



Gender Norms and Agency in the Pakistan Agriculture Sector

Key messages

- ▶ Investment and robust studies are needed to strengthen the body of evidence and facilitate gender mainstreaming in agricultural development;
- ▶ Women's contributions to the agriculture sector (e.g. homebased livestock rearing and vegetable farming) are devalued by extension workers and often not considered 'agriculture';
- ▶ Rural women are shut out of decisions, consultations, and research at the local and national levels;
- ▶ Household resources and information are not equally shared;
- ▶ Women must seek men's permission to be economically productive and mobile, which reduces their opportunity to capitalize on market dynamics;
- ▶ Existing gender inequities put women in a disadvantaged position in the agriculture sector and hampers their economic contribution to the household and nation.



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development



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Methodology

We asked 351 respondents (140 adult women, 137 adult men, 37 females aged 16-24, and 40 males aged 16 to 24) from poor and middle-income households in six wheat-growing villages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and Baluchistan 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?

Approximately 75 percent of women and girls in Pakistan are employed in the agriculture sector, 60 percent of whom are unpaid (and often shoulder additional unpaid caring roles).² Women's unpaid work is valued at PKR 683 billion, or 2.6 percent of GDP.³

Some of the strongest forces behind persistent gender gaps are harmful social norms and stereotypes that limit expectations of what women can or should do. This ultimately limits Pakistan's food security and growth.⁴ The McKinsey Global Institute's 2015 report, *The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth*, estimates \$100 billion in annual impact to Pakistan's economy from gender equality.

1. For more information see: http://42q77i2r-w7d03mfrd11pvzz-wpengine.netdna-cdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/GENNOVATE-Methodology_Feb2018_FINAL.pdf
 2. UNwomen 2018, *Rural Women in Pakistan Status Report 2018*, Islamabad, Pakistan.
 3. Ibid.
 4. Unilever, see: <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/11/why-is-gender-equality-in-decline-and-how-can-we-reverse-it/>

Results

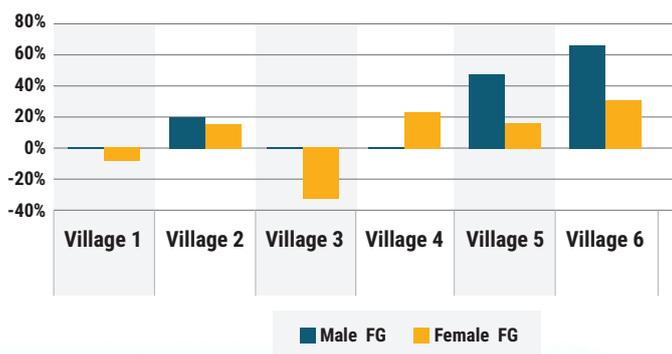
1. Inequitable Poverty Reduction

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). In villages two, five, and six, men reported higher percentages of movement out of poverty than women.

The men attributed this reduction in poverty to infrastructure development, improved farming techniques (fertilizers, new seeds, mechanization), and income diversification. Men in villages one and three reported no change in the percentage of households below the poverty line. Meanwhile, women in villages one and three estimated that 9 percent and 33 percent of households, respectively, have fallen from above to below the poverty line in the last ten years.

They attributed this to continued civil unrest, strict gender norms (women's limited physical mobility, lack of participation in marketing, and lack of information on agricultural innovations), and natural disasters (drought and earthquake). In village four, women estimated that 23 percent of households in their village have moved out of poverty, while men reported no change over the last ten years. The range of responses indicates a potential difference in the understanding of poverty by men and women, which may have arisen from a lack of communication and transparency regarding access to and use of resources at the household level. These differences affect children's welfare and household food security and thus more research is required to better understand these dynamics.

Figure 1. Movement out of poverty



2. Prevailing gender norms around domestic and farming roles

In all six villages there was strong normative association of good husbands with the productive sphere and economic provision, while wives were associated with the reproductive sphere. Consequently, women are generally considered to have little knowledge about, or role in, farming. They are deprived of opportunities to learn new agricultural practices and innovate due to social norms such as sex segregation and mobility restrictions. Yet, in many households – especially if impoverished – women contribute to the household economy as much as men. Gender norms and expectations affect men and women differently. The qualities of a “good husband” include being fully responsible for his family, a role model to his children, patient and cool minded,

and able to generate income. A “good wife” should be respectful, obedient, and loyal to her husband and in-laws, and yet is also expected to be knowledgeable in farming, to have a job, and earn money. On the other hand, a woman who works on the farm is considered poor and her husband (who is responsible for his family’s welfare) may feel ashamed if she has to work. This emphasizes the immense challenge women face in meeting gender norms. Moreover, women who mostly work outside the house for pay are less respected by the community and considered ‘untamed’. Gender norms and expectations reveal contradictions and challenges that affect women and men from different socioeconomic backgrounds and age groups differently. This emphasizes the need for heterogenous agriculture programs.



