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Fostering an Enabling Environment for Equality and Empowerment in Agri-food Systems

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ABOUT THIS SERIES

This working paper, produced by the CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform, is one in [a series of analytical working papers](#) by our researchers. They were produced to inform the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to write the 2023 report on the *Status of Rural Women in Agri-food Systems*.*

These evidence-based papers address key themes important for gender and social equality, and women's empowerment in agriculture and food systems. They each discuss:

- current status and emerging thinking
- the theme's relevance for transformative change toward more inclusive food systems
- the evolution of equality in agriculture and food systems over the past 10 years in low- and middle-income countries
- what has proved effective to ease structural constraints, and promote equality and empowerment
- specific suggestions about interventions, programs and policies that can help make agriculture and food systems more inclusive.

COVER PHOTO CREDIT: CGIAR Climate/Timothy Mwaura. *Learning route participants interact with local communities in Isiolo, Kenya.*

ABOUT CGIAR GENDER IMPACT PLATFORM

Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results (GENDER) is CGIAR's impact platform designed to put equality and inclusion at the forefront of global agricultural research for development. The Platform is transforming the way gender research is done, both within and beyond CGIAR, to kick-start a process of genuine change toward greater gender equality and better lives for smallholder farmers everywhere. gender.cgiar.org.

DISCLAIMER

This working paper has gone through a process of nonblinded peer review by two reviewers external to the CGIAR Gender Impact Platform, and has also been reviewed by the FAO team working on the 2023 FAO report on the *Status of Rural Women in Agri-food Systems*. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations nor of the CGIAR Gender Impact Platform.

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Abstract

Lasting transformative change in agri-food systems and wider societal benefits require fostering an enabling environment for empowerment and equality by gender and intersecting social differentiation, while concurrently reducing existing inequalities in access to and control over productive resources, services and technology, resilience and leadership. Fostering an enabling environment hinges on addressing key structural constraints to equally accessing resources, exercising agency and achieving desirable outcomes across multiple scales in a holistic manner. This paper discusses the emerging thinking about key structural barriers at the scales of the state, markets, communities, households and individuals that are rooted in policy, discriminatory (formal and informal) social and economic institutions (including social norms) and dampened aspirations; and their relevance for transformative change in agri-food systems. It shows the trend and current status of key structural constraints, and what has proven effective to relax such constraints. The paper lists key evidence-based recommendations to promote an enabling environment for empowerment and equality in agri-food systems.

Keywords: gender equality, social equality, women's empowerment, food systems, transformation, policies, institutions

1. Introduction: tackling structural barriers to equality

It is increasingly widely recognized that achieving lasting gender equality and women's empowerment (GEWE) in agri-food systems requires tackling the structural barriers to equality and not only addressing the symptoms—which take the form of gender gaps in access to resources and services, in agricultural productivity, and in benefits from agri-food systems. Similarly, there are structural constraints linked to other intersecting axes of social differentiation and exclusion—such as age, marital status, religion, ethnicity, location, belonging to a disadvantaged group, or type of livelihood system—that need to be addressed as they hinder equality and empowerment in agri-food systems. This newly emerging thinking is laid out in more detail in the companion overarching working paper (see Lecoutere, Kosec, et al. 2023).

Lasting transformative change in agri-food systems depends on fostering an enabling environment whereby the 'deeper' underlying structural constraints to equally accessing resources, exercising agency, and achieving desirable outcomes are relaxed (McDougall et al. 2021). This paper discusses key structural constraints that are rooted in policy, discriminatory (formal and informal) social and economic institutions, and dampened aspirations; and how addressing these constraints can contribute to an enabling environment for equality and empowerment in agri-food systems.

The paper proceeds as follows: Newly emerging thinking around fostering an enabling environment for equality and empowerment in agri-food systems is discussed in the second section, and its relevance in the third section. Evidence of the trends and current status of key structural barriers to equality and empowerment is provided in the fourth section, and evidence of what works to relax structural barriers in the fifth section. The sixth section concludes with policy recommendations.

The companion overarching working paper (see Lecoutere, Kosec, et al. 2023) discusses the broader societal relevance of equality and empowerment by gender and intersecting social differentiation in global agri-food systems. Its [annex/glossary](#) includes details of the search and review methodology for this paper; and companion glossary includes key concepts and definitions.

2. Newly emerging thinking around gender-transformative change in agri-food systems

Promoting gender-transformative change in agri-food systems hinges on fostering an enabling environment by challenging the structural (institutionalized) constraints to equality and power relations that maintain and exacerbate inequalities (Pyburn and van Eerdewijk 2021).

The Gendered Food Systems framework identifies ‘deeper’ underlying structural constraints to equality in agri-food systems that can be formal and systemic, informal and systemic, formal and situated at an individual level, or informal and at an individual level (gray box in figure 1) (Njuki et al. 2022). These types of constraints are inspired by the Gender at Work Framework and presented as a quadrant (Rao et al. 2016, 2017). These types of constraints to equality are interrelated, and the formality–informality and individual–systemic nature is a continuum. Such structural constraints to equality are not only linked to gender but can also be linked to intersecting axes of social differentiation and exclusion (illustrated by the blue axes in figure 1).

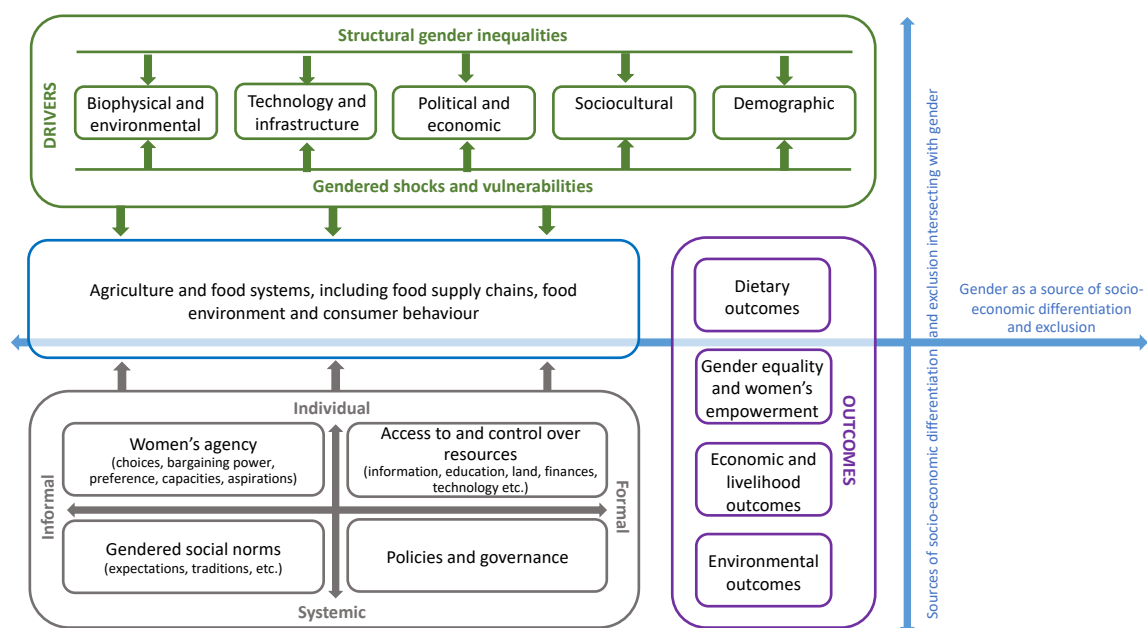


Figure 1. Gendered Food Systems framework with formal and informal structural constraints to equality from individual to systemic level.
Source: adapted from Njuki et al. (2022) and de Brauw et al. (2019)

The (formal and informal, individual and systemic) structural constraints to equality identified in the quadrants are embedded within multiple nested micro (local), meso and macro scales (comprising individual, household, groups, community, markets, state and society) (figure 2). The constraints have effects across three domains: agency, social relations and structures. Women's and men's capabilities, power, voice and status thus derive from a complex set of relationships and institutions at different scales (Cole et al. 2014).

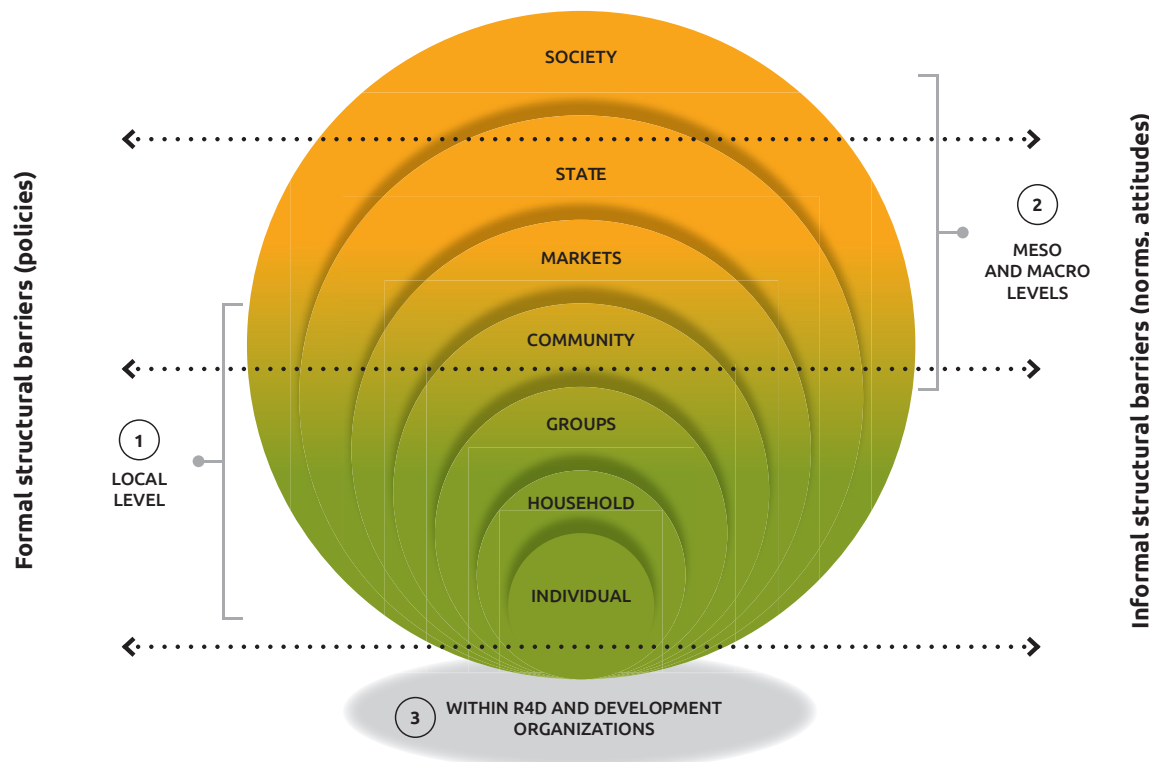


Figure 2. Formal and informal structural barriers to equality at multiple, nested scales. Source: McDougall et al. (forthcoming)

Structural barriers to equality at different scales intersect and are mutually interdependent. Formal institutions such as policy or laws (systemic), and informal institutions such as social norms (systemic) interact and co-evolve, with mutual feedback effects. As such, they generate multiple stable equilibria with different sets of self-enforcing institutions and norms (Alesina and Giuliano 2013). One example of such interdependence is where different formal regulations have embraced different degrees of gender-equal and gender-responsive principles: for instance, if the local implementation of gender-responsive policy is hindered by government financing rules that still lack gender responsiveness (Ampaire et al. 2017). Another example is that norms, which are collectively held in the community but also reside in the consciousness of the individual, are often embedded in formal and informal institutions. Jayachandran (2015) argues that the context-specific evolution of gender equality in the economy and society is partly explained by the interaction of prevailing gender norms and institutions in development processes.

In this paper, we distinguish different scales at which structural constraints to equality with various degrees of formality–informality and individual–systemic nature can be found: (i) the scale of the state where we focus on global-, regional- and national-level policy, guidelines and legal frameworks; (ii) the scale of markets where we focus on market and value-chain systems and collectives; and (iii) the scales of the community, household and individual where we focus on social and gender norms, as well as role models and aspirations.

Although in this paper we situate collectives at the scale of markets, they cross over to the scales of groups and the community. Likewise, we situate norms at the scales of the community, household and individual, but they arguably also play a role at the scale of markets and of the state.

