

Understanding women's empowerment

A qualitative study for the UN Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women conducted in Adami Tulu and Yaya Gulele woredas, Ethiopia



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Understanding women's empowerment

A qualitative study for the UN Joint Programme on Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women conducted in Adami Tulu and Yaya Gulele woredas, Ethiopia

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I. Introduction

The growing importance of women's empowerment as an explicit or implicit objective in many agricultural development projects calls for a measure of women's empowerment that agricultural development projects can use to diagnose key areas of women's (and men's) disempowerment, design appropriate strategies to address deficiencies and monitor project outcomes related to women's empowerment. Kabeer (2001) defines empowerment as expansion of people's ability to make strategic life choices, particularly in contexts where this ability had been denied to them. Alsop et al. (2006) have also defined empowerment as the ability to make purposeful choices and translate choices into desired actions and outcomes given the opportunity structure within which one operates.

Empowerment in agriculture is defined as one's ability to make decisions on matters related to agriculture as well as one's access to the materials and social resources needed to carry out those decisions (Alkire et al. 2013). Empowering women is essential for enabling their rights but also to achieve the broader development goals such as economic growth, poverty reduction, health, education and welfare. Particularly, economically empowering women is a win-win that benefits women, families and society as a whole (Golla et al. 2011; IFAD 2012). When women have access to land, water, education, training, extension and financial services and strong organizations/networks, they are able to harness the opportunities around them, thus benefitting themselves, their families and society (IFAD 2012). Owing to this recognition, many governments and development agencies, especially in the developing world, are making efforts to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in order to harness the above benefits.

The United Nations (UN) Women, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) launched a Joint Programme (JP) in September of 2012 aimed at empowering resource-poor rural women through economic integration and food security initiatives. Access to financial services is one of the critical tools in poverty reduction and in tapping and unleashing the productive potential of poor women for inclusive economic growth. The United Nations Joint Programme "Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women" (UNJP-RWEE) strives to strengthen women's access to financial services in order to accelerate rural women's economic empowerment, coupled with other integrative interventions such as: improving rural women's and their households' food security and nutrition, development of individuals' capabilities and fulfilment of rights, fostering access to markets and agricultural inputs, promoting income-generating activities (IGA) in agriculture and strengthening women's participation in and benefit from community and rural institutions such as cooperatives and farmer's associations.

Women's empowerment has often been assessed using quantitative measures with less attention given to the qualitative aspects. Given the context-specific nature of agricultural interventions, the existing survey-based Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) may not be suitable to measure women's empowerment in different projects. Furthermore, the local meaning of empowerment has not been fully understood by researchers to inform the criteria to measure women's empowerment in a given context. The FAO, International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI) and International Water Management Institute have partnered with the International Food Policy Research Institute through the Gender, Agriculture, and Assets Project Phase 2 (GAAP2) to conduct a study aimed at assessing the extent to which the UNJP has been effective in achieving its goal of economically empowering rural women in Ethiopia, using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and to understand the local meaning

of empowerment. The findings will be used to validate the proposed project-level Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (pro-WEAI) domains and indicators. The results presented in this summary report are limited to the qualitative study conducted at two project sites in the Oromia region. The qualitative study was conducted using adapted methodologies previously developed for (i) the From Protection to Production program to evaluate the impact of cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa and (ii) the GAAP2 qualitative protocols developed to measure women's empowerment within agricultural development projects. The qualitative study explored two key domains of empowerment in Golla's et al. (2011) framework of women's economic empowerment: (1) economic advancement and (2) power and agency, assessing the impact of the program design on the two domains, including the degree to which gender equality and women's empowerment were mainstreamed in program design and implementation. The report is organized as follows: first, we present the introduction to the study; secondly, we give a brief description of the UNJP; thirdly, we describe the methods; fourth, we present the overall findings from the study. This is followed by a synthesis of these findings in relation to the pro-WEAI variables being tested/validated, before concluding and providing recommendations.

2. Brief description of the UNJP

The UNJP titled, *Accelerating Progress towards the Economic Empowerment of Rural Women*, is a five-year global initiative implemented in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Kyrgyzstan, Liberia, Nepal, Niger and Rwanda. Each program country defined its specific program based on the local context. For Ethiopia, partnering UN agencies, in collaboration with government and other national stakeholders, designed the program. The main program objective is to enhance and secure rural women's livelihoods and rights in the context of the global and national development agenda. The program has four key outcome areas including: 1. improved food and nutrition security of rural women, 2. improved and sustained livelihood of rural women through income-generating interventions, 3. skill development and improved access to resources, 4. decision-making voices of women strengthened through enhancement of leadership and participation in rural institutions and establishment of a gender-responsive policy environment.

The suggested selection criteria for women's savings and credit cooperatives (SACCOs) or self-help groups include women members who:

- are resident in the targeted kebele¹ for at least two years;
- can productively engage in IGAs;
- do not have bad credit history and no current debt;
- do not benefit from other interventions by other donors;
- are willing to participate in all project activities;
- are hardworking;
- are willing to share their experience with other similar women (peers);
- are experienced in business and IGA;
- are well respected by community members and able to influence others;
- are marginalized because of their disability, health status and other social conditions;
- are willing to take responsibility for their debt and that of their group;
- have some members with leadership quality;
- have some members who can read and write;
- have some members who have or are female household heads;
- have experience in running off-farm and on-farm activities.

¹A kebele is the smallest administrative unit of Ethiopia.

Table I Brief description of the program's intervention sites

Region	District (Woreda)	Beneficiary number
Afar	One woreda (Dubti), two kebeles of approx. 37,000 people	500 women
Oromia	Three woredas (Adami Tulu, Yaya Gulele and Dodola), six kebeles of approx. 150,000 people	1,500 women

The program's achievements to date include:

- assessment of the existing situation and identification of appropriate technologies and IGA for beneficiaries using:
 - market assessment study
 - baseline study
 - feasibility study for technologies.
- capacity development activities at all levels, i.e. woreda, kebele and beneficiary level training.
- awareness creation through community conversations (using the community conversation manual) such as
 - enhanced access to productive resources for IGA including revolving funds through SACCOs (without collateral), agricultural inputs and technologies including seeds and technologies required for agriculture and other IGA and savings.

3. Methods

In Ethiopia, the UNJP-RWEE operates in two regions, i.e. Oromia and Afar. The qualitative study was conducted in two woredas (districts), i.e. Adami Tulu and Yaya Gulele districts in the Oromia region, from 31 July 2017 to 12 August 2017. In each woreda, the UNJP team selected three kebeles for the study, two of which were action kebeles (project sites/ treatment villages), while one was a control kebele. In Adami Tulu woreda, the three kebeles were Abune Germama and Aneno Shesho (treatment villages) and Gulanta Boke (control village), while in Yaya Gulele woreda, Nono Chemerie and Iluna Dire were the treatment villages and Dede Tege was the control village. The action sites were selected based on the degree of market integration using distance from the main road as the proxy measure to sample one relatively remote and one relatively integrated community. The sites in Adami Tulu are more integrated, closer to the urban trading centres, while those in Yaya Gulele are remote. The control sites have similar socio-economic characteristics.

