



Photo: LR/Georgina Smith

BEST PRACTICES THAT ENABLE EQUITABLE GENDER RELATIONS CAN HELP OVERCOME GENDER-BASED CONSTRAINTS AMONG LIVESTOCK KEEPERS IN ETHIOPIA

A LOOK AT FOUR-VALUE CHAIN SITES IN ETHIOPIA

KEY MESSAGES

The gender context within which women pursue their goals appears to be generally not autonomy-supportive across the study areas.

Men and women have the ability to deviate from strong social norms and engage in desired practices in gender relations.

In order to exercise their perceived agency, individuals or groups need to make decisions in three areas: self-conviction, subjective norms, and structures.

The self-determined behaviors identified in the target sites could be potentially used for designing transformational interventions.

This work was supported by the University of New England International Post Graduate Research Award Grant (UNE IPRA) and the CGIAR Research Program on Livestock, which is supported by contributors to the CGIAR Trust Fund (<https://www.cgiar.org/funders/>).

INTRODUCTION

The negative effect of social norms, as structural barriers to progress achieving gender equality, is established beyond doubt (Aguilar et al., 2014; Didana, 2019; Legovini, 2006). With the premise that gender equality and women's empowerment improve agricultural outcomes (Najjar et al., 2019), development efforts have so far increased women's perceived empowerment and freedom but this has not always resulted in altering norms (Boudet et al., 2013). Few studies have looked into the reasons behind this.

Nevertheless, anecdotal reports, for instance from Lemma et al. (2019), show that constraining norms can be reshaped and possibly ultimately done away with. In Ethiopia, although research on changed gender relations is nonexistent, custom-based gender relations and their associated gender roles in mixed livestock-based systems are slowly beginning to change (Hebo, 2014).

This study aimed to fill this gap by qualitatively assessing how a few agents, particularly women, have managed to achieve expanded agency while living within a constraining normative environment. This is vital for generating evidence that could be used for the design and implementation of transformative approaches that help to transform constraining social norms and bring about long-lasting social transformation. The research contributes to the debate on women's empowerment by shedding some light on existing knowledge of gender contexts, how positive deviance in gender relations occurs, and what the associated consequences are in mixed and livestock-based systems in Ethiopia.

Farmers Askale Lombamo (left) and Abamo Lombamo (right) in their garden in Doyogena District, Ethiopia.

METHODOLOGY

To explore the subjective experiences and views of women and men engaged in deviant but desired gender relations, the study draws on an interpretive phenomenological approach. This qualitative methodological approach is designed to “focus on personal meaning and sense making in a particular context, for people who share a particular experience” (Smith et al., 2009, 45).

The study relied on female and male community members and key informants for exploring and understanding their experiences in positive deviant gender relations, particularly why and how individuals decide to deviate from the normalized but harmful gender norms. The rich contextualization and description of their experiences in positive deviance in gender relations was the focus in adopting a phenomenological perspective for the current study.

Table 1. Study participants by method, site, and gender for the qualitative assessments in 2019 and 2021, rural Ethiopia.

Study approach	Region	District	Gender		Total
			Men	Women	
Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Oromia	Horo	11	9	20
		Elweya	15	16	31
	SNNP	Adiyo	14	14	28
Case studies (in-depth individual interviews)	Oromia	Horo	1	4	5
		Eleweya	1	2	3
	SNNP	Adiyo	0	6	6
	Amhara	Abergele ^c	0	4	4
Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with community leaders and experts	Oromia	Horo	1	3	4 ^a
		Elweya	2	2	4 ^a
	SNNP	Adiyo	2	2	4 ^b

^aThree KIs were with experts and the remaining one was with religious leader.

^bTwo KIs were with experts and the remaining two were with religious leaders.

^cFGDs and KIs were not conducted in Abergele due to a security issue at the time of the study.



Tefera Shamebo helps his wife Abaynesh Tefera at their home in Doyogena District, Ethiopia.

FINDINGS

The gender context across the study areas is non-supportive of autonomy. Systems of access, ownership, and control of resources are dominated by men. The existing gender roles dictate choices and devalue women's roles, posing great challenges to the efforts

being made to realize women's empowerment. Nevertheless, the study identified a number of useful positive deviant gender relations being practiced by women and men against the normative gender relations (Table 2).

Table 2. Motivating factors and best practices in gender relations among livestock keepers in selected CGIAR Research Program on Livestock (Livestock CRP) target sites, qualitative assessment in 2019 and 2021, rural Ethiopia.

