



A resource for scientists and research teams

Photo: Sam Storr/CIMMYT.

LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND: Supporting women, poor people, and indigenous people in wheat-maize innovations in Bangladesh

In 2015, the governments of 193 countries agreed on “Agenda 2030,” a charter of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They also committed to “Leave No One Behind” (LNOB) in order to ensure that everyone is able to benefit from sustainable development processes. No goal is deemed to be met unless met for all.

Bangladesh has translated Agenda 2030 at the national level by formulating a Perspective Plan (2010-2021) and by bringing the SDGs into its 7th Five Year Plan (2016-2020). A “Whole of Society” approach involves all development partners—multi and bilateral agencies, NGOs, civil society, the private sector, and the media—in interpreting and implementing the SDGs. An SDGs Implementation and Monitoring Committee has been formed at the Prime Minister’s Office to facilitate implementation of the SDG Action Plan.

The SDGs and the principle of leaving no one behind has clear implications for the work of international agricultural research organizations, as well as national agricultural research partners, rural advisory services, and other partners in the public and private sector in Bangladesh. CIMMYT is committed to optimizing the use of research resources, accelerating the uptake of innovations, and enhancing impacts and their social inclusiveness for poor producers and consumers of wheat and maize in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.² Working ever more effectively with women and socially marginalized farmers is part of this, as is working with farmers with small land parcels who are often excluded from project interventions on the basis that their lands are too small. Our research shows that many such farmers strongly seek inclusion in innovation processes and that if they succeed they have the potential to lease additional land and thus improve their economic status.

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

² <https://www.cimmyt.org/strategic-plan-2017-2022/>

This Guidance Note for scientists and research teams acknowledges the complexity of marginalization processes and provides recommendations for making sure no one is left behind. To do so, we draw on GENNOVATE³ findings

from a community which we call Kalipara (a pseudonym) where the indigenous Santals, Bengali Muslims, and Hindus live and work together (see Farnworth *et al.*, (in press), for full details).

Box 1: Gender and social inclusion in Agenda 2030



Goal 10 commits to the social, economic, and political inclusion and empowerment of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, economic, or other status, and recommends eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices and developing empowering legislation, policies, and action.

Goal 5 commits to “achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.” It highlights the importance of linking access to technology with women’s empowerment. Policy recommendations include secure and equal access to productive resources, inputs, knowledge, financial services, markets, and opportunities for value addition and non-farm employment for rural women.

³ <http://gender.cgiar.org/themes/gennovate/>

The drivers underpinning marginalization

Research shows that it can be extremely difficult to unlock the multiple drivers of marginalization that people left behind experience because these drivers fuse together in a complex process whereby outcomes fuel causes of exclusion which in turn create further exclusionary outcomes (Kabeer, 2016). Mittal *et al.* (2016) explain that four structural drivers underpin marginalization processes: (1) an inadequate asset base, (2) poor access to services and infrastructure, (3) weak political voice, empowerment, and institutional governance, and (4) identity-based exclusion and social norms. The converse of the first three structural drivers—assets, services, and voice—equally act as “enablers” to lift people out of poverty. However, the

processes of identity-based exclusion, and the social norms which underpin and “rationalize” this, are an underlying driver hampering marginalized people from accessing and utilizing the first three drivers to their advantage. This interlocking process is depicted in Figure 1.

Identity-based discrimination operates at group level and thus creates group-based “horizontal” inequalities (Kabeer, 2016). The most enduring forms of horizontal inequality are associated with identities ascribed from birth such as gender, race, caste, and ethnicity. Kabeer highlights how “personal” the articulation of social hierarchies can be. Cultural norms and practices can “disparage, stereotype, exclude,

ridicule, and demean certain social groups, denying them full personhood and equal rights to participate in the economic, social, and political life of their society” (Kabeer, 2010: 13). Understanding how different types of group-based horizontal forms of marginalization overlap, layering disadvantage upon disadvantage—for example being economically poor, a woman, a widow, aged, and a member of a discriminated-against ethnic minority—enables us to almost viscerally perceive what it means to be left behind, and how difficult it can be to escape that situation.

