

# Going to scale with community conversations in the highlands of Ethiopia

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CGIAR is a global partnership that unites organizations engaged in research for a food-secure future. The CGIAR Research Program on Livestock provides research-based solutions to help smallholder farmers, pastoralists and agro-pastoralists transition to sustainable, resilient livelihoods and to productive enterprises that will help feed future generations. It aims to increase the productivity and profitability of livestock agri-food systems in sustainable ways, making meat, milk and eggs more available and affordable across the developing world. The Program brings together five core partners: the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) with a mandate on livestock; the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), which works on forages; the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), which works on small ruminants and dryland systems; the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) with expertise particularly in animal health and genetics and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) which connects research into development and innovation and scaling processes.

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# Abbreviations and acronyms

HEARD	Health of Ethiopian Animals for Rural Development
ICARDA	International Center for Research in the Dry Areas
ILRI	International Livestock Research Institute

# Introduction

The ILRI and ICARDA gender team, with support of the Livestock Health flagship and the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock Strategic Investment Fund, in collaboration with regional research centres and district development partners in Ethiopia, facilitated three rounds (modules) of community conversations on gender roles, zoonotic diseases, and women livestock ownership and decision-making since May 2018. This report summarizes the fourth round, which was a closing and dissemination session. The closing session aimed at reviewing and reflecting on the process and participants' learning experiences. It was a participatory and reflective review of community conversations to document change stories of participants, what has worked well, what needs improvement and going forward. Participants were guided through a set of reflective questions to capture and document their experiences and stories about the benefits of the conversation sessions and the changes they have made individually and as a household, community or group.

The closing and sharing sessions were conducted in Ancha Sadicha (5 March 2019) and Hawora Arara (6 March 2019) located in Doyogena district, Southern Nations, Nationalities, and People's Region, Sine Amba (13 March 2019) and Key Afer (14 March 2019) in Menz Gera and Menz Mama districts, Amhara Region. In total, 55 males and 50 females in Doyogena attended the event. In the Menz Gera and Menz Mama districts, 118 males and 45 females participated. Participants included men and women livestock keepers, community leaders, religious leaders, heads of woreda Offices of Agriculture, woreda livestock experts, woreda Communications Affairs officers, woreda Women and Children's Affairs offices and community development agents.

The closing and sharing event also included other community members (those who did not directly take part in the series of sessions) to widely share information and testimonies of changes given by community members who participated in the sessions. It aimed at facilitating community-wide sharing of information, influencing wider community members and engaging discussions around gender relations, zoonotic diseases, control of livestock, and women's access to information and extension services.

In Menz Mama district, the livestock development manager facilitated a district-wide sharing of information. The Livestock Development office mobilized community representatives from 19 kebeles (lower administrative units) for the sharing and scaling event. A few community members (both men and women) who participated in the community conversations at Key Afer were invited to share their experiences and tell change stories at household and community levels. The Menz Mama and Doyogena government Communications Affairs office documented the sharing and learning event which was broadcast through social media (radio, television and Facebook) to reach a wider audience.

The closing and sharing sessions started off with a word of prayer by elders or religious leaders, followed by a reflection of what has been learned so far and sharing changes in knowledge, attitudes and practices. The sessions were concluded by statements from community elders and mandated institutions who iterated action points and commitments to scale the approach and experience.

# Reflections and information recall

Using a semi-structured facilitation checklist, facilitators asked participants to recall what had been discussed during previous community conversations, what they learned and how they have used the knowledge.

Summary of reflections:

- 'We learned about gender equality and division of labour; men can do what women do and women can also do what men do,' recalled a male participant. 'We discussed who has more work burden—man or women—and discussed about labour demanding roles. Whose work is more demanding?', added a female participant.
- 'We discussed gender roles in livestock production and the position of men and women. Why should men be superior and women inferior?', remarked a male participant.
- Participants in doyogena also recalled being enlightened about their practice of eating raw meat and drinking raw milk. 'In the second round, we learned about cultural practices like consumption of raw meat, zoonotic diseases, what we did in the past and what we do today,' said a male participant.
- 'We learned about decision-making in the household. How do we make decisions, e.g. sell of livestock, collectively deciding about resources and animal diseases?', recounted a male participant. 'Zoonotic diseases can be caused by drinking raw milk or eating raw meat. If an animal dies, it must be buried. We must also not eat raw meat; we should cook it. If you drink raw milk, it can cause diseases. Eating uncooked meat can cause tapeworms and other diseases.'
- Women reported changes in roles and handling of animal-source foods due to the community dialogue: 'If we eat raw meat, we are exposed to tapeworms, so we have to cook our meat and boil milk. We now boil milk. We have taught this to our children. In the past, men did not engage in domestic activities but now, some men have started engaging in domestic activities. The change is not at a large scale, but we see some changes.' Another woman added, 'We use protective gears like gloves or plastic when cleaning barns and handling sick animals, and boil milk.'