Several data collection methods were applied including: group discussions with project female beneficiaries and indirect male beneficiaries, in-depth interviews with individual case studies (empowered and disempowered women and men) and key informant interviews (KIs) with project implementers (at woreda level) and kebele leaders in the three selected kebeles of each woreda. The group discussion participants, key informants and case studies were purposefully selected with the help of experts working on the project in each woreda. Female beneficiaries were selected purposefully based on: being a member of the cooperative supported by the project, direct project beneficiary and level of empowerment (empowered and disempowered). The male indirect beneficiaries were also selected based on level of empowerment and the fact that their spouses were project beneficiaries.

Separate group discussions for women and men were conducted and after the group discussions, the research teams held a plenary session where women and men came together to discuss the emerging findings. The discussions were done in the local language, Oromifa. The KIs were held in mixed groups, including one group discussion with KIs at the woreda (project staff) and one group discussion with KIs at the kebele (kebele officials) within each woreda. A total of 187 women and 198 men participated in group discussions and case studies.

Table 2. Participants and number of group discussions conducted in Adami Tulu and Yaya Gulele woredas

Name of kebele	Description	Total number of participants		Name of kebele	Description	Total number of participants	
		Female	Male			Female	Male
Adami Tulu woreda				Yaya Gulele woreda			
Woreda representatives		0	4	Woreda representatives		1	5
Aneno Shesho	Community representatives	2	3	Nono Chemerie	Community representatives	1	2
	Group discussion participants	32	32		Group discussion participants	32	32
	Number of group discussions	4	4		Number of group discussions	4	4
	Case study empowered persons	2	1		Case study empowered persons	2	2
	Case study disempowered persons	2	1		Case study disempowered persons	2	1

Name of kebele	Description	Total number of participants		Name of kebele	Description	Total number of participants	
		Female	Male			Female	Male
Abune Germama	Community representatives	2	3	Iluna Dire	Community representatives	1	2
	Group discussion participants	32	32		Group discussion participants	32	32
	Number of group discussions	4	4		Number of group discussions	4	4
	Case study empowered persons	2	1		Case study empowered persons	2	1
	Case study disempowered persons	2	1		Case study disempowered persons	2	1
Gulanta Boke	Community representatives	1	4	Dede Tege	Community representatives	2	2
	Group discussion participants	16	16		Group discussion participants	16	16
	Number of group discussions	2	2		Number of group discussions	2	2
	Case study empowered persons	1	1		Case study empowered persons	1	1
	Case study disempowered persons	1	1		Case study disempowered persons	1	1
Total number of participants		93	100	Total number of participants		94	98

Several participatory tools were used to facilitate the discussions with female beneficiaries and indirect male beneficiaries including: the understanding of empowerment tool (used only in the action sites), the livelihood matrix (capturing decision-making/control over income), access to and control over household and community resources tool and the seasonal calendar, gender division of labour, decision-making tool. The proportional piling technique was used to stimulate discussions on perceptions and preferences. The community profile tool was used to collect data from kebele KIs, while the project operations checklist was used to collect data from project staff. The life history checklist was used to capture histories of empowered and disempowered women and men, serving as case studies to provide in-depth and detailed understanding of empowerment pathways. The note takers documented the interviews and discussions in field notebooks. After data collection, the handwritten notes were checked for accuracy and expanded into complete narratives. All focus group discussions (FGDs) were audio recorded and the English translations were subsequently transcribed. Data collected from different sources were used to triangulate the findings.

Data analysis started at the end of each day during debriefing sessions. First, each research team reviewed and summarized the discussion from each FGD, categorizing the findings into the subthemes of the three key research themes. A summary of each FGD in relation to each of the domains of empowerment was developed. Next, the findings of all FGDs conducted in each woreda were compiled into individual woreda reports. The third and final step was to look across reports, summaries and transcripts to establish the emerging themes, key findings specific to the empowerment domains and indicators across the thematic areas and illustrate this with quotes. During analysis, a variety of factors were taken into consideration including: factors intersecting with gender to shape life experiences, differences between and among women and men based on age/generation, social position within household/family, social identity, ethnicity, socio-economic status, geographical locations and others.

4. Results

This section summarizes the key emerging themes from the findings and discussions presented in the main report (Nigussie et al. 2017). Other emergent themes have been extracted and presented in addition to the pre-defined subthemes explored in the study.

4.1 Economic advancement

The key subthemes that the study explored under economic advancement were: sources of income and women's roles in income generation, time use in productive and reproductive work, access to credit and use of credit and other financial services and access to services and infrastructure.

Pursuing diverse livelihoods

The main livelihood activities for community members in the study woredas are: 1) crop production, 2) vegetable production, 3) livestock rearing, 4) apiculture, 5) poultry production, 6) trading and 7) wage employment. Men and women in the two woredas participate in these IGAs at varying degrees and carry out different roles which influence the level of control over income from these sources. Overall, adult women mostly participate in rain-fed crop production, irrigated and non-irrigated vegetable production, fattening oxen and sheep and petty trading and apiculture, while young women carry out quarrying in groups, poultry production and casual labour (such as weeding and other employment opportunities within the communities). The most prioritized livelihood activities for adult men include rain-fed crop production, irrigated vegetable production, fattening (oxen, sheep and goat), and selling khat, while for the young men it includes quarrying, casual work, rain-fed crop production, irrigated vegetable cultivation and donkey cart renting. In Yaya Gulele, women rarely work as casual labourers, due to limited opportunities in the area. In Moreso, donkeys are income sources mostly in Adami Tulu woreda. Beneficiary women can make choices from the given livelihood options provided by the UNJP-RWEE. In former times, women had limited abilities to make choices and decisions because of limited knowledge. In the past, women only owned small livestock, like chicken. This is changing now due to the targeted interventions from the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that sensitize women about their potential and support them with initial capital, which they invest into different IGAs, including larger livestock. One of the beneficiaries remarked:

I engage in farming, milk production, chicken raising and saving and credit to get income. I dislike chicken raising because chicken has bad smell. But the income from these activities is used for educating my children, saving and to buy household necessities... I bought a donkey and built house with the benefit I obtained from participating in saving and credit group. (A 40-year-old empowered beneficiary woman, Aneno Shesho kebele)

Another female beneficiary stated:

I took a loan of 8,000 birr from RWEE; I saved 2,500 birr with the cooperative and I was left with 5,500 birr. Then I bought a cow [heifer] worth 4,500 birr, a goat worth 450 birr and four chickens at 100 birr each. After two months, I sold the four chickens and bought six chickens at 600 birr. I benefit a lot now; the cow gave birth and I have milked it for five months. I have sold milk only for two months; from the chicken the two are laying eggs. (A 41-year-old empowered female beneficiary, Abune Germama kebele)

Being a farmer

In all the kebeles, agricultural activities are mainly associated with men because men hold the plough and till the land. Yet women also participate in many of the agricultural activities. Men also consider themselves to be more knowledgeable about agriculture than women. However, this perception is contested by some women, as these women think they have almost equal knowledge as men about agricultural activities. Although all household members play a role in all of the agricultural activities, women's role in agricultural activities such as ploughing, planting, harvesting and transportation are less valued by men, demonstrated by men giving women's contribution lower scores. However, most of the women's groups gave women's contribution equal scores to men (3-3). Both men and women gave youth lower scores on most of the activities.

