

Women's Social Networks in Resettlement areas: the Case of Metema Resettlement Site, Ethiopia

By Dessalegn Molla Ketema¹ Ranjan S.Karripai² Ranjitha Puskur³

Abstract

THIS STUDY IS designed to understand the existing formal and informal social networks among re-settlers in Ethiopia. Its main purpose is to explore the extent and gender implications of women's participation in different social networks. The study aims to identify options for enhancing the role and sustainability of these social networks for promoting agricultural innovation in the Metema resettlement site in Ethiopia. Using multistage sampling procedure, the study is based on the selection of 2 out of 18 Peasant Associations (PAs) in the district, and on a random sample

of 160 households. The results show significant variations between previous and recent settlers, and between male and female headed households in terms of membership in different social networks. Relatives, friends and neighbors are the most important source of information and mutual support; and of influential networks in the adoption and diffusion process in the study area. The study recommends for government and NGOs to provide genuine support to social networks, to strengthen their organization, and to promote community based self help groups.

Introduction

THE ETHIOPIAN ECONOMY is among the most vulnerable in sub-Saharan Africa (Pankhurst and Gebre, 2002; Devereux *et al.*, 2005). This is partly due to high dependence on agriculture output, which has suffered from recurrent droughts and extreme weather conditions. The number of food insecure households in Ethiopia is increasing since the 1960s. Domestic food production is continuously failing to meet the food requirements in Ethiopia. As a result, food insecurity is seen as the most important feature of development challenges in the country.

In response to the chronic food shortages faced by millions, the Ethiopian Government launched a large-scale intra-regional resettlement program with the objective of enabling 2.2 million chronically food insecure people to attain food security. The program started with a pilot resettlement (access to land) program in the past four years. People from the drought-prone areas have been mobilized voluntarily to the relatively unpopulated fertile low land areas (NCFS, 2003).

1) Bahir Dar University, Department of Rural Development, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

2) Department of Rural Development and Agricultural Extension Haramaya University Haramaya, Ethiopia

3) International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

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Food security requires recognition and understanding of the settlers' social inter-relationships as 'context' that directly affects their behavior. The types of social context of the settlers include: the settlers' immediate family, those with whom he/she lives and/or works (on a regular basis); extended family or kin with whom there is occasional, possibly irregular contact; neighboring farmers, in close proximity, who may or may not be friends; farming colleagues; and farming friends.

Objective and Research Methodology

THIS PAPER ON women's social networks in resettlement areas focuses on Metema resettlement site as a case study. It identifies the various sex disaggregated formal and informal social networks of previous and new re-settlers in the study area. Also, it studies the extent of women's participation in different social networks and their gender implications, and identification of options for enhancing the role and sustainability of these social networks.

The study is based on information gathered through qualitative methods (semi structured interview with individuals and groups, field observations). Two in-depth interviews were conducted with 8-10 people in each peasant association (PA), consisting of men and women in both previous and new settler areas. Also it is based on quantitative information gathered through household survey covering 160 respondents (123 males and 37 females). This was done through multi-stage sampling design.

Both primary and secondary sources of data were collected for this study. The primary data were collected

Moreover, in a given social system, especially in resettlement areas where social capital is disturbed, it is important to identify influential social networks and their functional contributions to diffuse innovation: health systems, schools, religious and political groups, social clubs, unions, and informal associations and also identify opinion leaders, peers, and targeted media channels.

from respondents through interview schedule, group interview including Participatory Rural Appraisal and focus group discussion. For the household survey and Group interview at community level, Instruments of the Social Capital Assessment Tool (Grootaert *et al.*, 2003) adapted to local context were used to elicit the views and understandings of households as well as the community about the existing formal and informal social networks and their gender implications.

Following data collection and coding, data were entered into Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 12) computer program for analysis. Primary data collected from individual and group respondents, through the interview schedule were analyzed using descriptive statistics to find out the importance of groups and associations to their household. Qualitative analysis of data from focus group discussion, key informants were made.

Succinct Review of Knowledge on Gender and Social Networks

IN MANY RURAL communities in Africa where small-scale agriculture is practiced, gender differences have a significant impact on resource allocation and productivity (Alderman *et al.*, 2003). Gender inequalities almost always favor men, with women often being disadvantaged both in the management and ownership of household assets (Fafchamps and Quisumbing 2003) and in the division of responsibilities in the household and in the community.

