



Economic participation of women and girls in rural Ethiopia (2010-13) WIDE Discussion Brief No. 7 of 10ⁱ

Key messages from the WIDE evidence

- **Women/girl economic participation has increased, and diversified**, with both the farm and the non-farm sectors providing important opportunities. Yet, weaknesses in more economically-focused interventions and in messaging to encourage a wider ‘enabling environment’ for equitable employment limit progress against what might be possible.
- **Broader infrastructural developments expand opportunities for women/girls** (work in factories, increased trading/business activities, daily labour linked to irrigation). But **employment equity issues are evident**, including unequal (or low) pay in some industrial sites and daily labour, and constraints for women seeking or engaged in employment given childcare (or related) responsibilities. Conversely, the productivity of female-headed households is often constrained by the cost of hiring daily labour (with the alternative of sharecropping increasing their vulnerability).
- Ensuring **both employees and employers benefit from expanding economic participation** requires equitable employment/accessibility provisions (as foreseen in the National Employment Policy and Strategy 2009, and the 2003 Labour Law), and might include:
 - Ensuring equal pay for equal tasks for women and men;
 - Ensuring provision of child care options, as well as maternity rights, in regulations on minimum work conditions;
 - Promoting awareness of employment rights to enable women (and men) to better assert themselves and strengthen negotiation/bargaining power for employment on non-exploitative/equal grounds.
 - Encouraging affirmative action by investors to promote women’s employment;
- **Access to capital, resources and assets, and individual/household wealth matter most** in determining what women are doing. Women with no land/capital are trapped in low-productivity ‘hand-to-mouth’ activities, or reliant on formal/informal support; whilst wealthier women report some success in e.g. running businesses, or larger-scale trading.
- **Credit** enables some women to initiate income-generating activities, **but is considered risky, insufficient, limitedly accessible, and led some into further economic decline**. For poor/very poor women/households, PSNP direct support is vital to meet consumption needs, but there are no indications that it enabled them to ‘escape’ poverty.
- As part of the wider Social Protection and promotion of economic participation policies, Government might consider alternative/ accompanying schemes to support the poorest women, such as:
 - **Provision of well-targeted ‘capital injection’** (through grants/asset transfer in sufficient amounts, alongside **sufficient training, coaching and follow-up**), enabling the poorest women to reach a level where taking credit becomes feasible.ⁱⁱ

- **Livelihood interventions aimed at both men and women, regularly bypass women/girls in practice (despite policy provisions for inclusivity).** Female farmers and married women are often **not reached by the agricultural extension services for various reasons.** Similarly, **young women are often ‘missed’ by youth interventions.** There is **frustration at the lack of interventions to support non-farm opportunities.**
- Government might consider measures to **ensure that interventions effectively reach both men and women:**
 - Agricultural extension services reach out to women, including wives in male-headed households and providing support beyond ‘women-targeted stereotypical’ advice;
 - Youth cooperatives and other youth livelihood interventions better consider young women’s specific needs, interests and constraints;
 - Support/accessibility to MSE expands in rural areas and reaches both women and men.
- The **broader gender equity drive is having some impact on social norms around women’s perceived capabilities.** And – in a two-way process – **economically successful women are found to further influence wider shifts in perceptions,** as well as what other women/girls consider possible for themselves. Yet, there is a sense that ‘not enough’ is being done to support women’s/girls’ livelihoods directly. Where interventions exist, their effectiveness is limited (e.g. women’s cooperatives show potential, but struggle due to limited resources, weak management and poor output-marketing /input-supply).
- Furthermore, **significant social constraints remain** (including male concerns over divisions of labour/decision-making/competition for economically lucrative activities). **Women report ‘doing more’** (productive and reproductive responsibilities), but with limited evidence of their direct control over income.
- Actions to **positively reinforce the two-way dynamic between economic participation and shifting perceptions,** as well as to overcome persistent social barriers to equity might include:
 - **Intensifying and locally tailoring interventions aimed to support women/girl economic participation** (including, for example, through adequate support to women’s cooperatives);
 - **Ensuring gender equity messaging appropriately engages both men and women,** through e.g. targeting gender-equity messages to ‘real life’ situations and addressing ‘real life’ concerns, importantly those raised by men;
 - **Broadening the influence of existing ‘role model’ women in communities** (from across a range of economic areas/professions, and sharing experiences in common with those of women and girls from rural communities) through more targeted and effective profiling (e.g. women invited to speak at schools, school media clubs encouraged to highlight positive female trajectories; informal social groups encouraged to identify and promote ‘success’).