Box 2: The Santal in Bangladesh

The Santal people in Bangladesh score very low on multiple indicators. One study conducted in six villages showed that over a period of 50 years the number Santal families holding more than 15 acres (6 hectares) of land diminished from 72 to 0. The Santal are “losing their existence with regards to their economic, social, and political lives” and now work as day laborers on the land they previously owned (Rahman and Bhuiyan, 2009; see also Brandt, 2011; Uddin, 2009; Barkat *et al.*, 2009 for similar findings). However, ethnic Bengali and indigenous women, including Santals, have a long history of active militancy and passive resistance to land expropriation, for example for mining, and in favour of more equitable sharecropping arrangements (etc.), in Bangladesh over many decades (Alam, 2015; Harrington, 2013; Priyadarshini, 2012) and are active in the Bangladesh Adivasi Forum, the Bangladesh Indigenous Peoples Forum and as members of the Citizens Platform for the SDGs (<http://bdplatform4sdgs.net>). The Citizen’s Declaration 2017 has a special focus on LNOB (Citizen’s Platform for SDGs, 2017).



Figure 1. Structural drivers underpinning marginalization processes.

Source: Adapted from Mittal *et al.* (2016).

Figure 2 illustrates some of the different opportunities and obstacles that women in Kalipara face. Constraints that typically apply to ethnic Bengali women also apply to Santal women, such as time-consuming responsibility for household and care work, and an inability to sell agricultural produce at formal markets. These constraints are shown in **blue**. However, the position of Santal women is worsened through identity-based discrimination, the loss of land, general lack of targeting in development programs, and even lower literacy than the average for Muslim women. Constraints specific to Santal women are shown in **orange**. Low-income Muslim women also share some constraints with Santal women, particularly engagement in low paying daily labor. The constraints shared by Santal and low-income Muslim women are shown in **green**. Taken together,

these drivers of marginalization can meld together to create a downward spiraling trajectory, whereby negative outcomes are simultaneously causes of further negative outcomes. The outcomes are unevenly distributed between women, with Santal women experiencing the most intense overlapping of drivers.

This understanding that indigenous people, and rural women more generally, are being left behind by institutional actors in wheat-maize innovation projects served as our starting point for exploring the participation of Santal and low and middle-income women in one maize and wheat growing village of northern Bangladesh. The findings were surprising.

