sera

“Gender issues are not budgeted and included in the plan because youths and women are not well represented on the conservancy board. Gender meeting activities are not followed up on because they are not prioritised.”

Female leader, Sera

“By the law, [having 1/3 of the conservancy board roles be women] is acceptable. However, the community is not fully aware of public participation, and therefore more awareness should be made.”

Male, Pate

“Women have a lot of work, and that is the main reason they don't make it to meetings and even aspire for leadership.”

Male, Sera

“According to the customs of this area, men should not travel with one woman whether in a boat, car, or plane. This is believed to cause misfortune throughout the journey.”

Male, Pate

Harmful gender attitudes and norms

Some of the barriers noted above are as a result of inequitable gender norms. Social norms are the informal and 'unwritten rules' rules in a community or society that shape how people behave and how they expect others to behave. Gender norms are social norms relating to the expected behaviour and roles of men and women. It is important to note that not all gender norms are harmful and that men can also be negatively affected by them. However gender norms remain the biggest barrier to gender equality, with the most harmful norms elevating men's status at the expense of women.

Attitudes are based on individual beliefs whereas norms are socially motivated, but often they align. Whether or not an individual adheres to a norm that does not align with what that individual believes depends on the strength of the norm and the consequences of not conforming.

Norms are held in place by sanctions, or punishments, for not adhering to the norm and by rewards or benefits for conforming to them. In Sera for example, Samburu culture is based on semi-nomadic pastoralism, where the use of resources is communal and togetherness is key for survival. Going against social norms and to be isolated for doing so is a huge risk and is detrimental to the individual and their household. In both sites we identified sanctions that individuals face if they do not adhere to gender norms.

The following are the most commonly expressed attitudes made by participants, that reflect prevailing gender norms.

- Men have a higher status
- Men are better leaders
- Women should not speak in front of men
- There is women's work and men's work
- Women should focus on the home
- Men should provide for the family
- Women who leave the home to work may be unfaithful
- Gender based violence is acceptable
- Sanctions for breaking gender norms

“Women are weak and cannot withhold pressure of leadership”.

Male, Sera

“She should adhere to the customs and traditions and seek permission from her husband before raising her hand in meetings.”

Male, Pate

The women rangers keep hearing words from fellow male rangers - statements like ... you are not up to the tasks of a soldier... you are incapable working as rangers... or to get entrusted with fire arms because you are a liability... when you are given a gun, your work partner will be providing security to you rather than protect the wildlife.

Female, Sera

“I married her for a purpose to help me at home, I don't see any reason for her to go for the job since I have enough resources to provide for her.”

Male, Sera

“When a man is seen performing household chores, he is often humiliated/mockered by the community.”

Pate

Enabling factors

In any context there will be enabling factors, often external to a project intervention, that contribute to gender equity, such as the church, NGOs, media, legal and policy changes, and broader livelihood and economic shifts.

In both sites, there are relevant policies that promote women's participation in natural resource management. The two group ranches that formed Sera Wildlife Conservancy have transitioned to register as Community Land under the Community Land Act 2016 (CLA). The act has provisions to promote the property rights of women including to equal benefit from community land, of participation in the community assembly and of representation in the community land management committee. Whilst there are challenges in its implementation, the CLA regulations stipulate that the 'two third gender rule' be taken into account in the election of the Community Land Management Committee. This is also the case for the Fisheries Management and Development (Beach Management Units) Regulations 2024. This rule is referring to Article 81 of the Constitution of Kenya that states “not more than two-thirds of the members of elective public bodies shall be of the same gender.”

Participants also pointed to the activities of other actors, both government and NGO's, who have promoted change. As noted above, religion can also be identified as an enabling factor.

- Government policies and legislation
- Activities of other actors
- Religion

“...the enforcement of the constitution of Kenya to have the one third gender rule inclusion of women is slowly being implemented through the county government.”

Sera

“The [Government] brought changes of two-thirds gender rule, laws on child protection that barred child marriage and FGM and ensured that all children attend school.”

Female staff member, Sera

“There is nowhere the Quran prohibits a woman from becoming a leader. If a woman is educated and qualified, she can lead.”

Male, Pate

“Culture and religion should be discussed at length so the community can gain a clear understanding and be able to differentiate.”

Female, Pate

Intersectionality

Biological sex is only one dimension of an individual's identity, with other dimensions including age, education, and marital status, or even where a person was born or lives. These different factors 'intersect' such that an individual may be more or less marginalised or discriminated against based on their intersection (Lau, 2020).

The evidence points to age being a significant factor in exclusion in a number of ways. In both sites, young people feel that they are excluded from conservancy activities, and the effect is multiplied for young women or girls. Where efforts have been made to promote the inclusion of youth it is significant to note that youth is often interpreted as meaning young men and not young women. Age also affects women's ability to participate; older women are more likely to have the resources, connections and time to be able to participate.