Introduction

From analysis of evidence drawn from twenty rural communities in Ethiopia, studied first by the WIDE research in 1995 and subsequently in 2010-13 (*DB01:introduction*), the paper highlights: (i) that there was an **expansion and diversification of women/girl economic participation**; (ii) that a **unique combination** of community-level (economic and social) and individual-level (e.g. social status) factors **influenced economic participation**, with access to **'new' opportunities driven largely by broader infrastructural developments as well as individual/household wealth/access to capital**; (iii) that **weaknesses in livelihoods interventions meant progress was not exploited as much as it might have been**; and (iv) that women/girl economic participation was contributing to – and influenced by – a **two-way process of shifting social perceptions**.

The evidence forms the basis for proposed policy implications and options that Government might consider in order to further strengthen women/girl economic participation contributing both to realising wider gender equity and women's empowerment goals, and the transformation of Ethiopia which it aims to realise.

Expanding economic opportunities: trends of change

Both the farm and the non-farm sectors provided important opportunities for economic engagement. **Women continued to be significantly involved in agriculture**, and women **doing farm daily labour was much more common** in 2010-13 (reported in twelve communities versus three in 1995). **Work opportunities in local industrial employment** (e.g. work in factories/on flower farms), not reported in 1995, had emerged as significant in 2010-13.

Small-scale/petty trading, reported in **almost all communities**, and **women's involvement in larger-scale trading** were expanding (reported in six communities, whilst in 1995 all larger-scale trading was undertaken by men). Roadside trade had emerged in a few communities and women were increasingly involved in **running small businesses** (e.g. teashops, restaurants, bars, some hair/beauty salons). In 2010-13, the **production of alcoholic drinks continued to be widespread**: women in thirteen communities reported engagement (versus eleven in 1995), with income from production significant for some in 1995 and 2010-13 (e.g. Turufe, Yetmen and Kormargefia). Yet, in four southern communities the activity had disappeared by 2010-13, a shift which might have been linked to the rise of Protestantism (forbidding the consumption of alcoholic drinks) in this area.

Engagement in women's co-operatives was also more widespread in 2010-13. In many 'aid dependent' communities, women/girls participated in government/NGO food/cash-for-food work. And, whereas **women moving to cities and/or abroad for work** was mentioned in only three communities in 1995, it was evident in most communities by 2010-13 (*DB08:mobility*).

Traditional activities such as spinning and crafts seemed to have declined – with the exception of Girar where pottery, previously frowned upon, was emerging in 1995 and had become widespread in 2010, especially important for poor girls and women. The decline may have arisen as a result of **women and girls being engaged in a wider range of other activities in 2010-13** than in 1995, **especially in the better connected and/or more urbanised communities**.

Amidst the broadly expanding economic opportunities reported, there were also counter-indications of economic un(der) employment: increased migration for work pointing to limitations in local employment options, and reports of land scarcity limiting youth employment opportunities, e.g. in Geblen, Girar, Aze Debo'a; as well as instances where closure of industrial sites had a direct impact on individuals' employment status, e.g. a metal recycling factory closing in Gelcha.

Economic participation: influencing factors

For every woman/girl, **economic participation was influenced by a unique combination of community-level economic factors, social norms and changes in these; as well as social status factors, and access to specific assets and resources.** The WIDE data richly illustrate how this multiplicity of factors produced a **wide range of individual experiences.**

Community context and the importance of broader infrastructural developments

The **wider community context was significant** for the types of income-generating opportunities available to women: **often connected to investments**, and found in communities with **good growth and/or good roads**, well-connected to markets, **and/or nearing relatively large and fast developing urban centres** (*DB02:(r)urbanisation*).