We argue that transformative change in the context of agri-food systems requires relaxing structural barriers (that maintain inequalities) by promoting individual and systemic change across the formal and informal spheres of life. Given the interrelatedness of constraints across scales, this necessitates a holistic approach across the multiple, nested scales.

2.1 *The scale of the state*

In terms of policy at the global, regional and national levels, 2011–21 has seen growing calls for agriculture for development (A4D) policy and practice to target the root causes of gender inequality. Consequently, despite the persistent stickiness of market-oriented and instrumental approaches to women in A4D and narratives burdening women with the responsibility to ‘fix’ various development problems, emerging institutional strategies emphasize gender transformation as a necessary approach for ensuring that A4D advances gender equality (Pyburn and van Eerdewijk 2021; Farhall and Richards 2021).

SDGs highlight the need for intersectional data analysis (see the central principle of the 2030 SDGs: “Leave No One Behind”), echoing the prior Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action but providing more guidance on targets and measurable goals (Aczona and Bhatt 2020). In parallel, A4D manuals on gender mainstreaming in policy and programming persistently include considerations and guidelines to address intersectionality (Acosta et al. 2020; Colfer, Basnett and Ihalainen. 2018). Feminist critiques stemming from academia have penetrated international-development discourse and practice to highlight the need to look critically at the intellectual and ethical underpinnings of gender interventions, particularly as they pertain to globally dominant constructions of agriculture and food policy, with cascading effects on national-level policy and its analysis (Cornwall and Rivas 2015; Farhall and Richards 2021; Drucza, Rodríguez and Birhanu 2020; Andersson, Pettersson and Lodin 2022). Critiques of land-rights policy emphasize a lack of understanding of the complexity of local contexts and the differing impacts on women and men per their situated vulnerabilities; furthermore, they highlight that policies must critically consider informal practices of land control and their gendered effects (Ali et al. 2021; Kocabicak 2021; Fischer et al. 2021). In parallel with increasing recognition of gender-transformative approaches (GTAs) in A4D (see section 5.3.), international-development actors use feminist economics to highlight the need for policies to stimulate growth of sectors with a demand for women’s paid work, and emphasize the importance of policies that promote equal distribution of the gains of growth—in particular, fiscal policies that fund social infrastructure, social protection and care policies (Esquivel and Rodríguez Enríquez 2020). These recommendations and critiques influence policy discussions affecting food production sectors and value chains.

2.2 *The scale of markets*

At the scale of markets, attention to inclusive value-chain and market-systems development has increased over the past 10 years as part of efforts to strengthen agriculture-led growth, improve food security and employment, and reduce poverty (Devaux et al. 2018; Cassinath and Mercer 2020).

Some donors have made women’s economic empowerment a key consideration and required outcome in these processes (Markel and Jones 2014). Value-chain proponents are testing more holistic approaches that go beyond the production node (to include other value-chain actors) and address “underlying constraints in the institutional context that prevent equitable outcomes” (Kruijsen et al. 2016, 6). Gender norms are seen as mediators of empowerment gains and losses in value chains (Ihalainen et al. 2021). Taking a broader view on interactions between household and market scales, women’s unpaid care work is increasingly acknowledged as a barrier for their economic empowerment (Thorpe et al. 2016). New research on food value chains exposes gendered wage gaps and a lower likelihood that young and migrant workers have decent employment (Fabry, Van den Broeck and Maertens 2022). It also explores how interventions can support women’s and young people’s pathways into decent work (Dupar and Lovell 2021).

Combining the private sector’s focus on economic viability and profit with a rights-based gender-transformational agenda could create “tremendous synergies,” as Laven and Pyburn state (2015, 25). However, their analysis of examples from three arrangements (corporate social responsibility [CSR], certification to voluntary social and environmental standards, and public–private partnerships) reveals large private-sector players’ reluctance to challenge

existing gender dynamics and their dependence on other actors (NGOs, government) to pursue gender-inclusive agricultural development. Where CSR interventions are conceptualized with a bottom-up approach, women are at risk of being side-lined especially if local norms hinder their direct participation (Uduji et al. 2020).

Taking a stronger systems approach, market-systems proponents view markets as deeply embedded in gendered formal rules (laws, policies) and informal rules (norms, relations) (Markel and Jones 2014; Markel et al. 2016). Powerful groups may establish or perpetuate unfair rules to take advantage of market exchanges. Recent research investigates direct and indirect strategies for addressing inequitable rules to catalyze systemic empowerment. These include promoting dialogue between women and men in target communities, and creating safe spaces for gender reflections within development programs (Markel et al. 2016).

Development policy has also increasingly turned to collectives to achieve women's empowerment in agri-food systems through collective action. Women's groups in agriculture have been suggested as solutions for women to access economies of scale, reduced marketing and supply costs, pooling of risks, access to training and other services—and subsequently, economic and social empowerment (Desai and Joshi 2014; Agarwal 2020a, 2020b; Sugden et al. 2021). These groups are expected to improve women's participation in the labor market. They are also thought to be better suited to facilitate progress in gender equality over other business models due to the perceived value of democratic membership control and ability to overcome structural constraints for women (such as low levels of land ownership, lack of collateral for accessing credit and restrictive social norms) (Esteban-Salvador, Gargallo-Castel and Pérez-Sanz 2019, 41; Agarwal 2020a, 2020b).

2.3 The scales of the community, household and individual

The idea that social norms, including discriminatory gender norms, can influence economic processes has gained wide acceptance in the course of the last two decades (Eriksson 2015; Pearse and Connell 2016). Norms influence individuals' behavior and interactions not only through individual preferences but also through the societal expectations and social sanctions they represent (Pearse and Connell 2016; Boudet, Petesch and Turk 2013). Gender norms do not only define women's capabilities. Entrenched norms of masculinity and the normative climate (what men think other men do) also influence men's behaviors and hold back gender equality in agri-food systems (Quisumbing, Meinzen-Dick and Malapit 2019a). Various social norms and stereotypes of exclusion can be associated with intersecting identities as well, and raise structural barriers to equality in agri-food systems based on those identities (UNDP 2020).

While social and gender norms and the accompanying power dynamics are deeply entrenched, they can be relaxed or changed to a new standard (Heise et al. 2019; Quisumbing, Meinzen-Dick and Malapit 2019a; Boudet, Petesch and Turk 2013). Gender norms can be transformed in multiple ways, in response to: macro-level forces, broad socioeconomic change, dynamics of gender relations, social pressure, and choices of individuals (inter)acting on their own beliefs and preferences (Boudet, Petesch and Turk 2013; Pearse and Connell 2016; Heise et al. 2019).

Norms can be negotiated and contested which, depending on wider acceptance, can lead to norm change (Agarwal 1997; Boudet, Petesch and Turk 2013; Pearse and Connell 2016). Badstue et al. (2018) and Najjar, Baruah and Garhi (2019) show such contestations can happen with women simultaneously transgressing some norms while accentuating others when engaging in agri-food systems. Convergent and contradictory norms may, at the same time, maintain gender imbalances and create avenues for change, with some people embracing and others resisting such change (Fischer et al. 2021).

The malleability of social and gender norms provides scope for moving beyond individual self-improvement among women toward transforming the power dynamics and structures that serve to reinforce gender inequalities—for instance, through GTAs (Hillenbrand et al.

2015). Doss (2021), however, cautions that promoting more positive and equal gender norms is not straightforward and not likely to be feasible through one-off interventions, while McDougall et al. (forthcoming) call for policy and institutional change that is complementary to overcoming structural barriers.

Furthermore there is growing recognition that, apart from constraints ‘external to self’, constraints ‘internal to self’ can be additional reasons for people to be ‘trapped’ in capability failure or poverty (La Ferrara 2019; World Bank 2015; Bernard et al. 2012). Low aspirations can be an internal constraint inducing the belief that one does not have the capabilities for being successful in certain domains, such as higher value agricultural production or entrepreneurship. There is evidence of significant gender gaps in aspirations, including in the context of agri-food systems.

Aspirations are affected by various formal and informal institutions (including social norms) at different scales and the way these institutions evolve (La Ferrara 2019). Gender differences in aspirations have roots in gendered informal and formal institutions. Aspirations and gender gaps in aspirations can be influenced by role models, and shifting norms and stereotypes (La Ferrara 2019). Yet, we should avoid a discourse of aspirations as purely individual responsibilities and ‘mental models’ that can be easily tweaked without considering the structural—and gendered—barriers and institutions that underlie aspiration traps and aspiration–achievement gaps (Huijsmans 2021).

3. Why foster an enabling environment for equality and empowerment in agri-food systems?

Closing the gaps and reducing inequalities by gender and intersecting differentiation in agri-food systems are intrinsically valuable, just and essential for achieving SDG 5 of “equality between women and men,” as well as for “achieving equality within and among countries” as set by SDG 10. Adherents of so-called ‘smart economics’ approaches have most strongly focused on the broader “pay-offs of investing in women” (World Bank 1995, 2015). Chant and Sweetman (2012, 12) have criticized these approaches as instrumentalizing women’s empowerment by “building women’s capacities in the interests of development rather than promoting women’s rights for their own sake.”

Agri-food systems that are not free of gender inequality and gender gaps are not just, and they are imposing costs and leading to missed opportunities (Quisumbing, Meinzen-Dick and Malapit 2019a). Rawe et al. (2019) state that without redressing unequal power dynamics and systemic inequalities, transformation to equitable, inclusive and sustainable food systems that feed and nourish the global population in the face of current challenges—climate change, in particular—cannot succeed.

Quisumbing, Meinzen-Dick and Malapit (2019a) argue that the projected benefits of achieving gender-transformative agri-food systems include increased resilience, incomes and ultimately well-being of households when women and men have equal opportunities and collaborate in agri-food systems. More positive social and gender norms and access

to services for all are projected to expand the pool of leaders to drive progress. Gender-responsive national policy, programs and services; gender-equitable laws; and monitoring progress toward gender equality are expected to foster gender equity and wider societal benefits. Yet, evidence of projected, quantified benefits of removing structural barriers to equality is not readily available.

There are, however, some caveats to projecting the benefits of tackling structural constraints to equality in agri-food systems. First, achieving gender-transformative agri-food systems needs a holistic approach that concurrently tackles structural barriers at different scales—such as, for instance, norms and formal institutions are mutually interdependent hence the benefits of improvements at one scale in one domain are contingent on changes in other domains and scales. Second, it is challenging to predict accurate and generalizable societal benefits because of the contextual nature of structural barriers which engenders context-specific equilibria, their potential to re-emerge, and the high degree of invisible barriers and changes.

3.1 The scale of the state

Global policy guidelines provide critical support to governments and partners on set standards, collective goals and strategic directions on achieving GEWE with respect to the SDGs, including the SDG 5 on gender equality.

Despite the diverse global policy guidelines that complement national policy frameworks, gender inequality has persisted, in part, because of governance and social systems that may not necessarily be part of the food systems but constrain women's capacity to participate in the food system (Mkandawire et al. 2021). Policies are needed to deconstruct legal barriers for women to work and advance, and help close gender gaps in economic participation and opportunity (see Global Gender Gap Index, [annex table 1](#)). At national and local levels, food policy interventions often have differentiated effects on marginalized groups (women, smallholder farmers)—these interventions include those in fiscal policies, research and innovation; investment and financial support; empowerment; nutrition education; and regulation (Wang et al. 2022). An intersectional lens is necessary to enable a fair assessment of the layered multiple identities, and power structures, which influence inclusion or discrimination across scales. Moreover, policies must account for the interconnectedness of the different elements of the food system to avoid perpetuating and further exacerbating inequalities (Mkandawire et al. 2021).

Policies that are more gender responsive, and policies that promote equity, are projected to contribute to reduced poverty, increased gender equality, increased economic gains and enhanced agricultural productivity. For example, studies of Ethiopia's land-reform program (that legally recognized women's inheritance rights and permitted joint spousal registration of rights to land) found that the reforms contributed to enhanced agricultural productivity (WRI 2019). The current level of discrimination, as measured by the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) (OECD 2019a), is estimated to reduce global income by 7.5 percent, a loss of US\$6 trillion, equivalent to US\$1,552 per capita. Yet if gender parity in social institutions was to be achieved by 2030, it could increase the world's GDP growth by 0.4 percent every year until then. Additionally, by modelling a baseline scenario of 'current trends' versus a 'better futures' scenario, a study by the Food and Land Use Coalition (FOLU 2019) suggests that gender-responsive policies ensuring the rights and well-being of women and girls, alongside parallel initiatives, are critical to improve gender equality. Such policies can also help contribute to annual economic gains estimated at US\$195 billion by 2030, and US\$140 billion by 2050. A 'Towards Sustainability Scenario' in which equity in terms of access to basic services is ensured, public investment promotes progress on pro-poor policies, and redistribution policies effectively address income inequality and food access for the poor has the potential to contribute to achieving poverty reduction targets by 2030 (FAO 2018).