Changing community perceptions about women working outside the home, their roles and rights

Participation of women in IGAs outside the home (such as petty trade and wage employment) is a recent phenomenon. Overall, in all of the study sites, the current attitude of the communities towards women's participation in work outside of the home is positive, in contrast to historical attitudes. Women that work outside of the home are appreciated and encouraged by their communities. These women are perceived as striving to improve the livelihoods of their households. Women indicated that they are happy working outside of the house, although it is challenging due to the demanding triple responsibilities (domestic, productive and community responsibilities). The change in attitude is mainly driven by ongoing government effort to raise awareness about women's rights and support from development and multilateral organizations that raise awareness on gender equality and women's empowerment. The opportunity for women to work outside the home provides them with increased income, improved networks and access to information. The opportunities offered by the UNJP have enabled men and other community members to appreciate women's work and their ability to earn an income within and outside the home because women have been able to contribute to their own wellbeing and that of their families. This has helped women not only to be valued but also supported without too much of a backlash for no longer following the previously socially prescribed roles.

Although there are changes in attitude within communities, there are men that perceive women working outside of the home as a threat, as revealed by one of the male indirect beneficiaries.

I sometimes feel I may lose my wife, if she gets a better opportunity, while she works outside the home. (A male group discussion participant, Nono Chemerie kebele)

According to the findings, the key factors that determine participation of women in work outside of the home include marital status, trust between spouses, level of responsibility and domestic workload, women's level of education or awareness about their rights, wealth status of family and availability of opportunities to work outside of the home. Married women consult their spouses and need to reach an agreement. In three of the group discussions, the men argued that women who engage in casual labour leave other activities behind and thus the money should belong to the household. Women who have relatively greater freedom of mobility such as the young unmarried, widowed and divorced are more likely to participate in work outside of the house.

Shift in gendered division of labour

Participation of women in IGAs has created positive and negative shifts in the gendered division of labour. Previously, it was men who were solely involved in farm activities and all the domestic work was done by women. Nowadays, women participate equally with men in productive activities such as farming and trading to contribute to the economic status of the family, although participation of men in domestic activities is still very limited. Because of these changes, one can conclude that women are overburdened with triple roles (domestic, productive and communal roles) and that empowering women might not reduce the time poverty (workload) since most of the husbands do not share the domestic responsibilities and women are not in a position to hire labour in their homes. The workload on women could be translated into long working hours that could impair their health and leave them limited time for self-growth (networking, attending training, meetings and other activities) and to effectively engage in economic activities.

In Yaya Gulele, while women participate equally with men in productive activities, the participation of men in domestic activities is limited to fetching water, collecting firewood and rarely babysitting or cooking food. This change in gendered division of labour, especially men sharing the domestic chores, is valued by the community. These changes are due to the various interventions by government and development partners focusing on changing attitudes of men and women towards gender division of labour. In Nono Chemerie kebele, a woman from the group discussion stressed the point by stating:

I have a good relationship with my husband; he also supports me with the household work. For instance, he fetches water, collects firewood using a donkey, and cooks food when I'm busy. It is a privilege for me, because my mother did not have such help in the past. I think this is a result of increased understanding about the situation of women, which came through various trainings. (A 38-year-old empowered woman, Nono Chemerie kebele)

Increased access to credit

In Adami Tulu, besides the UNJP, there are other credit and saving associations, cooperatives and unions such as: Biftu Batu Farmers' Union and Oromia Saving and Credit S.C. (WALQO, in its Afan Oromo abbreviation) that provide credit to men and women to increase their participation in IGAs. Women who generate a significant amount of income are models. In Yaya Gulele prior to the UNJP, within the treatment kebeles, there was *Bakkalachi bari* cooperative, which provides access to loans to women and energy-saving stoves. In the treatment kebeles, UNJP-RWEE provided women with access to loans in-cash and in-kind (improved seeds, e.g. wheat and teff) at a low interest rate and various training that enabled them to participate in a variety of IGAs. With loans, women are able to buy oxen for ploughing and/or for fattening, dairy animals, rent land for cultivation and start businesses. The saving habit of UNJP-RWEE beneficiaries has also improved, as the program encourages them to save ETB 20 per two weeks. The ability to save also strongly emerged as one of the indicators of an empowered and preferred woman by both men and women.

4.2 Power and agency

The subthemes under this key thematic area were: control and decision-making over productive assets, control and decision-making over production and income generation, control and decision-making over cash expenditures, savings and transfers from the UNJP, control and decision-making over food and nutrition, perceptions of women's economic roles, empowerment, self-esteem and dignity, social networks and leadership and influence in the community.

Defining joint decision-making

During the study, efforts were made to establish what joint decision-making really means. Joint decision-making entails two things: on one hand, it is a decision-making process in which women equally participate with men and agree on

certain decisions; on the other hand, it refers to the situation in which both men and women participate in decision-making but either of them exercises more control and decision-making power because of the monetary value of the asset or traditional, gendered association with an asset or expression of superiority. Unlike five years ago, when men were the sole decision-makers, joint decision-making is becoming popular such that women feel empowered and results in increased harmony between spouses. Sole decision-making is where an individual decides by himself/herself with or without informing the counterpart.

Women's autonomy limited to productive assets/resources of low value

Across the study sites, control and decision-making power over productive assets/resources varies between men and women based on: mode of asset acquisition, gender division of labour, the monetary value of the asset and position in the household. First, women mostly acquire assets or resources from husbands and relatives upon marriage, while men acquire assets or resources from parents through inheritance or as a birth right. Secondly, unlike women, men are mostly responsible for productive work that provides them with the opportunity to have more control over most of the productive resources. Women exercise sole decision-making over small productive assets or resources (such as handcrafts, vegetables, chickens, smaller quantities of produce, household utensils and others) whose monetary value is low. Large productive assets whose monetary value is high (such as land, oxen, sheep and goats) are subject to joint decision-making, although men may exercise more power. One of the women stated:

We have joint decision regarding agricultural activities and the ultimate decision is my husband's. I alone decide on some activities like selling chicken, eggs, small amount of crop harvest and buying of cloth for my children. There have been changes in how decisions are made in my household over the past five years because there is joint discussion on different issues including agricultural activities and the selling of big assets, which was minimal in the past. This change was made possible through the awareness raising given mostly by the government and sometimes by NGOs like RWEEJP. (A 30-year-old empowered woman, Abune Germama kebele)

In Adami Tulu woreda, husbands are registered as land owners on the land certificate while wives with children are regarded as beneficiaries, which gives men more decision-making power. In Yaya Gulele woreda, the government has started issuing land certificates with both husband's and wife's names and photos so that men and women can have equal rights over land. Nono Chemerie kebele (which is a RWEE beneficiary kebele) is one of the pilot kebeles. Though men are the ultimate decision-makers regarding larger assets, they consult their spouses before making decisions and acting. Where disagreements occur, for instance, in polygamous families (where land must be shared between wives), the court of law helps women to claim rights over property. Upon divorce or separation, spouses share resources equally, except the horses (which belong to men). Upon the death of a husband, the wife will inherit half of the property, while the children inherit the remaining half. Exceptionally, only adult and young men have full access and control over horses.

Women's invisible power

Women tend to exercise more control over assets such as livestock that they inherited or acquire from their parents or buy using loans from various sources (such as UNJP-RWEE) which is registered in their own names. This was approved of by both male indirect beneficiaries and female beneficiaries of the UNJP. Although culturally women cannot publicly claim individual ownership ('I cannot say that it is mine. I have to say that it is ours', stated one of the beneficiaries), they exercise more bargaining power over such resources and men cannot freely access or control them without women's consent. Such invisible control over assets by women causes under estimation of their power as it makes transformed conditions appear normal. Women have more bargaining power over what they claim is theirs and legal processes (court) also help women claim rights over such property.