Structural change factors were instrumental in increasing women/girl economic participation. **Irrigation expansion and introduction/expansion of new cash crops** led in some of the concerned sites to daily labour (Korodegaga, Adele Keke, Do'oma, Harresaw, Shumsheha; emerging in Yetmen, but not in Gelcha) or trade opportunities for women (e.g. larger-scale trading of coffee in Somodo).

Processes of industrialisation were slowly expanding, **bringing new opportunities for women and girls**, although not to the same extent everywhere. Such opportunities, linked to inward local/nearby investment, were found primarily in sites **closer to urban centres and with good road access** (e.g. Habesha beer factory; private dairy farm, shiro processing factories in/near Kormargefia; other examples in Oda Dawata, Turufe, Sirba). Industrial-type opportunities were less frequent in more remote and/or difficult to access communities, with exceptions linked to specific contexts (e.g. coffee production). But this was also idiosyncratic, with private coffee plants, for example, in Aze Debo'a (providing the biggest off-farm employment opportunity for women) and Gara Godo despite their relative remoteness; but none in Somodo (better connected).

There were some links between **different forms of community urbanisation** and the **relative importance of types of activities undertaken by women and girls**. For instance, there were no women running small businesses in Dinki and Korodegaga, the only two communities with no form of urbanisation (in 2010). Women running small businesses were found in internally urbanising communities where it may have been a response to increased demand for more 'urban' services in sites which remained far from bigger urban centres (e.g. Geblen); and in peri-urban centres where people may have found it convenient to access more easily services found in towns (e.g. Shumsheha, Turufe). The production of food and drinks for sale was also more notable in communities near a town or with a slightly larger urban centre (explicitly reported to be for urban consumption in Turufe (near Shashemene)).

There were some **links between the presence of electricity and some specific activities undertaken by women**: in (parts of) all of the communities where small businesses were said to be flourishing there was electricity, and no mentions of such activities in the seven communities with no electricity at all. The presence of electricity had enabled the use of technologies (e.g. grinding mills) reducing the time women spent on reproductive activities, with potential repercussions on economic participation.

Land scarcity and rising landlessness continued to matter mainly for young men's economic prospects, more than for young women: but there were **indirect effects** as young men's marriageability was delayed, with some young women reportedly migrating for work as a result of this (*DB06:youth; DB08:mobility*).

Individual context: wealth and access to capital determining factors

The interaction between different individual factors was complex, with **wealth the most important** for both the types as well as the diversity and relative success of activities undertaken (*DB03:inequality; DB09:success*). For **poor women, economic participation was often linked to necessity** (e.g. trying out different things in Shumsheha, taking on trade activities in Oda Haro). Poor women reported **engagement in the widest range of types of activities** (all except larger-scale trading), whilst the **very poor had limited options** and were often reliant on support of others, both informally (including begging in e.g. Dinki, Geblen) and through formal safety-nets. **Women in 'more comfortable' economic positions were often not required** to seek an income. However, in some instances women from richer backgrounds engaged in a wide range of activities, facilitated by access to capital, and **when they did participate they were able to achieve quite significant success** (*DB09:success*).

Wealthier women were thus able to invest in income-generating activities (e.g. larger scale trading, running small businesses). **Petty trade** was important across wealth groups, but with **higher value products more commonly traded by rich women** (e.g. coffee, crops, milk/butter) and the lowest by destitute/very poor women (grass/wood/dung cakes). Larger-scale trading was only undertaken by wealthier women, as this required access to capital to be able to purchase products from wholesalers (e.g. the wife of a rich man in Gara Godo buying teff/maize and coffee for re-sale); as well as a degree of financial stability to be able to 'survive' periods of no trading; and/or assets such as land and the means to grow products for sale (e.g. rich farmers' wives in Sirba selling crops).

Very poor/destitute and poor women were more frequently engaged in '**hand-to-mouth**' activities (e.g. trading grass/firewood). Poorer **women lacking land or with land but lacking labour** engaged more often in daily **labour/wage labour activities** in the farm and non-farm sectors. The pattern was less clear in relation to daily labour in FFW or PSNP: some wealthy women engaged, whilst some destitute/elderly/or women unable to work, reported that they did not have access to support. **Domestic work in other people's households** was only mentioned amongst **women/girls from poor/very poor backgrounds** (though it was likely underreported).

