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## Exploration of cultural norms and practices influencing women's participation in chickpea participatory varietal selection training activities: A case study of Ada'a and Ensaro districts, Ethiopia

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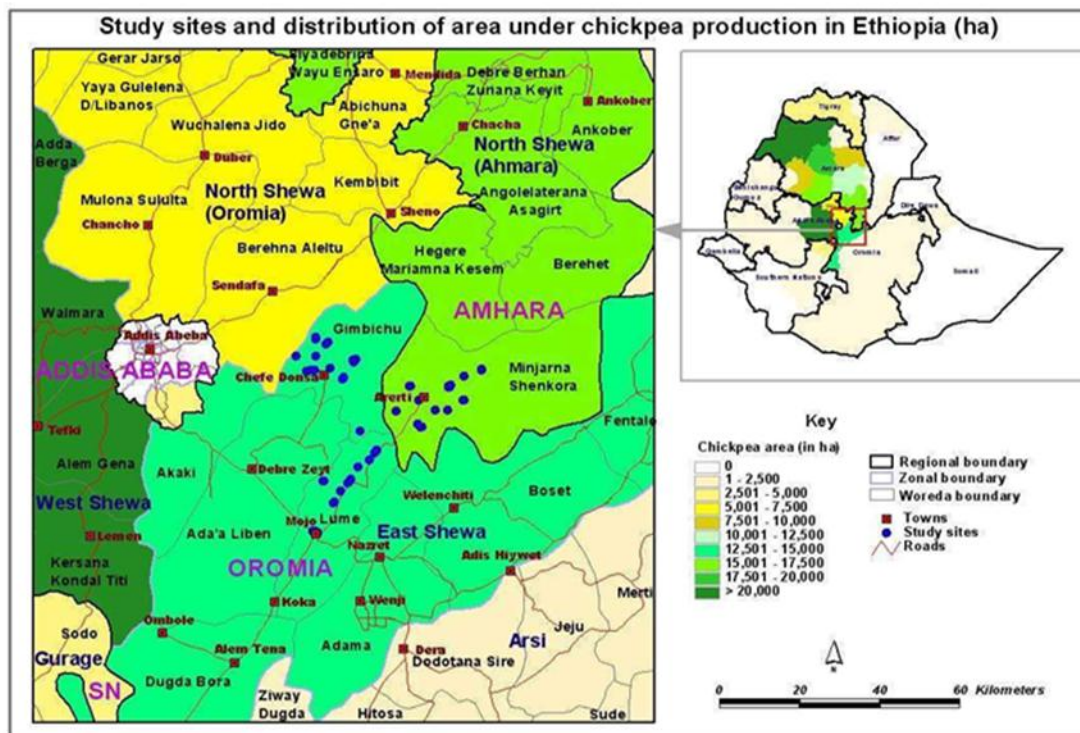
### Abstract

In order to encourage gender equality in delivery of varietal knowledge to male and female farmers in Ada'a and Ensaro districts of Ethiopia, chickpea breeders set a policy that each male farmer would bring along his wife to participatory varietal selection sessions. Women farmers did not attend planned trainings as expected. Using small-n approach, the 'reasons' women in these communities did not take up the training opportunities were explored. Vignettes designed to depict the lives of a typical Ethiopian couple were used for exploring negotiations between husband and wife on 'participation' decisions. Short radius of movement, labour burden, sex of extension agents, intimacy and harmony in the home emerge as key factors considered by women. We propose dialogue between men, women, the old and the young to initiate transformation of gender relations to cede 'space for women', to build capacities to support chickpea production, and agriculture in Ethiopia.

**Key words:** Cultural norms, women's participation, agricultural trainings, participatory varietal selection, chickpea, Ethiopia.

### Introduction

Ethiopia is ranked the number one chickpea producer in Africa and seventh in the world. It accounts for 60% of Africa's total chickpeas production and contributes about 4.5% to the total world production (FAOSTAT, 2014; Pachico, 2014). There are increased investments in the chickpea value chain in Ethiopia from government and donors in the last decade. The International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) contribution to enhancing chickpea production and productivity in Ethiopia has been through the Tropical Legumes (TL) project (2007-2019). The TL project is implemented in the major chickpea producing areas of Amhara and Oromia regional states in Ethiopia (Map 1). These two regions represent more than 90% of the entire chickpea growing area and account for 92% of the total chickpea production in Ethiopia (Kassie *et al.*, 2009)



**Figure 1: Study areas and area under chickpea production in Ethiopia (ha)**

The project employed field days and demonstrations and training programs for farmers and extension staff (Ganga Rao *et al.*, 2015) in scaling of suitable chickpea varieties, management options and marketing strategies (Asfaw *et al.*, 2010).

Under the project, several chickpea varieties were developed through Participatory Varietal Selection (PVS) approaches. In theory, participatory research is a process of inquiry between scientists and communities that aims to resolve problems through an interactive process of discovery, empowerment, knowledge sharing, and action (Isaacs and Njuguna, 2016). Inherent in the theoretical PVS approach is the inclusion of marginalized voices to ensure that everyone's inputs and needs are met. Ideally, a variety is promoted if it receives approval of the stakeholders based on their selection criteria. This may or may not be the best bet by the breeder's standards. If the best-in-class variety by the breeder's standards is not accepted by the stakeholders in PVS, the breeder has to improve it further or use it as a source of trait for which it is considered best. An ideal scenario is where the worst-in-class by the breeder's standards also happens to be the worst-in-class by the stakeholders' selection criteria.

The chickpea breeders in the TL project in Ethiopia intended to have the women's voice on the PVS process. They invited male and female farmers to participate in the PVS sessions to select chickpea varieties but the women farmers did not attend the organised training. After

deliberations, the team decided to institute an internal policy that all the male farmers who attended the project trainings would be required to be accompanied by their wives. Out of a participating group of 70 male farmers, only 3-5 would be women; but yet, when the breeders visited the chickpea growing regions, they witnessed that women were actively participating in the production of chickpeas (Ojiewo, pers. Communication, 2015). The team was intrigued by this observation. They did not understand if the challenge was from the project end (in the communication or in the organization of the PVS meetings) or if it was on the women farmers end (culture and time needs) and if there was any way they could facilitate dissemination of information to the women farmers in chickpea production.

