

## Thesis abstract

# Investigating changes related to gender equality in water, sanitation and hygiene: transformative approaches and opportunities

Jessica MacArthur

Abstract of a thesis submitted to University of Technology Sydney

The (re-)emergence of a gender-transformative model of development has challenged the narrow women's empowerment paradigm to engage in a more nuanced conversation in development research and practice. Gender-transformative programs aim to transform gender dynamics and structures within and through development interventions. In parallel, the evaluation field has been considering opportunities to apply gender-transformative approaches to assessments. Hence, there is both opportunity and imperative to investigate how assessments can meaningfully explore and foster gender-transformative change in the development sector. This inquiry focused on a particular subsector of development — water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) — which is in the early stages of engagement with gender-transformative approaches. This methodological inquiry adopted a collaborative action research approach and partnered with a sanitation program in Cambodia to investigate opportunities for innovative and qualitative forms of gender-transformative assessments. Through a compilation of eight studies, the inquiry reviewed, designed, piloted and evaluated practitioner-focused gender-transformative assessment approaches. The inquiry focused on the creative use of two visual storytelling assessment practices:

micronarratives and photovoice. First, the inquiry critically reviewed relevant literature from international development and the WASH sector, to investigate methodological and conceptual alignment with a gender-transformative approach. Second, the inquiry clarified the extent to which assessments can be designed to meaningfully explore gender-transformative forms of social change. Last, the inquiry considered how assessments can foster gender-transformative change by strengthening their transformative potential. Together the eight studies clarify definitions of a gender-transformative approach in the WASH sector and provide insights on how to strengthen the transformative potential of assessments. The studies indicate that design considerations such as respondent-led interpretation and centring embodiment, can help programs to meaningfully explore gendered change. The studies suggest that gender-transformative potential in an assessment approach requires: (1) assessment quality, in terms of overall assessment rigour; (2) efficacy to ensure elicitation of gender-related insights; (3) inclusivity throughout all stages of the assessment process; (4) reflexivity to be cognisant of power dynamics and structures; and, last, (5) a purposefully transformative objective in pursuit of gender-transformative change. Throughout the thesis, I argue

for the purposeful integration of investigation and intervention, in an expanded definition of the transformative paradigm of research and evaluation. I suggest that gender-related assessments provide a distinct opportunity to raise critical reflection and catalyse critical action amongst both participants and evaluators. Adopting the methodological advancements and insights generated through this thesis, the WASH

sector has potential to better explore and support gender-transformative change.

Dr Jessica (Jess) MacArthur  
Institute for Sustainable Futures  
University of Technology Sydney

E-mail: [jessica.macarthur@uts.edu.au](mailto:jessica.macarthur@uts.edu.au)

URL: <http://hdl.handle.net/10453/169182>