

The role of community conversations in transforming gender relations and reducing zoonotic risks in the highlands of Ethiopia

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Key messages

- Community conversations engage community members in dialogue around an identified challenge and help explore perceptions and practices to find solutions together.
- Open and genuine conversations make community members question their gender-biased views, attitudes and practices, encouraging many households to transform their gender relations and reduce women's work burden.
- Community conversations have been found to be appropriate community-based engagement tools to bring about change in knowledge, attitudes and practices related to gender relations and handling animal source foods and sick animals.
- Strengthening the capacity of local partners is key to scale the approach and support continued gender transformation and prevention of zoonotic diseases in the intervention sites of the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock.

Background

Studies conducted by the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) Livestock and Fish on Livestock systems revealed unequal division of labor among men and women and that women's role in small ruminant management is undervalued in Ethiopia. Women's work is often invisible in livestock production, and they hold unequal status as compared to men. They do most of the laborintensive livestock husbandry activities, whereas men control management decisions (Kinati et al. 2018).

Gender norms and division of labor expose women and men to different levels of risk to zoonotic diseases. Due to their gender roles, women are often more exposed to zoonotic diseases; and when sick, they do not receive the same level of care as male members of the household (Kristianson et al. 2010). In addition, lack of awareness on zoonotic diseases among community members can exacerbate their risk of exposure to such diseases.



Gender norms also constrain women from owning and controlling livestock. For example, if a woman owns and controls livestock assets and actively participates in social groups, the men may fear they are going to lose their role as head of the household (Kinati 2017). Such perceptions limit women's ability to own and control animals, preventing them from becoming members in local associations such as community-based sheep breeding cooperatives.

To address this gap, gender teams from the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and the International Centre for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) piloted a community-based transformative approach called 'community conversations (CC)' in selected Livestock CRP intervention sites to sensitize community members about gender relations in livestock production and how this can expose them to zoonotic diseases. Strengthening women's empowerment pathways requires engaging community members in open dialogues and transforming gender-based constraints, in particular, restrictive gender-based norms and asset gaps. This has implications for adoption of integrated livestock health management practices that improve rural livelihoods and empower women. The research team followed action research principles to test a community-based approach to transform constraining gender relations at community and household levels and sensitize community members about the implications of gender roles on exposure to zoonotic diseases.

Community conversations

Community conversation is a participatory approach which brings together community members and encourages them to think, discuss and explore gender relations in livestock and the associated risks of exposure to zoonotic diseases. CC is based on the recognition that people have the knowledge and capability that can bring about positive gender and animal health outcomes individually and collectively. It helps people feel included in the process of decision making about gender and zoonoses issues. Community members taking part in the conversations feel empowered, question their values and re-consider their cultural and traditional practices. The approach engages women and men in examining, questioning, and most fundamentally, shifting discriminatory gender norms, attitudes, behaviors, practices and related imbalances of power.

In 2018, CCs were facilitated in four kebeles from three districts in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples region (SNNPR) and Amhara region. The CCs engaged a cross-section of the communities and were facilitated in four rounds where 50–60 men and women farmers and local development partners participated per session. In total, in Doyogena, 235 men and 195 women whereas and in Menz, 354 men and 144 women participated in the conversations. The research team worked with local community facilitators drawn from regional research centres and district agriculture

and livestock development offices. A follow-up session was held in early 2019 to capture changes in behavior and practices.

Objectives

The overall objective of CCs is to raise community awareness and enable community action on gender dynamics at household level in relation to livestock and animal health management. Specifically, the dialogues aimed to transform constraining gender relations and reduce risk of exposure to zoonotic diseases among small ruminant farmers in the highlands of Ethiopia. The research question addressed was: how does community gender awareness raising through a community-based transformative approach shape the social and institutional context in which livestock systems develop?

Methodology

We conducted pre- and post-KAP surveys to establish the baseline and compare changes in knowledge, attitude and practice as a result of the community conversations. A sample of 83 (47 men and 36 women) randomly selected CC participants took part in the KAP survey. Moreover, we developed change indicators and documented early signs of change in the course of the conversations.