A quick qualitative study was commissioned to answer two questions that were pertinent to the project

1. Why were women farmers not able to participate in the Tropical Legumes II chickpea PVS training activities?
2. Which strategies might be effective in enhancing women's participation in chickpea agricultural trainings in Ethiopia?

This paper outlines i) the literature drawn in conceptualizing the study, ii) the methodology that was followed in obtaining qualitative information from men and women farmers in Ada'a District in Oromia and Ensaro District in Amhara, Ethiopia; iii) the challenges identified that limit women's participation in PVS trainings and iv) opportunities that could be tapped on to enhance women's participation in chickpea PVS trainings in particular and agricultural training in general.

### **Literature review**

The importance of agricultural technology adoption in ending poverty, food insecurity and improving the livelihoods of rural farm households in developing countries has been well discussed (Hailu *et al.*, 2014). Women in Africa continue to adopt high yielding varieties at low rates (Doss and Morris 2001). Adoption and diffusion of improved chickpea (*Cicer arietinum L.*) variety seeds in Ethiopia is documented as having been slow (Krishman and Patman, 2012). Women farmers need to participate meaningfully in the technology development process (Collett and Gale, 2009).

Adoption of technologies is a well-studied concept since Rogers (2003) described the adoption curve and patterns. There is a five-step path that individuals appear to go through before they can be said to be adopters of a technology including: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption. This conceptualization has guided methods chosen by researchers and extension agents in exposing farming communities to new technologies through awareness raising forums like field days, experience building activities like demonstrations and other participatory methodologies. Participation of women and men farmers in such organized events designed to enhance awareness and evaluation is considered a very important step in enhancing agricultural adoption; as farmers must have information about new technologies before they can consider

adopting them (Doss, 2006). Factors that facilitate or inhibit participation of men and women in such training activities are increasingly becoming prioritized areas of interest to development actors and scholars. The areas identified in literature include:

### ***Gendered social norms***

Gender norms stem from society's ideal values of what it means to be a woman or a man (Chattier, 2014). These norms include everything from cultural beliefs to expected behaviors and practices. Social norms of gender are in constant dialogue with women's agency and may determine women's capacity to act. Social norms and their influences on women's and men's decisions are difficult topics even for well-designed household surveys to explore effectively. Invisible social structures constrain and shape the environment within which men and women operate (Mudege *et al.*, 2015). Social norms influence decision-making processes in the home, which in turn affect the ability of women to access training opportunities, as seen in seed potato multiplication and ware potato production in Malawi. However, failure to direct information to the person responsible for a given farm activity, when women are the ones responsible, does not result in the intended productivity gains or reduction in stock losses, even though the men access the information. To this regard, Asfaw *et al.* (2010) suggested that social behavior and traditional rules of men and women have to be well considered. There is scarcity of information on the role of social norms and the ways in which it limits participation in agricultural training. Adekunle (2013) recommends that in most developing countries where agriculture is a key sector in the economy, socio-cultural factors need to be analyzed and understood for developing effective extension and training programs to reach rural women farmers.

### ***Restrictions on women's mobility***

Women's restricted mobility has been cited as one of the reasons why they are less likely to participate in meetings and in many cases this is embedded in the social and cultural norms (Ragasa, 2012). Findings from a study by Mudege *et al.* (2015) shows that existing gender inequalities, especially norms restricting women's mobility and decision-making power, meant that women could not always attend training. Women could not make independent decisions to attend training and often sought permission from their husbands. Findings from a study in Afghanistan also indicate that rural women's mobility outside the home or village is restricted by security concerns (World Bank, 2011). Poor roads and the lack of transport services affect the entire population's mobility in general, but women are particularly affected by the need to adhere to strict standards for socially acceptable behavior. Women may be prohibited from travelling outside the village, required to have an escort, and unable to interact (including proximity seating) with men outside the family (*ibid*). In Ethiopia, Asfaw *et al.* (2010) observed that compared to women, men have easier access to technology and training, mainly due to their strong position as head of the household and greater access to off-farm mobility.

### ***Definition of a good wife***

In an attempt to explore the prevalent gender norms surrounding the lives of women and men in the communities across 20 countries, through focus group discussions defining a "good wife", Boudet *et al.* (2013) identified consistencies across both men's and women's focus groups, the urban and rural contexts, and across different economic, political, and social circumstances of the 20 countries that were engaged. Men and women held similar views of the wife's roles. The

focus group accounts of a good wife depicted her first and foremost as an obedient, caring, and respectful mate responsible for all the housework and the care of all members of the household. The definitions of a good wife may take the form of actions that she is expected to take and those that she is not expected to take; contribution to generation or administration of family resources and how well she manages to negotiate peace and harmony in her household. Resourcefulness may mean undertaking economic responsibilities whether paid or unpaid (Boudet *et al.* (2013). Often, women's active economic participation would go unrecognized or hidden because of the status their communities attach to being 'just a housewife' (ibid). In some societies, sacrificing of a woman's wants and desires is encouraged, viewed and interpreted as character of a good wife. Women may sacrifice their desires to participate in agricultural trainings to attain social mark of good wives.

### ***Intra household negotiation***

Intra household bargaining refers to the negotiations that occur between members of a household in order to arrive at decisions regarding the household unit. Households are not 'unitary'. There are asymmetries in the power to bargain among household members (Agarwal, 1997). The factors that lead to differentials in bargaining power amongst household members are not well understood but men always seem to have an advantage as social norms support their superior position as household head. The cultural construction of appropriate female behavior affects their ability to bargain and that social norms could impinge on the bargaining power by setting a limit on what can be bargained for, affecting how the process of bargaining is conducted by favoring some groups over others (say men over women). Agarwal (1997) further observed that in cultures or context where social norms stifle explicit bargaining or voice, women may be pushed to use explicit forms of contestation such as withdrawing into silence. Therefore, when women don't have sufficient bargaining power within the household, the benefits of new technologies may be taken over by men, even when the technologies were designed specifically to target women (Doss, 2011).