Although a **woman's status in her household** had some influence on the type of activities undertaken, this in turn was strongly influenced by **household wealth and resources**. **Ownership or access to assets** was an enabling factor (e.g. a woman from Girar, selling drinks for an income, whose oxen and cow provided a safety-net) and the lack thereof a strong constraint. **Running a business** was most commonly reported amongst **wives/dependents of wealthier households**, a combination giving them access to capital and a degree of financial security (e.g. the wife of a successful farmer in Aze Debo'a used the household's money to open a shop/beauty salon).

In the same vein, both '**own account**' **agricultural activities and supporting the household income** were mostly done by wives of rich or successful and middle-wealth farmers/businessmen (e.g. a rich farmer's wife in Harresaw engaged in the household's irrigation work/livestock care). Whereas **poor wives** more frequently engaged in a **range of activities** (petty trade/daily labour etc.) **alongside support to the household activities** which, in themselves, were insufficient to support the household. It was not always evident that women retained control of the income they contributed to the household (e.g. control of revenue mostly with men in Kormargefia, Oda Haro).

Land was a particularly important household level factor. **Women without land and any form of capital often ended up trapped in low productivity activities**. **Access to labour** was also important, **especially for female-headed households**. Some women who had land but lacked labour sharecropped (exposing some to wrongful claims on their land, e.g. in Turufe) and engaged in the

same activities as landless women heads of household (daily labour, petty trading, PSNP/FFW labour). Outcomes **were not always better for women with access to labour from the family, or for women hiring labour** rather than sharecropping as labour could be too costly (e.g. a woman in Adele Keke had to sell assets to cover labour costs).

Ensuring all-inclusive economic participation...

As outlined, **broader community-wide infrastructural developments expanded opportunities for women/girls**. However, issues related to equitable employment were evident. Women **reported being paid a lower rate than men for activities both in industrial employment and daily labour** (e.g. young women in Do'oma paid half the 'current rate' as men for the same irrigation activities; in Harresaw, women paid 30-40 birr/day for work on irrigation, compared to men paid 50-60 birr; and girls paid less than boys at the coffee processing plant in Aze Debo'a).

Local industrial employment, sometimes aimed at women specifically had reportedly had a significant impact in some communities (e.g. in Oda Dawata, affirmative action policies encouraged female Grade 10 leavers and degree completers). At the same time, other investments favoured boys (e.g. a Chinese Construction Company employing mainly men/boys in Sirba); and 'higher-grade' positions (managers etc.) seemed to rarely be given to women (e.g. male coffee plant manager in Gara Godo; male seedling nursery head in Dinki; male coffee union manager in Adado).

Alongside moving for employment (*DB08:mobility*), local industrial work was more frequently reported by young girls/women. Likely (and in some cases explicitly) linked to young women seeking independence, shifting aspirations (beyond farm/local work for livelihoods) and higher levels of education (*DB05:education; DB08:mobility; DB04:youth*), **there were reports that these opportunities were less feasible/accessible for women with family/household responsibilities** (e.g. in Turufe, a woman struggled to maintain employment alongside childcare; in Dinki, a young woman, with a daughter, was unable to access 'town' employment).

Ensuring **both employees and employers benefit from expanding economic participation**, requires equitable employment/accessibility provisions. Policy considerations (including those foreseen in the National Employment Policy and Strategy 2009, and the 2003 Labour Law), might include:

- Ensuring equal pay for equal tasks for women and men;
- Ensuring **provision of child care options, as well as maternity rights, in regulations on minimum work conditions** (offering options for women with (or expecting) children would provide employment protection and go some way to avoid women being excluded);
- Promoting **awareness of employment rights** (e.g. through targeted messaging) would support and enable women (and men) to better negotiate their terms of employment, to better assert themselves and increased their bargaining power for employment on 'non-exploitative'/equal grounds;
- Encouraging **affirmative action by investors** to promote women's employment.