3.2 The scale of markets

Promoting an enabling environment for equality and empowerment at the scale of markets is recognized as a precondition for successfully and sustainably ending poverty. Market-systems proponents view gender inequality as “one of the most inhibitive barriers to reducing poverty” (Springfield Centre 2014, 4). In a Theory of Change for gender-equitable value-chain research and development, Kruijssen et al. (2016, 28) assume “that pro-poor improvements in the productivity, profitability and adaptability of value chains can only be achieved to their full potential and be sustained in the future if they occur jointly with changes in the social norms and attitudes that underlie inequalities” in relation to gender.

An important assumption is that the removal of structural barriers to gender equality at the scale of markets will not only facilitate the empowerment of women and other disadvantaged market actors, but also trigger societal benefits at various other scales. Societal benefits are expected in terms of reaching larger numbers of people and with respect to various development goals, including improved natural resource management, nutrition security and education (Devaux et al. 2018; Kruijssen et al. 2016; Markel et al. 2016).

Rural collectives (formal or informal) as institutions enabling access to credit, information, inputs, collective action, natural resource management and access to common resources (e.g., rangelands water) are important vehicles to address constraints to (individual) access and agency in these domains, as well as to foster collective action. Yet their governance, the extent to which they are geared to collective action, and their inclusion or exclusion criteria have implications for the benefits reaped by women and ultimately for GEWE in agri-food systems (Biskupski-Mujanovic and Najjar 2020). For example, while self-help groups are more conducive to women’s participation compared with other forms of collectives, these groups involve the poorest segments in a society. Land-dependent groups such as agricultural cooperatives, some of which developed during the ‘Soviet times’ and endure to the present, are far less welcoming to women. Women’s exclusion from such collectives impedes their access to information, credit and inputs. This can partially explain the so-called gender productivity gap in agriculture. Despite these challenges, rural collectives more recently are promoted as a panacea for overcoming structural barriers to women (such as access to land, mobility and marketing norms) and for transforming these gender norms collectively (Biskupski-Mujanovic and Najjar 2020).

3.3 The scales of the community, household and individual

3.3.1 Discriminatory social and gender norms

Social and gender norms can cause inequality by gender and intersecting differentiation (including age) through different mechanisms (Jayachandran 2015; Leon-Himmelstine et al. 2021). Social and gender norms can define resource access, control and ownership by influencing formal regulations or by shaping customary practices and (informal) institutions that coexist with formal institutions (legal pluralism) (Doss and Meinzen-Dick 2020). Even if formal law stipulates equal property rights, women’s informal property rights might be weaker than men’s if guided by discriminatory norms and practices linked to male-centered kinship institutions and authority structures (Kuusaana, Kidido and Halidu-Adam 2013; Leon-Himmelstine et al. 2021; Jayachandran 2015). Gender-unequal security of property rights over land is associated with gender gaps in agricultural productivity (Goldstein and Udry 2008; Peterman et al. 2011) (see Puskur et al. 2023), as well as unequal benefits from increasing land values (Doss and Meinzen-Dick 2020).

Discriminatory gender norms can raise barriers through social and internalized expectations about (i) women’s time use and responsibilities in unpaid care and domestic work, (ii) women’s mobility and options for nondomestic work and market activities, and (iii) women’s access to and control over assets and income. These can hinder women’s economic participation in

agri-food systems—as buyers, sellers, agricultural input and service providers, employers, employees, and financial lenders and borrowers—as well as their access to and benefits from agricultural training, inputs, services, social networks and higher value nodes of value chains (Guloba et al. 2018; Farnworth et al. 2020b; Petesch and Badstue 2020; Leon-Himmelstine et al. 2021; Bergman-Lodin et al. 2019; Lawless et al. 2019; Henry and Adams 2018; Theis, Sultana and Krupnik 2018). While there are contextual differences, gender norms that assign land, decision-making power and farmer identities to men tend to hamper women's effective use of land, their agency in and benefits from agricultural production, innovation and marketing (Badstue et al. 2020a). Norms pertaining to women's decency may hinder women from engaging in specific agricultural activities or market transactions with men (Atherstone et al. 2019; Lusiba, Kibwika and Kyazze 2017).

Norms, the patriarchal nature of local social structures and services, and unconscious associations of technology and its development with masculinity can restrain the supply of gender-responsive agricultural services and innovations (Kilby, Mukhopadhyay and Lahiri-Dutt 2019; Badstue et al. 2020b; Tarjem et al. 2021; Polar et al. 2021). Roles and norms related to mobility and time use linked to gender—and, in Asian contexts, also to caste and socioeconomic status—influence the extent to which innovations and extension reach and speak to women (Badstue et al. 2020b; Farnworth et al. 2021; Farnworth et al. 2020a).

Discriminatory social and gender norms can sustain harmful practices—such as gender-based violence and a culture of silence and victim shaming—within families as well as in commercial agricultural workplaces, and consequently constrain the empowerment of women and young women (Cislaghi et al. 2019; Cole et al. 2014; Henry and Adams 2018; Basse and Kwizera 2017; Namuggala 2015; Leon-Himmelstine et al. 2021).

Not addressing discriminatory social and gender norms potentially creates high costs for human development. Wider support for discriminatory gender norms is associated with higher gender inequality (in health, empowerment and the labor market) which, in turn, is correlated with a loss in human development progress due to inequality (UNDP 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa, a one percent increase in gender inequality reduces a country's human development index by 0.75 percent (UNDP 2016).

3.3.2 Aspirations and role models

There is evidence of gender gaps in young people's aspirations for agricultural and non-agricultural occupations (Kosec et al. 2016; Elias et al. 2018; Nandi and Nedumaran 2021; Costa, Gonzales and Palacios-Lopez 2022). Dampened aspirations can both indicate and form structural barriers to women's agency at the informal individual level. In Kyrgyzstan, for instance, higher aspirations in agriculture by women support their agency and reduce gender inequality in households (Kosec et al. 2021). Furthermore, women's role as agricultural producers or entrepreneurs is not always recognized (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2011), nor do women necessarily identify as such (Farnworth et al. 2021). There are few role models of successful female agricultural producers and entrepreneurs.

By raising belief in self-efficacy, raising aspirations, and challenging gender stereotypes and gender-role incongruity beliefs, female role models may positively influence women's and girls' occupational choices and ambitions (Beaman et al. 2012; Riley 2017), including in male-dominated domains like cash-crop agriculture or high-node value-chain activities, thereby narrowing gender gaps.

4. The current status and evolution since 2011 of key structural constraints to equality in agri-food systems

4.1 *The scale of the state*

From 2011 to now, there has been increasing attention for GEWE in agri-food systems in global policy, with the recognition of GEWE as a specific SDG and an international human right. Financing institutions have also come together to jointly develop financial strategies that can advance gender equality. For example, the Paris Development Bank's statement on GEWE, made in November 2021 at the first global summit of all public development banks, calls for four goals matched by corresponding concrete outcomes. Three of the four goals relate to gender equality in agriculture (Finance in Common 2020).

Furthermore, there is increased recognition of the significance of global data gaps related to GEWE for informing national policy and government provision of services related to sustainable development and food security. A 2018 survey of gender advocates' perceptions and use of gender data found that 85 percent of advocates reported that existing official data related to gender equality was somewhat or mostly incomplete (Connell, Holder and Kearney 2020). A critical impediment to both advocates and policymakers is that available data might not exist in easily accessible formats, nor are they put into tools for end-users. Correspondingly, gender-equality considerations have been integrated into SDG monitoring standards, and international-development actors are pushing forward initiatives to improve global data related to GEWE, such as Equal Measures 2030 (<https://www.equalmeasures2030.org>).

Global trends in national legal and policy frameworks surrounding mobility, access to assets, and entrepreneurship over 2011–21 show that laws have improved with respect to gender equality for several countries. New legislation to enhance gender equality and abolish discriminatory laws also shows increasing national political commitment since the last edition of the Social Institutions and Gender Index (SIGI) in 2014 (OECD 2014, 2019b), which is important for lifting barriers to women's social, economic and political opportunities in agri-food systems (OECD 2019a).

However, many national legal frameworks have remained at the status quo, perpetuating the same discriminatory environment. This legal environment is important for enabling women to contribute and benefit from agri-food systems equally to men, and to be empowered through their contributions. Women, Business and the Law data from the World Bank on gender equality in the legal environment for 190 economies shows that, in general across regions, laws have been and continue to be most disabling factor for gender equality concerning mobility and access to assets, in comparison to laws concerning entrepreneurship (see [annex tables 3–7](#)).

The regions of Europe, Central Asia, Latin America and Caribbean have shown the least change across the three indices between 2011 and 2022; however, (with some exceptions) these economies' scores tended to be high (i.e., in favor of GEWE) in 2011 already. In South Asia, scores for the three indices in 2022 vary across countries but remained relatively stable over time (2011–22) and some economies in South Asia score consistently low on laws promoting gender equality in access to assets. In East Asia and the Pacific region, with some exceptions, scores for mobility and entrepreneurship are relatively high in 2022, but relatively low for access to assets. With some exceptions, the region did not show much change over time. The Middle East and North African region shows consistently low scores for access to assets, high variation in scores for mobility across economies, and relatively high scores for entrepreneurship in 2022; but did not show much change in comparison to 2011.

The sub-Saharan African region showed the most substantial change toward gender equality in the legal environment concerning mobility, access to assets, and entrepreneurship between 2011 and 2022 in comparison to the other regions, with several economies showing increases of 20 to as much as 100 points (Women, Business and the Law data; [annex table 2](#)). In relation to this increase: even though progress in achieving gender equality has been uneven and slow across African countries, all African countries have ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and 42 African countries have ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol). Many countries have also enacted legislative reforms in support of women's empowerment by addressing gender-based violence against women, supporting women's land rights and access to finances, and promoting women's political representation (OECD 2019a).

The status of gender mainstreaming in national-level policies may have improved over the last five to 10 years. Studies assessing the level of gender inclusiveness across national policies and budgets in Latin America and East Africa prior to 2018 highlighted the structural gaps and challenges that existed in planning processes, and recommended proactive efforts to integrate gender in policy and legal frameworks for promotion of gender-equality outcomes (Gumucio and Rueda 2015; Ampaire et al. 2016; Aura et al. 2017). In comparison, recent studies in sub-Saharan African and Pacific countries show that there may be increasing gender responsiveness in agriculture, fisheries and natural resource policies; however, they show superficial understanding and treatment of the structural issues to be addressed (Ampaire et al. 2020; Andersson, Pettersson and Lodin 2022; Lawless et al. 2021). An outlier may be Ethiopia's agricultural-sector policies, which have progressed over the last years to recognize women as producers and accept them as paid workers; in contrast, other national policies in Ethiopia tend to relegate women to a more limited role as carers who do not carry out paid work (Drucza, Rodríguez and Birhanu 2020). Although national governments have developed youth and gender strategies, meaningful intersectional approaches are still not applied in policymaking, limiting the degree of gender transformation possible (Andersson, Pettersson and Lodin 2022; Drucza, Rodríguez and Birhanu 2020). Furthermore, notwithstanding some country gains in the agricultural sector in Tanzania and Uganda, Ampaire et al. (2020) highlight how lack of budgeting for gender-equality actions and how incoherence across governance levels can hamper meaningful impacts in practice.

4.2 *The scale of markets*

Over the last 10 years since 2011, donors' funding for inclusive market interventions has grown. Cassinath and Mercer (2020) speak of at least 15 recent market-systems activities targeted at women and youth in agriculture in 17 countries (with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia) with a combined value of US\$500 million. The International Fund for Agricultural Development recorded a 26 percent increase of its projects with value-chain components in its complete portfolio over 10 years from 2009 (46 percent to 72 percent)—a development that was accompanied with new emphasis on the inclusion of poor rural people, especially women (IFAD 2020). While gender had not featured prominently on the value-chain research agenda before, Kruijssen et al. (2016) observed a shift from 'gender-blind' to 'gender-sensitive' investigations. Markel et al. (2016) discerned a paradigm shift in market-systems development, with practitioners, policymakers and private-sector representatives incorporating more gender and power analysis into their work. The publication of a variety of frameworks, tools and guides for gender research in value chains (FAO 2016; Twyman and Ambler 2021; Akhter et al. 2018) underlines this trend.