### ***Triple labour burden***

Women's participation in organized training activities is constrained by lack of time resulting from the heavy workloads they have pertaining to productive, reproductive and communal responsibilities. Women are producers and procreators; they are active participants in the social and cultural activities of the community. However, the important roles they play have not always been recognized (Tegegne, 2012) as women's work in the agricultural sector has often been erroneously documented as marginal and they have been considered more as consumers than producers. Majali (2012) showed that women did not have time to commit to crop production activities or other kinds of agricultural activities, because they had other responsibilities to take care of. Between household responsibilities, working full time jobs and taking care of their children and husbands, women did not have enough time to dedicate to farming.

### ***Sexual identity of extension agents***

Cultural and social restrictions on interactions between men and women that are not kin hinder easy communication between male agents and female farmers. The gender identity of the persons delivering the PVS training might contribute to the decision of a woman to attend a training or not, depending on the community. Agricultural extension continues to play a key



role in technology dissemination as the uptake of new technologies is often influenced by the farmer's contact with extension services (Morris and Doss, 1999; Rathgeber, 2011). In Northern Nigeria for instance, contact between a male extension agent and an Islamic Hausa women farmer is almost impossible (Saito, 1994). However, some national systems are still gender insensitive. For example, in rural Zimbabwe, despite a large proportion of female-headed households, only 10 percent of women farmers participate in agricultural extension training (Anandajayasekeram *et al.*, 2008). A report by World Bank and IFPRI (2010) documents that in Ethiopia, women farmers may not be comfortable dealing with male extension workers or with the time and location of the training. Ragasa (2014) also highlighted that in Ethiopia, extension agents are overwhelmingly male, and cultural taboos restrict their interaction with women. Likewise, Due *et al.* (1997) showed that in Tanzania many women farmers preferred to work with female extension agents as they were free to discuss problems with them and they could accommodate their time preferences for meetings better than with male extension agents. Morris and Doss (1999) observed that the frequency of contact with extension agents was strongly associated with the gender of the farmer. On average, women reported fewer contacts with extension agents, and a larger proportion of women reported no extension contacts at all. Although, researchers have reported that male farmers have more access to agricultural extension services than women in Nigeria, agricultural extension services are mostly staffed by men and are inclined to helping men folk (Adenkule, 2013).

### ***Men as heads of households***

Women in Ethiopia have secondary status within the family and in the society, and hence are continually to be regarded as an appendage to the family (Tegegne, 2012). Another documented challenge of reaching rural women by agricultural agents in Ethiopia is the perception that if extension services are provided to a member of the family, and in most cases a man, the information will trickle down to the rest of the household (World Bank and IFPRI, 2010). The underlying gender and cultural norms mediate access to information as men regard themselves as representatives of the households during trainings. Extension officers unconsciously reinforce these views by using biased recruitment methods for training that favor men (Mudege *et al.*, 2015). However, men do not necessarily discuss production decisions with their wives or transfer extension knowledge to them, and if extension information is tailored to men's crops or priorities, the information may not help women. According to Women Thrive Worldwide (no date) information transfer or learning from extension services is merely a filtering down process that reaches women indirectly, if it reaches at all. Recruiting, hiring and training more women extension agents and then developing and implementing programs with a full understanding of the gender roles in a community is a necessary change.

### ***Low literacy among women***

Ragasa (2014) highlights that in Ethiopia, women generally have lower levels of formal education and this hampers their ability to take part in extension activities requiring reading and arithmetic skills. Tegegne's (2012) work in Ethiopia showed that the place of women in the

society is complex and involves many interrelated problems such as high illiteracy rate that influences women's role in agriculture despite other factors such as: women's dependence on their husband, ignorance, low social status, traditional religious and cultural dominance. Illiteracy is also confirmed as a major constraint that inhibits women's ability to access and use agricultural information to achieve and sustain household food security for women in Rural Zimbabwe (Gundu 2009).

### Methodology

The question of 'why were women farmers not able to participate in the Tropical Legumes chickpea PVS training activities?' needed to be answered by men and women farmers who were familiar with the TL project. They would ideally be men and women who had decided to attend or not to attend the PVS activities implemented by the project. The study sites were therefore chosen from chickpea producing areas of Amhara (North Shewa Zone) and Oromia (East Shewa Zone) regional states in Ethiopia. In East Shewa Zone, Ude Village in Ada'a District was chosen while in the North Shewa Zone, Dembi and Deramu villages in Ensaro District were chosen. The two study regions have distinct and different cultural values associated with differences in language, ethnicity and practices. The Eastern Shewa people are from the Oromo ethnic group, while the Northern Shewa are the Amhara ethnic group.

Recruitment of discussants was done through the national partners from the Ethiopia Institute of Agricultural Research, the *Woreda* (district) agricultural extension officers and the '*kebele*' (village) leaders who had worked with the men and women chickpea farmers through the TL project. The farmers, especially the women, did not have to be members of the TL activities but it would be helpful if they were aware of the project activities. Farmers were informed that participation was voluntary, confidential and their names will not be used in any publication and consent was obtained to continue. The focused discussions were carried out in November 2015. Thirty male farmers and twenty eight female farmers participated in the discussions (Table 1).

**Table 1: Number of male and female participants invited and attended discussions in Ada'a and Ensaro districts, Ethiopia**

	Ensaro District		Ada'a District	Total number of FGD participants
	Dembi village	Deramu Village	Ude Village	
<b>Number of female participants</b>	10	8	10	28
<b>Number of male participants</b>	11	10	9	30
<b>Total number of participants</b>	21	18	19	58

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This research was a small-N study, which is appropriate for situations where few or no previous studies have been conducted and little information exists (Galie, 2014). The study design was exploratory, with a limitation of budget and time.

A design of an innovative process that allowed for deep conversation within a short time of interaction was required to capture the perspectives of men and women on the research question and how they experience gender differences in their households and community without the benefit of long term immersion into the community. Vignettes were designed to remove the focus from the actions and behaviours of the participating discussants; but yet the information could be about them and their choices.