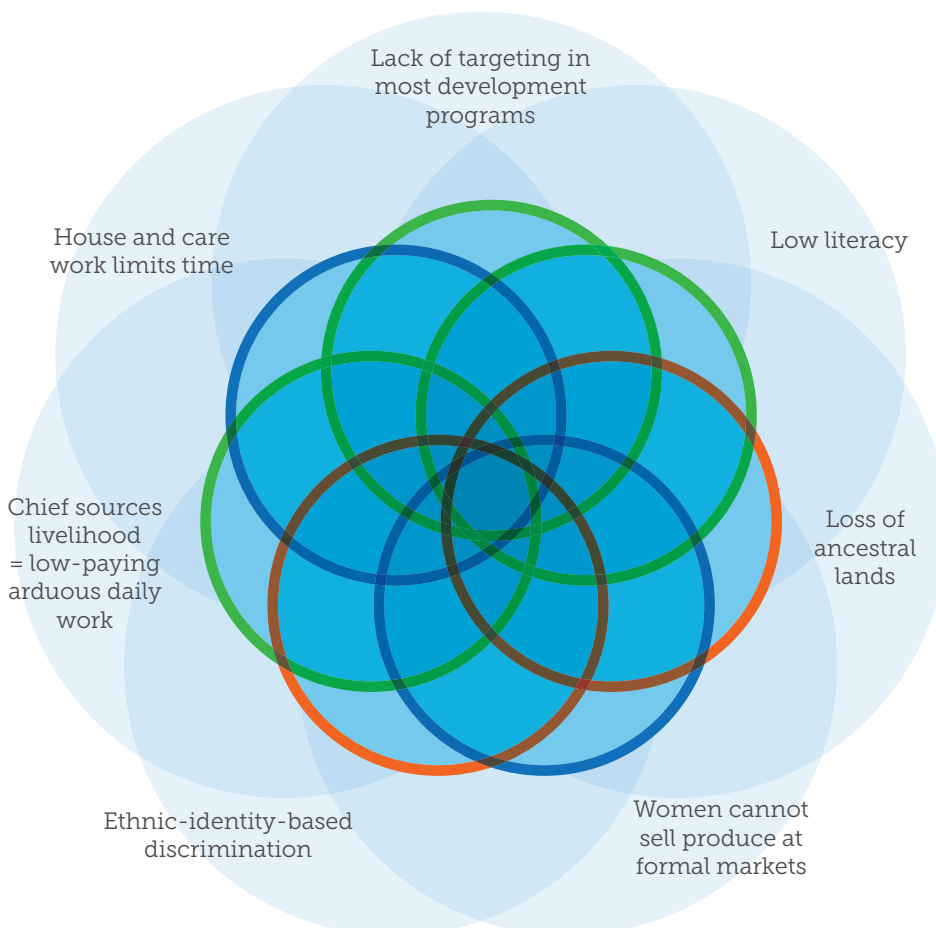


Figure 2. Overlapping drivers of Santal women marginalization.

Findings

All women have strong interests in wheat-maize innovations

Middle-income Muslim women do not work on field crops. However, they want to be able to discuss agricultural innovations knowledgeably with their husbands and to take decisions together. Whilst in such families men are expected to be the chief wage earner, effective household budgeting, including spending money wisely (and other responsibilities such as raising children well, being religious, and maintaining the family's honor) are considered important skills for women. Women argued that if they were able to participate in training on wheat and maize and thus understand the costs and potential implications of the innovations involved they could help to "improve their household's position."

Low-income Muslim women from families with small amounts of land experience substantially more freedom of movement. They work as daily hired laborers and on their family fields alongside men, and have clear interests in improving household income through using new technologies themselves. The use of machinery promises considerable labor savings in their own fields as well.

Middle- and low-income Santal women in households with land work in field-based agriculture and indeed appear to be taking over from men in many activities as men start to seek off-farm income generation opportunities. A "good" Santal wife is expected to be knowledgeable about improved seeds, inorganic fertilizers, irrigation practices, and the use of herbicides and pesticides. They have strong interests in all agricultural innovation processes including wheat/maize. Ensuring that Santal and other marginalized groups retain control over their land is a major issue in Bangladesh; ensuring they are officially included in innovation processes will help to strengthen recognition of their presence as farmers and community members.

Drivers of inclusion and exclusion affect women differently

Cultural norms hamper **middle-income Muslim women** from participating in wheat and maize agricultural training courses. Middle-income women explained that “many men are not open to accept training for women particularly regarding field crops” since “illiterate husbands think what will be the benefit if my wife attends agricultural trainings since she is not allowed to work in the field.” An added complication is the fact that norms frown on middle-class Muslim women interacting with non-family men. Since all agricultural technicians are men this makes it next to impossible for them to attend training events. An important point is that extension courses do not exclude these women. Cultural norms do. Addressing this issue requires sensitive mediation.

Low-income Muslim women

with some land are excluded through their gender and low-income status. The majority of such women and their husbands are unable to meet the minimum targeting criteria for training in wheat-maize innovations. The local partner organization stipulated that participating farmers should farm at least 20 decimals (.08 hectares), whether owned or hired in. Potential participants also needed to have a minimum level of education. These criteria automatically exclude most low-income women and men, the majority of whom have never been targeted by the rural advisory services. At the same time, poor women and men expressed a strong desire for inclusion.



A farmer using broad bed maker.

Santal women and men have traditionally been excluded from development programming. However, in Kalipara the establishment of a woman-only organization called the Kalipari Union Federation (a pseudonym) opened the door to them securing training in wheat/maize innovations.

Women’s strategies to secure inclusion in wheat-maize innovation processes

CIMMYT’s partner in Kalipara is a large NGO called Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS). RDRS is active in hundreds of communities across northern Bangladesh and forms farmer clubs. It establishes women-only Union Federations in order to train women in new agricultural technologies. Since Santal women are strongly active in field crops, they were a clear target for training in wheat and maize innovations. These include improved wheat and maize varieties, inorganic fertilizer, and machinery including the power tiller operated seeder (PTOS). The PTOS is attached to a small two-wheeled tractor to simultaneously drill, sow, and fertilize crops in lines.