Control over income

The degree of participation in decision-making over use of income from a specific IGA depends on the power to make decisions over productive activities, who earned the income, size of income, size of produce, access to market information, culture and household headship. Either of the spouses can have more control over the income from any IGAs in which they invested more time and energy compared to their spouse. Women tend to have more control and decision-making power over the income they earned from petty trading of handcrafts, poultry, dairy products, local brew etc. Local culture also determines who can have control over income from a specific source. For example, in the two study woredas, the culture decries any attempt by men to control income from poultry and dairy products. Men, on the other hand, have more control over income from wage employment and small businesses they operate such as barber, weaving and others. Taking the leadership position regarding lucrative farm activities gives men more control over income from this source such as cereal production. Even if there is unequal control over household income from various sources, the results show that there is increased participation of women in controlling and making decisions over income.

Control over produce—women's autonomy limited to smaller quantities

Since men claim to contribute more labour in production, they control large produce and income from large sales. A woman can sell crop produce of up to 25 kg without consulting her husband. He also does not enquire about the amount earned for he knows that she solely uses the income to buy household necessities. However, selling crop produce greater than 25 kg necessitates consultation and negotiation between the husband and wife. It is men who usually sell a large volume of harvest (>25 kg) for specific purposes such as buying fertilizer, improved seeds, paying back loans, buying items for children or others. Husbands sell the produce or livestock and consult their wives on how to invest the income. However, the ultimate decision-making power on such sales and expenditures resides with the man. Men and women consult each other on almost everything related to production and income generation. However, the final decision is still made by the man. Women sometimes accept men's ultimate decisions to avoid quarrels. In some cases, disagreements between husband and wife on certain decisions may involve third party mediation. Across all the study kebeles, there are mixed results about control over income from sale of vegetables, but there is an indication that the size of the field and amount of harvest influence control over this produce. The Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell named such advantages or privileges the 'patriarchal dividend' (Connell, 2002).

Women's leadership improved

Participation of women in groups as members and leaders is improved compared to the past. The UNJP-RWEE beneficiaries and the key informants indicated that all the members and leaders of the cooperatives where the UNJP-RWEE is hosted are women. Women are now participating in many of the community affairs. There is increased participation of women in meetings and their ability to speak in public is enhanced. The changes in women leadership and influence in the community relates mostly to interventions by the government and development partners such as the UNJP who have put in much effort to raise awareness on women's rights and unleashing their potential. The UNJP strengthened the existing women's cooperatives that provide women with the opportunity to acquire knowledge, exercise leadership and have influence within the community. Husbands of female beneficiaries realized the benefit of participation of women in such development programs, as members and leaders. Even though women are now increasingly participating in community leadership, the number of women who come forward and speak out is still limited. Both men and women in the treatment kebeles mentioned community leadership as one of the key indicators of women's empowerment or disempowerment.

Harmony

Through training offered by the government, NGOs and the UNJP, there is increased knowledge acquisition among women. Women use this knowledge to contribute to decisions at household and community levels. The UNJP has enabled the men to recognize and value the role and voice of women in the household and in the community. For instance, cattle can now be sold only with the agreement of both wife and husband. This joint decision-making has increased harmony within households. The court of law also protects women against domestic violence. However, in Gulanta Boke, the control site in Adami Tulu, the men's group argued that men are the presidents in the home and can decide to sell livestock even when the woman says no, which often triggers conflicts. One of the female beneficiaries commented:

I now have a good relationship with my husband. He used to whip me with a strip of animal skin (shaabbee). Now everything is done through discussion and in agreement. I will take him to a court of law if he dares to touch me now. I'm no longer in a state of lack of knowledge. In the past, husbands thought that women should not give them orders. Now we decide together. There are changes over the past five years. My participation in decision-making has increased. Now knowledge has expanded. We watch television. We also listen to radio. Our children who are attending school also changed us. Knowledge regarding saving and trading activities has increased. There is no beating like in the past. We now discuss and settle our differences. (A 40-year-old beneficiary woman, Aneno Shesho kebele)

Control over credit from UNJP, savings and remittances

The results from the women's groups in Aneno Shesho kebele, the men's groups from Nono Chemerie kebele and the women's groups from Iluna Dire kebele indicated that women have more access to credit than men, which is mainly due to targeted interventions such as UNJP-RWEE that provide access to loans to women. Regarding loans from UNJP-RWEE, spouses have relatively equal control, where women are borrowers and men are guarantors. Overall, spouses have equal control over credit since servicing the loan lies on the shoulders of all household members. However, compared to adults, youth have less access to credit.

Regarding control over savings, the results reveal mixed perceptions. The results from each woreda are split evenly between spouses with equal access to savings and women with more access to savings than men. Women tend to have more control over savings from their own effort, if the amount is small. In the case of significant amounts of savings, they consult with the spouses on how the money can be spent. In Adami Tulu woreda, men in the Abune Germama and control kebele indicated that they have more control over joint savings, while those in Aneno Shesho indicated that joint savings are equally controlled by spouses. However, women in Abune Germama and the control kebele think that women have more access to and control over joint savings, while those in Aneno Shesho think spouses have equal access to and control over savings. The youth in this woreda have less access to savings and have no control over savings. Similarly, in Yaya Gulele woreda, men in Nono Chemerie and women in Iluna Dire indicated that women have more access to and control over joint savings, while in the other group discussions men and women are considered to have equal access to and control over joint savings. Youths in these sites have less or no access to and control over savings. The UNJP-RWEE has increased women's understanding of the importance of saving and credit. The program has enhanced women's saving culture. Beneficiaries are expected to save ETB 20 every two weeks. In all the treatment kebeles, women are praised by the community for their saving skills. Women are perceived (by both men and women) as being good at saving money because they do not waste money on unnecessary things, unlike men who drink and chew *khat* with friends.

The remittances are from household members who live and work outside of the woreda, i.e. in other parts of Ethiopia or outside of Ethiopia. Adult men and women have equal access to and control over remittances, while youth have less access to and control over this.

