



Gender Norms and Agency in the Ethiopian Agriculture Sector



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development



Key messages

- ▶ Investment and robust studies are needed to strengthen the body of evidence and facilitate gender mainstreaming in agricultural development;
- ▶ Restrictive gender norms remain one of the most significant obstacles for women's agricultural innovation. Moreover, inequitable intra-household resource allocation affects food security at the household and national level;
- ▶ When women try to innovate they are watched more keenly and judged more harshly than men, and are less likely to be reached by extension workers due to social norms;
- ▶ Transformative methodologies such as Community Conversations create more egalitarian gender relations and social harmony and should be used in the agriculture extension system;
- ▶ Strengthening women's ability to make effective choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes will bring positive changes to household food security and agricultural productivity.

Methodology

We asked 275 individuals (99 adult women, 96 adult men, 39 adolescent girls, 41 adolescent boys) in four Ethiopian wheat growing villages about gender norms relating to behavior, innovation, technology, and agency (i.e., the capacity to make choices and act upon them). Seven qualitative data collection instruments were used, including single-sex focus group discussions, participatory instruments, and semi-structured individual interviews.¹

Why is addressing gender norms in agriculture important?

Female household heads face greater barriers than their male counterparts. Additionally, 56 percent of women engaged in the agricultural sector are unpaid workers, and 65 percent of women work for a family member.² Women perform twice as much unpaid work (304 minutes) as men (141 minutes) per day.³ People should have the same opportunities to improve their lives, regardless of their sex, marital status, religion, age, etc. When people are held back by unequal behavior norms, their incentives to work harder are reduced because – regardless of the effort they put in – they will not succeed on par with those who are fully included by society. Over time, their opportunities and motivation reduce, and fatalism ensues.

1. For more information see: http://42q77i2rw7d03m-frd11pvzz.wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GENNOVATE-Methodology_Feb2018_FINAL.pdf

2. Central Statistical Agency [Ethiopia] and ICF International. (2012). Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey 2011. Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Calverton, Maryland, USA: Central Statistical Agency and ICF International.