Supporting women's livelihoods: progress alongside shortcomings...

In all communities, **there were a number of livelihood-related interventions not necessarily targeting women** but to which, in principle, they had access. In just half of the communities, there were also some women-focused livelihood interventions.

In reality, women/girls were often not reached by general livelihood interventions, and there was strong criticism that *'not enough'* was being done for women/girls (e.g. in Geblen, due to *'lack of commitment'* from government structures; in Oda Haro, the HEWs talked of *'theoretical ideas from authoritarians, (but) no practical initiatives to inspire strong women'*). **Where interventions existed, there were issues limiting their effectiveness**, including; (i) poor access; and (ii) limitations in the interventions themselves (e.g. insufficient credit/lack of sufficient 'follow-up').

Women farmers were often overlooked by agricultural extension services, despite policy provisions for their inclusivity. Across communities, advice and inputs were often geared towards supporting model farmers (usually men), thus not reaching the majority of women (e.g. in Do'oma, Oda Dawata, Girar). Moreover, it was **unclear the extent to which married women had access to extension services on their own**, with DAs tending to work with household heads (more often men) (noted in e.g. Kormargefia, Oda Dawata and Girar). There were examples of women (mostly widows or divorced women) getting and using advice through the agricultural extension services (e.g. in Sirba) or being engaged in specific initiatives (e.g. 53 FHH in Korodegaga getting access to irrigated land). However, when women were provided with advice and support, it was often in relation to 'stereotypical', 'female' activities (e.g. women encouraged to establish hen and egg production activities in Somodo; women receiving advice/inputs for vegetable gardening in Kormargefia), which arguably reinforced – rather than challenged – gendered economic activity divisions.

Women were said to be given **equal opportunity to participate in the PSNP works**. However, in addition to issues such as unadjusted workload, participation in public works **forced women to take time-related trade-offs** that were not necessarily in their best interest – like a poor woman in Harresaw, who did not have enough time to weed her land properly, which reduced her harvest, but who could not spend time in her fields because it would mean losing her PSNP registration. There was no evidence that PSNP support alone enabled households/women to overcome poverty.

By and large, young women tended to be bypassed by youth livelihood interventions, and in the few cases of mixed membership, officials did not know how many young women were involved. Activities were either considered traditionally 'male' (such as beekeeping in Geblen); or young women had limited awareness or were dissuaded/not encouraged to participate (e.g. in male dominated stone or forestry cooperatives in many communities). In other cases, the saving prerequisites made it hard for young women to join (e.g. in Adado). Unlike in urban areas (as noted in Adado), there **was little support to non-/off-farm activities**, frustrating young people in particular (as noted in Dinki, Somodo, Kormargefia, Oda Dawata and Oda Haro). Women in Girar also complained about the lack of support for pottery, which many women were involved in.

There were **women's cooperatives in nine communities**, all established through government- or NGO-initiated support. Although some showed (or had shown) potential (e.g. a savings and credit cooperative scheme in Gelcha reporting some success giving individual loans), the majority were struggling. Constraints included issues about output marketing or input supply (e.g. a spinning cooperative in Gara Godo/an improved stove cooperative in Shumsheha); lack of trust between members; lack of support (including financial, follow-up and technical assistance); insufficient management skills, and in some instances, weak support from kebele leadership; or, on the contrary, allegations of nepotism regarding membership.

It was **not clear how easily young, unmarried women could access women's cooperatives** (e.g. the spinning cooperative in Yetmen was reported to be for young women, until older women joined) or whether they were ever excluded from membership. Yet, the majority of women involved in cooperatives across communities seemed to be married/widowed or divorced. This highlights

possible issues around the perception of young, unmarried women, ‘missed’ by both ‘adult’ and ‘youth’ interventions (*DB04:youth*).