In spite of these developments, some scholars observe that there is still too little attention to the sociocultural context, including norms and beliefs, and how they restrain or promote market participation and benefits for different subgroups of women (Markel et al. 2016). A clearer distinction between symptoms and causes of why markets do not work for the poor is needed, as well as actions to address the latter (Humphrey 2014). In line with this, Kruijssen et al. (2016) suggest a further move from gender-sensitive to gender-transformative approaches that engage with the underlying causes of gender inequity.

In terms of the trend and status of collectives and GEWE in agri-food systems, four types of collectives have been at the center of development and applied development evaluation literature: self-help groups; natural resource management groups; processing, marketing and farming cooperatives. Desai and Joshi (2014) found that women in villages that had self-help group NGOs were more likely to save money regularly as well as to have a say in decisions about children's schooling, family medical care and family planning. Natural resource management groups related to irrigation and rangeland management were largely discriminatory against women despite women's increased contributions in irrigation and rangeland management (Zwarteveen 2011; Najjar and Baruah 2021). Groups for processing forest products, such as shea and argan oil, are dominated by women, but often limited benefits accrue to these women (Elias and Arora-Jonsson 2016; Perry et al. 2019). Women members in argan cooperatives were more likely than nonparticipants to earn an income, to feel optimistic about their opportunities and to vote (Perry et al. 2019)—however, these cooperatives have drawn criticism that mostly male leaders reap the primary benefit of collective membership (Fischer and Quaim 2012; Perry et al. 2019; Montanari and Bergh 2019). Members who were more educated, often men, were far more likely to benefit from these cooperatives whereas women worked for meager wages and in some instances for free.

Agarwal's study found that women's farm groups outperformed individual farms: "their annual average value of output was 1.8 times greater, and annual average net returns per farm (calculated by subtracting all paid out costs from the annual value of output) were five times higher" (Agarwal 2020a, 184). Group solidarity in collective farming caused the local political power of landlords to decrease, resulting in greater power for landless tenants and marginal farmers (Sugden et al. 2021, 16).

4.3 *The scales of the community, household and individual*

4.3.1 *Discriminatory social and gender norms*

The decade since 2011 has seen an increase in systematic, large-scale data collection on a number of key gender norms. Some of these directly relate to GEWE in agri-food systems (e.g., norms defining women's access to resources and participation in the economy); others relate indirectly through constraint of individual agency (e.g., beliefs around gender-based violence), or confirmation of gender stereotypes (e.g., beliefs around leadership capacities) (Hanmer and Klugman 2016). Data on norms related to other sources of social differentiation remain scarce.

In what follows, we reflect the current status of a selection of gender norms using the latest data point in relevant surveys, and their evolution by comparing to a data point approximately 10 years earlier (Pereznieto 2015, figures 3–10; [annex tables 8–14](#)).

Currently, the acceptability of (and therefore norms about) wifebeating is generally rarely supported in Latin American countries (by women respondents), moderately widely supported in South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, and widely supported in some exceptions (figure 3; Demographic and Health Surveys 2006–13, 2013–19).¹ There is variable, yet generally wide, support across sub-Saharan African countries, and very wide support in North and West African countries. Generally, over time and across low- and medium-income countries (LMICs), support for this norm slightly decreased.

1. As a reference, we label < 20 percent of the population/respondents' support for the norm as 'low'; > 20 but < 30 percent 'moderate'; > 30 but < 50 percent 'wide'; and > 50 percent 'very wide' support.

Afrobarometer data shows moderate support for the belief that men are better political leaders than women norm in most sub-Saharan African countries; however, there are exceptions in the form of wide support in a few sub-Saharan African countries. Generally, support remained relatively stable over time, yet decreased substantially in some exceptions (figure 4; Afrobarometer 2011–13, 2016–18).² World Values Survey data shows generally moderate and, over time, slightly decreasing support for this norm in Latin American countries. In South Asian and Southeast Asian countries, support is relatively high; there is insufficient data on trends (figure 5; World Values Survey 2010–14, 2017–20).

In terms of gender norms related to care work, across regions, it is generally widely-in some cases very widely-believed that preschool children suffer if their mothers work (figure 6; World Values Survey 2017–20). Across sub-Saharan African countries, there is a very widespread belief that a family is better off when a woman is responsible for caring for children and the home (figure 7; Afrobarometer 2016–17).

In terms of norms related to women's rights to economic opportunities (some of which also play out at the scale of markets), in most sub-Saharan African countries there is very wide support for women having the same rights as men to own and inherit land (figure 8; Afrobarometer 2016–17). Norms assigning more rights to a job for men than for women in times of job scarcity are moderately supported in Latin American countries, but very widely supported in most South Asian, Southeast Asian and sub-Saharan African countries (figure 9; World Values Survey, 2017–20). The belief that women should only work in case of insufficient income is widely supported in many Latin American countries. However, support is moderate in a few countries, after it followed a downward trend (figure 10; Latinobarómetro 2008, 2015).

In-depth case studies by Gennovate (<https://gennovate.org>) and Align (www.alignplatform.org) show that norms assigning the roles of breadwinner and household-head to men, and the responsibility for domestic duties to women, prevail in agricultural and fishing communities in sub-Saharan African and Southeast Asian countries (Bergman-Lodin et al. 2019; Locke et al. 2017), and across rural and urban communities in LMICs (Boudet, Petesch and Turk 2013). Restrictions to women's mobility and participation in the public sphere continue to limit women's access to markets and income in rural South Asia (Petesch and Badstue 2020). Across sub-Saharan African, South Asian, Southeast Asian and Latin American countries, agricultural innovation remains men's sphere of action—women are often perceived as helpers rather than farmers, and are discouraged from using machinery (Fischer et al. 2018; Badstue et al. 2020b).

There is some evidence of shifting norms: for example, in Kenya, women are increasingly viewed as 'developers' for their households. While this expands their access to training and groups, it constrains their time further (Bergman-Lodin et al. 2019). Women are increasingly involved in income-generating activities in fisheries in Southeast Asian, and commercial farming and livestock keeping in South Asia. In the process, mobility for women has become more acceptable (Locke et al. 2017; Petesch and Badstue 2020). In some contexts with conducive market, infrastructure and empowerment dynamics; and/or male outmigration, local opportunity structures open up—enabling women to innovate in agriculture (Badstue et al. 2020b). In other contexts like Nigeria, however, men's privileged agency, mobility and asset ownership permit them to innovate unilaterally, which entrenches gender inequalities (Farnworth et al. 2020b).

4.3.2 Aspirations and role models

Across African, Asian and Latin American countries, young women and men primarily aspire for higher education and salaried, non-agricultural jobs rather than agriculture-related occupations (Elias et al. 2018; World Bank 2019; Guerrero et al. 2016). Aspirations

2. Where available, World Values Survey data for sub-Saharan African countries estimate systematically higher support for this norm than the Afrobarometer data.

beyond agricultural occupations varies by parents' educational background, class and family asset-ownership (Guerrero et al. 2016; Huijsmans et al. 2021). It is also tied to young people's life course and their available options, which are gender unequal in many cases (Huijsmans et al. 2021; White 2021). Ambitious aspirations, however, tend to be dampened by aspiration-achievement gaps, or a lack of economic and mental support by the family (Elias et al. 2018; Guerrero et al. 2016; Costa, Gonzales and Palacios-Lopez 2022).

In the face of aspiration-achievement gaps in contexts across Africa, Asia and Latin America, young men consider modern commercial agriculture as another option. Young women, however, tend to hold on to high educational aspirations as they face persistent norms, beliefs and resource constraints that hinder their equal opportunities in agriculture (Elias et al. 2018). Young people are increasingly expected to have ambitious aspirations and make (economic) progress (Dost and Froerer 2021). These can be hard to achieve within high levels of poverty and educated unemployment. The responsibilities and failure to live up to social expectations can weigh heavily on young women and men (Morrow 2013; Dery 2019; Kaland 2021).

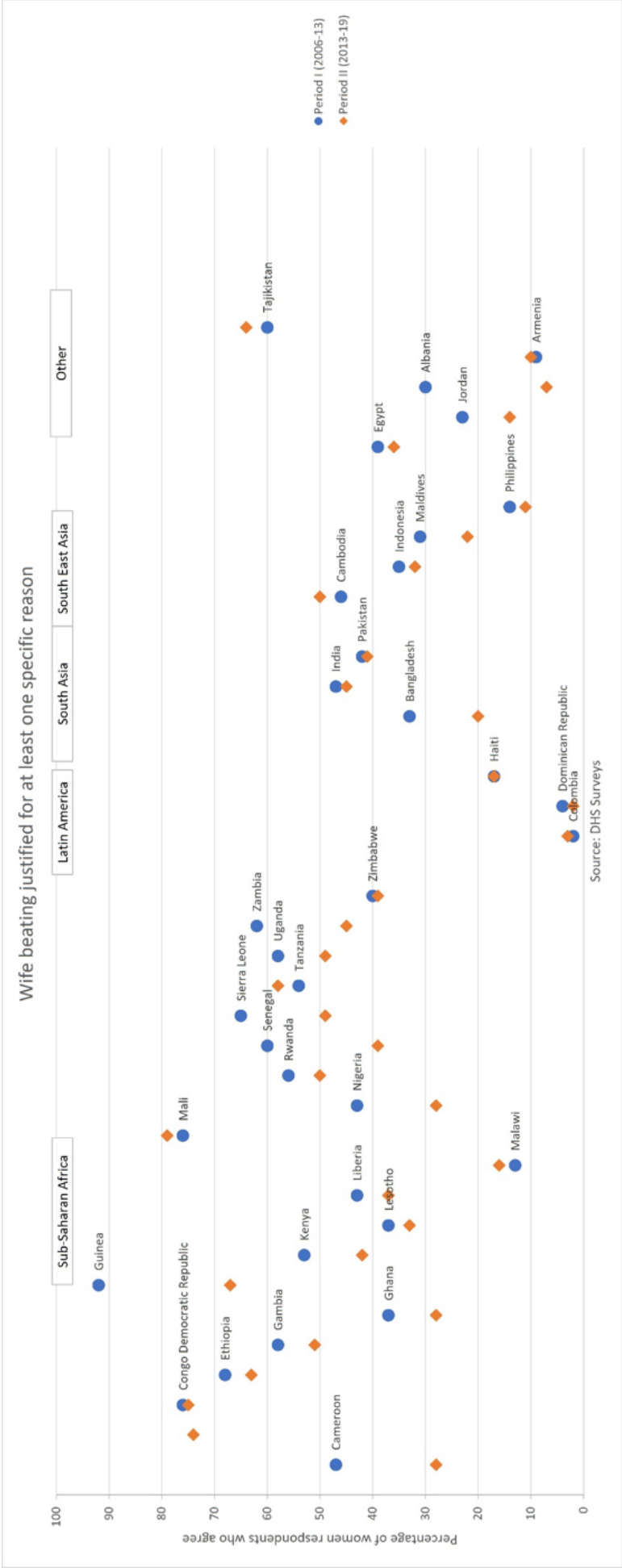


Figure 3. Percentage of women respondents agreeing wifebeating is justified for at least one specific reason