Self-esteem, self-efficacy and dignity

Compared to the past, today there is a change in women's self-esteem and dignity, demonstrated by their increased participation in decisions related to selling high-value items such as cattle and surpluses, increased participation in meetings, enhanced ability to speak in public and increased participation in IGAs. The main actors of this change are the government and development partners who have been implementing targeted interventions towards: i) increasing awareness about women's rights and gender equality and ii) increasing access to various resources/opportunities to enhance women's self-esteem and dignity. With the UNJP-RWEE intervention, the beneficiaries: i) have developed the "I can" and "we can" attitude to participate in an IGA, ii) have the opportunity to move and work outside of the house, iii) have increased participation in decisions at home and in the community, iv) have increased opportunity to participate in meetings and speak in meetings, v) have increased opportunity to share, learn and network and vi) experience enhanced harmony within their homes (receive more respect from spouses), and vi) gained respect from community members. It is now possible to see women who till the land. Women now have their own money and husbands borrow from their wives. Women feel like they can do anything that other women and men cannot do. The project also increased the motivation of women for work. The project has helped women develop a positive image about themselves, develop confidence and be proactive. The 'I can' attitude creates an opportunity for continuity regarding women's participation in economic opportunities and empowerment. One of the empowered women declared with confidence:

I participate in meetings equal as a man. In the beginning, the community said that I break the cultural rules because women are not allowed to participate in community meetings. And culturally a woman is not allowed to go to funerals to prepare the burial place. One day, I asked a member of idir if I can go with them to do that. Nobody accepted my idea and they laughed at me and some shouted in shock "uuuuu". Except this, I can do everything even activities men can't do. For example, putting fire in bee colonies; most of the men can't do this but I can do it. (A 41-year-old empowered woman, Abune Germama kebele)

I am a woman who can explain her ideas clearly. I am not educated but I am knowledgeable. I have a good position in the community, because of my knowledge. I am also empowered because I can participate in farming of crops and vegetables, educate my children and speak at community meeting, as I am a RWEE beneficiary. (A 40-year-old empowered woman, Abune Germama kebele)

Male control over women's mobility

Mobility of women is determined by various factors including age, marital status, household headship, distance from home, time of the day, cultural norms, wealth status and domestic responsibilities. For example, at a younger age, specifically before getting married, a woman's mobility is controlled by her parents, while after marriage it is controlled by her husband, allowing her to move freely to nearby places (within 3 km away from the village), e.g. local markets. A woman who does not have a husband is relatively free to move. A woman who goes wherever she wants at her own will is considered by the community as a social deviant and disobedient. However, compared to the past, women's freedom of mobility has increased immensely which is attributed to girls' access to education and various initiatives by the government and development partners to increase community awareness about women's rights, gender equity and empowerment. On the other hand, increased population growth and limited resources have made mobility of women a necessity rather than a choice. Women in poor households tend to work outside of the house more than those from wealthier households.

4.3 Operational issues

The subthemes which were explored under this key thematic area were: gender-sensitive design of the UNJP and targeting and impact.

Gender-sensitive design of the project

At the woreda level, six focal persons from six different sector offices coordinate the program. The coordinators at woreda level are all men. In the case of Yaya Gulele woreda, at the kebele level, there are two women that facilitate implementation of the program activities and mediate communication between the beneficiaries and focal persons at the woreda level. However, in Adami Tulu woreda, there are no fieldworkers mediating between the women beneficiaries and the woreda focal persons.

Targeting

The direct beneficiaries of the program are women, while their spouses are indirect beneficiaries. The program targets already existing women cooperatives in the kebeles. Targeting women cooperatives increases the number of women reached and strengthens women's cooperatives. Targeting these cooperatives also provides opportunities for women to exercise active leadership, as these cooperatives are run by women, access services and influence the way services are delivered. However, due to limited resources, not all women in these cooperatives are beneficiaries of the UNJP-RWEE. Therefore, among the members of the cooperatives, women in the lower wealth category with good conduct, good saving records and good reputation in paying back loans were targeted. Women heads of households were given priority.

Project impact: climbing the livelihood and technology ladders

With the loan (in-cash and in-kind) from UNJP-RWEE, beneficiaries have been able to i) generate more income by diversifying their livelihoods through activities such as fattening cattle or sheep and petty trade, ii) boost production by using inputs such as improved seeds of wheat and teff, iii) accumulate assets, e.g. chickens, oxen for ploughing, buying cows for milk, rent land for cultivation and iv) gain knowledge and information from various training (such as financial management, sanitation and hygiene, balanced diet, women's rights, literacy and others). This training has enabled women to participate in a variety of IGA, manage their homes well and make informed decisions. RWEE has strengthened women's relationships while working in groups. Beneficiaries in these woredas are able to buy and use mobile phones, due to the adult education program which has improved women's literacy levels. Project beneficiaries and indirect beneficiaries have noticed improvement in food security and nutrition. Unlike in the past when households ate 1-2 meals, now they eat more than two meals a day. There is improvement in eating a balanced diet as awareness about the importance of nutrition has increased. All the beneficiaries have toilets. In the past, people and cattle shared the same house but now, the space is separated. Some of the women currently participate in *iqub* (cash revolving groups) using proceeds from the UNJP to invest. Conversely, as women undertake activities that were traditionally for men, they also take on additional responsibilities, while men may be relieved of some of their tasks or are at least able to share the workload with the women. Overall, in the project sites, men's contribution to domestic chores has increased minimally, except in a few isolated cases.

Project challenges

The amount of inputs (such as seed, bee hives) provided by the project is very small, compared to the number of beneficiaries who expressed interest in investing in specific enterprises. Women producing the same types of crops with the same technological package are asked to consolidate their plots, yet the plots of the beneficiaries are not continuously adjoining each other. The amount of credit given to the beneficiaries is not compatible with their business plans in most cases, causing change of plans, some of which force women to revert to traditional practices. The project does not release the required money at the time when the beneficiaries need it (opportune times). The project needs continuous monitoring and yet there are no logistics like motor bikes for staff to regularly visit the project sites and follow up on the activities. Furthermore, the loan repayment period is not commensurate to the time when farmers make money. Money is due to be repaid in October, which is not aligned with the harvest season, i.e. in December, when farmers have increased income.

5. Synthesis of components being tested for validation

5.1 Definition of empowerment

The study explored the local definition of empowerment, as defined by women and men, by asking both women and men to describe a woman who is “strong” or “a model” within or outside the community. Both men and women provided contextual definitions for the term empowerment. *Cimina and Gahumsa* were identified and used by both the research subjects and researchers as local terms (in Oromifa that mean being a strong or outstanding person. The characteristics of such individuals, as elicited by male and female group participants, have been grouped into broad categories.

An empowered woman was defined by women and men based on different dimensions: a woman who has knowledge and is educated (INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE), leads other women and the community, attends public meetings, speaks in public meetings (LEADERSHIP), can generate income by diversifying activities such as crop production and brewing and selling local drinks (INCOME), manages her household well, plans for family and educates her children (INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT), lives in harmony with husband (HARMONY), has assets such as a house and has the ability to save (RESOURCES), uses her time properly (TIME), has good conduct, e.g. respect and does not drink alcohol (BEHAVIOUR), can freely move and work outside home (MOBILITY), uses family planning (REPRODUCTION), and has a say/voice in joint decision-making (INPUT IN DECISIONS). The women emphasized the ability to work outside home (MOBILITY) as empowering, although there are factors raised by the control group in Adami Tulu, (such as poverty) which force women to work outside their homes not by choice but necessity. The importance of the indicators, by rank, varied across groups and sites.

Similarly, the characteristics of an empowered man as elicited by men and women are: a man who has knowledge (INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE), engages heavily in agricultural production, cultivates well and adopts technologies (PRODUCTION), accumulates assets, saves and invests (RESOURCES), has good income (INCOME), manages his home effectively, e.g. through meeting food, clothing, shoes, education and medication needs (INDIVIDUAL EMPOWERMENT), makes plans jointly with wife (INPUT IN DECISIONS and HARMONY), has the ability to lead the community, ability to resolve conflicts in the home and community and treat community members fairly (LEADERSHIP), has good conduct, e.g. respect and does not drink alcohol (BEHAVIOUR), uses his time effectively (TIME), and uses family planning methods (REPRODUCTION). The ability to resolve conflicts in a home was mostly expressed by men and women in polygamous communities, in Adami Tulu woreda. Similarly, the ranking of the importance of the indicators varied across groups and sites.

