Opportunities for strengthening gender and social equity in Afghanistan’s wheat sector

by Kristie Drucza
## Acknowledgements

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This analytic overview provides agricultural development partners with a synthesis of the research and policy environment necessary to improve wheat agricultural productivity and address food insecurity for more of Afghanistan’s citizens using a gender-sensitive and inclusive approach. It outlines how an insufficient focus on the barriers women face continues to have a significant impact on the nation’s agricultural productivity, economic growth and food security. The Afghan Constitution declares women and men to have equal rights and privileges. However, the reality is different. This inequality is an ongoing barrier to economic growth in the agricultural sector.

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) is committed to improving gender equality. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani announced in 2015 that “women’s rights are a top priority.” There is a National Priority Program for the Economic Empowerment of Women and a reform agenda to increase women’s mobility, improve markers of gender equality, capture sex-disaggregated data and reduce or eliminate regulations that block women’s access to credit and markets.

Agriculture is the greatest driver of the national economy, providing 58 percent of Afghanistan’s GDP. Eighty percent of Afghanistan’s 35 million people live in rural areas, and agriculture is the main source of income for more than half of the rural population. Afghanistan’s agriculture extension services were established in the 1970s, but the system is under-resourced and inefficient.

Poverty is worsened by climate change, which has led to drought and low and erratic rainfall. Persistent conflict in many areas of the country has destroyed irrigation systems and challenged farmers who struggle to make a living on agriculture that is not opium based.

In 2016, less than a third of Afghans felt the country was moving in the right direction.

Climate-driven food shortages force many families to marry off their daughters to generate income via the bridal dowry. Persistent changes in weather patterns are breaking the link between livelihoods and agriculture and forcing tight-knit family units to separate. Nearly 45 percent of the population is food insecure. Afghanistan has one of the fastest demographic growth rates in the world. Its population growth rate was around 3 percent from 2010-2015, and the country has high levels of fertility with an average of more than 5 children per woman. Feeding Afghanistan’s growing population is a key challenge for the GoIRA.

The agriculture sector needs to align with the national nutrition agenda. Stunting and malnutrition are serious problems in Afghanistan. Very little meat is consumed due to scarcity and the prohibitive cost. Micronutrient deficiencies contribute to malnutrition among women and adolescent girls. When women and girls are nutrient deficient, there are generational effects on mental and physiological development that lead to impacts on education, employment and the broader economy.

Agriculture employs a large number of women, yet female labor in the formal sector is underutilized. Education and literacy are necessary to encourage adoption of new agriculture innovations, such as improved wheat seeds. Education is also required to appropriately manage key inputs like fertilizer. On average, women have 4.7 fewer years of education than men. This disparity means women will have a harder time adopting new agriculture techniques necessary to increase productivity. Fortunately, Afghanistan’s policies aim to reduce barriers for women and girls, and especially in education. Creating a more inclusive and gender equitable wheat sector is recognized as important to the nation’s own development agenda. Despite the number of development challenges, the Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) sets standards for inclusion and gender equity from 2017 to 2021. There is also a Citizens’ Charter National Priority Program that aims to improve the reach of government services, basic rural infrastructure and agriculture services in order to reduce poverty and violence. GoIRA signed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which aim to “leave no one behind” and achieve gender equality.

Life expectancy

- 62.8 years for men
- 65.4 years for women

Early marriage

- 17% of women ages 15 to 19 are married
- 3% of men ages 15 to 19 are married

perceptions of agriculture and nutrition policies and practice:
This analytic overview summarizes evidence collated from a research for development (R4D) project that ran from 2014 to 2018. The project sought to improve the focus on gender and social equity in wheat-related research and development in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Ethiopia. This overview collates evidence from:

- A literature review of 45 documents on women’s role in agriculture from 1990 to 2016;
- Qualitative research with 260 farmers (132 men and 128 women) from wheat-growing households across four sites in the Kabul and Nangarhar provinces;
- Analysis of publicly-available national data.

A “wheat-growing household” is defined as a household where more than 50 percent of the household’s income comes from wheat.