Access for women to credit schemes (general and women-focused) was said to be increased (e.g. Geblen, Adele Keke, Harresaw). In some cases, credit enabled women to access capital (e.g. a rich wife in Geblen who opened a shop; a poor woman in Adele Keke able to purchase sheep to sell, investing in products for petty trading); but it was not always an available option (e.g. for a poor female household head in Adado, land-poor and trapped in lowly-paid inset production-related daily labour, lacking the required collateral). In other cases, women reported that they were pressured to take credit, in order not to lose other benefits (e.g. Geblen). But generally, **access to credit was limited and did not meet demand**, which negatively affected women and limited potential impact, as noted in e.g. Turufe, Aze Debo’a. There were **also significant risks, and cases where women’s investments did not generate returns, or led to economic decline** (e.g. a poor female household head in Geblen invested in a cow which died; crop failure led women in Korodegaga to be unable to pay back debt); and concerns that repayments would be costly, money would be poorly invested/used by husbands (e.g. Turufe).

In the majority of cases and at the community-level, women/girl actual economic participation was not linked with any particular intervention. A few individual women linked their ability to engage in an activity requiring capital to a specific intervention (e.g. a wife in a successful couple in Sirba received credit initially from WALKO and was engaged in various business ventures) (*DB09:success*). But, for example, in a number of communities with none/or very limited support for women’s livelihoods (Geblen, Harresaw, Gara Godo, Adado, Oda Dawata), women were engaged in business activities requiring capital.

Better reaching women....

Promoting **economic participation forms part of the wider commitment to reducing inequality** and lifting vulnerable individuals out of poverty. The WIDE evidence highlights that economic status shapes women’s ability to engage in income generating activities, that credit has not offered many the ‘route out of poverty’, and that women are often not reached by interventions aimed at supporting their livelihoods. In line with the broader poverty reduction objective just mentioned and the Social Protection Policy (approved 2014), Government might consider alternative/accompanying mechanisms to ensure access to capital, as part of this commitment to support the poorest women, such as:

- **Provision of well-targeted ‘capital injection’** (through grants/asset transfer in sufficient amounts, alongside **sufficient training, monitoring and follow-up**), enabling the poorest women to reach a level where taking credit becomes feasible (see end-note ii).

Other measures strengthening existing interventions contribute to social protection aims and the promotion of economic participation – in particular, measures aimed to ensuring that livelihoods interventions effectively reach men and women such as:

- Agricultural extension services reach out to women, including wives in male-headed households, providing support beyond ‘stereotypical’ advice;
- Youth cooperatives and other youth livelihood interventions better consider young women’s specific needs, interests and constraints, enabling them to benefit from opportunities.
- Support/accessibility to MSE expands in rural areas and reaches both women and men.

The gender equity drive: effective but ‘barriers’ remain...

There were indications that the broader gender equity drive was contributing to shifts in perceptions of women/girls, with a **two-way process between changing social norms and women/girl economic participation**. Yet social barriers remained, including male concerns over divisions of labour/decision-making/competition for economically lucrative activities.

Interventions for women’s rights

Interventions supporting equitable provision of health and education services and women’s rights to access these saw an expansion, and improvement, across communities (*DB05:education, DB06:maternity*). In principle, **greater access to education and health services would be expected to contribute positively to women/girl economic participation**. There were **individual-level instances** of this effect (with e.g. girls in a few of the communities employed as professionals, and much aspiration towards this kind of life; and women highlighting ill-health as a critically negative factor). But **no community-wide pattern** was discerned – with the exception of the higher education/aspiration/un(der)employment/migration nexus in a number of communities. (*DB05:education; DB04:youth; DB08mobility*). Also, and while some women still reported barriers to access (including male resistance), there were instances where **family planning was used for economic reasons** (e.g. a woman in Aze Debo’a reporting to be able to trade as she avoided unwanted pregnancy; young men and women in e.g. Harresaw reporting delaying their first child to first become economically strong).