According to the results, the characteristics of an empowered man and woman were very much aligned with the proposed pro-WEAI domains and indicators of empowerment. Empowerment is defined based on the ideals of femininity and masculinity and ideals that make someone strong/able/capable, acceptable and respectable as a woman or man. However, time was not assessed in terms of workload or leisure (as proposed in pro-WEAI) but in terms of being able to plan and use time effectively and being hardworking. Possession of knowledge, particularly by women,

was considered very empowering by both men and women (knowledge is power). The difference between the empowering domains and indicators for women and men is that mobility, knowledge and education, along with the ability to attend and speak in public meetings and proper administration of the home are more empowering to women than men. For men, accumulation of resources or wealth, working hard on the farm, knowledge of good technologies and proper family administration are key. Men tend to perceive women's empowerment in terms of economic advancement while women tend to perceive their empowerment in terms of knowledge and awareness about their rights and being able to take part in spheres that were previously denied to them.

Considering the local definitions of empowerment, socio-cultural aspects stand out strongly and need to be part of the definition. Empowerment is strongly embedded within the cultural environment in which women and men thrive. Empowerment is not only about the ability to decide or make a choice but also about conduct, respect and trust within the household and community. The moral being of a man or woman is very important and valued by communities. If we focus on choice alone, then it focuses on individual independence, which is likely to westernize the African woman and disempower her. It fails to capture mutual interdependence. A woman has a relationship with her husband and society; individual choice lacks mutual interdependence. We are what we are because we are in a relationship with someone, a shift from individualism to 'jointness'.

Proposed definition of women's empowerment in agriculture: the ability to have a voice, engage in decision-making on valuable assets or resources and influence decisions in situations where norms, culture and policy are not constraining.

Based on the findings, it might be important to differentiate empowerment in relation to agricultural production and empowerment in relation to non-agricultural aspects (e.g. ability to educate children). The causal relationships need to be clearly discerned to delineate empowerment in agriculture and how it contributes to empowerment outside the agricultural domain.

5.2 Is empowerment seen as a good thing or bad thing? By whom?

Both men and women discussants perceived empowerment as positive. They indicated that the communities recognize and respect empowered women and men. The individuals in the community see empowered men and women as role models and want to be like them. The wives of empowered men are regarded with respect in the community. Men are also proud of their empowered wives.

Although both men and women perceive women's empowerment as positive, some aspects of empowerment are perceived negatively by both men and women, for instance, **mobility**. Men are uncomfortable when women travel far from home due to fear of loss of control over women, especially when women are more exposed to information, knowledge and networks (**threatened masculinity**). Women prefer to work at home if they have an improved economic situation rather than to move or travel far to engage in activities such as wage employment or petty trade, particularly women in remote villages. Very empowered women who challenge stringent cultural norms are considered social deviants by the community and other women are afraid to follow their footsteps. Men consider women's **knowledge** about their rights as a disadvantage, particularly among the young girls as they become uncontrollable, e.g. when choosing partners to marry.

5.3 Domains and indicators of empowerment

Table 3. Validation of the proposed pro-WEAI domains and indicators

Domain	Indicators	What do we learn
Production*	Input in production decisions*	Important decisions on inputs for agricultural production, when to plough, plant and harvest are mostly made by men. The decision to sell and buy large animals, mainly oxen, cows and other livestock such as sheep/goats, is mostly made by men even though there is discussion between spouses. Although women are consulted, the ultimate decision and expenditure is made by men. Men are considered more knowledgeable. Input into highly recognized and valued decisions is more empowering to women. Therefore, if women's knowledge is enhanced, they can provide input into such decisions. There is need to explore influence from other household members, e.g. mother- and father-in-law.
	Autonomy in production*	<p>Women household heads entirely decide on production aspects as compared to women in men-headed households who have less sole decision-making power.</p> <p>Women in male-headed households exercise autonomy over agricultural activities that occur on small scale, smaller quantities of produce and products/activities of low value (i.e. the returns are small and do not arouse interest from men, e.g. milk, butter, eggs). Can this be considered empowering for women?</p>
Information and knowledge	Access to extension services	<p>Access to information and knowledge strongly stood out as an indicator of an empowered woman—knowledge is power. Information and knowledge can stand alone as an indicator, while possession of knowledge can be demonstrated through input into decisions and other aspects.</p> <p>Men have more access to agricultural information than women. Men accessed information mostly from the government bodies (development agents, woreda experts) and mobile phones. Men are more networked and are highly mobile.</p>
	Access to education level	
	Access to training	
	Ability to apply new technologies	
	Number of information sources	
Resources*	Use rights over land	<p>Land certificates that bear both the husband's and wife's names and photographs give both equal ownership and use rights (voiced in Nono Chemerie, one of the RWEE sites). We did not explore what happens to the certificate in situations where the husband has many wives.</p> <p>The value of land was not explored but it would be interesting to know the value of land that women and men use/own</p>
	Ownership of assets*	<p>Big and highly valued assets/resources like agricultural land, livestock (oxen, cows, goats, sheep, donkeys, horses) and house are owned jointly by husband and wife and decisions tend to be joint. Men have more control over highly valued livestock (like oxen, cows and horses). Women have control over donkeys and the proceeds from hiring them out; donkeys are less valued by men. It is important to tease out the livestock species owned or controlled by men and women (rather than generalizing livestock), their value and mode of acquisition when assessing women's empowerment. It is crucial to understand the value (importance) of all productive assets including land.</p> <p>Assets under the woman's name increase her bargaining power.</p> <p>Do assets of low value empower women? If yes, how? It is important to understand the local meaning of "ownership" of assets and frame the discussions around that definition.</p> <p>The court plays a key role in helping women claim rights over resources especially during divorce or separation or marrying a new wife. Therefore, it is important to explore the political enabling environment in addition to cultural norms and how valued assets are shared.</p>

Domain	Indicators	What do we learn
Resources*	Access to and decisions on credit*	<p>Both women and men have equal access to credit from financial institutions like WALQO and VisionFund. However, women have more access to and control over credit from RWEE which is given under their names.</p> <p>Access to credit from RWEE gives women more bargaining and invisible power. Therefore, it is important to understand who received the credit from other sources and how decisions over credit are made.</p> <p>Measuring women's access to credit alone is not enough. Delve into issues of control of credit, who manages the investment, size of investment and how credit is serviced. In the study sites, repayment of credit seemed to be a family's responsibility.</p>
	Access to a financial account (control over savings and remittances)	<p>Book accounts in banks/micro-finance institutions are mostly opened under the names of men and the men have more control over these accounts. In case of joint savings, there are mixed perceptions about who has more control over joint savings. When women have large amounts of money, they consult with their husbands on how to use it. Access to a financial account may not be enough to measure women's empowerment. Explore control of the savings as well. Women in SACCOs have access to accounts within these institutions.</p>
Income*	Control over use of income*	<p>Income from petty trade (like selling of arake and tella–local brew), hand craft, butter, cheese and eggs is entirely controlled by women, but these sources generate little income. Diversification of IGAs can be empowering if the quality and return from the activity are valuable.</p> <p>Sale of large crop quantities (e.g. greater than 25 kg of teff) and larger livestock is the sole responsibility of men. Decisions about income from selling large quantities of crop harvest and high-value livestock is jointly made by both men and women, although men control the expenditure.</p> <p>Control of income alone as a measure of women's empowerment may not be sufficient. Consider input into decisions over income from large and small sales.</p> <p>Diversification of income sources seems to be empowering to women and can be considered as a potential contributor to empowerment.</p> <p>Consider ability to decide to engage in non-farm/wage IGAs.</p>
	Autonomy in use of income	<p>Women have autonomy in spending income from small sales or other petty income sources like daily wage employment. How can women utilize "small" amounts of income to empower themselves? Female household heads have more autonomy over income. Explore influence from other household members, e.g. mother- and father-in-law.</p>
Leadership*	Group membership*	<p>Membership in groups alone might not be enough to measure women's empowerment because most women who belong to groups do not speak out (particularly in mixed groups) and their concerns are not taken into consideration. However, being in a leadership position (at group or community level), able to speak out, able to attend meetings (with or without consultation of spouse) and controlling benefits from the membership are potential indicators of empowerment.</p> <p>Some of the women who were categorized as empowered and held leadership positions in a group (e.g. chairperson) had to seek permission from their husbands to attend group meetings.</p>
	Hold leadership position	
	Ability to speak out and be heard	
	Ability to resolve conflicts at household level and community level	