A focus group discussion (FGD) approach was chosen for setting the discussions. A FGD is a good way to gather people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a specific topic of interest (ODI 2009). The group of participants is guided by a moderator who introduces topics for discussion and helps the group to participate in a lively and natural discussion among themselves. The strength of FGDs relies on allowing participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides insights into how participants think about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community's beliefs, experiences and practices. A total of six (6) FGDs, with 3 groups of female and 3 groups of male participants groups were carried out. This allowed each group to voice their perspectives independently. In each FGDs, eight to ten participants were involved for effective interaction. In total, 30 male farmers and 28 female farmers participated.

The research questions were presented in the FGDs as vignettes. Vignette-based interviewing approach, a technique used in structured and in-depth interviews as well as focus groups, providing sketches of fictional scenarios. It is a suitable vehicle for presenting narrative stories or focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical, or emblematic in the case being investigated (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The respondent is then invited to imagine, drawing on his or her own experience, how the central character in the scenario will behave. According to Miles and Huberman (1994), the creation of the vignettes is based on the assumption that none of the characters depicted exists; yet all could. Vignettes thus collect situated data on group values, group perceptions, group beliefs and group norms of behavior (Bloor and Wood, 2006). This approach allows researchers to get at topics that might otherwise be challenging to ask about.

The vignette stories for this study were designed based on insights from the literature review, drawing on the constraints identified to have potential to impact women's participation in group trainings in agriculture. A series of vignettes representing eight scenarios revolving around the lives of a typical Ethiopian couple called Getachew and Gete, guided the exploration of the cultural beliefs, expected behaviors and practices of a good wife, interaction with extension agents and PVS training organization and attendance by either Gete or Getachaw. At each of the scenarios, Getachew and Gete's decision making process was analyzed, the negotiations between them were investigated for the space, agency, access and control that was accorded to Gete by the different players: her husband, her parents, her in-laws (parents in law and the aunts to the



husband). Asking ‘why’ at all stages helped understand the underlying factors behind the decisions made.

The vignette guide was developed in English and translated into Amharic language. Each FGD session lasted approximately three hours each. Verbatim note taking was done in the local language and the field notes were later translated into English. The authors created a coding tree that identified different themes based on questions asked during the study. After identifying the themes, data was manually coded in NVivo version 11 in a sex-disaggregated manner. Analysis was sex disaggregated to help identify any differences and/or similarities between men and women’s experiences, views and opinions.

At the end of the discussions, FGD participants were asked to fill a short template on age, gender, level of education attained and marital status.

### ***Study limitations***

The major limitation of this study lies in the use of a small non-probabilistic sample size, which was appropriate for the exploratory approach used for scientific inquiry. Also, given the limited financial resources that were available to undertake this study, the researchers did not reach the data saturation point of the sample size as required (O’Reilly and Parker, 2012). Since this was a cross-sectional qualitative case study, the intent was not to generalize the findings but to provide insights on cultural norms and practices influencing women’s participation in chickpea PVS trainings in the regions where the chickpea breeding and agronomy team is operating. In view of these limitations, the study findings should be used with caution in unrelated contexts or settings.

### **Results**

This section is divided into three sub-sections. The first subsection summarizes the characteristics of the focus group discussants. The second subsection describes the gender norms defining a good wife; and the last subsection focuses on the women’s interactions with extension agents and trainings attendance. Excerpts are used to emphasize the ‘first voice’ of the discussants on selected issues as presented in the paper.

#### ***Characteristics of the focus group discussants***

The female participants were aged between 25 to 63 years averaging 45 years while the male participants were 24 to 71 years old, with an average of 46 years. Nearly all (90%) the male participants identified themselves as married while the rest were single. Forty six percent of the female discussants identified themselves as married, 29% as widowed and 25% were divorced. Fifty seven percent of the female discussants had never gone to school while 25% and 10 % had attained primary education and adult learning respectively. Only 4% of the female participants had attained secondary education. In contrast, 50% of male discussants had attained primary education, 13.3% had attained secondary education while 13.3% had never gone to school (Table 2).

**Table 2: Level of education and Marital status of the FGD participants in Ethiopia by gender**

		Sex of the participant		
		Male (n=30)	Female (n=28)	Both (n=58)
<b>Level of Education</b>	Never gone to school	4 (13.3 %)	16 (57.1%)	20 (34.5%)
	Primary	15 (50 %)	7 (25 %)	22 (37.9%)
	Junior Primary	2 (6.7%)	1 (3.6 %)	3 (5.2%)
	Secondary	4 (13.3 %)	1 (3.6%)	5 (8.6%)
	Pre-University	2 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	2 (3.4%)
	Adult Learning	3 (10 %)	3 (10.7 %)	6 (10.4%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>30 (100 %)</b>	<b>28 (100 %)</b>	<b>58 (100%)</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	27 (90%)	13 (46.4%)	40 (68.9 %)
	Divorced	0	7 (25%)	7 (12.1%)
	Widowed	0	8 (28.6%)	8 (13.8%)
	Single	3 (10%)	0	3 (5.2%)
<b>Total</b>		<b>30 (100%)</b>	<b>28 (100%)</b>	<b>58 (100%)</b>

***Gender norms defining a good wife as reported by men and women***

The participants were asked to describe the important ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ ascribed to a good woman/good wife in the community. They were also asked to describe a ‘woman role model’ in their community. The ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ of a good wife revolved around actions, behavior, and resourcefulness.

***Actions and behaviors***

The men’s and women’s groups gave similar descriptions of ‘a good wife’; depicting her as someone who has good manners, who fosters harmony (agreement) with her husband in any aspect of decision making; is active and hardworking; loves her job (job here being caring and nurturing responsibilities); is loyal, respectful and committed to her marriage. This would be attained through learning her husband’s behavior, aligning hers to compliment the husband, not committing adultery and allowing the man to be the ‘key decision maker’ the one who makes the ultimate decisions for the household. This was exemplified using the following excerpts:

*“She should not show bad manners ...She should not sell the harvested crops without discussing with him, she should not buy exercise book for children without discussing with him, if she had a plan to go somewhere else she should tell him.” (Female FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November, 2015)*

*“She should not disrespect her husband. In our culture (a) husband is considered as head of the house. Our religion also teaches us to respect our husbands.” (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

*“She should not sell crop produce without a convincing reason and when the price of the produce is low ... She should strive to be the one who is loyal to her house by doing things in consultation with her husband.” (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

There were differences in the description of a ‘role model woman’ by the women compared to the men discussants. The female discussants mostly described a ‘role model’ as a woman who implements her domestic tasks in an exemplary way i.e. cooking, caring for children, ensuring the homestead and neighboring surrounding is clean. The men focused on how the woman treated and represented her family to society. In Ada’a District, the impacts of mobile phone technology on household relations were weaved into the description of a ‘good wife’ in conformity with the idea that norms are always changing in society. The authors thought that this was because men were perhaps feeling a ‘loss of control’ because although they would want to limit the ‘physical mobility’ of the women, the mobile technology opened new possibilities for the women to interact with the outside world beyond the physical space.