# Change stories

## Change in attitude and practices around gender relations

Community members shared their experiences and stories of change regarding gender roles and interactions within the household. A woman participant in Doyogena remarked:

In the past, when children came from school, the boys did men's work and girls did women's work, but after the conversations, we are holding household discussions and sharing roles. The boys started to carry out roles normally done by girls, e.g. they clean barns and feed animals. We are teaching them to share tasks irrespective of their sex. It was a taboo for a boy to milk a cow, but we are teaching them not to wait for girls to milk the cows. I am a widow and responsible for teaching my children to undertake any task. In the past, cooking was the role of the woman and girl but now I am teaching my sons to cook. I consult with the children what to sell and how to use the money. My first son cannot decide alone. We must decide as a household. I have shared knowledge from the conversations with my children.

A woman participant in Menz Gera said, 'Attitudinal change starts from home. If there is change at the family level, there will be change at the community level.'

A male participant in Ancha Sadicha, Doyogena also shared the changes in his household, remarking:

I was the only one who took livestock and crop produce to the market. But now, my wife also participates in the market. She sells potato and wheat. We now collectively discuss and make savings. We are planning to open a joint bank account. Before she did not trust me but now, she knows the market and trusts me. Our relationship in the home has improved, and we discuss more openly. Now we understand and appreciate one another. If I need money for socialization, I ask her, and she gives me some money. Now, I help my wife in ensete processing; we hire labour to process kocho. Although we hire labour, I support the women. My wife also helps me in ploughing. I was not cleaning the barn and did not help with household chores. Now we discuss how to share roles.

This testimony was validated by the spouse and neighbours.

As husbands increasingly engage their spouses in decision-making, there is increased harmony within households. This harmony has in turn encouraged men to support women in carrying out household chores and increasingly involve children in carrying out domestic chores. This was testified by both male and female participants but mostly among male participants—'Men used to make decisions solely but now we have started consulting as a household and it brings in more trust and cooperation.' In the past, there was a distinction in what men and women do. Due to the conversations, a male participant said:

I realized that there was a lot of workload on my wife. When I finish ploughing, I would go and relax with my friends and my wife would still have domestic responsibilities, after working on the farm. Now I assign the children to assist their mother. In the past, men didn't fetch water but now, I fetch water. Now I am mobilizing my children to fetch water which I used not to do. I am asking my children to take on more responsibilities. Now I give my wife space to take sheep to the market. Now we are a talk of the community. Increasingly, men are now sharing barn cleaning. Even the man was not allowed to enter ensete backyard but now, men started sharing women's work.



Another male participant recounted:

I used not to fetch water but now during the day or evening time I fetch water. I am now learning how to milk a cow. Even in the past, my wife used to encourage me to learn how to milk a cow, but I did not take it seriously. Now I realized that what my wife used to advise me to do was right. So now, I am ready to learn because it's for the benefit of my household and I am happy to do it. We now share tasks with my wife. In the past, I used to plough, and my wife would stay at home. But now she helps me with farm work. When we come home, we also share tasks. We are happy and there is a change in my house.

Both men and women consider the changes in gender relations encouraging. Sharing her experience and benefits from the community conversations, a woman participant reflected:

I regretted my past life. Now we share domestic responsibilities and are teaching our children. My husband gives me the space to participate in the market. But we decide together which animal to sell and how much to sell.

In both communities, women participants claimed that they experienced a reduced workload as men showed willingness to share domestic activities. A woman participant reflected, 'There is change in my home. My husband began sharing domestic activities. Since we are working together, including the children, I experienced a reduced workload.'

In Hawora Arara, male participants explained that it was traditionally unwelcome for men to take part in kocho processing (a traditional food made from the ensete plant). A male participant said that he now helps his wife—'I chop off the top part of the plant, which is laborious, but my wife still does the processing.' Women participants appreciated men's willingness to support them in kocho processing and sharing domestic activities. They explained that men even collect manure and take it to the ensete farm. Men also cut the plant and help women level the ensete in the ground where it is buried. A woman participant remarked:

I am not from this area and I do not know how to process kocho. So, my husband taught me how to process kocho. He also cleans barns. When my in-laws noticed this, they also stepped in and started helping me process kocho. My husband was not ashamed of doing domestic tasks and he withstood social pressures from neighbours. He invited his friends to our house to see what he does. He encouraged them to do the same.