Methodology

Wheat in Afghanistan

This overview looks specifically at development of the wheat sector as a method to improve food security. Total wheat production has increased from 3.5 million tons per year between 1990 and 2009 to 4.5 million tons per year in 2016-17. Afghanistan is one of the world’s highest per-capita wheat consumers. Wheat supplies about 60 percent of an average Afghan’s caloric intake. Wheat is therefore important to the nation’s food security and nutrition.

Wheat farmers face many challenges in Afghanistan. Approximately 60 to 70 percent of the total crop area of the country is planted with wheat, yet the country has to import wheat from Pakistan to meet its food security needs. Afghan wheat farmers have experienced a reduction in average wheat seasonal rainfall. Rising temperatures are likely to cause additional challenges to wheat production. Other key challenges faced by Afghan farmers include smaller land plots, water shortages due to poor irrigation systems, insufficient access to credit, minimal mechanization, insufficient outreach in agricultural and veterinary extension services and poor access to markets.


The average size of owned irrigated land decreased by one-quarter over almost a decade, from 6.7 jeribs (1.3 ha.) in 2007-08 to 4.9 jeribs (1 ha.) in 2016-17.\(^{30}\)

Noting the importance of wheat to the nation’s development, the GoIRA has set a target to increase wheat yields by 26 percent and achieve self-sufficiency by 2022.\(^{31}\) To achieve self-sufficiency, GoIRA plans to rehabilitate the strategic grain reserve and establish a Grain Reserve Board to support farmers, add 110,000 hectares of cultivated land, halve post-harvest losses and develop a standardized wheat seed market.\(^{32}\) Yet, there are reports that “improved” wheat seed are not locally or culturally appropriate. For example, some of these improved seeds require more fertilizers and pesticides than local varieties, which introduces prohibitive cost barriers for the poorest quintile of farmers.\(^{33}\) The best way to achieve wheat self-sufficiency in an inclusive manner is disputed in the available literature.

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Gender relations in Afghanistan’s rural areas

Gender is an intersectional analytical category co-constituted with other categories such as age, ethnic membership, religion, status and so on. How these social categories converge varies from context to context. This section summarizes the available literature and reveals the need for more in-depth analysis of internal household dynamics to improve agricultural productivity. Afghanistan is a country where cultural notions of honor and gendered ideals of personal integrity are central to the citizenry, yet the literature available to help understand these realities is scant. The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap report does not have enough data to rank Afghanistan, highlighting the lack of data in the country. The United Nations Development Programme’s (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index ranked Afghanistan 153 out of 160 countries in 2017,\(^{34}\) emphasizing the country’s lack of gender equality and the magnitude of the challenge to address inequality.

store the harvest and process and grind wheat inside the household. In times of food shortage, they mix the wheat flour with barley flour and legume flour. Thus, women are responsible for feeding the family and managing the household’s nutrition.

Women also perform the largest portion of unpaid domestic work. Additionally, in poor households, women work on wheat fields during harvest time, but frequently alongside their husbands due to security concerns. Given that most agriculture extension workers are men, they are unable to reach women due to gender norms relating to sex segregation. Considering women’s roles remain hidden, the necessity of teaching women new agriculture processing and storage techniques is overlooked.

Understanding gender norms connected to masculinity is essential to recognizing ways to appropriately strengthen gender equality. Bahri (2014) found that Afghan men resist a Western notion of gender equality in a variety of ways and that their points of view are often ignored by development actors. Employment for men is scarce, and masculinity is threatened by women adopting what are perceived as traditionally male roles. In Afghanistan, masculine norms embody power and promote roles that stem from religion, such as “breadwinner,” decision maker, protector of women, head of the family and occupier of public space.

Reaching women with agriculture extension services will improve food security and agricultural productivity. Women are involved in wheat production, but their tasks are often less visible than men’s. Women clean and prepare the seed, separate wheat and chaff, and store the harvest and process and grind wheat inside the household. In times of food shortage, they mix the wheat flour with barley flour and legume flour. Thus, women are responsible for feeding the family and managing the household’s nutrition.