Results

1 Division of labour and control of animal resources

Before and after the intervention, CC participants were asked to reflect on their participation in and the value they give to different livestock husbandry practices; ownership and decision making on animals and the benefits they get. After the CC sessions, the number of participants who have shown positive change sharply increased in all the parameters examined, especially among male respondents. During the sessions, it was said that when a man does domestic work, women pity him and ask him what happened to his wife. Fellow men also ridicule him saying, 'he is womanish; he does women's work allowing his wife to sit'. After the CC sessions, women recognized that they are part of the problem by not encouraging men to support them. Due to the conversations, participants have recognized the problem, shown willingness to change, started practicing more equitable labor sharing and making decisions jointly. These changes have led to more family cooperation and harmony. As Figure 1 shows, almost all participants agreed that women can have equal control and decision-making power as their husbands regarding animals they take care of. This tells that the CC process has contributed to more balanced gender relations and social cohesion.

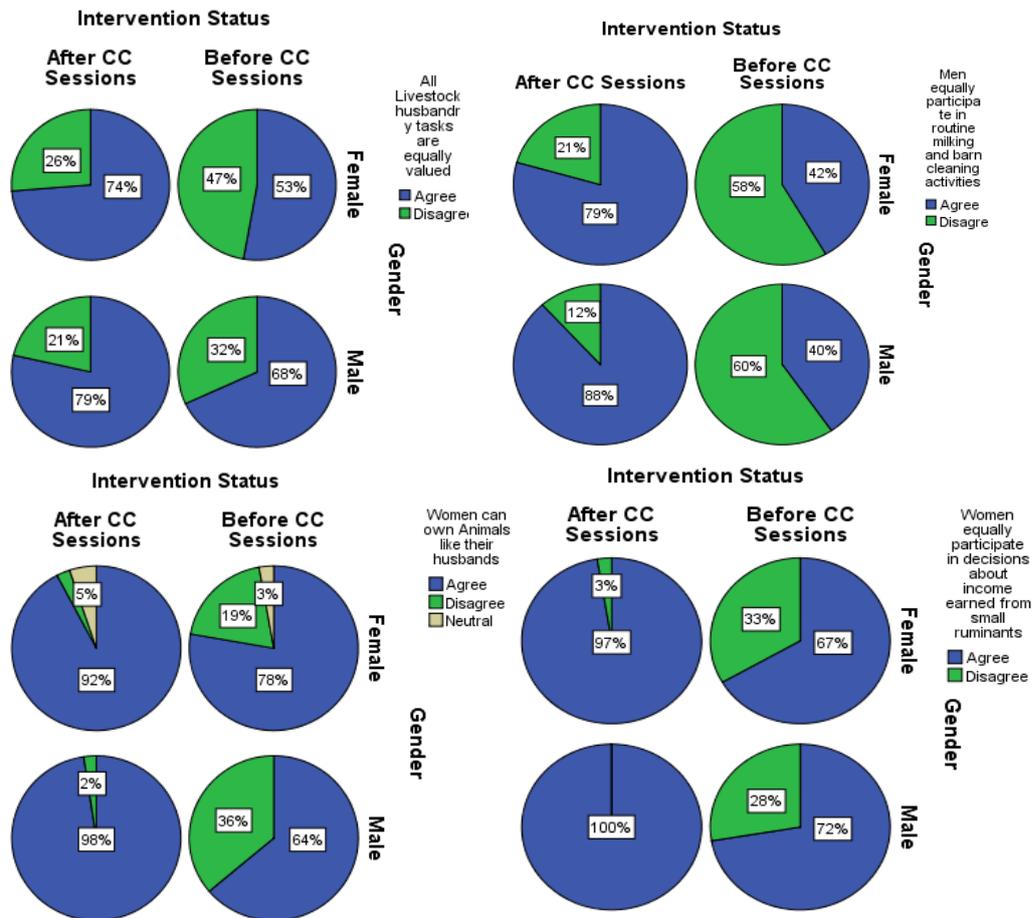


Figure 1. Community perceptions regarding division of labor and control of resources before and after the CC sessions