3. UNDP 2015. Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)

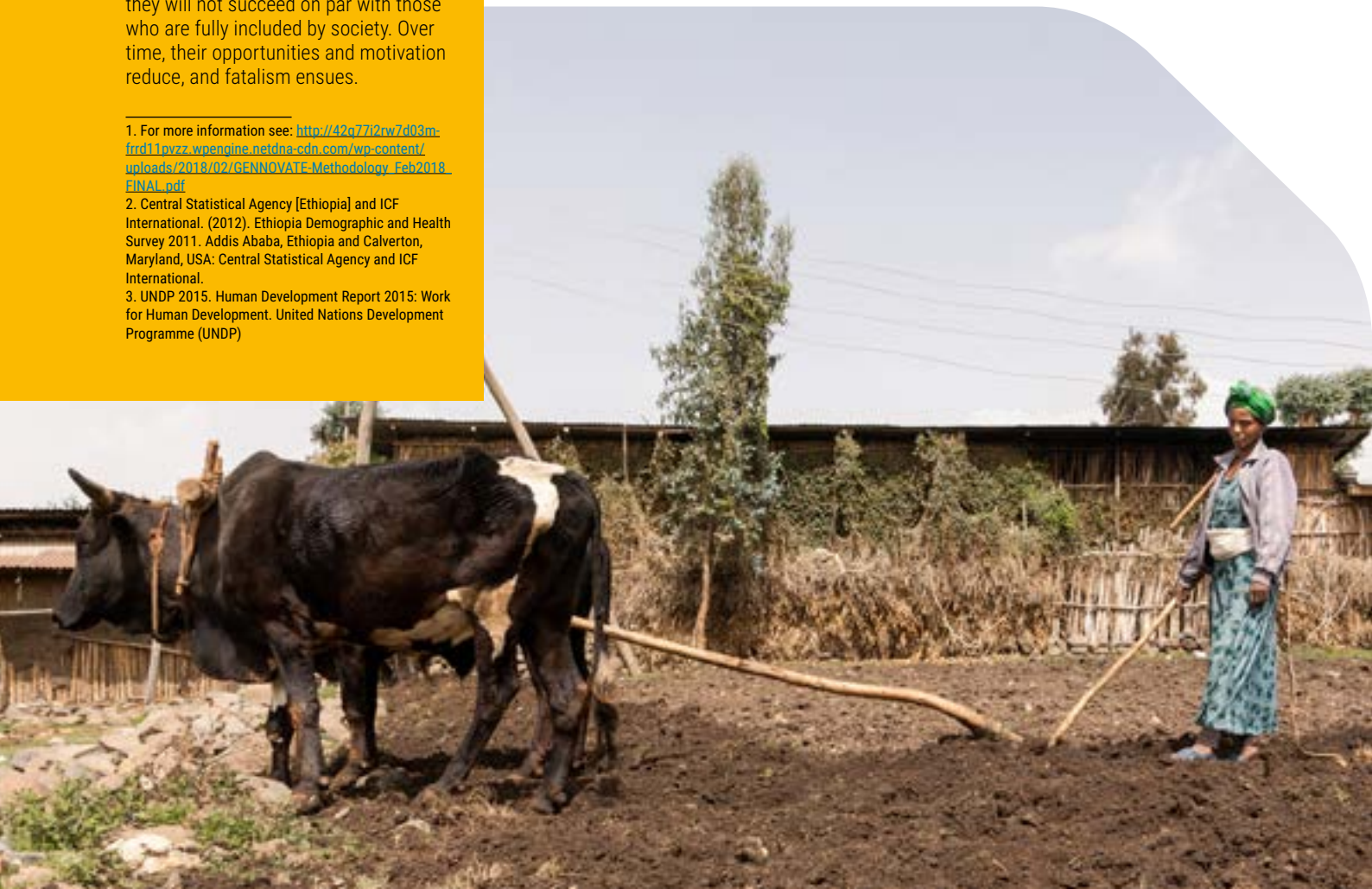
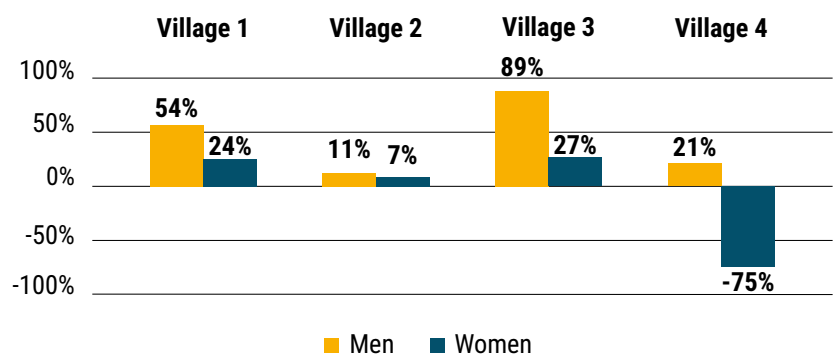
Results

1. Inequitable poverty reduction

Study participants were asked to estimate the percentage of households within their community that have moved from below to above the poverty line established for each village within the last ten years (Fig. 1). Male respondents consistently reported higher rates of movement out of poverty compared to female respondents. These results could indicate uneven intra-household dynamics whereby men do not share information and resources with their

spouse, and/or it may reflect women's lack of mobility and opportunity to earn income. It is not clear why the women respondents in Village 4 estimated that 75 percent of households in the community have fallen from above to below the poverty line in the last 10 years. As women are predominantly responsible for feeding the family and ensuring their children's welfare, more research is required to better understand intra-household resource allocation.