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Women 73% as percentage of workforce

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Like with women’s labor, expressions of female power occur in the private domain of family. A woman’s absence from the public domain is not the same as subservience. Being a wife and mother are central to a female’s identity and thus prioritized. Anthropologists show that women’s leadership and decision-making still occurred during the oppressive Taliban era. For example, women participated in non-public matchmaking, gift exchange and life-cycle rituals. These roles are important to the politics of alliances, which are often done in private but central to tribal and village life. Hence, women play a greater role in family and community than is often portrayed in the agriculture literature because it remains hidden from external men.

Afghan gender and social relations require more extensive discussion and analysis. Women adopt a range of negotiation strategies that demonstrate a certain degree of power within a household. As Kabeer and Khan (2014:21) explain: "The women in our study did not experience 'Afghan culture' as a static and internally coherent system that lay outside the realm of contestation, but as the lived relationships of everyday life that had to be negotiated on a daily basis from highly unequal positions."

Thus, gender relationships are fluid and negotiations are common; however, specific research methods, like ethnography, are needed to understand the reality of men and women’s lives and the nature of gender relations.

Despite the anthropological literature demonstrating that women do have a degree of authority within households and community relationships, their power should not be overstated. The household can also be a site of control and oppression for some women. A woman’s position within a household and community depends on her namus (face/honor) and can vary by educational attainment, age, family status, ethnicity and other networks. When discussing “family” in Afghanistan, it should be noted that there are polygamous families in diverse ethnic groups as well as household members with diverse ages. Not all women in polygamous marriages have the same rights, responsibilities and privileges. Women want to maintain the status quo as they get older and gain status. This emphasizes the importance of adopting an intersectional view of gender relations and why traditional household dynamics render it difficult to define an Afghan agenda for women’s empowerment.

The literature shows the need for more in-depth analysis of household internal dynamics, which are complex and essential to rural life. Expressions of female power and women’s contribution to household food and nutrition security occur within kinship structures and households. The terms “gender” and “development” used by the West and in aid programs have different meanings for rural Afghans and this varies by age, location, marital status, etc. The family is a unit that requires further scholarship.

41. Ibid.
Gender norms represent perspectives on what gender relations “should” be like and how individuals of particular genders “should” behave. While gender norms can be restrictive and limit social interaction, they are constantly challenged and negotiated. Agency is the ability to make choices and act upon them.


The previous section explained the complicated nature of gender relations in Afghanistan and how development projects often make these relationships more rigid. This section will outline results from qualitative data collected from a total of 260 (132 men and 128 women) farmers from wheat-growing households across four sites. This research illuminates how gender norms and agency work together to shape access to, adoption of and benefits from agricultural innovation at the local level. This is important because uptake of innovation is one of the largest drivers necessary to increase national wheat production.

Women’s normative gender roles pose major barriers to their access to information that would help them contribute to agriculture or innovation. Women respondents from all four villages reported that women do not participate in agriculture meetings, training sessions and other public events that promote new technologies, which limits their capacity to be good farmers. As a female farmer explains, “There is not any place for women to go and even if there is, women will not go. It is men’s job to get information.” A male farmer said, “A woman farmer should have knowledge and experience to perform watering and cleaning activities. But women can’t work alone, a woman can’t be a farmer if she is not with her husband.” Whenever a husband is not around or is deceased, it would be the brother or oldest son who would then be responsible for all the farm work and for the family in general. Gender identity and social norms that govern this behavior result in whole communities policing women’s behavior and mobility. That inhibits women’s ability to access information and play more substantive roles in agricultural improvements.
Given that agency is defined as the ability to make choices and act upon them, the data show that men have more agency than women across all ages. Female respondents generally emphasized that a woman’s freedom to make important life decisions depends on whether her husband would allow her to do so. One female respondent summarizes a commonly-heard sentiment during the research:

“It is common in our village that men don’t let women go out and work; men prevent women from working outside and say, “When everybody sees you, it is shame for us if you work outside.” Because of this shame, the men don’t let their women work outside and they mainly stay at home; that is the reason why they [women] are very backward in their thinking as they have no information about anything.”