Generally in developing countries women usually play primary role in food production and processing. Rural women, who often undertake a major proportion of farm

work, are responsible for family food security and home production, and are often involved in post harvest processing and marketing. However they often enjoy lower levels of social status and economic security in the family (Ravula *et al.*, 2006). Women are the most vulnerable groups of every society in Africa. Hence, in order to address the challenges of poverty eradication and sustainable development, it is important to understand women's circumstances at the grass-root level.

Particularly, when communities relocate from their point of origin to resettlement site, women lose their social

capital (mutual support, social networks). Social integration cannot be realistically achieved within one or two years after arrival in resettlement site. It usually takes more time for settlers' lives to stabilize. Until this happens, they remain extremely vulnerable to such shocks as seed shortage, crop failure, epidemics, food price fluctuations and critical labor shortage. And they may not have an opportunity to get important support information for their survival.

Also it is costly for women to build and maintain a social network in terms of both time and other resources, imposing a barrier to social capital accumulation (Dasgupta, 2005). Women typically have a high opportunity cost of time that reduces their incentives to participate in certain social networks (Meinzen-Dick and Zwartveen, 2003). They were found to join groups that mobilize fewer resources than men because they are resource-constrained

Analyses of Results

SOCIAL NETWORKS ARE property of groups and communities more than individuals. In a given society, social capital can exist only if individuals come together, create and maintain relationships. Proponents of social capital' approaches maintain that tight communal groups, relationships of kinships, friendship and ethnicity can form dense networks of solidarity, cooperation and communal sanctions that reduce the transaction costs of economic activities. Several studies have found that men and women's personal networks differ in composition, although they are similar in size. Men's networks tend to be more formal since men are more often involved in formal employment. Male networks include more co-workers and fewer kin than women's networks (Moore, 1990).

Understanding the groups and networks that enable people to access resources (such as seed and labor), and collaborate to achieve shared goals is an important part of the concept of social capital. Informal networks are manifested in spontaneous, informal, and unregulated exchanges of information and resources within communities, as well as efforts at cooperation, coordination, and mutual assistance that help maximize the utilization of

(Maluccio *et al.*, 2003). Gender norms in the community may also exclude women from social capital-enhancing activities, such as drinking clubs.

Women are more likely to rely on kin and social networks for access to resources. Because men and women belong to different social networks, the economic and social consequences of technological choices and developmental interventions impact their social networks and associations in different ways. Traditionally, women are responsible for household welfare and child rearing. Reliance on informal exchange networks is necessary among women and their households to share resources, stabilize incomes, and reduce risks. For women in female-headed households networks are also important for their economic activities (Ravula *et al.*, 2006) contribution to economic growth and an equitable distribution of income through reducing information asymmetries and transaction costs.

available resources. Informal networks can be connected through horizontal and vertical relationships and are shaped by a variety of environmental factors, including the market, kinship, and friendship (Dudwick, *et al.*, 2006).

Networks of the Respondent Beyond the Immediate Household

Research indicates that the number of close friends and relatives beyond the immediate household is often positively associated with the household propensity to accumulate organizational or group based social capital. The survey result shows that (Table 1) 50.0% and 22.0% of the total sample households had 2 to 3 people and only 1 close friend, respectively that they can talk to about private matters or call on for help. Moreover, 14.2% of the respondents had more than 5 people in their proximity. About 30% of previous settlers had more than 4 close friends. On the other hand, about 16.2 % of the recent settlers had more than 4 close friends. Clearly, the type of settlement affects the size of social network.

TABLE 1 Percentage of close friends to whom the respondents can privately talk (N=160)

Settlement category	Sex	Number of close friends			
		1 person %	2-3 persons %	4-5 persons %	More than 5 persons %
Previous settlers (n=123)	Males	18.4	48.0	14.3	19.4
	Females	32.0	52.0	16.0	0.0
	Both	21.1	48.8	14.6	15.4
Recent settlers (n=37)	Males	20.0	60.0	8.0	12.0
	Females	41.7	50.0	8.3	0.0
	Both	27.0	56.8	8.1	8.1
Total		22.0	50.0	13.8	14.2

Source: computed from own survey, 2007

However, the number of people beyond immediate household who are willing to assist the respondents in case of a long term support/help (for example: in case of the death of breadwinners or heads of the households) varies among sample households. As shown in Table 2, the majority of previous settlers (43.9%) reported they had one or two people beyond immediate household, who are willing to assist them. However, the majority of recent settlers (48.6%) reported they have no social networks to call on for help with money, food or labor and no one is willing to provide long term support/help. During movement people lose their social networks.