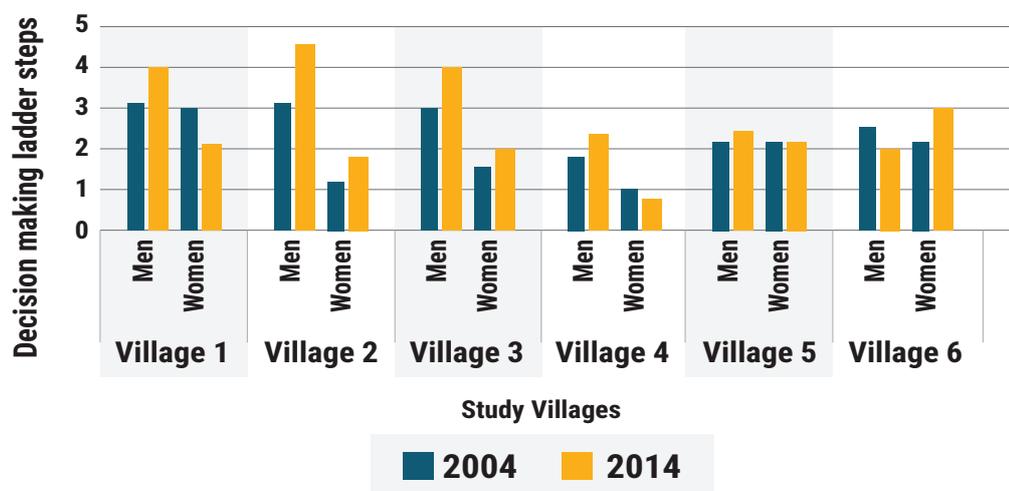
3. Decision-making

Decision-making is dominated by men, especially male elders. In these interviews, respondents were asked to rate the decision-making power of the individuals of their own sex within their village on a scale of 0 to 5 now and ten years ago. Male respondents determined that, over the past ten years, their decision-making power has increased, except in village six (fig. 2).

Female respondents in village one reported decreased decision-making power, while women in village five reported no change.

In other villages, female respondents reported increases in decision-making power over the last ten years, but these increases were smaller than those reported by the men. Women are rarely involved in or consulted about farming decisions.

Figure 2. Decision-making power
Power and freedom to make decisions over a 10-year period (Single sex focus group discussions with middle-class adults)



Furthermore, women often do not have the chance to practice decision-making, nor understand the economic consequences of decisions, before they become widowed. This has devastating effects on female headed households (10 percent of the population) and their children, as well as their land fertility and agricultural productivity.

4. Gendered Innovation

Men's and women's ability to innovate are supported and hindered by different factors, though both genders reported that they are affected by financial capacity. Female respondents reported that financial capacity, plus their access to education, knowledge, and skills are the two most important factors that facilitate learning about and experimenting with new agricultural innovations (fig. 3).

Men consider resources such as land and financial capacity as the two most important factors that support innovation. However, women uniquely listed single sex vocational training, power and support from friends and the community. While men learn from other farmers, women prefer formal training and support from friends and the community to innovate.

Figure 3. Factors that support innovation for men and women

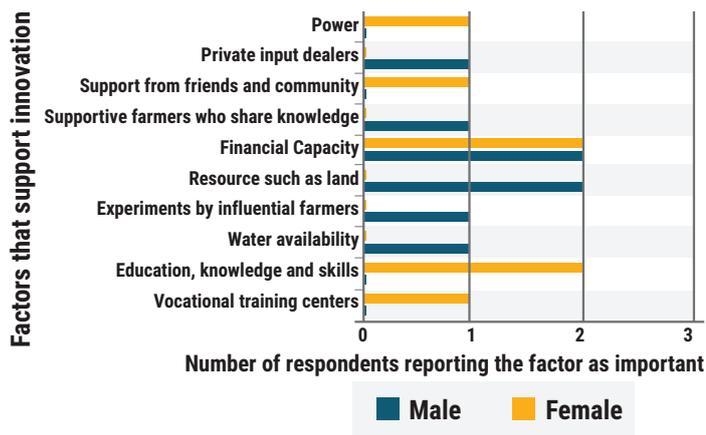
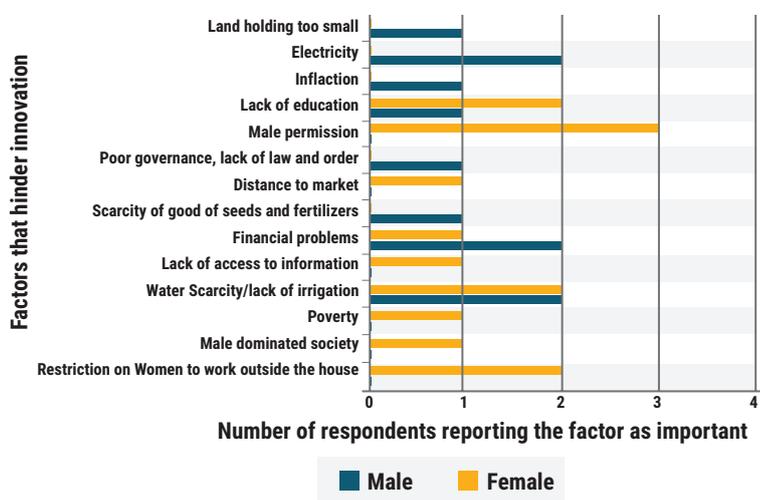


Figure 4. Factors that hinder innovation for men and women



When asked about barriers to innovation, women's responses related largely to gender issues (need for male permission, mobility restrictions, a lack of education, and water scarcity), while men were more affected by infrastructure (banks, irrigation, electricity) (fig. 4).

Socio-cultural factors and gender norms (e.g. sex-segregation, mobility restrictions) impact women's ability to learn and innovate (which are not often considered by extension workers). This affects women's participation in agriculture and the benefits they accrue.

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 policy initiatives that raise awareness on gender inequality and emphasize female headed household participation and husband and wife co-participation in extension activities. This will protect women and children's food security, should male labor become unavailable. Employing more female extension workers would send a message that agriculture involves women and men, and that the government supports women's mobility. Agricultural research for development professionals, policymakers, and extension workers should consult women more, advocate for women's participation in extension activities, promote gender equality, and collect more data on women's role in agriculture.

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