Age also affects individual attitudes, with older men in Sera perceived as being more receptive to change than younger men. Samburu men belong to age sets, and the age set an individual belongs to appears to influence their attitudes towards women, at least in terms of the norms they adhere to. Junior elders (currently the Lkishami age set) and morans are perceived to be the most resistant to change, although there is evidence of change as well as opportunity in terms of the relationship between morans and their older female relatives, especially their mothers.

Men are more likely to have attended and/or completed their primary and secondary education than women, and those in the more rural and remote areas (both boys and girls) are less likely to have attended school. It is easier for those located in towns, and for those with more education, to get information about and participate in conservancy activities; rural women in particular are less likely to receive information and have knowledge of conservancy activities and processes. Men in rural areas, even if they have not completed their education, are more likely to have travelled out of their home area and be exposed to information including from external (to the conservancy) sources. Inequitable gender norms and practices are generally more deeply entrenched in rural areas.

Whilst there were differences between the two sites, there were also some commonalities including marital status, disability and wealth. All of the factors identified, across both sites, influence the extent to which individual or groups of women (or men) participate in and benefit from the conservancy and other opportunities and resources. They also influence resistance or openness to challenge harmful norms.

- Age
- Age sets
- Clan
- Education
- Location
- Marital status
- Disability
- Wealth and social connections

“Widows sometimes may not know when meetings are held especially meetings not communicated in advance like the government meeting that was called to discuss the sale of community land, some women may not have heard about the first meeting.”

Male, Sera

“The Lkishami men are also changing but they hide this especially fetching water, they don’t want to do it openly.”

Female, Sera

“There is a need to expand the SAA training to the elderly men and women since the youth are under the elders who are still controlled by harmful social norms and cultural beliefs.”

Male, Pate

Conclusion

This theory of change provides evidence of the pathways through which improved gender equity, through a process of reflection and action to tackle harmful gender norms, can lead to improvements in governance and natural resource management decision making. This, in turn, will lead to improved conservation outcomes. It also maps the enabling factors and barriers that facilitate or hinder progress towards gender equity in the two case study sites, and the intersection of various social characteristics such as education, age, or marital status.

The data we have gathered shows that changes in the three dimensions of gender equity are mutually reinforcing. For example, **recognition** of women’s time burdens leads to changes in the **distribution** of labour in the household which allows women to have more time to **participate** in conservation activities as well as employment and other activities outside of the home. These changes also lead to improvements in women’s confidence, with reinforcing effects for gender equity. Following the same example, women whose value in society is **recognised** feel more confident to vie for leadership positions, increasing their **participation** with knock on effects for **distribution** of costs and benefits, both directly (in terms of positions held) and indirectly through decisions that are made.

We recognise gender dynamics vary across geographies and cultures and societal change to undo harmful gender norms, and promote more equitable alternatives, is a long-term project. Although the evidence for this theory of change is currently based on data from one year of action in each of two sites, the results on gender equity and improved perceptions of conservation demonstrate significant impact. Furthermore, there are indications that the depth

of personal change is significant and that the project has generated commitment and motivation for sustained and ongoing change.

“The culture of not allowing men, women, and youth to mix never allowed gender transformation to take place and it propagated the intergeneration handover of the negative gender norms, but nowadays such culture is changing and people are realising that each group has a voice to transform our community.”

Male community member, Sera

“If I got this information earlier my wife could be a ranger now because, in the past, I could not allow my wives to participate out of Samburu norms. I sometimes feels like crying when I think how I have lost a lot, just by self-oppression because of ignorance.”

Male board member, Sera

“I saw and understood that women are humans with feelings.”

Male, Pate

In addition to contributing to the growing evidence base of the benefits of promoting gender equity in conservation, we hope that this theory of change can be useful for other conservationists seeking to improve gender equity within their project contexts. Whilst some of the themes and factors are specific to the Sera or Pate contexts, there will also be many that are relevant or generalisable to other contexts.

References

Bennett, N. (2016) *Using perceptions as evidence to improve conservation and environmental management*. Conservation Biology, 30(3): 582-592.

Cookson, Tara Patricia, et al. (2023) *Social Norms, Gender and Development: A Review of Research and Practice*.

Dawson, N., Martin, A., Danielsen, F. (2018) *Assessing Equity in Protected Area Governance: Approaches to Promote Just and Effective Conservation*. Conservation Letters, 11(2): 1-8.

Franks, P. and Schreckenber, K. (2016). *Advancing equity in protected area conservation* Available at <https://www.iied.org/17344iied>

Harper, C et al. (2020) *Gender, power and progress: How norms change* London: ALIGN/ ODI

Lau, J. (2020) *Three lessons for gender equity in biodiversity conservation*. Conservation Biology, 34(6): 1589-1591.

Leisher, C., Booker, F., Agarwal, B., Day, M., Matthews, E., Prosnitz, D., Roe, D., Russell, D., Samberg, L., Sunderland, T.C.H., Temsah, G., Wilkie, D. (2017) *A preliminary theory of change detailing how women's participation can improve the management of local forests and fisheries*.

Available at <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/rgakw>