Both previous and new female headed households reported the same trends mentioned above. The majority of female headed households (52.0% of previous and 66.7% of recent settlers), had no one beyond immediate household willing and able to provide long term support/help (Table 2). Compared to female headed households, male headed households have a better social network beyond the immediate household. This is in line with the findings of Katungi *et al.*, (2006) where male-headed households build and maintain bigger social networks with relatives and friends in close proximity than female-headed households in Uganda.

TABLE 2 People who provide long term support (N=160)

Settlement category	Sex	Number of people (not household members)			
		None	2-3 people	4-5 people	More than 5 people
Previous settlers (n=123)	Male	27.6	45.9	17.3	9.2
	Female	52.0	36.0	12.0	0.0
	Both	32.5	43.9	16.3	7.3
Recent settlers (n=37)	Male	40.0	40.0	16.0	4.0
	Female	66.7	16.7	16.7	0.0
	Both	48.6	32.4	16.2	2.7
Total		36.3	41.3	16.3	6.1

Source: computed from own survey, 2007

In focused group discussion with women (previous and recent settlers separately), it has also been confirmed that, women have less number of close friends. They are usually confined to their home and therefore do not participate in most social gatherings, meetings and in different committees. Due to these and other socioeconomic barriers (access to resource such as credit and time constraints), they had limited opportunities to build trust and solidarity with their colleagues. One of the participants, from the previous settlers group named W/ro Zewdie said:

“Oh! We know very well only our husbands and children. Apart from these, probably we may know our neighbors of the same sex, who are always with us in fetching water, market and milling places. But if you ask me about my husband, he is a cabinet member, committee of the “Gode mahber”, and he was also committee member of Kokit multipurpose cooperatives. So, probably he may have more than 10 close friends, can you imagine the difference?”

Decision making is an integral part of every one’s life. Decision can be made alone, with a group, or as an organization. It has become clear that agricultural decisions are not made solely by the individual “head of the household,” but extends to other household and/or community members and is also influenced by other actors in, or even

outside, the agricultural chain (Maarse *et al.*, 1998. cited in Leevwis, 2004).

In the group discussion with male settlers (previous and new male headed households separately) , it was also agreed that neighbors, friends and acquaintances were important networks on which every household depends for decision making. They also added the Amharic proverb “*Keruk Zemed Yekirb Gorebet Yishalal*” to mean, “A neighbor is better than far away families or kin”.

Family member’s participation in different social networks

Social networks are made up of more complex inter-relationships in which households are linked to other agents such as individuals, organization or groups through bilateral relationship. As indicated in Table 3, most of the previous settlers’ families participate in at least 5 social networks. However, families of recent settlers were participated in few social networks in the community. It was also hypothesized that households with a higher participation in social networks have better access to information and are likely to use different resources.

TABLE 3 Proportions of households’ participation in different social networks

No	Social networks	Previous settlers (n=123)			Recent settlers (n=37)		
		MHH (n=98)	FHH (n=25)	Total	MHH (n=25)	FHH (n=12)	Total
		%	%	%	%	%	%
1	Kebele social Court	5.1	0.0	4.1	4.0	0.0	4.0
2	Parliament (regional)	4.1	4.0	4.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
3	Local Cabinet member	25.5	4.0	21.1	28.0	8.3	21.6
4	Education/family-teacher	9.2	8.0	8.9	0.0	0.0	0.0
5	Church/Mosque	15.3	0.0	12.2	0.0	8.3	2.7
6	Market place	52.0	44.0	50.4	40.0	58.3	45.9
7	Unions/cooperatives	77.6	40.0	69.9	12.0	16.7	13.5
8	Networks of Neighbors, friend	81.6	76.0	80.5	76.0	83.3	78.4
9	Mutual support	41.8	16.0	36.6	20.0	41.7	27.0
10	Development group	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.0	8.3	5.4
11	Committee member of groups	6.1	0.0	4.9	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: computed from own survey, 2007

