



Fund for Innovation  
and Transformation

Fonds pour l'innovation  
et la transformation



ST. MARY'S ROAD UNITED CHURCH

# Engaging Culture and Community to Address and Change Persistent Harmful Gender Norms and Attitudes.

## Context

Zimbabwe ranked 150 out of 189 in both the 2020 Human Development and the Gender Inequality Index. Women are systematically excluded from access, control, and decision-making power from the household to community level. Their political participation is ranked in the bottom 25% of all African countries. Because women's work is often based in the home, their contributions and role in economy and society are invisible and undervalued. As a result, women are overworked and face increased instances of domestic conflict, gender-based violence and disempowerment.

## The Innovative Solution

Supported by FIT, St. Mary's Road United Church tested a community-designed innovation that redefined masculinity and associated norms in a positive, supportive way at the family and community levels. This included the Men Can Cook competition, a skills-based learning taught by women, and the Men's Forum on Gender, a platform for discussing norms and attitude shifts through modeling intent, rather than mandating behaviour.

## Advancing Gender Equality

The Gender Equality Strategy aimed to remove barriers to gender equity through local contextual appropriate solutions with effective engagement of both men and women in the testing process. Local Gender Champions (M&W) lead by example and used traditional respectful dialogue and activities to show alternative ways of considering what it means to be a Shona man/woman.



**COUNTRY**  
Zimbabwe

**AMOUNT**  
\$210,000

**TESTING PERIOD**  
13 months  
Ended Nov 2022



**SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY**



**GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE (GE3)**



**THEME: SOCIAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS**

# Testing Framework

Testing was done through two control and three intervention groups and included verification exercises with spouses, family members and key stakeholders including local government officials, traditional leaders', chiefs, and village heads.

## Results and Impact

The test group, which received both treatment variables, showed the strongest changes in behaviour related to gender equality. This included participating in household chores, men advocating for gender equity, women having more time and opportunity to engage in other non-household activities and women gaining access to family assets. The innovation test proved that the combination of both skills training and dialogue, when both genders are involved, is the best way to cement stronger, broader and sustainable change inside and outside the family. The innovation also had the unintended positive outcome of reducing gender-based violence in the home. Results confirmed that transformational gender equity can be dramatically increased in a short period of time when local contextually appropriate material and gender equity components are carefully integrated and implemented.

## Key Lessons

1. The hypothesis proved that for transformative change to happen in the family, engagement of men must involve simultaneous involvement and input from the women in their lives.
2. Having wives at both the forums and the cooking components meant that spouses were working together and thus exposed to tools to improve their relationship and their family. This repetition of time working together changed the way the couples interacted with each other building a positive pattern and leading to new habits of family interaction.
3. There was a focus on remaining contextually appropriate and giving power to the participants during the testing process when decisions were needed. This approach resulted in trust and high levels of participation.

“The forum exposed me to an alternate way of looking at the family, a new group of friends, a group of men from my community that were doing well and had the respect of their wives, families and neighbors through thoughtfulness and sharing.” - Competition participant, man

“I am doing well now because I am stress free, my husband used to block my success but now he is the facilitator and initiator. I am proud.” - Innovation participant, woman

### PARTNER ORGANIZATION

SCORE Against Poverty

### TARGET PARTICIPANTS

120 participants (60 men, 60 women)

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

[Fund for Innovation and Transformation](#)

[St. Mary's Road United Church](#)

### ABOUT FIT

The Fund for Innovation and Transformation supports Canadian small and medium-sized organizations (SMOs) testing innovative solutions that advance gender equality in the Global South.



In partnership with

Canada