*“[Role model] She should be a role model in cooking, cleaning her kids, her house, surrounding, she should be good in social interaction with neighbors and should advise neighbors regarding cleaning their surroundings” (Female FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015).*

*“[Role model] She should love her family and mainly her husband, love her job, should respect people, hardworking, need to be socially bonded and live in harmony with neighbors and other community and give priority to her duty.” (Male FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015)*

*“[Role model] Gete [wife] should strive to be like women who are sociable in the society... [and] should follow woman who has good behavior - who do not fight with her husband and live peacefully with the community.” (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

The men also identified discipline, creativity in revenue generation and prudence in use of financial resources as key aspects of a ‘good wife’.

*“She should manage her time when going to market, visiting her family and other places by returning on time to her home and must behave as before when they met. [She] Should not have other address number in her cell phone and should not [be] found playing or struggling with other youngsters in the area and must avoid unnecessary relation with other male ... She has to be disciplined ... creative, wise use of finance or appropriate budgeting on expenditure” (Male FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015).*

### Resourcefulness

A good wife was considered ‘resourceful’ if she contributed to the income of the household either by helping generate it or by being prudent in spending what the man generated for the household. This was a view depicted across all the FGDs. Female discussants considered a woman resourceful if she helped her husband in agricultural activities. The male participants expected that she would not only be helpful in the field but would also engage in income generating activities such as running small businesses; keeping poultry; practicing dairy farming; spinning and preparing jewelries from locally available materials; being able to save household income and ultimately, not only depending on the man to generate household income.

*“... To be a hard worker, to know agricultural activities.” (Female FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015)*

*“She should help her husband especially in the field work.” (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

*“She should not totally dependent on sole source of income from her husband, rather she has to make an effort in developing skills of small businesses and create job[s] like poultry production, dairy and must be active in both field and other works ... She should be financially strong through appropriate allocation of finances and must have good saving habit.” (Male FGD, Ada ’a District, 17 November 2015)*

*“She should strive to be like one who has good experience in doing agricultural activities and has skill of spinning ... She should be very skilled in preparing jewelries from locally available materials... She should create income generating activities to assist her husband ... She should be good at saving.” (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

### ***Interactions with extension agents and attendance to PVS trainings***

The study explored the views on women attending PVS trainings that were facilitated by male officers *within the village*; women attending PVS trainings that required a three day stay *away from the village*, facilitated by male officers. We also explored the alternative of a female officer being a facilitator of women only trainings in the village as well as away from the village.

#### *Can women attend a PVS training in the village facilitated by male officers?*

This question elicited mixed responses across the FGD type and sites. Female discussants from both sites concluded that a married woman is unlikely to attend a training in the local village about PVS reiterating that *“women usually cannot go without notice unless they are called in person”* and that if she has to, *“they should first discuss and agree with the husband and one of the two should attend the training, because there are kids and animals at home to care for. If she (wife) gets someone to take care of her kids and homework, she should go”*. Women are usually busy with their reproductive roles at home, and if they go away from home, their husbands would be unhappy and this would in turn leave the women stressed. This is exemplified in the following excerpts:

*“No, the number of women is small because most of [the] women are busy [with] homework and they do not get a chance to attend training.” (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

*“No, because there is a negative influence, the husband says she spent more time outside home and the women get stressed because of this.” (Female FGD, Ada ’a District, 17 November 2015)*

Male discussants from Ensaro District felt that women cannot attend the local PVS trainings because of their busy time schedules in performing reproductive and productive roles at home. They also felt that the number of women attending the local trainings will be fewer as their husbands will not give them permission to attend.

*“No, because she perform home activities like preparing food, milking cows, looking after her children ... she keep children and cattle ... we don't think [she will attend training] because most of the time women practice home activities ... they cannot get permission from their husband” (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

In Ada’a District, the male discussants acknowledged that a woman/wife can attend a local training but subject to agreement by the husband and wife, depending on the chores at home. They also expressed that the likelihood of having more female attendees at the local training will be high *“because others also wants to acquire new production skills on improved chickpea variety”*.

The decision to attend a local training for the women was an agenda for negotiation at homes depending on whether the women has been invited ‘in person’, productive and reproductive responsibilities she has, who is most suitable to attend the meeting between her and the husband and the emotions the decision will elicit in the husband. It seemed that the odds were too high against women attending the PVS training.

*Can women attend a three days training that requires staying away from home and is facilitated by male officers?*

Male and female discussants agreed that a man can attend a training away from home and sleep away without a problem. Women cannot go. Women’s reproductive roles coupled with too much workload; and husband’s fear and suspicion of adultery happening were the two main reasons advanced for why a woman can’t go. This can be illustrated using the following quotes:

*“Yes he [Getachew] will go. He has no workload as compared to Gete. Gete [wife] is better to stay at home rather than Getachew [husband] because He will not control the home well.... [also] She will not go because her husband will not allow her to go because he thinks that other men will see her.” (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

*“She cannot go because many activities are expected to be accomplished at home by her.... She is expected to prepare food for the children ...She is a female, the training place is far away and the trainers are male; who called her to far distance.” (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

The female discussants in Ada’a District reported that the husband will have to attend because “he is a man”, but their male counterparts highlighted that the husband can attend the sleep over training “but through a discussion” with his wife. This difference was interesting. It was not clear whether the men actually consult or they ‘inform’ the women of their intentions to go or whether the women give an ‘okay’ for the men to go or whether they take it that he must go because he is a man.