Among the previous settlers, 80.5%, 69.9%, 50.4% and 36.6% of family members participated in networks of neighbors and friends, unions or cooperatives, market place and mutual support respectively. Male headed households mostly participate in networks of neighbors and friends (81.6%), unions or cooperatives (77.6%). While, female headed household mostly participate in networks of neighbors and friends (76.0%), market place (44.0%) and unions or cooperatives (40.0%). It is also shown that, relatively male headed households were participating in formal social networks of *Kebele*⁴ social court (5.1%), Parliament (regional) (4.1%) and local cabinet member (25.5%). This implies that males headed households (MHH) have relatively linking social capital than female headed households (FHH).

Likewise, 78.4%, 45 %, 27 % and 21.6 % of families of recent settlers also participated in networks of neighbors and friends, market place, mutual support and local cabinet member respectively (table 3)

In the group discussion held with women, it was also revealed that, marital status could have influence on women's participation in different social networks. Married women are likely to be active in collective decision-making meetings because they are better trusted and respected. They are also able to influence higher-level decisions indirectly through their husbands and their own informal networks. Their marital status allows them access to more networks and thus enables them to generate more social capital.

According to some key informants, most of the re-settlers came to the area and registered as single. However, after sometime, they are married. Even some male recent settlers have wife and children at their origin.

Family membership in different groups or associations

In this study, household's membership in different groups or association was studied. Group membership is found to be varying among settlers (previous and recent settlers) as well as between female and male headed households. Economically oriented organizations such as cooperatives (68.3%), credit and finance group (34.1%) and labor exchange groups (36.6%) and social organizations like religious or spiritual groups (58.5%) were the most popular among the previous settlers. However, in the case of recent settlers, social organization such as religious or spiritual groups (40.5%), mutual support associations (27.0%), economically oriented organizations such as labor exchange groups (54.1%) and politically oriented group (27.0%) were the most popular groups or associations (table 4).

The result of the study reveals that membership in formal organizations (networks) were mostly dominated by previous settlers. However, in case of recent settlers, they are mostly involved in informal trust based exchanges groups and identified as the main sources of labor and other economic benefits. Due to the inability to fulfill the preconditions set by the formal organizations, most of the recent settlers and female headed Households could not be a member of these groups. The varying composition of men and female headed networks was clearly seen in this study. On one hand, the male headed Households networks tended to be more formal usually comprised of fellow farmers who are members of these economically oriented organizations/associations. On the other hand female headed household's networks tended to be informal and included more in religious groups and mutual support associations in contrast to Male headed Household's networks.

4) "Kebele" is the lowest level of government administration.

TABLE 4 Proportions of Households belonging to groups or associations in the study area

No	Groups or associations	Family Membership					
		Previous settlers (N=123)			Recent settlers (N=37)		
		MHH n=98	FHH n=25	Total	MHH n=25	FHH n=12	Total
		%	%	%	%	%	%
1	Cooperatives	78.6	28.0	68.3	12.0	16.7	13.5
2	Credit/finance group	38.8	16.0	34.1	4.0	0.0	2.7
3	Farmers group	8.2	0.0	6.5	4.0	0.0	2.7
4	Religious group	63.3	40.0	58.5	40.0	41.7	40.5
5	Mutual support association	30.6	16.0	27.6	28.0	25.0	27.0
6	Political group	22.4	8.0	19.5	32.0	16.7	27.0
7	Women's group	0.0	4.0	4.00	0.0	0.0	0.0
8	Labor Exchange group	42.9	12.0	36.6	60.0	41.7	54.1
9	Ethnic-based group	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	8.3	2.7

Source: computed from own survey, 2007

As reported by IPMS (2005), in order to get credit, 5-7 people should form a group and elect a chair person. The chair person controls the group and monitors his fellow group members for any possible misuse of money. Farmers who would like to take credit for the first time will submit request through the Peasant Association (PA). The PA committee composed of (chairman, vice chair, Development Agent, representative from youth, representative from elders, etc) will screen farmers by taking certain parameters given by Amhara Credit and Saving Institution (ACSI). These are: farmers who are believed to be hard working, economically active (18-60 years of age), socially acceptable, motivated, resided at least for 5 years in the PA, ownership of one or no oxen, no outstanding debt etc.