Some participants explained that young men have more power and freedom to make decisions than their young women counterparts. Young women and girls are under the full control of their parents and brothers when they are single and then remain under the full control of their husbands and in-laws after they get married.

Some respondents portrayed a greater sense of intra-household collaboration than others. According to male and female respondents, the major role women can play to help their households move out of poverty is supporting their husbands through providing constructive advice as well as effectively managing their household budget. As one male respondent explains,

“The main actor of a house’s economy is the woman. She is the best source to understand the betterment of a home’s economy. Consultation from women should always be considered. If men think the comments of their wives are not appropriate, they should still listen to their comments and take action in the most appropriate ways.”

Some male and female respondents reported that women have decision-making roles around how much of the wheat harvest to allocate to household consumption compared with how much the household should sell. This emphasizes the need to collect more data on male and female farmer realities and livelihood strategies.
The research found tension between the normative notion of a “good wife” and a “good female farmer.” Participants were asked about the qualities of a good male and female farmer and a good husband and wife. Almost all characteristics of a “good wife” relate to women’s household and care roles, which are mainly confined to the house. On the other hand, the qualities of a “good female farmer” demand that women play another set of roles, including being able to cultivate well, have experience in farm work, be able to take care of the farm and earn money. A female respondent said, “Men should provide poultry for their wives and buy cows for them to raise at home so that women can earn money from selling their products to help her husband to get ahead.” These statements suggest that some women are ready to take on work to improve their households, and that some men would be supportive. However, there is a lack of opportunity in these communities to earn an income. The barriers facing rural Afghans is a combination of a lack of economic opportunity and the lack of willingness to change traditional gender norms.

There were generally different views between men and women on why households moved out of poverty but agreement on the barriers that trapped households in poverty. According to women respondents, factors that help households move out of poverty include working hard, couples working collaboratively in farming and other income-generating activities and saving money for times of shortage. Men list the following factors: children who graduate from school, working for the government, working on grape vines, vegetable and raisin production, importing goods from Pakistan and receiving remittances from members who temporarily migrate to Dubai, Saudi Arabia and Europe for work. According to male and female respondents, some of the reasons that made households stay trapped in poverty include unemployment or the sudden loss of a job, war, laziness and not working hard, high expenses, husbands being addicted to drugs, women’s lack of control over household income, spending too much, violent husbands and conflicts between co-wives. Thus, the ability to move out of poverty is frequently associated with intra-household relationships and gender norms that dictate coping strategies.
However, other explanations for poverty were associated with religion rather than gender norms, relationships or the economy. For example, many women explained that households had fallen into poverty because someone in the household (usually perceived to be the man) may have eaten food which is considered haram (illegal in Shariah) or took a bribe and earned money illegally or mistreated orphans and widows. Community members believed the consequences for these actions were that Allah would take wealth from him. As a female respondent said, “Someone must have made a mistake [to fall into poverty] ... like not offering prayers or not fasting or remaining proud of wealth.” Another explained that poverty was caused by “not fully thanking Allah for the things that had been given to him.”

Despite the aforementioned religious and gender norms, when it came to asking about why people weren’t innovating (adopting new practices and varieties), answers were associated with a lack of opportunity. The two most important factors that support innovation for men are improvements in the economy and larger farm sizes. Many men identified the lack of provision of improved seeds as a barrier to improving wheat yields. Women ranked financial support, education, consultations with elders and workshops as the most important factors that support innovation. Financial problems and poverty hinder innovation for both women and men.

Additionally, women cited the lack of agriculture information and training as a barrier to improving their economic situation and hinted at their lack of mobility as a barrier. For example, many women reported being beaten for working outside the house and for travelling without male permission but did not necessarily identify this as curbing their opportunity for innovation. Even though religious devotion is considered a contributing factor in poverty, barriers to innovation are associated with governance, gender norms and other cultural practices.