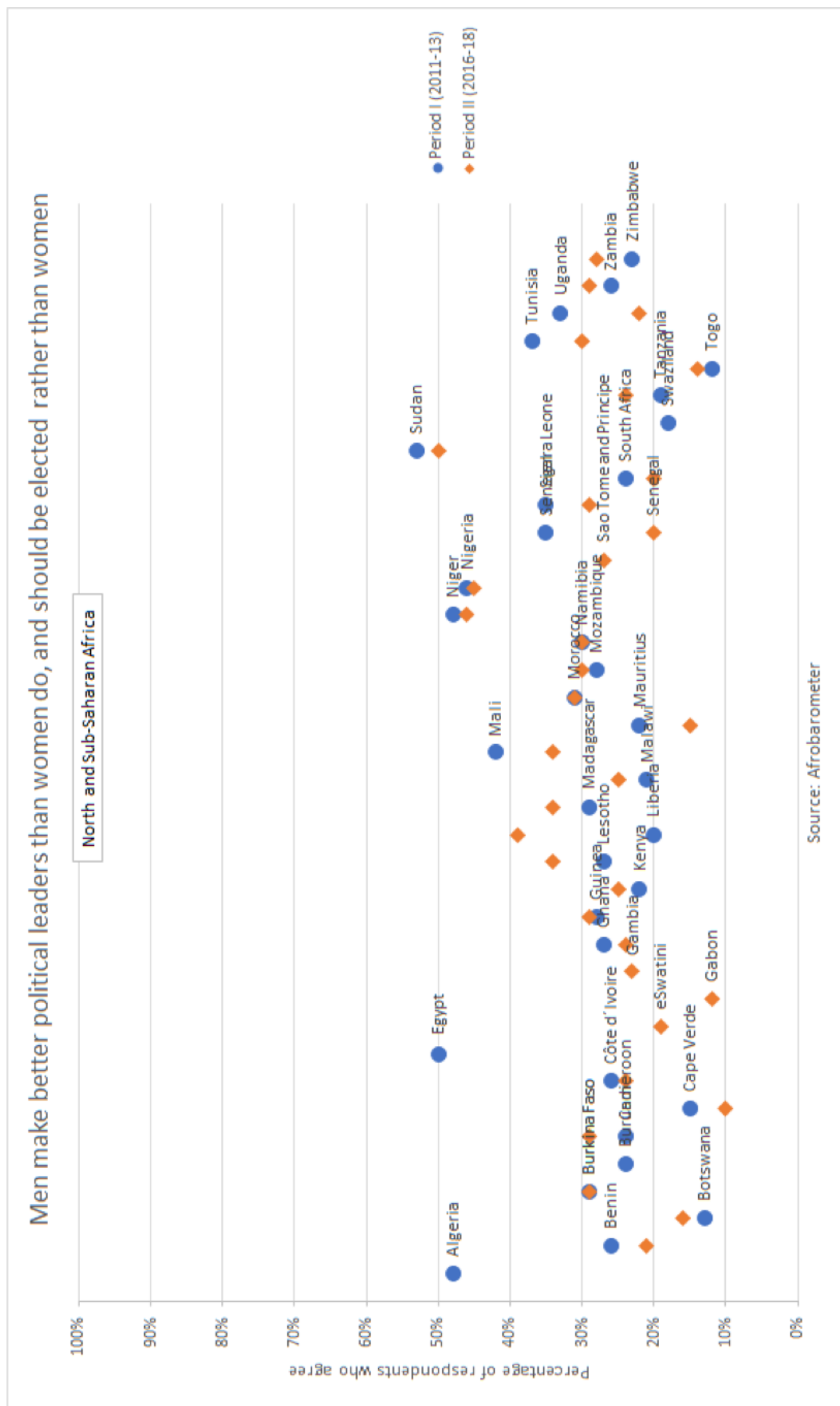


Figure 4. Percentage of respondents agreeing men make better political leaders than women do (Afrobarometer)

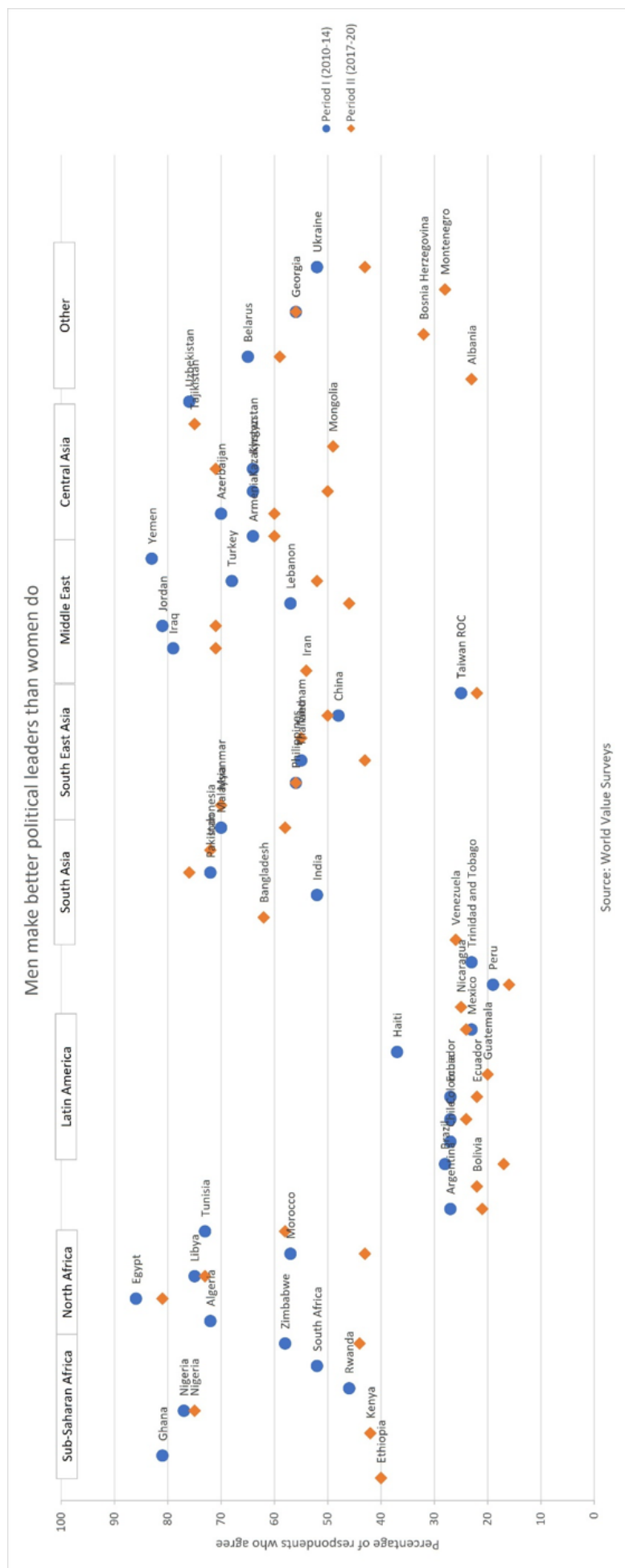


Figure 5. Percentage of respondents agreeing men make better political leaders than women do (World Values Survey)

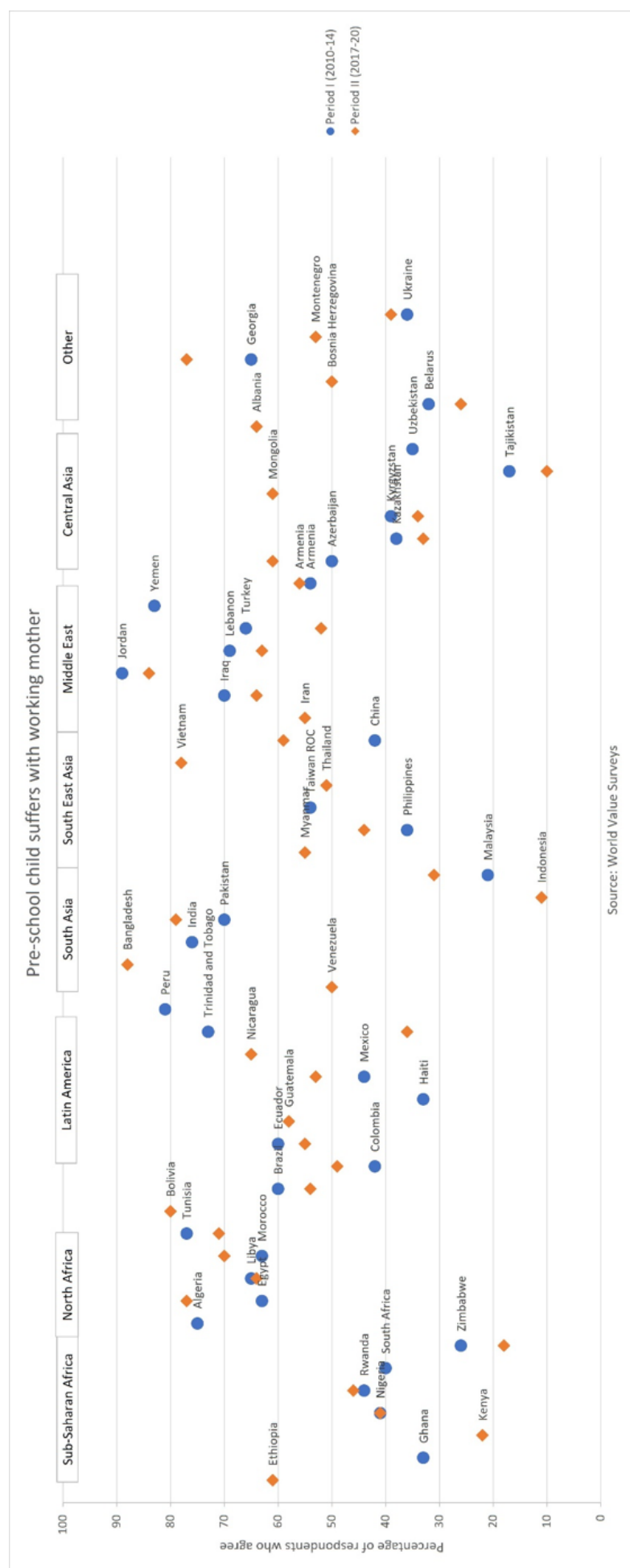


Figure 6. Percentage of respondents agreeing a preschool child suffers if their mother works

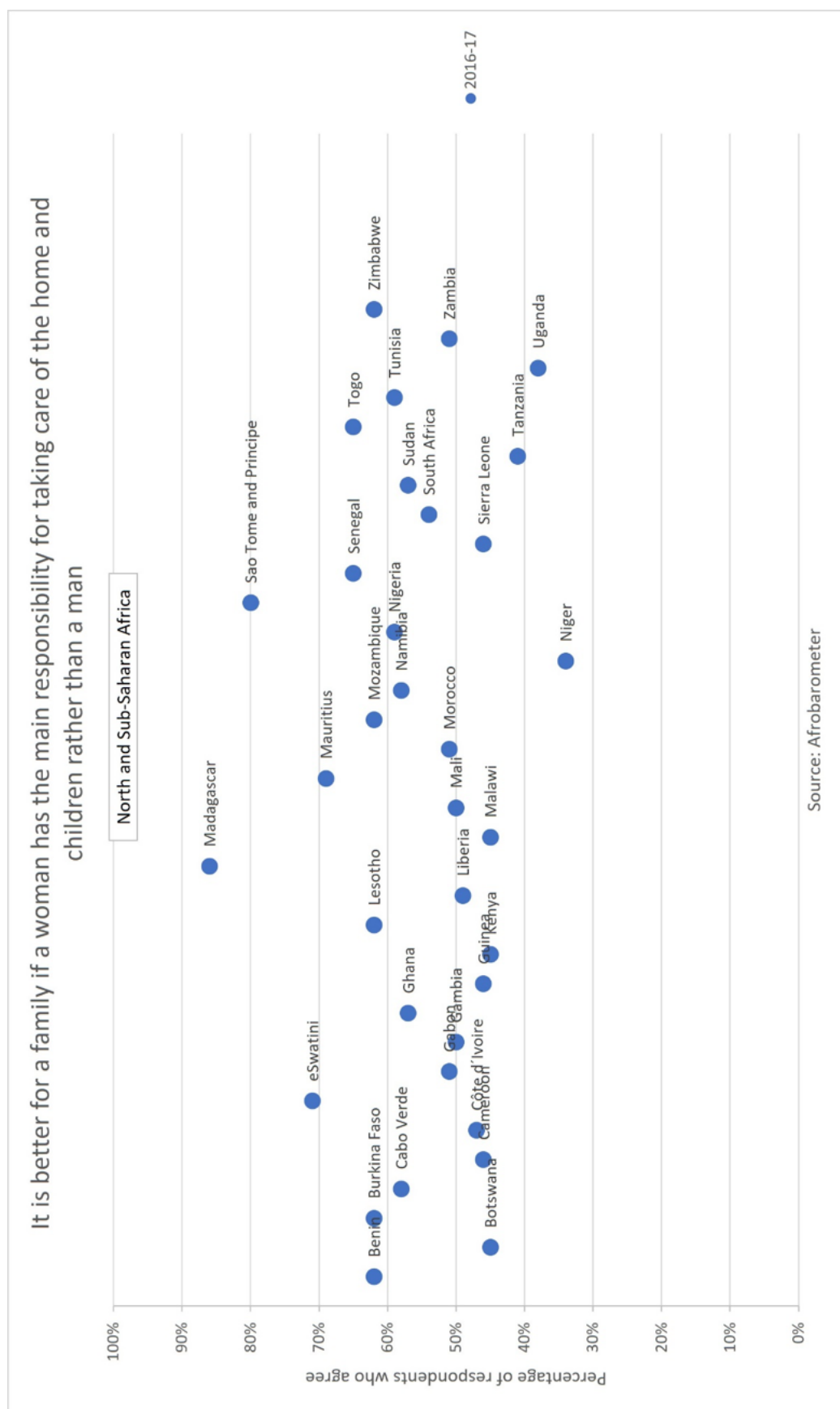


Figure 7. Percentage of respondents agreeing it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility for taking care of the home and children rather than a man