The government's resettlement document says, "re-settlers would be eligible to make use of existing physical and social infrastructure that is already in place in the receiving areas" However, as they do not meet most of these criteria, except few recent settlers (13.5% in cooperatives and 2.7% in credit and finance), most of them in the sample PAs, were not able to join cooperatives and credit and finance groups. In the group discussion held with recent settlers, it was pointed out that, recent settlers had no guarantee to stay in the area and had no fixed assets to be used as collateral and to fulfill the above mentioned criteria set by ACSI. They might leave at any time they feel uncomfortable because the process of resettlement

program involves the temporary separation of families and they would retain their land use rights and other immovable property in the original home villages for up to three years after being relocated. So they can return to their original home villages for good whenever they change their mind. Therefore, other previous settlers do not want to allow them to be a member of their group. Because, they do not want to take the risk of repayment problems that could happen in their group. One of the group participants from the recent settlers, who live in village 2 of Kokit PA, confirmed that;

"We want to join groups like cooperatives and ACSI "kuteba" but we were not given opportunities so far. I hope this may changed after some time. Especially, previous settlers are not willing to form a group with us. When we arrived here, the government gave us cotton seed on credit through the cooperative, but because of crop failure, we couldn't harvest in that cropping season and we couldn't repay the credit till now. When we express interest to join the group, they always point out that, we did not repay the old loans and are still in debt".

Among the recent settlers, those who became member of cooperative (12.0% male and 16.7% female headed households) were spouses of previous settlers who could fulfill the preconditions for membership. Recent settlers depend primarily on labor exchange group (54.1%) and their religious or spiritual groups (40.5%) followed by mutual

support associations (27.0%) and political group (27.0%) (Table 4). Some key informants also pointed out that, local government officials insist that settlers be member of political group (cabinet or *Kebele* militia) during the initial process of the program and their arrival to their destination. The probable reason may have the objective of persuading their family members, colleagues who left in their origin to follow their footsteps and to establish their own administrative at their destination. This shows that, the recent settlers have relatively linking social capital than bridging social capital.

As indicated in table 4, sampled male and female headed households had different membership in different groups or associations. In the previous settler's category, most of male headed households were members of cooperatives/cooperative union (78.6%), religious or spiritual groups (63.3%), labor exchange group (42.9%), credit and finance group (38.8%) and mutual support associations (30.6%). However, the female headed households were members of religious or spiritual group (40.0%), cooperatives (28.0%), mutual support associations (16.0%) and credit and finance group (16.0%). This shows that, female headed households were participating primarily in religious or spiritual groups such as "*Senbetie*" and "*Mahber*"⁵ followed by cooperatives and mutual support associations.

On the other hand, most male headed household from the new settler's category, were members of labor exchange group (60.0%), religious or spiritual group (40.0%), political group (32.0%), and mutual support associations (28.0%). Likewise, recent settlers of female headed were members of religious or spiritual group (41.7%), labor exchange groups (41.7%), mutual support associations (25.0%) and political group (16.7%). Table 4 also shows that, among recent settlers, male headed households were heavily depending on their labor exchange groups, religious or spiritual group and political groups based on number of households participating in each group. However, Female headed HHs depends on their religious or spiritual group, labor exchange group, mutual support associations and political groups.

IPMS (2005) report the presence of Women's affairs offices at the regional, zonal, district and PA level. Vice chair of the PA follows women affairs issues. It was

also reported that, 697 rural women have organized themselves in association in the study area. Parents committees have been established at all schools and oversee girl students' issues. And it was also pointed out that, women who organized themselves will be given priority to get credit from ACSI to run small business. However, this study shows that women's groups were not popular among re-settlers. This implies that rural women were not well organized in groups or association. In fact those groups which are claimed to be organized by women's affairs were concentrating in urban and pre-urban areas like *Shehedi* and *Metema Yohanes*. However, unlike other villages included in the study, in "*Gode*" village of *Kokit* PA, there were women's "*edir*"⁶ and men's "*edir*" separately. In other villages, both men and women had the same "*edir*" but with different roles and responsibilities. In this case, women's "*edir*" has its own chairwomen, secretary and rules and regulations. It is managed and operated by women only.