Overall, the research finds that men are generalized as “farmers.” Women add value to agriculture products that men sell. Meanwhile, women’s role in agriculture awaits categorization because they are not considered farmers, nor are they seen as playing a major role in a household’s livelihood. When combined with the lack of economic opportunity, the perpetuation of gender norms provide a barrier to increased agricultural productivity and growth in wheat production. Women have less agency than men and lack access to opportunities that require mobility. Consequently, male and female farmers will require different forms of assistance to be productive, especially to innovate. A better understanding of these issues could help identify opportunities for expanding the benefits of wheat-related innovations to many more women and heterogenous poor households.
The previous section explained how traditional gender norms are connected to religion and a lack of economic opportunity and can limit agriculture innovation and productivity. Therefore, it is important to understand if, and how, gender norms can change. The research also found that, despite sex segregation and fixed gender roles, gender norms governing household relations are changing with rising access to information, education and awareness of women’s rights. The Asia Foundation’s 2016 survey found that “more Afghans, particularly rural Afghan men, support women’s right to vote and women’s right to work outside the home than ever before.”

This is an important and recent change and shows that it is possible for gender norms to evolve. Poverty and necessity are changing gender norms in Afghanistan.\(^\text{50}\)

50. The Asia Foundation (2016).

The literature discusses the best way to change gender norms. As Kabeer and Khan (2014:6) point out, “while we agree that the concept of empowerment lends itself to many different interpretations [...] we would argue that in highly restrictive patriarchal societies like Afghanistan, it needs to be conceptualized in ways that capture the subtle shifts in consciousness, the incremental changes in agency that are likely to signify some shift in underlying power relations - even if these changes fall well short of ‘liberating women from the chains of gender oppression’ [...]”

Thus, the measure of gender equality and women's power used in development programs cannot be too ambitious at first. The “renegotiation of gender roles needs to occur gradually over a period of time” and should avoid contributing to Afghan men’s crisis in masculinity\(^\text{52}\), for this leads to violence.


Of the Afghanistan agriculture projects reviewed by USAID,\(^\text{53}\) there were several examples of overcoming traditional gender taboos to economically empower women. Success stories included women-owned and managed greenhouses\(^\text{54}\) and the Sukhrod Packing Facility, which is run entirely by women and provides packing services to traders who supply fresh fruits and vegetables in Afghanistan and abroad\(^\text{55}\). Additionally, the Mennonite Economic Development Associates’ (MEDA) “Through the Garden Gate” program increased women’s incomes by over 800 percent\(^\text{56}\) by introducing vegetable gardening and marketing support. These projects all initially faced challenges related to gender norms.

55. USAID (2010), p13
For example, the MEDA project had to target and train a group of relatively mobile female farmers to be sales agents. They could only find 12 women. These women then helped the other non-mobile female participants. Rather than assuming that gender norms cannot change, good programs work with the community to find appropriate solutions.

Gender norms are changing in Afghanistan due to poverty and necessity. Some families are ready to change if given opportunities. Good programs are able to find creative ways to work with community norms and structures so that Afghan women can benefit from agriculture projects. Consciously overcoming gender norms can be achieved by focusing on the benefits to the family, rather than focusing on individual economic benefits or rights-based arguments. In line with the literature review, careful, context-specific and nuanced programming that works with families is required.

57. USAID/Afghanistan, Alternative Development Program.

Inclusion and social equity

17% of Afghan women independently own a house compared with approximately 50% of Afghan men

This section argues that it is not only women who need context-specific and nuanced programming. Afghanistan is a highly heterogenous country with more than 40 ethnic groups. Deep pockets of exclusion exist in the country, and inclusive development is a priority for the GoIRA that is enshrined in policy (e.g. the SDGs). Additional areas of exclusion are based on literacy, poverty and land ownership. These can compound gender norms to increase intersectional exclusion of the most marginalized people from any ability to engage in agricultural improvements.

63. USAID (n.d).
Land ownership patterns underpin power relations both within the village and externally and determine whether such relations are reciprocal or hierarchical, resulting in varying levels of exploitation and obligation. For example, wages are often paid in kind rather than cash, and remuneration can be determined by custom, gender, locality and age. Insecure land tenure and land ownership controlled by an elite minority contribute to lower agriculture production rates.