Best practices for enabling equitable gender relations	How the practices were facilitated
Women taking part in “roles of men”	Loss of husbands to death and divorce as a result of various factors, and prior exposure to urban life, leading women to start engaging in such practices in order to support their families and make a living. The burden of raising children after divorce is left to women in most communities.
Speaking in public arenas	Autonomy and a supportive family environment at an early age. Growing up in a family where female children are encouraged to actively participate in family matters. A relatively longer stay in school compared to the rest of the community, providing the courage and ability to speak out and participate in community affairs affecting one's own life.
Shared decision-making and participation in social associations	A higher schooling and literacy level on the part of husbands. Husbands and wives consulting and jointly making decisions that affect the household. Added value of the wives' involvement in decisions affecting the family, leading the husbands to encourage wives to take part in producer associations together with themselves.
Participation in public duties (community management activities)	Aspiration for a better wage as a result of some level of schooling combined with loss of a husband and a need to overcome life challenges. Resulting active participation in community and school administration, hoping that this would pave the way to a civil service position.
Pro-active information-seeking behavior	The desire for higher income through use of technologies. Better social capital as a result of some levels of schooling, enabling openness to technologies, innovations, and new practices. Frequent experience of being used as a model and compared with men by fellow female and male farmers and extension agents.
Male participation in domestic activities	Removal from his comfort zone and favored social environment through becoming a soldier. Exposure to new practices such as cooking combined with better literacy. Resulting lack of shame in actively taking part in domestic activities.
Women playing a role of community elder	Expectation of getting hired at community level. Formal schooling leading to a search for formal work in the community. As a result, willful engagement in community management activities such as school administration and governance, expecting that one day this will pave the way to a formal job.
Involvement in income-generating activities regardless of their nature, for example house construction	Extreme poverty leading to family break-up, which imposed the burden of raising children alone due to divorce. Need to be involved in any income-generating activities for the sake of survival and to raise children. Change of location to escape cultural restrictions and negative reactions from relatives, peers, and community members and be able to engage in activities considered culturally inappropriate.

Individuals who shared their stories for the current study have witnessed positive gains in all dimensions of their empowerment: economically, socially, and politically. As a result of their engagement in the new behaviors—although these are generally against the norms of the communities in which they live—individuals, often women, have economically advanced through having better access to information services, asset accumulation, and active participation in decision-making. Women who managed to take part in the “roles of men” such as plowing, harvesting, and threshing also developed the capacity to pro-actively seek information on improved agricultural technologies and market services. They are able to break social barriers and regularly contact extension agents in spite of their gender to access extension services.

Those who were able to overcome the effects of social norms were found to be active in local politics. They spoke in public, representing fellow female and male members of the community, and actively engaged in community affairs. They developed the capacity to articulate and present their interests and priorities as well as those of other women. Their active engagement in public spaces helped them to take part in local administration and school councils. Moreover, community reputations developed

as a result of these process enabled some such women to play the role of community elders, performing the work of mediation to resolve disputes.

The study suggests several important motivating factors for adopting changed gender relations. The driving factors identified include economic advantage, striving for survival, desire for prestige, agency, self-determination, being visionary, manageability of the practices, readiness for change, progressiveness, relationship with others, the degree to which the normative relations are positively evaluated, self-control, commitment, collective agency, autonomy-supportiveness of formal and informal institutions, and community incentives.

It appears that the intentions that lead to given behavior/s emerge not only from one's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control according to the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991), but also in combination with demographic and economic factors that play an important role in adopting desired behaviors in gender relations (Table 3). Individuals or households need to make decisions in three areas—self-conviction, subjective norms, and structures—in order to engage in the practices of desired behaviors in gender relations.

Table 3. Decision areas, factors, and attributes in deviant behaviors in gender relations, quantitative assessment in 2019 and 2021, rural Ethiopia.

Decision areas	Enabling factors	Description
Self-conviction (attitude and perceived behavioral control)	Economic freedom	Struggle for economic equality through engagement in more productive activities that are usually outside women's reach because of gender norms.
		Engagement in a new sphere of practices considered masculine in order to sustain life, particularly after loss of a male spouse.
	Related gain	To achieve desired-for recognition—a sense of being respected and proud for being able to appear in public with men.
		Act of revealing one's capability of engagement in highly rewarding jobs (such as commercial activities, for example livestock trading and house construction), although culturally inappropriate for women.
		Desire to attain the power of control over economically important assets.
		Passion for change through one's own efforts and a strong belief in oneself.
Perceived behavioral control	The degree to which new practices are simple to implement, particularly for practices that require specific skills.	
Subjective norms (within household and community)	Family and community readiness	Family and community openness to accepting and encouraging changes that are against established but constraining norms.
		Community progressiveness due to gendered awareness interventions and other factors.
		Level of social capital and engagement in services that one has in one's community.
	Family and community support	The capacity or the extent to which reactions from internal and external relations (family members, peer pressure, and social networks) as a result of deviation from existing norms are tolerable.
		Restraint from norm-based dictates (for example nicknaming) that discourages others from deviating and engaging in self-driven practices.
		Family and community commitment toward supporting changes.
General progressiveness of the public/community members as a result of education, expansion in Protestant religion, etc.		
Structures (autonomy-supportive state and non-state institutions)	Formal change support	Recent positive changes in policy context moving toward gender-responsive policies, and the capacity of actors and communities to adapt to the changes.
	Informal change support	Autonomy-supportive environment, for example expansion of Protestant religion and its teachings that support more gender-equal attitudes and practices.
		Words of encouragement from educated segments of society and the general tendency of young generations to be more liberal.