We asked if a woman had an opportunity to bargain with her husband to attend training in the village if she was the one responsible for the chickpea enterprise by stating ‘I want to go because I spend most of my time on the chickpea farm’. Some of the female participants felt that if the husband loves and respects his wife, he will be happy and have no problem with her attending the training in the village but only *if she asks him politely*. Some of the male discussants agreed that the husband will do nothing as the wife is free and comfortable to attend the training. They further reinforced that “*a woman attending training should not be seen as a competition but rather, it should be quietly decided*” (Male FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015).

Some female participants voiced that the husband will feel bad and unhappy unless she was invited in person. “*He won’t be happy, but if she was invited personally, he cannot do anything*” (Female FGD, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015). The expression that ‘I want to go because I spend most of my time on the chickpea farm’ was not considered ‘*polite enough*’ and would lead to the husband rejecting the request. Male discussants in Ensaro District were sure that the husband will be unhappy and feel uncomfortable and would persuade their wives not to go for the local training.

Majority of the male and female discussants were sure that if the husband tells the wife ‘you can’t go to the training, you have to stay home’, the woman would not bargain further. The norm of staying within private space enforced by the husband and community; fear of a disagreement and conflict arising from bargaining; and the inability of the husband to listen because he is the



head of the household were cited as reasons that would make the woman not to bargain further. However, 'Inability of husband to listen' reason was only stated by the male discussants:

*"... She is frightened of her husband and she assumes disagreement may happen between them. She chooses silence rather than bargaining." (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

*"No, because since the husband is the head of the household she can't be convinced by him. He refuses to listen to her." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

When asked "how will the husband feel about his wife saying: 'I want to go to training away from the village because I spend most of my time on post-harvest handling'", - all the female discussants across the two sites stated that the husband will feel bad and he will not let her wife attend the training. The male participants in Ensaro District supported this view too. Female discussants attributed this position to child care responsibilities, possibility of impolite language from their husband while discussing the subject; while the male participants in Ensaro District attributed it to the women's likelihood of committing adultery or challenging the privileged position of men's position as head of household. This is illustrated by the following statements:

*"A disagreement will happen because he is not allowing her because of her responsibility to take care of kids at home." (Female FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)*

*"He will not feel good. He refuses and not let her to attend on training. Because ... how she asked is not good." (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

*"He feels uncomfortable because the trainers are male and he suspected as if she is going to commit adultery ... She consider Getachew [husband] as inferior [as] she should not raise this question." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

There were few male discussants across the two study Districts who expressed positive views highlighting that the husband will have no problem as long as they discuss and agree who will take care of the home given the husband has been participating in many trainings before. The men in Ada'a District were more likely to give some concessions to the women. Men who had attended the training were likely to allow their wives to go for the training away from home

*"Still they can decide and [(have)] further discussion on the issue but one of them should stay home to take care of home." (Male FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)*

*"He feels nothing because he has been participating in many trainings before." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

Besides the husband and the wife, the opinions of the kin, represented by the opinions of the aunts from the man's lineage were also important in influencing whether a woman would bargain to attend the training. Across all the FGDs, participants indicated that the aunts will feel unhappy and oppose the statements that their daughter-in-law pose 'I want to go the local training because I spend most of my time on the chickpea farm' and 'I want to go to the sleep over training because I spend most of my time on post-harvest handling'; as such statements were considered a sign of disrespect for the husband and his authority as head of household was challenged:

*"They [aunties] will not feel good. They choose Getachew [husband] to participate in the training because they want Gete [wife] to stay at home for children ... They [aunties] feel bad because they sense that he is inferior ... she [wife] does not respect him." (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

*"They feel unhappy and they oppose Gete [wife] ... they become jealous of Gete [wife]." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

A woman bargaining to attend a sleep over training can be perceived by aunties as going against the societal norms and a woman's role as a home maker. The act of questioning the authority of their son could be a basis for divorce'. The following excerpts illustrate the discussants concerns:

*"They [aunties] feel bad, saying that she want divorce ... she has gone against the existing societies' norms and she is undisciplined." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

*"They [aunties] are now about to conclude that he [husband] is sick, how could he send his wife for three days." (Male FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)*

*"They will say she killed him in life, they say he is not alive." (Female FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)*

The opinions of kin, from the lineage of the wife are also important. In the study, these were represented by the opinions of the parents of the wife. It was interesting to note the difference in the opinions of the parents of the wife and the aunties from the husband lineage. While the parents were supportive and flexed the social norms to offer their daughter opportunities to access knowledge, the aunties were the anchors supporting the traditional norms, ensuring they are followed. Across all the FGDs, the participants highlighted that girls parents will feel happy and receptive about their daughter bargaining to attend the PVS training, whether it is within the village or a sleep over training. They would associate their daughters' invitation by the government with her capacities; this would be an opportunity to improve her knowledge.

*"They [parents] will be happy, they think that the government invited her because she is clever ... they [parents] want Gete [wife] to gain knowledge." (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

Male discussants in Ensaro District, as parents, supported their daughter attendance of training away from the village because she would have an income. *"They [parents] feels happy since they expect she would get money, per diem ... they consider as if she is superior." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*. This was an interesting contradiction for the Ensaro male discussants because they had different considerations when it was a wife compared to when it was a daughter. Gender norms are relaxed when it comes to own daughters as opposed to an in-law.

#### What will the community feel about a woman attending trainings among many men?

The authors wanted to explore if the participation of women in training would be easier and supported if the facilitators were women. Female discussants expressed that *if the husband supports his wife*, the rest of the community would be supportive, and women could participate in the training with men. The male discussants agreed that the community will appreciate the woman because she is clever, active, and 'acting as a man', and it is an opportunity for her to gain new knowledge and skills that will enhance their chickpea production just as men do. This can be illustrated using the following quotes:

*"The comment they [community] give depends on the behavior of her husband, meaning if he supports her they won't comment negative stuffs ... The community will feel good. They believe a woman can also participate in any training with men." (Female FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)*

*"... They judge her as active and appreciate for participating in the training because she is going to gain new skills and knowledge to enhance productivity like men do ... The community appreciate her, they say she act as male, cleaver, she did good." (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

It was interesting to note that the men felt that a woman did not participate in the training just because she was a woman, but was qualified: clever, active and 'acting like a man'; this view is

not necessarily supportive of women's agency and empowerment, where they maintain their dignity in femininity. Some of the discussants felt that the community will take it negatively. Specifically, the male discussants noted that: *"The community will complain why she wants to participate while the husband is alive!"* Some female discussants feared the community will view such a woman as a bad role model for other women in the community.