Those who rent land to grow food, or sharecroppers, are rarely as productive as land owners, who can take bigger risks and consider investments in land improvements to be long lasting. Sharecropping is the most common way that rural households gain access to land, oftentimes underpinned by deeply unequal patron-client relations. Hence, class and “land ownership structures and patterns of sharecropping are fundamental to understanding agriculture opportunities.”

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68. USAID (n.d).
Many households are not autonomous but rather embedded in hierarchical relationships.\(^{70}\) Community relationships governed by social and gender norms and patron-client arrangements characterize economic behavior in Afghanistan. They create a barrier for some citizens and a ladder out of poverty for others.\(^{71}\) This means that not all citizens have the same opportunities to advance. Development projects in Afghanistan have to factor community relationships into their designs in order to deliver equitable development solutions that do not create unintended consequences.

Agriculture policies, however, are considered by provincial stakeholders to be donor-driven, ill-designed and the product of top-down processes.\(^{72}\) They are designed with little consultation, insufficient knowledge and a lack of awareness of Afghanistan’s heterogeneity and local realities.\(^{73}\) Agriculture interventions largely support landowners and neglect the livelihood strategies of those without land.\(^{74}\) Adopting an intersectional approach in agriculture policies is needed so that gender, age, location, dependency ratios, literacy and land ownership are deliberately considered. For agriculture research, this means more intra-household research and sampling to ensure hard-to-access areas and excluded population segments are studied.

More evidence around these intersectional drivers of marginalization can ensure more effective and inclusive agricultural interventions to target those who most need them. While there is global documentation on the loss of GDP from inequality,\(^{75}\) the data in Afghanistan is too scarce to make the same analysis. Yet, social equity and inclusion can strengthen agricultural programs and policy by enabling a more nuanced approach that recognizes Afghanistan’s heterogeneity and maximizes the country’s resources. A critical part of increasing agriculture productivity in the wheat sector is changing norms of behavior that are based on tradition, religion, and unequal power relations, rather than evidence and effectiveness.

\(^{70}\) Ibid.
\(^{71}\) Ibid.
\(^{72}\) Poole, et al. (2017). p68.
\(^{73}\) Ibid.
\(^{74}\) Coke (2004).
Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to identify ways to improve the nation’s agricultural productivity, economic growth and food security through gender and social equity. Afghanistan faces a number of major development challenges, including increasing wheat yields and market access and feeding a growing population. Additionally, reducing gender inequality and social exclusion are priorities for GoIRA. This R4D project collated evidence on women’s role in the wheat sector and examined effective ways to change gender norms and inequality.

Some research has been conducted into how to improve household livelihoods, and large literature gaps remain. These literature gaps pose many questions for future research: How can gender relations change in a manner that protects rights and leads to fairer development? How is masculinity constructed in households where gender relations are more equal? Which sectors have the greatest potential to engage both men and women? Which structures and narratives identify gendered constraints and opportunities for change at the local, national and international level?

Moreover, what role does agriculture, and more specifically wheat farming, play in a rural landowner’s livelihood strategy? Is this conceived of differently by men and women, and by the landless? The situation for women is complex, and so is researching women and delivering equitable outcomes for Afghanistan’s heterogenous population.

An intersectional and inclusive approach should be adopted by all who work in Afghanistan’s agriculture sector. People should have equal opportunities to improve their lives, regardless of their sex, marital status, land size, age or other identities. Gender equality and social inclusion is good for the whole country. When people are held back by unequal behavior norms, their incentives to work harder are reduced because, regardless of their effort, they will not succeed at the same rate as those who are fully included by society. Growth and food security do not reach the most marginalized. In Afghanistan, the intersection of gender with age, ethnicity, religion in the lives of rural women should not be overlooked in any researchers’ analysis.

Limiting women’s access to agriculture information affects their participation in agriculture and their contribution to household food security and nutrition. Not enough is known about gender norms and the role of women in Afghanistan’s agricultural sector, especially in wheat.