Picture 1. Husband and wife carrying kitchen waste to fertilize their ensete plantation (photo credit: ILRI).





Some women participants have taught their sons to take part in domestic activities. A female participant reflected, 'I had discussions with my son and daughter on sharing domestic tasks and assigned my son to do domestic activities which were traditionally assumed to be women's role. He resisted but I insisted that he must learn how to carry out domestic tasks.'

## Information sharing and community influence

Participants shared information with neighbours, friends and other community members using different informal channels such as bible study groups, village savings groups, women's groups, social gatherings and community meetings.

In Hawora Arara, a woman participant shared how she influenced her neighbour with information obtained from the community conversations. She narrated the story of her female neighbour whose husband was selling livestock without consulting her. She remarked:

I had a conversation with my neighbour. I advised her that they must make decisions collectively and that her husband shouldn't take livestock to the market without her consent. Then my neighbour invited me to her home, and I shared information from the community conversations in the presence of her husband. The husband stopped selling livestock without consulting her.

A male participant also shared how he influenced his neighbour with information learned from the community conversations:

I observed my neighbour cutting trees and selling wood and I got concerned. So, I approached and advised him to stop cutting down trees and start working together with his wife on their farm. The neighbour's wife asked her husband to come to my house and observe what I do with my wife. He came and observed how we work together. So, he went back and started working together with his wife.

An elderly man told a story of how he shared information about zoonotic diseases:

Many years back, there was a family that was wiped out from eating raw meat of a dead animal. They never knew that their animal died of anthrax. So, from the community conversation, I learned that it is not safe to eat raw meat from sick animals. So, I have used this story to share information about the risks of zoonotic disease learned from the community conversations. I advised my neighbours not to eat raw meat and drink raw milk.

## Consumption of boiled meat and milk

Participants in Doyogena are gradually shifting to consumption of boiled meat and milk. The transformation is significant, although raw meat and milk are a delicacy in the area. Changes in consumption behaviour were expressed more by women. A woman in Hawora Arara participant reflected that:

Before the community conversations, we gave raw milk to the children thinking that it gives them strength but now, we give them boiled milk. Before we used to eat raw meat. But now our perception has changed. We decide together in the family and now we cook meat and boil milk. Whenever we ate raw meat, we would experience stomach upsets. Immediately after eating, we would run to the clinic to buy medicine but now we don't.

A pastor in Ancha Sadicha related his experience of sharing information from the community conversations. When he performed house-to-house prayers and preaching services, households offered him raw milk. Instead of drinking the milk, he used the opportunity to explain why drinking raw milk is not advisable.

In Hawora Arara, a female participant shared her story of refusing to eat raw meat. While at a wedding ceremony in town, she was served raw meat. Using information that she obtained from community conversations, she advised the guests that it is not safe to eat raw meat.

# Scaling locally: knowledge and practices

## Reflections and action points by community members and leaders

In both districts, participants were asked to scale the conversations out to reach the wider community. They discussed possible avenues for information sharing in order to influence the wider community. They agreed to share information using traditional associations and local groups such as *idir*<sup>1</sup>, village savings and women's groups. At the end of the closing event, participants stood up and joined hands, citing phrases of commitment to continue behavioural change and share information with others who did not participate in the community conversations.

Elders, community leaders, community women's affairs representatives and religious leaders committed to share the information with other community members and continue to transform constraining gender relations in their households. Women participants agreed to teach their children and husbands to share domestic activities. Women also committed to share information with other women and to encourage each other to transform unequitable gender relations in their households.

## Reflections and action points by local development partners

In Doyogena, the deputy head for the Livestock and Fisheries office (a female) reflected on what she had learned from the closing session and appreciated the participation and commitment of community members. She explained that community conversations are important to address underlying social norms and practices that restrict women's participation in development activities and decision-making. She asserted that the conversations facilitate engagement with community members and expressed commitment to strengthen and expand community dialogues to include the wider community. She identified farmers' development groups, development agents and community animal health workers as representatives to scale out information. These representatives can be agents of change, fostering continued engagement with community members to transform undesirable gender relations and improve human and animal health.

In Doyogena, the Women, Children and Youth Affairs director encouraged the participants to share information with others. 'Please share this information with different people in various ways,' she requested participants. She stated that change begins in the household and expands to the whole community. 'We have 14 kebeles in this district. We will sensitize development agents and community leaders.'

Recognizing the role of the conversations in transforming constraining gender relations, the Menz Mama Women and Children's Affairs director said that, 'We shall expand the lesson using the 651 women groups established in the woreda. The fact that men understand and appreciate women's work burden by itself is a change.' Similarly, the director of the Menz Gera Women and Children's Affairs office stressed the importance of teaching children so that the coming generation will inherit gender equity behaviour and practices. She said, 'I felt like I am doing my own work. I am happy that I have change agents at the community level that we can use them to replicate this experience to other communities. You will change others through sharing your experiences and the changes you are making at your household. We must work on our children.'