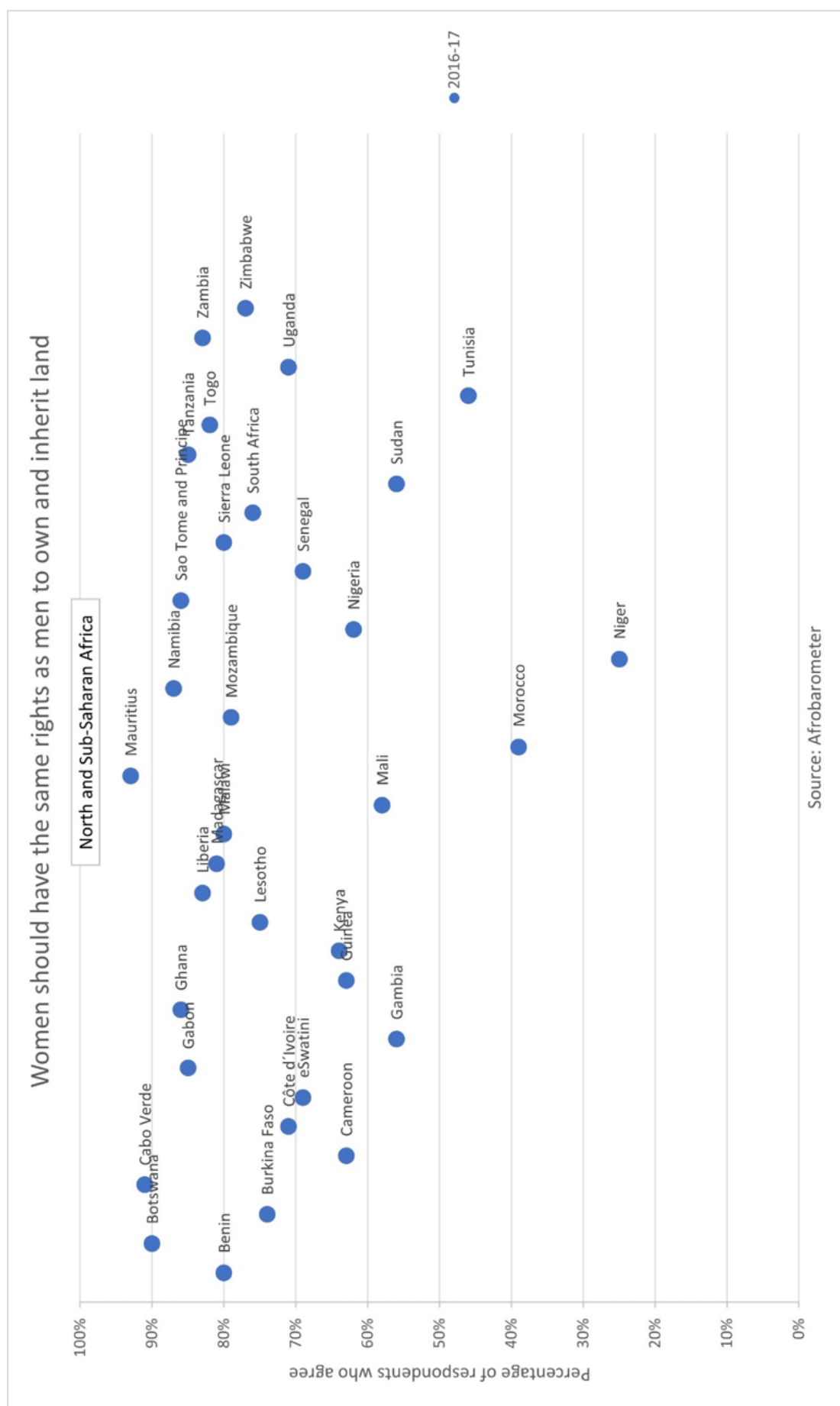


Figure 8. Percentage of respondents agreeing women should have the same rights as men to own and inherit land

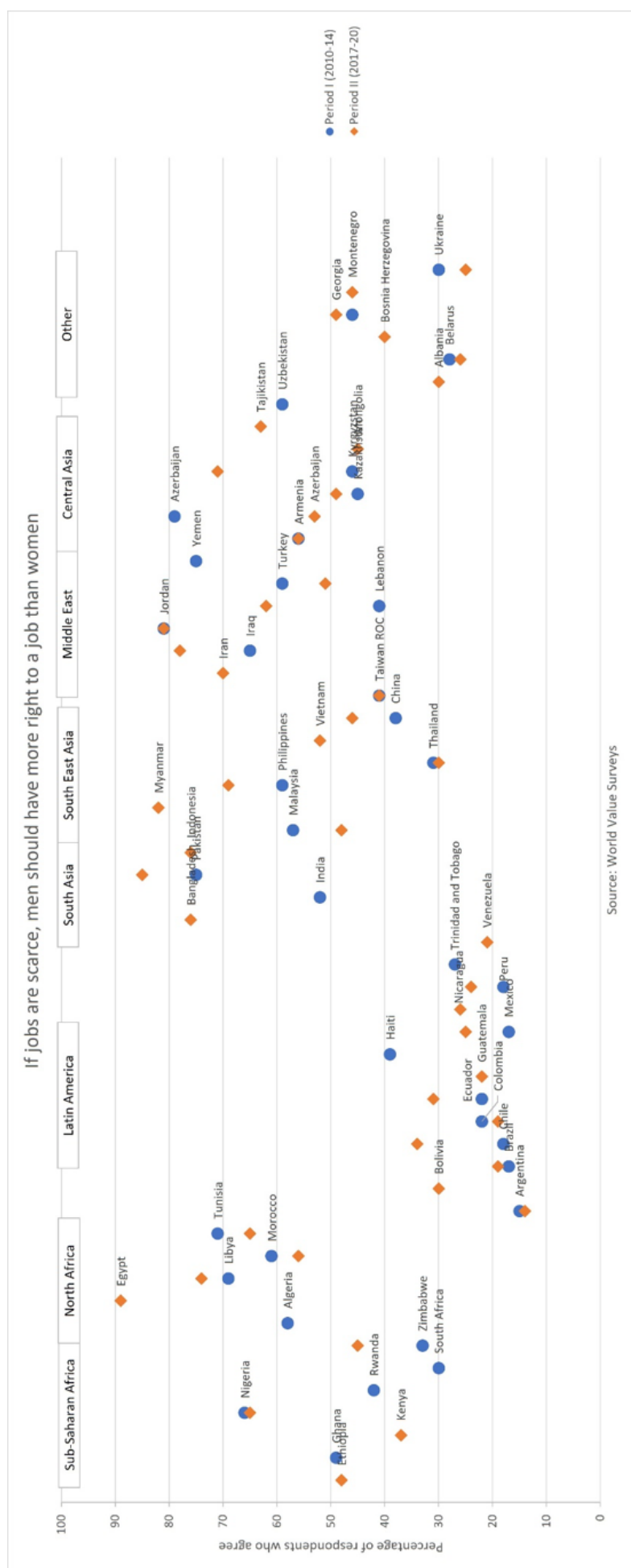


Figure 9. Percentage of respondents agreeing men should have more right to a job than women if jobs are scarce

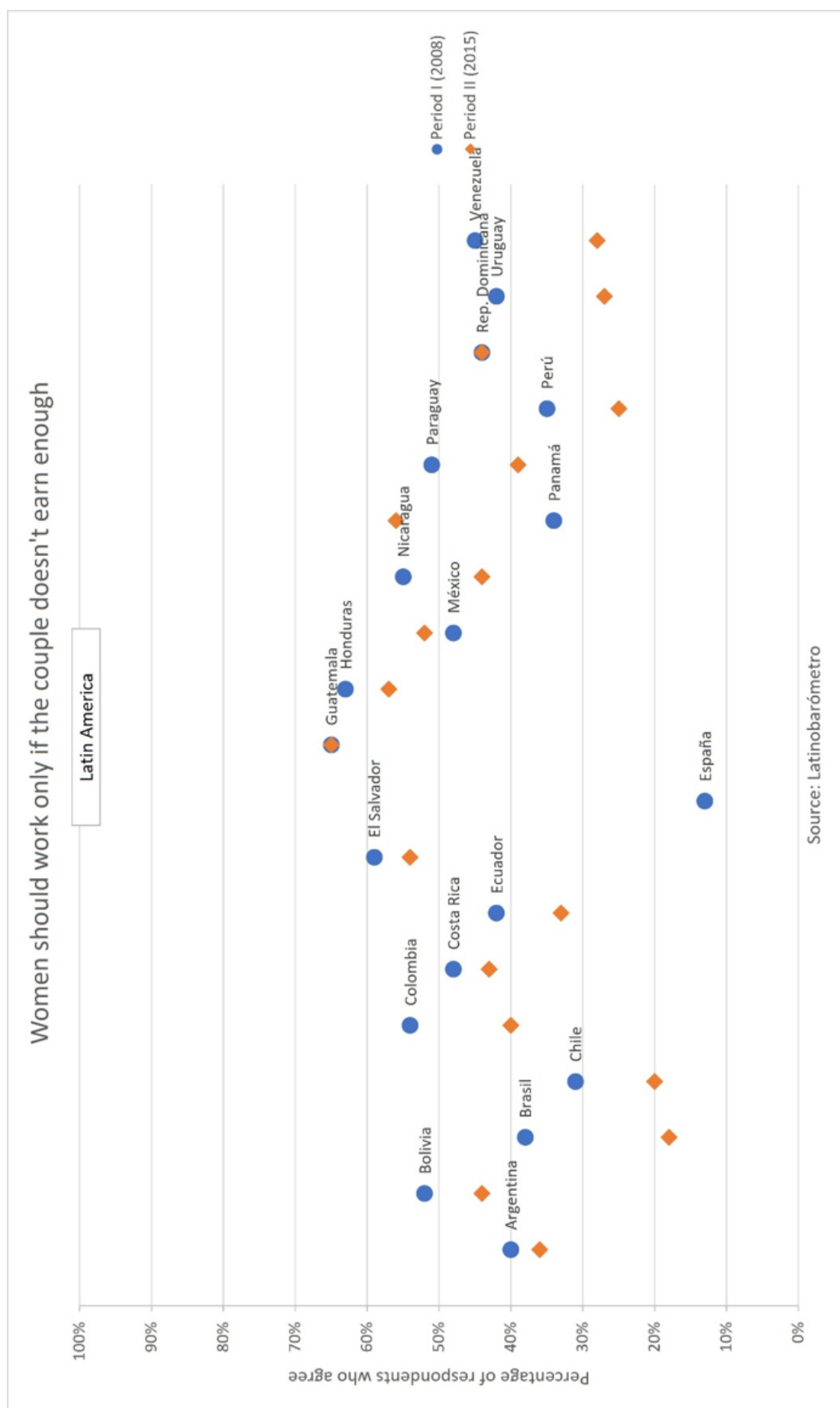


Figure 10. Percentage of respondents agreeing women should work only if the couple does not earn enough

5. Effective strategies for relaxing structural constraints to equality

5.1 *The scale of the state*

Currently under development by the Committee on World Food Security, the Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment (CFS 2021) can:

- provide policy guidance on gender mainstreaming in national legal and policy frameworks for food security and nutrition
- help promote improved policy coherence
- motivate stakeholder actions aligned with achieving the SDG 2030 goals

Although nonbinding, the guidelines can serve as tools for advocacy and policy action. For example, women mollusc collectors in Costa Rica used the voluntary guidelines' (i) gender inclusion for securing sustainable small-scale fisheries and (ii) responsible governance of tenure of land, fisheries and forests information to help to request formal recognition of their work and recognition of their tenure rights to local resources (FAO 2020). As a result of the formal recognition of their work, the women are able to participate in decision-making processes, obtain social-security rights and access credit.