Practices of changed gender relations are mostly challenged by external factors, which include peer pressure, risks of being isolated from a neighborhood, and loss of social networks ranging from informal to formal associations. These are often exhibited in the forms of discouraging words from peers, neighbors, and members of social associations, mostly experienced during the initial stages of the new practices. The relative fluidity of the normative environment across the study areas set the context for women and men to exercise their agency to take important decisions and engage with deviant but desired behaviors and other opportunities for the betterment of their lives.



Photo ILR/Georgina Smith

A woman sells her produce at a market in Doyogena District, Ethiopia.

IMPLICATIONS

The intentions that lead to the desired behavior/s in gender relations emerge not only from one's attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control—as suggested by the theory of planned behavior—but also in combination with demographic and economic factors that play an important role in adopting deviant, but desired, behaviors in gender relations.

The results shed light on the different alternative empowerment pathways that could be used as an input for the design and interventions of transformative approaches. The self-determined behaviors identified have potential implications for the designing of transformational interventions.

Those individuals engaged in these behaviors might serve as role models, and efforts to support such champions can play an important role in unlocking new approaches to gender transformation. When a critical mass of such individuals is achieved, sustainable social transformation can be realized. Hence, it is recommended that a public extension approach should consider ways to include them.

NEXT STEPS

- Investigate functional community level platforms and identify their appropriateness for the identified individual women and men engaged in the best practices for sharing their experiences with the wider community members.
- Establish a community of practice among these community members so that they can share their experiences and best practices, and encourage each other to continue breaking down the gender stereotypes.
- Devise mechanisms to enable the extension system to consider results and support local level stakeholders who are able to organize community events where identified individuals can share their stories and set the stage for catalyzing attitudinal changes at household and community levels.

Authors

Wole Kinati¹, Dina Najjar², Elizabeth Temple³, Derek Baker⁴ and Barbara Ann Rischkowsky⁵.

¹ PhD Student, School of Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Health, University of New England, Australia.

² Gender Scientist, International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA), Rabat Office, Morocco.

³ Senior Lecturer, School of Psychology, Faculty of Medicine and Health, Australia.

⁴ Professor of Agribusiness and Value Chains, Business School, Faculty of Science, Agriculture, Business and Law, University of New England, Australia.

⁵ Research Team Leader - Resilient Agrosilvopastoral Systems (RASP) and Social Economy and Policy Research (SEP), ICARDA.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to the ICARDA Ethiopia program office and staff, farmers and partners who participated in the study and were used as data sources.

References

- Aguilar, A., Carranza, E., Goldstein, M., Kilic, T., & Oseni, G. (2014). *Decomposition of Gender Differentials in Agricultural Productivity in Ethiopia*, Policy Research Working Paper 6764.
- Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 50(2), 179-211. doi:10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-t
- Boudet, A. M. M., Petesch, P., Turk, C., & Thumala, A. (2013). *On Norms and Agency: Conversations about Gender Equality with Women and Men in 20 Countries*. Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data: The World Bank.
- Didana, A. C. (2019). Determinants of Rural Women Economic Empowerment in Agricultural Activities: The Case of Damot Gale Woreda of Wolaita Zone, SNNPRS of Ethiopia. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 10(3), 30-49. doi:10.7176/jesd
- Hebo, M. (2014). Evolving markets, rural livelihoods, and gender relations: the view from a milk-selling cooperative in the Kofale District of West Arsi, Ethiopia. *African Study Monographs. Supplementary Issue* (No. 48), 5-29.
- Legovini, A. (2006). Measuring Women's Empowerment and the Impact of Ethiopia's Women's Development Initiatives Project, In R. Alsop, M. Bertelsen, & J. Holland (Eds.), *Empowerment in practice: From analysis to implementation*. World Bank.
- Lemma, M., Kinati, W., Mulema, A. A., Mekonnen, M., & Wieland, B. (2019). Community conversations: A community-based approach to transform gender relations and reduce zoonotic disease risks. Nairobi, Kenya: ILRI.
- Najjar, D., Dhehibi, B., Baruah, B., Aw-Hassan, A. A., & Abderrahim, B. (2019). *Wage Work, Women and Decision-making Power in Saiss Morocco*. Beirut, Lebanon: International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA).
- Smith, J., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method, and Research*. SAGE.

CONTACT

Wole Kinati
wwakjira@myune.edu.au

This document is licensed for use under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence. December 2021