In all the FGDs, the discussants preferred women farmers to learn and interact with female extension officers if they were available. Common explanations given were that in such a forum, women would be able to speak freely, share ideas, raise questions without reservations and the female officer would understand their behavior and problems. This was exemplified using the following excerpts:

*"Yes they exactly listen to her well. They express their idea and feelings frankly because they assume [women] share their problems and feelings and find solutions to their problems."* (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)

*"...Because the officer is female, they [women] are able to raise any questions without any reservation."* (Male FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)

*"... Women mostly prefer to listen and share ideas to female experts than male from behavior point of view. Women pay more attention to female experts, this is very natural."* (Male FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)

When asked what the women need the female extension officer to understand about their village, culture and traditions that make them not attend trainings, the discussants across the two districts expressed mixed views and opinions. In Ada'a District, the female discussants reported that the female officer needs to understand the *"gossip of the community, the anger of their husband"* while the male discussants acknowledged that *"she should emphasize to change the societal attitude of men that have been influencing women [not to attend trainings]... She must try to convince men to give equal access for training [to women], reduce [women's] burden, and let them know that women are equally responsible and must have equal right for the family"*.

In Ensaro District, both the male and female discussants reiterated that the female officer should eat and work with the women in the village. To the female discussants, this was part of their customs and beliefs as exemplified below:

*"She should respect their traditions and beliefs, like the way they dress, eat and working in the village."* (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)

#### What should the female officer do and change that the male officers have been doing?

Female discussants across the two study sites mentioned that the female officer should discuss closely with women to identify a 'time' when the trainings could be conducted taking into account women's reproductive and productive chores. The training sessions should be short and effective.

*"She should let the women understand by closely discussing with them, she should ask and know the time they will be free of house work."* (Female FGD, Ada'a District, 17 November 2015)

*"She should change or regulate time as preference of woman... and [should] use her time wisely this means she should make the training short as much as possible."* (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)

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*“The meeting time should not compete and interfere with working time of the ladies, since they are given many roles at home such as caring for children, fetching water, food preparation and others assignments ... If beyond this it is difficult for the ladies to actively attend the training”. (Male discussants, Ada’a District, 17 November 2015)*

All the discussants, male and female proposed that the trainings should take place within the ‘Kebeles’ (Villages) because it is a central place and is easily accessible to all.

In Ensaro District, the female discussants highlighted that the female officer should be friendly, communicate in a language that women can easily understand (because of the literacy levels), and should respect their customs and beliefs in terms of dressing. This is exemplified using the following excerpts:

*“She should make them friend. She should communicate with known and understandable language” (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 26 November 2015)*

*“[What female officer should change] She should understand the feeling and the behavior of community like ... She should wear similar dressing style” (Female FGD, Ensaro District, 25 November 2015)*

The male discussants in Ensaro District were ready for a gender responsive training. They highlighted the need for the female officer to consistently train the male and female farmers on issues of women’s rights and gender mainstreaming as these aspects might not have been tackled by the male officers: *“She should try to fill any gap of previous extension agents and ... giving regular training on issue of women rights for women farmers and their male counterpart [and] on gender mainstreaming that might be not given by previous male extension officers.”*

For the community in both Ada’a and Ensaro, women’s attendance to PVS trainings is a decision that is subject to ‘negotiations’ with the spouse and needed approval by the men. The men wielded immense control of the woman’s time and needed assurance that the time spent away from home would benefit the household, it wouldn’t corrupt the morals of the women and that they would still manage their triple roles of care giving for the household and society. Enhancing women’s participation in PVS for this community would therefore have to start by demonstrating benefits, getting men to support the women participation and ensuring that women’s participation doesn’t overwhelm the women’s labour burden.

### **Discussions and conclusion**

The authors thought the decision for a woman to attend PVS training in these two districts of Ethiopia would be a straight-forward decision. Results show that it is an intricate negotiation agenda where a woman has to consider the ‘language and art’ of negotiating with her husband (to be polite enough), in consideration of the social norms enforced by kin and the general community. Lower literacy level for women could also have a bearing on their negotiation power in the household in order to attend the trainings. It has been documented that education is a key instrument in empowering women in the household because it helps them gain a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities (Escardíbul, 2016). Increased educational attainment of both men and women serves to empower wives in terms of their contribution to joint decisions (ibid). Mobility of the wife and the interactions she is able to have with the outside world is strictly limited. Women’s radius of movement is short and strictly enforced by their husbands and kin (especially the older women), whereby wives account strictly for their

‘time out of home’. The culture has engrained the enforcement of this rule into the definition of a ‘good wife/good woman’. However, we find that where ‘*husbands support the wife*’ the social norms can be relaxed and the kin and community ‘voice’ may not be strong in negatively influencing the woman’s decision to attend trainings. The challenge for development therefore seems to be in the identification of processes of involving ‘*the men*’ in a platform where ‘supporting the wife’ is unpacked into actionable interventions for transformation of gender relations.

Besides interrogating how ‘husbands can support their wives’, working with ‘older women members of society’, who have an *anchor role* in sustaining social norms as transformative change agents, in leveraging some ‘space’ for younger women seems to be an opportunity to explore. Older women hold considerable power in influencing the space younger women have for bargaining. Inequities women suffer are socially constructed (Agarwal, 1997) and the older women seem to be the agents of that construction. Borrowing from literature by Mailu *et al.* (2011) on the concept of ‘mavenism’ (Mavens are individuals who have information about many kinds of products, places, and are socially inclined to initiate discussions with acquaintances and respond to requests from their acquaintances for market information), older women could be considered as ‘mavens of social transformation’. Mavens are socially gifted people and therefore, their role in inducing change cannot be downplayed; ‘mavens’ in cultural change are cultural brokers/mediators given their strong alignment to the societal norms, beliefs and values that are expected of a good wife in the community.