Figure 1. Moving out of poverty (2004-2014)



2. Prevailing gender norms around domestic and farming roles

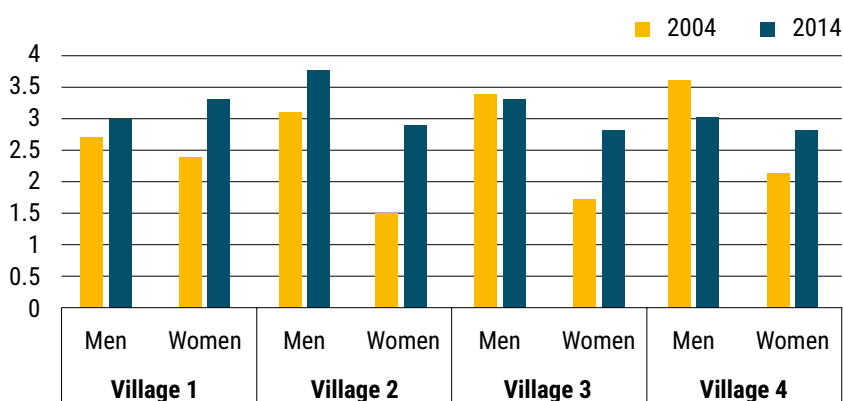
Existing gender norms and gender inequality are preventing poverty reduction. When asked about the qualities of a “good wife”, women commonly cited socially acceptable behavior, her relationship (bonding) with her husband, and fulfilling family responsibilities. Men, however, had a longer and more detailed list of expectations that focused on housework, care duties, and income/farm work. Contradictory expectations make it difficult for women to fulfil the role of a “good wife”; for example, they are meant to stay at home but also earn an income and be a good farmer. According to both male and female respondents, being a “good husband” involves living in harmony with one’s family,

helping wives with household chores, working hard to improve the household’s livelihood, not abusing substances, and being a role model for children.

Respondents in all four villages strongly associated “good husbands” with the productive sphere and economic provision, and “good wives” with the reproductive sphere. Women’s productive contributions continue to be framed as “helping their husbands”. This framing masks women’s contributions to farming and reduces their capacity to gain recognition as farmers, let alone as participants and potential agents of change in agricultural innovation and rural transformation.

3. Decision-making

Figure 2. Power and freedom to make decisions (2004-14)



During a ranking exercise with better off villagers, women in all four villages reported significantly larger increases from 2004 to 2014 in their perceived power and freedom to make important life decisions, compared to male respondents (fig. 2). However, women do not have the freedom to choose when and how much of the crops to sell, or what to do with the money. Financial decisions are made by husbands, with little consultation with their wives. Women rarely make decisions about their own lives – not as young women, nor when they marry – but men’s power increases with marriage.

To maintain the ideal of a “good wife”, women do not ask their husbands for more resources, instead taking grains in secret to manage household food security. Women consider this stealing rather than their right. Some villages have introduced farm gate selling, which reduces women’s access to the stored harvest and reduces household food security (though it gives instant cash to the husband).

This highlights the need to incorporate gender analyses within market interventions.

Village one and two had improvements for men and women and these communities had experienced a transformative methodology known as Community Conversations.⁴ Participants reported that this process contributed to more egalitarian gender relations and cohesion. These respondents felt that each generation should participate in this process as they learned so much from it.

Meanwhile, a plethora of information on agricultural innovations, combined with the speed of technological change, economic dynamism, and intra-household gender dynamics is making it difficult for men to make decisions. More studies are needed to better understand the details of these findings and how community conversations can assist.

4. A community conversation is a facilitated approach which helps communities to discuss issues of importance to them. It involves a process of self-reflection and learning and usually tackles gender issues in some form.



4. Female-headed households

Female household heads tend to depend on male relatives and/or an older son to make important decisions. This is primarily because women who are divorced or widowed have not previously had the chance to practice decision making, nor do they understand the economic consequences of decisions. Furthermore, extension agents (usually men) do not want to be seen speaking to single women because the community will gossip about them having an affair. This makes it very hard for single women to learn new agricultural practices and the quality of their land may deteriorate before they gain the necessary capacity and skills.