The relative importance of groups and associations

This sub section indicates how sample household heads perceived the importance of the groups and associations of which they are a member. Distribution of groups and associations in terms of importance to the household is presented in Table 5 for previous and recent settlers as well as male and female headed households. The response analysis of Table 5 indicates that cooperatives credit and finance group and religious or spiritual groups were the most important group or associations for previous settlers in general and male headed household in particular. The other probable reason might be that household heads among previous settlers being better educated individuals and having the potential to provide collateral are more likely to join economically oriented organizations. Sample households in previous settlers category also felt that mutual support associations, neighboring or village associations and political groups were important groups for their household (table 5).

For recent settlers, labor exchange groups, religious or spiritual group, mutual support associations and political groups were the most important group or associations for recent settlers. Labor is very expensive in the study

5) *Senbete* and *Mahiber* are religious associations founded by a group of people who belong to the same church.

6) "*Edir*" is a traditional community organization in which the members assist each other during the mourning process.

area, this may require that the recent settlers rely on labor exchange groups. This could be due to the fact that recent settlers had no access to formal organization (co-operatives and credit and finance groups) which require membership fees and collateral that could not be fulfilled

by recent settlers. Membership in cooperatives and credit group were mainly dominated by male headed households from the previous settler's category. Female headed households were primarily participating in religious or spiritual groups.

TABLE 5 Relative importance of groups/associations to the respondent's household (N=160)

No	Groups or associations	Relative importance							
		Previous settlers (n=123)				Recent settlers (n=37)			
		MHH		FHH		MHH		FHH	
		Total Score ⁷	Rank	Total Score	Rank	Total Score	Rank	Total Score	Rank
1	Cooperative	195	1st	19	2nd	2	5th	6	3rd
2	Credit/finance group	84	2nd	9	3rd	1	6th	1	5th
3	Religious group	79	3rd	22	1st	23	2nd	14	1st
4	Labor exchange group	66	4th	5	4th	37	1st	13	2nd
5	Mutual support	42	5th	5	4th	17	3rd	6	3rd
6	Political group	11	6th	0	-	11	4th	0	-
7	Farmers group	9	7th	0	-	0	-	0	-
8	Women's group	0	-	1	-	0	-	0	-
9	Ethnic based group	0	-	0	-	0	-	2	4th

Source: computed from own survey, 2007

Conclusions and Recommendations

THE STUDY REVEALED that economically oriented social groups or associations, such as cooperatives and credit and finance groups, serve mostly the previous settlers and male headed households, which are relatively the well-off groups in the study area. Recent settlers and female headed households are the least beneficiaries of these social groups. These social groups or associations are crucial components in the process of agricultural development in general and food security in particular. Therefore, efforts should be made to involve recent settlers and female headed households, who are the most vulnerable groups, to be food secure through purposeful intervention mechanisms.

The findings of this study confirmed that, due to their strict rules and regulations, formal credit and saving

groups or institutions such as Amhara Credit & Saving Institute (ACSI) are unable to serve the recent settlers. Most of the recent settlers and female headed households could not fulfill the preconditions and parameters set by the institutions. Besides, for recent settlers, their traditional resource pooling systems have collapsed as they relocated from their origin. Therefore, village savings and loans associations would need to be organized for the recent settlers if food self sufficiency among re-settlers in general and recent settlers in particular were to be achieved. The Cooperative promotion office should encourage, follow up and facilitate the organization these associations, and it should provide the necessary support to promote them. In addition, NGOs should take the initiative to provide a revolving fund that could be managed by the members of social groups and associations, with a close supervision of

7) The total weight score in this study is the rank order frequencies multiplied respectively by 3 for first importance, 2 for second importance 1 for third importance

these organizations and Bureau of Agriculture and Rural Development (BoARD).

The results show that women's groups are not popular in the study area. The existing formal groups or associations are mostly in favor of men. Therefore, efforts should be made to encourage women to establish social groups and associations. There is need for transforming the existing

informal social groups into self-help groups (SHGs) with purposive planning of projects and programs that will empower and benefit women. Women's affair at the regional and district level has to lead this initiative with a close and collaborative support of NGOs and BoARD. Organizing women could be done by women's affair of BoARD, and could be supported by the rich experience of NGOs.

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