2 Knowledge, attitude and practices about zoonotic diseases

Participants knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding use of animal source foods (ASFs) and contact with and management of sick animals was greatly enhanced as a result of their participation in the CC sessions. Before the CC sessions, the majority of participants had practiced unsafe handling and consumption of ASFs. Now, community members are aware of the risk of zoonotic diseases and have started taking measures to reduce the risk. Before the intervention, a considerable proportion of participants believed that humans do not get diseases from animals; whereas after the CC sessions, this was reduced by close to half for women and by quarter for men (Table 1). Moreover, awareness about practices that expose humans to the risk of zoonotic diseases has increased, which include use of raw animal products and unprotected contact with sick animals. In both sites, many households reported that they have started burying dead bodies of sick animals.



Table 1. Knowledge and attitude of community members towards zoonoses before and after the CC sessions

Parameters of interest	Gender	Before CC intervention				After CC intervention			
		Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Total (%)	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Total (%)
Drinking raw milk is not a health risk for the consumer	Female	63.9	2.8	33.3	100.0	5.1	0.0	94.9	100.0
	Male	50.0	6.5	43.5	100.0	4.8	0.0	95.2	100.0
Boiled milk is bad and raw milk is good	Female	61.1	0.0	38.9	100.0	10.3	0.0	89.7	100.0
	Male	54.3	2.2	43.5	100.0	11.9	0.0	88.1	100.0
Fresh milk itself is medicine and recommended for patients	Female	79.4	2.9	17.6	100.0	5.1	0.0	94.9	100.0
	Male	64.4	0.0	35.6	100.0	4.8	0.0	95.2	100.0
If milk is boiled, vitamin is destroyed	Female	55.6	0.0	44.4	100.0	10.3	5.1	84.6	100.0
	Male	44.4	6.7	48.9	100.0	4.8	0.0	95.2	100.0
Reason for boiling milk for children is to prevent milk-borne diseases	Female	66.7	5.6	27.8	100.0	94.9	0.0	5.1	100.0
	Male	63.0	4.3	32.6	100.0	95.2	0.0	4.8	100.0
Humans do not get diseases from animals	Female	38.9	16.7	44.4	100.0	20.5	0.0	79.5	100.0
	Male	30.4	4.3	65.2	100.0	19.0	0.0	81.0	100.0
Sharing shelter with animals is not a health risk	Female	47.2	0.0	52.8	100.0	0.0	5.1	94.9	100.0
	Male	32.6	0.0	67.4	100.0	11.9	0.0	88.1	100.0
Drinking raw blood is good for strength and does not have health risks	Female	25.0	22.2	52.8	100.0	2.6	0.0	97.4	100.0
	Male	17.5	5.0	77.5	100.0	4.8	0.0	95.2	100.0
Souring milk helps prevent disease transmission from animals to humans	Female	72.2	8.3	19.4	100.0	23.1	5.1	71.8	100.0
	Male	56.5	6.5	37.0	100.0	4.8	2.4	92.9	100.0
When animals die of disease, the carcass should always be buried/burned	Female	65.7	0.0	34.3	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	Male	62.8	0.0	37.2	100.0	90.5	2.4	7.1	100.0
Use of protective devices reduces disease transmission risks	Female	72.2	8.3	19.4	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
	Male	63.0	4.3	32.6	100.0	97.6	2.4	0.0	100.0

3 Perceived knowledge on animal diseases

One of the discussion topics in the CCs was how gender affects knowledge and access to information about animal health. During the conversations, community members identified constraints to women's access to information. For example, when service providers visit the home, it is often the man who is contacted due to existing gender biases. Identification of men and women's knowledge about animal diseases and their clinical signs convinced community members that women are also knowledgeable about animal diseases and that they must get access to information and advisory services. As Figure 3 shows, men started recognizing that women do have essential skills in diagnosing diseases, treating sick animals, identifying animal feed and applying proper management techniques to ensure food safety and product quality. The intervention fairly shifted the perceptions of both male and female participants from self-dominated applause to recognizing valuable skills in each other in managing their animals. During the conversations, it was noted that community members recognized the importance of engaging women as they have a wealth of knowledge as their male counterparts. 'I will make sure that I engage my wife in discussions regarding animal management at home', a male CC participant said in Doyogena.