Domain	Indicators	What do we learn
Time*	<p>Workload* (plus child care)</p> <p>Using time appropriately</p> <p>Participation in agricultural activities and community activities</p>	<p>Leisure is not considered a good way to spend time, e.g. women enjoying coffee together. However, efficient use of time in farming activities (for men) and efficient use of time in productive, reproductive and community activities (for women) is considered empowering. Women's domestic work is not valued. How can efficient time use be measured when women are overburdened, and the time spent on these activities is less recognized by men?</p> <p>Workload is heavier for empowered women because they handle both domestic and other activities and, in most cases, their husbands do not help with domestic work and women do not have money to hire labour.</p> <p>According to the local definition of empowerment, an empowered woman should be able to manage her time well. But how can this be measured without causing increased workload and still be valued by community members?</p>
Physical mobility	<p>Frequency of movement</p> <p>Decisions on physical mobility</p>	<p>There is a set of mixed perceptions about mobility as an indicator of empowerment. What women wish for, however, is mobility because of empowerment and freedom of choice, which for men remains difficult to accept, for reasons related to preserving their power and their culturally assigned roles as heads of households and main decision-makers (hegemonic masculinity).</p> <p>Within the studied communities, mobility of women depends on the distance from home, time of the day, permission from their husband, age, marital status, wealth status, reason for mobility and religion; these need to be explored to understand the context within which mobility can be empowering.</p>
Intra-household relationships	<p>Mutual respect</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Harmony</p>	<p>Trust of spouse is an important element as it aids mutual decision-making and mobility. Group membership is by consultation with a spouse because it requires money for membership. Harmony is a product of joint decision-making. Husbands may help wives with domestic chores when there is harmony.</p>
Individual empowerment/ self-empowerment	<p>Self-efficacy</p> <p>Life satisfaction</p> <p>Self-esteem</p> <p>Positive image in society</p>	<p>When the individual empowerment process occurs in a woman's or a man's life, they begin to believe that they can have more control over their lives; they understand their situation and begin to act to improve their lives and their environment, e.g. the 'I can' attitude developed by RWEE beneficiaries.</p> <p>Women who freely engage in discussions with their husbands, work hard to generate income, participate in community activities, accumulate assets and manage their homestead (educate children, feed children on balanced diet etc.) have relatively better life satisfaction, confidence and self-efficacy.</p>
Gender-based violence	<p>Attitudes about gender-based violence</p>	<p>Beneficiaries relatively have more awareness on gender-based violence as compared to non-beneficiaries. With increased sensitization, the group participants acknowledge that domestic violence is not appropriate. The court has a big role to play in curbing domestic violence and helping women claim their rights. Gender-based violence can be used to validate intra-household relationships.</p>

Domain	Indicators	What do we learn
Nutrition	Input in healthcare decisions	Nutrition is the domain of women although men also purchase food. Women are free to decide on household nutrition using the income from petty trading. Minimum power relations manifest here because men have low interest in this issue; men do not want to discuss food.
	Input in reproductive health decisions	
	Input in infant and young child feeding decisions	
	Input in food consumption decisions	
	Input in food consumption decisions while pregnant/breastfeeding	
	Input in purchasing decisions for food and medicine	
Reproductive decisions	Input in decisions on child bearing and use of contraceptives	For disempowered women, reproductive decisions seem to be mainly made by men although there seems to be some consultation. The attitude that God decides on the number of children also prevails among men and women. Frequent pregnancies constrain women from engaging effectively in agriculture and other empowering activities.
Behaviour at community level	Good conduct and acceptance (e.g. does not drink alcohol or chew khat)	Trust is key in empowering women. Most credit institutions still favour women because of trust. Trust is important for group membership as well.
	Respect for others	An empowered man is one who adheres to community norms, cultural aspects and government rules.
	Trusted by others	Although self-conduct is key to the community, it is difficult to measure. However, it should be considered under institutional/structural factors.
	Ability to challenge constraining cultural norms	Women who are over empowered are perceived to be social deviants as they challenge most of the cultural norms.
Migration decision	Deciding not to migrate	Ability to decide to migrate can be empowering or disempowering
	Ability to control migration of household members (control over agricultural labour force)	The project has great potential to curb migration of women and young girls; this is a potential measure of empowerment.
	Control over remittances	Families that receive remittances tend to have improved livelihoods.

5.4 Gender roles, social norms (including marriage practices) and implications for the project and women's empowerment

- Culture restricts women to domestic roles and the triple role burden limits the extent to which women can fully realize their empowerment potential. This calls for interventions that save women's labour and encouraging men to support women in their productive and reproductive activities. Men need to recognize women as farmers and their contribution to agriculture, which will challenge the patriarchal dividend/men's privilege.
- Women's access to assets is mainly through marriage and dependence on her husband, while men have family inheritance or birth rights. The deeply held discriminatory norms and practices place women and men, girls and boys at unequal starting points and ability to spiral up the empowerment ladder. Such norms shape men's and women's behaviour in the society and define their sphere of action, influence and control. However, as women achieve empowerment, a few positive changes have occurred in family decision-making processes, shifting towards a more equitable joint decision-making process.

- Existing culture, where the bride is given assets (including livestock) to take with her to her new home, gives women greater bargaining power over those assets. Such initial capital is a stepping stone for women to invest in and quickly climb the ladder, when provided with external support, such as the UNJP credit scheme.
- Disempowering marriage practices (such as abduction) were common in the study areas in the past but have drastically declined. Historically, girls did not have the chance to choose their partners, however, this is now changing. These changes present a good opportunity for the project to capitalize on helping women and girls to learn how to make choices.
- The cultural marriage practice that demands the total submission of women to their husbands is changing because of the increased awareness of women as a result of various trainings provided by the government and NGOs. Women have started to work beyond the domestic sphere and yet their activities are limited to small businesses. Women can be supported to expand these businesses.
- The norm that discourages women to claim individual ownership of assets masks assets that women own and their ability to exercise control over the assets. This was demonstrated in Adami Tulu, where married women claimed that they cannot say that 'this is mine' but say 'this is ours' even when the asset is acquired using women's own income, inherited or given to them by parents.
- The work burden on women negatively affects the time and labour women can invest in targeted IGAs by UNJP-RWEE.