The data show that Santal women quickly took advantage and started demanding inclusion through ensuring support from husbands, children, and extended family members. Their success inspired low-income Muslim women to join the Union Federation and likewise secure training. One of these women started her own group of 25 women who mutually support each other on rolling out the technologies. A Santal woman, Joytee (a pseudonym) was elected head of the Union Federation due to her success in adopting, and adapting wheat-maize technologies. She has inspired a large number of women to follow her example. The only group which remains marginalized are middle-income Muslim women who have not yet secured male support for the participation.

The findings indicate that women, including those suffering from multiple layers of disadvantage, can take a lead in innovation processes. The enabling environment, which was crucial to this, was supplied by a rural advisory partner organization directing technical training on wheat and maize through a women’s organization. The findings further suggest that the transformational power of women’s agency has been underestimated in conceptualizations of how to reach people who are left behind. The Santal women in Kalipara managed to flip the four drivers underpinning their marginalization (Figure 1 above) to bring themselves and low-income Muslim women into innovation processes.



Photo: Sam Storr/CIMMYT.

Recommendations for making sure no one is left behind

All recommendations address people with small land areas rather than landless people.

Find creative ways to involve marginalized people with small lands in wheat-maize innovation processes

Do not set minimum targeting criteria, for example land area managed by a farming household, as entry criteria for participation in wheat-maize innovations. Rather, find creative ways to involve women and men in hard-to-reach households and ethnic communities. These strategies need to be nuanced according to the forms of marginalization experienced. Strategies include institutional innovations, for instance by forming small mutual self-help support groups of women. The key is to commit to developing a targeting and outreach strategy as an organizational response to the SDGs and the commitment to LNOB.

Target women for technical training

Women, as much as men, are interested in and passionate about innovations and improving their own and their family's lives. They want to take part in technical training. Recognition and promotion of women and their capacities by external actors will facilitate the ability of women to overcome gender and other disadvantages they may face themselves and to transform their futures.

Work through women's organizations

Women's organizations provide a space for women to come together in a community. The headquarters of such organizations can provide a venue for training events, and allow women to socialize, share constraints, and obtain solutions.

Aim for a critical mass

Targeting a large number of people in a small community is more successful than attempting to cover a large geographic area. This enables a critical mass of women and marginalized innovators to be developed and can facilitate cooperation across ethnic and religious affiliations. Obtaining a critical mass will help to break down cultural norms which can isolate people from each other and from participating in innovation processes.

Develop strategies to work with secluded women

A specific effort needs to be made to work with middle-income couples, where the wife does not work directly in field crops, to obtain the support of husbands for their wives' participation in training in such crops. This will allow women in such couples to provide informed input into intra-household discussion processes, and it may promote women's participation in other activities over time. This will also strengthen women's capacity to manage household budgeting effectively. Women's informed participation in decision making around innovations is likely to support the successful adoption of these innovations by such households.

Women-only training is a step to bigger things

In some communities husbands and the wider family do not allow women to interact with male extension workers. Measures to overcome resistance include locating training events close to women's homes in order to facilitate their participation. Involving men and other relatives in discussion processes around the benefits of women securing training in field crops, even when they do not work in the field, is important. Appointing a woman facilitator and training women on their own can be a useful strategy as well.



GENNOVATE fieldwork: Women's focus group discussion in Bangladesh. Photo: Anuprita Shukla/ CIMMYT.

Develop affordable financing mechanisms for participation

Affordable financing mechanisms for accessing seed of improved wheat and maize varieties, machinery and other technologies need to be developed with a specific eye to assisting the participation of the lower income categories in the community.

Support equity in intra-household decision-making processes

Household methodologies (HHM) promote family togetherness and empower men as well as women to take charge of their lives through the process of developing personal and family visions, and working together to reach them.

Combine technical training on innovations with gender transformative approaches

Make sure that key decision makers influencing women's participation in innovation processes, for example husbands, in-laws, and community-level opinion formers, are included in innovation training events. This can include reflection and dialogue around enabling and harmful norms.

Support men to support women

In some situations, it may be useful to create men-only groups to help men support each other in changing their behaviors and challenging concepts and practices related to harmful gender norms, including ways of being a man.

Continually demonstrate the benefits of more equitable gender relations on agricultural innovation

Showcase examples of how more equitable gender relations contribute to improved production and productivity in wheat and maize, better intra-household food and income security, more flexible livelihood planning, and stronger families.

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To learn more visit:
<http://gender.cgiar.org/themes/gennovate/>

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