Doss (2011) observes that most studies that analyze women’s bargaining power focus on the relationship between spouses yet a number of researchers emphasize that simply analyzing the bargaining power of women within the household ignores the bargaining that takes place at the broader level within the kinship network and community. This study analyzed the husbands as well as the aunts of the man, parents of the girl and the general community’s attitudes towards women’s bargaining power, which helps depict what happens in such broader levels. Although changing community norms and informal institutions can have an impact on household decisions, Doss (2011) further acknowledges that it is not easy to measure women’s bargaining power as it is unobservable. However, at its best, she recommends that researchers should find good proxies for women’s bargaining power depending on what you are trying to understand. In this study, we find that negotiating to attend PVS trainings by women goes beyond husbands to aunts and parents. Disapproval from such social stakeholders can lead a woman to decide that she won’t attend the training.

Men indicated that women could bargain with them to attend local and stay over agricultural trainings but men make the ultimate decision. ‘Bargaining to go for trainings’, however, is not an action the women will easily take up: it is ground for breeding contempt and probably could cause marital conflict, especially when kin misinterpret it to depict that the woman is questioning her husband’s authority and control. We share opinions with Agarwal (1997) that within the household, the cultural construction of appropriate female behavior affects their ability to bargain and that social norms could impinge on the bargaining power by setting a limit on what can be bargained, affecting how the process of bargaining is conducted by favoring some groups over others (say men over women). In cultures or context where social norms stifle explicit



bargaining or voice, women may be pushed to use explicit forms of contestation such as withdrawing into silence. This was demonstrated in these two communities, with female discussants pointing out that a woman cannot bargain with her husband to attend training but would rather 'keep silent to avoid the repercussions'. When women don't have sufficient bargaining power within the household and cannot attend public meetings, it is hard to reach them with the benefits of new technologies even when programs are designed to 'target women'.

In defining a good wife in these two districts, the notion that a woman should be 'resourceful' came up strongly from the men. A woman is resourceful if she contributed to the income of the household either by helping generate it or by being prudent in spending what the man generated for the household. Female discussants considered a woman resourceful if she helped her husband in agricultural activities. Being 'resourceful' is an interesting and paradoxical concept as presented in these two communities; men wanted the women to have limited mobility sphere, but expected a lot out of that limited sphere. Indeed women were expected to 'know agricultural activities' but without the avenue to replenish their knowledge by interacting with agricultural extension agents, especially if they are men. Women were also expected to participate in the field activities; generate income at the household (but without going far from home) and to be prudent in spending the income the household generated. While this is an overwhelming constraint, it offers an opportunity for negotiating with the men in the community on how to give 'concessions/enablers' to the women so that they can meet the roles ascribed to them (access to knowledge, opportunities to engage gainfully with the value chains) so that they can be able to make contributions for the household as expected. It is therefore recommended that dialogues between the men and the women of different ages in the community to explore the linkages, effects and outcomes between women's 'resourcefulness' versus their limited mobility and access to knowledge as a basis of social transformation for this villages be considered. The dialogues would have the potential of evaluating what norms can be relaxed and the gains this society would have.

Sexual identity of the trainer remains a key factor as to why women do not attend PVS trainings in these two districts. The trainings conducted away from the village are highly contentious. One challenge that becomes apparent in this study is that even though the community proposes using female officers as an enabler towards women's attendance to trainings, some women, and specifically in Ada'a District, still feel this approach will not work for them. The men trust female officers to facilitate women's trainings. Women even in these two districts attend the health related trainings overwhelmingly and the men are fine allowing the women to go to those meetings. Those health meetings are facilitated by women and they focus on women issues. Women facilitators are expected to conform to the 'way of the women' in terms of dressing, language and understanding the women's situation. It's not clear whether the female trainers would be expected to conform to the oppressive social norms too, or if they would be accepted if they question and call out the oppression.

Although there is a strong suggestion that female trainers would help reach the women farmers, it seems that this would only help in the short-run, and they (female trainers) might be expected to conform to the same social inequalities to be acceptable. This is not to say the approach doesn't always give positive results, as there is an example from Nigeria where 'Women in agriculture units' are facilitating dissemination of agricultural information (Anandajayasekaram

*et al.*, 2008), targeted to the women's role in production chains. In the long-run, it would be more effective if the men and the older women in this society are the agents of transformative gender programs.

Language barrier concerns as indicated by the female discussants was a genuine issue given that majority of them identified themselves as illiterate. This is also justified by findings by Tegegne (2012) who acknowledges that many interrelated problems women in Ethiopia have are as a result of their high illiteracy rate. Adekunle (2013) also emphasizes the need for the extension service to be more gender-sensitive when organizing extension activities, so that women farmers can have full and appropriate access to extension meetings, demonstrations, field days and other activities. To this regard, adult learning approaches that take into consideration women's challenge of illiteracy need to be addressed. One way of doing this is through capacity building of key contacts among the community to bridge the extension gap.

The question of labor needs at the home and in the field was mentioned a lot in the discussions as the main constraining factor that would make the women not be able to attend PVS trainings, in the village and away. While this is used to bargain against the women leaving the homes, it is a genuine concern as women are heavily burdened. Labor saving technologies at the home and also in the fields would help a lot in saving women time and offering them a bargaining chip for involvement in trainings. The use of herbicides to control weeds in Mali has been cited as a great technology that allows women time to participate in other activities away from the home (GENNOVATE Report for CRP DC, upcoming). Moreover, focusing on workload sharing and care giving at the household level by the spouses could relieve women from the triple work burden so that they can attend trainings. Gender dialogues at community level could go a further step in addressing the workload sharing concerns in a gender transformative manner.

Intimacy and harmony in the home was a theme around which women seemed to be willing to make high concessions on what they could sacrifice and not negotiate for in order to maintain peace and harmony at home. Men were also very concerned about assurance that their women would be 'faithful' and their 'morals not corrupted' and this became a basis for constraining women's movement and interaction with the outside world. The requirement was however not applied to the men in equal measure. This is an area that needs further analysis as it seems that it has strong influence on household decision making processes, but this study did not have the tools, time and resources to understand it well.

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