Women’s role in the agriculture sector is undervalued and uncategorized but has an impact on food and nutrition through production. Finding new ways to reach women with agriculture extension services and research should be a priority, as this will improve food security and agriculture productivity, provided women’s time burden is not negatively affected.

The review shows that research can be conducted with women. Afghan gender relations are hard to fully capture through only quantitative tools or technocratic development program frameworks. Experimenting with different research methods, such as ethnography, is necessary to capture more nuanced data around gender norms. When development partners try to understand women’s lives through observations and gender-aware questioning, it challenges Western notions of what gender equality means for Afghans. What Western development practitioners see as a negative form of dependency and subordination is not considered the same way in Afghan society. Afghan women should have a larger say in determining their own development direction through participatory methodologies that give them a voice.

While gender norms can be restrictive and limit social interaction, they are challenged and negotiated within some households, often in restrained ways. Based on the findings from the qualitative research conducted in four villages, much work remains to enhance a gender-equitable environment for enhanced agricultural development. Future R4D programs need to address strict gender norms by working closely with religious institutions and traditional leaders and hiring more female enumerators and extension and development agents.

Changing gender norms requires certain ways of operating in Afghanistan. To successfully reach women and men equally through R4D projects, men and women should be targeted as a family, and the economic needs of the household should remain the focus of interventions. Targeting more liberal households and having them support other households is also required. While gender norms are frequently cited as barriers to change, they can be harnessed to deliver improvements for women, men, families and communities. Further scholarship on gender norms and how they change is needed to help Afghanistan meets its own development challenges.
Recommendations for strengthening gender and social equity integration in wheat R4D

Achieving gender equality in Afghanistan’s agriculture sector will take considerable effort and investment, though the benefits are well documented. The following is a list of recommendations for researchers and for donors that fund agriculture research for development to strengthen gender equality and social inclusion in the wheat sector.


For researchers:

► Collate culturally and agro-ecologically specific data on wheat and gender roles (especially in low-productivity areas).
► Collect case studies of villages where women report enhanced rights and understand the history of gender programming in those areas. Identify the appropriate, safe pace of change for men and women.
► Work with women in groups and work with whole families, especially men and boys.
► Employ more female scientists, enumerators and extension agents.
► Involve gender experts in all R4D project designs and in training project teams to ensure equitable benefits, appropriate methodologies and an ability to capture women’s feedback and participation.
► Consider intra-household resource allocation during research and ask women and men from the same household about their food preferences and crop/livelihood choices.
► Understand which research methodologies and approaches (e.g. participatory, qualitative, purposive sampling) best capture gender norms and exclusion dynamics in agriculture.
► Understand what forms of protection male and female farmers require to manage price volatility and climate changes.
► Complete positive deviant studies of households where women have more mobility and are educated and identify the way men understand and justify these breaks from social norms.
► Conduct research on culturally-appropriate terminology for “gender” and “development.” Ensure research instruments are field tested with men and women for cognition prior to conducting research.
► Design more gender-sensitive wheat-focused interventions.
► Work with Imams to find religious justification for rising out of poverty and for working in partnership with wives.

For donors:

► Experiment with a portfolio of normatively sensitive, rigorously-monitored approaches that help to empower women to understand the market and financial planning and to receive fair prices for their labor and produce.
► Give scholarships to females to study agriculture sciences.
► Fund local discussions on gender norms and attitudes in the agriculture sector and train the national agriculture research system in gender-responsive qualitative and participatory methods.
► Fund more rural masculinity research.
► Fund a pilot study where men and women from poor rural households are given cash transfers. Study the choices men and women make in terms of expenses and how they contribute to the household’s overall productivity and food-nutrition security.
► Heavily invest in NGOs delivering culturally-appropriate opportunities for women in partnership with men. Require researchers to study the effects and unintended consequences of these interventions.
► Fund small-scale farming pilots where the husband and wife work as partners in farming (e.g. develop a collaborative farming model).
► Emphasize the benefits to the household/family in projects.
► Fund community projects for groups of women – especially the landless.
► Incentivize land reforms.
► Fund nutrition programs in wheat farming districts.