Female household heads often face discouraging and embarrassing comments from close family members and the community whenever they take initiatives to try new things.

Men often advise female-headed households to rent out or sharecrop their farm (sometimes with unfair arrangements) instead of farming it themselves. This reduces women's confidence as farmers. Extension workers should be encouraged to reach female household heads and women in male-headed households (before women become single). Greater awareness about the challenges faced by single women is also needed.

5. Gender norms and agricultural innovation

Women's innovative capabilities are affected by a unique set of factors (fig. 3). Self-confidence and knowledge and skill training are the most important factors supporting women's innovation, while discouraging words from others and financial constraints are the factors most likely to hinder innovation. Meanwhile for men, the primary factors supporting innovation are the availability of financial resources and presence of farmer role models, while the main factor hindering innovation is financial constraints (fig. 4). Male respondents also reported social factors such as fear (risk aversion), jealousy, disrespect, laziness, and old-fashioned thinking, as hindrances to innovation, which highlights the need to also focus on the social lives of male farmers (while still tackling the traditional constraints of access to finance and knowledge).

Figure 3. Socio-cultural factors that support and hinder innovation for women

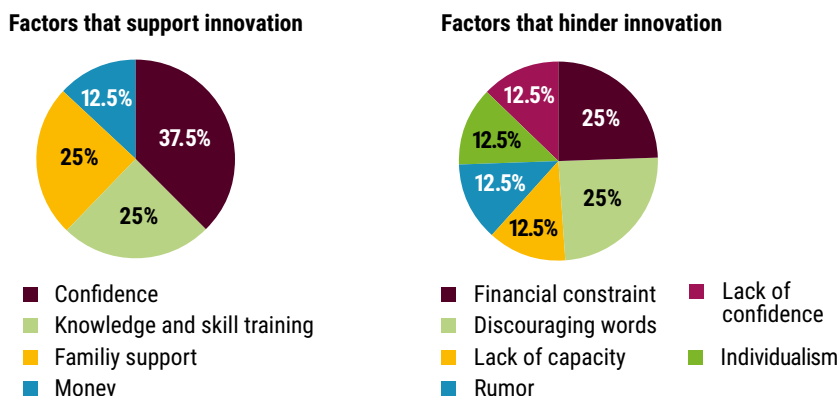
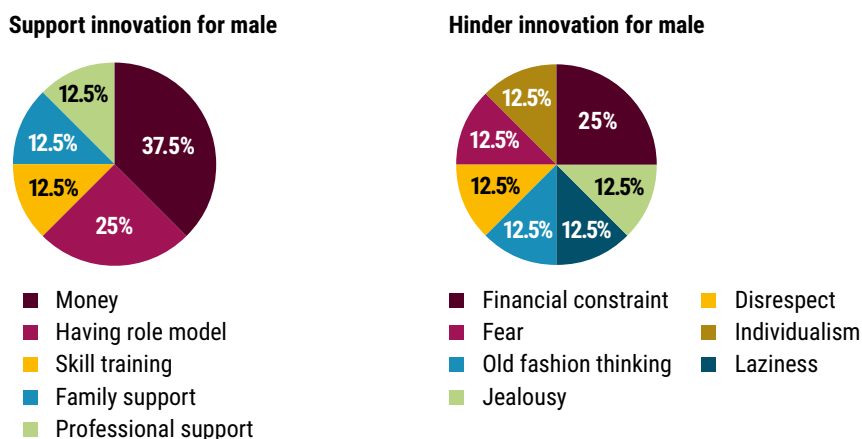


Figure 4. Socio-cultural factors that support and hinder innovation for men



Conclusions

Restrictive gender norms have a negative impact on women's ability to innovate and be productive. Gender inequality negatively impacts the national economy, food and nutrition security, women's wellbeing, and child welfare, but can be reduced by building on existing good practices and creating equitable learning and sharing platforms. As part of this, extension workers, policymakers, and researchers need to more comprehensively address gender inequities in their work.

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