4 Practicing safe handling of ASFs and Sick animals

The CC sessions helped the majority of participants recognize consequences of harmful ASF handling and consumption practices. In Doyogena, drinking raw milk and eating raw meat was common among participants before the intervention and the majority were not aware of the associated risks. Cooking meat and boiling milk was assumed to destroy nutritional value. Although the act of changing behavior is complex and challenging, CCs contributed to raise awareness of community members about consequences of such harmful ASF handling and consumption practices (Table 2). Moreover, the majority of participants (74.4% female and 79.1% male) understood the importance of and started practicing burying or burning carcasses of dead animals to prevent zoonotic diseases. Similarly, the practice of washing hands with soap after contact with animals and the use of protective gears during cleaning of barns, attending births and handling sick animals has greatly improved.

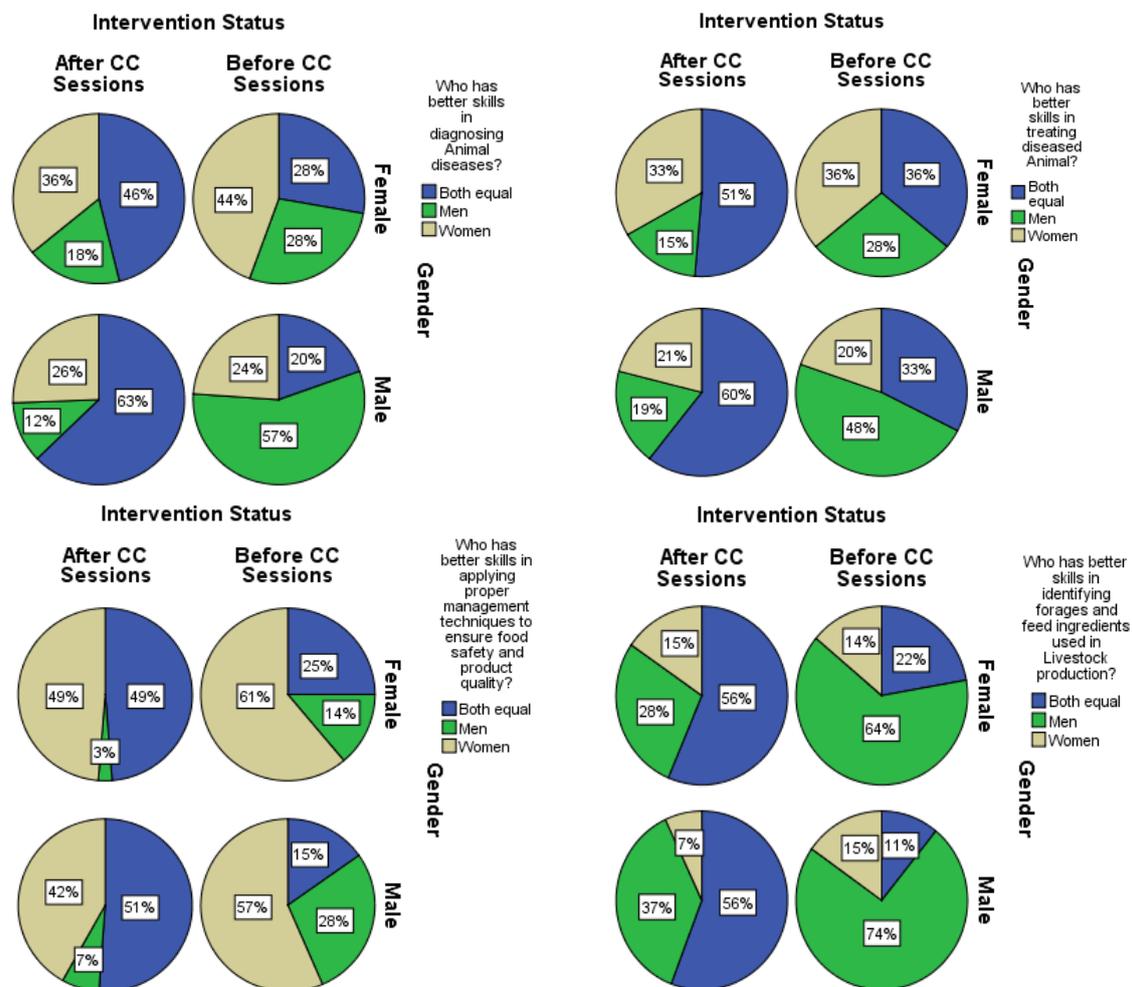


Fig 2. Perception on animal management skills of both genders before and after CC sessions

Table 2. Proportions of participants practicing safe handling of ASFs and diseased animals before and after the CC sessions

Parameters of interest	Gender	Before CC intervention				After CC intervention			
		Never (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Total (%)	Never (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Total (%)
Eat raw meat	Female	27.8	13.9	58.3	100.0	87.2	2.6	10.3	100.0
	Male	19.1	17.0	63.8	100.0	95.3	0.0	4.7	100.0
Drink raw milk	Female	14.3	34.3	51.4	100.0	92.3	2.6	5.1	100.0
	Male	23.4	34.0	42.6	100.0	97.7	0.0	2.3	100.0
Feed pets raw animal products	Female	20.0	42.9	37.1	100.0	51.3	33.3	15.4	100.0
	Male	20.0	60.0	20.0	100.0	48.8	30.2	20.9	100.0
Cull sick animals for consumption	Female	68.6	5.7	25.7	100.0	89.7	0.0	10.3	100.0
	Male	70.2	10.6	19.1	100.0	95.1	0.0	4.9	100.0
Eat animals that died of animal diseases	Female	91.7	0.0	8.3	100.0	94.9	0.0	5.1	100.0
	Male	89.4	0.0	10.6	100.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