More broadly, there were **signs of implementation of the government-led programme and laws** to improve women’s land, inheritance and divorce rights across communities, including instances of affirmative action (e.g. in land redistribution in Harresaw). But, achievements varied, due to varying degrees of male resistance and depending, notably, on the elders’ position, the calibre and commitment of women’s leaders and officials at kebele and wereda level, as well as the extent of support of male-dominated institutions like courts and police. **The right of young people to choose their partner** was increasingly accepted, but not everywhere (e.g. Gelcha). **Moves against harmful traditional practices had reduced** early marriage, abduction, rape, and widow inheritance, with some women who resisted supported by their families. But these practices had by no means disappeared. Female genital cutting being illegal made it difficult to determine whether it had been abandoned/not in communities where it was customary, but there was vocal opposition to the ban in three sites. (*DB04:youth; DB06:maternity*). Measures to enhance women’s political participation were weakly implemented in some communities (e.g. only four women kebele councillors in Do’oma; kebele women’s associations lacking resources), and were of uncertain effectiveness where some of them were in place. Overall, most women across communities were not very politically engaged.

Individual women pursuing their rights needed courage, time and support from elders or courts. Poor women and women-headed households often faced particular problems in doing so. Yet, there were indications that gender equity measures were **slowly helping to make women more assertive and to shift perceptions**.

Perceptions – both enabling, and limiting, participation

On the one hand, **shifts in social norms**, more or less pronounced across communities, **mattered for the types of activities that women could participate in**. This included shifts in women being perceived as ‘weak’ (e.g. women now seen as capable of engaging in independent activities in Oda Haro); shifts in terms of divisions of labour with some men sharing some domestic tasks (rare) and women taking more of a role outside of the household (more common). There was a **sense that**

overall women's work load had increased, and as women from Shumsheha said, they were now *'doing everything'* (both productive and reproductive work). There were indications of changed/changing aspirations surrounding marriage and economic independence (e.g. women's migration said to be bringing about *'another type of household'* in Kormargefia); as well as changed perceptions and emphasis on the importance of girls' education (e.g. wealthier households hiring domestic labour to leave study time to the household's daughters in Somodo and Sirba). On the other hand, **women's success in economic affairs and their hard work led to changing perceptions** in some cases, such as Kormargefia where some female-headed households were more successful than male-headed ones.

However, this link was **not clear-cut**, with some communities noting shifts toward less conservative attitudes whilst the range of activities undertaken by women was still limited (e.g. Harresaw and Geben); whereas women were de facto engaged in a wider range of economic activities in other communities reporting limited social change in relation to women's status (e.g. Gara Godo). There were also indications that men continued to dominate certain 'more profitable' activities, for example, trading of the main cash crops was usually overseen by men (e.g. exclusively male in Adado) and when activities became more profitable they were taken up by men (e.g. milk production/trading in Kormargefia/Adele Keke previously a 'female'-led activity).

Culture and religion interacted in complex ways with women/girl economic participation, with examples of shifts (e.g. in Aze Debo'a where Kembata women customarily remained at home, they now migrated for work) and others of contest between sets of norms (e.g. in predominantly protestant Adado, customary ways keeping women at home were generally more influential than the protestant values promoting economic success). Men also expressed concerns about women's economic participation, including that it would conflict with/lead to neglect of household responsibilities or went against appropriate behaviour (e.g. a farmer in Do'oma concerned that his wife would 'be taken' or adopt inappropriate behaviour if she worked on farm daily labour); whilst women were reportedly 'shy to participate' in schemes not only because of their *'domestic mind-set'* but also their husband's reluctance (e.g. Girar). On the other hand, women sensed that male concerns were linked also to what shifts would mean for their own status (e.g. in Sirba women, primarily doing crop trading, indicated that men feared women would become 'too powerful' if set free).

Guiding transformation: the importance of role models and aspirations

The data shows **some evidence of a 'virtuous spiral'**. The presence of a number of **'role models'** in the form of women and girls economically active in atypical ways or otherwise successful, together with the wider shifts in the perception of women and women's and girls' rising **aspirations**, were **influencing the types of activities** that women and girls undertook and/or considered possible for themselves. There were **women challenging customary roles and perceptions** – such as a woman wereda councillor in Dinki who showed women they did not have to depend on men; or a rich businesswoman in Somodo who had obtained the support of elders against her husband's initial resistance for her becoming economically active (*DB09:success*). These women were **few**, but there was evidence that **role models like these and other** educated and/or economically successful and/or independent women **were significant**.