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<sup>1</sup>A community based structure traditionally organized for supporting individuals during a funeral ceremony.

In both districts, government Communication Affairs officers pledged to broadcast farmers' experiences and change stories on FM radio, television news and Facebook to broadly share the information and inspire others to transform. They added that community conversations engage people to take their own actions and community influence is greater due to social interactions, unlike many other approaches. For example, the Doyogena district Communications office covered the closing sessions in six local languages through regional television broadcasts. Similarly, the Menz Mama district Communications officer covered the closing sessions on its official Facebook page

(<https://www.facebook.com/menzmamacom/posts/841916009490021> and video clip <https://www.facebook.com/menzmamacom/videos/411984956295899>).

The Doyogena district Office of Agriculture director reflected on his key learning and appreciated the level of learning community members achieved. He reiterated that women have a heavy workload and acknowledged the changes community members have made due to their conversations:

We have been practicing a top down extension approach with a focus on technology not on people, but community conversations are the way we are supposed to do our work with the community... our experience with community conversations gave us hope that bringing a change in attitudes and practices of the community is possible. Since then, we have started consulting women as well, which before was not a practice.

He further explained that participating community members are resource persons for the woreda and are responsible for sharing information and teaching others. He saw the adult functional education program of the government as an opportunity to integrate community conversations to engage community members in a meaningful way. In addition, farmer development groups offer opportunities to share information and engage the whole community in conversations about gender and related issues. Development agents, community animal health workers and health extension agents will play key roles to share and reinforce messages in village savings, women's, farmer development and self-help groups.

In Menz, the Livestock Development office manager and animal health team leader reflected that community conversations opened new ways to engage with community members. The approach is participatory and inclusive. The engagement of local partners from the design to the implementation of the community communications has been a unique aspect of the approach. The district experts, development agents and community members who participated in the community conversations are key resource persons to share information with the wider community.

# Scaling regionally: team reflections and the way forward

At the end of the closing sessions, the research team held a reflection meeting with the local partners. This meeting afforded community facilitators and local partners an opportunity to reflect on the overall process, their experiences and advantages of the approach. Local partners described community conversations as an engaging and result-oriented learning approach.

## Action points

- Woreda communication officers will broadcast messages from the conversations and experiences of community members to a wider audience using websites, FM radio and television. In Menz, government Communications Affairs offices have partnership arrangements with national and regional radio and television stations, and they saw the community conversations as an opportunity to package experiences and change stories for dissemination. In Doyogena, the communications officer sought to use the lessons and change stories from the community conversations in different ways, such as woreda meetings accompanied by pictures, during presentations from experts and information leaflets.
- In both districts, local partners saw the conversation guide as useful. In Menz, they have a plan to localize and use it as part of the annual development agent's training program. The district manager hoped that this will streamline the community discussions they have been using in their activities.
- In Doyogena, the Agriculture office director said:  
Within six months, you have realized changes, but we have been training farmers in farmer training centres and we had no champions which motivate other[s] for change. In future, each farmer trained will hold [the] hands of five other farmers to teach them. We will also raise awareness of development workers in the communities to teach the farmers. We shall integrate this approach in other ongoing activities. This work is supposed to be done by us, and you are helping us. We have 17 kebeles so we need to expand to other kebeles. We need leaflets to be able to use this approach. We have been making political talks and reporting [to] political figures by just estimating the numbers of people trained...but in this project, we will be reporting the exact number of people trained.
- In both districts, local partners agreed to share the information and train other woreda experts in the approach. They saw the advantage of bringing woreda experts on board through sensitization trainings to integrate the approach into other tasks.

# Scaling nationally: the way forward in the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock

Given the level of engagement and interest of participants during the community conversation sessions, and the encouraging changes observed, the Livestock Health flagship will continue to develop modules that use the community conversations approach and efforts are ongoing to also develop a module on livestock breeding. These new community conversations modules will also facilitate continued follow-up on previous topics discussed in previous community conversations and continue capturing change stories.

A new bilateral project, Health of Ethiopian Animals for Rural Development (HEARD) funded by the European Union, addresses access of livestock producers to animal health services. In this project, ILRI leads a component that aims to review existing extension materials, ensure that extension materials are gender sensitive, and develop new materials and approaches to strengthen the extension system. The community conversations approach is promising to change the way extension is performed; the HEARD project offers an opportunity for further scaling out and embedding the community conversations approach in the national extension system.