Initiatives to improve global data have given us important lessons on how to better understand the scale of a problem, clarify trends and verify whether an intervention is working, such as through the SDG Gender Index. Launched in 2019, the index includes 51 indicators across 14 of the 17 SDGs, gathering data from 129 countries. The indicators address themes critical for achieving gender equality in agri-food systems and sustainable development—including such factors as poverty, nutrition, water and work. The index was developed with an interest in increasing accountability and addressing data gaps that had inhibited the success of the Millennium Development Goals (Connell, Holder and Kearney 2020). In parallel to the index's launch, the Equal Measures 2030 initiative sought to collaborate with gender advocates as they applied the data drawn from the index, and trained them about the index. Lessons learned from the index's first years in implementation highlight the importance of a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data; for example:

- advocates pairing the data from the index with their own detailed contextual analyses
- working the data into tools and products that women's rights organizations can apply to hold their governments accountable

Another initiative under development, the 'Inequality, Gender, and Sustainable Development' approach seeks to incorporate intersectionality in measuring progress toward the SDGs, and can help to more critically inform global and national policy development on gender equality in agri-food systems. The approach recognizes the significance of inequalities not only between women and men, but within groups of women and girls, and across the various dimensions of sustainable development (Aczona and Bhatt 2020). Although still in initial stages, attempts to use existing survey datasets have been able to identify the groups of women and girls with the lowest well-being outcomes related to labor force participation (from 84 countries).

The participation of women's rights activists in food and agricultural policymaking is crucial for revealing the ways in which gendered international, national and local institutions may violate the right to food, and for ensuring that theories, norms and practices of rights are fully informed by diverse, contradictory and intersectional experiences (Ackerly 2008; Suárez

2013; Rivera and Álvarez 2017; CSM 2018) (see Elias et al. 2023). Similarly, identifying and involving women's and civil society groups, and specific individuals, that can push forward gender issues in policy; strengthening capacities of actors for effective participation; and giving them sufficient authority during policymaking processes have helped ensure that gender considerations are meaningfully integrated into scenario-guided policy-formulation processes on nutrition and food security in cases across the global South (Marty 2021). Ample time must also be allocated for processes of meaningful engagement with diverse women's rights and civil society organizations such that their inputs are included in the design of food and agricultural policies (Botreau and Cohen 2020).

Inclusive consultation processes with diverse stakeholders have helped promote effective gender inclusion in policymaking related to climate change, agriculture and food security in Latin American countries (Gumucio and Rueda 2015). Correspondingly in Ethiopia, the 2017 Gender Equality Strategy for Ethiopia's agriculture sector was "the first policy to conduct a country-wide consultation" and has been found to more completely represent women's realities, compared with previous national policies (Drucza, Rodríguez and Birhanu 2020). Ensuring that women participate in decision-making at all levels has been important for the development of policies that promote both food security and gender equality (Botreau and Cohen 2020).

5.2 *The scale of markets*

Development efforts to promote an enabling environment for increased equality in agri-food systems at the scale of markets are relatively recent. A broad and systematic evaluation of what has proven effective is still due, and should include the question of when results can be transferred from one context to another. A review of first case studies yields the following insights:

1. A combination of scaling agricultural technologies with GTAs leads to more value-chain transformation—creating not only more market options for women, but also more equitable gender relations beyond the chain (Kruijssen et al. 2016; Cole et al. 2020, based on a case study in Zambia).
2. Process upgrading (increased efficiency of production) promotes more equitable value-chain participation if women's capacities are developed and restrictive norms (such as those related to mechanization) are addressed. Evidence varies widely about how vertical coordination (e.g., fair trade certification, contract farming schemes) can successfully improve women's empowerment (Ihalainen et al. 2021, in a review of various studies).
3. Market-system programs were effective where they combined a business-venture approach to working with private-sector partners with a variety of other measures. These measures included, for instance, facilitating women's and youth inclusion by building their capacity, and strategically and consistently using data to prove the business case for upgrading their roles. Sharing monitoring results with partners was also seen as building their accountability for further inclusion (Cassinath and Mercer 2020, based on four case studies in Albania, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Indonesia).
4. Efforts at improving financial inclusion can be amplified if the targeted social groups are already changing restrictive gender norms. Effective interventions that address the enabling environment for financial inclusion depend on the cooperation of various market actors (Scarampi, AlBashar and Bujorjee 2020, based on a case study in Turkey).
5. The gender gap in productivity and profitability of microentrepreneurs can be reduced if some of the social constraints that women face (such as expectations to use their returns for household expenditure, or time constraints to undertake business and skills training) are addressed (Buvinić and Furst-Nichols 2016, based on a review of rural and urban case studies in 30 countries).

There are several examples of the potential of agricultural cooperatives for relaxing barriers to GEWE in agri-food systems. In the 2021 study by Sugden et al. on agriculture collectives in India and Nepal, women's participation in mixed groups ranged from 12 to 87 percent. The researchers argue that women-only groups showed a greater ability to work together with little conflict, and demonstrated stronger bonds of solidarity compared with the other groups (Sugden et al. 2021). Land ownership, along with recognition of women as farmers by both development organizations and local communities, is a promising way for women to equitably benefit from agricultural cooperatives (Najjar et al. 2017). Land, however, is a scarce resource and it is not possible to expect that all women and men will own land.

A promising example of women's participation in producer organizations is the Popular Knowledge Women's Initiative Farmer to Farmer Cooperative Society in Uganda, which supports members to grow sunflowers and later process the seeds into sunflower oil for local markets (Lecoutere 2017). The authors note that women's influence on decisions in their households, groups and the wider community has increased because of their cooperative membership (Lecoutere 2017). Similarly, youth-related groups are promoted by several governments—particularly in sub-Saharan Africa (Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa and Uganda)—to alleviate youth unemployment, improve their access to skills and resources, and encourage their engagement in agricultural value chains (Yami et al. 2019). The youth groups, however, are predominantly male; women's limited involvement is in part associated with their time-heavy domestic roles, mobility constraints and lack of agricultural aspirations.

5.3 The scales of the community, household and individual

5.3.1 Discriminatory social and gender norms

Programs and interventions seeking to promote less harmful social and gender norms incorporate mechanisms of social change. They use reflexive and participatory methods for individuals and collectives, and engage with agents of social change, including men (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2020; McDougall et al. 2021). They build on ways to influence norms by changing individuals' attitudes and social expectations with information and reflection, social pressure, social sanctions and incentives, or altering the symbolic meaning or signaling function of norms (Eriksson 2015; Hillenbrand and Miruka 2019). GTAs typically include both women and men; and increasingly make masculinities and men's roles more visible, or try to transform these into more positive norms of manhood (Dworkin, Colvin and Fleming 2015; Cole et al. 2015; Achandi et al. 2019; Farnworth et al. 2020b).

Recent non-exhaustive reviews illustrate the potential—and challenges—of GTAs to promote more positive gender norms and more equal gender relations (Wong et al. 2019; FAO, IFAD and WFP 2020; McDougall et al. 2021; McDougall et al. forthcoming). We now discuss examples.

Many GTAs focus on individuals and households; some extend to the community and groups. Technical improvement programs for agriculture, livestock, fishery and aquaculture that integrate GTAs, mostly implemented in sub-Saharan African and South Asian contexts, are associated with: (i) women's greater sense of self-worth and improved capacity to negotiate relationships (Galiè and Kantor 2016), (ii) acknowledgment of women's knowledge and shifts in norms regarding women's engagement in agriculture (Cole et al. 2014), and (iii) women's increased voice in intrahousehold decision-making (Farnworth et al. 2016). Youth economic empowerment programs with GTAs in sub-Saharan Africa challenged prevailing norms, enabling young women to own a business and decide on income use (Leon-Himmelstine et al. 2021). In sub-Saharan Africa, a GTA resulted in larger gains in gender-equal attitudes and women's decision-making power over income use compared with a gender-accommodative approach (Cole et al. 2020).

GTAs integrated in farmer field schools are associated with women's reduced resistance against and increased uptake of agricultural practices and technology; women's increased involvement in intrahousehold decision-making about farming, income and assets; and men and women's awareness of gendered labor distributions (Choudhury and Castellanos 2020; FAO, IFAD and WFP 2020). Combined agricultural and nutrition programs induced more gender-equitable attitudes toward gender roles in studies of GTAs in sub-Saharan Africa, and with and without gender sensitization activities in South Asia (Quisumbing et al. 2021; Kerr et al. 2016).

GTAs that apply participatory action learning methods with households and/or communities such as the Gender Action Learning System, the Nurturing Connections program (as developed by Helen Keller International) and the Journeys of Transformation program (<https://www.care.org/news-and-stories/resources/journeys-of-transformation/>), are associated with (i) increased awareness of negative consequences of gender inequality, strict gender roles and gender-unequal division of labor; (ii) more accepting attitudes toward women's involvement in decision-making and access to resources; and (iii) men's engagement in care and domestic activities (Farnworth et al. 2013; Wong et al. 2019; Mayoux 2012). Community conversations used to address gender in animal and human health risk management in sub-Saharan Africa increased men's support for women's access to livestock-management information (Lemma, Tigabie and Knight-Jones 2021); men's involvement in domestic, productive and high zoonotic-disease risk activities; and women's voice in livestock marketing and ownership (Mulema, Kinati and Lemma 2020).

Household methodologies that challenge discriminatory intrahousehold gender relations and norms implemented in sub-Saharan African contexts, such as the Gender Household Approach, the Gender Model Family approach, and households mentoring integrated Gender Action Learning System tools: (i) increased women's involvement in traditionally male domains such as farm decision-making and access to cash-crop income (Lecoutere and Wuyts 2020; Lecoutere and Chu 2021), and (ii) are associated with more equitable sharing of resources (FAO, IFAD and WFP 2020).

There are, however, concerns about the extent and depth of changes in norms and empowerment following on from GTAs at the scale of individuals and households (Galiè and Kantor 2016), as well as a lack of evidence to assess the sustainability of the effects of GTAs. Moreover, in many cases, entrenched gender-unequal institutions—such as women's limited access to land, productive assets, education and information, and women's caring work burden—continue to hamper women's empowerment. Furthermore, the relationship between norm change and women's empowerment remains ambiguous and unpredictable (Aregu et al. 2018; Galiè et al. 2022). Norms favoring women's engagement in agri-food systems can also be disempowering if women experience heavier work burdens, harsh working conditions and meager incomes (Najjar, Devkota and Feldman 2022).

Enacting effective and lasting change requires engagement across multiple scales (McDougall et al. 2021). A non-exhaustive list of GTAs at higher scales (e.g., state, markets and organizations) includes:

1. feminist policies and budgets strengthening women's rights, including to land (see section 2.1.) (McDougall et al. forthcoming)
2. policies addressing discriminatory norms and harmful gender stereotypes, prejudices and practices (UNDP 2020)
3. reducing the gender-blindness of (national) data systems, such as in censuses or large-scale surveys (McDougall et al. forthcoming)
4. addressing gender norms preventing women's financial inclusion (Koning, Ledgerwood and Singh 2021; Scarampi, AlBashar and Bujorjee 2020)
5. gender-transformative messaging in media and educational curricula (Workwear Guru 2020; Bevitt 2021; UNDP 2020)

Within-agency tools to increase critical self-awareness about one's own gender norms and behaviors—which is essential for agencies addressing GEWE to be committed, credible and effective (McDougall et al. forthcoming)—include: gender audits, the Gender at Work Framework (Rao et al. 2016, 2017), Gender Action Learning System and GTA tools applied within organizations (Sarapura and Puskur 2014; CARE 2020; Slegh, Pawlak and Barker 2014).

5.3.2 Aspirations and role models

There is evidence that role models, in real life or in media, have an impact on increasing aspirations and choices such as:

1. increasing savings, making investments and encouraging children's education (Ethiopia) (Bernard et al. 2015; Bernard et al. 2019)
2. challenging prevailing gender norms and improving women's status (India) (Jensen and Oster 2009)
3. changing reproductive choices (Brazil, Nigeria) (La Ferrara, Chong and Duryea 2012; La Ferrara, Banerjee and Orozco 2018)

Female leaders and role models who are successful in their profession and/or challenge gender stereotypes have been found to raise aspirations (Beaman et al. 2012), increase exam scores (Riley 2017), change career choices (Porter and Serra 2020; Bohnet 2016), induce more gender-egalitarian attitudes among young women (Clayton 2018; World Bank 2019), and challenge incongruent beliefs about women's entrepreneurial capacities (Barsoum et al. 2022).