Girls/young women were often seeking greater independence and a **'better life'**. This was often associated with **education**, although high and rising perceived and actual levels of youth un(der)employment **also generated uncertainty**. **Migration**, aspired to more because of the hoped-for returns than because of seeking particular types of opportunities, was also **linked with a wider**

aspiration to mobility as a step toward a better life, with many girls not wanting to settle in their community (*DB05:education; DB08:mobility*).

Younger girls/women were generally more ambitious in thinking about what was possible (many wanted to study and work as e.g. doctors and engineers). Whereas 'older' women, often less educated, already engaged in 'real life' and in charge of a household, and more aware of the constraints in securing an income, aspired to e.g. open shops or restaurants (e.g. Harresaw, Gara Godo), engage in irrigation farming (e.g. Gelcha) or expand their existing business (e.g. Gara Godo).

There was a **considerable gap between young women's/girls' aspirations and actual jobs locally available**. Some had a '**plan B**' if their first ambition did not materialise – oftentimes migration or engaging in income-generating activities if continued education was not possible (with examples e.g. in Oda Haro/ migration, Kormargefia/poultry and Shumsheha and Adele Keke/opening commodity shops) (*DB05:education*).

Most of these more realistic aspirations were **geared outside farming**. Only a few women or girls wanted to engage in farming/farm-related activities, which may reflect a more general trend among both male and female youth. But also the fact that women did not usually see themselves as 'farm managers', even when some of the land belonged to them, and/or they were in principle co-tenant with their husband for the couple's land (*DB05:education; DB04:youth*).

Influencing norms and aspirations to build on progress...

Changes in the economic and in the social context interacted with one another in community-specific ways, in turn shaping women and girl economic participation. In Oda Haro for instance, changed perceptions of women's strength and local economic growth had likely contributed to open up some larger-scale trading opportunities for women; at the same time, girls' education was progressing, alongside rising disillusion with education returns and an increasing number of young women migrating for work; which in turn was likely leading to further shifts in perceptions of women – e.g. young women's migration to seek economic independence described as a '*prudent economic move*'. In contrast in Shumsheha, relatively high levels of economic activity amongst women did not seem to suffice to challenge the fairly strong Amhara conservatism; for many parents, marrying one's daughter early was still more important than other possible options.

Perceptions and social norms often remained as barriers to women's economic participation in spite of wider shifts and developments. **Reinforcing the two-way dynamic between economic participation and shifting perceptions, and overcoming persistent social barriers to equity** would contribute positively to wider gender equality goals (as outlined in the National Policy on Ethiopian Women), and ensure women's full and equitable participation in the country's transformation, as foreseen in the GTPII. Actions to promote participation might include:

- **Intensifying and locally tailoring interventions aimed to support women/girl economic participation** (including, for example, through adequate support to women's cooperatives). Tailoring support to the specific needs of women in communities would maximise the potential of interventions to support women's effective engagement in the labour market.
- **Ensuring gender equity messaging appropriately engages both men and women**, through e.g. targeting gender-equity messages to 'real life' situations and addressing 'real life' concerns, importantly those raised by men. Gender equality efforts often 'miss' men, yet there is need for sensitive and targeted space to engage men in discussions/enable dialogue around concerns (and what changes for women mean in terms of their own participation).

- **Broadening the influence of existing ‘role model’ women in communities** (from across a range of economic areas/professions and with experiences in common with those of women and girls from rural communities) through more targeted and effective profiling (e.g. women invited to speak at schools, school media clubs encouraged to highlight positive female trajectories; informal social groups encouraged to identify and promote ‘success’).

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ⁱⁱ A pilot programme in Tigray, implemented by the CGAP-Ford Foundation Graduation Programme, highlights the potential of these schemes to ‘tactically build on PSNP’ and provide ‘pathways out of poverty’ when appropriately targeted and accompanied by sufficient support (see report: Sengupta, A. (2012): Pathways out of the Productive Safety Net Programme: Lessons from Graduation Pilot in Ethiopia: Working Paper. CGAP/Ford Foundation. June 2012.).