5.5 Key findings from the qualitative research about the likely impact of the project on women's empowerment

- We observed a sufficient level of local awareness about gender issues which provides other projects a good foundation upon which to transform constraining gender norms. Given the relative nature of the empowerment concept, enhancing women's local ideal qualities (social expectations of a strong woman) together with challenging the constraining norms and engaging men in the processes of empowering women serve to create a positive image for the project. Helping communities to appreciate the importance of women being in recognized positions in the social structure minimizes backlash against women. As the project builds on these local ideals (while constructively challenging the constraining norms), the treatment and control communities all perceive women's empowerment as a positive trait, except for a few aspects that men are not comfortable with.
- Men and women indicated that the UNJP-RWEE program has been contributing to women's empowerment, as it provides them with opportunities to learn about their rights and responsibilities and provides them with starter capital. The knowledge acquired through training helps women manage their homes properly, manage their finances, be able to analyse investment options, participate in different IGAs, participate in meetings and speak in public. These opportunities enabled women to develop self-confidence.
- While UNJP-RWEE provides women with farm technologies and other farm inputs, working on attitudinal change towards women is important. Women who apply agricultural technologies may not be recognized as empowered, since a 'farmer is a man (*stet*)' (as elaborated in section 4.1). Therefore, the project should strive to shift perceptions by helping communities to value and recognize women's contribution in agriculture through training or holding community conversations.
- The qualitative study elicited the process through which women empower themselves through the credit scheme. The credit that women access in their own names gives them more bargaining power with their spouses and increases their ability to accumulate assets and improve their social status. The project approach is holistic, addressing the functional soft and hard skills which aid accumulation of other empowerment aspects.
- It is difficult to attribute the project's contribution since there are other government and NGO interventions undertaking activities that empower women

5.6 Implications for quantitative methods

- Empowerment has many emotional/feeling elements which should be elicited using qualitative methods. Qualitative methods provide flexibility in data collection and in further disaggregating components (domains and indicators) defined in the quantitative tool. Empowerment is also subject to various local meanings and conceptualizations that are difficult to quantify. For example, criteria like good conduct, patience, someone who thinks for the family etc. emerged as characteristics of an empowered woman by the community, yet difficult to measure and quantify. The community is also skewed towards the ideals of feminism and not necessarily empowerment. Such contextual aspects can help interpret the quantitative findings.
- Quantitative methods can help to quantify the amount of income and savings that men and women decide on to be able to categorize it into large, medium and small incomes/savings. The average family savings need quantification. The frequency of food intake and varieties of food consumed by household members should be quantified. The number of women/men having accounts and/or taking credit and from where can complement qualitative findings. Quantitative data may be required on the number of migrants, amount of credit received, number of livestock and amount of crop sold by men and women. The qualitative data can be used to add meaning to the numbers—explaining the how and why.
- Adding weights to empowerment indicators from the scientists' perspective is not justifiable. Prioritization of the indicators based on the perceptions of the community members, men and women, should form the basis for weighing the indicators. The strengths or importance of an indicator varies from community to community.

6. Conclusions, general observations and learning

- The pathway to women's empowerment involves negotiation between the ideals of femininity (as defined by the community) and individual desires, which may be in direct conflict with each other. Women negotiate their actions in the face of social norms either to conform or violate in order to make a choice and act upon their choices. Men benefit from patriarchal dividend/privileges which have been reproduced and maintained for generations; their masculinity is threatened when women attempt to encroach on their sphere of control. The dominant forms of masculinity restrict men's ability to recognize their role in supporting women's empowerment.
- Empowerment is a matter of individual and group perceptions. It includes traits that are difficult to quantify but can be described and characterized according to local standards (e.g. knowledge, confidence, conduct, attitude or perception, intra-household relationships, freedom of mobility etc.). The socio-cultural context always informs the way societies understand project concepts like empowerment. Qualitative methods should complement quantitative methods to foster a meaningful understanding of empowerment either as a process of becoming or a state of being. Empowerment remains an elusive concept, challenging to standardize to the broader context.
- The number and significance of the empowerment traits (as perceived by the resource persons) determine who will be considered empowered or disempowered. The important characteristics that define one as empowered need to be fleshed out together with community members.
- While empowerment may bring about positive changes in women's lives, some of its effects may be negative. Measures need to be put in place to avoid unintended consequences.
- Qualitative research requires appropriate selection of respondents, qualified and trained researchers, commitment and appropriate consent. Continuous data analysis exposes gaps that can be addressed while in the field.
- Most of the interventions by the UNJP-RWEE such as provision of farm inputs and various training are similar to the interventions of the various sector offices. Unlike other interventions within the study areas, i) the UNJP-RWEE program provides access to loans with a low interest rates and ii) the program provides training on financial management. This makes it difficult to measure the sole impact of the UNJP-RWEE program.
- Conducting the study in treatment and control villages elicits findings which aid comparison across communities. Future studies can interrogate both project beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries within the same communities, in addition to the control site. This will help us understand the impact of the project beyond the target beneficiaries (scalability).
- The enabling environment, e.g. the court of law, is very important in helping women claim their rights over assets/resources. Therefore, in the effort to understand women's empowerment, understanding the structures and institutions within which women and men pursue their livelihoods provides a proper understanding of the enabling/disabling environment.

7. Recommendations

1. It is important to increase the amount of cash transfers from the project to improve results (in Adami Tulu woreda). The amount of loans that women are granted in Adami Tulu woreda is smaller than what they request for in their business plans. According to them, the loan size is only sufficient to do business as usual, but not to carry out activities in a more advanced manner (i.e. to increase investment and carry out the activity in a different/more efficacious way).
2. According to the research team, the project should hire more female field assistants, who mediate between the beneficiaries and the woreda focal persons and between the donors and the beneficiaries, especially in Adami Tulu woreda. All the focal persons at the woreda sector offices are men and there are no field assistants that liaise between beneficiaries and the woreda. This will improve the quality of monitoring and the ability to take corrective measures.
3. To secure men's support for the project, it is crucial for the project to work on enhancing women's ability to decide together with their husbands rather than focusing on promoting women's individual choices. Emphasis on joint decision-making aligns with the locally accepted behavioural norms and fosters progressive and culturally acceptable social transformations, although some of the women were happy to be able to decide alone.
4. Strengthening the contextual understanding of the existing gender relations by carrying out gender analysis will aid identification of the root causes of gender inequalities in the two woredas, so that training is tailored towards addressing the identified issues. Such knowledge should be used to shift institutional structures that shape women's choice and voice and ultimately their lives and future. Additionally, gender analysis should be used to understand how gender inequalities and power inequalities intersect with other demographic characteristics such as age, wealth, marital status etc.
5. To reduce women's increased workload, labour saving technologies that ease domestic and farm work for women should be introduced and promoted by the project. Child care services will enable women to attend meetings and pursue other livelihood activities outside the home.
6. To ensure successful investments by project beneficiaries, money transfers should align with the local agricultural calendar, that is, before the sowing/planting season. Equally important, loan payment deadlines should be set after the harvest period, when previously invested funds have yielded returns. This will increase women's ability to repay the loans. The seasonal calendar can help project implementers to determine the appropriate time to set dates for different events.

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