Wash hands with soap after handling animals	Female	16.7	47.2	36.1	100.0	2.6	94.9	2.6	100.0
	Male	14.9	51.1	34.0	100.0	0.0	95.3	4.7	100.0
Bury or burn animal carcasses	Female	61.1	16.7	22.2	100.0	5.1	74.4	20.5	100.0
	Male	51.1	25.5	23.4	100.0	7.0	79.1	14.0	100.0
Slaughter domestic animals with protective devices	Female	61.1	13.9	25.0	100.0	28.2	48.7	23.1	100.0
	Male	72.3	14.9	12.8	100.0	30.2	48.8	20.9	100.0

Conclusions

Gender norms constrain women from owning livestock and controlling the benefits that emerge from livestock production. Socially prescribed gender roles in livestock production, combined with lack of awareness on zoonotic diseases among community members in general, and women livestock keepers in particular, exacerbates their risk of exposure to zoonotic diseases. Addressing restrictive gender norms and values requires community-based transformative approaches that engage a cross-section of community members in open dialogue to bring about change in knowledge, attitudes and practices of community groups and local partners. Community conversation proved to be an effective community-based engagement tool to engage community members in open dialogue about their views, perceptions and practices related to gender relations and prevention of zoonotic diseases. The conversations facilitated change in knowledge, attitudes and practices of community members regarding division of labor, harmful gender norms and handling of ASFs and sick animals. The pre- and post-intervention KAP survey results reveal differences in the level of change with more men demonstrating change in knowledge, attitudes and practices in gender relations while women demonstrated more change in knowledge, attitudes and practices around zoonotic diseases. Localizing the approach and providing support for local partners will be needed to expand interventions and reach out to more community groups as part of the regular extension system.

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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 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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