In agri-food systems in Latin America, female leaders involved in cash-transfer projects have been shown to amplify the effects of those cash transfers on women's future-oriented attitudes, and sustainably so (Macours and Vakis 2014, 2018). Involving female role models in ICT-enabled agricultural extension videos in a SSA context reduces male unilateral agricultural decision-making and spouses' overestimation of their own decision-making power (Lecoutere et al. 2019; Van Campenhout, Lecoutere and Spielman. 2021). In various contexts, the absence of men (outmigration) and a lack of non-agricultural livelihood options are associated with women aspiring toward—and engaging in—commercial agriculture and livestock keeping, at times in defiance of gender roles (Nandi and Nedumaran 2021; Kawarazuka et al. 2022).

However, in the context of rural India, Raghunathan et al. (2018) show that the effects on aspirations can vary by group (e.g., by caste or income level) as well as by the type of aspiration. Alvi et al. (2019) show that priming on gender in a lab setting makes women aspire more highly for their daughters; priming on caste makes lower caste women aspire more highly for their daughters than high-caste women.

While it is shown that female role models promote more ambitious choices by girls and women, there is little and mixed evidence about the effects on achievement (Riley 2017; Beaman et al. 2012; Raghunathan et al. 2018). This may follow from other (socioeconomic) constraints that prevent the translation of higher aspirations into achievement gains (Beaman et al. 2012).

5.4 Across scales

Some larger scale programs embrace a holistic approach by addressing various structural constraints to equality in agri-food systems at multiple scales. Rigorous impact evaluations of such complex interventions are complicated by the fact that the interactions between the different components of the program are likely—and intended—to produce effects that are different from the sum of effects of each component if implemented separately (Masset and White 2019); hence, they remain scarce.

Examples of mixed-methods evaluations include a landscape analysis of the Feed the Future Initiative which adopted a value-chain approach to leverage agriculture for nutritional impact. It showed that addressing constraints related to women's roles and gender norms is important for empowering women in their households and in value chains (SPRING 2014), but that greater attention to the gendered dimensions and implications of (proposed) agricultural policies is needed (USAID 2016). In a wheat project in Sudan, strategically targeting institutional relations—with a milling company, women's groups and governmental microcredit institutions—increased experience of these stakeholders in integrating women into research and programming for development (Najjar, Abdalla and Alma 2016). Focusing on improving gender relations at the household and community levels promoted women's knowledge and involvement in wheat value addition, increased their decision-making power and income-generation abilities, and reduced their workloads.

6. Key policy recommendations for fostering an enabling environment for equality and empowerment in agri-food systems

6.1 Holistically addressing structural constraints across scales

Our key recommendation is to take a holistic approach to fostering an enabling environment for equality and empowerment by tackling structural barriers across multiple scales related to the state, markets, community, groups, households and the individual, while concurrently reducing existing inequalities in access to and control over productive resources, services and technology, resilience and leadership.

Gender-equity goals can only be partially accomplished through policy measures and economic interventions. Consciousness-raising initiatives and promotion of norms supporting equality are as crucial as pro-women policy reforms and state actions. Removing only some of the barriers and only at some scales does not necessarily lead to (lasting) change and gender-transformative agri-food systems.

The literature provides ample examples. For instance, if gender norms and informal institutions around property rights to land remain discriminatory, gender-equal formal property rights may lead to little improvement for women's and daughters' access to land or prevention of loss of land access upon divorce or widowhood (Fischer et al. 2021; Najjar, Baruah and Garhi 2020; Jayachandran 2015; Acosta et al. 2020; Daley, Osorio and Park 2013). Formal gender-equality and antidiscrimination laws may be of little avail to improve women's access to work in agricultural value chains, or their psychological and physical safety if laws are poorly enforced and norms acceptive to gender-based violence prevail (Eissler et al. 2020). Even if norms become favorable to women's inclusion, participation in rural collectives can be of limited utility if institutional support declines or political unrest occurs (Najjar, Baruah and Garhi 2019). While gender roles may become more accommodating to

women's equal participation in productive work, the empowering effect may be limited if norms assigning unpaid care work to women prevail (Picchioni et al. 2020). Higher aspirations may not translate into achievement gains if (socioeconomic) constraints at other scales are not addressed (Beaman et al. 2012).

As a way of informing policy- and innovation-led pathways toward more equitable, healthier, more sustainable and resilient agri-food systems, future forecasting research may benefit from including gender dynamics and norms, unpacking mechanisms behind adverse consequences for gender equality, and projecting effects of holistically addressing structural barriers to equality at different scales (including policy, market and value-chain systems, norms and aspirations) (Farnworth et al. 2021; Lentz 2021; Barrett et al. 2021).

It is useful to reflect on holistic packages of interventions or policies that worked, with a view to tailor them to the specific needs, challenges and realities of other contexts (because their impact may sometimes be context-specific). Such tailoring processes ought to be inclusive to ensure relevance and buy-in for lasting gender-transformative change.

6.2 Addressing structural constraints at the scale of the state

Donor agencies have a role to play regarding translating international policy frameworks on gender equality to national and local contexts (Acosta et al. 2020). For example, the international Voluntary Guidelines on Gender Equality and Women's and Girls' Empowerment can serve as a substantial tool for national governments and civil society. They can help to advocate for legislation prohibiting discrimination in accessing credit, formalizing women's equal rights to land ownership and natural resources, and ensuring women's fair and well-paying employment. Such international guidelines and policies may have also been important in promoting positive change in sub-Saharan African countries.

Furthermore, to promote accountability to gender-equality goals and to support advocacy efforts that incorporate intersectional approaches globally, substantial investments are needed in quantitative and qualitative data and indicators that can help identify those women and girls who, because of entrenched forms of discrimination, are the most disadvantaged in societies (Aczona and Bhatt 2020; IDLO 2017). This is key for closing critical global data gaps.

State actors must work to promote policy coherence across multiple sectors and governance levels to ensure meaningful impacts on GEWE in food systems. In some cases at the national policy level, agricultural policies have progressed more than other sectors regarding integrating gender-equality considerations (Drucza, Rodríguez and Birhanu 2020; Gumucio and Rueda 2015). Cross-sectoral coordination and coherence can lead to more gender-transformative food systems (Wang et al. 2022; IDLO 2017).

In order to achieve gender-transformative policies in food systems, more time and funding must be allocated for consultative processes that engage women's rights groups and diverse civil society organizations (IDLO 2017). Increased engagement with civil society as well as academia is necessary to target policies to address the root causes of inequality and avoid reproducing the gendered status quo (Farhall and Richards 2021; IFPRI 2020).

6.3 Addressing structural constraints at the scale of markets

To address structural constraints at the scale of markets, donors and implementing partners should engage more with and dedicate more resources toward (i) the analysis of specific environments; (ii) the development of strategies for transformation; and (iii) monitoring, evaluation and learning for change.

In terms of analyzing specific environments, a better understanding of opportunities and risks for different groups of people in the empowerment process is needed—specifically for subgroups of women and people facing multiple forms of exclusion (age, caste, disability, etc.). This will increase the best use of opportunities and increase risk mitigation (Markel et al. 2016). On top of that, gendered market-systems analyses should more strongly explore norms, including masculinities and how they affect men’s ability and willingness to support women’s economic empowerment (Markel et al. 2016; Singh, Parvez and Canepa 2018).

Looking at developing strategies for transformation, strategy development should break new ground by offering women and youth opportunities in nontraditional sectors as a means for transformative norms change (Cassinath and Mercer 2020). It should also be marked by reflectivity and cooperation on the part of implementers. They should document strategic planning processes to address gendered social norms (Markel et al. 2016) and share information with multiple actors to bring insights to scale (Singh, Parvez and Canepa 2018).

With respect to monitoring, evaluation and learning for change: gender norms as indicators of systemic change in the market system need to be integrated into monitoring and evaluation (Markel et al. 2016). Systematic evaluations of recent market efforts—in terms of their successes and pitfalls (see for instance Cassinath and Mercer 2020 for a landscape study)—will not only encourage learning from experiences for those who design and implement new interventions, but also encourage a more conceptual understanding of inclusivity and the basic requirements for market participation that poor people (including women and other disadvantaged actors) have to meet (Devaux et al. 2018). Links between engagement in the market and empowerment need more evidence (Ihalainen et al. 2021).

For overcoming the various barriers facing women in rural collectives, Perry et al. (2019) and Montanari and Bergh (2019) recommend clarifying the governance of cooperatives, which is currently vague and lacking in the argan sector, for instance, to enable the distribution of profits and work more equitably especially for gender-mixed groups. Agarwal’s (2010) recommended approach still holds true: of achieving a critical mass of women membership (between 25 and 33 percent) in order to create and sustain positive change and gender-equitable practices; yet it is not attained in many groups, especially in gender-mixed and masculine groups (Najjar, Baruah and Garhi 2019). Supporting women in key roles in these collectives, such as president or executive committee members, can also contribute to closing the gender gap in collectives and communities more broadly. Strengthening women’s land rights and decoupling land-ownership status from participation in production cooperatives are also enabling factors. Addressing women’s limited land rights and gender norms that invalidate women in their agricultural roles—particularly in so-called masculine roles, such as irrigation and rangelands management—are essential for tackling the root causes of barriers to women benefiting from markets and collectives on an equal footing with men (Zwarteveen 2011; Najjar and Baruah 2021).

6.4 Addressing structural constraints at the scales of the community, household and individual

GTAs are recommended as they can shift individuals’ mental models, values and beliefs; transform women’s and men’s understanding of social relations; and challenge social structures at multiple scales (McDougall et al. 2021). They can be a way to promote less discriminatory and more positive social and gender norms; or reduce structural barriers at other scales such as policy, market or value-chain systems, and organizations. Because of the relational and collective nature of norms, including other social actors—most importantly men and boys, in the case of gender norms (Chant and Sweetman 2012)—and influential people such as power holders, and traditional and religious leaders is recommended. As

gender roles and norms are embedded in the socialization process from an early age, GTAs with boys can be effective to develop alternative models of what being a boy and a man can mean (Farnworth et al. 2020). Similarly, GTAs with girls can positively influence their attitudes toward and beliefs in self-efficacy in role-incongruent domains like agriculture, technology, entrepreneurship and trade (World Bank 2019).

When implementing GTAs, it is recommended to keep conceptual clarity and coherence (what change is envisioned and how), reflect on the ethics of the envisioned normative change (Wong et al. 2019), and accommodate for differences among women (including intersectionalities) (Kristjanson et al. 2017). Given that we cannot precisely predict social agents' responses, the minimum ethical responsibility of 'doing no harm' requires being careful and watchful for harmful intermediate outcomes, emerging views or perceptions (Eves and Crawford 2014). Winterford, Megaw and Gero (2020) note that violence is a significant barrier and risk when challenging power relations; hence, backlash and unintended negative consequences need to be recognized, and addressed early and continuously.

The scalability of GTAs (i.e., implementation at larger scale, reaching more people) can be a challenge, not only because of the lack of systematic scaling out, but also because of the contextual nature and unpredictability of the impact of GTAs when implemented in other settings, at wider scales, and in interaction with other processes (Wong et al. 2019). To create a tipping point toward gender equality in agri-food systems, scaling out GTAs needs to happen in nonreductionist ways to an appropriate extent ('critical mass') and be combined with scaling up (addressing constraints at meso and macro scales) and 'scaling in' (transformation within agencies and actors) (McDougall et al. forthcoming).

Role models are key to strengthening aspirations of women, young women and men in agricultural and non-agricultural endeavors, and key to reducing gender gaps in people's aspirations. Successful female leaders and role models who challenge gender stereotypes can raise women's and girls' aspirations—even in traditionally male domains—and inspire more gender-equal attitudes, potentially also among men and boys. Including and supporting female role models in media; mass communication campaigns; agricultural extension programs; and leadership positions in (local) governments and companies (e.g., via quota), school programs, academia and (agricultural) research bodies are highly recommended. While there is limited evidence about role models for rural LMICs' contexts and agri-food systems, role models representing disadvantaged social groups are likely to similarly raise aspirations and reduce aspirational gaps.

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ANNEX AND GLOSSARY

Available at: <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/129705>



GENDER Impact Platform

Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results (GENDER) is CGIAR's impact platform designed to put equality and inclusion at the forefront of global agricultural research for development. The Platform is transforming the way gender research is done, both within and beyond CGIAR, to kick-start a process of genuine change toward greater gender equality and better lives for smallholder farmers everywhere.

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CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future dedicated to reducing poverty, enhancing food and nutrition security, and improving natural resources.

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